

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**

**Interview with Shari Miles-Cohen**

*Interviewed by Axelle Karera*

*Newport, RI*

*March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

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Alexandra Rutherford, PhD  
Project Director, Psychology's Feminist Voices  
[alexr@yorku.ca](mailto:alexr@yorku.ca)

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**Interview with Shari Miles-Cohen**  
**Interviewed by Axelle Karera, Alexandra Rutherford, & Laura Ball**  
**Newport, RI**  
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AK: Axelle Karera, Interviewer

AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

LB: Laura Ball

SMC: Shari Miles-Cohen, Interview participant

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AK: We ask everyone for the record to state your name, place, and date of birth.

SMC: Shari Elizabeth Miles-Cohen, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1964, Indianapolis, Indiana, United States of America.

AK: The first question we have been asking everybody is to tell us about the emergence or the development of your feminist identity.

SMC: For me it was pretty early. I had an aunt who died of pancreatic cancer when I was probably 4 or 5 years old, maybe 5 or 6 years old. I have an older brother, a younger sister, and a younger brother, who then would have been 2 years old. My sister and I were not allowed to go to my aunt's funeral because we were girls, but my 2 year old brother was allowed to go because he was a boy. They felt that we weren't emotionally equipped to handle a funeral. That is probably when I became a feminist. It's pretty early, and not consciously, but I think that experience has never left me. I still remember how excluded and powerless I felt.

AK: Has that experience informed your trajectory as a student? As you were going through your education did that inform the way you understood things? The kind of questions you've asked.

SMC: I think I've been a feminist since then. It sort of plays itself out in different areas. I definitely remember wondering why people did things when I was in elementary school, and junior high school, and high school, and college, and looking at the world through a feminist lens probably since then.

AK: I looked you up a little bit and...

SMC: Oh you did, see all of the hair styles changes?

AK: No, I did not. The only Google picture I found was of your son and your mother. I've noticed that a lot of your work is very much hands on, very pragmatic, and with all of the positions you have had have always focused on public interests, women's health, and poverty. I was wondering if that was a conscious decision for you to work outside academia and focus more on policy making and the practical side of things?

{3:25}

SMC: In college I took a course to teach you how to become a rape crisis counsellor, and it was an elective. I don't know if I actually wanted to become a rape crisis counsellor, but I took the course as an elective, because it seemed very interesting. That's probably the first time I thought about not becoming a physician, because I was pre-med in college. I had some doctors who weren't particularly progressive and then I was taking this class and our textbook was *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, so of course, if my life hadn't been changed by then, certainly with *Our Bodies, Our Selves* my life was changed. I started to understand better how to make change, as opposed to being acted upon or on a very small level, like raising questions in class. How to engage in structural change. I went to college in Boulder, Colorado, which is a place for lots of radicals to go to school; it's a nice environment for that.

From that point on, psychology became a possibility for me. I was very much interested in working with individuals, I did not want to become a clinician or a professor, and I certainly did not want to become an administrator, that never crossed my mind. I think it was probably not until I got to graduate that I realized that clinical psychology wasn't for me. It wasn't expansive enough. I'd gone through this period in college where I was going to follow Angela Davis wherever she went. I was a socialist Marxist person. I cut all of my hair off, I dyed it all sorts of different colours and my parents were terrified, they didn't want anyone to know we were related, in sort of a funny way. After I cut my hair off my father said, "we have to walk on opposite sidewalks, I just can't walk down the street with you anymore." So I'm going through this period of South African activism, all this stuff. I still felt like it would be more filling for me to engage in work with just another person.

I got to Howard [University] and I did not like my clinical psychology courses, so I switched to personality theory and I thought "well I'll just be the next Sigmund Freud," focusing specifically on African American women. What actually changed my life was I had a job in the Library of the Congress in the stacks. I was a stack attendant, I shelved books and retrieved books for people who came into the library and it was great job for a graduate student, because other than congressional staff people like me where the only people who could check books out of the Library of Congress. I could literally read any book that had ever been published, any place in the world, it was a great job.

I was there one day and I was in the stacks with HQ's and E's and this book literally fell off the shelf and opened up to an article that Kenneth Clarke had written to an address he had given to the journal the Adlerian psychologist, so it's in the *Journal of Adlerian Psychology*, and it is admonishing psychologists for not being engaged in social change and social justice. That's when I got interested in working in public policy. So it's a long and circuitous route to say that I started off wanting to be physician, as a biology major, I switched to psychology, I was going to be a clinician, so still a practitioner, then I went to theory and then I went to policy.

AK: You mention that was the Congress Library?

SMC: The Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

{7:18}

AK: I also read that you were a fellowship director and also a fellow of the Women's Research Education Institute, which I believe one of the things was to basically train you in policy making and you were in DC for a year or so?

SMC: Yes, I was in DC for a year going to graduate school at Howard, and I had the job at the library and so this book falls off the shelf, it's about policy, and then I started looking for ways to learn about it, so I applied for the fellowship and was granted a fellowship to work for Ron Dellums who was a very progressive member of the House of Representatives at the time and now he is the Mayor of Oakland, California.

AK: Could you speak a little bit about your experience of doing that year in Washington?

SMC: Oh yes, working on the Hill. I worked there for about a year and a half, and it was pretty amazing. My research in graduate school was on racial and feminist identity development in Black women and I went to the Hill to work for the congressmen, when the census bureau was just starting to talk about introducing multi-racial categories. And the census is out of this committee called the Post Office and Civil Service committee, which doesn't exist anymore, but I did not expect to go up on the Hill and be able to work on something that was directly related to my research. There was a lot of controversy back then about whether or not communities of colour could afford to have their representation diluted by adding a multi-racial, multi-ethnic category. There was what the empirical literature said and there was the socio-political context that this discussion is happening within. It was fascinating for me to work up there.

I also worked for him when his best friend, a Member of Congress named Mickey Leland, and maybe 2 weeks after I started working Mickey Leland was killed in a plane crash in Addis Ababa and it sort of changed the focus of the office. Then the earthquake in San Francisco happened, in Oakland really, because the majority of the damage was done in Oakland, this was 1989. There was a place for psychologists to be in that space, because there was so much tragedy happening in the office. But as sort of a learner, I worked on the census work, universal health care, women's issues, child care, that was my portfolio in his office.

AR: Could I ask you to tell us a bit more about your dissertation research?

SMC: My dissertation research was on "Racial and feminist identity development in African American women and its impact their psychological wellbeing," I think. I remember they saying it's got to be at least 20 words long or it's not a dissertation title. What I was interested in was whether their experiences were different. I was educated by mostly White people my entire life, in class obviously, not at home. Howard was the first place I ever had an African American teacher, or been in a space in an educational setting with the majority of African American people. I wanted to know if a feminist at a historically Black college could be successful. So my question was "How do racial and feminist identity development interact with each other and impact academic success?" I only looked at US-born Black women, so I didn't look at Caribbean women or African women or women from any other country, because the politics of identity became too complicated for me.

{11:25}

My findings suggested that African American women at Howard who identified primarily with an advanced racial identity were the most successful at the university. Women who had disparate levels of identity, where they were high on the racial identity and low on feminist identity development, were the most successful. Then the women who were the same, had the same levels of identity, had advanced levels of racial identity and regressive levels of feminist identity levels were the second most successful and the women who had high levels of feminist identity and low racial identity were the least successful. And the ones in the middle were in the middle. The research suggested that if you were a feminist with not much advanced racial identity you were not going to survive at Howard, you just couldn't do it. And I think it's not all that surprising.

AR: Who were your mentors at Howard, who did you work with?

SMC: My chair was Jules Harrell, who was an African American man who went to college in Boulder, where I went and so I came out to work with him. But my mentors were really Martha Mednick and Sandy [Sandra Schwartz] Tangri. They were actually my mentors and they're the ones who sort of gave me license to study this, because my chair didn't care if I did it, but he wasn't particularly interested in the subject matter. Sandy was a social psychologist and I was in personality and Martha was in personality also, but she had a pretty heavy load and I really, really wanted to work with an African American psychologist as a graduate student. And there were no Black women in the research tract when I was there, they were all clinical, so it limited my choices.

AR: Has that changed at Howard as of late?

SMC: There are a few more women of colour in the research tract, but the majority of them are still clinical.

AK: Have you played the role of mentor?

SMC: Yes, I taught for a year and a half at Howard, but I did not like teaching at the university. Everyone has a different experience, but I felt that my students were too privileged and entitled and I just didn't like being in that space, so that is why I didn't keep teaching. Being a mentor, do you mean at the university in particular?

AK: Well not necessary, or outside the university as well.

SMC: I think that yes, any opportunity to be a mentor I take. At the university, being a junior person, once I became a professional, there was a feminist student group that came to me to ask if I would be their faculty supporter or liaison or chair and I told them that I would be happy to and I did do that. But what I told them is that they really needed a senior faculty member, because politically, on campus, on any campus, you need someone with power who is going to advocate for your issues.

{16:06}

Howard was a patriarchal institution, as many institutions of higher education are, and for a feminist organization to be on campus without a strong senior faculty advisor it would not have worked for them. I think part of being a mentor is on the individual level and helping students get some help and guidance and it's also helping them place themselves on this larger milieu and then helping them figure out how they are going to move through it and understanding what the consequences of their actions are. And personally, I just recently became a member of the High Tea Society of Washington, which is this group of mostly women my mother's age who are providing cultural and social outlets for lower income girls in Washington, DC. We all get to wear big hats and go to tea, which is very fun. I just joined and I joined the curriculum committee and I looked at what their presentations had been on in the last year and they were mostly people coming in to talk about dance and music and the arts, which I think are absolutely fantastic. But I said how come no engineers have come in? Or telephone pole climbers? These sorts of non-traditional professions, because it is always easy to teach a girl, or encourage a girl, to become a manicurist, or a hairdresser, or a dancer, but why not an engineer or a physicist? I'm hoping I can take them in another direction, because these girls who participate in the program are 11 through 18 it's a perfect time, it's not too late to introduce them to science. So that is one type of mentoring that I am doing right now.

AK: Are they mostly African American?

SMC: Yes, I'm hoping that that changes but I think, particularly with the High Tea Society, that it is a particular segment of the African American community and I'm not sure being brand new that it's the right time to say, "Well, what about the Latinas in DC? Can they come too." So I think that might come in a couple of years after I have a bit more credibility with the group, but I think it's a conversation that needs to happen.

AK: One thing that I was interested in with your dissertation research was what were the reasons behind those findings it? Talking from a personal experience, up until very late in my academic training have I come somewhat in touch with my feminist side. I was very much aware of my racial oppression more than I was aware of my gender oppression, I couldn't even see the intersection. I was wondering what were reasons you found behind most Black women identify with the racial oppression more than their gender oppression, and why is it more likely that a woman who identifies with her racial oppression will strive better than a woman who has some sort of feminist consciousness?

SMC: I think the first is a self selection issue, they have chosen to come to school at Howard University which is an historically Black college. They could have chosen to go to school at Spelman College, which is an historically Black women's college. We think that 17 and 18 year olds who had more of a feminist orientation, but wanted to go to a Black school would have gone to Spelman or Bennett [College] or some other Black women's college, as opposed to Howard. There is a self-selection question. So for them, women who chose to go to the school, race was clearly paramount for them because they chose Howard. That is one reason why they would be more successful, because race is really important at the university.

{21:08}

There is an African Studies program, there is no Women's Studies program. There is now a Women's Studies certificate at Howard, but there is no Women's Studies program for undergrads where you can get a bachelor's degree. The reinforcers are not really here. My recollection is that it was primarily a self-selection issue and that the students had chosen to come to school at a primarily Black college. My next research question was, let's compare them to students at Spelman College, which would be the equivalent flagship school for Black women who wanted to be educated at a Black women's school, and then maybe some place like Smith [College], which is sort of a more majority focused White women's school and then the University of Maryland, maybe which is a mainstream institution in the Washington Metropolitan area. I think that would be the next research question.

AR: How has that intersection worked for you in terms of being an African American women and a feminist?

SMC: Sometimes it's hard. I've been married twice. With my first husband I didn't change my name and I didn't think it was a big deal. I was making a political statement that I was my own person. It was a problem from the moment we got married until we got divorced, it was always there. With my second husband I thought "Well, I still really do want to keep my last name, so maybe I'll just add his to the end," and it seems to be working out. There are just so many things that, in the Black community, that I'm constantly questioning and raising issue about. I have a very progressive husband right now, which is good. But dealing with heterosexism in the Black community is a huge problem, and pointing those things out to people who don't want to hear about it and have plenty of other repressions to deal with on their own. It's not like it isn't an issue, but I think it was much easier to be a Black woman feminist in a White institution; it's much more difficult for me to be a Black woman feminist in a majority Black institution.

AK: It's probably going to be something that I will be looking at later on, and I think it's important to know the history behind it, that tension between gender and race in the Black community, because I think it's something that we share. I'm originally from Africa, and it's definitely something you find in every Black community.

SMC: You think it would have been much easier to be at Spelman, at a women's school it would have been very easy to be a Black woman feminist. There aren't a lot of spaces where you get to be a Black woman feminist without having to choose which one is more important, to be a fully integrated person. There is always some other person asking you to make a choice and that was always very present at Howard. In a White institution you are just a multiply oppressed person, so it's not really about choosing, it's about trying to negotiate how to keep yourself safe. The shield is already up, it's not that it's safer; it's that I'm prepared for the fight all the time, as opposed to relaxing a little bit and getting hit when your guard is down.

AK: That raises the next question, have you experienced any explicit discrimination based on your gender or on your feminist views?

SMC: Ever in my life?

{26:14}

AK: Sure. I'm just wondering if there has been any point when you have been explicitly discriminated against because of your feminist views at Howard, or because of your gender and feminist views at Howard?

SMC: Not long after I started in the graduate program, so I'm 22 years old, 23 years old, and the chair of the department told me that I needed to wear dresses, because I was wearing jeans everyday. He said, "You need to dress like a professional woman." This isn't going to cut it. Howard was a very conservative place, and he grew up in a time when Black women were not seen as feminine or attractive. I know what he was saying to me, but he didn't realize all of what he was saying, all that he was saying. He thought he was saying one thing and not understanding that there was this sexist component to what he was saying, an anti-feminist component to what he was saying. I don't think it ever hurt me in his course, because I think I was a fine student in his course, but I definitely had people say in class, "Oh, she's that feminist girl." So I definitely had a reputation, but it was okay. It's who I was.

AK: I imagine that you had some trouble with your dissertation as well?

SMC: My chair, like I said, wasn't a huge advocate for me, but he didn't stand in my way. I just had to do a lot of it by myself. Part of it also was not just the subject of my dissertation, it was that I was working full-time in the policy world, which had very little standing in the department. They wanted us to become scholars and to teach, to become academics and the question which came up often was, "Why am I investing all this time in you and you aren't going to teach after we are finished?" So that also complicated my experience at Howard, because I really knew that I wasn't going to teach for very long even if I did teach, that I really wanted to do policy work, or advocacy work, or administrative work, or however else it all plays out.

AR: I want to talk about your policy work, but I'm also really curious about the curriculum at Howard when you were a grad student there, and in psychology specifically. How diverse was the curriculum? When you learned about psychology, was it the same old psychology you would get anywhere?

SMC: No, there was a much greater focus about what the theories and what the theorists said about people of colour, Black people in particular, but people of colour. Also how the practice of the discipline played out, methodological issues around sampling. All of that was very much apparent and stressed in the department.

AR: Did you ever take History of Psychology?

SMC: I did.

AR: And was that at all diverse?

SMC: It was less diverse.

{29:44}



AR: I have a particular interest in that.

SMC: It was less diverse, but the amazing things was I was taking a course with Martha Mednick and it was on personality theories. We got to pick a topic, any topic we wanted and I was going to do racial identity development. Howard an archive, the Moorland-Springarn Archives at the university which has these copies of books written by and about Black people from the beginning of time. There is stuff in there about the Egyptian mystery systems, and there is all this amazing information in there. I went in there to find a particular book and I ended up spending days just in this library, looking at photographs, and images, and books, that I had to use gloves to look at, and it was pretty amazing to think about. Most of this I had never heard of in Boulder. I hadn't heard of any of it before. I hadn't heard of the people before. And then at SPSSI [Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues], that's when more of my modern day History of Psychology interests got fulfilled by looking at the archives there.

AR: And you'd run across Kenneth Clark's work.

SMC: Yes, I had. As a graduate student, absolutely. I certainly knew who he was. Although he never came up in undergraduate school in Boulder, we never talked about him.

AK: Was primarily his work mentioned? Only his work was mentioned over Mamie's work?

SMC: Oh yes, Mamie's work isn't mentioned much at all. I guess you see it when it's Clark and Clark, but not many people talk about her. She was not a co-author on this particular article that I found in the Library of Congress, but you sort of think, where would he have been without her? And then her willingness to be this amazing intellectual being and still not shine, to allow him to really be out there. As much as I would have wanted to see him at the end of his life to talk to him, it would have been amazing to see her. It would have been just amazing to sit with her for a little while and talk.

AR: She died so much before he did. There are a couple of scholars who are getting more interested in really trying to really heighten her visibility in the History of Psychology. We have one working on an article on her for the *Journal of Social Issues* special issue that is going to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> [anniversary] and she is looking at Mamie. Her name is Layli Phillips [Maparyan]

SMC: Oh I know her! C. Layli or Layli C., there is a C in the somewhere.

AR: And Shafali Lal's article, unfortunately Shafali is no longer with us, but she wrote a great article on Mamie too. Just as an aside.

AK: Going back to policy work, you have been involved in the National Council for Research on Women?

{33:27}

SMC: For a long time, yes.

AK: I've noticed that part of their programs include work on domestic policy issues as well as global policy issues, and I was wondering, where is your focus?

SMC: My focus is primarily domestic, but when I was still with the Women's Research and Education Institution I spent a lot of time overseas in Eastern Europe in the former Soviet Union and then in China for the UN [United Nations] women's conference. This was the first time I was introduced to the UN, I didn't know anything about the UN before 1994. There were a couple of things I became aware of doing that international work. The first was that international women know a lot more about the United States than anybody in the United States knows about anybody overseas. They come to the table being able to tell you your life story before you even open your mouth. It was space where I felt incredibly ignorant and very uncomfortable with that lack of knowledge. It was also painful to acknowledge this sense of American privilege that I had never acknowledge before I went overseas. Being in this space where I am interacting with people who know more about the United States than I know about their country, and I'm in their country.

When I first went to... I was trying to get from Russia to Ukraine and I got on the wrong plane and I went to Latvia instead. Because of course the ticket is in Cyrillic, it's not in English. I get off the plane and the person at customs does not speak English and they are not letting me in. I'm saying "I'm an American, I have to get through here." Looking back it's so ridiculous, and after maybe an hour of arguing with this guy he finally says "go on, this woman doesn't know what she is going, she thinks she is in the Ukraine and she's in Latvia." Then of course I get in and there is no car because it is in Kiev waiting for me and I'm in Riga. All of this stuff that I never thought I possessed came out. I'm sure it was not the most unattractive American who has been over there and had something happen, but I did not think of myself that way, as progressive as I am.

That experience of being overseas, being a Black person in these countries was not cool, right? So a lot of negative things happened when I was travelling over there, but I learned so much and I still have friends there. It's informed my understanding of women's issues, in that we have so much in common all over the world. That's where it started and I'm hoping that with the women's programs, we are thinking of doing some work on trafficking and international domestic violence, and some work around that. The UN is a great place, it's just wonderful. It's going to be very interesting to see how the US relationship with the UN continues to develop with Susan Rice as the new person there representing the government.

LB: In what sort of capacity do you work with the UN?

SMC: Now most of my interaction with the UN is through the National Council for Research on Women [NCRW]. NCRW has consultant status with ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council of the United Nations]. APA [American Psychological Association] has representatives, so I review the outcome documents that they might want to comment on that might have an impact on women, so I would review those, but I don't go to the UN to represent APA, I would go as an NCRW representative if I went.

{38:16}

I don't have my annual pass anymore where I could go for anything, but I can go for particular meetings, like the meeting that just ended a few days ago for The Commission on the Status on Women, which is held every year.

AK: You also work, I couldn't figure out if it was the same organization, but for the National Association of the Commission for Women?

SMC: Oh yes, it's an appointed commission. I'm an advisor to the mayor of the District of Columbia, so we advise him on issues related to women in DC.

...

AK: One of the works I saw that you introduced at the Commission was the work of CARE and I couldn't find out what it stood for.

SMC: The work of CARE?

AK: It's C-A-R-E and they have worked on a documentary called *A Powerful Noise*.

SMC: Oh right, this was pretty amazing. *A Powerful Noise* is a documentary that was produced by Sheila Johnson who is an African American billionaire, sort of almost Oprah level, and CARE is an international non-profit that looks at women's and children's issues. Last year I just happened to see a trailer for this film, *A Powerful Noise*, which is a story about 3 women...

AK: ...in Mali, Bosnia...

SMC: ...and in Vietnam. It just moved me, 30 second in. I was in tears by the end of it. It's just an amazing documentary. So I wrote to them and said I would like to do a film screening. Never done a film screening before, I don't know how to do a film screening, but I'm thinking that other people need to see this film. I wrote to them, they wrote back and they said, "Sure, partner with us." So I got the DC commission, the Montgomery County Commission, which is just outside of Washington, DC in Maryland, and the Virginia Commission to all partner to sponsor this film screening. The amazing thing is Bui My Hahn was here, the Vietnamese woman came to Washington for the screening. I asked her to come to APA to talk to the staff and she came.

{41:49}

AR: Wow.

SMC: She is maybe (this tall), HIV positive, very frail. Her story of how you see an injustice and just want to do something, she is the voice for people in her city who are HIV positive. She talks about losing her daughter. In the film she tells a story about her husband, she gets HIV from him, unknowingly, and then passes it on to their daughter when her daughter is born. Her

daughter dies. She finds another man, they fall in love, and he dies right before she came to the United States for this film screening. It is just tragic and she is still filled with hope. She is just an amazing woman. I saw the video clip and you just have no idea where things are going to go. I've tried to stay in touch with her, but she hasn't responded to my emails recently so I'm not sure what is going on.

AK: You were trying to screen the movie across the country, around International Women's Day?

SMC: Yes, so I wrote to the National Commissions for Women and all over the country now Commissions for Women are screening that film with CARE. It's pretty nice.

AR: What I think is really neat is you saw something and then you tried to figure out how to get it to a wider audience. Whereas someone like me, who doesn't have your experience in policy and structural organization, would have said "oh, we'll just a little film day at APA, or something." You were able to hook up these organizations and have it be a massive effort.

SMC: I guess so, but I know that everyone who has seen it, have you all seen it yet? You all should definitely see it. They are planning to release it on DVD and you could have a screening at the school. That would be really nice.

AK: Changing gears a little bit, you have a son, one of my questions is then, how do you balance personal and professional things in your life? You are a very busy woman.

SMC: It's really hard. I mean, it's really hard. I think people who tell you it isn't hard, somehow there is either a little fairy that is doing some of their work, or there is something in their lives or someone helping them that they aren't acknowledging. It is very difficult. When I took this job at APA, I said to them "I'm coming here, because you will give me a 9-6 workday." I started off that way. It is not like that anymore. I'm always tired, always fatigued. I thought for a moment about going to work for the Obama administration, and we had some conversations, and then I thought "I've waited my entire life for this boy. My whole life to have this son, and I'm going to give that up, spending my nights with him?" I love Barack Obama, but I've waited my entire life for this son.

SMC: I do, I love Barack Obama, but.. My husband and I talk about it a lot and when we got married, I said women who get pregnant and have children, their career trajectories can plateau.

{45:59}

I said, we talked about a pre-nuptial agreement and we went through all of this work on how to make sure, since I was going to be getting pregnant and having a baby, that there was some sort of recognition that my earning potential was going to plateau. He was not sympathetic at all. Then of course, I get a job making more money. I sort of shot myself in the foot. Then he says "See I told you, you wouldn't make less money once you got pregnant!"

At home, I am always making compromises. There is a meeting I should go to, but there is Xavier. I almost always pick him up and I almost always drop him off in the morning. I have to negotiate with my husband for him to pick him up or drop him, and I have an amazing husband. I have an amazing husband. There are just some things that he doesn't...one of the things we are struggling with right now is that he will commit to evening activities without checking in to find out if I have anything to do. He is getting there, but he's just not there yet because he assumes that I'm just going to do it. There are lots of things that I just don't do anymore. I try to find a way to do them during the day, or on the weekend. There are lots of things I've had to narrow my scope a little bit to spend time with our son. In the end I wouldn't have it any other way. But it is hard, it's very difficult. I remember when I started my new job at APA, for the first year it was like I was learning in a different language. I didn't really understand what people said, I'd stare at them and I'd see their lips moving, it just wasn't going in the same way that it did before. The [American Psychological Association's] *Monitor [on Psychology]* had an article about baby brain, what happens to women's brains after they have babies. That these babies, in a good way, are taking lots of things from your body and you are so tired that you really do have trouble acquiring new information. I was having a lot of trouble, and it was hard to come to terms with and it hasn't come back, I still have trouble. Every night I read to Xavier, he gets three books a night, each one we read three times. The joy is immeasurable. He's a really good kid.

AR: We are going to try and wrap this up.

SMC: I am all over the place, so I'm sorry about rambling so much.

AR: Oh no, not at all. Can you tell us a little bit about this new job? You are executive director of the Women's Programs Office at APA. Tell us about how that has been, what your priorities have been, what types of things you do, how it has been for you to be there.

SMC: I left a job that I really loved at SPSSI at an interesting time. I was pregnant, went on maternity leave to have my son and then I got offered this job. It was very hard, because I felt like SPSSI was the opportunity to do everything social justice related, was very cool. There were also personal relationship issues. That I am on maternity leave and I am going to call up and say, "Guess what I'm going to take another job." Very hard, and I think there are still...that some of the damage is irreparable, some of it is never going to be fixed, because how do you convince somebody you didn't know you were going to do this before? It's very hard and I struggle with this a little bit. My current boss, Gwen Keita, was clear that if I didn't take the job when she offered it to me it would be gone. I put her off for a month, but I had to go back to work at some point.

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The focus of the Women's Programs Office is that we work to improve the health, education, well being, and status of women psychologists and consumers of psychological services, so that's our mission. We are working on a lot of different projects, but in the end, my particular focus is getting the work out of APA and out into the world. We have a project on post-partum depression and right now we are working to translate that into Spanish, Chinese, and French, because those are the languages most spoken by the women in the metropolitan area. We all

make lots of assumptions. What I didn't think was, well we want to translate this but we need to translate it for a low literacy population. I was just thinking, "Let's just translate it." So we are working to do that now. Our sexualization of girls project, which I think has had about a million hits on the APA website, it's really, really sought after. We are working to translate that into curriculum for middle school students, to help girls and boys understand the impact sexualized images have on their development. We have a mental health and abortion report that come out last year that I'm not sure what APA is going to do with, it's sort of a complicated social issue. I'm not sure what APA wants to do with that in terms of getting it off the shelves and into the general public, and then our leadership institute. I think we are probably going to do something on trafficking, in the next couple of years, when APA's financial situation stabilizes and that will be a good project because it will have a global focus just by the nature of the subject matter. We can get psychology thinking more broadly too. But I think in the end I want to spread the Gospel According to Shari and get everybody thinking about the more expansive ways to make change.

AR: Here is a closing wrap up of question. Any advice to any feminist psychologists starting in the field now? Or to people starting in the field who are feminist and who want to be psychologists or are being psychologists?

SMC: I guess I'd say find your voice and hold onto it. I think in many ways, as a feminist, and certainly as an African American feminist, getting up every morning and walking out the door is a revolutionary act. That I'm not trapped in my house, silent. Understand it's going to be hard sometimes, but just find your voice and be true to it, I guess is what I would say.

AR: Anything else?

AK: I was still on the same question, given your dissertation as well, do you have any kind of specific survival techniques for African American feminist psychologists, or feminist psychologists of colour going into the field right now? Any type of coping strategies, ways of being oppressed...

SMC: I guess armour comes in lots of forms, and one of the most important things is to have a cadre of people you trust around you, to be strong for you when you can't and who you can return that to. That sort of that symbiotic relationship is really healthy. I think you have to believe in yourself, you really have to trust that you are doing the right thing for yourself. That you are always aware of your own humanity even when other people aren't. You really do need to have this group of people who are there to keep you strong when you can't be and who you can return the favour to.

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AK: Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to mention?

SMC: I think that psychologists are amazing people and our history is really amazing and more people should know about it. I think this is a really, really great project and I'm really glad you all are doing it. I'm really looking forward to seeing it once it's in the archives, or before that.

Not mine in particular, but sort of everyone's. There are some people that I would love to see their interviews. So thank you.

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