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Claire Brown Interview: Paula Fass and Christina Maslach, "Academic Pioneers: Women at Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s." Interviews with Berkeley's pioneering women professors, Berkeley, CA. Conducted 2019-2023.

Christina Maslach:

Okay, so we will begin. And if you could just basically give some basic demographics, your name, your birth, high school, college. So who are you?

Clair Brown:

I'm Clair Brown. I was born in Tampa, Florida in February, 1946. I went to a public high school, Plant High School, which was the "white" high school. Tampa was segregated when I was growing up, with schools segregated by race—Black (called Negro), white, and Cubano (Tampa's main industry was making Cuban cigars). All aspects of life were segregated—housing, stores, restaurants.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. All right.

Clair Brown:

And so I learned a lot growing up in a segregated city. It made me realize how unfair it was to have the African-Americans' jobs mainly serving white people. They were the maids and the gardeners, and the Cubans had low-paying jobs hand-rolling cigars. White men, smoking cigars, ran the city and their wives hired black servants. I learned about racism and elitism growing up in the segregated South that still celebrated the Confederacy.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

I was determined to leave the South as soon as I could, which was when I graduated from high school. I went to college at Wellesley, where I applied early decision after visiting. I loved Wellesley, because it opened the world to me in many, many ways. As a Southern, I also faced some discrimination, because you many Northerners didn't like people from the South, and they would accost me. I would just look at them and say, "I think what's going on in the South is also awful, so please don't blame it on me. Like, I'll do what I can with you to make changes." This was actually a good experience too, to understand how people can make judgments that have nothing to do with the person they're judging. All these experiences helped me as a woman to go into a man's world that judged women as intellectually inferior. Also, I had a passion—to reduce discrimination against Blacks and against women.

Christina Maslach:

Right. So, okay. You finish at Wellesley then and what is the...?

Clair Brown:

So I graduated with a math major in 1968, into a strong job market. I decided to be a research assistant, and went to work for a research group in Washington, DC. I was also married to a Harvard lawyer (my first marriage).

Clair Brown:

Being married took a lot of learning for me. I often need lots of learning!

Christina Maslach:

Not uncommon among the interviewees, by the way...

Clair Brown:

I was probably already a budding labor economist at the time, because I looked around and asked, "What are the career ladders here?" I realized that there were no career ladders. It's like, you were a research assistant, and that was it. I realized to have a better job, I had to go to graduate school. I liked economics, and math had become boring to me and didn't seem to relate to real world problems. I had started taking economics courses at Wellesley because my friends who had the most interesting conversations were economics majors.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, okay.

Clair Brown:

And it was the biggest major at Wellesley. So I applied to graduate school in economics, but I hit the male discrimination wall because the economics departments just weren't admitting and providing aid to women. I applied to the University of Maryland, which had some excellent faculty in policy work, and my husband and I were living in DC. Graduate schools had plenty of male applicants because of the graduate school deferrals from the Vietnam War draft. Then the graduate school deferrals ended, and the draft lottery began for the men. All of a sudden the graduate schools had a large decline in male applicants and decided that female applicants were looking better. The University of Maryland Economics Department reached out and said, "We not only want to admit you, we're going to let you be a TA (teaching assistant)," Immediately their policies against allowing women to be TAs was changed.

Christina Maslach:

Whoa!

Clair Brown:

Earlier I had been admitted, but I told the Chair, "I need a way to pay for myself, and want to be a TA." I was told that I had a husband who can pay for me. Another woman, Joanne, who was a math major from Carnegie Mellon, was also admitted and denied a TAship. Then with the draft deferral, and empty TA slots, Joanne and I were offered TAships. Then the "office problem" arose, because the TAs shared one large room with one desk per student. We were told by the chair of the department, "Women can't be in the same room as men. You have to go over to this room in another building across campus." But Joanne and I were quite feisty. We just walked into the office where the male teaching assistants worked and said, "We're here, where are our desks?" They showed us the two empty desks. We said, "You know, we aren't supposed to actually be in this room." They said "What? Of course you're going to be in this room. We all are." That solved that problem because the chair never knew. Things actually worked well, except unfortunately a lot of men were being drafted as the destructive unpopular war continued.

While I was in graduate school, we spent quite a bit of time protesting the war. It was an important part of our lives as graduate students to do well in graduate school and to protest the war.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Clair Brown:
Finally the Vietnam War ended about the time we were graduating. Then I got my first big breakthrough as a woman economist. The Brookings Institution reached out and asked me to apply to for a doctoral fellowship there. It's a fellowship in residence while you're finishing your dissertation. I said, "You don't have any women." They said, "No, we haven't, but we really want to broaden the search and see if there are any women who might qualify. So please apply." I applied and they accepted me, because my U of MD advisor and mentor was the brilliant female economist, Barbara Bergman. I was extremely lucky to go to a graduate school that had a senior female faculty member who worked on poverty and discrimination. Plus Prof Bergmann was a terrific role model. She was feisty and didn't put up with any stupid remarks by men. Also Charlie Schultz was on my committee and he was at Brookings. So both of them were highly respected and Brookings most likely said, "I guess we should take a chance on Brown. She has a good record and recommendations, and she will probably be okay." So Brookings accepted one female out of the seven fellows. For me, it was a big honor and also it enriched my knowledge about doing policy work as I finished my dissertation in economics.

Christina Maslach:
Okay. Yeah.

Clair Brown:
It turns out the Brookings fellowship helped me on the job market, Because I was married, I was looking at local university jobs. I was getting offers from Johns Hopkins and William and Mary, but then I got a call from Berkeley Economics. Once again, they asked me if I would apply. Of course I wanted to apply to UC Berkeley!

Christina Maslach:
So what year was that?

Clair Brown:
This was Fall 1972. Berkeley (like Brookings) said, "We're reaching out to get some people to apply that might not normally think to apply." Odds are they are women. Also the head of the committee was Gerard Debreu, who was a Nobel Laureate. I think it helped that I had been a math major, because that meant, "She knows how to do math. We didn't know women could do math." I applied and was invited to Berkeley for interviews and a seminar presentation. The young male faculty were terrific. They supported me, and shored up my confidence and helped me navigate the department. One of them even said to me, "Clair, we're hiring in labor economics, your field, you're the third person invited to visit. The first two people, young men, couldn't even complete a sentence. So if you can give a good seminar, you've got a leg up." He added, "Although, we know that women are discriminated against, but hey, give it a shot." The

senior labor economist, Lloyd Ulman, was always great about supporting women, supporting people of color, supporting everyone. He wanted to help people achieve their best, and do their best work and to break down discrimination.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Clair Brown:
Lloyd Ulman was also a big admirer and friend for many years with my advisor, Barbara Bergman. So I had a network at work, but it wasn't just the "old boy network" because it included a rare woman. Berkeley Economics hired me, and so I moved to Berkeley. It was definitely affirmative action because they would never have considered me without the EEOC telling UC Berkeley to broaden their searches to comply with the law. Then I think they hired me because the labor economics field in their view was pretty weak because it focuses on policy and is not high status. So if you're going to hire a woman in labor economics, it's probably okay. After all, Jessica Peixotto was a female faculty member in "Social Economics" in the early 1900s. Plus, my dissertation was on how race and gender discrimination worked in labor markets.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my gosh. Good for you.

Clair Brown:
Institutional economists understand how rule and custom affect how markets operate. However most economists assumed free or competitive markets operate, where discrimination cannot happen. I went to one interview where I was asked, "How can you say there's discrimination in the labor market? We know markets work, because markets are competitive. If people are qualified, if there is a Black or a woman who's any good at all, they'll get hired because that's how you maximize the quality of your faculty." I replied, "This department isn't the right place for me because your underlying assumptions and your worldview are so different from mine. You're ignoring social rules, custom and culture, and these institutions structure the labor market. I'm an institutional economist." I was excited to join the Berkeley faculty.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. That's great. Oh, okay so...

Clair Brown:
My appointment began September 1973, but I was married and I wasn't quite finished with my dissertation. My husband decided to run for the state legislature in Virginia and I wanted to stay and help him. I told him, "I'm leaving. I'm going to move to California. I know you really love politics, and you love Virginia. It's your home. You can stay, but I'm going to Berkeley." He understood that the Berkeley appointment was a big stepping stone for me, and we didn't have any kids. So he won his election and I left for Berkeley. That was the end of marriage one.

Christina Maslach:
Okay. So there's sort of like a couple of forks in that road here, but let's start with the

professional. What was it... I mean, if you can just say more about your introduction to the department, what it was like when you first came, were there particular high or low points in terms of your experience or your interactions with your colleagues? I mean, what was it like starting off here at that time?

Clair Brown:

I quickly learned that it wasn't easy being the only female faculty in the department. It was quite difficult, but once again I felt lucky because as a labor economist, I studied discrimination. I knew how it worked, and my experience on the faculty as their first female was like doing field work. I would watch the behavior and activities that were going on by the male faculty. It became clear to me that they had no intention of interviewing and hiring more women because they had their token. I taught a course on "Discrimination in the Labor Force." It had been "Women in the Labor Force," but I broadened it to include race. Both race and gender discrimination are important to me and operate differently. The course was quite popular. One of the readings was "A Tale of O" by Rosabeth Kanter at Harvard.

Christina Maslach:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

The article has a visual that you draw on the board: You draw a bunch of "X" that all look quite different. Then you draw an "O" somewhere among them and you ask, "What do you notice?" They say, "There's O." "Did you notice how different the Xs are?" They say, "Actually, no, the O stands out." I ask, "What do you want to do if you don't want to just focus on O?" You draw lots of other Os which all look different. Now it is obvious to the students that the Os and the Xs are all different, and the focus is on the group and not an individual letter. The students understand the moral of the story—if you're the only woman, the first thing you do is get more women hired. This was my goal.

I realized that I needed to learn about how lawsuits were changing the way that the laws prohibiting labor market discrimination were changing enforcement of the law. The female faculty network was always important to me at Berkeley, and I reached out to Prof. Herma Hill Kay who was our reigning anti-discrimination expert at the law school. I asked her to present one lecture on the legal aspects of discrimination to my class. Because once I heard her lecture, then I would have a good sense of what to do. She said, "Of course I will." Prof Kay gives an informative, insightful lecture that encouraged many of the students to become passionate about the law, and also about ending discrimination. This was how Prof Kay and I got to know each other, and I was grateful to her for a brilliant introduction to the laws against discrimination and how they were being watered down by the courts.

This helped me in watching my department. At a faculty meeting, when we were hiring, there was a woman on the short list for interviewing. A faculty member immediately said to cross her off the list because the department doesn't need to hire in her field. And so that was the end of her, although she was terrific when she came out for her interview and seminar. She was a strong candidate, and she was hired by Stanford. So, you know, she was a strong candidate. The next year we were hiring again, and guess what—we hired a new faculty member in the field that we

excluded last year, even though the faculty in that field had not changed. I said, “Last year, we didn't hire in that field because we said, we had too many faculty already.” Y colleagues replied, “No, no, no. We always hire by the quality of the candidates, we don't hire by field.”

I went to Herma Hill and said, “Here's where I'm observing in my department. This seems like discrimination to me.” Prof Hill said, “I'll say.” I said, “I'll write it up and submit it to the EEOC.” She said, “That's a great idea.” You can vet it once I do it. She said, “Yes.” She added, “But you know, there might be some backlash.” I said, “I can't live in a department as the only woman.” It was real clear after that experience that the they won't hire another woman. So I wrote how hiring discrimination occurred in my department and submitted it to the EEOC. Then the backlash began. My colleagues was furious. My chair called me in and said, “We're nice people.” I said, “You're extremely nice people. Of course, you're nice. You just don't understand how you're discriminating. You don't have this awareness of how discrimination works. And as a labor economist, I teach this course and I am happy to help you understand discrimination and how you evaluate women differently from men, and cause women to be thrown off the list.” This was a big eye opener for me as it caused negative feedback from people in my department. But guess what else it did—the EEOC told the department to hire more women. We didn't hire just one more woman. The next year we hired two more women!

Christina Maslach:
Oh!

Clair Brown:
What a turnaround. My life changed. Totally. One of the women was in history and she left after about five years. The other woman was Laura Tyson.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my God.

Clair Brown:
Who went on to be the first female chair of the Council of Economic Advisors under Clinton, the Dean of the Haas Business School. Laura Tyson was very accomplished and well known and a good friend. The Economics Department completely changed because now there were three women professors. I no longer had to sit in a faculty meeting having a discussion, and they'd turned to me and ask, “Clair, what do women think?” I'd say, “I don't have the data, and I don't think it is worth doing a survey to find out what women think on this.” They'd look at me like, “Oh no, we don't really care what women think.” I'm sure that's what they were thinking, trying to look at the “female viewpoint,” which their way of seeing the world in a way that's discriminatory. They had a lot to learn.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Right, right.

Clair Brown:
I already learned how systemic racism functioned from growing up in the South where there was deep, deep racism. I knew that the whites, who were deeply racist, come across as perfectly nice neighbors who help each other, and they help the white community, which they lead. When I

worked with the black people who worked in our house or our garden, I realized how marginalized they were, as their jobs were to serve white people. My nanny, Nazareen, was a wonderful, caring Black woman whom I loved dearly. I realized that the Blacks were kind, generous, talented people who deserved to be an equal part of the community. I realized that racism was a system that created the social and economic relations in Tampa. No matter how nice the white people are as individuals, they are racist and treat Blacks as inferior. The white population oppresses the Black population, and there is nothing an individual can do about it. So I'd already understood how sexism worked in a similar way. I knew the economists can be perfectly nice, and we can get along fine at a dinner party. But they have a biased viewpoint of women, and think men are smarter than women with women's role is serving men in the home. Like racism, sexism is deeply believed and systemic.

Christina Maslach:

Have there been women in the department before? I mean, what was the history before you came? I mean, you were the only one then.

Clair Brown:

Right. Well, this is so interesting because the Economics Department had a common room named the Peixotto room after Prof. Jessica Peixotto, who was on the faculty in the first three decades of the 1900s.

Christina Maslach:

Oh yeah. It was one of the founders of this club [Women's Faculty Club].

Clair Brown:

Yes, and Emily Huntington was another female faculty member during this period. But Charles Gulick, who was a retired labor economist whom I'd meet with for a monthly lunch in his office, would tell me stories about the Economics Department. He said, you realize that Jessica Peixotto and Emily Huntington were not actually economics professors, but were Professors of Social Economics, as he was also. Labor economics was considered low status, and so the economists working on labor and society were called professors of social economics.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, okay.

Clair Brown:

This group actually became the School of Social Welfare. [See <https://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/news/our-founding-mother-jessica-blanche-peixotto>]

Christina Maslach:

Really?

Clair Brown:

Yes. The Economics Department had a group of women economists who studied the well-being of workers, families and children. They did detailed work on family budgets, which showed how much income families had and how they spent their income. They also studied work and how

labor markets operate, but they were called professors of “social economics.”

Christina Maslach:

Wow. That's an interesting history. I didn't know that.

Clair Brown:

I am grateful to Charles Gulick who taught me this history of the department. He would take books off the shelf and show me under his name or under Peixotto's name, it said “Professor of Social Economics,” not Professor of Economics.

Christina Maslach:

Are there other things that came up in terms of the research, you did, your tenure process, as you progressed through your department?

Clair Brown:

As you know, I was working on discrimination, and also inequality and low income workers, who were disproportionately women and Blacks. But I was told early on as an assistant professor by a Department chair, “You know, Clair, you should work on topics that aren't related to women or Blacks or, you know, work on topics that more people care about.” Meaning topics that white males care about. And it is true that in those days research on discrimination or racism or women's work were not topics that journals wanted to publish. Research on women's work involves a lot of work like on household data and household time use, because a lot of women's work is within the home. I had a great article on time use, with detailed data on women's time use, and how it fit into the larger scheme of the time required to run households based on social norms. I had an editor say, “We can't publish this because it's based on time use data that no one knows if it's any good or not.” Anyone working on time use knew it was an excellent data set about how people used their non-paid work time. I wrote him back that his view was sexist. “You're not going to publish articles that use data that documents how people use your time. This is detailed, rigorously collected data on hours of time use.” He actually stepped back. He said, “I tell you what, we'll send it to one more reviewer who might know this data.” The article was accepted, because once a reviewer knew about time use, they could evaluate it as an important topic.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And they would have had there for the credibility to be able to make that statement because they had been chosen as the...

Clair Brown:

Yes, there was a lot going on and things were in flux. One of the people who really helped me when I first came to Berkeley, besides Herma Kay Hill, was Sociology Professor Arlie Hochschild.

Christina Maslach:

Oh!

Clair Brown:

She was terrific.

Christina Maslach:
Okay.

Clair Brown:
Arlie also worked on women's work in sociology.

Christina Maslach:
All right. So Arlie Hochschild, when did you first meet? She came about, I mean, she became an assistant professor at about the same time. Wasn't it?

Clair Brown:
No, she was ahead of me...

Christina Maslach:
She came earlier? Okay.

Clair Brown:
Arlie had tenure by the time I met her.

Christina Maslach:
Okay. Let's say, so she'd be early in the seventies... I knew it was the seventies, but, okay.

Clair Brown:
I came in '74, and I had a tenure struggle with the department being very divided. So the department gave me a terminal year, a second vote. However the major problem was that many of my colleagues didn't like my research areas. Although my research was valid in labor economics, and I published in good journals...

Clair Brown:
Also I did service. I did all the things you're supposed to do. But I could tell there was no way in the world to satisfy a department that doesn't like work on discrimination and women. Also I'd started working on a book on the American Standards of Living, 1918 to 1988, because that dovetailed with the idea of how people in different classes (low-income to working class to professional to the rich) spend their money. How do they spend their time? It followed in the tradition of the earlier budget work by Peixotto and Huntington. I loved doing it, with the goal of thinking that if research showed how the rich bought luxurious or status goods that marked their position in society, then the public would understand why progressive taxation isn't harmful to those at the top. My research documented over time the dynamics of income and consumption—how it changed, how the standard of living changed and why it changed. Some economists brushed it off by saying, "Oh, that's history," as if that made it irrelevant. I could tell that my colleagues who were against me were not going to change. Some of them actually mentioned that they didn't like the way I'd made the department look bad in their not hiring women or evaluating female candidates in a discriminatory way. They were very upfront about wanting more collegial colleagues.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Clair Brown:

At Berkeley, the Chancellor can play an important role in hiring and promotions. The Chancellor was Heyman, who wanted UCB to be a leader in hiring women. Heyman let the department know, and he also let me know, that if the department had a split on my promotion vote, but the Budget Committee [a Faculty Senate Committee] said it was okay to move forward with my tenure without the department being unanimous, the Chancellor would follow the recommendation of what the Budget Committee said. The Budget Committee worked on it a long time. This process is private and confidential, but I later learned that Herma Kay Hill was Chair of the Budget Committee, and as you know, Prof Hill is a leading expert on discrimination and how it works. Plus most faculty thinks that she is a good judge and doesn't lower criteria, and they respect her. The Budget Committee recommended my promotion to tenure and the report went forward to the Chancellor, who signed it. I was promoted with tenure!

Christina Maslach:

That's really interesting. Really interesting. I mean, to learn some of that larger context behind the committee or the Chancellor or whatever in terms of how that was coming together as part of that process.

Clair Brown:

I think it highlights the importance of having women across the campus who understand how the social dynamics work, and who support each other. For example, Arlie Hochschild knew, and she was terrific at supporting me during this process. Arlie brought together other woman and they formed a Clair Brown support team for tenure. It provided me a lot of emotional support and was so important to me. It really kept me going. They said, "We know that you've looked at other jobs, you've gotten some other job offers, but just hang in there. Don't leave yet, and don't say you're going to leave. Let's see how this unfolds." Meanwhile, I had my first kid.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. Okay. That's a wonderful story because that's one of those, going back to the history of the university, kinds of things that I don't think get made more visible. They mean a lot, and they're very visible to the people involved, but knowing that this kind of thing would happen....

Clair Brown:

Yes. It was so important to me. It allowed me to stay sane to have this network of people whom I admired and respected. And to have them back me was so meaningful.

Christina Maslach:

That's so wonderful. Okay. Well now the other fork in that road, family, a child. Okay. So this was all the same year?

Clair Brown:

I realized I had this “final” year and I had plenty that I was doing. However I also wanted to have a child, and I was getting on in years (around 35 years old). I realized, finally, there's no good time to have a kid when you're an academic. There's no time when the workweek is not overloaded, and you have lots of deadlines with papers, classes, committee meetings, reports and recommendations to write.

Christina Maslach:

It wasn't designed with pregnancy in mind at all...

Clair Brown:

Yes, taking care of babies and having family time isn't part of the picture for academics. To make a long story short, when I finally realized there's no good time, I had my first child. A boy who enriched my life, and gave me a new way of seeing the world in a much broader way and to understand the role of women and women's work in a much deeper way.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Wow.

Clair Brown:

Also I had great help from his dad because we cared for him equally, along with wonderful caregivers, and then preschools. As you know, we are fortunate to have the resources to hire people and groups who help care for our young children. Women are great at finding ways to make it work, with help from our partners and others who help care for kids. We may be anxious and tired, but we make it work.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah

Clair Brown:

Let's skip a few years ahead. I was doing different kinds of research. I worked with engineers on semiconductors at one point because it was important to me to help the US do better in terms of how they managed companies and how they treated their workers. At this point in the 1980s, Japan was a global powerhouse. Many economists were looking to learn from Japan. With a team of Japanese scholars, I co-directed a US-Japan research project. Eventually realized that I would like to do more service on campus.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, right, right.

Clair Brown:

Shelly Zedeck, a Psychology Professor with whom I worked at the Institute for Industrial Relations on campus, was involved with the Academic Senate. He suggested that I do some Senate work, which is important because UCB has co-governance with the Faculty Senate and the Chancellor and the administration. Shelly said, “I think you would get a lot out of it, and the campus could use you.” I was assigned to the Committee on Educational Policy. Soon I realized

how little I knew about educational policy, which covers a broad range of areas, and I wanted to learn. Much to my good fortune, the Vice Chancellor in charge of undergraduate education was Christina Maslach! This is when I met you, Christina. You taught me so much about education—how to make education better, how to implement what are known to be great ways to teach, how to work with other faculty to improve teaching. I love steep learning curves and this was a steep learning curve. You were terrific at teaching in a way that never made me feel dumb or inadequate, and I learned a lot. Also you were great at brainstorming, and helped move faculty interest and skills ahead by getting us to figure out ways we can have more hands-on learning in the classroom. Working with you was so rewarding that I became chair of the Educational Policy committee and worked even more closely with you. In my mind we were able to improve teaching in many different departments. We were able to get departments to discuss how their undergraduate majors were learning the skills and talents they needed, and to think about how their future jobs or graduate work would use their undergraduate education. As you know, there were some recalcitrant departments, but many department chairs came back and said, “Thank you. We do want to be better at teaching our undergraduates.”

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Clair Brown:
That was a big high for me -- working with you.

Christina Maslach:
Ditto! I do remember that well.

Clair Brown:
My work on educational policy with you is another example where a woman on campus who is an expert in an area and is terrific to work with and to learn from can make a big difference.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Well thank you for that, but you know, but thank you also because you were so good at how you ran things, at how you explained how stuff works. You may not know it, but I probably learned more about economics from your discussing all kinds of things.

Clair Brown:
That's right. Because I would always come in with an economic viewpoint, like what are the incentives?

Christina Maslach:
It's a little extra comment here. That was one of the things that always struck me was (and I think sometimes for a lot of people it's either not recognized or undervalued) the value of actually meeting and working with people from other disciplines and other departments who see the world differently, know different things, and so the Senate among others, what a great place to get to know these colleagues and have those kinds of experiences as opposed to, Oh no, I don't want to be on any committee kind of thing. You don't know what you're missing.

Clair Brown:

So true. And faculty don't know what they're missing. I suggested Senate committee work to other colleagues, and later they would agree that it was so rewarding.

Christina Maslach:

It was, I have to say. And particularly when we were seeing more of that specialization, like you only talk to the people in your field no matter where they are. Actually some of the friendships I made were not because we had a lot in common in terms of interests, but we just were interested in hearing what the other person was doing. And as we chatted, you know, waiting for the meeting to start or afterwards and had a cup of coffee and, it was just like, Oh, you would do it in English. I hadn't thought about that. You know...

Clair Brown:

I also love hearing the worldviews in different departments that would arise in a discussion, where a professor would come at a problem with a totally different way of thinking about it. I learned so much, and it made me understand how narrow-minded I was as an economist until I heard these smart people with other ways of viewing a problem. I would tell my husband, a biochemist, these stories and here's a saying that we developed, "It's a long walk across campus," which means that research across campus would benefit from sharing and integrating knowledge, and these interactions weren't happening.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Clair Brown:

I saw the value of interdisciplinary work in research and in policy, and finally I was able to put it to practice on campus. Now I must bring in another UCB female faculty member, Alice Agogino in Mechanical Engineering, whose expertise and work became an important new experience for me. I got to know Alice Agogino because she was Chair of the Academic Senate when I was Chair of CEP. You've been Chair of the Academic Senate twice, so you understand how the leadership group works together. So I got to know Alice pretty well.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Clair Brown:

Approximately a decade after my work with Alice on the Academic Senate, because of my work with engineers, especially on the semiconductor project, along with my work on innovation, I was asked to set up an interdisciplinary faculty group with economists and engineers to create an graduate minor for PhD students to work on innovations for the developing world.

I thought it was a great idea, and agreed to help create the program only if I could pick a great engineer as co-head because an economist and an engineer needed to work together. I said I would see if Alice Agogino would do it with me.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, right. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

Alice agreed, because she understood the value of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary work. I already knew she was great to work with. She's an excellent organizer, and also terrific at getting people to work together. Alice understands the strengths that each faculty member can bring to a project, and then bringing them together. Plus Alice knows how to find resources and raise funding. Soon we had the Development Engineering program up and running with a well-known group of faculty, who attracted excellent students. We started DevEng eight years ago, and we've already graduated some PhD students, who show the benefit of having interdisciplinary work part of their PhD studies and research. One of my students, from Social Welfare, graduated with DevEng minor, and her work was greatly enriched by integrating engineering knowledge of satellite imagery with social science knowledge about how villages function. She is now on the Rutgers faculty, and her dissertation won a best dissertation award.

Christina Maslach:

Wow, yeah, again, editorial comment here: What I'm hearing from a lot of the stories, the interviews that we've been doing, is a rather consistent theme. It comes out in different ways and so forth, but it's of pushing boundaries and redefining things that become multidisciplinary or become, I don't know exactly another word, but it's women more often are telling this kind of story where they're here, they're there, they're bringing their work, and they come up with these newer perspectives, different paths -- as opposed to straight shooting out of the disciplinary box.

Clair Brown:

So as a psychologist, you probably could talk about that in a really interesting way.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. I hope so.

Clair Brown:

I see how looking at the world in a broader way enriches our understanding. As a Buddhist, I want to go beyond my ego that separates me from others. I see women doing this in their daily lives, as they care for others. I think women have an easier time thinking, "I'm interdependent with all these people. I care about other people, and how they're doing affects me." Many economists have trouble not thinking people are selfish and focus on their own well-being, but our profession seems to stand alone on this. As a Buddhist, I have no trouble understanding interdependence, and how your happiness can affect my happiness. So I started teaching Buddhist economics. And once again, you know why? Because of you!

Christina Maslach:

Oh yeah?

Clair Brown:

You may not remember. We were having lunch at Gather, and we were catching up, talking about what we are doing and what we like doing. I said, "I'm a Buddhist, and my worldview focuses on what it means when we're interdependent with each other and with the planet. I'm doing a lot of work on sustainability because I care a lot about the climate crisis. I'm trying to

integrate these ideas into a holistic economic approach. Already we know how to do different aspects of this, based on Amartya Sen's work on capabilities, Jeffrey Sachs' work on sustainable development, and Joe Stiglitz's work on inequality. Now we need to pull it together. However I don't know when I'm ever going to find the time." You were terrific. You looked at me and said, "Clair, if you want to find the time, you have to teach it." When I asked how, you said, "Teach a sophomore seminar." Then you told me about the program, which is a terrific program. So thank you. I am grateful that you started the program when you were Vice Chancellor, and especially grateful that you suggested I do it. I'm wise enough to follow your advice, because you have always had great advice. I started teaching a Sophomore Seminar on Buddhist Economics, and the students loved it. You were right that I would learn so much, and also I would make sure I had the time because I was teaching it. You can't walk into class without working on it, and it goes from the bottom of your list to the top of your list.

Christina Maslach:

As opposed to one of the extras, when I have enough time, let me get to it, you know...

Clair Brown:

That's right.

Christina Maslach:

Exactly. It's like, okay, this is what I do is teaching. This is what I'm going to be. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

This seminar was the beginning of a book. A woman emails me from The Garamond Agency and asks, "Are you writing a book on Buddhist economics?" When I replied no, she asked if I would consider it? As an academic I had to say that I would consider it. She said, "Let's explore it because I think it's a great topic, and would make a terrific book." This was pre-Trump by the way, when people have become selfish and aggressive. During the Obama era, people seemed more aware of racism and more accepting of others, even more caring for others. But the culture can change very quickly. My agent negotiated a great contract with Bloomsbury Press to write a public popular book with an excellent, experienced editor. Unfortunately Bloomsbury decided they would wait to bring it out until after the election, even though the book was finished. They assumed Hillary would be elected, and didn't want to bring it out during the campaign. Hillary lost, as we know, and the country seemed to change overnight in terms the way people think that it's okay to act and behave. My book came out right after Trump was inaugurated.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. I didn't know that part of it.

Clair Brown:

We have to change the world with getting rid of Trump, and also take back the Senate, because we can't keep harming people at the border and causing harm to people throughout the country and people abroad. Our country is doing so much harm to people and also the planet. It's huge.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. When I am with other people from other places in the world, I have felt embarrassed by

the fact that our country is now doing what it's doing, and stuff like that. So this is not the country I was born into. These are not the values that we all grew up with and knew why it's good to be American and all that kind of thing. You know, it's like what happened? Where did it go?

Clair Brown:

Buddhist economics lays out a pathway of how you create an economy that cares for the planet and for people, both at home and abroad. When things are so bad and there's so much harm going on, I think that it is the obligation of each person to not just care about how they are living, which is important, but we need to get off the sofa and join a group to fight for change. Each of us has specific talents and skills we can offer, and we only have to focus on a specific problem because we are part of many organizations working to help the world. I am putting my time and energy to work on climate justice policies in California to reduce carbon emissions. I work with 350 Bay Area Action, which has hundreds of volunteers, especially women.

Christina Maslach:

It's interesting because I was talking with a couple of people recently, each of whom was raising the issue of why is climate change not a bigger issue among all the candidates trying to unseat Trump? Why is it not a bigger issue among the Republicans? Why is it not? And all of them, now that you say that are women, who've raised that question in that way. And I know men who are concerned about climate change and so forth, but that's not...

Clair Brown:

It doesn't seem to be not their number one issue. It's got to be the number one issue now. I worked on the problem of inequality for years. Many economists did. Our research shows how to reduce inequality. We know the policies, but we failed because politicians said, "We don't have to reduce inequality with progressive taxes. We'll let trickle down work." Economists knew it didn't, but nobody listened to what our studies showed. With the climate crises, I knew we had to do better. We cannot fail this time. Yet you wouldn't believe, Christina, how few economists actually do work on climate and have incorporated it into their work, especially their work on economic growth and on inequality. I started asking different colleagues how they are integrating climate change into their teaching and research. Usually he would reply, "I'm not. I don't see how it fits, and I don't know much about it." I reply, "How can you walk into a classroom when the climate crisis is touching all aspects of life, everything we're doing, and your students want to learn about it. They do care. You need to think about it." A colleague said, "Clair, I've never heard you act this way before and be so pushy on a research and teaching issue." I said, "Yes, but this is different. We've got to do it." He told me about six months later when I ran into him, "Thank you. You were absolutely right. I could easily incorporate the climate crisis into my undergraduate class. You were right, the students want to learn it. And it improved my own thinking. So thank you." That was really nice for me.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

Still resistance continued along the lines of this is what I do, this is how I do it, and don't bother

me.

Christina Maslach:

Okay.

Now the question is, are there any other issues or topics that we haven't discussed enough? Was there anything about, say personal or family life, that had an impact on what you were doing here on campus and that we didn't touch on? Different people will have different things that they've considered important that they want to talk about. And I just want to make sure that we're getting at that. I mean, is there anything in particular that you think is...

Clair Brown:

I think one thing happened that was critical for me as a female faculty member. I happened to have my first child at exactly the time they started family paid leave for mothers.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, okay.

Clair Brown:

It was tied to the unemployment insurance system, which provided six weeks of paid leave. The university provided full pay, but how can leave be only for six weeks under a semester system?

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Yeah. I know.

Clair Brown:

I was quite lucky because my chair at that time was a Social Democrat who grew up in Sweden. He understood social welfare programs and didn't question paid family leave. He called me in and he said, "You're the first faculty member who needs family leave, and we're going to apply for this. It's really important. I also want to tell you that six weeks is ridiculous. I don't know or understand what they're doing in the United States." He figured out a way to do it, and still follow the rules. He decided that the first six weeks or two months, however long it is, you don't have to do anything at all. Just take it easy. Restore your health, take care of your baby. Enjoy life, which was a nice thing to say. He then asked, "Would you like to do anything on campus? You can hold office hours. You're on a few committees, so you could do your committee work. That's all you need to do. If you want to have a presence on campus, decide how, and it's great to do your committee work because then it's really easy to say what you did."

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Right. Okay. I like that.

Clair Brown:

The leave policy for me was fantastic, because I needed not to teach that semester, and to have the support of my Chair. As you know, across campus there were problems with faculty taking paid family leave. We had even expanded family leave to include fathers who were involved in primary care of their newborns. A survey was taken about why more faculty were not taking family leave.

Christina Maslach:
I remember it.

Clair Brown:

The survey revealed that for a lot of women, the Department Chair made her feel like a serious scholar would not take paid family leave. It was the opposite of my experience. You were already heavily involved in this. I became involved where our committee went to the Chairs and said, "This is an important policy, and can help you recruit and retain, according to our faculty survey." At first many Chairs didn't believe us. However we reminded the Chairs that paid "newborn" leave is not a policy that faculty "choose," it is university policy. When you have a newborn, you are on leave. We changed the way it was presented. And once we did that...

Christina Maslach:

Are you going to choose it? Or oppose it. It just is. And if you want to opt out, that's another story, but you know, it is.

Clair Brown:

That's right, but a faculty member as a new parent has this leave. Then the Dads also were able to do it too, and they did. We did a follow-up survey, and I was asked to do the statistical analysis, which showed that paid leave did help retention, but it wasn't significant in recruiting because people don't know when they're going to have a kid.

Christina Maslach:

Right.

Clair Brown:

The survey showed that faculty think "Berkeley was a great place to work, that they care about me, they care about my family." They responded "when I visited Harvard or MIT or whoever tried to recruit me, I actually wanted to stay at Berkeley." This was an important finding. Besides being a humanitarian policy, it also helped us retain our faculty. A win-win. A few years ago, I was talking to a colleague about a specific research project. and he looked at his watch and said, "I'm so sorry, I have to leave right now because I pick my kid up from his play school." I said, "That's terrific." He said, "Yes, I am on part-time parental leave." I said, "I am happy to hear that. Please go enjoy." He said, "It's made all the difference that I can spend a third of my time not feeling guilty, picking my kid up, spending time with my kid. It's just been fantastic." He is an extremely well-known economist who turned down Columbia to stay at Berkeley after that experience.

Christina Maslach:

At some level this is not rocket science, but a lot of people, I think, didn't fully understand that until they themselves were in that kind of position.

Clair Brown:

Right. The problem was most of the Chairs were men and their wives were homemakers. The male Chairs just couldn't understand why anybody needed parental leave. It's didn't fit their

worldview or their experiences.

Christina Maslach:

And I remember, my colleague Rhona Weinstein, always tells the story -- but we were together and we were talking with someone, a male colleague, and this was about some of the challenges of getting ready for the tenure process, as we were both assistant professors, so we were talking to people about what it was like for you. I mean, give me some advice, you know, etc. And he was saying, you just have to make it a hundred percent of your life. You do nothing else, but you're going to be working, writing, whatever. And we're saying, and what happens to the rest of your family? And he said, Oh, well, my wife would take care of everything. And we were kind of, okay, yes. If it was a tough time, she just took care of it. And all I did was just my writing. And, you know, we left the room and just broke out laughing, saying, we need wives! Why did we not think of that?

Clair Brown:

Yet people regret later not spending more time with their families.

Christina Maslach:

Yes. I can't remember what survey it was, but it was a number of years ago, but it included questions that people looking back on their life. And that is probably the thing that came up most for all kinds of people was "regret that I did not spend as much time with my kids, with my family, when they were growing up." That comes out again and again.

Clair Brown:

Whereas they say no one regrets that they spent time with their kids.

Christina Maslach:

No, you know, and how many people have said, Oh gosh, I should have been spending more time in the office. And I regret that. I didn't do enough of it, you know? Or something like that.

Clair Brown:

Exactly. That's the other side of the coin.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. It's like almost an overly future-oriented focus, which means that the present or the past just kind of come down to very little parts. But that's where you're having fun and good times and having relationships and all that kind of stuff.

Clair Brown:

That's right. For me, leading a meaningful life means you ask, "What's important to me? How do I have a balanced life?" Also it is important to understand that as individuals, we can't create the life that we necessarily want without restructuring the way work is done, and how the government provides public goods such as health care, child care, education. This is why it was so important to have family leave, and to give it to dads as well as moms. This is part of Buddhist economics, by the way. People have to function within a social, economic, and cultural structure. We have certain options and we can choose among them, but these options are fairly

limited, depending on your class [your parents]. If you want to explore living a balanced and meaningful life, then you must think about the social safety net for everyone if they become unemployed or if they get ill, and how we provide medical care for everyone. How we structure our economy will determine what is produced and how it is distributed, and our economic policies determine inequality and greenhouse gas emissions. In our materialistic economy with enormous inequality and extremely high carbon emissions per person, the U.S. is not taking care of our people or the planet. Instead of enjoying life, I notice how stressed out we are. Women end up blaming themselves for not having enough time to do all the things on their very long TO DO lists. A main reason is because we're forced to work too many hours. Let's think about how to provide ways that people work fewer weekly hours, and also have adequate paid time off for family care, sick leave, and vacations. Instead of worrying that technology is doing away with jobs, let's see how technology allows us to reduce work time while still providing good quality jobs. This type of change is not easy to do. I recall a group of young law students at Yale and Harvard wanted to have young associates jobs at major law firms, and receive less pay with fewer work hours because they didn't want to work 70 hour (or more) weekly. A large group of these top law students went to their job interviews and said, "I would like to work for fewer hours and less pay, and we want all the young associates to do this." The white-shoe lawyers replied, "No, that's not how we operate. We're going to require the same number of billable hours as we always do. If you want to work fewer hours, then this is not the job for you."

Christina Maslach:

This is not the place. Goodbye. Yeah.

Clair Brown:

This is a good example of how, even within this elite group, workers weren't able to create the change that they all wanted.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Or figure out other strategies. I mean, I run into this all the time with the work I do on job burnout. Because the predominant way people are talking about it is, it's a problem of the person, the people who can't take it, they can't do it. How do you treat them? How do you fire them? Why are we seeing more and more burnout, it must be gen Z, or the millennials. And I'm saying, no, it's the job, stupid. It's the context. And that's just expanding, asking more, going more hours, 24/7, we'll keep you working all the time. We'll feed you. We'll take care of everything at the job. Don't go home. But people are always asking, how can I deal with this? When basically all I'm being told is, well, meditate some more, take a hot bath, work harder, but get sleep at night. Why can't you take care of yourself?

Clair Brown:

Yes! That's exactly what I'm talking about. It's not the fault of the individuals. It's the fault of the way we've organized work.

Christina Maslach:

Exactly. And we're not, we're not getting better at it, you know?

Clair Brown:

No, but we can. When people worry about AI [artificial intelligence] replacing jobs, I say that I want to have more use of AI at work to make jobs less tedious and provide more engaging work with fewer hours. I think it's time for us to cut back the hours that we're working, let the robots, let the computers take over a lot of these jobs that none of us want to do anyway.

Christina Maslach:

We're working too many hours and at the same time, and this is what drives me crazy, is we do not have enough people to do the kind of things that really need to get done in our society. So it's not that there's not enough work to go around. You know, we have infrastructure that needs repair. We have people that need to be cared for, and we have need for way more teachers, in the schools we have, you can just go through and say, we don't have enough. I'm working with people in medical professions and they're cutting staff all the time saying, you know, you're just going to have to have a higher patient load. Whatever I'm saying, this is not good for the quality of the care. Something is wrong with whatever models we're using, financial, whatever, to make it, that fewer people have to do more. And that's the mantra that's out there these days. "We're going to have to do more with less."

Clair Brown:

You just made a Buddhist economics argument.

Christina Maslach:

That's why I love your book.

Clair Brown:

We can keep growing the economy by providing good quality jobs for people who care for us—kindergarten teachers, nursery school teachers, home care workers, retail workers. They all need to be paid a decent wage, livable wage, and we need them desperately. Our organizations must stop trying to reduce labor costs while increasing executive pay. For example, we don't need to make the over-worked nurses take on more patients.

Christina Maslach:

I know it's not good for the patients. Not good for the nurses. It doesn't work out, period. You know? And so this whole mantra that everybody is hearing all the time, sorry, but next year 2020, we're going to have to do more with less. And it's a kind of a math, that just does not compute.

Clair Brown:

Bottom line: the profitability approach is based upon greed and not based upon the common good. If you want to ask, "How is the health of our people? How well are our children developing and progressing? How happy are they?" The U.S. is an extremely rich country with plenty of resources. Yet we let the top 5% take much more than their share of income. The economic growth that we've had over the last four decades went to the the top 5%, and often mostly to the top 1%. We cannot give the bulk of our resources and income to a few rich people, then make everyone else struggle, and act like that's okay.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. I know, and people are saying, Oh, well, you know the economy is great, the unemployment rates are low, and I'm saying but how many people are not able to live on the wage that they're being paid?

Clair Brown:

At least we were pushing for a \$15 minimum wage at fast food places. Because that's where a lot of people are working. And they should at least make \$15 an hour, and they should have health care.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Clair Brown:

We must keep pushing on the issue of wages, and decent jobs, and income distribution, because I think that a lot of these issues are finally being talked about. [This was shortly before the pandemic began, when race and ethnic groups were hit harder than whites with illness and death, with unemployment, with hunger and inadequate resources to care for their families.]

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Well, the thing that is interesting to me is I remember talking, this was when I was very young, but some of the older relations, older relatives about what it was like going through the depression in World War II, and because there was family history in terms of what happened and you know, what didn't happen and all that kind of thing. And the thing that always really resounded with me was when they talked about how it was creating jobs for people so that they could work and earn money and whatever. So, I had among some of my older relatives, there were artists and they were hired...

Clair Brown:

They were hired, yes. The WPA hired a lot of artists.

Christina Maslach:

Right. You know, and they did all kinds of things. And there were other people who were being hired and they became teachers, and they learned how to teach. And then they had a new kind of career to keep going on in terms of working in the schools, and all this kind of thing. And I kept thinking, wait a minute, how did we lose that? I mean, we needed it during that time. And could we have a new version of that, saying we have work that needs to be done. We have people who are not getting trained, you know, to do the kind of work we need to have done...

Clair Brown:

It's called the Green New Deal.

Christina Maslach:

“Socialism! “You know, kind of like, “communism!”

Clair Brown:

We do need a bigger role for government programs, yet we still have a market economy. The

important point is to structure markets so they work for everybody. Plus, we have social programs for education, healthcare, a social safety net—we know how to do these things.

I have two student research teams that are part of the URAP [Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program], which is another great Berkeley undergraduate program that you helped start. One team created a Sustainable Shared-prosperity Policy Index (SSPI). The SSPI measures and integrates all the policies that create an economy that's sustainable, that shares prosperity, that cares for people and so forth. The three pillars are sustainability, market structure, and government services. The SSPI lets you see how well country policies are providing an economy that supports the well-being of all people and also the planet. Joe Stiglitz demonstrated the policies that reduce inequality, and he received a Nobel prize. The climate scientists tell us how to reduce carbon emissions and create a sustainable environment. The UN shows us how to relieve suffering globally. We know how to do these things, and you see that the Scandinavian countries do quite well. So do Australia and UK. In fact, most high-income countries do much better than the United States, which ranks 37 out of 50 countries. We know how to do it, but the US is not—but we could. Instead we lower taxes for the rich. Before the Reagan tax cuts, the U.S. had a highly progressive tax system. Reagan reduced taxes for high-income households four times. Every economist I know thinks the top tax rate should be between 70% and 80%, instead of the current 32% to 37%.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. Yeah. It's not like yes or no.

Clair Brown:

That's right. This crosses all race and gender divides. It turns us again to one's worldview—do we have the individualistic viewpoint and think freedom is an individual's right to do as they want? Or do we care about the common good and how we come together as a community to care for each other? This divide is polarizing economic policy. And it's also the divide that is going on in the country, politically.

Christina Maslach:

And it has a gender inflection.

Clair Brown:

Yes. It does. Tell me more about how you see that.

Christina Maslach:

I think it has been a more standard type of masculine roles in many cultures. So I hate to ever suggest something is universal, but you see it in many different kinds of cultures. It manifests itself in different ways, but it's that rugged individualist, more authoritarian, nobody gets in my way. Other people have to do what I say or I go first and, all of those different kinds of things, is much more true of what I will call the more masculine gender role. Whereas the feminine gender role, again cross-culturally in a lot of places, is much more about paying attention to other people, having to make sure that other people get taken care of, they get fed, their diapers get changed, they get cured of measles or whatever it happens to be. A lot of what those traditional feminine roles have been is more socio-centric than egocentric.

Clair Brown:

When you were giving the male, I saw the Western cowboy. And when you were giving the female role, I saw a mother. Yes, there's a big macho vision versus a caring vision.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And, and it's interesting because, yesterday when Paula and I were at lunch before we did an interview and, we were talking about being in other countries, and what it was like as a woman going in, if you were by yourself, that the immediate response (and from women, as well as men) was essentially this antagonistic, Western where kind of thing, that you would be on your own traveling alone, that you were not following behind the husband, the father, the whatever. The discomfort, the potential threats, about being there by yourself, even if you were part of a group that had other men or something, this was not something that you should be doing.

Clair Brown:

Yeah. Independent women are judged as having something wrong with them.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Well, when you think about all the insults that can be hurled at women, if they are the leader, if they are independent, if they fight back, if they're feisty

Clair Brown:

If they're powerful...

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

And now we're getting close to the end of our interview time. Is there any last word you want to throw in there?

Clair Brown:

I want to thank you and Paula for doing this. I am so happy to celebrate the role of women and bringing women into the Academy because when the EEOC picked UC Berkeley, it made a big difference. Affirmative action made a huge difference in having departments finally consider women. Then the minute they looked at women, they realized how great we were. Women were hired, and they became leaders. And we've enriched this university so much. And even today, our Economics Department is known for having great female faculty. So I feel extraordinarily grateful to have had my job, to have the opportunities and the experiences as a professor. I think all of us together should feel good about helping to bring women faculty along and make history, and your recording our stories will hopefully support other women as they continue to help each other.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Thank you for that. That's a perfect ending -- Yay!

END.