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Oral history interview with Rachel Pulley, 2000 Sept. 25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Rachel Pulley on September 25, 2000. The interview took place at the Williamson Gallery, Scripps College, in Claremont, CA, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Paul Karlstrom has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Rachel Pulley, a senior at Scripps College, California. This is part of the Artists and Models series for the Archives today being conducted in Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery at Scripps and the date is September 25, 2000. And the interviewer, as usual, is Paul Karlstrom. This is Tape one, Side A.

So, Rachel, here we are finally and in this nice gallery. We have it all to ourselves. Mary MacNaughton, a good colleague, is Director of this gallery and during the summer we met because she brought you out to the Huntington, or over to the Huntington, whatever you say, for some reason, and were you working then as an intern?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right, I was an intern, a Wilson intern for the College.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And is this because you're an Art History major?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, and it was because I was—it's because I'm an Art History major and also because I desperately needed a job over the summer. And I wanted to stay in California.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, sort of hard. Well, working with Mary must be a good experience.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, it was great. Mary's really well-connected. So, she introduced me to a lot of really interesting people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I presume that she also took that seriously, she felt that it was important that she do that. She's Chair of—I don't know if you know this—the Archives Advisory Committee.

RACHEL PULLEY: No, I didn't know that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: For the West Coast. Besides being President of Art Table, big women's art—professional art organization.

We're here to talk today some more because we had lunch together and talked about some of your work and your interest in feminism, post modernism, post feminism. We're talking—most of us here are interested, but specifically when it connects with two things, your interest in art, that side of your activity. Because you have a double major, right?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. Both Art History and Philosophy. And in both I have a sort of a women's studies oriented emphasis.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And what we were talking about specifically, not exclusively, was the whole phenomenon of artists and models, which is the subject of this series of interviews and something that, as you know, I've been working with. For you there's the art interest, of course, that comes out of that particular framework. I guess there may be three issues at stake. Then what it tells you about representation of women, and the experience of the model, nude models. And we are talking not exclusively, but I think for our purposes today, about male—heterosexual male—artist and heterosexual female models. The third part I think would be your own experience. And that's why we're really here is that this was just sort of a fishing expedition. We were talking back at the Huntington and you seemed real interested. We were talking about this.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I said, "Well, have you posed?" And you said, "Yes." And you said that you had some very specific experiences. So that's what I would like to get on tape today. You were born in 1978.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess that makes you 22 years old.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So congratulations, you're the youngest model that I've interviewed yet. I'm really grateful for the opportunity. There are a lot of ways to come to this but I suppose it would be useful to have a little bit of background from you, just a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up, the kind of environment it was, always remembering that we're going to move pretty quickly onto the fact that you, for some period of time, were posing nude in different situations. So—

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. Well, I'm—I've lived in Pennsylvania, and you can say that I grew up in Pennsylvania, outside of Allentown, between Allentown and Philadelphia. I went to public school in a working-class town. Not too many people went on to talk about theory or to talk about anything really beyond working-class jobs and working- class life.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did your family—what does your family do?

RACHEL PULLEY: My father presently is unemployed and he's been unemployed on and off for a really long time. He was a corporate man, middle management and got laid off in the early 90s. And my mom, she's a—I guess some sort of elevated secretary but she's always been really anti-male and just pro-women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Are you able—I don't want to dwell on this, but are you able to comment on a little more specifically what that means? You say your mom was anti-male. Still married to your father?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, they're still married.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Must be rough for him.

RACHEL PULLEY: They have a really interesting relationship. They live on two opposites ends of the house and—yeah, I guess I'm sort of reading—I'm reading stuff right now by Faludi and it's sort of contextualizing for me my father's experience, having been laid off in the early 90s and how it must have felt for him as a man to be laid off.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You've been reading Susan Faludi.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. But my mother has always thought that my father was—I guess not very family-oriented and very distant, and she's always been sort of—thought that men are lazy and let us know that and let us know that we can do anything with our lives.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what do you think about your father in that respect?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that my father was really distant but I—having gone away, far away, for college I now realize that—I'm developing a relationship with him that I never did. But, yeah, he has a problem now with drinking. So, he's even more distant than he was when he was always on the road when he worked for the companies that he worked for when I was little. He was never very involved in our school or extra-curricular activities. I can understand why, he didn't have a father figure because his father had left my grandmother when he was little. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, but he stayed with your mom for whatever reasons even though they may live in different wings of the house.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, I think they have a love/hate relationship but they really love to hate each other and it's sort of—I mean, it keeps them going I think even now. It's also economic habit, they both—and I know there's some sort element of love there—but they both claim to live together only for financial reasons.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That must be great for you guys to hear. How many siblings do you have?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah. I have a younger sister who's 20, who's now at Barnard, and I have an older sister, older half-sister, who's 33. And yeah, it's pretty interesting. My mother always—she always basically harped on my dad and my dad always harped on my mom. And they just—they have a sort of co-dependent relationship. But I always thought that was pretty normal. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Conflict.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I think that's true. Did you talk with your sisters about the situation? You must have.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you feel that it was worthy of discussion, or did you just accept it as the facts of life?

RACHEL PULLEY: We accepted it. And we realized that we never wanted to get married and never wanted to have a family. So we accepted it and we also questioned why they would stay together. But it was always as—it always just kept us on our toes and gave us interesting stories to tell to our friends whose parents, at least seemed to be, in happy—whose parents seemed to be in happy marriages. But oftentimes we found out that those marriages weren't as happy as we had—they had seemed on the outside. Because all of our friends' parents had ended up getting divorced by the time that we'd graduated high school.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you're part of the generation, or a group that has a very cynical idea—or what you would say realistic—about the possibility of creating a life together with somebody else.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you do with the real success stories, because there are some, you know? Do you view those as sort of anomalies that—

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that I'm—well, they are anomalies. I think that they are really wonderful things to have happen to other people and I think that, at least my younger sister and I, we've always just felt that that wasn't really for us and that we're much—we'd be much more comfortable being totally independent and—I mean, we can be in relationships but just to question like whether those relationships—whether they should be dependent on each other or even emotionally dependent on each other.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So finally you end up, as the existentialist would say, alone.

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I think since we went to—since we both went to women's colleges, we've sort of—we don't see our experience as being alone, but, rather, sort of up in the air and grounded only in relationships with our friends and our family, especially, and at least in my case, my mother.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You're close to your mom?

RACHEL PULLEY: I'm really close to my mom and really close to my younger sister.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, so, what—and we won't dwell on this so much, but it's interesting anyway. So what do you really think about men?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I definitely—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Based on your whole experience.

RACHEL PULLEY: I've definitely grown to be skeptical of them through numerous experiences. And based only on what I learned at home, to understand that I always need to be financially independent and—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Smart.

RACHEL PULLEY: —my mother always said that the best situation was always a duplex and with separate checking accounts so that you can always maintain a relationship and yet have your independence. Both your spacial independence and financial independence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well this certainly would be part of that life experience that informs your interest in school now with your topics you're pursuing. It would seem to me—because we had a really interesting conversation at lunch about what could happen to academia—what could happen with intellectual activity and studying and writing to affect society in a positive way. And we didn't, of course, resolve that one. But we must certainly the case that—or it seemed to be as we were talking that you've chosen—well, in choosing the school, and probably in other things, but chosen a topic that's very close to you and that you're going to continue probably to be working on, which is good. This is great. You're working on feminism in your philosophy paper, on your paper that's your topic and then in Art History. You didn't tell me—well, you haven't started that, you hadn't chosen your subject yet, is that—?

RACHEL PULLEY: No, I haven't. I'm still sort of up in the air. Thinking seriously about the work of Richard Avedon and how commercialism has fit into art and how his work reflects sort of commercial interests that are linked with elitism and classism, but I haven't yet decided. I don't know if I'm going to be beating a dead horse with feminism after this semester. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Perhaps. Do work on artists and models, there's going to be a lot, lot more to come from that than what I'm able to do. But, anyway, I'm not trying to recruit. So you came to—how did you choose Claremont, [Scripps] College?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, it was one of the only women's colleges that I applied to and I was really interested in both the women's college and its location in California. Because I really needed to break away from my small town that I came from and move to a different world in California. And the women's college thing was really appealing to me also because I was always sort of like a little different from the rest of the people in my class. So, I was one of the only feminists in the class and it just sort of seemed right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I bet that didn't wear very well in your town.

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I guess I didn't—people really didn't wonder about it and people didn't really know about it. They didn't—they'd never heard of this school because it's a small school and now-a-days people talk about me at home and they say, "Oh, Rachel, she went far away and she hasn't been back for years." And that's basically, sort of a side note because I was always sort of separated from the rest of the school in like honors classes and things like that. So . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: When did the art interest start? Was that any part of your growing up, your family life in terms of your cultural environment or is it something you came to—?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, my mom had always dragged us to museums and things like that. But it was more just to sort of chalk it up and tell people that she went to a museum. It wasn't anything pretentious. But the actual real art history interest was developed when I took a class in modern art. That sort of piqued my interest. I just sort of had a—I was sort of—it just worked for me. It was something that came really naturally to me. So, memorizing how certain periods would look and memorizing a lot of different things. And then later the actual theorizing about them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So where was it, here? You mainly took a modern art—?

RACHEL PULLEY: No, at a—

PAUL KARLSTROM: In high school?

RACHEL PULLEY: No, actually it was at a community college when I took a year off from Scripps.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And where was that at, Pennsylvania?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yes. Yeah, at Bucks County Community College.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, okay, here's the question then—At some point you found yourself with this interesting opportunity, perhaps you thought it was interesting, of being an artist's model.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Some people would say being a muse—not amusing, but a muse. And, how did that come about? What were the circumstances that led to that? I guess the second question would be, is this something you would have been interested in, you know, why did it attract you enough for you to agree to do it?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, the first time I modeled was here at Pitzer College [one of the Claremont Colleges] and it was $10 an hour and it was cash and it was the highest-paid job on campus. That was one reason. But probably the main reason was just to say to people "Hey, you know, I was a model and I took my clothes off for people." And that's really—it was empowering, at least I thought, to be able to say that. It takes a lot of guts to stand there and you're naked in front of 30 people. So, my—

PAUL KARLSTROM: I would think so.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah. The first time I did it was basically to prove something to myself. Prove that I, you know, I could—I wasn't ashamed of my body and sort of—I mean, I knew that it would be sort of—that people would perceive it as cool. I think the coolness really was important too. When I started doing it more by [inaudible] it was at Bucks County Community College when I went back home. And I would model sometimes for 20 hours a week and then it was more—I was—I wanted to be an artist's model. I mean, not necessarily in the long-run. But, I wanted to be, I guess, like the star of their modeling department. To be a professional in that field and to be known amongst, at least the artists, and the art professors and the staff in that one community college, to be known as "the art model."

PAUL KARLSTROM: To excel, just like you wanted to do in school.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You probably always wanted to be first in the class or high up there.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right, and it was really easy obviously to excel in art modeling because it was based on looks. It was also based on a rapport between myself and the art students and professors. Although I don't think that necessarily had too much to do with it, because the rapport was already there, you know, before I opened my mouth.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why—now the questions begin. Why did it matter to you? There are different ways to excel and be a star and I'm curious to know why this unusual activity that still in some quarters has a certain—is slightly questionable, used to be the prostitutes were the only artists' models and they ended up being mistresses of the artist. Bohemianism [perceived as loose]—and you can study modernism—or were at the time, a little bit. So you must have been aware of that part of Bohemianism. Do you think that was part of it? I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'm trying to get it beyond just the $10 an hour and wanting to show that you were proud of your body.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That it's okay and that you're cool.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. Well, I think—I think I did it a lot because I guess I just wanted—I'm sorry, could you repeat that question?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I suppose. I'm looking for other reasons, possible reasons, other than those perfectly good ones that you've stated and I—for posing, for continuing and wanting to excel. You know, wanting that to be a kind of identity I suppose at one point. And I guess what I was asking, you had the benefit of some art history and you'd studied Modernism a little bit and so I guess I'm wondering if you sort of cast yourself as a bit of a rebel, as a Bohemian?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, that definitely was part of it and I love the fact that I was also—I thought I was being a feminist rebel, which really—I thought it really interesting that I was a feminist in this world that was traditionally an anti-feminist role. I really—I loved doing—first of all, I love doing—I love doing anything that people are going to be like "Whoa, that takes guts to do." I find myself doing a lot of these things. But with art modeling that usually, that was one of the reasons. It was an adrenalin rush and I also loved being a feminist doing it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you think of yourself all, at all as an exhibitionist? Do you enjoy when people look at you? And I don't mean necessarily even with your clothes off, just in general?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, I think so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you like attention of that?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that that is part of the rebel thing too, you know, just doing something that not too many other women do. Doing something that most people are surprised about or shocked about or something that I don't even necessarily want to talk about in public or in private. But, yeah, I think exhibitionism is pretty interesting as a woman because I don't go around flashing men, but it was sort of an acceptable way to be—to grab people's attention in a really blatant way. But even with my clothes on I think that the exhibitionism, I always have felt somebody looking at me and it's not just after having read, you know, gender theory and blah, blah, blah and post modernism, everyone's looking at me [inaudible] business. It's, you know, everybody is looking at me as a woman, you know, a beautiful woman. So, I think it's sort of something that I've grown to like need and to feed on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't think you're alone in that. But it's refreshing to hear it put so directly. I've asked that question to some of your older "sisters" and they have to sort struggle with it because there's a connotation of exhibitionism and voyeurism, which are, of course, key concepts within this whole study of representation of looking, and you put it pretty directly. Is there a sexual part of that for you or is it operating some other part of your self-awareness? See what I mean?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. Well, I think, first of all, with the voyeurism, I always knew that somebody was looking at me and it only—it's just very obvious that someone's looking at me. In a class when I'm nude in front of people. But I never felt the women looking at me as much as I felt the men looking at me. As far as the sexual connotation. Sometimes, like when I was thinking about the men looking at me. When I was looking out at the men looking at me, it would—I wouldn't be attracted to him but he would usually—I mean, I knew that he was looking at me in a sexual way, which is part of the reason I finally decided I wasn't interested in modeling

anymore. Just because it did become very sexualized and I was no—even if I tried to assume a sort of assertive stance and be almost like a feminist model and try to sort of efface myself in various, like militaristic poses, or—it still would—it would always be sexualized regardless.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, do you think that that's inevitable?

RACHEL PULLEY: Not necessarily. I think it has to do—I mean, I worked with a lot of lesbian women who posed with me. I think perhaps it might be inevitable if the art students know and the art professor knows that you are a heterosexual woman. And it's just magnified when you fit in norms of beauty.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me get this straight. You, yourself, there is no sexual element in your anticipation of doing this even the first time that—I'm not saying this is what you said—I'm trying to get it straight. That you acknowledged there was a sexual element, that your exhibitionism was of a different order—that was the question I was asking. Did it exist elsewhere in your self-awareness, meaning not sexually? Was that always the case? In other words, was that removed from your sexuality or was there some way in which the two came together?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I think a lot of times, I mean, especially around the time that I was modeling, my sexuality had a lot to do with approval. You know, the sexual approval of someone else of me. It wasn't necessarily my being—my wanting to be sexual. It was just—I was very interested in sort of having people look at my body and say, "That's a good body." I want to look at it more and that's—I mean, it had a lot to do with approval I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were you looking for approval more in one place or for one group than another? Did it make a difference or is it a broad, general approval?

RACHEL PULLEY: No, I think definitely I was very interested in getting the approval of the art professors and the male students as opposed to the female students. I was—when I was modeling though, I always had a sort of commiseration with the female students that I didn't have with the male students. It didn't have to do with—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah. It didn't have to do with approval. For instance, one time I was doing a four week long sculpture modeling job and one of the weeks I had my period and the women in the class totally connected with that and identified with that and begged the professor not to let me model and so I ended up modeling with my pants on for just a little bit and it was all pretty funny. But it was something that I really enjoyed modeling for the women and it had nothing to do with sexuality. It was more like a feminist awareness of sisterhood. I really liked the fact that they were—they didn't seem as voyeuristic, they didn't seem as—they seemed more interested in just making their pathetic little beginning sculpture, beginning sculpture and paintings. Not so much as, "Oh, I can take this class and look at a naked woman."

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about lesbians who were—you wouldn't necessarily know, but probably you did. There'd be perhaps lesbians in the class. How did they look at you? Were you able to tell, could you tell a difference, they are "sisters" of course, but—

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. Well, I always made the assumption that there were some lesbians in the class and in that way it was—I mean, I guess some—I mean, I would look at some women and be attracted to them and then I would, like I said, a sexual element would arise between me and this person but it was always like my perception of it being a sexual element. It was the only time actually when I really felt that there was a sexual element between a couple women, but, again, I never felt violated by that sexual element. I think it's because I had initiated it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, because you imagined it? Is that how you initiated it? I mean, you chose to look at that as—

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, what you're saying is that for you it was important—I think this is what you're saying, to really be in charge that to a certain degree at least in terms of these kinds of sexual connections.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

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PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, continuing this very good interview with Rachel Pulley. This is Tape 1, Side B and—Rachel, the—you said something really interesting and I'd like to go into this a little bit more and we're not going to dwell totally on the sexual potential or tension of a studio situation because this is like the disclaimer saying,

"Yes, we understand, this is one aspect of this," it's the one that hasn't been examined quite as much. But you are saying that you felt more comfortable, in fact, you even introduced, at least in your own mind allowed the sexual to enter in when you were posing for women students or interacting, was that right?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I suggested, and I'd like to know your response to this, that—not just as a feminist but as an independent person that you wanted to be the one who dictated the terms where something personal like that can happen, is that correct?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I think particularly when I was in the position that I was—you know, I was an object being gazed upon by others. I think in that way I definitely wanted to be the person who initiated the sexual elements of the relationships between myself and the students. But I do think that a lot of it had to do with the historical power that men do have and that I do—I mean, I acknowledged all along. I would contextualize the gazes of the men in the classes. And I—having known and like read about the—I definitely knew what a male gaze meant and I think that I read into the gazes that I came across what I carried with me to the sessions. I do think that a lot of the gazes had to do with power and I felt very un-empowered when I was modeling for men. Even in—especially in cases where I did some independent modeling jobs where I would go out in the woods for instance with these men and—you know, by myself with them. It was very un-empowering and very frightening actually, too. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did they ever step over the line with you on these trips into the woods?

RACHEL PULLEY: Oh, definitely—men have definitely stepped over the line but they have always done it in a way that I could not pinpoint a particular action and say, "Oh, you are violating me." But I always walked away feeling violated. You know, a hand on my thigh that was—it was completely inappropriate. But, you know, he could justify it by saying, "Oh, you know, I was moving your leg in a particular way that I wanted to." Things along those lines. It was always a sort of right that a lot of the men that I modeled for used, you know, to sort of reinforce the power dynamics between us. You know, they would come really close to me when they were doing sketches or paintings and the women artists or the women students always held back from doing that. They would never come up close to me and—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know, of course, that's what they say about one of the differences between men and women anyway is that women—I said you "guys"—women tend to give up the space, to back up and men supposedly challenge, which I have found is true in some cases. But at any rate, that's interesting. What I like—I want to talk shortly about these private sessions because theoretically that's where more of these issues can come up. In the classroom it's a more controlled situation I think.

I'm real interested in where you allow sexuality to emerge and where you don't. And it seems to me in the situations you've described you draw the line, basically it's gender lines that there's a male gaze—and it's not a reversed [inaudible] male gaze—it's a female gaze I guess. That involves looking at the model in a sexual way. Now, most of the men—or often the men would do this, you sensed that, or you projected it into the—that's another question we can save. But with the women you seem to almost welcome that as a possibility, that's very interesting. Are you attracted to women?

RACHEL PULLEY: Sure, women or men.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How would you—I'm asking you, how would you describe yourself then in terms of your sexual interests?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I'm in a heterosexual relationship now; but, I mean, I'd say that I'm a five on a scale from one to 10. So, I really—it doesn't matter to me the way—

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you can love in all iterations of the term?

RACHEL PULLEY: Hm-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: An individual and that's the important part, not necessarily the gender?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, I definitely feel that my attraction to either a male or a female is gendered though. And I feel that when I'm attracted to a man it's because he's a man and because he—not because he sort of sits the fence in terms of sexuality or because he's an individual or anything like that. I think I'm attracted to him because he demonstrates traditional male things. And I think that being with a woman is a little more fluid. I think with a woman it might be on a more individual basis.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you say that you prefer manly men? That's an old-fashioned term, like in the South, [they] say he's "very manly."

RACHEL PULLEY: I prefer a man who's manly publicly and perhaps more womanly privately.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This gets close to some very complicated terrain. But I think it is interesting. It seems to me that there are several things at work. Well, it seems to me that you think about this a lot, anyway. And so it's going to be kind of difficult to separate your ideas about power and the male gaze from your own experience. But hey, that's the way it is. We bring it to them what we can. Your whole history. I'm not a shrink, by the way, or a psychologist, but these things seem to be quite evidently at work. That you'll allow—I think you cut much more slack to women than you do to men. Just by observations on our little conversation. And even in a studio—and there could be reasons for it—that you're less—well, I don't know, what do you think it is? Because you brought up like feminism empowerment, women less threatening?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that not only are the women less threatening both in like a historical way and also just from personal experience. I think that the men are threatening. I think that it just—it doesn't just so happen that only men wanted to have models as an independent project. And those projects were very usually loosely defined and I really had no idea usually what projects I was getting into when I was dealing with these men. It was the men who most often approached me and asked me to do these like private going-off-in-the-woods type thing. And, you know, it was men, who not only in mind, but also physically like were very invasive. And when they were trying to come up to my room or, you know, try to take me on these long escapades where I could really not go anywhere for help if I needed to or wanted to and so, it was—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you ever see the movie called the Men's Club?

RACHEL PULLEY: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You should rent that sometime. I think Jennifer Jason Leigh is in it. But, anyway, I understand what you're saying. Let's—can you tell me about some of these experiences?—Because I have a feeling that that's where a big part of the story lies in terms of your developing or reinforcing ideas.

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I would meet with an artist in a restaurant for instance and, you know, he would show me his portfolio, this really horrible work and I'd say, "What is your project?" And, "Oh, I'm just trying to update my portfolio." And they wouldn't even be professional artists. And then they would call me and call me and call me until I finally agreed to go out and check out the spots that they wanted to paint me or whatever. And they were so interested in it. It almost was—it was always—I was very hesitant. But I also, I mean, I definitely acknowledged that I brought something to the table and once I was working with an animator and he came over to my house and I just assumed that he wanted to do—I didn't know he was just an animator. I assumed that he wanted to do a nude session and that he didn't. And that was totally shocking to me because he was one of the only men who didn't want to do a nude session.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he said—he actually said, "No, no that's not what I have in mind"?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right, you know, and he's like, no, no—

PAUL KARLSTROM: There you, so, see?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. But more cases than not, you know, I had men meet me in the living room of my dorm room and sort of subtly and slowly sort of coerce me to come upstairs and he wanted to see some outfits that he wanted to take pictures of me in. And, you know, "Could you show me that and is it okay?"

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you posed for photographers as well?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right, yeah, I've done everything, photographers and painters and sculptors, and everything. But there's been a couple of cases where I've actually, now I would say no. Now, I don't model for men at all and there are no cases that women have needed models so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you would pose for women?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah, probably. But I think it's just because I've had a long history with dealing with creepy men artists or wanna-be artists. Or wanna-be creeps. I don't even know what they were sometimes. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were there any good artists who were working, whom you admired and maybe even had some kind of reputation, perhaps locally, perhaps beyond where you still felt that a big part of the motivation was to see you? To see you nude and enjoy the view?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, there was a—there was a professor who was a local—locally renowned artist. There was a professor at the community college that wanted to have me do some private stuff for him. Because I was a student at the college I couldn't do that. But I do think that it had to do—I mean, he needed a model, or perhaps not necessarily like urgently needed a model but—yeah, I think he just wanted to—not necessarily to see me

naked. I think it was he wanted to use me as a model and I think it had to do with the fact that he wanted to see me nude also. But I think—I mean, he'd already seen me nude for his classes and then just wanted to take it sort of a step further in a more private environment.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he like you? Did he show you in terms of your other interactions that he liked you?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, there was always—yeah, there was always—yeah, I think that he—I think that he and I had a good rapport, but I think there was always a lot of sort of underlying sexual bantering and things like that. It was very subtle. But I think that—yeah, he was a really—he was nice guy. And I think of—I trusted to work with him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you couldn't.

RACHEL PULLEY: But I couldn't because I didn't—I mean, I didn't agree also at that point with modeling, I think I had just really grown tired of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, how long was it then that you—?

RACHEL PULLEY: For about six months I did it on a weekly basis, either 10 to 20 hours. And then I had done it on a whole for about a year-and-a-half or maybe a little longer.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about—and then—but that was mostly then though at the community college?

RACHEL PULLEY: Mostly at the community college, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When you came back here did you pose, or were you through? Was that the end of your career?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I met with an artist that was the one who had coerced me to come up to his—for him to come up to my room. I met with him in the living room of my dorm and I looked over his portfolio and it was really ridiculously horrible. And—so, he was the one artist and after that—that was probably the most violating experience because he did touch me and not—I mean, it was a very slow process and he sort of worked his way into like actually taking like the strap down from my tank top or things like that. And I realized all along that he was being totally a jerk and that he was probably taking pictures that he would go home and use for all sorts of reasons. But when he finally left, it was sort of—it didn't have anything really to do with me. I didn't finally say "get out"; the phone rang and so it provided me an outlet for me to say, "Please leave. I have to pick up this phone," or something like that. After that I had contemplated and I was like this was the last time I'm going to do this. So, I did do it once when I got back here. And the night that I met with this guy I hadn't even intended to model for him but he had sort of worked into the conversation like, "Oh, well, just a couple of shots," and that being—

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's like a seduction is what you're describing, an attempt at seduction.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right, right, but if that's what he was trying to do I don't know—it wasn't sexual. At least I didn't feel it was sexual. I felt like it was trying to persuade me to model as opposed to trying to seduce me to look at him in a sexual way. I found out later that he actually would take pictures of—or he would get models through the colleges here and take them up to the mountains or wherever, which I refused to do, and he would make money from his friends and whoever else at this other community college in the—nearby. To like have them pay him to get the models and—

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it was like art cam?

RACHEL PULLEY: It was really strange, it was really strange and the models were paid only in these really horrible prints. And I had decided, like when I met with him in the living room that I didn't want anything to do with him because he was really a horrible artist and he wasn't professional.

PAUL KARLSTROM: To speculate, there's a sort of—that's difficult. But so far you've been describing [posing] in terms of these other pleasant experiences. It sounds to me like lots of them were, maybe more than were okay. At least in the private thing. Sounds to me like you got then hooked up, unfortunately, with a gang—not a gang because they didn't have anything to do with one another but those who have other agendas, other motives in mind that aren't very good artists. How do you suppose you would feel—maybe you have had some experiences where it's a private session or even a small group, where these are really professionals, there can still be a male gaze. There can still be "desire", but that may be just simply in some ways an appreciation of how—would that be—what am I asking? I'm asking if they were really good, because you keep saying his work was lousy.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you have no respect for those artists. I mean, what's the point?

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what if you—what if somebody like, let's say Nathan Oliveira, or Richard Diebenkorn or—you know, of one of these really terrific figurative artists?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think at this point, I mean, I've been able to contextualize my experiences so that I don't want anything to do with nude modeling. And it doesn't—I mean, it has to do with bad experiences but it also has to do with the fact that I just don't appreciate the projects that men work on. And I don't appreciate the fact that their work hinges on female nudes. I just—I'm not interested in it anymore. I'll be interested in working with females because I do think that their projects are pretty interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the so-called reversal of the male gaze? Like Joan Semmel, Sylvia Sleigh, look at these subjects people—Judy Dater did some of that photography and then there are others. What's the difference? I mean, is that not an acknowledgment that yes, inherently, in the unclothed figure there is this element? They're not neutral.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In other words what—well, I guess I'm asking you the question, but I'm just curious, you've given women a hell of a lot of credit here to be clean thinkers and you know, somehow wash away any desire, but I'm asking you about lesbians, that seems to be okay. I mean, I've talked with lesbians who are really hot to—well, they get excited, they may behave okay. See what I mean? When it gets reversed is that then somehow exempt from the same kind of critique that you're bringing to the men?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think for me it has to do with historical power dynamics also. I think it has to do with the fact that when it's said and done, the men do hold more power, which I don't agree with, obviously. But I think that the difference between a woman painting a male nude and a man painting a female nude is that there are just these—I guess I look at it in the same way that I look at—well, I don't know how to explain this. But I do think that it's okay for a woman to question—it's sort of a way of questioning—it's a political thing I think for a woman to paint a male nude. It might be sexual too, but it's always going to be political even if she doesn't mean to be.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I agree. And that's a real interesting—the final word isn't in on this and probably never will be. But taking it away from reversing the gaze—female model/male artist, both heterosexual, presumably they have a potential for connection. What about these women who—artists who do nude women, and they are lesbians? Where the object, literally, the object of their desire is what is the subject. And—I try to get at this—is that the way they do it—the project—that there's something that redeems that and keeps it okay. Even though desire is evident possibly.

RACHEL PULLEY: No, I don't think so. I think—at least in my experience, I want to just get away from sexualized or overtly sexualized nude modeling. And I think that if I was posing for a lesbian artist and I wasn't really interested in her project and she was just trying to capture some essence of female sexuality or something along those lines that I wouldn't find it very worthwhile. If it was a more—like a strategic approach or like a more political approach to the female nude and putting her in a context of disempowerment or something—sort of questioning the historical disempowerment of women then I think I may be interested in her project. But if it was strictly, just, I want to paint some nude women because I think women are hot. I think I wouldn't be interested in that project. And I think that immediately I would sense a position that I'd be in as the model and probably decline until I continue the project.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So for you nude modeling is a political act?

RACHEL PULLEY: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sounds to me as if it's almost entirely politicized, perhaps entirely removed from other aspects of human experience and behavior. So it's ideological. Is that right?

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, that—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Or that's what you said contextualizing yourself so, but that's what you bring [to the discussion] yourself.

RACHEL PULLEY: The act is political and then when that work is shown it becomes public I think, and I think that it—the spreading of the political message is pretty interesting. It's not to whom it's being spread, it's always an interesting question and it has to do with the elitism that's always in the art world. But I do think that being an art model is always going—especially as a woman—is always going to be. And—you're always going to be

sexualized and I just—at least it's not always going to be sexualized. But it's always going to be a sexual aspect to it and some artists can play around with that and poke fun at how ridiculously sexualized female nudes are or they can embrace that, and I'm not interested in working with people who embrace that, and I'm not interested in working with people who embrace my sexuality or my essential beauty or any of that business anymore.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What, what do you think—by the way you're not alone in this. I've talked with a number of models where this is really a key consideration. Where does it fall? They invariably get uncomfortable with the more —no matter how or where it comes from, where the sexual comes in. I've also talked to the male models who seek, they, themselves nude seek to create this [erotic situation]. I don't know how this came about but this seems to be—and there are some exceptions, but—let's see what was I going to ask you? Now I've lost my thought. Oh, I know what it was. How do you feel about erotica? I mean, do you think erotica is somehow off limits or inappropriate or is it that you just don't want to be yourself involved in producing what you would call erotica, eros in the studio or high-level erotic art?

RACHEL PULLEY: I'm not about high level—you mean like soft porn? I'm not about that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no I don't mean that. I mean, fine art that has an erotic content, of which there's plenty. Rembrandt did drawings like that.

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that I'm not going to prescribe normatives for—especially for women. They've had enough normatives placed on them already. But I don't want to personally be involved with it anymore. And I much rather appreciate hardcore porn. I think it's much more interesting and I guess it's more defeatable. I mean, erotica is incorporated by—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Catherine McKinnon doesn't think so.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right. It's—I think its an easier target to fight against, whereas erotica is so touchy the whole idea of having you know, art . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Well I understand that, although it puzzles me just a little bit because it's like then precluding something that has been with us always and can be handled in many different ways in some levels and some forms. In literature it's absolutely true. And it can be life-affirming and even affirming relationships and celebration of the senses; and to demonize in a way that enterprise, that effort, that both men and women are seeking, many of them—Joan Semmel for instance, wanted to create a vocabulary of eroticism for women, a special vocabulary. That's acknowledging there would be different things at work. But I find it interesting that you seem to throw out the baby with the bath water.

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I think that I'm—I think that erotica is—like I said, I don't want to have anything to do with the creation of it any longer.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, for you, personally.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you don't—that doesn't prevent others—in other words, this isn't sort of a blanket political prescription or ideological prescription that you would say [erotica] needs to be avoided?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that—I don't think that it's something to be avoided. I think that it's really important for discourse, but,—I mean that it exists. It's really great to talk about it and how it works in this culture. That's, I think, very repressive and I wonder if it would be so interesting if we weren't so repressive. I'm not anti-sex or anti-erotica. I think that those things are really important aspects of human existence; however, I think that when they sort of hinge on a power hierarchy they could become problematic. So that if the playing fields were leveled then that would be one thing, and then it's a question whether erotica would exist. I think that it still would. But—

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think that's a safe bet.

RACHEL PULLEY: Yeah. So, I mean—

PAUL KARLSTROM: All the ideology in the world isn't going to get it away from some—from a whole history of interest. But it seems —I'm sorry I interrupted you, were you . . .

RACHEL PULLEY: No, no, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It seems to me—this is very interesting that—I think you're the only model I've talked with who has brought an intellectual, based on experience, but intellectual, understanding of an activity and all of it's implications to the table and then finally that has determined the response, your own experience, which is—it

sounds to me like unfortunately, understandably maybe a negative one. Most of the models I've talked with seemed to be [inaudible], they're able to separate these two. You seem to generalize and universalize a bit, which is something that when you write your paper I'm sure you won't do.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right

PAUL KARLSTROM: But this your story I'm not being critical.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's just that I'm sort of thinking about how this story goes and—but it's interesting that you operate apparently so much from the realm of your understanding [of] history. The last—well, I guess the last question I'm going to have, I was going to ask you one about poses but it doesn't really matter too much and is this—this is one thing that can be very much at issue what kind of poses are requested.

RACHEL PULLEY: Right

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's like seeing more. My guess is that, that with some of these guys that was very much a part of it. But I'm more interested in this idea of the power struggle, of course, because that's what I've been writing about and how it seems to me you feel, for some external reasons, historical reasons—

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PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, we're continuing this—I see the little light going so I guess it's working on my side. Just—this is continuing the interview with Rachel Pulley on Artists and Models and we've done one tape but we didn't quite finish, so we're now on Tape 2, Side A.

And let's see if I can get us back to where we were. I don't want to make a big long statement that's for sure on this. But I do believe I was asking about your tendency to bring a historical framework to your own personal life and therefore from that basis to project into virtually every situation and relationship this truth of history as described in a certain text, and perhaps by your studies and observations and your own life experience as well. And I think personally that that's too bad. But that's just my point of view and I'm just thinking of maybe some cut-off opportunities, if you had had a little more trust. And I say that because of our earlier conversation, because then this was very much the issue; but it's not my business it's just an observation. I guess the question is though do you feel that a positive experience with an artist- model relationship, not to mention all other kinds of relationships, is pretty much impossible because of historical patterns, and habits that have developed and that the way we have somehow come to look at one another and treat one another? That's a big question and I realize that perhaps making a mega thing out of our artists and models [conversation]. But I'm just curious.

RACHEL PULLEY: Well, I think that to say that it is a historical trend that can't be changed is to say that it can't be changed. And I do think that my relationships with men are very diverse. It just so happens that my experience as a model mostly reflected things that feminist theorists have developed—ideas that they've developed. Not necessarily truth but rather collections of observations, under which my personal experiences do fall. But I do feel as though once women and men are on the same playing field, which would have to come from financial and social equality, I think that in that case then the relationship between the model and the artist would be much different. Just as in—I'm sure it's happening now, it's much different than it was back in the 60s. And just as in personal relationships are much more different oftentimes or they at least have the potential to be.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, it doesn't operate actually in the realm of sex. I mean, what you've described is that when economically there's parity, you've talked about a level playing field. And you mentioned these areas, another one was—well, I suppose in certain social ways. But don't you think that what we're really talking about to a large extent is taking place within the sexual arena?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that the disparity in economic and other social context is directly linked and manifests itself in sexuality so that we can talk about a man and a woman artist having, artists and models, having this sort of power dynamics between them. And it's a sexual power dynamic but it's also inherently linked to the dynamics between men and women in this culture.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not to pursue this overly but what happens when it's a female artist who clearly has the power in terms of choosing the model, arranging the roses, in some cases, as I was telling you, as much as [even] engaging male/female models to have sex. One might say, well, they're addressing the problem of human experience and so forth by a problem with a theme. One could also argue that they get off on it. Now, they're in the power position and obviously they can't force the models to do that. That is an extreme example but I'm just wondering what—how you think that fits with your generalization of power of female passivity and victimhood—

RACHEL PULLEY: I guess I'm sort of in the postmodern school and I believe that power can manifest itself both in gender but also in race, in class, in culture, in artist to model. Whereas you have one person who is basically paying for somebody else to engage in these sorts of activities. And it's not necessarily only an economic issue because you know when I was modeling it wasn't that much more money. I didn't need to do it, but there were sort of these other dynamics that are linked to those relationships.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Don't you think you're letting some of those women off the hook that choose to do those kinds of—to basically behave the way one would say abuse the power, perhaps, with these models?

RACHEL PULLEY: No, I don't think that their—their work should be celebrated as paradigms of equality. But I do think that the issues exemplify that we do sort of function in this power matrix and one can be an oppressor, and oppressed at the same time. And that one person can't necessarily be pinpointed as the man or the oppressor. That women can—women artists can oppress male or female models also. But this power structure, or the power hierarchy has traditionally been gendered between men and women. Whereas more men had the power and women didn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Final question, see this is the problem with our topic, it just raises all of the other issues. What hope is there for any situation in this—can't even call it post-postmodern, or something, time? If what you say is true, there's almost no way out because almost anything you do then finally [one can] say well, that's okay but basically this person is operating whether he knows it or not, within what amounts to an unfair power relationship. Where are the exceptions—where are, then, the models, [not] models in the studio, but the paradigms to celebrate, pursue—If everything is determined by this power relationship, power struggle?

RACHEL PULLEY: I think that the artist-model relationship isn't necessarily—doesn't necessarily hinge on power dynamics. But in most cases, especially with what I've experienced, it has been. And in the case of a woman videotaping people having sex I think that it is. But I do think there are cases that can be celebrated as functioning sort of on the edge of that power dynamic or even outside of it and so that I don't think that it's a quality of the artist-model relationship more than it is of particular instances that just so happen to be the norm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And for sure your experience was like that and that, of course, is what we were talking about. Well, this has been very enlightening. I want to thank you. I've enjoyed it. Good discourse, as they say. And I think you're going to have some interesting work ahead for your paper. I'd like to thank you, Rachel. We are through.

RACHEL PULLEY: Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]