The women's movement for equal rights has been under continual siege by right-wing forces since the US Supreme Court ruled in a landmark decision in 1993 making access to first trimester abortions legal. Progress and equal pay has been slower despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Thus resulting in congressional efforts, that have passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009.

Arguably, the Women's Movement and Feminism itself was rebooted in the aftermath of the 2016 election. When Hillary Clinton considered one of the most qualified persons to ever run for the presidency, was defeated by Donald Trump, a candidate that ran by denigrating women. In the shocking aftermath of this election. The Women's March took place in January 2017, the largest demonstration in US history that went global.

The matches have continued in ensuing years that have been reinvigorated by the emergence of the 'Me Too' phenomenon. When actresses emerged who had been sexually harassed and raped by big name Hollywood producers such as Harvey Weinstein. A number of prominent men in entertainment and the media world's have since been fired because of women coming forward.

To put these events into a studied framework of understanding is Professor Lynn Chancer, a lifelong feminist scholar, sociologist and faculty member at Hunter College in the Graduate Center, CUNY. She is the author of the newly released "After the Rise and Stall of American Feminism: Taking Back a Revolution", published by Stanford University Press 2019. Welcome to the Thought Project. Professor Chancer.

Lynn Chancer: Thank you so much. Tanya, nice to be here.

Tanya Domi: In the preface of your book. You said that you had difficulty writing it. Can you tell us more about that and all the reasons for the difficulty?

Lynn Chancer: Well one obvious difficulty is that trying to sum up 50 years of the US feminist movement, which is an extraordinarily complex topic to begin with. So certainly at an intellectual level, it's a difficult task to begin with. I think, in addition to that, which I talked about in the book, in the preface, but in ensuing chapters, also, I think there's a sense of the question of feminism and how one lives in relation to feminism. Possibly being one where there's been a history of divisions, all kinds of divisions.
I wrote a previous book called 'Reconcilable Differences', which was on sex debates in feminism. Which was often very antagonized one side versus the other, and then in talking about the whole feminist movement and how it unfolded, there's often been fragmentation and divisions. And I was I'm trying to find a constructive tone with which people across the board can share a theme of the book which is commonalities and differences, not or differences.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Lynn Chancer: So I think there was just a sense that I had, of someone from one angle could be upset with you, someone from another angle from you and I was trying to not-

Tanya Domi: Engage that.

Lynn Chancer: Right, sort of go beyond that, try to find some constructive tone and remember that there's many things that I think feminists across different divisions can agree with including, ironically enough the relevance of differences now, the concept of intersectionality has become I think much more accepted.

Tanya Domi: I think it's come to the forefront.

Lynn Chancer: I think it's come to the forefront and I think perhaps what I'm pointing out in the book is that, differences can also go along with commonalities, even commonalities about differences.

Tanya Domi: That's an interesting thought. And the other thing that you said to me and we didn't talk about this in the book. But you said to me outside, in our discussions about you coming on, you talked about the writing and making scholarly research available, as in the concept of public sociology. So I see this book and the timing of this book that this is a really public discussion, that you're now capturing on paper in a scholarly text. Can you [crosstalk 00:05:37], talk about how you see public sociality playing a role here?

Lynn Chancer: Right. I used to study history as an undergraduate and I love history and the book obviously has a historical dimension. But sociology I think is contemporary sociology, I think has trouble avoiding and [inaudible 00:06:00] not avoid the major issues of our day. In some way or another, we're engaging through discussions of gender, race, class. Sexuality is exactly how we relate to, are shaped by and then shape in turn the public sphere of which we are a part. So public sociology which has become more and more important in sociology over the last 10 and 15 years is something I subscribe to. I always ask myself in writing I do, "Is there some relevance? Can what I'm writing about help to shape how we look at things? And can I draw on other people who are doing the same thing?" It's a very strong virtue of sociology in general, and I think sociology at the Graduate Center.
I think that there's very much a sense here, of understanding the significance of what we're undertaking as sociologists.

Tanya Domi: Well, this is probably when the most dominant discourses in American society today. So that's one of the reasons why the arrival of your book is so exciting. In your chapter on taking stock, you point out the relative success of the LGBTQ civil rights movement. And you juxtapose that, in comparison to the relative decline of the legitimacy of abortion rights. What is interesting to me about that juxtaposition is that right in both these groups as opposed by almost the identical same right wing groups. Why do you think this has happened? I'd like to hear your thoughts about that?

Lynn Chancer: I think that it's very complicated and I tried very hard in writing about this, to say that both issues have had an experience, have to do with discriminatory attitudes. I think, all I meant in a certain sense is that in terms of legal changes, the LGBTQ and cultural consciousness, I think, has had made progress, I'm happy to say. In terms of greater cultural awareness, acceptability and where, if you juxtapose that to, not just reproductive justice overall, but certainly the issue of abortion, has had feminists on the defense.

I'm also careful to say that this does not mean by any stretch of the imagination that there isn't ongoing terrible biases against LGBT people. The term transgender may be called into legal question, violence against transgender people. So there's definitely problems on both sides. But what I tried to draw attention to in the chapter on this is that it seems to me that both issues, have to do with what could be argued in a larger perspective. Has been a blurring of the church versus state distinction.

What I'm trying to argue is that, both these issues have in common I think, that it have to do with diversity of how people live, what they experience, what they want, what they choose what they desire. And we believe in a church versus state distinction that would maximize people's options and, various kinds of freedoms. And I'm arguing that both that has broken down, in a way that's affected both issues. Now it's affected, perhaps the abortion issue, I think there's a sense of being on the defensive. In the sense of dominant discourses making, if you choose to have- if you don't feel badly about having an abortion I'm arguing, you are more and more made to feel guilty about it. And even if that's your personal, cultural, religious choice, and it seems to me that the LGBTQ framework has fit into a sort of individual rights perspective a little bit more easily, even though they're both suffering from that breakdown of church versus state.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, I think-

Lynn Chancer: It's complicated.
Tanya Domi: It is complicated. I also think having been, having actually been in both movements, having worked in politics in both movements and having seen it up close and personal and perhaps I should write about this in my own memoir, is that-

Lynn Chancer: I think you should.

Tanya Domi: Thank You. I think what I saw was a contrast and I think the LGBTQ civil rights movement emerge from a virtual death, out of AIDS. And there was a [inaudible 00:11:12] an existential threat. People were dying, and the government had turned their back on them and said, we don't care about to because you're gay. And therefore you, you do not deserve attention, medical attention. And I think there was a ferocity that came out of that. That really emboldened LGBT rights.

And juxtapose that with women who were fighting to protect their own bodies and their own bodily integrity. And women were finally coming to the forefront politically and I think they thought they needed to be at the table. But I think what they also found out that being at the table is not enough. And so I think gay people already knew that being at the table, they would have to slam the table, they would have to pound on the table.

So I saw some decisions made by feminists groups that I really lamented. And I also thought that they didn't engage in enough civil non-violent disobedience over their rights. And we saw for example, in Virginia when they were discussing court order compel transactional examinations. I don't know if you recall that and women were outraged by that and they engaged in civil non-violent disobedience. And guess what, the Virginia legislature backed off. And I've always thought that unfortunately, that I thought Planned Parenthood should have done that more and gone actually gone in and have people arrested in a calculated way. It's just an observation but it's an interesting diversion.

Lynn Chancer: Right. But it actually, your observation goes along with something I was struggling with to try to say is that there's, even though these are different issues with different histories, that common breakdown of church versus state and yes, being told what to do, I think suggest the importance of similar politicization in response to it. Which is what you're saying.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Lynn Chancer: Yeah. So I think you have a good point and I hope you write that in a memoir.

Tanya Domi: Thank you. So you talk about the F word which I was really fascinated with. And so in your discussion about it, I come out with a question is, so how did feminism and its root word a noun 'feminists' become so demonized? What's your, I mean we saw it emerge like in the late 70s in the 80s there was Shclafly and Elaine and all these people that, do pretty horrible things, and the demonization of the word, but you really give it some attention.
Lynn Chancer:

I think part of it is, there was such strong, it's kind of in sociology people study social movements and counter movements and the counter organizing, against the initial very strong successes of feminism sort of rose to public consciousness. The Equal Rights Amendment that time period of that was going on, there was a burst of activism around feminist insights about the personal is political, about suddenly sexual politics becomes something that people are concerned about. And I think it rocked huge multi-leveled reactions. And well-funded reactions.

So one dimension of it was the strength of counter or movement organizing, against feminism and the word feminism when it began. I quote from a book called 'Feminist Fantasies' that Phyllis Schlafly wrote about, defining what a feminist was. And it becomes anti-male, it becomes all these things, you can't be in a relationship, it starts to become demonized and stigmatized in very definite ways.

But what I argue in the book also is that there were, maybe this was your first question to me. That there are also all kinds of debates among feminists, that made it perhaps also sort of difficult and my book 'Reconcilable Differences' which is really the previous book that this continues, was asking through five case studies. Can I be a Feminist if? And that, 'can I be a feminist if', is what if I get cosmetic surgery? Am I still a feminist What if I like pornography? What if I'm a sex worker? I continue it in this book to, wait a minute, how do I breastfeed? Do I do this naturally? Or do I use formula?

So there're these debates about-

Tanya Domi:

What makes a feminist?

Lynn Chancer:

What does it mean to be a feminist? Is that, I think created a sense of concern about being labeled with the word. Did that mean this radical thing? Did it mean that you can't live in ways that you've been socialized and that you feel comfortable with? And what I tried to argue in reconcilable differences, but now in "After the Rise and Fall of American feminism" is that, that's the wrong question, that we tend in America, the deeply rooted individualism to individualize everything. And we should keep our eyes on the feminist price, so to speak. Like what are we trying to attain and why? And not blame each other so much.

But I think the roots were both counter movements and internal questioning of what does it mean to be a feminist? And what's okay in the way I live individually?

Tanya Domi:

So is this is settled topic now? Or is it going through another evolution?

Lynn Chancer:

Well, it's a good question. I think that the rise of advocacy both among activists and academics belief in intersectionality and that awareness is a very good sign
of feminists of various stripes, various [inaudible 00:17:30] cross-genders, races, ethnicities set classes hopefully sexualities coming together. But that I think the concern about divisions and divisiveness is one that I argue in the book. We have to be reflective about that we have to be aware of how easy it can become to get angry at each other instead of at the system. Which has been sexist and problematic in class and racist, racialized terms of course as well. And hetero-sexist support as well.

Tanya Domi: So also, with regards to taking stock, in terms of just assessing where we're at, you pose, you organize the book so that you look at different areas. What are the biggest obstacles that face women right now in American society in your view having written this book. I think some of those obstacles continue from the past but, what are some of them that you think really impair women's ability to advance and to fully exercise their human bodily integrity and their human rights actually?

Lynn Chancer: Well, there's many obstacles that I take up in the different substantive chapters of the book. But, one I'll mention is a bread and butter issue, that was very much part of early feminism. And that's the issue of universal childcare's availability. And what I point out in the initial chapter, which steps back and ask, Where are women in terms of political equality, economic equality, educational equality? And I point out that of course, we've made a great deal of progress. But the stall is in the title because they were decades when it did not see, in the early 2000's did not seem like there was enough progress being made.

And what I argue an obstacle or impediment was, that early goal of providing universal high quality daycare. Which is a cross class issue potentially. People tried it and then it kind of dropped out of the picture. It's surfacing a little bit now but I think it's important because in that respect, We're behind other countries, like [inaudible 00:20:04] So many other countries allow women to go to school and have some place to leave their kids or to go to. So I think that is a very obvious sociological impediment, if you will. And then I also talk about my chapter on masculinities and asking the question, why do we still have so much sexual harassment, so much violence against women?

And I'm arguing, I hope in a complex way, which I tried to in all the chapters that, we have to look at, what's reproducing, what some feminists have called toxic masculinity. Not just why? Why is it that so much sexual harassment continues to exist? And what can we do about it? And in such a way that acknowledges everyone's humanity. That is, because I think an early feminist belief which is still very much my belief is that this movement laboratory for everyone.

And so there has to be a way of examining how do we enculturate and reproduce climates in which, women across sexualities feel not Unsafe? At the same time how do we not reproduce that in men? And how do we allow a sense
of human beings including men to realize that this is a laboratory movement across the board.

Tanya Domi: Now, I think sexual violence in intimate partner violence in America today remains at epidemic levels. In fact, studies by the Centers for Disease Control, Department of Defense and even the UN, which recently launched a campaign with the tag-line 'the most dangerous place for a woman is the home'. Yeah, I think this is a dominant issue in our culture, American culture is quite violent given all the armed arms, guns. The discussion I think we're sort of going at it through some doors.

One would be, someone has been charged with domestic violence, so they should remove all weapons from that home. Some judges do it. Some don't. 50 states you don't get a uniform enforcement on these issues. The other Fact is, is that in America, 80% of women who are murdered, are murdered by someone they know. And in the Department of Defense a topic that I'm quite familiar with that is military rape and military sexual trauma. Because there's more men in the military, actually an aggregate numbers more men are raped and women. But because of the lower number of women, 15% of the force it's still disproportionately women are raped as a percentage of their presence.

And so, your assertion about [inaudible 00:23:14] for everyone hasn't quite gotten there yet, I don't think and-

Lynn Chancer: It's not being perceived as such.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Lynn Chancer: Yeah and I think part of the problem is that we're not, if you look at, feminist theory of what I'm talking about in this book, people take courses on feminist theory, but it's off to the side, I think feminist insights are not basic to the education that children get right from the beginning.

Tanya Domi: From the beginning.

Lynn Chancer: Right from the beginning. So something is happening when you're saying it's an epidemic level.

Tanya Domi: It is.

Lynn Chancer: We are reproducing, what early feminist theorists correctly identify as not just a polarization between "femininity" and [crosstalk 00:24:07]"masculinity" but between emotionality and rationality. And I should put in it's not in this particular book it's hinted at in the conclusion, is that one of my strong academic interest is how do we bring multi-dimensionality emotionality into everything that we do?
Because it's still something in the chapter on masculine. I talk about compulsory masculinity, that the little boy is still feel [crosstalk 00:24:34]like sort of-

**Tanya Domi:** That's a pivot off of Adrian Rich's compulsory heterosexuality-

**Lynn Chancer:** And also CJ Pascoe talked about compulsive heterosexuality. So it's sexism and hetero-sexism. But I think that little boys growing up are still not feeling enough, that there that objectifying women is bad. It's problematic and that you learned that very early on. So I think we have a ways to go in how we talk about this still dichotomies realms of rationality and emotionality to allow boys to express vulnerability, instead of enacting anger. There's still very much of that going on. And it's reproducing I think what has been called toxic masculinity. And I think we need to do something about that as[crosstalk 00:25:33] feminists.

**Tanya Domi:** What's interesting too about this is for a psychological standpoint, there's a lot of produced work out there saying to be successful in today's workplaces. You have to be socially and emotionally intelligent. And so I think that yields more to women success than to men's. If you're talking about how women are socialized to be relational and so many ways, as a mother, but just in general, women are supposed to be nice and the talk to people and to listen to people and that men are more or less required so to speak, or socially socialized in that way.

So, who's succeeding now? And it's interesting, if you look at communications, now, corporate communications, you see more and more women dominate this field. It's very interesting.

**Lynn Chancer:** If I could just add to that, it's very interesting, but going back to your earlier question about impediment. You could say that women have learned to be emotionally and socially skilled. But at the same time, I think what we are perhaps in the process of learning is standing up for our political rights. And so an example in the book is the fourth chapter on the culture industries. So something I was very interested in is how we see so many depictions of gender in TV and film[crosstalk 00:27:12] all over. But what I argue in that chapter is when you step back and you say, wait a second, who are running the Hollywood Studios? Who are the directors? There's still immense sexism. So women are very skilled, but I think women are in the process now of learning or having a resurgence, I think hopefully right now, of politically standing up and saying, no, this is not a good situation in Hollywood. This is not acceptable. And it's not acceptable in many other corporate contexts, including, hopefully having a president who is a woman for the first time in US history. Hopefully that'll happen sooner rather than later.

**Tanya Domi:** I would suggest, as an outsider so to speak, even though I'm really involved, is that probably one of the best things that happened is the emergence of 'Me Too'. And the reaction in response to the defeat of Hillary Clinton in November 2016, all these images speaking of imagery to see all these women in the 'House
of Representatives', is just unprecedented, its historical and to hear them in political discourse, saying, no, that's not going to work anymore-

Lynn Chancer: Fantastic.

Tanya Domi: ... it is one of the most inspiring moment, since I've been alive. From the time I was a little girl till now. Hanging on to people like Shirley Chisholm when I was in high school. Or meeting Gloria Steinem when I was a freshman in college, these kinds of things. This moment is a huge moment, the marches that you talked about in the preface, following the so called election of Donald Trump, the anti-feminist, the ultimate extreme antifeminist, and the physics of the reaction to that has been, I think, one of the most remarkable series of events since I've been alive.

Lynn Chancer: Which is why the preface says 'I changed the tide' was not going to call, the Stanford press loved "The rise and Fall of American feminism". But I couldn't leave it with that, because that I don't see it as stalled right now. I see it in movement, actually. And the fact that so many women have entered Congress that women are speaking up. There's the sort of diversity of voices[crosstalk 00:29:56]. Of engagement is very heartening for sure.

Tanya Domi: You dedicate your third chapter which I thought was, I think really Ground Zero political, economic and educational inequalities, I mean, all three of those have direct impact on whether women are going to rise or they're going to stall out or there they're going to fall. And the other thing I just want to remark about this is that, in the history of the United States, we always came at, throwing the King of England out, it was always political. It was about political activism, was about political rights, was about the resistance to these searches and seizures that were initiated by the King. And I think that what we did and you mentioned this earlier talking about political rights, we sort of ignore the economic rights or we've been also forced as women to defend abortion rights and not be able to get to pay equity. Even though in 1963 the first law was passed, and then later 'Lilly Ledbetter', which Barack Obama signed into law in 2009.

So what do you think the way forward is in these areas and, they're intertwined, but I would love to hear how you address this in the book and why you put one chapter on this. It's very important obviously.

Lynn Chancer: Well, it comes back to what I was saying earlier that one thing there's many things that could differentiate the United States and I also think that what's what's a challenge is how do you keep in mind so cool bread and butter issues that involve class but also issues of gender and sexuality and racism? That somehow a challenge I think, and I think it's happening, is to somehow really take seriously the feminist aphorism of 'both and' instead of 'either or'. That we can be looking at the whole picture for, and the many dimensions of it without having to oversimplify it.
So that's a more theoretical so to speak statement but at a practical as you called a ground zero level I think it's exceedingly important for us to return to some issues, such as pay equity, such as our women having sufficient control, they having problems being promoted. Do they experience the way anchors on news have experiences what I call 'looksism' in the book? That you if you don't look the same that did the-

Tanya Domi: The blonde.

Lynn Chancer: Yeah right, the older male news [inaudible 00:32:52] can go on until he is much older.

Tanya Domi: Yeah a woman can not look like Larry King and still be on TV.

Lynn Chancer: There's an example. But I'm also saying that for women who are part of families who have children, that it's also time that we do something much greater to help them in terms of [inaudible 00:33:15] if you should have children or not have children. So, the reproductive justice issue is always about both. What about if you don't want to have children, or you do want to have children, but if you do have children or want them, we need to have, women spend huge amounts of money on childcare. You find yourself dependent on do you have a grandmother or mother or an aunt who will take care of your small child, and if you don't happen to, you really can find yourself left back. Not able to pursue that degree. And among academics it's been an issue, when women have three children, it can really hold you back in terms of the publication standard.

So I think it's about time it's not an issue that's out there we finally got health care, but we do need high quality universal daycare. And it's something that the book is suggesting was in early feminist demands, and has been lost in contemporary discourse.

Tanya Domi: Well, what's interesting about that is that now there are four states that do provide paid family leave that's New York, California, Rhode Island and New Jersey. Only four, very popular. This is very popular in an all opinion polling. The ERA is making a comeback, there's a new ERA camp team-

Lynn Chancer: Which is great.

Tanya Domi: ... which is really wonderful. They believe that they're only really one state away and that they'll take it to court. If it's not recognized, because nowhere does the constitution say that those 37 states have to be done within a certain period of time. So they're willing to take that to court. What's interesting is that our colleague, Julie souk, who is a scholar, legal scholar, she talks about in a recent article that even if women were to be able to secure the ERA, that legal scrutiny at the highest level, which is what races at the highest level, will not really change the outcome for women in a really profound way until they get help with childcare. And she's made that point over and over and over again.
Lynn Chancer: So we are overlapping in that point. I agree entirely.

Tanya Domi: Yes, and I wanted to bring that-

Lynn Chancer: I agree entirely.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, and I think that-

Lynn Chancer: Its keeping women back. For the women who it's relevant for, and that's many women and families.

Tanya Domi: So even if you do pass the ERA, you've got to be able to adopt public policies that are going to actually raise women's [inaudible 00:36:04]

Lynn Chancer: Definitely, 100% I agree.

Tanya Domi: Literally, we can just look to the north, our friends in Canada, they get one year maternity or paternity leave, the government pays 60% of their salary that the employers require to top it off. So I mean, that's just pretty incredible. All those issues are basically intertwined, though. All I want to say is, thank you for coming today.

Lynn Chancer: Thank you so much for having me. I enjoyed the conversation a good deal.


Lynn Chancer: Thank you, Tanya.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project. And thanks to our guest Professor Lynn Chancer, who is the Executive Officer of the sociology PhD program at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.