

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Margaret Signorella

Interviewed by Prapti Giri

Toronto, ON

August 3, 2015

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MS – Margaret Signorella, interview participant

PG – Prapti Giri, interviewer

PG - Dr. Signorella, thank you for joining me for this interview with our Feminist Voices project. We always start our interviews by asking the interviewee to state their full name and their date and place of birth.

MS - My full name is Margaret Louise Signorella and I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on April 28th, 1952.

PG - Thank you. So we will start in order of the questions and take it from there. So if you could tell me about the emergence or development of your feminist identity.

MS - That was a very difficult question because I can't really say how it happened. When I was an undergraduate - this is probably where it started. In high school I was very good in math and science, but received no support or encouragement to go into any kind of what we now call [a] "STEM" [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] related field. And so I ended up starting in a small liberal arts college, which was a family tradition on my mother's side of the family, as an education major. I am laughing because very early on, I did some field experiences and I knew that that would be a disastrous occupation for me. I was taking introductory psychology and something clicked in that class and so I decided to change my major. I went to my advisor in education and he looked at me and he said, "Why do you want to change your major? You are just going to get married and not work anyway." And I think maybe that was the click that started me on the [feminist] path. I was furious. I couldn't believe that he was so insulting and condescending. I said, "Please sign the 'Change of Major' form, thank you" and moved on in psychology.

As a result of the change of major, I decided I needed to move to a larger school. I didn't feel I would be competitive getting into graduate school so I transferred to the University of Pittsburgh. I had a Women's Studies class. The Women's Studies program was in its infancy then. I took a Women's Studies class with Pamela McCorduck who is a fairly well-known writer, although I had no clue at the time when I was taking her class. We had some interesting

exercises. We were supposed to rewrite fairy tales from a feminist perspective and I think she really liked the way I wrote that [assignment]. When I went to her to ask her for graduate school recommendations, I don't know why I said this, but I said, "I don't think I have ever been discriminated against." And of course I had been when I went to change my major! And she looked at me, I can see it now, she was looking at me like, "Just you wait." She didn't try to argue with me.

I think those were the beginning pieces. When I was applying to graduate school, I didn't have any really good mentors and I just applied randomly to different schools and I was accepted at Penn State. When I got that acceptance, people were saying, "That's wonderful. You need to accept that." So, I did, and off I went to Penn State as a social psychology graduate student. I ended up working with Carolyn Sherif.

PG - I'd like to backtrack in that story just a bit. First, you said that you went to the small liberal arts college because of your mom's history. Did she have a degree? {4:55}

MS - Yes. Not in education. She actually had an undergraduate degree in biology and essentially an MBA at the graduate level.

PG - So she did study the sciences.

MS - Yes. And my father was a physician.

PG - Did you feel that academia was something you knew you would get into?

MS - No. The reason I changed my major was because of the issues that were being addressed in psychology. I didn't know what I was going to do, but when I got to the University of Pittsburgh, which we call "Pitt" locally, I became an undergraduate teaching assistant (TA). And so I started taking seminars with faculty and other undergraduate TAs. That is where I developed the idea that I needed to get to graduate school, still without a great deal of understanding of what I would do with it.

PG - Again, just going back to the first story where you wanted to switch your major, you said you felt a sense of fury that they said that you were just going to get married anyway. What do you think empowered you to have that reaction as opposed to, "Oh, okay."

MS - That's a very good question. It always angered me when people were condescending towards me or seemingly didn't have confidence in my abilities. I think partially, when you are very short and you are female, people tend to treat you that way. For example, when I would answer the phone - my father would get calls at home and it was very important that everyone answer the phone and take the message. And when I would answer the phone, his answering service would treat me like I wasn't capable of taking an important message. That kind of thing would really infuriate me. My father always pushed me and he accepted that I didn't feel

comfortable going to medical school because I was not comfortable dealing with blood and with suffering. But he always felt that I had the capability to do anything I wanted to.

PG - Sounds like you were instilled with some confidence from your dad.

MS - Maybe I should mention, he used to tell me about something that would make him angry. His mother encouraged him. He had eight brothers and sisters and all of the brothers went on to get graduate degrees of some sort. Interestingly the sisters did not. But his mother always encouraged the boys in the family to do that. She died, I never knew her, she died before I was born. After she died, he and his brothers were all graduating from Pitt with graduate degrees and the newspaper wrote a story about it. Because [his mother] was dead, they attributed her actions to his father. He told me how angry that made him - that they would not acknowledge what his mother had done. And also, his father was not the driving force in the family. But he didn't frame it in a feminist perspective.

PG - Sounds like there was some kind of feminism though. He grew up in the thirties, right?

MS - Yeah, he was born in 1920. {10:03}

PG - Yeah, so there wouldn't have been a lot of feminism around, but sounds like his mother was a strong figure.

MS - Right.

PG - What sort of role did your mom play would you say?

MS - Even though she didn't work outside of the home after I was born, she always worked. She was essentially a partner in his medical practice. She did a lot of the book-keeping and that sort of thing. She always was someone who demanded to be treated with respect and not treated as just a stereotypical "Doctor's wife."

PG - There is a lot of strength in your history, just leading up to going to school. And you said you were interested in psychology because of the issues that were being addressed. What were those issues?

MS - It would be social issues at the time. So that would have been the early seventies, at the height of the protests against the Vietnam war, the emergence of the women's movement, civil rights movement, Black Power in the United States. And also, in education [we were asking], "Why are we wasting time in the classroom doing it the way it has always been done? Why don't we teach students how to think?"

PG - Can you speak a bit more about how psychology was addressing those issues?

MS - I think in my Intro to Psych class, all those issues were touched on in the social psych chapter, which is of course what I ended up going in to.

PG - When you decided to go into grad school, you started with social psych.

MS - Yes.

PG - You were talking about Carolyn Sherif, she was your supervisor in your Masters?

MS - And dissertation, yes.

PG - Did you want to speak a little about your experience working with her?

MS - Yes, I do. I feel very keenly, right now, that people don't know her contribution. She has become somewhat forgotten, which bothers me. But here is the strange thing. So I knew, when I went to Penn State, what Sherif and Sherif had done. I studied it in my Social Psych classes. I knew that she was on the Psychology faculty. I just had this idea that she was too important to lower herself to work with ordinary students. When I arrived I wasn't sure what would happen. I met her very quickly and I'm not exactly sure now how we started working together.

I remember her telling the graduate students that she and her husband had decided to anglicize their name and pronounce it, "sheriff" [as opposed to "Sher-eef"]. {14:11} To this day, I think Stephanie Shields and I are two of the only people left who remember this. Stephanie didn't know the part that I just told you about, my cohort being told about the anglicization. But [Stephanie] knew that Carolyn had said that the pronunciation was "sheriff." But Carolyn's husband, Muzafer, never lost his very thick Turkish accent so he couldn't actually say, "sheriff." And I think that is what confused people. He would introduce himself as, "Muzafer Sher-eef" and that led to a lot of confusion. But I think that was a very '50s thing. My father accepted the anglicization of our last name probably for the same reasons. It helped people fit in during the fifties in the United States. I'm not sure that Carolyn would have done that today, but she is not here today.

PG - You said you can't remember how you started working with her?

MS - I just know that I did pretty early.

PG - For the sake of the interview, could you talk a little bit about the work that she and her husband did that really influenced you or why you wanted to work with her?

MS - The Robbers Cave study is still to this day a classic on how you get rid of a horrible intergroup conflict. [Carolyn] told us wonderful stories in class about how they did this study and how Muzafer disguised himself as the custodian, "Mr. Muzzy." He was able to blend in and go around and talk to the kids who were the subjects and get them to tell him things that they might not ordinarily tell the camp counselors or the people in charge. So the fact that they were able to reduce stereotyping and intergroup conflict through superordinate goals I just found endlessly fascinating and inspiring.

PG - I haven't read the study so could you tell me a little bit about it.

MS - Yes. There were actually three studies. In the first two, something went wrong. The first one, they tried to reduce the intergroup conflict by introducing an outside enemy. They were doing these in summer camps and of course they were all boys because at the time that was what you would have to do. After they created conflict through sports competition between the two groups in the camp, they brought in an outside group and so the two groups united to defeat the outside group, but they didn't really become friends. And so, the Sheriffs were very unsatisfied with that solution. In the second study, one of their assistants tried to escalate the conflict without permission from the researchers. So they halted that study and just had a summer camp for the rest of the time. So the third study was in Robbers Cave, Oklahoma where they had relocated at that point.

Muzafer was at the University of Oklahoma and Carolyn only had her Master's degree, she didn't have her doctorate at that point. If you read in her autobiography, it is very interesting where she talks about how she defined herself [because] society saw her [only] as her husband's assistant. {19:12}

At Robbers Cave, they created a conflict: they had a sports competition - the Eagles [vs.] the Rattlers. The Eagles were the ones who prayed before every sports competition, the Rattlers were the tough guys and so the group names reflected the norms of those two groups. After the conflict was created they first tried to get the two groups to be together in pleasant surroundings so they had better food. What happened? They took the better food and they tossed it at each other across the aisle because, of course, they were sitting in segregated groups. They showed them movies, which in the '50s would have been really amazing - and they sat on separate sides. The researchers were pretty sure that [those interventions] wouldn't work, but they felt they had to try it.

For the superordinate goals, they took them off the site of the camp to real camping in the wild and they manufactured a series of problems that the subjects had to overcome. The truck broke down and so they had to pull it to the camp ground. All of their tent materials were mysteriously mixed together and they had to work together to sort them out. And so, doing things like that several times broke down the barriers and they became friends. And not only did they become friends, but in the really touching end of the story: on the way back from the camp, I think the Rattlers had won the competition - I could be wrong on that. The group that won the competition had enough money to buy their group a full lunch or to share a partial lunch with the other group, and they chose to share. I just thought that was a really beautiful end to that story.

PG - What about that, do you think, fascinated you?

MS - I think in the midst of all the horrible conflicts that were going on at the time, it was a message of hope for getting people to work together, overcome differences, break down stereotypes and eliminate prejudice.

PG - Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Carolyn Sherif and what it was like?

MS - Yes. Carolyn was a fascinating person who was very difficult to work with and I say that with all due respect and appreciation for what she did for me. She was a little difficult to work with. I heard this from other women who have worked with female professors who came of age, so to speak, in the pre-feminist era. Carolyn ended up getting a tenure-track position at Penn State because Penn State wanted Muzafer. So that engendered, I think, some resentment in the department. There were only two women in the department at the time. I think she felt that and so she was on her guard against that sort of reaction. {22:56}

We had a couple of blowups. The first one came when I bungled something in my Master's thesis. Because I was interested in social issues, I decided to study some of the big student social groups who were active at Penn State at the time. This was '75 to '76. I had an ecology group, the student public interest group and then my big target was the Young Socialists Alliance because they were the most radical group. I was negotiating with each group to get them to fill out the questionnaire for my thesis. The bottom line was that everybody else decided to do it except the Young Socialists who demanded that in exchange for their participation that I call a press conference and announce that I was going to use them as one of my groups. And of course, I couldn't do that. Not that anyone would have come anyway, but I couldn't do that. So, I think Carolyn was pretty upset. I don't remember exactly how it went down, but she got over it and I did my thesis with the groups who participated. Of course, I didn't find anything as a result of losing the group who was most committed. I was looking to study different degrees of involvement in social issues and so I didn't get the levels of involvement that I had hoped to get.

PG - And that was your PhD then?

MS - That was my Master's.

PG - What did you do for your PhD?

MS - For my PhD I did something on gender and it wasn't wonderful and it is not anything that anyone cites, but I did get it published. But I should tell this story for the camera. In my comps [comprehensive exams] I had my biggest blow up with Carolyn. For my comps, I was doing a project for one of the areas and at the last minute the person who was supervising this project told me I had to reanalyze the data differently than what I had been doing. This was virtually the night before the orals. I thought I had to do what he said. I knew that Carolyn wouldn't like what he wanted me to do, but I felt I had no choice so I did it. When Carolyn saw it, she went absolutely nuclear. She went nuclear on me in the oral examination.

PG - Can you talk a little bit about what...

MS - What I mean? She just went after me on why I had analyzed the data the way I did. She was obviously extremely angry. All the other people in the room told me later that they knew she was really angry at me and they didn't know what to do about it. I guess it was my first test by fire of standing up to an awkward and difficult situation. I think I handled it really well; all I did was answer her questions. I felt it was inappropriate for me to say, "He told me to do it" so I didn't. I told her privately later, when she apologized to me. I think she said to me right off the bat, "I'm sorry about what happened." And I said, "I did it because he told me I had to do it that way and I thought I had to do it." I think she suspected that that was what happened. I think she may have thought that that person was trying to get at her through me, but that was the end of it. And I kept working with her, because she apologized and I understood that she was in a difficult situation in the department. And it really didn't bother me because we were still working together and she was supporting me. {28:17}

PG - It didn't bother you?

MS - Well, it bothered me and it made me determined not to do that to someone I mentor.

PG - What motivates you to tell you this story?

MS - Well one thing that motivated it is that when Stephanie Shields and I wrote the paper, the little bio of Carolyn, we just started talking about what it was like being students working with her and I said, "I don't know if I ever told you what happened during my comprehensive exams." She said, "No, you didn't." I still haven't told her because we were just emailing back and forth.

I think that what motivates me to tell it is to say that number one, she was in a very, very difficult position in that department. She was really isolated and I've been in that position too. I understand that it would have been better if she hadn't reacted that way, but I understand her reaction 100% - maybe 80%.

I met a student at a conference of a really famous female figure in psychology, someone that I really respect. And I said to the student, "Oh, it must be really wonderful working with Dr. X." And her response was, "She has made my life hell." I said, "I'm sorry about that." But when it is your student and you are really committed to your student, I think your reaction is different than someone you meet at conferences. I think that the degree of involvement is so much higher that it can provoke a reaction like that.

PG - What were the more positive aspects of working with her?

MS - She absolutely did support me. Everyone has arguments with friends, with close friends, with relatives, with loved ones, and we were able to continue to work together. And she absolutely supported me.

PG - How would you say, either from your graduate work or in working with her, that she or that time period influenced the development of your feminism?

MS - I have to give you a little bit of a context. When I became her student, [Carolyn] had just started to write about gender. Up until that point, she had written about it, but it wasn't a focus. And so, she started focusing on it more and more. Between 1972 to '82 when she died was a very productive and important period for her in writing about gender.

My dissertation was about gender, as I had said. I experimentally manipulated tasks. I was trying to experimentally manipulate students' reactions to a task based on whether they thought it was masculine, feminine, or neutral. I wasn't really very successful at doing that, but that is where I was going. If there are gender differences in cognition, can I get women to do better if they didn't think it was a masculine task?

Carolyn was writing a couple of her really famous pieces during this period. We were going to write a chapter together and maybe I should have done it alone. But, she died right when we were going to start writing this chapter and I pulled out of it maybe thinking I couldn't do it. I don't know. Maybe I shouldn't have pulled out of it, but I did. That was the huge influence she had on me. {33:55}

She had less of an influence in terms of feminist organizations. So, she was president of APA Division 35 in '75 or '76, but that was not something that she talked about much with the students. Maybe she was afraid of being accused of rabble rousing in the psychology department, I don't know exactly. I became more involved in Division 35 as a result of getting to know Irene Frieze.

PG - Can you talk a little bit about that and when you met?

MS - I am not totally sure when I met Irene. I didn't know her when I was an undergraduate; I never took a class with her even though she was in the psychology department. So I met her when I went back to Pittsburgh, but I think I must have met her at a conference before then. I had worked on a task force on "sexist research" as we were calling it then, for Division 35. But that is a really good question, I am not sure now when I first met Irene.

PG - But you said that meeting her was how you became involved in Division 35?

MS - I think so and also AWP [Association for Women in Psychology]. And AWP met in Pittsburgh in 1976. I presented my first paper there, at AWP. I presented my paper that I did with Lynn Liben, which was published in 1980. It is a very highly cited paper. We presented it at that conference.

PG - What was that experience like, your first paper at this conference?

MS - I think it must have been okay because I don't have any nightmares about it. But I think that is where I got to meet people who were involved in that research. That is maybe when I met Irene's student, Maureen McHugh, who is the current president of Division 35. She is someone I work with because I am the Division 35 treasurer.

PG - What has your experience with the AWP been like?

MS - I haven't been very much involved recently. I just rejoined this year. I quit AWP when it became too focused on therapy and I felt that it was something that wasn't useful to me. I just couldn't see it having a connection to what I was doing. And so I did quit AWP and I quit APA at the same time and joined APS. I rejoined APA when several people, including Lynn Liben, said, "You really should rejoin the APA. Whether you approve of everything they do, it still is a major organization and I think you should rejoin." APA had a special sale to get back the people who had quit when APS had formed. I got a bargain in rejoining.

PG - You were a fellow for the Society for the Psychology of Women in the APA, that is Division 35, right?

MS - Right. {38:11}

PG - What was that like?

MS - Well that was something that I should have done a long time ago. Not being always politically adept or tuned in, when I rejoined APA, I probably qualified at that point to be a fellow and it all went over my head. When I got involved in Division 35 executive counsel as a result of Stephanie Shields asking me to be considered for treasurer, that's when it dawned on me. When I looked at the fellows list, I [realized that] I should have probably been a fellow a long time ago. So, when I got people to nominate me and submit my application, that was the reaction, "You should have done this a long time ago."

PG - What does it mean to you to be a fellow?

MS - It means recognition for the research that I have done in the gender field. A couple years later someone nominated me for SPSSI fellow, Division 9. I don't even know who did it, but I also appreciate the recognition [for] what I have done, in the arena of social issues.

PG - Can you talk about the work that you are most proud of?

MS - My most cited work that I am very proud of is the meta-analysis of children's gender stereotypes that I did with my frequent collaborators, Lynn Liben and Becky Bigler. What we did was to really highlight the importance of separating knowledge of stereotypes from attitudes. People were getting them all mixed together and saying, "Kids are really stereotyped" when what they meant was, "kids *know* the stereotypes really well," unfortunately. I'm not saying that knowledge doesn't have important impacts, but they are much more willing to say that it is okay for anyone to be a doctor, be a nurse, whatever. They show less stereotyping when you ask them that sort of question than if you force them to identify what the societal stereotypes are. There are very few children who, when forced to choose, are going to be able to say, "I refuse to choose." Just like right now, there are very few people who are refusing to do what the IAT [Implicit

Association Test] test asks you to do. The first time I saw that, I said to myself, "How can anyone even do this?"

PG - I don't know what "IAT" is.

MS - Oh. It is an automatic processing test on stereotypes. What people are asked to do, let's say the stereotype is race, they ask you to respond - it is a forced choice reaction time test - where they pair up, for example, a person from an under-represented group with a positive adjective or a negative adjective. And then [they pair] a person from a dominant group with a positive or a negative adjective. And of course, the idea is that if you are very bigoted, when the underrepresented group member comes up with a positive adjective you can't process it and you [have a] slow [reaction time]. When the person from the underrepresented group comes up with the negative adjective, that is the association that will speed reaction time. So my argument all along is, "I don't know that person, I have never met that person, how can I have an association that they are good or bad? This is an impossible task for me to do." {43:02}

PG - What about this work makes you the proudest? You said it is your most cited work.

MS - And for good reason! It made a very important point about children's stereotyping. We can't label kids as being "stereotyped" without understanding what the question is that we are asking them.

PG - I was wondering if Carolyn Sherif had an influence in your research methodology or how your methodology developed.

MS - I think what people don't realize about Carolyn Sherif is she was very good methodologist. Even though she felt social psychology had gone a little off the rails in focusing on laboratory research, she was not opposed to laboratory research. She was very good at understanding all different kinds of methodologies. I think that she really inspired me. She was the one who first introduced me to Bartlett. I believe it was 1932 when he talked about attitudes being reflected in memory. That led me to take a developmental class, with Lynn Liben, which led to my very first developmental study with children and looking at their memories for stereotyped information. I really think that Carolyn started me on that path. We talked a lot in my dissertation about, "Can we come up with an experimental methodology to get people to respond differently to stereotypical or counter stereotypical tasks?" That didn't work so well. I think I realized that kind of manipulation is not my strong point. But still, I was able to explore and get to know different methodologies. So yes, I think Carolyn had a huge influence.

PG - I am wondering about that blowout that you had during your comps and how that influenced how you analyze data? It sounded like it had such an impact, you having to make a change the day before.

MS - I think it also influenced me because I feel very strongly that there is an ethical component to how we analyze data. Frequently, in gender research, there are often unethical things done in analyzing data. One of the examples that Carolyn used to give that I then give a lot in class when I talk about this topic is the horrible PMS research that was done. There was a British physician, Katharina Dalton, who thought that women went insane during the pre-menstrual period. So Carolyn went through Dalton's book and really chewed apart the horrible methodology and analyses that Dalton used to come up with the conclusions that women were going insane during their premenstrual period. I think that did have a big influence on me. {47:18}

PG - Can you talk a little bit more about how you apply ethics when you are doing your gender research?

MS - This has been in two recent pieces. One of my students [Jeanna Cooper] came up with the idea of doing a study on a horrible pop culture book about relationships, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992). Thank goodness it is no longer as popular or as high on the best sellers list, but it was pretty hot at the time we started the research. We had talked about it in class and she was just as enraged by it as I was. She decided that she would like to do a study on it. We had some other students help us.

John Gray, in this famous book, had two lists of items. He had the list of items that he said were "What women would want men to do for them in a relationship." Of course it was totally heterosexual relationships that he was addressing. We thought it would be interesting if you took away all the gendered contexts [to see] what would happen. There were 105 items for women that men were supposed to do for them. There were only 40 that women were supposed to do for men. That was one really odd thing. The ones for women were all, "cook dinner for her, buy her flowers, take care of the children" - those sorts of very stereotypically feminine tasks that the guy was supposed to do once every month, maybe. The ones for men were really strange. They weren't the usual ones that you see in the stereotype literature. They were, I think, based on psychobabble about relationships. Several of them were based on his concept of "the cave." Gray thought that men should have a cave that they could escape to, where they shouldn't be bothered until they were ready to come out.

So we took [these items] and rewrote them in three versions: masculine, feminine, and neutral. We stripped away as many gender connotations as we could. Even when we were writing the neutral ones, we were trying to make it as neutral as we possibly could. We did three studies and what we found was that it was very hard to identify the neutral ones as stereotypical. They were coming out pretty cleanly neutral. A lot of the masculine ones were [also identified as neutral]. The only feminine [items] that were not coming out as neutral were the really stereotypical ones, "cook dinner."

The first two studies, we submitted for publication and basically the reviewers said that we were being unfair to John Gray. The editors said that if we could collect more data, the paper could be

reconsidered. We collected more data, but it took a very long time to collect the additional data because we were also trying to use a sexism measure and we couldn't get people responding in categories that other researchers were finding. We ended up getting close to 400 respondents in the end. We also had a lot of different conditions. We manipulated the kind of relationship, whether it was romantic vs. roommates. We needed to have a lot of participants. Finally, it was published and I wish it would get more attention. It is not getting very much attention. It may be that it has a boring conclusion. No one can identify the stereotypes. {52:34}

PG - Why do you think that is?

MS - I think that people work backwards from stereotype conceptions to apply it to their own lives. Similar to Spence's gender identity theory, where you decide, "I am a manly man so what I do is manly. I am feminine so what I do is feminine." Because Gray had so many different items, people just picked and chose from the list and ignored the fact that, "I like ten of these feminine items" but "I did not like nine of them" and just said, "Oh yes, this is me" and accepted it because of their own overall stereotypical conceptions. I also think that when you read a book, when you are not heavily into this thing as I am, and it says, "Women like these things" you also have a self-fulfilling prophecy, or a schema, you are priming the schema.

PG - Why do you think your work [critique] hasn't gotten a lot of attention?

MS - I think it is partially because it was the study. It was too long and complicated. The take home message may not be clear, and maybe I did not do enough to promote it using social media. I wasn't really in a position to promote it for a couple of reasons. I went back into administration just about the time this article came out. And, you probably aren't following the whole mess we had at Penn State, but we had a child abuse scandal at Penn State [Jerry Sandusky, football coach, convicted of child abuse in 2014].

[Addendum from MS: As I read the section about the child abuse scandal I am concerned that my comments may seem insensitive. I did try to explain below the context for my frustration beyond personal concerns].

PG - Yes.

MS - Okay, so you are familiar with that. That was exactly at the same time so my hopes of anyone at Penn State helping me to promote this was zilch. I didn't really have the ability at that point to try to promote it. And then I had another piece coming out and I thought, "Maybe this has a better chance." It was the first special issue in *Sex Roles* on single-sex education. We tried to get some promotion of that, but again, it got swallowed up by what was going on at Penn State. That [said], however, in the last couple of years, the intro that I wrote has been fairly frequently cited considering that it has been out just the last couple of years. I'm getting a bit more attention for those two pieces and for the piece that I wrote too.

The ethical dimension that I see to that is that people kept citing a U.S. Department of Education report on single-sex education that was never published. They cited it as showing, "Maybe it isn't too bad" or "well, there is really no difference. May be tipped slightly toward 'it might be okay to have single-sex schools in some circumstances.'" I read this report and I was pretty upset at first personally, because they didn't cite the paper that I wrote with Irene Frieze and Susanne Hershey, which is an excellent paper on single-sex education. We studied this school in transition from the beginning of the year to the end of the year and we found no difference on stereotyping measures - single-sexed vs. mixed-sex classes. I am trying to figure out why they didn't cite my paper. It fits right in with what they are doing. So I read through the whole document, the whole 3000 pages (I'm exaggerating).

I discovered way at the end [of the report] that they had my paper on a list of excluded qualitative papers. I didn't have any qualitative measures. So I did read further and they said, "Well, there were some papers that we thought were qualitative and didn't realize they weren't and we excluded them." I couldn't understand why they wouldn't put it back in the quantitative [section]. So, I started looking very, very closely at this report and I discovered a lot of problems with it. I [then] decided that I wanted to really focus on a methodological critique of this report. I discovered that they were double and triple counting the same study. They were wrong about what they said the results were in many cases. I and my co-authors reanalyzed it and meta-analyzed it. We discovered that there was very little difference between mixed-sex and single-sex schools. When you do find a difference, it is correlated with pre-existing differences {58:32} in the students along the lines you would suspect: SES [socio-economic status], or pre-existing performance on various cognitive tasks. So, that was the focus of that paper.

PG - Could part of the reason why they didn't cite your first paper be because they were trying to support single-sex education?

MS - I think they wanted to [support single-sex education] because some of them had written papers that were positive towards single-sex education, but I think in the end, it is really hard to say. I hesitate to make that conclusion. I think that the Department of Education was under time pressure to get this done because the US Congress had asked for a re-evaluation of whether or not it was okay for public schools to have single-sex environments because of some legislation that had been passed.

PG - What is your opinion on single-sex education being publicly funded?

MS - I am opposed to it.

PG - Because you don't see any benefits. Do you see any problems?

MS - Initially, I wasn't sure. Before I had done the study, the first one with Irene and Susanne, I don't think that I was totally sure about what I thought about it. What had happened was that

Irene had gotten a call from the school saying, "Would you be interested in doing this study?" She knew that this was an area that I focused on and so she contacted me. I said, "Wow, this is really great. What a great opportunity." But I don't know that I really thought, at that point, and this was a private school so we weren't even getting into the public arena. I'm not sure what I really thought one way or another. I guess this was good, doing this study having a neutral outlook. At the end of the study, it was very clear that we weren't getting any differences in classroom school environments. The only thing we were getting were the usual developmental changes that I had found in my earlier meta-analysis.

As a result of that study, I was invited to go to an AAUW [American Association of University Women] confab on single-sex education. The pro and con people were represented. It was a very good discussion and AAUW issued a report that was called *Separated by Sex*. There wasn't good evidence that separating students by sex really helps. Maybe in certain limited circumstances - I was still willing to consider that maybe there are some situations where girls might do better, but I wasn't convinced. What convinced me [that single-sex education could be a problem] started in 2001 when some female politicians, including Hillary Clinton, who of course went to an all-girls college, introduced legislation to loosen up Title IX a little bit. Title IX is the statute that bars gender discrimination in public education. A lot of people associate Title IX with making sure that girls have the same number of athletic teams in sports, but it applies more broadly. Now, people are realizing it applies to sexual assault, to rape, to actions where there is clearly some gender discrimination going on. So they loosened up Title IX and then there was further clarification from the Department of Education in 2005/2006, which said there could be single-sex classes in schools, publicly funded, under certain circumstances. The problem is that there was an explosion of these experiments that were not really compliant with even the loosened regulations.

PG - Experiments in having single-sex classes?

MS - Yes. There was a whole group that sprung up to support public single-sex education. This group was originally called National Association for the Advancement of Single Sex Public Education, it [has] had several names. In the heyday of these experiments, it was the "National Association for Single-Sex Public Education." My co-author Rebecca Bigler has debated the head of NASSPE about whether publicly funded single-sex education was appropriate. They used to have a huge website touting the virtues of single-sex education by pointing to individual studies and not looking at the whole body of research.

PG - What are the worst implications of loosening up Title IX?

MS - The worst are - first of all, getting back to what people were saying in the Civil Rights era in the United States: separate but equal is not equal. Whenever you start separating people in any characteristic that is an accident of their birth as opposed to some other more reasonable characteristic, then you create stereotypes. There is all kind of social-psychological research - in

going back to what we learned in Robbers Cave to what Rebecca Bigler and Lynn Liben have done experimentally now, when you start separating out people according to demographic characteristics, they start forming stereotypes. That is usually not helpful. And then number two, or that may be number three, I have lost track, it is a heterosexist assumption in many cases that says, if we put girls and boys in separate classes they won't be distracted by thoughts of sex. Well, that is assuming that they are all heterosexual. The third thing is that if you really truly think that a lot of girls are not learning leadership and competitiveness and you think that a lot of boys are not learning or expressing emotions, it is not at all clear that if you separate them, that is the way to get each group to learn characteristics that they may not be conversant with. The problem is the instruction, not how you arrange the students. Wouldn't it be better to fix the instruction, train the teachers how to deal with these situations? That would benefit everyone. Then you put students in classrooms the usual way and everyone can potentially benefit from it. Valerie Lee did an observational study in various kinds of schools and found teachers were not behaving less stereotypically in single-sex schools. So you don't magically un-stereotype because all of your students are all girls or all boys. In fact, that organization [NASSPE] has been training teachers to behave stereotypically.

PG - Wow! And for people who don't identify in these binary categories, [single-sex proponents] don't speak to that at all. {69:21}

MS - Exactly. Fortunately, there has been greater sensitivity towards that issue in recent years. Penn State has been a little bit slow on these issues without question. They have been very slow during the whole Jerry Sandusky crisis. They failed to see the relationship between broader issues of homophobia and sexism and heterosexism in what was going on. They isolated it as "people don't understand child abuse and they don't know the phone number to call to report it." They still have not really gotten out of that mindset. It is better, but it is still an issue. There has been some research in some single-sex schools with the idea that if you do have someone who doesn't identify strongly with one gender or another, maybe they would be more comfortable in a single-sex school because there would be less pressure on them because there would only have to be one group that they would have to deal with. I don't think there is very strong evidence to support that. But I don't think we have a lot of evidence.

Again, I think it would be better if we simply had students and we didn't worry about labeling them all the time as whatever. I was telling one of my colleagues, I was signing up for something at Penn State and it was some seminar and it was a requirement that I say my gender. I said to my colleague, "Why do they have to know my gender? I don't get what the connection is for me attending this workshop. All they need to know is my name and my email address so that they can send me the confirmation."

We keep asking people for their gender, their race, age, ethnicity, all those characteristics, when it is mostly irrelevant. In fairness, I should mention that this is an argument that the single-sex proponents sometimes make. They say, "Then we shouldn't segregate students by age in school".

I think that is definitely true once they reach a certain developmental level. That is what happens, right? So, we don't segregate college students by age. But earlier, it has to do with developmental levels when it does relate to the task at hand in the classroom. Gender does not. That is one of the Department of Education's stipulations: you have to show that gender makes a difference in learning when you separate students by gender. And of course, it doesn't.

PG - That is really fascinating. There are a lot of political implications in your research. Do you have time for me to ask you a few more key questions?

MS - Absolutely.

PG - This may be redundant, but just to hear it in your words, how do you see your work as being feminist? {73:44}

MS - I guess I have always adhered to the definition of feminism as being focused on equality by gender. So that is how I see my work as really aimed at that goal. In order to reach that goal, we think we have to address this issue straight on in our research and teaching.

PG - I wanted to return to mentoring. You said you didn't have a lot of mentors in grad school?

MS – Well, no. I think Carolyn [Sherif] was clearly and Lynn Liben was my main graduate school mentor. Even though we are now colleagues, it started out with me taking a class from her and doing research with her. She would be the other main mentor from graduate school. I do consider Irene Frieze a mentor even though that was mostly post graduate school.

PG - What sort of a role did they play as mentors for you? How did they do that?

MS - Carolyn and Lynn were writing letters of recommendation for me throughout my whole pathetic job search when I first graduated. I say that because I had a lot of interviews that I don't think went very well. I do not interview well. I have a tendency to give it to people just straight, which isn't always a good idea. Or I become a little bit unsure how to handle it when people ask [me] what are essentially illegal questions during the job interview. They were very supportive throughout that whole process. I have continued to work with Lynn throughout my whole career. She and I have bounced back and forth in and out of Penn State and now we are both back in Penn State. We work together quite closely.

Irene was very supportive of me when I moved back to Pittsburgh.

[Transition]

One of the questions you asked was whether or not I had been discriminated against. I would like to talk about a couple of those situations.

When I got my first full time job in 1980 at SUNY [State University of New York] College at Rockport, it was a one year position. It was one of those, "We love you and we have a tenure

track position opening. You could apply for it if you do a great job and you will be a shoo in.” After I arrived there, I discovered the department had been burning through female faculty members at a very rapid pace. And one of my colleagues had just been denied tenure and I think there may have been another female faculty member there on the way out. I arrive and I find out that they are chewing up and spitting out the female faculty. I found myself aligned with the people who were being kicked out of the department. So that was political mistake number one. And then, during my job talk for the full-time position I talked about my research, which is about gender stereotyping and I could tell that it was not going over well. So I didn't get the job. They did hire another woman, not me, but that person didn't stay very long. So I had a year where I was teaching part-time and I started applying [again] and got the job at Penn State. Was it gender discrimination or feminism discrimination? When I talked about my research I could just see that it was too radical for some of the places that I was interviewing.

PG - Not having studied in that time, I'm just trying to get a sense of what it was about your research - did it feel too radical or did it feel not important?

MS - It could be either. I think in some cases it was the former. I think both of those were going on. One interview, I remember, I was talking about how cognitive developmental theories of gender were challenging the old Freudian theories. I honestly didn't think that in the 1980s people would be shocked that there were theories challenging what Freud said. This one interview, they went at me for the Freud part. I think in other cases it was like, "Who cares?" {80:36}

PG - Do you remember what it felt like being in this faculty [at SUNY] and not having your research validated and how did you get through that?

MS - I think what helped me get through it in that one year position was that I hated the area of New York and so that was the way I thought, "Good, let's just get out of here." When I came to Penn State, it was very good that I had a mentor in Lynn Liben while at the Greater Allegheny campus. Lynn was department head for psychology at most Penn State campuses. She was around and very helpful. When I came to Penn State, there were virtually no women tenured at that campus. Penn State had just decided that it was going to start emphasizing research [at the campuses]. I was [one of] the first people hired who had a research background in this new era. We had some women who were tenured, but they were tenured assistant professors or they weren't doing any research. I had no mentor on that campus who was in my situation. I had to look to people like Irene Frieze at Pitt and Lynn Liben at UP [University Park] The whole tenure process was very painful. I was tenured and promoted, obviously. It did happen and it is on my CV. I decided to read the review letters, which maybe I shouldn't have done.

During that time period, one of my students told me that she had been warned to stay away from me because I was a radical feminist. When she got to know me, I don't think she knew what the term meant, "What does this mean? I enjoy your classes. Why do I have to stay away from you?"

So that was a very difficult period. Women who were doing research were clearly viewed as being radical.

PG - What did that imply, being “radical”?

MS - All of Penn State is somewhat conservative. The regional campuses are very conservative and somewhat parochial. I think all of us who were in this boat were also interested in social issues and we had come from other places. We traveled abroad and maybe spoke other languages. There was a cultural war going on. A lot of faculty who had been hired were local people who didn't necessarily have advanced degrees. When this shift occurred within Penn State: “We are now going to bring people in from the outside” - it was a very tense time. There were racial issues. I had the feeling sometimes, if I was talking to more than one non-white person at a time, people would be looking at me like, “You are fomenting revolution. You are conspiring. What’s going on?” I am not the only one who experienced this. I had to learn. I am a very intense person; I had to learn how to moderate some of my responses because that would play into the radical persona. This has followed me for my whole career. I have been viewed as being a bit of a loose cannon as though I am a bit radical, a bit on the edge. I think [the judgement comes] because I am not afraid to promote social justice issues. I don't laugh at sexist jokes - I don't put up with that. {87:01}

PG - How has the culture at Penn State shifted, how does your research or feminism fit in the culture now?

MS - I think that our campus has undergone a wonderful shift whereby we have a program called “Teaching International” that my colleague in sociology started and I helped support while I was in administration. It has brought together a lot of these issues. We focus on a region each year and we also have a theme that we explore. I think that has been an important change for a lot of people. It has been a safe place to talk about these issues. There has been some push back. Some students are not okay talking about difficult issues, “Why do I have to do this? Why is this required?” But it is so much better than initially. Students [now] are so much more open to talking about these issues. We have a wonderful conference where they display their work. That has made a big difference with making students proud of what they are doing and making them comfortable in exploring these difficult issues.

PG - How would you say that your research and feminism fits into psychology, more broadly?

MS - I have a little bit of an awkward fit between social and developmental psychology. Social psychologists who study gender stereotyping tend to not pay attention to the developmental literature. Part of what I can bring to make it cross that bridge is by looking at those issues. That is also a very feminist kind of research that says that gender and other social categories are very important ones that we have to look at across the lifespan. I think that is how [my research] fits in.

I think the difficulty I have in answering this question is that unlike some of my colleagues, I haven't explored it explicitly in my work and labeled it as "feminist." I think it is implicit. I think it is so obvious you would have to be blind not to see it. I think that is where the difficulty lies. I haven't necessarily, explicitly labeled it that way even though I feel it is very much a part of that tradition.

PG - I would definitely say that your research is feminist.

MS - I am glad to hear that. I think it is obvious. A group of my students did this wonderful project - I wish we had been in the social media era where it could have potentially gone viral. They took a bunch of their classmates and filmed them while they answered what it is to be feminist: "What is feminism?" "Are you a feminist?" The array of answers they got was a wonderful representation of why people struggle with the label - because they don't understand the broader meaning of the term or the historical roots. Why call it "feminism"? There is a historical reason we call it that.

PG - Could you talk about your own mentoring style? {92:01}

MS - I think I'm a really good mentor and people have told me that. I have mentored colleagues as well as students. I think that my biggest strength as a mentor is identifying what a person's strong point is and matching up what I am doing that could help them and also speak to their strengths. For example, when I have had colleagues who needed to get started on research, I have been able to find research topics that interest all of us and get us together in a team and produce some interesting research. The same thing with students, if they are interested in starting research projects, telling them about one of my research projects that may spark their interests. I think I do have a great deal of strength as a mentor in doing that. I think I can work, as a mentor, with anyone even though I am a "radical feminist." All right, I couldn't work with anyone, but I could work with a lot of different people. And I don't really care if they like me. I admit that if they don't that wouldn't be happy news, but I don't consider that a prerequisite for working with someone.

PG - Emphasizing someone's strengths sounds like a good way to create a foundation for a relationship. What advice could you give to feminists entering psychology now?

MS - I think that as tempting as it is to want to go full force into promoting the ideas that you want, I think that you do have to balance that with understanding what the structure is of academia. That is where I work, so that is where I am most familiar. I think that students have to understand how the world is structured and I'm not saying betray their principles, but find a balance between working within the structure and accomplishing your goals. If you think that you must be within the structure, for example, when you are with students, you have to be within the structure. To some extent, you have to work within the order of the rules. That balance is really important. That is why I sometimes laugh when people say I am a loose cannon because I do work within the structure, but only within certain limits. I have reached barriers or dead ends

because there are limits to what I am willing to do. You have to know what your limits are and you have to learn the politics.

PG - Can you give an example from your life [illustrating] that dichotomy of what your goal is and what the structure is and what you've compromised and haven't?

MS - I would say that each time I went back into administration it was a huge compromise. A lot of people do aim towards that as their career goal, but that was never something I aimed for. I have always done it because I thought that was the best way to accomplish the larger goal, but always with the tension of not being comfortable conforming to the organizational structure. Administrators have to be more conforming than faculty members who can be a bit more independent.

PG - What are your career or research goals now? {97:28}

MS - What I am hoping to do - I have two huge projects that I want to get analyzed, written and published. They are really huge, longitudinal data on massive groups of participants. Those two I really want to get accomplished. I have several other projects that are not quite as big. I have other projects that I think could be important. I have a paper that I just finished with a colleague. I think it is pretty good, related to the children's gender stereotyping issue. I would also like to write something a little more non-traditionally academic about the single-sex school controversy. There are some methodological issues that intersect with public policy issues that I am interested in. I might want to do a follow up on the John Gray study. I keep thinking that maybe if I looked at how people are influenced by those materials, I know that he is not the current hot relationship author, but there are others who have taken his place. Maybe there will be something to look at in that. And then I think I have become a lot more politicized. A lot of what we are doing in Division 35, all of the issues that are going on right now in the United States - there has been a convergence of these concerns. The Teaching International program, I think a lot of us are interested in looking at those issues through that program and doing more discussions getting the students involved and thinking about these issues.

PG - Which issues, specifically?

MS - The police actions that have occurred and the confederate flag issue are the ones that have really come to the forefront.

PG - It is great that there is a space and network now where you can have these conversations safely, like you said. Is there anything else that I haven't asked that you think would be important for me to know about you?

MS - I really think we have covered the main points.

PG - Thank you so much for your time today.

MS - Thank you for talking with me, I really appreciate it. {101}

[Added audio recording - added after video was shut off but audio was still on and we were talking.]

MS - Carolyn Sherif learned, in the mid '70s, as the result of a congressional investigation in the U.S., that one of her studies had been funded by the CIA. The study that was funded was the reference group study, which was an adolescent group in Texas. She talked about how she was getting phone calls from the Robbers Cave parents who were saying, "You didn't tell me that this was the CIA studying my baby." She had to explain to them that it wasn't the study [in question]. She was interviewed by at least one writer about the issue. Then, she was interviewed on the NBC nightly news where she expressed her outrage about what had happened. She said, "If the CIA had been interested in my research, why didn't they go to the library and read it? Why did they have to make a fake foundation to fund it?" I think that was a very good question, but it was just part of the whole concern. A lot of psychology does have strong roots in the intelligence community and industry. My historian colleague has done a lot of research on freedom of information requests from the FBI. So I started to ask how you get CIA documents. I was wondering how to actually get these documents to find out what was in the congressional investigation. I have another colleague in communications who is very interested in the topic as well. I gave them some information on Carolyn and I think we are going to try to look into it and see what happened then and how it relates to what is going on now because I think it does. What is the mindset [needed] that you secretly do this research, or you secretly fund some group to fund the research instead of just openly supporting the research. What are the motivations for doing it that way and aren't there many dangers because then people are not replicating the research if it is not being openly shared and published. [When] people are not critiquing it you start doing things that are not effective and are actually dangerous things to do because you are not openly sharing this information.

PG - How could it be dangerous to you, do you think, when digging up this kind of history?

MS - Right now, I don't think it is dangerous, but I think it could be controversial. APA, for example, still has not resolved the issue of how far should a psychologist go [when torture or similar acts take place]. I take a radical position, which is that psychologists should not be involved period, end of discussion, in any kind of activity that might be harmful. That is more than just torture. People get fixated on torture and it is not just torture, it is extended to incarceration. People are put into solitary confinement for months, for years. That is harmful. I don't think dangerous, but I think potentially controversial and not what Penn State wants to put in the *Daily News Digest*.