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Title

Susan Shaw Oral History Interview Webpage

Date

March 5, 2019

Extant

59 minute interview

Abstract

In this interview, Oregon State University students Sarah Shields and Kelsie Rust interviewed noted feminist professor and author, Dr. Susan Shaw, regarding her educational grounding in Southern Baptist theology and her career teaching theology contrasted with her lesbian feminist identity and her decision to switch to teaching Gender Studies at Oregon State University.

Biographical

Susan Shaw was born in Rome, Georgia, and raised in a Southern Baptist church there. She attended the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where she discovered feminism while earning an M.A. and Ph.D. In the 1980s and 1990s she was Assistant Professor of Religion and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at California Baptist College, and for four subsequent years an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at George Fox College (a conservative Quaker institution). Although she came to understand herself as lesbian during that time, she did not come out publicly because she would have been fired from these conservative schools if she was open about it. She resigned from George Fox College in 1995 when she could no longer live with the dissonance. She left the Southern Baptist Convention in 1996 over the change to its constitution that excluded congregations that affirmed LGBTQ+ people

Shaw joined the (then) women studies faculty at Oregon State University in 1996, where she found openness to her sexuality and support for her controversial feminist writing about religion. For her, religion and sexuality are not necessarily in conflict and the classes she has taught support this concept. Her most recent books are *Reflective Faith: A Theological Toolbox for Women*, a book and workbook that make feminist theology and feminist biblical criticism accessible for a general audience, and a book on intersectional theology with Dr. Grace Ji-Sun Kim of Earlham School of Religion. She and Kim also published *Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors and Feminist Theologies: The Basics*. Shaw with Dr. Janet Lee is the co-author and co-editor of *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. She was a senior columnist for *Baptist News Global*, and she wrote for *Huffington Post* on issues of social difference, social justice, and religious liberty.

She also is the general editor of an encyclopedia of women's lives worldwide, two Open Educational Resources textbooks, and a reference book on women and religion around the world. She was the PI on an NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant that seeks to improve recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing women in STEM and social and behavioral sciences at OSU and another that supported the *ADVANCE Journal*. Her final book is about how to retire for academics and will be published by Princeton University Press in 2026. She retired in December 2025.

Biography by Doris Malkmus from information in the interview, on OSU faculty pages, and other websites, December 15, 2025.

Scope and Content

Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Oregon State University, Susan Shaw, born in the conservative Deep South town of Rome, GA tells us of her courageous journey to selfhood. At a young age, Shaw had close connection to her female peers while watching the women's movement happen upon her television amidst an intolerant/quiet community. Raised within the Southern Baptist Church, which had a strict no tolerance attitude towards homosexuality and feminism, Shaw oppositely found the love and tolerance the Bible preached, while studying in seminary school. She describes becoming a feminist while attending The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY and what feminism means to her. Although ready to come out in the 80's and 90's, she feared being fired from her position of Assistant Professor of Religion, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies and at California Baptist College, as well as during her time as Associate Professor of Religious Studies at George Fox College (a fundamentalist Quaker university). She describes herself as a Baptist in exile

in the United Church of Christ after finding the Southern Baptist churches to be more conservative on the West coast than in the South. She describes living a double life during her last two years working for George Fox and attending OSU. Shaw extrapolates on her time, working for the HIV respite care in Portland and the discrepancies in class vs funding. She also tells us of her “coming out” to family and friends afterwards. Shaw stresses how being in the closet equates to death and how moving from theology to women’s studies at OSU was a breath of fresh air. Shaw describes how OSU directors have been supportive of her sometimes-controversial feminist religious writings and what she learned from the WGSS program. She stresses how faith and sexuality do not have conflict for her and discusses the classes she has taught that support this concept. Shaw tells of her life partner and their struggle with marriage equality. To conclude, Shaw explains the need for the LGBTQ community to be more inclusive/intersectional, discusses how ageism affects her, and her book/programs she is currently working on.

Source

This interview was conducted by Oregon State University students Sarah Shields and Kelsie Rust as part of the [OSU Queer Archives Oral History Collection](#).

Access

Open to all researchers at <https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/susan-shaw>

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Digital finding aid created by Doris Malkmus, 2025

Tags

Author/editor, Feminism, Theology, Baptist (Southern), Oregon