

Co-founding the Association for Women in Psychology, 1969

by Phyllis Chesler



Naomi Weisstein

In 1969 a group of feminist psychologists who had been meeting for a year cofounded the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP). I was among them. I was sharing a hotel room with Naomi Weisstein. Back then, I was five feet, four-and-a-half inches tall and she was even shorter than I was. In 1968 she published the essay "Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female." Naomi was also a cofounder of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, a group that introduced women to their bodies and to Marxism. Naomi and I discussed feminism. But late at night we started looking at each other somewhat shyly.

I asked her: “Are you Weisstein of . . . ?” and cited one of her studies published in *Science*. And she replied: “Are you Chesler of . . . ?” and cited one of my studies, also published in *Science*.

We were both studying the brain but in different ways. We were alone in our hotel room, yet we looked around, afraid that Big Sister might be listening. Almost in unison we asked: “Are we allowed to talk about brain research?”

Then we laughed—and discussed our studies.

Naomi was a world-class scientist; I was only a dabbler, dazzled by physiological psychology, working in a cutting-edge research lab, attending medical school on a fellowship. Still, I had been documenting the electrophysiological correlates of learning by observation—the sudden “aha moment” of consciousness.

Naomi was also more than just a psychologist. She was a tough little comedian and a cofounder of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Rock Band (1970–73). She wanted an outlaw, badass, agit-rock, all-girl band that sang and “took shit from no one.” She regarded lyrics sung by male rockers to be a “cultural carpet-bombing of girls, based on the amplified idea that male abuse was all that we girls wanted to live for.”



Soon enough, some women who loved to dance to rock music but found the lyrics that denigrated them distasteful formed their own politically oriented rock bands.

Yes, we had the great Janis Joplin, who too soon went up in flames. But her lyrics were not feminist; she rocked the blues

and did not stop loving the men who rejected her in both song and life. We had tough, sassy, proud black women blues singers—we had Aretha! We had Nina Simone!—but we had no tough white girl singers.

The Chicago and the New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band appeared all over the country; wherever they went, they induced "massive euphoria" (Naomi's words) in their audiences. Women would start singing along, clapping, crying, laughing, and demanding that the band repeat songs over and over. Sometimes women stripped to the waist and danced in circles.

You can read more [here](#) in my latest book: "A Politically Incorrect Feminist."