

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
OF JOAN HUBER
AT THE OSU ARCHIVES
OCTOBER 24, 2013

Q. This is Susan Hartmann and today is October 24, 2013. I'm interviewing Joan Huber, whose birthdate is?

A. October 17, 1925.

Q. Okay, thank you. Let's just start out by you telling us, describing the positions that you held or the roles you played at Ohio State, in what units and over what time periods?

A. I was Dean of the College of the Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS) January 1984 to March 1992, and interim Provost April 1992-August 1993, when I retired.

Q. Okay, well we'll get back to that position later. But first I wonder if you could talk about what shaped your life as an academic, your career, your family, and your background experiences before you came to Ohio State?

Q. Not a one of my grandparents, born on farms in northwest Ohio, got beyond the fourth grade. The Hubers were Lutheran, but my father attended a nearby Church of the Brethren. Grandma Huber was of Scots-Protestant descent. My mother was Swiss Mennonite. After graduating from high school, my parents passed the Boxwell and taught school. My father intended to be a county agent but got a PhD in entomology instead because he was allergic to horses.

Q. And they both grew up in Ohio?

A. Yes, I'm a sixth-generation Ohioan. My father wanted my twin and me to get good educations but within limits. As a high school sophomore, I won first place

in the state in world history, but when I told my father that I'd like to enter the diplomatic service, he said, well, that's a fine occupation but your husband might die and you'd have to work. You'd better take education.

Q. I got the same message.

A. So things weren't perfect. My family moved to State College in 1943, so I went to Penn State. The history department wouldn't let me take anything by exam (the chair said I might fail) but the German department would so, majoring in German, I graduated in August, 1945. I'd been admitted to Radcliffe in history, but my fiancé, an organic chemist, said that if I went there, it would be the end of us. He was right and I made the wrong decision. For two years I taught five courses and took two graduate courses each semester but never finished the M.A. in German. In 1947 we moved to New York where my husband took another post-doc, then to Philadelphia in 1948. Our children were born there, 1949 and 1951.

Q Did you do anything else, any other kind of paid work, when your children were young?

A After they were in school, I was president of the PTA and AAUW and such. My husband finally moved us to Grand Haven, on Lake Michigan. He wanted to do R & D for Brunswick in Muskegon. I didn't want to be so far from a university.

Q You had been living in?

A Coshocton, Ohio, for six years, after the seven years in Philadelphia. When the children were little, I couldn't have gone to graduate school, but in 1960 my father died and I knew I had to get going or I wouldn't get there at all. Grand Haven was 100 miles from Michigan State, and 150 miles from Michigan. When I

told my husband I didn't want to go there, he threatened suicide and I folded. We moved to Michigan in 1961. I commuted 100,000 miles for an M.A. at Western Michigan in 1963 and a Ph.D. from Michigan State in 1967.

Q. That was fast.

A. Relatively fast, yes.

Q. Your kids were teenagers by then?

A. Yes, more or less. It was manageable. A wonderful woman came in and bailed me out one day a week, did the wash and cleaned. I didn't have to teach and the last two years I had federal money to boot. When I was divorced in 1969, I taught at Notre Dame, 100 miles south of Grand Haven, but still in the snow belt.

Q. You were doing all the commuting.

A. Not quite. Brunswick was in Muskegon, 10 miles away. Western Michigan in Kalamazoo was 70 miles; Michigan State was 100 miles, and so was Notre Dame. The divorce ended my commuting in 1969. It was at Notre Dame that I became aware of the women's movement. I'd always been a closet feminist (you don't get a Ph.D. without having feelings along that line) but at Notre Dame I went whole hog. In 1971, I was one of eleven women who met with Jessie Bernard and Alice Rossi in New Haven to make the women's caucus organized at the annual meeting into an institution. Alice was its first president, I was the second. So I was very much a feminist. In 1971 sociologists had a lot to learn but they learned fast. The discipline attracts people who want to know the how and why of human customs. I introduced the topic of gender into the introductory course and taught an undergraduate course in gender stratification. I loved undergraduate teaching.

- Q. Can I just interrupt a moment? What year did you leave Notre Dame for Illinois?
- A. In 1971, I remarried. Notre Dame offered Bill a job, but we preferred Illinois. Notre Dame is the top for Catholics but for us Illinois looked a little better.
- Q. And you married Bill.
- A. Yes, Bill Form.
- Q. Who eventually came here with you.
- A. Yes, he was emeritus from Illinois and Michigan State. Provost Diether Haenicke hired him as a visiting professor.
- Q. So let me take you back to the early 1970s. You were involved in feminist activities in your profession through this organization for women.
- A. Yes, it was a perfect fit for me, and I never lost that interest.
- Q. And at the same time you were teaching gender studies in Sociology.
- A. Yes, courses that explain how it came to be that humans got layered into groups with variable levels of social power. My M. A. thesis was an analysis of the laws that applied to consensual sex behaviors that occurred in private, and I chaired the American Sociological Association's Task Group on Homosexuality, 1979-82.
- Q. Maybe just for our factual purposes, tell us when you left Illinois.
- A. I didn't leave Illinois until December 1983 because Bill and I were both scheduled to teach introductory [courses], [which are] hard to staff. We got here January 2, 1984. At Illinois, I'd been the first director of Women's Studies and headed Sociology. After the first interview, I told my Illinois friends not to worry, I wouldn't leave but during the second interview, I heard the drums beating and knew it was time to march.

Q. Who hired you here?

A. Diether Haenicke, a first-rate provost with the right academic vibes.

Q. Did you think you wanted to go into administration before this opportunity?

A. I hadn't really thought much about it. I certainly didn't mind it. I've always liked everything I did. I even liked being a housewife. Someone asked me once, in a snide way, how I liked being a dean, and I said that I'd liked being a housewife and if you like that, you can like anything. I liked both research and teaching. When I was a department head, I didn't give up either one, though I did less of each. Being head takes much more time now owing to the increase in paperwork. Being a dean precludes research and teaching; being provost is worse. But, as you know since you've done it, you learn things about administration that can't be learned any other way, about balance and about handling very different things.

Q. Figuring out how to get things done, who to get to, and how to get to him or her?

A. Yes, who to get to, how to get it done, and how to survive. And you learn how much you can do and how to be realistic about what you can't do. Some feminists think you can do everything you want and you just can't.

Q. I had trouble answering this question myself: How do you generally identify yourself in terms of gender or race, sex, religion, class?

A. I have no problem with gender. I'm a woman. My primary research question has always been to explain how it happened that women's secondary status came to be universal. I'll say more about that later. It involves the interaction of biology and culture. I feel very strongly about race; we all belong to the human race. Skin color has nothing to do with what counts, which is what's in your head. When I'm

asked about my race, I say “white,” only because skin color is still an indicator of discrimination and the number of persons in the categories matters. Religion is very important to me but I see religion and science as separate realms. Science can’t address moral issues, but my religious beliefs don’t contradict science. Before confirmation, I asked my father how I could confess that Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior if I didn’t believe it. He said that it was poetry, an answer that I found satisfactory. Poetry is very important. I call myself a Christian. It’s not perfect but it was my only choice; religion has to involve a community. I recite the Athanasian Creed each Sunday, though it’s awash with statements that are not literally true. But that’s another topic. I take moral issues seriously, and that’s the sense in which religion matters. I couldn’t be an atheist. Aldous Huxley once said that Beethoven’s string quartet, opus 131, proved the existence of God. Mozart and Bach are proof enough for me.

Q. Let me ask you, you’ve touched on this in describing your background, but I don’t know if there is anything else you might want to add about how being a female shaped your life, and if any other identity shaped your life?

A. Being female shaped my life. I expected children, and felt a great obligation to them. It didn’t occur to me to work when they were little; they were sick a lot. My son had bronchial asthma. My daughter brought whatever was going around home, then he’d get it. I thought I couldn’t tackle anything serious until after they had measles, and they got very sick; this was before the vaccine.

Q. So it certainly delayed your career?

A Yes, it was delayed. I didn't enter graduate school till 1961, so many of my friends are younger, which is nice when you're old. So many my age are gone.

Q. Any other ways being a woman shaped your life?

A. Oh yes, the whole idea of political power. Who's on top and, especially, who is not. Women clearly are not. And that's shaped my life enormously. I was much involved in the organizational politics of both the University and the American Sociological Association while I was at Illinois.

Q. Do you think you had to work harder to prove yourself?

A. I had to work hard to make up for the time I stayed home caring for children and doing housework. Women who want children might still lose a few years (or might not) but no one should have to lose as many as I did.

Q. And gained two children.

A. Oh yes.

Q. Did being a woman shape your experiences at Ohio State?

A. By the time I got to Ohio State, I was pretty much what I am now. I was teaching gender stratification and had very strong feelings about it, and by 1984 most men in the humanities and social sciences understood that if their perspective wasn't feminist, they had best be polite about it. Some, I suspected, were not overly sympathetic. But there were and still are areas where women are scarce, and some men in such areas have likely changed considerably less than one might hope.

Q. What about how you were treated and how you were able to do your job, as dean and as provost? Do you think gender entered into that at all?

A. To an extent. I knew that there were women who honestly thought that every claim of gender discrimination was true, but from experience at Illinois and in the American Sociological Association, I knew that some claims were exaggerated. I also knew that some men just didn't understand what women were complaining about, and saw no reason to change. But I thought that the provost shared my views concerning both academic merit and fairness to women, and I believed that deans and department chairs had to try hard to be fair in judging issues that are in fact very hard to untangle. Few professors are so productive or unproductive that you can at once say yes or no. Many times, as you know, the decision is hard to make and you must try to keep your feelings out of it. It's no fun to tell someone you like that you're sorry but they just haven't measured up. But that's what administrators must do.

My experience with cases brought by women in sociology nationwide indicated that some of them who claimed that they had experienced discrimination had relatively weak records in research publication. Most of us don't like to admit that we might have lacked the capacity to do the work, or as happens more often, that we just didn't work hard enough. But however hard a case is, deans are stuck. You simply have to deal with it, and above everything else, you have to be fair. I came here because [then-OSU President] Ed Jennings convinced me that he wanted to put Ohio State on the map. For too long Ohio State had paid relatively little attention to research quality, in part because of its open-admissions policy. Having to flunk out half of the first-quarter students demoralizes faculty (and especially the poor students you're doing it to). I grew

up in Ohio and used to wince when anyone called Ohio State a cow college. I wanted to change that. The department chairs in SBS were sympathetic but there were others who just didn't agree. They didn't think Ohio State had any business competing with schools like Michigan and Wisconsin. They would point to cases that might have involved discrimination, but the actual records of those cases typically involved complex issues that made judgment difficult.

Q. Still talking about the climate then. Do you think that there was a significant discrimination against women or racial minorities at Ohio State?

A. Oh, I certainly think that there had been and there probably still was. There may be some to this day; I don't know.

Q. But you didn't see it?

A. While I was dean I didn't see it in SBS, though I saw it elsewhere. Some of the claims seemed valid; others seemed an overreach. For example, I knew women at Illinois who had been teaching undergraduate courses year after year in some areas though they had never been hired as faculty. The practice was common enough in the 1960s but by the 1970s the academic labor market weakened and those administrators who were concerned with faculty quality were able to set higher standards for decisions that concerned hiring and promotion. So there was less need for these women, but by then they had taught so long that they had come to feel that they had a right to do so. You must have known people in that fix, too. They thought they had experienced discrimination, and they were right, in part, but it was complicated because in most instances their publication records were less impressive than one might hope. There were others who had truly

experienced discrimination. So yes, I've known (or known of) such people. But as far as I know, not in SBS while I was dean. I have no doubt that there had been many instances of discrimination before people came to believe that women should be treated fairly. The system had been set up for men. The Danforth Fellowships, for example, were for people under age 35. But if you'd stayed home with little children, you were too old for a Danforth, which is why I remember that name.

Q. I know Danforth well. I went to Washington University.

A. Oh yes, you must have.

Q. I grew up in St. Louis, yes.

A. Well, he was really a rather admirable man, considering the Republicans of these days. We should have more like him.

Q. So far as considering today, he was far to the left.

A. Yes. But before 1970, everyone simply took for granted that it was okay to assume that women were home with babies.

Q. What about the numbers or percentages of women faculty? Was that something that was identified as an issue then or one that you saw progress?

Q. Yes, it's always been an issue, and it will remain an issue until it's about fifty-fifty. Of course, some areas are nearly all women, and then they get paid less. What is needed will be some time in coming because of two problems: First, more men must equally share the time spent in rearing children. That's happening now, but slowly. Well, actually, it isn't all that slow; when you consider how ingrained it was, it's actually been relatively fast. These days you see men wheeling babies

at Kroger's, a big change in 40 years. Second, rearing children is very costly in time and money, and those who do it will need to be adequately repaid via the tax system. That wouldn't be easy now. Today, you can't even persuade some people that poor children should get enough to eat. But it will get easier in the very long run because it seems highly probable that levels of education will rise and birth rates will level off or decline world-wide. The thought that the human race is declining in number tends to make people nervous.

Q You really see women's child-bearing roles as the key limit?

A. Yes, after retiring I learned as much as I could about evolutionary biology and human customs. The fact that women's secondary status has been universal is a consequence of two biological facts: No man can bear a child, nor, until the 1890s, could any man feed an infant the only food it could digest. The hunters and gatherers who represent 99 percent of human time on earth were more egalitarian than were humans in all later societies. This began to change 10,000 years ago, then about 4,000 years ago, the huge surplus of food produced by the plow tempted rulers to seize as much as possible, which entailed armies and a social structure topped by a ruling elite, [with] peasants, serfs, and slaves at the base. The non-fit of reproduction and warfare let men monopolize both violence and decision-making. Women took no part in it because they experienced a cycle of pregnancy and lactation that was nearly continuous during all of their most vigorous years. A child was typically breastfed four or more years because frequent suckling prevented ovulation and the contraceptive effect maximized infant survival. If a woman bore a child before her older one could follow in the

daily food search, the older one starved. It was the huge decrease in the number of three- to five-year-olds still on the breast that enabled a very large number of women to enter the labor force over the course of the twentieth century. The Bible said that a painful birth was the consequence of Eve's giving Adam the apple. Biologists say it was the evolutionary cost of bipedalism and a bigger brain. Now what was I saying?

Q. We were talking about limitations on women and sort of looking at why they're not represented in equal numbers in academia.

A. They're getting there but it's slow because the academic labor market has long been depressed. After World War II, anyone could get a job. (I taught German in 1945 when the ex-GI's flooded back.) By the 1970s academic jobs were hard to get and still are and the retirement age was removed to boot. In academia it should be 70; the profession needs new ideas. Now we just have to wait for people to decide to retire. The boomers' retirement will likely open up some positions. In the very long run societies will likely have to worry about replacing themselves because child-rearing is costly to the couples or individuals who do it. Those who are willing to rear a child will need to be compensated. Early in the twentieth century bottle-feeding became safe, and use of the bottle crossed all class and ethnic lines. Today, even those who breast-feed tend to adopt the time-schedule introduced by use of the bottle, that is, every three or four hours. Before the 1880s, infants were fed on demand, like other primate infants, and women were pregnant or lactating while elite men wrote the laws. Eventually I expect that

child care will be shared and academia will be peopled by men and women more or less equally.

Q. Looking back on your deanship first, then we'll talk about being the provost, what did you see as the major challenges and major accomplishments? I know you talked a little bit about upgrading the quality of the faculty. So that was sort of the key?

A. That was the key thing that I hoped to do. That idea had become important at Ohio State at that time.

Q. Do you know if that brought more women in or not?

A. Well, it certainly didn't keep women out. Whether or not more women are hired depends on the size of the pool of new Ph.Ds. In some areas there were hardly any women in those pools for a long time. In other areas, the number of women in the hiring pools increased rapidly during the 1970s. For example, sixty years ago the women graduate students in sociology and history were few indeed. Now there are many. Some disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences and humanities have more women graduate students than men. Getting to the half-way mark in hiring should be relatively easy as retirements occur over time.

Q. Just for the record, you were the first female dean at Ohio State.

A. Yes.

Q. You didn't encounter any difficulties in dealing with people – with people who reported to you and people you reported with or your peers?

A. No, there were no difficulties with the people reporting to me, probably because when department chairs must tramp on a dean's toes, they do it with great care. I

never concealed the fact that I was a feminist; moreover, social and behavioral scientists, more or less aware of the effect of social customs on beliefs and behaviors, were somewhat unlikely to think that biology made men better teachers and scholars than women, though most men doubtless felt some reluctance in giving up the services of a devoted full-time child-watcher and housekeeper. I'm sure that there were people here who would have offended me had they gotten close enough to do it. For example, someone once asked me why I didn't call myself a deaness, and all I could think to say was that deaness wasn't a word in English. People are less likely to insult a provost than a dean. What's said behind my back I don't know.

Q. And who was it that appointed you provost?

A. [Then-OSU President] Gordon [Gee].

Q. But you didn't stay there very long.

A. I couldn't. I was hired as interim provost when my predecessor went off to Maine as president. The Trustees removed the "interim" descriptor because the financial problems involved hard decisions. I told Gordon that I would retire as soon as they replaced me because I would be nearly seventy by then. I didn't expect to teach again because of allergies. Laryngitis, or so I thought then; now I think that was wrong. I could have taught introductory sociology and gender stratification until I was 80. That would have been fun.

Q. Were there any big particular challenges while you were provost?

A. No, I don't remember that. There should have been but there couldn't be. Let me explain. The College of Medicine was doing far less research than its competitors,

but I wasn't going to be there long enough to do tackle a problem that had so much effect on the status of the entire University. I behaved the way I had always behaved with humanities and SBS, and almost that way with the rest of the campus. A home discipline of any provost is necessarily far removed from many other disciplines across the university. I felt at home with many disciplines in SBS and the humanities, but I felt relatively ignorant elsewhere, especially in mathematics and the physical sciences.

Q. I understand that. Okay. Did you look at the second page [referring to the list of questions]? The most powerful experience you had at Ohio State?

A. I don't know. It's hard to decide. Maybe it was being president of the American Sociological Association in 1989, but that didn't really depend on Ohio State.

Q. I couldn't either. I said it was my retirement.

A. I didn't think in those terms. Did I work to effect institutional changes? Yes, I did, all the time. And can you talk about allies who supported change? By the time I got here I knew who my allies were.

Q. Even before you got here?

A. My allies were strong in the social sciences. Less so I think in history because history had many professors who were accustomed to the idea that women had babies but didn't do much of anything else of historical interest. It was easier in the social sciences because they focus on contemporary beliefs and behaviors and women entered public life in great number during the twentieth century.

Q. This [interviewing] project is particularly interested in equity issues. And so were you involved or did you see, could you identify other people who you thought were promoting equity issues, in terms of race or gender?

A. The chairs in SBS were very strong on equity issues with regard to race and they wanted me to believe that they were also strong with regard to gender. Some of them really were, but I had doubts about some of the others who, at least when I first came here, not only seemed relatively uninterested in the quality of the research being conducted in their unit but who also had a rather low level of interest in gender issues. And sometimes the Council of Deans surprised me. A woman who worked in Minority Affairs once said that whenever they sponsored something, Dean Bailey (in Human Ecology) and Dean Huber were the only ones who showed up. And one time, a person who was prominent in Minority Affairs was speaking to Lena [Bailey] and me and some women students, and made some sexist remarks. The person was not pleased when I pointed this out. And, I must add, there were a few times when another dean would make racist comments and I just sat there with everyone else and let it pass. Now I'm sorry I didn't speak up.

Q. Either when you left the university or now, what do you think remains undone relative to the progress of women and other diverse groups? We've talked a little bit about this already, I think.

A. You mean in other diverse University groups?

Q. Yes.

A. There are times when I feel that what would help most is a strong dean (male or female), who would remind people right on the spot that it is not appropriate to

make public display of their convictions about the basic inferiority of any large human group. Sexist or racist remarks, especially at faculty meetings, are out of bounds. Offenders should be reminded of this in public. Such remarks are out of bounds because a wealth of evidence indicates that all human groups share just about the same abilities and talents, and a university is one place where evidence matters. What all groups do not share is equal access to the quality of education and training that is needed to bring these abilities to fruition in a given setting.

Q. Anything else, any other kinds of changes that would promote the progress of women and other minorities, sexual minorities, racial minorities?

A. No, the main game is for people to do satisfactory research, on the assumption that their teaching is also satisfactory. Good teachers tend to be more common than good researchers, and what you want, of course, is faculty members who are good at both, and this is harder to find. Sometimes when you have found a really good researcher, you tend to forget about the teaching but that usually turns out to be a huge mistake because Ohio State is not a research institute. It's a teaching institution. People who are really good at research sometimes forget this. You must balance those things as best you can.

Q. I'm surprised to hear you say that this is not a research, but a teaching institution.

A. There was a faculty member in SBS who got an offer from an elite university. To counter the offer, a college here in which the person held a joint appointment was willing to dispense with the teaching requirement. The person then wanted the SBS department to do the same. I went up in smoke and said, "You just can't do that." So the person left Ohio State. It's complicated. I approve of people's buying

off half of their teaching time, but I do not approve of anyone ever buying off more than half because this is a teaching institution. Moreover, some people spend all of their teaching time on graduate courses, especially those with very few students. We want faculty to have two crucially important characteristics and they've got to have enough of both.

Q. And we tend to hire people on the basis of their research. We look for research.

A. We look for research and I do think that's the place to look hardest because good teaching is more common than good research. Graduate teaching is especially attractive. If they don't enjoy sitting about with some smart graduate students, then they shouldn't be hired at all. Most faculty members who are real scholars like graduate students because the graduate students are interested in them.

Q. And they can focus in on what they're interested in.

A. So usually these kinds of problems can be solved. What's hard is to find someone who likes teaching sociology 100. But I loved it.

Q. I always loved the introductory history course.

A. I used to have 503 kids (what the auditorium held) in my introductory class in Illinois. I'm really sorry I didn't go back to teaching it when I retired.

Q. Are there any topics that you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

A. I can't think of any. Oh dear, there's so much left undone on women's progress. Maybe I'm too optimistic, but I'm very hopeful that over time enough women will go into mathematics and take an interest in engineering. Women's brains are like men's in this respect. If you don't learn math, you exclude yourself from so much. The last thing I can say is that women's status is a result of both biology

and culture. Technology trumped biological constraints. A future problem is how to compensate human infants for not being fed on demand. Our primate ancestors nursed their infants almost continuously. Contemporary human infants probably cry more often than did infants born before the 1890s. But that's not seen as a problem.

Q But nobody does it anymore.

Q. No, that's right. No one does it. A mode of primate infant feeding that's lasted millions of years is gone in a century and we're unaware of it. We just let them cry it out. And somehow it doesn't seem right. A baby may be able to get used to not being handled every fifteen minutes but if it's hungry it's hungry. And I think not feeding children, infants and children, is probably one of the worst sins that we humans, adults, can commit. I'll think of more later. It always happens.

Q. You can add when you get the transcript. You can add something. Do you have any memorabilia that you might be willing to give to the Archives to copy?

A. Like what?

Q. I don't know. Letters, memos, reports.

A. Probably not because I sent all my stuff to the Archives at Penn State. They took all the ASA stuff but sent some back and I have yet to look through it. It may be for correspondence with [OSU alumnus and CBS President] Frank Stanton, which was for development. And I liked him anyway.

Q. For journalism, for supporting journalism?

A. No, Frank supported the Department of Psychology because his degree was in psychology. Anyway, there are those letters.

- Q. Well, if you see anything.
- A. All right, because some of those letters may contain stuff from when I was provost or after I was retired and Dick Sisson was provost. I remember writing about a sit-in they were having on second floor of Bricker Hall. I can't remember what the issue was but the second floor really smelled.
- Q. Was that when the service workers went on strike?
- A. It might have been. I just don't remember for sure. But it was students and so forth. Sisson had left town and whoever was President then – it wasn't Gordon.
- Q. If it was the strike it would have been [William] Kirwan.
- A. It was Kirwan. He was out of town. He was the one who let Bricker Hall be invaded. My office was there. I don't remember where it was in the building, but I resented the fact that he let Bricker be invaded and then went off and left the rest of us to crawl over all these people.
- Q. Yes, because there were picket lines in front of the building. That was the strike.
- A. I didn't like it and I wrote Frank Stanton about it. I hope I can retrieve the letters.
- Q. I think the Archives would be interested in copying them.
- A. Yes, they probably would be. I'll see. If I live long enough. I'm going to get what I'm working on now off before I do anything else. But I will see if I have anything there. I've got to look through it anyway because I can't leave my daughter to go through all that stuff.
- Q. Okay, well this has been really enjoyable for me. As I said, you'll have a chance to look at it.
- A. I'm glad that you were my interviewer.