

## Making Oneself Vulnerable to Discovery

*Carol Gilligan in Conversation With Mechthild Kiegelmann*

**Key words:** Carol Gilligan; human development; research relationships; voice approach; resistance; disconnection

**Abstract:** In an interview with Mechthild KIEGELMANN, Carol GILLIGAN talks about her academic development, explains key ideas in her psychological theory and method, and reiterates her commitment to civil rights movements. GILLIGAN first began studying literature before she became a research psychologist, helping her to combine art with psychology, which is evident in her most widely influential book "In a Different Voice." In this book GILLIGAN illustrates her theory on disconnection and connectedness, voice and resistance. In the interview she updates us on further developments of her thinking and her research on the psychological development of women, adolescent girls, and young boys. The conversation between GILLIGAN and KIEGELMANN explores research relationships in empirical studies as well as the connectedness of articulating research questions and authentic listening in interviews. They discuss the voice approach as a method of analysis and GILLIGAN presents her current work in psychology and theater.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Becoming a Psychologist](#)
- [2. Perspective on Methodology](#)
- [3. Dissociation and Relationships in Research on Girls and Woman](#)
- [4. Research Relationships Within Interviews: Moving Beyond Role Play ...](#)
- [5. Voice Method](#)
- [6. Theater as Place for Psychology ...](#)
- [7. Body and Self in Relationship](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

### About the Interview

The text is based on an audiotaped telephone interview. We spoke for approximately 90 minutes. The tape was transcribed by Kerstin SÄNGER from the Technical University of Dresden, Germany. Both Carol GILLIGAN and Mechthild KIEGELMANN then revised the transcript in order to transform the spoken language into a text of written English. In the summer of 2008 the current version was authorized by Carol GILLIGAN. The associations and logic of the conversation are captured in the interview text. [1]

### About the Interviewee

Carol GILLIGAN is an influential psychologist who, in 1996, was cited in *Time* Magazine as one of the 25 most influential people in the United States (US). Her work is interdisciplinary and she is internationally recognized among academics and practitioners, especially among second wave feminist scholars and activists. Her groundbreaking book *In a Different Voice* (GILLIGAN, 1982) has been very

influential on research in psychology, education, political science, sociology, philosophy, and related social sciences, and was translated into 18 languages. She has received numerous awards and honorary degrees, including 1998 Heinz Award, and from 1989 to 1993 a Senior Research Fellowship from the Spencer Foundation. [2]

Carol GILLIGAN studied literature at Swarthmore College, studied psychology at Radcliffe College, and in 1964 earned her PhD at Harvard University. Carol Gilligan became a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1971; in 1997 she received the Graham Chair in Gender Studies. In 2002 she moved to New York University, where she is a University Professor. She has also been working in collaboration with gender studies researchers at the University of Cambridge in the UK. [3]

Carol GILLIGAN conducted research on psychological topics such as identity and moral development, development of adolescent girls, boys' psychological development, and conflict in couples. Besides her psychological research, Carol GILLIGAN writes plays and recently published her first novel, *Kyra*. [4]

Selected publications:

Gilligan, Carol (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47, 481- 517.

Gilligan, Carol (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, Carol (1986). Exit-voice dilemmas in adolescent development. In Alejandro Foxley, Michael S McPherson & Guillermo A O'Donnell (Eds.), *Development, democracy and the art of trespassing: Essays in honor of Albert O. Hirschman* (pp.283-300). South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Gilligan, Carol (1990). Joining the resistance: Psychology, politics, girls and women. *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 24(4), 501-536.

Brown, Lynn & Gilligan, Carol (1991). Listening for voice in narratives of relationship. In Mark Tappan & Martin Packer (Eds.), *Narrative and storytelling: Implications for understanding moral development* (New directions for child development, No. 54) (pp.43-62). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, Lyn; Debold, Elizabeth; Tappan, Mark & Gilligan, Carol (1991). Reading narratives of conflict and choice for self and moral voices: A relational method. In William Kurtines & Jacob Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development: Theory, research, and application* (pp.25-61). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gilligan, Carol & Brown, Lynn (1992). *Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [New York: Ballantine, 1993; paperback]

Taylor, Jill; Gilligan, Carol & Sullivan, Amy (1995). *Between voice and silence: Women and girls, race and relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, Carol; Taylor, Jill & Sullivan Amy (1996). Missing voices, changing meanings: Developing a voice-centered, relational method, and creating an interpretive community. In Sue Wilkinson (Ed.), *Feminist social psychologies* (pp.233-257). Buckingham, England: *Open University Press*.

Gilligan, Carol (2002). *The birth of pleasure*. New York, NY: Knopf. [New York: Vintage, 2003; paperback]

Gilligan, Carol (2002). *The scarlet letter*. Stage Adaptation, produced by Shakespeare & Co, 2003.

Gilligan, Carol; Spencer, Renee; Weinberg, M. Katherine & Bertsch, Tatiana (2003). On the listening guide: A voice-centered relational method. In Paul Camic, Jean Rhodes & Lucy Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp.157-172). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Gilligan, Carol (2008). *Kyra: A novel*. New York: Random House.

## 1. Becoming a Psychologist

KIEGELMANN: Can you please tell us how you became a psychologist. [5]

GILLIGAN: Through a rather circuitous route. As an undergraduate at Swarthmore College, I studied literature, which shaped my understanding of the human world. But I also was riveted by a seminar on perception, where we studied Gestalt psychology. I remember watching the demonstrations of illusion, seeing how we organize or construct our visual world, and I was also fascinated by the ability to see through illusion, as when a two-dimensional image of a triangle on a screen is rotated and you see the edge, realize it has three dimensions. In my responses to literature and to the study of perception, as well as my background in music, I can see seeds of my subsequent work. But I went to graduate school in clinical psychology because I thought I wanted to become a therapist. [6]

Gestalt-Psychology had intrigued me, but in graduate school at Harvard where I was studying clinical and social psychology, I couldn't really connect to the field—to the irony of using deception in research on pro-social behavior, or the use of binary categories to establish whether a person is this or that. It was more like playing a game than delving into the mysteries of human experience. Almost from the beginning, I found myself thinking of going back into literature or into medicine. And then I fell in love and had a child and wrote a very short dissertation called *Responses to Temptation: An Analysis of Motives*. It was basically a critique of the field. What grappled me were the social movements of the time, the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement, and I became active in both. When my husband and I returned to Boston, I had the good

fortune of teaching with Erik ERIKSON, and that experience led me back into psychology, because he opened up the field to me in a new way. Erik combined the eye of an artist with the wisdom of a clinician and insisted on the need to join the study of life history with a study of history. Then I met Lawrence KOHLBERG and was hired by him as a research assistant. I was interested in people's responses to actual rather than hypothetical situations of conflict and choice, and that led me into research, first with him and then with some graduate students who shared my questions about how issues of identity and morality shape people's life choices. [7]

KIEGELMANN: What happened to your wish to become a therapist? [8]

GILLIGAN: By that time, I was the mother of three young children, and I found that more engaging. Also, I discovered that I loved teaching, and I could integrate that with the rest of my life. In graduate school, I had been put off by the clinical language, which sounded crude to me—case reports in which mothers were described as "cold," or fathers as "distant," as if that were a sufficient way to characterize a person. [9]

KIEGELMANN: Yes, it was too short and too much categorizing people into boxes, I assume. [10]

GILLIGAN: There was too great a disparity between the reality of people's lives and the language and methods of psychology. But I was also fortunate in having the freedom to explore questions that interested me. I began to interview college students about their responses to the Vietnam draft, first when they were sophomores in college. My intention was to interview them again as seniors when they would actually be facing the draft, but then President Nixon ended the draft. This was 1973, the year the Supreme Court legalized abortion, so I resumed my study, now interviewing women who were considering whether to continue or abort a pregnancy. I was completely blind to gender, unaware that I had moved from studying men to studying women. So the findings of *In a Different Voice* took me by surprise. That was when I got hooked on research. I had discovered something that I hadn't expected to see, but which made sense of experiences that had baffled me: Why women posed such a problem for psychologists—FREUD and ERIKSON, PIAGET and KOHLBERG—and why my own experiences often seemed at odds with their ways of seeing and speaking about life. I had assumed it was something about me. When I saw that women often started from a different premise, from an assumption of connectedness rather than separateness, I had a sense of epiphany: a sudden, radical shift in perception that led me to see my own experience, that of other women, and also the field of psychology in a new way. What had seemed my problem was not just my problem, and I understood why women so often felt unseen or misheard. It was like the Gestalt experiments where you could see a vase or two faces in profile; psychologists were talking about vases while women were often seeing the faces. And then I discovered that women had been left out of the major theory-building studies of psychological research. Certain experiences from that time have stayed in my mind. When I was interviewing a woman, asking her to

resolve one of KOHLBERG's moral dilemmas, and she asked me, "Would you like to know what I think? Or, would you like to know what I really think?" But history also played a role in this story. One effect of the Supreme Court's giving women a decisive voice in abortion decisions was to legitimize women as moral agents, capable of thinking and judging for themselves. Listening to how women spoke about the decision they were making, I was struck by their tendency to characterize whatever they wanted to do (have the baby, have an abortion) as "selfish," while regarding doing what others wanted them to do as good. I found myself asking why if it's good to be empathic and responsive to people's needs and concerns, why is it selfish to respond to yourself? And women would look at me and say, "Good question." It was the time of the women's movement, a time of questioning authority, and in this context many women were coming to see that selflessness, considered the epitome of feminine goodness, was instead morally problematic. It signified an abdication of voice, an evasion of responsibility and relationship. Women's voices challenged the categories of psychological and ethical theory and also the terms of the public abortion debate, introducing a different voice—a different way of speaking about self and morality and relationships. In excluding women at the critical theory-building stages of psychological research, psychologists had made a huge methodological error. They had left out half the sample, but what fascinated me was the extent to which this was not seen or not seen as a problem. It reflected a cultural blindness, "so obvious that nobody noticed," to borrow a phrase from Arundhati ROY's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). In summary, it turned out to be no small thing. The inclusion of women changed the categories of psychological theory, shifted the way of speaking about human experience and thinking about the human condition. It changed the way of listening to both men and women; it affected how people listened to one another and to themselves. It was after writing *In a Different Voice* that I came to think of myself as a psychologist, as someone who had something to say about human psychology. This is a long answer to your question. [11]

KIEGELMANN: Well, since you already talked about *In a Different Voice* I have this question: Now, almost 30 years after this book, did the world learn? In other words: what is relevant today about your work that started in the late seventies? [12]

GILLIGAN: What is still most alive and actual is the question of paradigm shift. You can hear the title of my book in two ways: as referring to women or to psychological theory and, in fact, I meant both. Women brought a different voice into the human conversation by articulating experiences of connectedness that had for the most part been unseen or unspoken, in part because of their association with women. And the inclusion of women's voices changed the voice of the conversation, it shifted the paradigm. And that is still being contested. As my friend, Wendy PURIEFOY put it, it's the difference between saying you can come into my house, you can come into every room of my house but it's still my house and saying, let's redesign the house. There is a general acceptance now of the principle of equality, that women's rights are human rights. Women can come into places from which we previously were barred. But the idea that

women's entrance would initiate a change in the structure, whether of theory or practice, work or love, by introducing new experiences, new perceptions, new ways of seeing and thinking, that's more contentious and also more pressing, because we can now see more clearly the limitations of the old ways. It brings questions about manhood to the fore, challenges the patriarchal gender binary and hierarchy where being a man means not being a woman and also being on top, introduces concerns about honor and shame that carry with them the threat of violence. In short, it exposes the tensions between democracy and patriarchy. I think this is where we are now. The research on trauma has also contributed to our understanding of voice and memory; how we can come to falsify our history and lose the ability to tell our story accurately. And these issues have become central to my current work. [13]

## 2. Perspective on Methodology

KIEGELMANN: I think this is a good point at which to talk about methods. How were you able to generate your new perspective on psychology when you did this research? [14]

GILLIGAN: Well, issues of method came into my research in at least two ways and were key to the insights I came to. First of all, I entered psychology with training in literary criticism and in music, both of which encouraged an ear for voice and for the sounds of different voices. I had learned the methods of new criticism, where you derive an interpretation from an analysis of the text itself rather than relying on secondary sources. Working with interview transcripts, I would analyze the structure of the narrative, the voices and points of view, the symbolism, patterns of repetition, omissions. And this led me to see outside the framework of existing theories. So listening for voice and the analysis of narrative were crucial methodological choices that still distinguish my research from that of many psychologists. It's a method my colleagues and I worked to render systematic in the form of a *Listening Guide*, which lays out a three-step process of listening as a way of coming to hear and to understand the structure of another person's inner world. The second place where questions of method came to the fore was in the studies of girls' development that followed *In a Different Voice*. In listening to girls as they moved from childhood into adolescence, my colleagues and I heard evidence of dissociation and also of resistance; girls coming not to know what they knew and also resisting a loss of voice and relationship. In our interview transcripts we noticed a sudden, precipitous rise in the incidence of the phrase "I don't know," as girls approached adolescence and discovered that rather than an admission of ignorance, it often served as a cover for knowledge. The relational dynamics of the interview then became crucial in determining what girls would say and what would remain unspoken. And with this, the paradigm of research shifted. What had been taken as objectivity, a stance of non-responsiveness or neutrality, appeared instead as a stance of non-relationship that discouraged the expression of an honest voice. The research encounter is a relational encounter, and voice is sensitive to resonance, to relationship. Non-responsiveness was one relational option among many, a variable rather than a standard of objectivity, and the awareness of dissociation, the realization that

people can know something without knowing that they know it, called into question the validity of a range of methods used by psychologists. It highlighted the need for a more clinical approach, attentive to the signs of dissociation and to the dynamics of voice and relationship. [15]

KIEGELMANN: How does your theoretical approach relate to the empirical data you collect? [16]

GILLIGAN: Following *In a Different Voice*, I began to study girls' development because I couldn't discern the line connecting the voice of the one eleven-year-old girl with the voices of the women that filled the pages of that book. It was as if a shift had occurred in the way of seeing and speaking about the human world, but I had no way of explaining this shift. Questions about women's psychology for the most part had focused on whether women differed from men, and if so, how and why, and were they better or worse. In effect, women's psychology was cut off from women's history, meaning from the development of girls. I wanted to fill in this missing line of psychological history, and the need to do so was underscored when I read in the 1980 *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* that adolescent girls "had simply not been much studied." [17]

KIEGELMANN: The researchers forgot to study women. [18]

GILLIGAN: Joseph ADELSON, the editor of the *Handbook*, actually had asked Anne PETERSON to write a chapter on female adolescent development, which in itself was a problem because what was the rest of the book about. But after surveying the literature, she concluded that there was not enough material to fill a single chapter. ADELSON noted the "subtle but pervasive masculine bias" that characterized the literature on adolescence, leading to an over-emphasis on issues of autonomy and achievement and a corresponding neglect of issues of intimacy, nurturance, and love. So, rather than asking how girls fit conceptions of adolescence derived from studies of boys, my students and I set out to discover what could be learned about adolescence by listening to girls. In this light, we approached girls' experience by deliberately trying to set aside preexisting theoretical frameworks. And in fact, girls' experiences of coming of age challenged many of the accepted truths about adolescent psychology, as Terri APTER (1991) captured in titling her book on the subject, *Altered Loves*. I came to the conclusion that the controversy over quantitative versus qualitative methods was fundamentally misconceived, because the choice of method depended on the question one was asking. When the question was how much or how many or how often or which one of several variable was driving the results, you had to use statistical methods. But if your goal was to discover the structure of another person's inner world, how they construed reality or shaped their experience, then you had to come into relationship with them and this required a clinical method and a qualitative analysis. The *Listening Guide* (GILLIGAN, SPENCER, WEINBERG, & BERTSCH, 2003) was designed for this kind of discovery research, where the road to discovery is through voice and relationship. [19]

### 3. Dissociation and Relationships in Research on Girls and Woman

KIEGELMANN: You already mentioned your work with adolescent girls. You found that dissociation is a big expectation from society for the girls. You wondered how the girls you interviewed connected to the women who participated in your studies. Could you please talk about how dissociation and connection are relevant to your work? [20]

GILLIGAN: The most startling finding of that research was how surprising it was to us, as women, to hear the voices of pre-adolescent girls. It was like entering a lost time in development; hearing a voice that was at once familiar and surprising. It was an honest voice that we had dismissed or dissociated ourselves from and in this sense, forgotten. And yet we knew it. Equally surprising, was the experience of listening to girls describe their struggles with dissociation. One thirteen-year-old spoke of her sense of losing her mind, which she located in her gut and associated with her "real thoughts and feelings." She distinguished her mind, which she connected with her heart, from her brain, which she located in her head and associated with her intelligence and her education. Other girls described silencing an honest voice that had come to sound or seem "stupid"; a sixteen-year-old observed, "the voice that stands up for what I believe in has been buried deep inside me." A high-school senior, the valedictorian of her class, reflected: "If I were to say what I was feeling and thinking, no one would want to be with me, my voice would be too loud." When she went on to add, by way of explanation, "But you have to have relationships," I said, "But if you are not saying what you are feeling and thinking, then where are you in these relationships?" She saw the paradox in what she was saying: she had given up relationship for the sake of having "relationships," silencing herself so that "she" could be with other people. It was what FREUD had called "the riddle of femininity": a riddle that cannot be solved because the choice between voice and relationship is psychologically incoherent. The fact that girls saw this and also resisted the move into incoherence was astonishing; more interesting than the loss of voice or the signs of psychological distress that followed, because it suggested a much more active tension between psychological development and what can be seen as the culture of patriarchy, with its gender binaries and hierarchies that force these kinds of dissociation. Girls were calling attention to a much larger psychological and cultural or political problem and highlighting a capacity for resistance that was psychologically rather than ideologically grounded; comparable to the body's resistance to disease. When girls stopped speaking about what they were experiencing and seeing or when their voices were discounted, the problem seemingly disappeared or became "girls' problems." The research with girls profoundly affected women, mothers and teachers and therapists, and also fathers who valued their daughter's honest voices. And all of this led to the further insight that girls' voices are crucial because the corresponding initiation of boys into the gender codes and scripts of patriarchy typically occurs at an earlier time in development, around the ages of four and five, when it is more difficult to articulate and reflect on the experience. Boys also showed signs of resistance, but it was more often expressed in action rather than words, and their initiation also was followed by a rise in signs of

psychological distress. As contact with pre-adolescent girls could lead women to recover lost voices within themselves, so young boys spurred men to recall an emotional openness in themselves which they had lost or kept hidden as the price of manhood. A culturally sanctioned initiation driven by gender was leading to dissociation, affecting women and men in different ways, but resulting in a constriction of voice and compromising the capacity for relationship. What had been seen as development bore some of the hallmarks of trauma. This was the discovery of the research on girls' adolescence. In *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, Lyn Mikel BROWN and I (BROWN & GILLIGAN, 1992) write about the implications for the design of research, how when you create a hierarchy, you also create an underground, and how by making contact with the underground, we came to discover what girls know. [21]

#### **4. Research Relationships Within Interviews: Moving Beyond Role Play ...**

KIEGELMANN: What happened there? What happens in research relationships when you interview? [22]

GILLIGAN: Well, the research relationship—I would say—became collaborative, became a relationship in a truer sense of the word. To learn from girls about girls' development, we had to come into relationship with girls in a genuine way and approach them as authorities about their experience. And once we communicated our desire to learn from them, girls responded by letting us in and in this way we came, often with them, to know what they knew. The process of inquiry has its own integrity when driven by a genuine curiosity, and it differs from the process of assessment, which has more to do with judgment and ranking. You could say that we stopped playing the research game, where the researcher asks the questions and the research subject answers the questions and people sort of know how that's done. [23]

KIEGELMANN: Hmm, kind of a role-play and then it's over—bye, bye! [24]

GILLIGAN: Exactly. [25]

KIEGELMANN: It's kind of like a role-play; everyone plays her or his role. [26]

GILLIGAN: Yeah, someone plays the psychologist. In fact, girls would do that, they would role-play, they would do dramatic skits; you know, one person interviewing the other and you could hear how they heard the psychologist's voice as a "fakey voice" ... and knew how one speaks to a psychologist, as opposed to being two people in a room trying to come to understanding, gain knowledge, with one having a real question and needing the other's help in pursuing it. You know, doing the best they can to try to get at what is—I don't want to make a simple thing of truth—but you know what I'm saying. [27]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, you know I teach now and when I teach methods students always ask me: "So when I do the interview, what should I ask?" And I say:

"That's the wrong question." I always say: "You have to have a question that you are really interested in. Not make it up but find out what you are really interested in." When we teach methods we have to be able to explain to the students how to do research. And I think you ... [28]

GILLIGAN: Yes, because if you are asking a question you are not interested in then you are playing a role and the other person will play the corresponding role. You can actually feel the shift from that kind of role-playing to a real conversation, driven by a genuine curiosity and directed towards trying to understand or discover something with another person. [29]

KIEGELMANN: How would you help students to learn to overcome the role-play? I would certainly start with asking a real question. [30]

GILLIGAN: By starting with a real question and asking someone if they would help you in pursuing it. You know, you come and say in effect: "I'm here asking you for some of your time, your life, because there is something I really want to know and I think you can help me. And that just changes the dynamics, shifts the power relationship. I find that it's often surprisingly difficult for students to grasp. They have been taught to ask "good questions," or to find the "right question," rather than to ask themselves what they know and what they don't know but would like to know. It goes against the grain of much psychological training and education, including the need to be right or to feel in control. The place of not knowing is a risky place, it involves making oneself vulnerable to discovery, letting go of control in the sense of being willing to be surprised or to be wrong, and people have all sorts of fears about what will happen, about being out of control or overwhelmed. The reality is that it opens up a clear path to follow, once one grasps the underlying logic of psychological research, and it brings a real integrity into the research process, including a genuine respect for the other person—for their experience, what they know and can contribute. I will often ask students what surprised them, where the inquiry took a direction they had not anticipated, where they found themselves most engaged, and I discovered that students are often suspicious of these moments, judgmental about their own responses, which may lead them to veer away from actual discovery. I encourage them to observe these responses in themselves and to see what happens if they replace judgment with curiosity. Once students get it, they see it, but they often have to go through the process many times before they trust it. And then they become hooked on psychological research. When you start from a place of genuine curiosity, you can go almost anywhere with someone, ask about what you don't understand or what you want to know as long as it makes sense in terms of your question. It frees the voice of the researcher and engages the participant in the research process. Then you are in a very different kind of relationship than when someone is assessing you and hiding what they are thinking and feeling. Once you realize how astutely people can read subtle psychological cues, it gives you pause about many commonly used research methods, including the practice of deception. [31]

KIEGELMANN: Yes, deception in research changes the research relationships. The way I hear you is—a study doesn't start with an interview question, it starts with the researcher figuring out what she or he wants to research on. [32]

GILLIGAN: Exactly. [33]

KIEGELMANN: And only when the students are able to figure out what is it that they are really interested in then they can go into an interview and gain new knowledge. [34]

GILLIGAN: One difference between research and therapy is that therapy starts with somebody coming for help; whereas with research the researcher initiates the contact and asks the other person for their help. And they can say yes or no, more or less overtly. So, then the question becomes what kind of research relationship facilitates the process of discovery and what impedes it? The ethics of research becomes an ethic of relationship, involving respect and honesty, not betraying people's trust. And what I find is that when people join you in the process of discovery, they often will come to new insights about their own experience, ask questions they may not have thought to ask themselves or may have wanted to ask but were afraid to pursue; and in the process, they may lead you to change your question and move in a direction not anticipated when the research began. [35]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, and in a way then the person who answers helps the researcher to understand, to articulate better, what her or his own question is. [36]

GILLIGAN: What strikes me is then the empirical work, meaning the work of learning through experience which is the essence of science, happens right in the interview rather than the interview recording experiences that had happened at some other time. You can observe the process, and this is the evidence I trust the most. [37]

## **5. Voice Method**

KIEGELMANN: This conversation leads right into my next question: How do you go about analyzing interviews? [38]

GILLIGAN: Well, how you analyze and what you analyze reflect your understanding of psychology. The process of analysis is complex and layered because the human psyche is complex and layered. It resists the binary logic of either/or categories. The listening guide method is called a guide because it guides the process of analysis, laying out three steps as a way of entering and coming to know another person's inner world, in the context of the research relationship. The first listening is for the plot, for the distinctive features of this particular psychological landscape or terrain, and also for the stories that are told. You listen for repeated words and phrases, key images and metaphors, for voice—who is speaking and to whom, in what body, in what societal and cultural frameworks, and also for the unspoken, for omissions, gaps and ruptures in the

narrative, interruptions, abrupt changes of subject, places where the voice falls off or shifts. And you also track your responses to the other person and what they are saying, making these explicit so as to avoid projecting them onto others or acting them out in various ways. Objectivity then becomes a matter not of avoiding relationship but paying attention to relationship, not silencing yourself but distinguishing your voice from that of the other person, not ignoring the surrounding culture but being aware of how it might affect the conversation. The second step of the Listening Guide involves listening for the "I," the spoken self, the first-person voice as it speaks in this interview conversation. Here the procedure is straightforward; choosing sections of the interview that seem puzzling or of particular interest, you take each I phrase (usually just subject and verb) that occurs and list to them in sequence ("I want, I know, I don't know, I think ..."). Elizabeth DEBOLD made the discovery that these I statements often fall into a poetic cadence and can be turned into "I poems," with stanza breaks marking the end of one cadence and the start of another. The I poems often prove to be remarkably revealing, picking up an associative logic that runs under the logic of the sentence and capturing what people know about themselves, often without being aware of communicating it. It's like a sonogram of the psyche. The third listening is for contrapuntal voices, and this is the creative step in the analysis, because the researcher has to distinguish different voices within the conversation, discover which voices speak to the research question, and identify their characteristic features (passive or active voice, first or third person, distinctive images or metaphors, emotional tone). The counterpoint is the interplay of these different voices within the narrative, and also their relationship to the first-person voice, what voices are aligned with the self, which are distanced from the self. In the end, you assemble a chain of evidence drawn from the different listenings, and this becomes the basis for composing your analysis. By making explicit the connections between evidence and interpretation, other researchers can see how you arrived at the understanding you have come to and also explore different paths. Reliability, reframed within a relational understanding of the research process, means checking one's listening against that of others, especially people whose backgrounds or cultures may lead them to pick up what you have missed or misheard. The Listening Guide relies on voice and relationship to gain entry into the inner world of another person and is intended as a guide—as showing a way to discovery and leaving the endpoint open. [39]

KIEGELMANN: What I like about the voice method, when I teach, is that it has both structure and openness. I can explain to students that there is a sequence of readings. You do the first reading, the second reading, and so on. This way, the students have the guidelines and write notes about discoveries in each step. This way, even beginners have a sense of knowing what to do. And on the other hand the method still leaves the openness for discovery. I teach in a way of training and of supporting the students to figure out their own questions and analyses. We never know what the voices are going to be. [40]

GILLIGAN: It's something to be discovered in the course of the analysis. [41]

KIEGELMANN: ... depending on the research question, of course, in each project. [42]

GILLIGAN: Yes, exactly. [43]

KIEGELMANN: We might be at a place in this conversation where talking about your current work in theater might fit well. [44]

GILLIGAN: There's one more thing before we leave the subject of methods, and that has to do with association and the power of association to undo dissociation. You cannot argue yourself out of a paradigm, but the process of association can free you from its logic. The radical potential that inheres in psychological research lies in this recognition: that the logic of the psyche is an associative logic, the logic of dreams and poetry and memory. It's a logic of connection that runs under the cultural radar. And the challenge for research is to tap into this logic. So you float a question and then wait to see where it leads someone, which may be somewhere you would have never imagined. For me, that's the joy of doing research. But you have to be willing to have your framework shifted. You have to tolerate the uncertainty of not knowing. One student called it "moving through darkness," and that can be unsettling when you think about having to have conclusions, findings, publications. Although in the end, this kind of work often leads to all of these things because it leads to real discovery. But you can't know this when you start. [45]

KIEGELMANN: And associative method here means association like in psychoanalysis, one association after the other; you go away from the categories. [46]

GILLIGAN: Yes. Instead of following a deductive logic (how one thought implies another) you follow the stream of associations. And if you think about the Listening Guide, the "I poem" and the contrapuntal voice analysis, it leads you to hear different voices and to follow their counterpoint or orchestration. It's a musical structure, an inductive method, and this takes us to literature and theater. When I ask myself, why artists are often the best psychologists—why, as FREUD noted, poets are often light years ahead—it's because of their use of associative methods. This allows them to break through dissociation, to see the cultural framework, which why artists often are the ones who speak the unspoken and reveal what is hidden. [47]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, just listening to you I imagine someone trying to do theater and using the write-ups based on psychological tests reports. The audience would say: That's flat, those are not full people, those are not characters that you are presenting there. [48]

GILLIGAN: Well, yeah, that's exactly it. I mean, it goes back to where we began this conversation. I tell my students that if they listen closely to the voice or voices of the person they are interviewing (or whose diary or journal they are reading), they will come to know its characteristic features and be able to write as a novelist or a playwright would write a character or scene. I find that the writing of my

students often takes on a literary quality and in the process becomes much more psychologically accurate and astute. And they become more respectful in their portrayal of other people, clearer in distinguishing their own voice from the voices of others, more ethical in sustaining rather than breaking relationship with the people they have learned from when they write up the results of their research. [49]

## 6. Theater as Place for Psychology ...

KIEGELMANN: ... and the students portray characters that are complex and not reduced to intelligence quota, depression level, and other test scores. The persons who are the basis of psychological research become human in a way. Well, are we finished with mentioning theater, or do you want to say something more? [50]

GILLIGAN: Working in the theater brought home to me the reality that the psyche is embodied as well as in culture. Voice is not simply a concept or a metaphor for the self; it has a physical reality. I should say I have written a play, inspired by Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, which was performed in 2007 at the WomenCenterStage festival in New York, but this shouldn't surprise you, right? [51]

KIEGELMANN: No. Maybe, I should not invite you to a psychological conference in Germany, but to a theater. [52]

GILLIGAN: Well, I probably would be more at home there right now. [53]

KIEGELMANN: Well, Tübingen has wonderful little theaters. [54]

GILLIGAN: But it's in German, right? And my German is very limited. [55]

KIEGELMANN: Language problems would easily be overcome. But that's a different project. I will think about it. Maybe, you can do some theater at a psychological conference. [56]

GILLIGAN: Fabulous! Wouldn't that be great? That would be terrific! [57]

## 7. Body and Self in Relationship

KIEGELMANN: How about that instead of doing an ordinary talk? It's a fun thought. When we talked about this interview beforehand, you said that you wanted to say something about neuroscience. [58]

GILLIGAN: When I observed dissociation among girls entering adolescence, and subsequently in boys around the age of five, what I saw was that they were splitting their minds from their bodies, their thoughts from their emotions, and themselves from their relationships in the process of entering a culture that sanctioned these splits. Developmental psychologists had seen these separations as markers of development, key to the achievement of rational thought and an

autonomous sense of self. Yet my colleagues and I noticed that children were resisting these splits, which often were marked by signs of psychological distress. And then I discovered in the work of Antonio DAMASIO (1999) that the splitting of reason from emotion was DESCARTES' error, neurologically unfounded, and as DAMASIO's research showed, a manifestation of brain injury or trauma. Divorced from emotion, reason can solve logical problems, deduce one thought from another, but it cannot serve as a guide to navigating the human social world, which depends on integrating thought and emotion, what we now call emotional intelligence. Children's resistance made a new kind of sense in light of these findings; in essence they were resisting losing a vital capacity that was part of their human nature, their neurological hard-wiring. But it was DAMASIO's second book, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, that provided the neurological underpinnings for a key finding of my developmental research, and I write about this in *The Birth of Pleasure*. In studying consciousness, DAMASIO distinguishes between core consciousness or a core sense of self, grounded in the body and in emotion, and what he calls the "autobiographical self," the self that is wedded to a story about itself. In our bodies and in our emotions, we register our experience from moment to moment, picking up the music or the feeling of what happens. It is how children know what they know. But in the course of development we also become wedded to stories about ourselves that shape our identity. I had witnessed a process of initiation through which children came to wed themselves to a false story about themselves, a gendered story that required them to dissociate themselves from what they knew in their bodies and through their emotions, to override or not know their experience. And yet within themselves, in their core self, they knew it. This is what makes psychological research so radical, so potentially powerful, because it holds the potential to reveal this knowing, to undo the dissociation, connect us with our own experience, reveal what stories are true to this experience and which are false. In this lies the liberating power of psychology, and it also explains the pressures to rein it in. In a book written with my NYU colleague David RICHARDS, a scholar of constitutional law and development, we explore this power and also the force of opposition as they play out through history and into the present. Our sense of urgency is conveyed by our title: *The Deepening Darkness: Patriarchy, Resistance, and Democracy's Future*, and the book will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2009. [59]

KIEGELMANN: And I just thought in a way of summing up we could talk about voice and how voice is able to, you know, from a method's point of view, is able to capture the inner world and the outer world, and the neurobiology and the psyche. Thus, my question now is: Could you say just as a summary how the concept of voice helps you to do the kind of psychology that you are doing? [60]

GILLIGAN: I find that speaking about "voice" is more illuminating than talking about "the self," where it's never quite clear exactly what you're talking about. Voice has a physical referent; you can hear it. A person has a distinctive voice, it's like a footprint of the psyche; you recognize it, hear changes in it. We are born with a voice and in relationship with the ability to communicate with other people. Voice is an instrument of the psyche, it is physical, it has vibrations and is

responsive to resonance, to relationship; it is in the body and in culture, and capable of conveying the full range of emotions and thoughts. Through voice we can bring our inner worlds into the outer world and into relationship with other people. And we also take in other people's voices which means, taking their inner worlds into ourselves, not only what they are saying but the emotional tone, the information you gain when you listen to someone's voice —Is it frightening? Is it inviting? Are they covering or revealing themselves? And then, of course, voice is also in language, in culture, so we take that in as well. [61]

Loss of voice is the psychological marker of trauma. It is also a mark of totalitarian or fascist societies that mount an assault on the human psyche. In emphasizing voice, I have tried to work against the dangers I see in the current tendency to reduce psychology to biology or to culture, to see people as either genetically determined or socially engineered and thus without the capacity for voice or resistance. [62]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, a person uses voice and language in order to speak up and to resist something. At the same time, you have to use the language from the culture you are resisting. So voice is connected and not connected. [63]

GILLIGAN: It's "both and" and not "either or." [64]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, when I say I use the voice method people often ask: Can you please define voice? The concept of voice is hard to articulate and understand for a research psychologist. [65]

GILLIGAN: I find that asking people to listen is a good way to begin. To listen to their own voice, listen to another's voice—what do you hear? What do you learn? Voice destabilizes the notion of separateness, renders it illusory, because we are constantly taking in other people's voices. Speaking and listening is like breathing out and breathing in, and psychological troubles come when people start holding their breath, when they cannot take in what others are saying or let out what they are feeling and thinking. Voice is an instrument of relationship, and in losing voice, one loses relationship. This is what makes trauma so devastating, so isolating. [66]

KIEGELMANN: I like about the voice method the idea that there is not just one voice to hear, but multiple voices, including the voices of other people. That is to say, you know, I don't have to reduce a person to categories such as "depressed person" or "smart person." When persons talk about different topics and different struggles, different voices come out. [67]

GILLIGAN: I remember the afternoon when Dana JACK and I were reading the transcripts of her interviews with depressed women (JACK, 1991) and came upon a voice we had not expected to hear. These were clinically depressed women, and yet there was a clear, first-person voice, saying "I think," "I know," "I want," "I believe." Countering that voice was another voice, a second person voice, the voice of what Dana called the "Over-Eye," observing and judging and silencing

the self. The voice of "You should," "You ought," and Dana came to understand the exhaustion of depression as reflecting the effort it takes to silence the self. She then went on to develop a "silencing the self" scale, a quantitative measure now widely used in cross-cultural studies of depression. [68]

KIEGELMANN: Well, in wrapping up there is one question that I learned from you for conducting interviews. That is: Do you have a question for me? [69]

GILLIGAN: I would love to ask you about your research and how you are thinking about the questions of theory and method we have been discussing, but that would mean another interview. I remember how much I learned from your study of brother-sister incest in the time when we were working together at Harvard. But for now, my question is, knowing me is there something you know I haven't said or anything that is not clear? [70]

KIEGELMANN: Well, you have addressed the question about the meaning of voice. Yet, when discussing with other psychologists, I am sometimes asked about a one-sentence-definition of what is voice. Can you help me with this question? [71]

GILLIGAN: You know that people talk about the psyche or the self and it's hard to define exactly what they mean. It's a concept. But with voice, instead of asking: "What is your concept of voice?" I would ask, "What is your experience of voice?" People know voice through experience, but they are not used to talking about it, especially within a psychology wedded to visual imagery and metaphors—observing and probing rather than listening and hearing. To speak about voice counters the premise of separateness and arouses fears about connectedness. It challenges the paradigm of separateness and calls for a relational language, a paradigm shift. [72]

KIEGELMANN: See, my experience with teaching is no problem. The students listen and talk; we try, we practice. I can easily talk about voice when teaching. But, when I have to write a research article I don't know my audience, or my audience is ... [73]

GILLIGAN: But more than that, you anticipate being misheard or misunderstood, having your work assimilated into a paradigm that renders it incoherent. I know this from experience, and the challenge is how to take on this question of paradigm, how to speak across paradigms, which is very difficult. It's one reason my writing has become more associative, why I try to show what I've seen, lead people into the experience before talking about it, break through dissociation. It's a real challenge to communicate when the findings of your research do not fit in the reigning paradigm. Ultimately you have to shift the framework, and it's like the Gestalt figures: people can see it, then not see it, go back and forth. And that can be crazy-making, because you know they've seen it and then you hear them speak as if they haven't. It's what happens when the framework shifts. [74]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, I know. [75]

GILLIGAN: Still, I remain optimistic. [76]

KIEGELMANN: And I do have hope, I think the field is changing and there are more and more researchers within academic psychology and sociology and education who know that there are different ways of doing research. [77]

GILLIGAN: Oh, absolutely! I mean the way the field was when I entered it, it's so different now. I'm hopeful too. You know, what moves forward also goes back and forth. As a psychologist you know that—change is not simple, and it's a truism of psychotherapy that people often turn back just when they have come to see the possibility of the new. I also think that research on trauma has sensitized people to dissociation and its effects on voice and memory. Women often forget the time before adolescence or remember it in dismissive terms, calling an honest voice "stupid" or "crazy," as men forget the emotionally open voice of young boys or come to hear it as "babyish," or unmanly. But that honest voice and emotional intelligence are not lost; they remain inside us. I am often surprised by how little it takes to call forth that voice and that intelligence, but sustaining them is more difficult. When the resonances shift, it becomes hard to hear them without remembering the loss, the shaming, the disparagement, and this leads us to disavow them again. Dissociation sets in, and we forget what we knew. So, while I share your sense of hope, I know it's not going to be easy. [78]

KIEGELMANN: Yeah, but that's why we are there. [79]

GILLIGAN: Right. [80]

KIEGELMANN: Well, I think we have talked for quite a bit, and it was very interesting, and it was also like a little bit coming back when I was in the U.S. and being able to learn from you. So I thank you very much that you did this interview with me. [81]

GILLIGAN: And I thank you. It was interesting for me as well and wonderful to hear your voice!. It brings back many conversations and also feels very immediate in the present. I hope we'll talk again soon. [82]

## References

- Adelson, Joseph (Ed.) (1980). *Handbook of adolescent psychology*. New York: Wiley.
- Apter, Terri. (1991). *Altered loves: Mothers and daughters during adolescence*. Robbinsdale: Fawcett.
- Damasio, Antonio (1999). *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Gilligan, Carol (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gilligan, Carol & Brown, Lynn (1992). *Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [New York: Ballantine, 1993; paperback]
- Gilligan, Carol & Richards, David (2009). *The deepening darkness patriarchy, resistance, and democracy's future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gilligan, Carol; Spencer, Renee; Weinberg, M. Katherine & Bertsch, Tatiana (2003). On the listening guide: A voice-centered relational method. In Paul Camic, Jean Rhodes & Lucy Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp.157-172). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Jack, Dana C. (1991). *Silencing the self: Depression and women*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roy, Arundhati (1997). *The god of small things*. New York: HarperCollins.

## Author

*Mechthild KIEGELMANN* currently holds a professorship (Lehrstuhlvertretung 2008/2009) in educational and applied developmental psychology at the University of Trier, Germany. She has also worked in developmental psychology at the Technical University of Dresden, Germany (Professurvertretung 2006/2008) and was assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Tübingen (Wissenschaftliche Assistentin 1999-2006) as she received her habilitation in 2006. She earned her doctoral degree in 1997 from Harvard University where Carol GILLIGAN was her thesis advisor. Mechthild KIEGELMANN is the founder and current president of the international Center for Qualitative Psychology. Her research interests are in developing qualitative and mixed method approaches for psychological research, especially in the areas of trauma, silence breaking, coping with discrimination as well as multilingual language development and identity. She is currently working on identity development of multilingual children in early education and on evaluating the popular practice of "Baby Signing"; i.e. using signs from a sign language to foster communication within hearing families.

Contact:

Mechthild Kiegelmann

University of Trier  
Institute of Psychology  
54286 Trier, Germany

Tel.: +49 651 201 2927

Fax: +49 651 201 2955

E-mail:

[Mechthild\\_kiegelmann@post.harvard.edu](mailto:Mechthild_kiegelmann@post.harvard.edu)

URL: <http://www.uni-trier.de/index.php?id=20548>

## Citation

Kiegelmann, Mechthild (2009). Making Oneself Vulnerable to Discovery. Carol Gilligan in Conversation With Mechthild Kiegelmann [82 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(2), Art. 3, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs090234>.