Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Dr. Dionne Stephens

Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford, Amanda Nkeramihigo, Aisha Kassim, Neh Shah, & Christiana Temowo
Toronto, Ontario
November 7, 2025

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AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer
DS: Dionne Stephens, Interview participant
AN: Amanda Nkeramihigo, Interviewer
AK: Aisha Kassim, Interviewer

AR: All right, so my name is Alexandra Rutherford, and we're sitting with Dr. Dionne Stephens in Toronto on November the 7th, 2025, and with members of the PFV [Psychology's Feminist Voices] research team. And Dr. Stephens, could I get you, again, for the record, so we can identify the video, could you state your full name, and then your place and date of birth for the record.

DS: Sure, it's Dionne Stephens. I was born in North York, Ontario, December 18th, 1972.

AR: Great, thank you so much. Okay, so I'm going to get us started in kind of a usual way for us, and that is: if you could tell us a bit about, okay, how you first began and relate to feminism?

DS: So, I don't think I really understood, what, how I relate to feminism, or had the word when I initially began. And actually, like we said, we're sitting here at York University, which was where my undergrad was. But even before that, I went to St. Joseph More Park, which was a girl's school in North York. And being at the girls' school, I look back now, and I realize that that was sort of setting the stage because there were only girls there. And so, who was going to be president? Who was, when we had sports, [and] whose sports were you going to watch? So, it gave you a freedom to not have to deal with a lot of the things that the research shows that girls have to deal with during adolescence because we were all girls at this school. My reason for choosing to go there was not because it was all girls, it was just a good school et cetera. But looking back that kind of gave me a sense of freedom, that I didn't have to think about a lot of things, and I felt comfortable with there (it wasn't perfect there), but that sort of set the stage for understanding the importance of being a woman and not having to have to deal with patriarchy or male control in the classroom as women, were the head of the math club, women were the head of the student….we were all on the student government because there were no guys there. And so, that's not a realistic reality in the real world, but that gave you a sense. And then when I went to York, and at the time, I went to York, York was a really liberal, kind of place where there was, you know, there were protests, and I remember they were lying down in front of the TTC [station]. Like coming onto campus, and this was the energy. And so, I was involved in the Women's Center, and I was involved in the Black Student's Union **[02:25]**. And I think what that was, was I started getting involved in social justice. So, I had this entree into understanding what it meant to be a woman and have the freedom to be a woman, but also this understanding of social justice. And so part of being a woman wasn't just like being a woman, but what it meant to be a Black woman, what was it around issues about economics, with the protests, or about the bus

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and tuition. And so in a sense, I was also learning about intersectionality without even realizing it at the time; I didn't have the language. But I was able to make these connections by the activities. And then I was lucky to do a degree called, it was individualized studies, which is sort of like a master's in that you had to pick a committee. It was Rudy Grant, who has since passed, and Gordon [Darroch], and I cannot remember his last name, but he was in the history department, were on my committee. And I was able to start looking at Black attitudes around sexual health, which is also intersectional, and I looked at women, I looked at [the] Black community, I looked at power, health and equities. I didn't have that language at the time, but that's what it was. And so, I was really in this fertile ground for understanding this. And I really got involved in women's [activism], I was protesting, I was going to all these events, because it was fun, but these were also the people I was around that were exposing. And so, where I got the language was I actually, my master's is in Women's Studies, which always surprises people. But that's where I got the language about the feminism, even though I took classes, but that brought everything together. Some people would say that that was a stopover for moving forward, but that master's in women's studies gave me the language, and the understanding to sort of bring everything together to understand of connecting that personal to the political, which sort of set the stage for my career.

AR: Oh, amazing, amazing. So, at York, you were really heavily involved in a lot of student activism, right?

DS: Yes.

AR: Can you tell us a little bit about kind of, kind of the, you know, your experiences in the particular groups you were in?

DS: Yes.

AR: Like Black Students Union.

DS: So, we actually started as the Black Women's Association. I don't think it exists now, but we actually started that, and so, that was one of the groups. There was the Caribbean Student Association; I was a part of that. But actually why I went to York [University] was an undergrad, not undergrad, in high school I had to do an internship, and I interned at CHRY [VIBE 105.5FM – CHRY-FM], the radio station. I think it's "Vibe 105", now it's changed. But I was like "oh I like it". I started meeting everyone, so I stayed and got a radio show, which apparently, is still running on Tuesday nights confunction. That was it, the DJ, he's still hosting, O'Neill, he's still hosting this. So, this is 30 years later. But around there, I was also—the radio station was very activist. I mean, I was interviewing the head of the local chapter of the ANC [Association for New Canadians], because we were still in part. I was interviewing the Black AIDS Alliance. I was a news editor there. But I was doing interviews with these agencies. I was interviewing government people because CHRY is a community radio station. So I was really engaged with the community, but at the university, so I was able to mix what I was doing at school with what was happening at their university. And then I also worked at *Excalibur*, which at the time was the largest student paper in the country. We had a huge budget, which I think at that time was like a $2 million budget. And I was on this, I was a news editor, and then I became the editor in another year. And all those articles were that, and I wrote, we had a special issue, I don't know if they do it anymore, the Black History Month issue, which the whole issue was for Black history month issue **[05:48]**,

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articles around that [Black History]. And I was the editor that, so that was kind of the organization. When I was also involved with the Black Student Union, at the time, we actually did a joint activity with the Jewish Student Union. We planted a tree, I should go and see if it's still here, but we planted a tree of unity. Because, at the time, there was a lot of tensions between the Black and Jewish community. And, so, we said, you know, we were hanging out and stuff, so this was one way we could engage, and we used to host forums and workshops. So, it was fun at the time. For me, it was about fun, but it was also this activism because there was an energy around it where you could see change, and you could see that I matter, that what I'm doing matters, and can make a difference. Even at the institution, but also in the broader community.

AR: In the community, yeah, yeah. So, I wonder if you could speak then about, I know that you did some work even in your undergrad on the impact of HIV in the Black community; can you tell a little bit how you got into that?

DS: So, that was actually what started my trajectories because, at the time, HIV had just started hitting the Black community at that time. So, this is the 90s" before that it was the "gay disease". And so, the Centres for Disease Control [CDC], came up with the four Hs. So if you were a homosexual, heroin user, haemophiliac or Haitian, you were legally allowed to be, people could legally discriminate against you. So, they could stop you from having housing. You could, you know, for sure, I remember, the big thing was when you went to donate blood, if you were any of those, you couldn't give blood. But it was, well, "Blacks aren't a part of that" (although Haitian, but that was a different narrative that we can go down that road in a little bit). But I was like: "Well something's going on here" because there were also high rates in the Black community. And at the My Magic Johnson came out with being HIV positive, so did Tommy Hurons. And of course basketball was a big thing at that time, so, there was this intersection of health and popular culture with Magic Johnson. And that's when I said: "I wanna find out what's going on". And so, that became my individualized studies thesis. You had to do a thesis; that became my project. And so, I started working with Black Capa at the time, I would go to their events, I was volunteering there. And then, I also started doing stuff on campus and talking about it. And so, that's sort of how I got to the HIV. And that led me to my master's project, which was intercourse, which was a "zine". Zines were big things back then. And a Zine, I'm not sure, well, I'm sure you figured out what a zine is, but it's like a self-made magazine, well now you would use blogs. But you would actually put together a magazine yourself, but you'd leave it. They're actually coming back into Vogue apparently. So it was called Intercourse, and I got give, shoutout to my friend, Marlin, [who] came up with the term. Because it was about Black sexuality, so intercourse was about creating dialogue. So, I created the zine, and what I did for my master's project was I created the zine and left it in beauty barbershops and beauty salons all over New [York], because I was in school in New York. And then we got people's responses to it because they would read it and talk about it because it was only about Black communities. But some of the articles were, it wasn't just about education, it was different topics. The big thing that happened at the time, was a case of a Black male, [who] had purposely given a lot of girls in buffalo HIV; he knew he had HIV. And this was a scandal, and in fact, they talk about it now that was what pushed [in] New York that you can now be charged with murder, if you knowingly have it. And that was the case that blew up while I was there. So that was like an article that I would put in the zine and discuss. So people would be discussing issues like that, like how does this tie to our own sexual health. And so, that's kind of where the HIV led to that, which then led to my PhD project, which would get Black women specifically and health issues. **[09:21]**

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AR: Definitely want to get there, but I also want to stay a little bit in the moment when you were at York [University], and doing all, you know, getting heavily involved in these different forms of activism and so on. Any reaction from your family?

DS: Oh yeah.

AR: Okay.

DS: Laughs. So I mean, even in the, I mean, it wasn't all glory. Like there was, there was tensions, for example, even within, among Black women about our activism and things like this. But, with my family, I think, my parents, I was the first one in my immediate family to go to college. And actually, even my broader family, not big, but the local family, the first go to college. So, I have to say this, my parents never understood what I was doing in college. What saved me was the aunt that encouraged me to go to CUNY [The City University of New York] would just tell my dad: "Don't worry, this is okay". And my dad trusted and liked her, and she had a graduate degree. So, my parents never questioned me in school. So, when I went to do a PhD, they were, at first they'd be like, how much longer, but after they never harassed me, they supported. Because my aunt would be like, "it's okay. This is what she's spouse to do". But the activism stuff, I think in a sense, my parents had always raised me to be independent, which is funny because my dad is more conservative, but he wanted us to be independent. Like my sister and I had to know change our tires, so this is also this feminism, was kind of part of; we had to change our tires, change our own oil, be able to take care of, pay bills on our own, my dad made us do things to be independent even though we had the safety net. But their attitude was they didn't care as long as I was not failing. But my dad did... At first my parents were paying for school, so I did have to show my parents my report cards, bring them over with grades, for the first two years. But there's enough …. So as long as I was not failing and I was moving forward, my family was okay. Although my dad said, when we used to do the…I still remember this protest, lying down in front of the bus: "If you get arrested, I'm not bailing you out". That was the one thing my dad was not gonna bail me out. We never got to the point of being arrested, but in some ways that was also fun at the age. At that age, you're like, "oh, who cares, we'll be fine"; so that made a difference. But I have to say, my parents were cool with it. I remember going down for CHRY, going down to gay pride parade and doing interviews. And my parents were never like: "What are you going down", you know. They never, they're just like: "Oh that's Dionne's thing". So I have to say my parents gave me a lot of freedom, around doing these things, but also I brought that into the home, so a lot of the people I worked with at CHRY would come to my house for dinner. So my parents knew my friends. Or some of them at Excalibur, I would have parties at my parents' house. I lived at home while I was at York [University]. So my parents also knew who I was interacting with. When I look back now, that is also probably a piece of why they were comfortable with it. **[11:56]**

AR: Yeah. And, in a way they were also, you know, having a window on your world.

DS: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

AR: Probably being totally changed by that.

DS: Oh, yeah, exactly.

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AR: Reading the room here, feel free to jump in. No? Okay. So, I wanna have you tell us a little bit more about, in fact, what took you to Buffalo. And how did you get to Buffalo and women's studies and all that? **[12:18]**

DS: Okay, that story. So I was doing all this work around gender. My aunt worked for CUNY, the CUNY system, and she had placed students, particularly low-income students, predominantly Black students, and Latino, Puerto Rican (it was in New York) in schools, that was her job for doing them. She was the head of that, so she knew about this program, that's the Women's Studies Program, and she knew there was another labour studies program at St. Lawrence. But she thought the women's studies would be a better fit for me. And she told me, you should go check out this program. But I was like, "maybe I'll go to grad school, why not" and so she… I went and looked at it, and I would go and visit. And at the time, Liz Kennedy, is a famous feminist who wrote the first book, once again, *Shoes of Leather, Slippers of Lacy*, which was the first history of lesbian, book of lesbian culture. And then Masani Alexis DeVoe, who wrote the, she's one of the famous people who wrote about Audrey Lord. She's, these are who these people, these women are, and they're well known in the feminist community. So, those are who was there at Women's Studies of Buffalo…was part of American studies, which was one of the leading American studies programs in the country at the time. And it had Native, First Nations studies et cetera there. So, it was a really great space. Now, why did I go there when I applied? I didn't think I'd get in, and [how] I've been told this is, Buffalo at the time was a place where you go and shop and you go to party and stuff like this. So, my parents were like, "yeah, you could take the car and go to Buffalo". So all of my friends from Excalibur here would load up in the car and spend the day shopping and go partying. And I'd spend the day visiting the university, and I got in. And I didn't think I would get in, and my dad was like: "Enough with York [University], you've been doing all this activism, you gotta keep going". My aunt told my dad, "It's great for her to go", so I went to Buffalo. I got in, and when I went there I got, which is unheard of as a master's somebody else was supposed to get a fellowship, so I got her assistantship. So, I didn't have to pay for my master's so all of that was my pathway into doing my masters.

AR: Yeah.

DS: But it was a great program, because CUNY Buffalo is the flagship for New York. So, it was like the top school for New York, but I didn't know this at the time. And then I didn't realize these powerhouse women that I was in this women's studies program [with]. That was one of the, it was one of the leading women studies programs in the country, at the time, because of these powerhouse women that were there.

AR: Yeah. Well, what did you think hitting women's studies? I mean, what was your experience in women's studies?

DS: Well, it was a very 60s issue. It was great for me. So, I actually used to go down to Albany women's prison. So they used to have prisoners coming, women that got out of prison teaching classes. This was a very different program. **[14:54]** So I used to go down to Albion women's prison and do sex education classes, which is … Albion's women prison is one the largest state prisons in New York. At the time, "Long Island Lolita" was there, Amy Fisher (which you guys might know that story). It … that story was a big scandal at the time; she was the one who shot her lover's wife. So this was a big school, I think, but part of one of my internship classes was to go and teach sex education because there's a lot of Black women down there. Well, what was funny was, I was all terrified going in and the women

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were all: “Oh, we’re coming to you, because this is fun”. And they taught me all kinds of things. But, I also got to see, doing that, these women after all I would forget they were in jail. And I would…I used to feel depressed leaving because I’m like I got to know them, and I’d be like: “I’m leaving these women who went to be [somewhere]”. They were in for murder but if you heard why they were in there for murder most of it was because of a relationship with a man. You felt, I would feel go home feeling bad because the depression but I realized this is part of my activism and the importance of being there, and so that also informs some of the work I started doing by recognizing these women who are vulnerable, and you know, they always say: “thereby the grace of God go I”. If I had been born in their situation I could have been sitting there. Because they weren’t any different than me, except I just happened to be born in a different support system or different setting. And so, that helped me start thinking about it, and then the women at the faculty we got they had me teaching. I taught a class; I taught Women Psychics no…. Women of Colour, Intro to Women of Colour as in my second semester. Like so they had…I mean, but I was teaching early, and I was reading early. They really gave me a sense of independence, and that I know who I was, and I should know who I was early. So women’s studies was another really good stepping stone which I wouldn’t have thought about at the time for my next phase. But it was my women’s studies professor who said if you want to be, go far in your career, [for] women’s studies you need to go to a more traditional field, bring your values but don’t stay in women’s studies like psychology. Especially because [of] the questions I was asking part of that too is because women studies when they cut they cut women studies departments, when they look at salaries women studies gets paid less. But she said, “you said you could keep doing the work you’re doing but go into a traditional field where you make the money you won’t lose your power but be authentic”. So my own, I applied to stay because I was like, “this is a great place”. But she no, you need to go to go, and so, that’s how I ended up in a human development program.

AR: I do want to want to ask about that but before I do, were you…there're three things I'm thinking about asking about your experience in women’s studies. So I’ll try to remember all of them. Did you get any psychology in the women’s studies program?

DS: Okay, so this is a great [question]. I took no psychology courses until I did my PhD.

AR: Were they even on offer? I mean

DS: Oh they were offered but I was like I was picking … because when I did my master’s…my undergrad my whole thing was around, and I was very much into ethnic studies and health studies. So, I took a lot of health studies, I took kinesiology classes. It was a professor, I forgot his name, I should remember this, this is sad because they were so central in writing my letters and being, Stephen was his first name, but he was my kinesiology professor. So I took kinesiology classes, I took African studies classes, women’s studies classes, history classes. So more humanities, I was actually, my foundation is humanities. So, when I did switch to psychology, I had to learn to rewrite, and I had to learn how to reduce.
That was the hardest thing: Learning how to write was different and learning how you read things was different. But no, I didn't take any psychology classes until my PhD. **[18:18]**

AR: Okay, wow.

DS: Yeah. So it can be done, it can be done.

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AR: And part of the reason I asked too is because women's studies has historically, there hasn't been a great representation of psychology in women's study.

DS: Absolutely.

AR: With some exceptions, but I was just curious.

DS: Yeah. I think what's happening now is you're going to see joint hires what's happening now, but for training. I think what's happening now is psychology as a field has been really traditional. I mean, I'm jumping ahead now, but I did my sabbatical at the University of Toronto's Critical Qualitative Research, and they interviewed me, Denise Gostado. I'll say her name, it's very sweet; I love Denise. But it was funny because I was like: "Why are they interviewing me? I'm a full professor". And she was right, she goes, "well, psychologists tend to come in and not understand what qualitative is, they want to quantify it." **[19:02]** And so, when she told me after, it made sense because even my professors, when I first did my PhD, she was like: "Qualitative isn't real research and the work you wanna to do is pop culture". So even when I went, even where I've ended up was my advisor, who I'll talk about was a Black woman, at the time. She blew off my work, and she blew off qualitative research because psychology doesn't view this, it's viewed as touchy-feely. Now the NIH (National Institute for Health) is funding qualitative research, so now psychology is doing that. But I would say that's only in the last decade.

AR: Totally.

DS: So I'm sorry I went off on a tangent there.

AR: No, and I want to get back to the ball piece.

DS: Yeah.

AR: Because I think it's so important and the community-based piece in your work. Right.

DS: Oh, that's it. Yeah, remind me, I'll tell you about the community-based stuff too, of how I got push-back I got with that too.

AR: It's on the list.

DS: Yeah, yeah.

AR: So the other question I had about your master's, we like to, we talk a lot in this project about mentors, too. You mentioned some high-powered women in the women in your master's program. Were there any particular mentors you had there?

DS: Oh, Alexis DeVoe. She was amazing. And she also was needed. She was the type that was pushing me to read. She didn't let me sit and settle **[20:08]**. She was, I even remember at the end, I had already been accepted to the University of Georgia. She goes: "You're not going until this is finished. So I'm not signing off". Like she was not even going to be like, "let's work together to get this done". Because she was right. I had the time. But she was like, "because this is not how the system works. You need to work within the system." She didn't buy into the system, but she's like "you need to know how the system works, especially

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coming from women studies, especially being a woman of colour, you better know how the system works and work within that system to make a change". So she was really powerful for getting me and pushing me to look at things and read things and not make it easy for me.

DS: Not making it hard, but she did not cut corners for me and that was something that I still hang onto like now that is 30 years later, that you can't cut corners because nobody is gonna cut corners for you later on.

DS: So she was really powerful for getting me and pushing me to look at things and read things and not making it easy for me. Not making it hard, but she didn't cut corners for me. And that was something that I still hang on to, like now it is 30 years later, is that you can't cut corners, because nobody's going to cut corners for you later on. Or if they do cut corners, they're going to say, well, you got corners cut for you. That's why you're here. Because I've had, but, and Liz was also, Elizabeth Kay, she was also someone that was like, you deserve to be here. She was someone who taught me that I deserve to be here. And one of the lessons she taught me was I couldn't call faculty by their first name. I'm from the Caribbean. You don't do that. Like, you don't call somebody. And what she said to me was, I appreciate that and respect that. But I want you to call me Liz because you're my colleague and we're going to become friends. Again, you have to move towards that, but it also showed me that there's a way of doing it that was comfortable and fit within my system and was respectful to her. And that sounds like a minor thing, but as a black woman faculty, I can't tell you how many people just call me, "hey, Dionne", like, I'm talking about undergrads, but if they did that, but they're not calling my white male colleagues, "hey George", you know, and I listen, I catch them. There's a, in fact, there's an issue, one of the secretaries, I call, hey, Dion, and I'm like, I never gave you that insight, but when other, I've been there, other people call. So there's a power dynamic around privilege. And Liz Kennedy, as tiny as that sounds, it really plays a role in how I navigate my career today. So those two women in different ways were important to even know how I have to navigate and how I mentor. **[22:13]**

AR: Yeah. Oh, interesting. Okay. The other thing I just want to ask about this and then I'd like to move into your PhD work too is you mentioned earlier that you didn't really have the language of intersectionality until you hit women's studies. Do you remember when that…?

DS: Oh, I could tell you. I actually met Kimberlé Crenshaw when she was doing this work. So when I went to, when I was at CUNY Buffalo **{End of Recording 1}**, I went to University of Georgia, because there was a fellowship, the Womanist Institute, which was led by Layli Phillips and Barbara McCaskill who were still in English at the University of Georgia. They created this Womanist Institute. It ran for about five or six years. And when I was there Kimberlé Crenshaw was doing her research. So she actually stopped at the institute to interview the black female faculty. I didn't know who she was. I now realize, oh, that's what she was doing. She was talking to us about our experiences. Now there were two graduate students, myself and another woman. We spoke, but it was mainly the black women faculty that spoke. So that was when she was talking about intersectionality, and that's when I heard about intersectionality. It was from Kimberlé Crenshaw being at the Womanist Institute. That would have been two thousand… no, 1997. 1997. So this is part of where I heard about the work she was doing because she presented what she was thinking about. **[0:01:02]** It still was not popular, and it was still very much in women's studies. In psychology it's only popped up in the last decade and now everybody is using it. But it was always there. Especially as a woman of colour, we were doing it. So how does this play in, and how does this play in. But in psychology it wasn't until the last decade. Especially anything feminist or anything that is

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outside of the WEIRD [Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic], white western kind of frameworks. So we are way behind other fields of doing this.

AR: Yeah and it feels like you are in a really good position to speak to that given that you have had such an interdisciplinary background. You've seen what has happened in other fields.

DS: Well it was shocking to me how people were so horrible about qualitative, but like they're doing it in anthropology, all these other fields were doing it and to be honest with you, my work in my PhD. What I did was groundbreaking for psychology, but people were doing this work in other fields, but they were doing it slightly different, but it was groundbreaking for psychology, and psychology is always kind of resistant. We have to be [like] this is a science, and there is no bias, which we know there is a bias, you know. Yeah, so that's been a big issue around it.

AR: Totally, totally, I'm thinking to Amanda of your work in Afrofuturism and you're like oh people talk about it and I'm like yeah but not in psychology. **[0:02:27]**

DS: Yeah

AR: And we are really far behind

DS: Yeah, you were talking about Afrofuturism, so for our podcast, we interviewed a woman, but I had looked for a psychologist. There was only one I knew, and she's an I/O [Industrial/Organizational] Psychologist. So she ties Afrofuturism to business psychology. We specifically tried to find psychology people, [but] we end[ed] up, I shouldn't say end up using Susana Morris who is huge in Afro Futurism at Georgia State. But in psychology, it's just been slow and then now Tanisha Hill-Jarrett's doing it with some work around dimensioned black women. But again, it's women who are just now doing it, even though Afrofuturism has been around for decades, you know. Since the beginning of the century. But psychology, I still don't think they are on it, so I think it's a great field to go into, but we're having pockets of early emerging scholars that are doing it. I think that's the same thing I was [doing], I was an emerging hip-hop scholar. So it's sort of having to… I don't want to say legitimize because we don't need to legitimize it, but doing what we know is important and making it. This is a legitimate area of work. History has done this, English has written about it, Anthropology has written about it, psychology hasn't. But the problem is psychology is one of the biggest fields in the world, so because I think we are the third largest field behind nursing and business in terms of majors, but then business and nursing are so specialized. Everybody will take a psychology course at some point in time. So we're such a powerful field that what we do is important for shaping how we frame knowledge, and that's why it's so important that we do feminist work or black work or intersectional work because we're the field that has the largest voice for reaching the most people.

AR: To be aware of that influence and then to be able to use it

DS: Yeah

AR: Ok, so tell us a little bit about your PhD. You made a choice then to go into psychology. You were advised to pick a traditional—[laughs]

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DS: [Laughs] She advised me to do that but because I went to Georgia, which I had never heard of the University of Georgia even though it's a flagship school. I never thought about it. I just want to work for the CDC [Centre for Disease Control]. That was my goal, work for the CDC. and You need a PhD to get a good job at the CDC, so I knew I was doing that and then I met all these great women when I was at Georgia that summer for The Womanist Institute. And so I applied to public health and human development. That was the only place I applied because I didn't want to spend money applying and also the GRE. I had to write the GRE. Which I'm from Canada, we don't write the GRE right? So this whole culture of the GRE was whatever. And so, I'll actually tell you, you can cut it out, but my dad gave me money to study for the GRE, and I took it and bought a treadmill [laughs]. This is like telling you like I did everything [laughs]. I had that treadmill right through finishing my PhD, so I kept it the whole lot. I wrote the GRE, and it was good enough to get in, but I didn't get into human development, and I thought oh I'm not getting in. I didn't get into public health, which was the one that was the easy, technically should have been easier but I got into human development, and I found out later Sharon Price a faculty member who I actually modelled. I love her because she is no nonsense, and I think that's where I get my personality. But I saw your application, you had a fire in your belly, and you thought critically. And that's why even though all my other colleagues who were in there had already done psychology, and they had done research labs and stuff, and so when I came in I was like, I don't know where these guys are. But I look back now, I could think better than they could and in fact, I graduated faster, I got more. You know, they tried to make comments, but in the end, I was one of the few that in terms of what we were trained for, went the furthest. Because Sharon Price said to me, your application showed that you had a fire in your belly and you could think, which I think is a reflection of women's studies. **[0:06:03]**

AR: Interesting, so tell us about your experience in human development. What kind of things, how did you?

DS: I had to learn to think differently. I had to learn to think differently, I had to read. I'm used to reading books. You're reading articles and you're looking, and you had to think quantitatively, because psychology is quant. Even though I do qual[itative] my dissertation, my initial dissertation was a quant. So I was trained as a quant[itative] person. My advisor at the time. Again, who was a Black woman told me one the work I was interested [in] was pop culture and also that qualitative is not real science. Now, I should also say that there was another black woman, Patricia Bell-Scott, who was also a well-known black-feminist scholar, was there but I was advised to work with this other black faculty member. Which they were right because they said you already did the feminist stuff with Pat Bell Scott. You need to learn the psych stuff. So as much as I had tensions with this other faculty member. She did train me well, to be hardcore. So I and my friends who worked with the other did the feminist they did ok, but I was trained to survive the worst of psychology, the quant[titative] people, I could do the best with all of them. There were tensions later, but under her, I was trained to survive in psychology, but the qualitative was blown off. I took those as my electives and they were amazing, **Juanita [0:07:24]**, I forgot these people's names… I should remember [laughs], but they were amazing, so I did take the qualitative on the side and then that's where I also met Layli Philips who is now Layli Maparyan, who started The Womanist and she wrote *The Womanist Reader* and was the head of the Wellesley Centers for Women and is now the president of the University of Liberia. She became one of my mentors. She wasn't in my programs, but she was one of my mentors and she worked with women's studies. She was a Womanist, so she taught Womanisim and so I learnt Womanism and that was central to my training, and so in fact, my earliest papers were integrating Bronfenbrenner and

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Womanist theory. The integration of those two. So all of my papers, if you look at my research in the early was a lot about, which was essentially intersectionality, without saying it. So I went to Georgia and my work with my traditional mentor was on black families and models of family relationships, because that was the quant[itative] data. But I ran a side project on the images of women in hip hop because even though that advisor told me that's not work. Layli said no, you're doing something here and I remember Layli and I meeting at coffee shops on Saturdays mapping out and thinking about what these scripts are, how does this work and she helped me do the IRB [International Research Ethics Board], so this was a whole side project. I won't get into the politics of it, but my advisor and I had a falling out which was a very big situation, and in the end that side script paper became my dissertation. So I have another dissertation, because when I had the falling with my advisor I was two months from graduating. So the other dissertation, the university, there's a lot of politics around it, they said "Well let's just graduate you on your sexual scripts", because I had published three papers by that time on it. I didn't publish anything on the quant[itative] dissertation and so that project became the heart of the work that I became doing and it was very feminist, womanist and brought from Bronfenbrenner work and that became the foundation of my training.

[0:09:10]

AR: Amazing, amazing, tell us a little bit about when you encountered womanism, and kind of how that, had you encountered womanism before?

DS: No, so I saw the flyer for *The Womanist institute* and I'm like: what is The Womanist Institute? But I was in women's studies, and it was on our board, so it had to be something of this womanist. And so then I started learning it and it was like what is it? Alice Walker. Womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender, and I thought that was just the perfect way of framing it and then I also loved Alice Walker's book on how you thought about that, and Alice Walker happened to be from Eatonton just outside of where the University of Georgia was. So all of this was like kismet to, so I got to go and learn more about her history and what was going on. But Womanisim for me was perfect because a lot of times I got pushback that feminism is for white women, and it was like but no I'm still connected to it and I think Womanisim gave me the space to say look there is a feminism for women of colour and different people so Womanisim sort of was like an intersectionality version of feminism if you think about it. It brought in sexual orientation, it brought in SES [socioeconomic status], it included men, men were part of this, so which was representational of what was going on. So when I met womanism, it was kind of a relief I mean I am a feminist, and I identify as a feminist but when you are still sorting things out and you have to get pushback from different people. Like guys would be like I didn't think you were a feminist you're too pretty, all of those stereotypes and kinds of things womanism at that point when I'm still trying to get language and get my footing gave me the safe space like yeah this is what I am, this is what fit, it is still feminist but this helps give a broader language to it.

AR: Absolutely. When in your experience and training and career did the notion of intersectional feminism begin to take hold in psychology, or just even in your own experience?

DS: So I knew because I've always was interdisciplinary one and also my identity is very intersectional. As I move through how I am viewed here in Toronto is very different than when I landed in Buffalo which was different than when I was in Georgia which is different than in Miami. I am viewed as very different people. Just my phenotype how I talk, my

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history, my positionality shifts. So I always understood that even with how it affected my work, and how I could collect data. We actually wrote a paper *Sister to Sister Talk*, which was about doing qualitative research with black women while I was a grad student and that speaks to how, I wrote it with two other black women, each of us had very different experiences so that intersectionality was always there I think because again psychology did not have the language and we were grad students and you still have to do what the reading was and Kimberly Crenshaw's work was still not crossing into psychology yet and I think Kimbery Crenshaw's work was always there but it didn't take off until Liz Cole [Elizabeth Cole] wrote the article even though it had been there but Liz Cole's article was the one that we had started using in psychology.

AR: And that wasn't until 2009.

DS: Right, and so that's pretty recent and so we were writing about intersectionality and using it, but we weren't saying the word, but the reality is my career has always been about intersectionality. Like everything, if you read everything, even where I publish—I don't publish in just psychology journals I publish in nursing, I publish in women's studies, I publish in ethnic studies and even the populations and how I look at the experiences has always been intersectional.

AR: Yeah, absolutely I'm even thinking back to your activism at York [University], you were doing intersectional activism.

DS: Exactly, right, it wasn't just looking at Black women, it was like looking at within the black women's discussion, with the Jewish and with men and all of this, exactly.

AR: Gay Pride, yeah, totally.

DS: Yeah.

AR: Okay, so I have on my list of questions I think you have already answered. It's what attracted you to psychology? But it sounds like you fell into it… [laughs]

DS: I fell into it, but it was the appropriate place for the questions I was asking and that's what I always tell students, I wanna do this, but what is the questions you are asking and where do you want to end up? So the question's I'm asking fit with psychology, and I wanted to work at the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], and a lot of psychologist's were working at the CDC. So those were the two pieces that made me go there. But if that had worked with anthropology, I might have ended up in anthropology. If the questions aligned, but the questions that I wanted to ask fit with psychology.

AR: So you said that you wanted to work at the CDC, Centres for Disease control, what did you picture yourself doing there? **[0:13:37]**

DS: Oh to be a health scientist, I wanted to be a health scientist, Which was again going in the field and even when I went to, we don't have it here but in the States, every single flagship schools, so like the SUNY Buffalo is a flagships school, University of Georgia, a flagship school for each state, University of Florida. Every school has a flagship state school they also have it's called extension. So these schools what they do is they have, it's part of you have teaching, research, service and extension. Extension are the people that take the

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research to the communities. It used to be like 4-H they were the ones who taught women how to… So they take the signs to the communities, and they are considered faculty. So if I didn't go to CDC, I wanted to do extension, I never thought about being a faculty member, I want to be out in the community. My thing was I always wanted to translate the research in the community. So if I didn't do CDC I wanted to [do] extension at work.

AR: So what was your next step out of your PhD?

DS: So again [laughs] I knew I was finished I was ready to do postdoc but again I knew as a Black Woman I had to pick where I wanted to go. So I was offered positions, but I was not going to places where I was not gonna get my food, or the big thing nobody could do my hair, and I remember this is attention because people would say but Dionne there's a great job it's a research one. I'm like after being in Athen's, Georgia which is not a bad place but it's this college town nobody could do my hair, I had to wait until I got home, I kept my hair shaved short at the time because of that, I found a barber, and that sounds minor but that was about my identity and where I felt comfortable and where I was landing and getting food and being in Georgia everybody it's African American, White and Mexican. There was not a lot of diversity, there's no Caribbean. So I said I am in Chicago, Miami or Washington, DC. So the job ended up it was in Miami and I started dating a guy in Miami too so that helped, now we broke up a couple months after I landed but all of that was Miami and as soon as I got in Miami I'm like oh people look like me, the food is like, there was a comfort in being in Miami that taking away all the other things about Miami. Miami is a comfortable place for me that I can be there and feel culturally safe, and then FIU [Florida International University] where I am, Florida International University. I have always gone to big universities, you know York is a big university, CUNY Buffalo. It's a big university and it's very diverse, 70% Hispanic like all of these things so I could do my work and feel comfortable and that's a big piece too. I had friends that went to these schools, but they hated being there and all they were doing is like I'm getting tenure and I'm getting out. I was never rushing to get out because even if I didn't like what was going in my university at the time, I liked my city, so I felt comfortable and safe in those spaces.

AR: Well you mentioned always wanting to work in and with communities. So can you tell me how that has played out in your career? **[0:16:30]**

DS: So all my work is still with communities, everything I do is with communities, I use my privilege in the university to do work. So like we're doing work and everything is about grants but a lot of community agencies put me on their grants because I will be able to bring work to them and I'm not looking to make a ton of money, I mean I want to make money but I'm looking to be like I want this work to make a difference in communities. So I also make sure that when they write me on a grant, even if it means cutting my salary, pay for a grad student so that I can have a grad student working in the community and get their tuition and salary pay. But also when I do community I do a lot of data collection in the community so if I'm doing a study there I go what do you guys need to know? I'll make sure to ask questions and get information you do. When I design the PowerPoints at the end I make sure to do a community version of the PowerPoints that they can use for themselves. Not the academic ones, nobody cares about the methods and stuff, but we make it nice in a way that they can use it, we'll do their evaluations. I also go in if they need presentations for their parenting groups, I'm not collecting data but I'll go and I'll do a presentation for them, I worked with *Girl Power* I worked with *Affirming Youth* that's a big group I work with now, I work with the HBCU's[Historically Black College or University] in Miami because they are

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underfunded and underpaid so I'll go and do workshops there I do a lot of training for those students to go to grad school but I also do community work in India I work with the public health research institute. they specialize in women's health and it's all women working there, I have students out through Columbia now, Amor Por Barú and we're doing projects in Columbia. So the community piece is really, I think that's the part I love the most though actually is like going out and doing the community piece, yeah, and that's part of my research and now for a long time that wasn't valued but now psychology is beginning to value community research, now I don't think they are valuing it the way we define community—the way feminists would define community research—for them it's like we went to the community and collected data versus in the classroom but at least now I'm getting, which going back to what **Masani [0:18:31]** taught me—okay that this is within the system now celebrate it and work it for you—since they are now valuing it, make it work for you. And so that's where I'm like I can be pissed off that now you are valuing it or I can be like okay good, now I can use it for me, my students, and getting the voice out and getting the silenced voices out and getting them the money and the resources they need to move forward.

AR: Yeah, have there been any, in your experiences, have there been any challenges doing community work?

DS: [laughs] It's a challenge, I mean I can sit now but this was years of you know I would go home and not have, like after work go to work at these after school programs and have to miss dinner and then get in traffic and etcetera, to build these and then their like oh no parents came for the group that you did the focus group on because this is community agency's or they don't have money. Their priority isn't the research right, which makes sense, but I need the research. So how do we get both of those things going, also, it wasn't always easy because you're the researcher coming in and also being a black woman Sometimes that was attention do you think you are better than us? And then also now to Canadians I sound like an American but for Americans I don't sound like an American I sound white, so there's also like who's this girl here. Oh yeah, I can tell you when I'm on the phone, I mean, now I sound more American apparently but when I was there they'd be like oh we thought you were a white girl coming when you arrive because of the way I talked, and so when I arrived there's also that tension around this, and who are you? And then I'm like I'm from Canada and Canada too is strange to people, there's Black Canadians? Yes, there are black Canadians and then all of that and then being a feminist too, if they're not into feminist and then saying oh I do feminist work et cetera , I think there is a lot of community building you having to establish yourself and then negotiating that and then working within their parameters of doing things but fortunately I have been in Miami now I've lived in Miami as long as, more than half of my life in Miami now. It's officially last year, half of my life was Toronto for the longest but now it's Miami. I have established enough now with relationship people that I think people can call somebody else if they're not sure, but the next step now is getting the next people in, like bringing my students in or bringing somebody else in, that's the feminist thing of doing it's not just that this is my private nobody come here, but making sure okay so how do we keep this going because if I drop dead tomorrow we got to keep this going and making sure the resources move forward. **[0:20:52]**

AR: One of the questions that we often ask, and you have kind of touched on it a little bit just now, is that have you experienced discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, being a feminist. What was that like?

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DS: I mean, but I think that's anything especially, so that you just have to learn that people are going to view you very differently. I mean, for a long time, the people when I go in Georgia in the south, my hair was shaved off short, they couldn't understand why you would cut your hair like that, you know, because, oh, you have good hair. "There is a concept of good hair". And then they would judge me, like that was a problem. And then I also realized, so in Georgia, I was also viewed as light skin. Well, in here, I'd never thought of myself as light skin. So the skin colour was brought up earlier so it is a very funny issue. So in Miami, in Toronto, I wasn't light. My sister's very light, so I always thought of myself. Then when I went to Buffalo, I was light skin. Then I went to Georgia, I was very light skin with the hair, and they couldn't understand the hair. Now, I am in Miami, I am a dark skin Hispanic. So all of these things, you have to learn how to negotiate, like how, and now I am comfortable. Like I am okay. I know how to play this out. I know what to say. But when I was younger, it was very difficult. Also the privilege now of being a professor and being older, I can say things that I couldn't say when I was younger. I could cut to the chase in a way. And so that is why it is also important to talk about these things so that someone can say, "oh yeah, I heard that from Dionne saying it. So when the next person comes in, they are like, oh yeah, I heard this type of information before." But no. I have experienced discrimination from other women, from other men, like all across the communities, because I think a lot of it too is that people are worried and they are trying to protect themselves. It's not always that people want to hurt you, but they want to protect themselves and they don't understand what's happening. But a lot of it has to do with the privilege. That, it was a privilege to go to school in the States. It was a privilege to be able, like a lot of the things that people are kind of comfortable with was also about privileges that I had even if I didn't see them. And so, you have to recognize power dynamics. So it's not that I am just a black woman collecting data. Maybe it is better to have a white woman go in and do it, because the dynamic of how people feel about that is different because of the meaning of me being a black woman who has education, who looks like this might have a very different meaning and we have to be able to talk about that.

[0:23:04]

AR: Yeah, maybe if you could expand on that.

DS: About

AR: You know how you do that in your work. How do you get people… how do you get those conversations going?

DS: I think you just have to start doing them and get comfortable with it. When I was younger, I did it out of ignorance and I look back now and people were like, I can't believe she said that. But now, and then there was a period where I was more cautious. It was probably tied to the tenure. Going to tenure was my cautious period. I wasn't inauthentic but I was quiet. And then so. It was funny, before tenure everybody was like, oh you should become that, because I was associate chair for, you should be the department chair. You are the nicest person. So we had a chair who was this horrible person. But at the time, I kept my mouth shut. He was like everybody said you are the nicest person in the department. We all, oh, everybody said you should be chair. When I got tenure, I started speaking out. Oh, I became the B. I. T … you know… and part of that was because I was a black woman. Now I am speaking out, and I am not speaking mean, and I would say publicly, I am not saying this any different than X over there. I go, is my tone any different. I am speaking to you the same way. And they couldn't say anything because I was speaking. But that changed all of a sudden. I was the mean person, but I had to embrace. For sometimes it was uncomfortable. I have lost positions. I have been punished, you know, whatever. But I also have the privilege

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that I can be authentic. I am financially okay. I don't have children, so I am not worried about making sure I got the rent paid. So there's privileges that I can make these things, but I also feel okay about who I am. I am not, and anybody knows that they are getting the truth, but there is a cost for that. But that's the cost of being a feminist. It's a cost of being social justice or doing equity because you are asking somebody to give their power or somebody to critique their power or you are calling them out on it. But I will say what I have learned is that nicety doesn't always work. That you can't, doesn't have to be awful. But sometimes you just have to be the same. You have to give it the same energy. There's a new t-shirt that says, 'I batch your energy'. I got to get it. That's exactly what it is. That you have to, maybe not to be mean, but you have to match that energy. And, especially, I think if you are a woman and a woman of colour, you can't bend. Because part of why people I think were shocked was that I would stay quiet. I push back. But what shocked them was that you were supposed to be this way. Now you are talking back. They are angry about that. Yeah. And they still are. It's been like 15 years, and they are still angry. So not speaking back is not going to change it. Because it doesn't matter, because by now they should have been over it. But I am still not in the place where they expect me to be. So staying silent doesn't, well, that's what you know they talk about, our silence does not protect us. **[0:25:33]**

AR: And so you talk about, you know the values that you hold as a researcher, and they are so apparent in your work. You are a community-based person. Community is important. Being involved with community, giving back to community, social justice is important, feminist — that's important. And you have also worked on topics like reproductive justice. And I want to get you to talk about those things, but before you do, can you just say what it's been like to be a social-justice oriented psychologist?

DS: Oh, absolutely. So what was really funny, I went to a panel last year in Orlando. And a girl that I went to grad school with, with the advisor, who I had tensions with, who was not a social-justice oriented person, this girl flourished under her. And she played the status quo. And she was not a black girl. But we were at the conference together, and then it's a conference, not because community-engaged research is a big thing. And she got on this, we saw each other. And she had done some racially, which we are not blatant, you know, racist stuff. But I knew she was racially problematic by comments she made so I knew who she was and so at the event we talked and then she got on the stage, and she said now we are doing this community work and Dionne, she remembers when we were grad students saying that we did community work. Social justice was a bad word, and I was like, girl, I didn't have the flexibility you had. I was always community and social justice. I was a black woman, and I did it. Now she can say it because the NIH [The National Institutes of Health] is funding it, etcetera. But she got on the stage and tried to tie me to her thing. And I was like, I have always done social justice work. I didn't have the flexibility to not do it. Now again, it depends. But I will say, if you look at when I started tenure track to getting tenure, my work was still around HPV [Human Papillomavirus], which was big funding, but it was a lot of quant work or qual with a school of nursing. I had to be strategic about what I did. And I did not publish feminist work, it wasn't like I avoided it, because I still did a chapter on reproductive justice, but I knew that what was going to be looked at, I better have a lot of that traditional stuff. So I had a lot of quant, which I partnered with a nursing professor, Tammy Thomas, and she was moving, and she was feminist, but she didn't use the language, but she was gathering all this. She needed my qual work so that qual work was a feminist piece, but we had all this quant work and that's what got me tenure, well, like that's not, but that's what they really looked at now. They questioned my other stuff. I got questioned a lot even for my—. I got, "Is that real science?, did you really run that?" centers things. But you have to be

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strategic again about how you do it. I didn't give it up, but I said I still did enough of what you guys like while still doing what I wanted to do.

AR: Well, can we switch gears a little bit and have you tell us, you have done so many… research programs, I think, are all interrelated, but you have done a lot of different, a lot of different things. So I have got, on my list, I have got your work on, I don't even know how to describe it, sort of, how could you describe black women's sexual health? **[0:28:52]**

DS: That was the broad piece. I wouldn't even say women of colour, especially because in Miami, it opened up, and then I do stuff with other kinds of global work as well, too. But I know my heart is always with black women's sexual health. So that's the me search piece, but it's all interconnected. So like, I did a talk the other day on, we were talking about Indian women and black women, how it's intersected, because I do a lot of work there. But what I think is in my work, because I even see these publications, I know how they are connected because I know what it is. What you are seeing in my work is, it's about how we construct meanings about health and how these are culturally informed. Because it's not just about, and how meanings are informed by who we are in our families and the cultures and how privilege, the intersectional identities they change. And so that was what's going through. But what you're seeing with a lot of pieces, those are, that shows my colleagues. That shows my network of people who I'm working with, who also like looking at from an intersectional lens and looking at how we construct meaning around these health issues. So one of the studies that use, there's a lot of publications that just came out with one of my grad students, former grad student, is around violence in Latin America and how he and I came together was he was doing work on masculinity and men and masculine in Latin America and how they can be challenging the stereotype of machismo. And challenging that, machismo is actually a problematic turn because there's respect and there's family, that we don't talk about it. We just talk about the toxic side. And so that's how he came to work with me about these images around there. But then he realized, well, soccer or football in Colombia is the big pop culture piece. So that's why there's that pop culture and then we looked at the violence. So that's how we came together. That's how that work mixes together. You don't see it necessarily in the publications, but I know that's how we have done it. Then, my other student is doing work on the doctor's perceptions of LGBTQ in India. Well, how that came about was, he was an undergrad with me when we went to India and he was looking at "hijras" which loosely translates to transgenders, but it's more complex than that. But I am just saying this for brief. So he was looking at Hijra experiences, and they all only fund for HIV, but really it was about violence and how they're looked at and how they experienced violence because of gender and sexual identity, which aligns with my work, and how caste plays into that, which aligns there. So then he's now looking at doctors because that was fundable, but he's also looking at the doctor's caste and their gender and play into these perceptions too. So I know it's connected, even though it might not look on the front, but there's reasons how we're connected that we're all interested in looking at the intersectionality pieces and how that's shaping outcomes and pieces of how people are giving meanings to health outcomes. **[0:31:25]**

AR: Yeah. No, absolutely that comes through in your description of your lab and so on and so forth.

DS: So there's lots of different projects, but they are actually connected. When you talk about, talk them through, but there are always this about inequality and intersectionality.

AR: Yeah. And I wanted to ask you a bit more, because I know you do this on a very regular basis, but what impact going to India and establishing those relationships in India? What impact has that had on your research?

DS: So when I first started doing it early on, because nobody cared, it was community global. Now it is, you know, it's a big deal for doing it. For me, it was really good because I should ask why I chose India. So it wasn't like I wanted to go to India, but my colleague, my friend at the time, has a health center. It's her, the Public Health Research Institute. And I had actually wanted to go to Brazil because I go, Brazil will be fun. And I have an uncle or whatever. But you had to speak Portuguese. India, I could speak English. So that's why I went to India. And my friend was like, I already have this place set up. But I fell in love with India. Like, I had such an amazing experience. And it was so interesting to see a lot of the same dynamics of what happens in black communities and Asians is in India. It's just, what we're really talking about is power. It's who has power. All these things, it's about power. So like in Miami, the Hispanics would be what we would call the white. Like my husband, who is white, gets upset. He goes, “I get gringled in Miami”. I'm like, that's the only place you don't have power is in Miami, right? But everywhere else in the world, you have power, so I don't want to hear it, right? So what we're really talking about is you see the Hispanics replicating. So I see that in India. And then going to India, I learned so many different things, and then I would bring students, and I got exposed. And one of the things, which is a bad thing about India is that, like, HIPAA [The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] is not, like, how we, oh, it's not HIPAA, but laws about how, see, giving rules about people going into health centers, we can go in and see things that we would never get to do in the United States because, like, yeah, students were in there for exams, and we're doing it with, you know, but we got to see like what does that mean that someone doesn't even have control over their body of who's walking into rooms right what does that mean that women only get one pap smear paid for by the government in their entire life in India. So you can think about that then well women who don't even get. In Canada we have universal health care. In America if you don't have health insurance you have to pay for that pap smear. So it's the same kind of dynamics that's happening, so you get to see that there's a connection between experiences based on where you are, on your positionality and power. And so this is really what the work in India and Colombia, and even some of the stuff in Canada, is really interesting to play out. **[0:33:56]**

AR: Yeah, absolutely. Can you tell us a little bit about the evolution of the textbook about the psychology of black womanhood?

DS: Okay, so this has been talked about. And that's actually, so Danielle Dickens, who was at Spelman College, which is really important to this book, which is one of the oldest and the most well-known HBCUs and the only one for women. And it's the one that you, it's the premier Black Women's University of college in the country, right? And so you see lots of people go, but especially the wealthy back in the days, that's where they sent their kids. And so that's why it's well-known. And they have, like, these women are leaders. The Spelman has women leaders all over the world. So Danielle teaches psych of women, and I teach psych of women which is in the APA [American Psychological Association], it's one of the course areas so she was trying to figure out who else teaches psych of women because at her school it's all black women. So we're using a psych of women textbook we're using a nice one. But she's like we need a black one I was like also textbooks are different there's lots of books about black women. Textbooks we provide all the foundational information that you should use to jump off so it's sort of like back in the day you had encyclopaedias it's sort of like the

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starting of the encyclopaedia and then you can go and dig more. So we're not digging in deep on every issue but it's setting the foundation of what are the major things about black woman in psychology, and from a black woman's lens. So that's why we talked about it, and she said let's do it and to be honest, we had another author, and this is something that's very important for black women. We're all feminist, black women feminists. She was involved in the publishing industry because you know they're not going to count on us to finish this book and we're like what, she was like, no they know black women rarely finish the books that they signed for things. Not because we're lazy or not intelligent, we have so much work going on we're mentoring and then textbooks don't count in academia, right? I mean not in academia in psychology. I didn't get any extra bonuses in my job. I need to publish four journal articles to equal that, so there's a cost for doing that. In the end, that woman had to leave the project because there was so much pressure going on with DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion], her family, which is very… So the same woman that warned us that we wouldn't finish the textbook, for a number of reasons had to leave the textbook, because of exactly what she told us about. And I also know someone who's working on the Latina book, psychology and they are way behind for the same issue. So this is it. And so we did the textbook, and it took us three, that's three years of work. We did a proposal, but we knew it was important because when they sent it out, they sent it out to 50 people, and they hope 20 people would respond. They send it out and over 90 % of the people they sent about wrote the details. They had to pay them for their responses because when they sent out, they're like, we've never had a response like this. And all the critiques were fair. Like there were critiques, but none of them were like, oh horrible, like, they were like you didn't do this and we didn't do this. Then we wrote the book and fortunately Danielle was on it, and Spelman put money. We had to put our own money into it. My husband's always like, are you making money off this book? We are not. So the publisher, a lot of the pictures they let us use Getty pictures but they're not a lot of black women, so we had to pay for the pictures of Megan the Stallion, we had to pay for the pictures of Mamie Phipps in psychology, we had to pay for the pictures of Angela Davis, the sit -in counters. A lot of the pictures in that book, we paid personally, or Spelman gave Danielle a grant, which is a private university. And also, they gave her a grant that she was able to pay for a photographer, so there's some pictures in there. And then we also had to, we paid out of our own pockets to, for a cultural editor. We paid a black woman who's an editor to go through, not for the spelling and grammar, but to make sure it's culturally capturing everything, the language is appropriate, all of these things, because it was a passion project. So the book is really a passion project, but it's the foundation. Another book can come out. But I think one of my girlfriends said it, which she goes, oh my God, it's a real book. It's like 700 pages. It's a really detailed tomb that covers, like at least for getting people started on topic. So that's the short version of the book or the three-year version of the book and so we're really yeah proud of that.

AR: And this is a book that we read as part of our research group and read several, we didn't read the whole thing. **[0:38:07]**

DS: Yeah most people don't get through the whole thing it's something you keep looking back to.

AR: But it's great but some questions came up for us I think as we were reading it too and one of them was how you decided. So I think you wrote about this somewhere, but how did you decide, you know, your own work is so global.

DS: Right. So why do we do US? Yes. I can tell you that. I thought it was two questions, why

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we used the word womanhood and why we kept it US-based. So I'll do the womanhood because it's shorter, because we don't want to say women because that's very essential. Womanhood was because a lot of us are socially constructed. So it might have made sense and economically would have been better to probably say psychology of black women because people Google that faster. But we consciously said womanhood because of the construction piece. That's why we did that. But we kept a US space, not because we want to. Do you know how big this book would have been if we tried to keep it broader? So that's why at the end of every chapter we have that globalizing, which is not very much, but the reason we kept it American-based was because now we know, I know we talked about this, most of the psychology is based on America. What is it? We represent 12 % of the population, but 90 % of psychology research is on America specific, or Western nations. So it is very Western - centric. We did pull Canadian citations, because I know me, I do that kind of thing, and we pull London stuff in there, but it's still very Western-centered and American-centered. But that was a critique, those were a couple of critiques, and we knew because these are what the people. The Black womanhood is so broad that we couldn't include, like when we did the colourism chapter we talked about the skin colour and the history in America but if I were going to bring it into what happens in Africa or the cake bleaching in Jamaica, that's a whole like you know how many pages that was going to be. So we had to do that because of time and space but it is a void. So ideally people could use the book because I think, like I said, it comes as a foundation, but they use it as jumping off for others. Okay, so this is what's happening in America, but how does it apply to what's happening in other countries?

AR: It makes perfect sense to me because if you're going to take seriously the notion that womanhood is constructed differently along different lines and histories and contexts, then you can't do every single—

DS: Everybody.

AR: Right. But it provides a means of looking and asking questions by doing it in a particular way. It's a dropping off point. **[0:40:34]**

DS: If somebody from another continent should do a version where they can reference stuff from ours, but they do it specific to there. So you don't have to repeat some of the information. It could maybe be a reader. I mean people could do their own book, but also a reader that can be an accompaniment. We do this in women's studies a lot. We have these readers on topics that you can use in a class where people put together topics relevant to that. But yeah, we couldn't and wouldn't be doing it properly. It would be done poorly.

AR: Yeah.

DS: So the book would be—well, it would have to be volumes, right? And that's not going to happen.

AR: So I don't want to make more of this than needs be, but I noticed in one version of your CV that the title of the book was once *Psychologies of Black Womanhood.*

DS: You caught that? That was probably an earlier version of the CV, because we were saying it's going to be broad. So that's why we changed it to *Psychology of Black Womanhood,* so womanhood replaced psychologies. Because I think it was *Psychologies of Black Women.*

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AR: Oh, yeah.

DS: We didn't like that because we said psychology of black womanhood and that way it's broader. Because we also didn't want there to be one version of it. So that's why it was done in this way. To be honest, the fact that we call it psychology which a lot of the research is from history, health, and everywhere so if you read the citations I would say maybe it's 50% psychological research and the other 50% are in other fields. You can't just pull from psychology. There's not enough, we haven't done enough research in this way. But psychology is the largest field, and more people use that terminology. For getting it out there. If we just said "Black Womanhood" a lot of people would say that it could be a history book and so that's why we put [psychology] in there. To make it easy to find and people can get what's in there. We think it is a bit more, but it is a starting point to understand what's in there. **[0:42:37]**

AR: Yeah, totally. So what is the reception of the book?

DS: It's been prom—I mean when you said you read it I said, oh, we know people have read it! We are in June of 2024, but it was nonstop. I didn't go home for two Christmases because I still had to write chapters. There were all of these things. It affected our lives. It was funny, my husband had just met Danielle for the first time, about three months ago, but he knew her from Zoom. We would be online at two o'clock in the morning working and stuff. So, we haven't been able to bask in the glory of it until maybe the last six months. But we realized the publisher, what the author said was true. This book has outsold what you're supposed to do. So they have a percentage expectancy, and we apparently hit it within the first semester. The book came out in June, and they already had people buying it for their classes in September, which is unheard of, because normally we have to have our course ready by the fall before. But what happened was—and this also speaks to the ground-level of connection and the importance of the book—Danielle is at an HBCU, and she sent a flyer about the book to… I got the list of every psychology professor related to women's studies at every HBCU in the United States. It took time and money. And Danielle from her Spelman account spent out the book. From that, we had 10 people create classes for that Fall based on the book. Which is big, I mean, you can't use that strength. Since then, we've had more, because that was a rush for some people, we've had more people create classes. And the thing is, with a class, that means they're going to keep buying the book every semester. And then people are buying it as gifts and things like that, and we have had events. So we surpassed the mark that they expected to sell early. But what I think that speaks to is one, that there is a hunger in people. They knew they needed it. There is also some resentment. We have had people saying "I was going to write that book" [laughs], and I think they literally were. But it is one thing to sit down and write the book. Other people could have written it, but we sat down and did it. We knew there was a need, everybody knew there was a need because how could you not have a book on this? There's not a reader like this. And it's not just in academics. People are buying it for their family and friends. That's one of the reasons for the textbook. It's accessible. It should be for upper-level high school or for first-level college students, but community groups and others are finding it useful. We use academic terms, but I don't think we wrote it in a heavy academic way. That was the other thing with the cultural editor. We wanted it not to be heavily academic language. We purposefully put examples that people know about. We talked about weaves, we talked about situationships, we talked about concepts that people will know about that may not be the same language in academia, but we taught and framed it in the research. **[0:45:38]**

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AR: I am going to take a couple of steps back and ask you some big picture questions, based on your experience in the field, but does anyone have any specific questions that they want to ask before I do that?

AN: I know there is a question that's going to come up and maybe I will ask it then. The question about advice to students. But there's something that came up a lot in what you said about strategy and about your experience in school and making choices on purpose, but also that you had some mentors.

DS: Absolutely.

AN: And they told you that this is what you need to do. But I wonder if—I know that one of the things that students who are very much like you were and are—are interested in pushing the envelope a bit in activism and things like that. That is something folks struggle with. It's like, if I fall back, if I hold back from saying what I want to say, then I'm betraying myself, am I betraying the cause? How do you manage that?

[0:46:41]

DS: It wasn't a glorious, easy situation. I should say to Layli Phillips—in a lot of my early papers you see Phillips, Phillips, Phillips—she's now Maparyan. That's who she was. I was lucky that I had her because she was a feminist and in psychology. She's very successful. She's well known now. She got turned down for tenure at [University of] Georgia because she was too radical. They won't say it. I look back now in my position. She was doing work on LGBTQ. She did all of this stuff. She didn't hit the markers that they wanted but I'm sure if she had been a white male doing traditional narrow stuff, they would have pushed her through. I have had guys in my program who haven't hit the markers but they're in the meeting going, well he's trying, so we've got to let him go. If that was me they wouldn't. So Layli went out on a limb for me. She sacrificed for me. When you pick a mentor, pick someone who can advocate. They might not fall on the sword. So, it wasn't always good, and I lost opportunities. I could be further along. I could have been the head of the women's studies program if I had one of the feminists who was in charge of it… if I had done what she wanted me to do. But I wasn't gonna do that, right? So you have to be prepared that it will cost you. I've cost publications, I've cost jobs, there are people that don't like me because of things that I've said about things or how I've done it. Maybe some of them I wouldn't do again. I would say, I'd do it all the same. No, some things I might have handled wrong. Absolutely. But I think that I did enough right that I can also sleep at night. I can say that now sitting here, I can sleep at night. Because the people that did stuff, if they were sitting here, I'm in a position now where I can be like, remember when you did that? Remember you did that? But 10 years ago I couldn't have said that to them. So it is not always—I don't care, I'm going to push through—sit back and think, okay, I'm going to push through, but how do I push through in a way that is going to cost me the least, but not sell out? Like I said, that girl who sold out and she wants to now call—because it cost me, it didn't cost her anything, so don't align with me, right? I still remember everything she did, but if there was somebody else who said, yeah I didn't realize then… So, there are ways that you can do it, but the key is finding a mentor. And there's nothing wrong with having multiple mentors. I want to stress that you should have your major advisor, because they know how the system works, but Layli wasn't in my program. But she was professionally guiding me, right? I have another colleague, Marilyn Montgomery, I should bring her up too. Very sweet woman. She was also guiding me, like, oh, this faculty member, yeah she's a little crazy but if you take her out to

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lunch she will be in your court. Yeah, she gave me a lot of professional guidance without being blatant about it. Marilyn is very sweet and quiet. And then I'm still friends with Joan Gibson who is retired. These are other people that—mentorship isn't always for everything. This person might guide you on how to work in the department, this person might guide you on how to work when you're at a conference. So, you have to have multiple layers and learn where to trust them. Does that make sense?

AN: Yes.

DS: Just because someone says that, oh, you can trust me, you need to watch what they're doing to be trusting them. But you should have multiple. They do this in the corporate world; you should have multiple levels of this. And they change, the dynamic changes. My relationship with Layli is very different now that I'm full [professor] and she's full [professor], but early on I relied on her. Now it's my job to back her up when she needs stuff because she backed me up. So that's the other thing too. It's two ways of doing things over time. And the stuff she did for me, I need to do for my students. You also learn from the bad mentors. The bad mentor, I understand some of the things she did not. I can see why she did it. It doesn't make it right, but I understand. But I also know I won't do this, or for the reason she did, I won't do it in that way. So learn from that too.

AN: Thank you.

AK: Yeah, I just wanted to say that I really appreciate you bringing up the importance of community, when it comes to where you do grad school. Because I brought that up before I said, especially the state of PhD programs in Canada, I don't want to go to New Brunswick to do it, and they're like, what do you mean, it's an opportunity…

DS: And that's okay.

AK: But I want to get my hair done. I want to eat good food [laughs]. Things like that are really important for comfortability. It's exactly what you said, I don't think you can do something as big as grad school without feeling comfortable.

DS: Or go in knowing it, does that make sense? Like no, this is a four-year thing, I'm coming out. I think for Athens, Georgia, I could go live there now as a professor without kids or… if you have kids, but as a grad student, it's a drinking town. It's like a college town, you go drink. Also, there are people that could do hair, but not my hair. There's all these dynamics. Or I could get to Atlanta. So, the other thing is, if it's good, I'm not saying completely do it, but figure out, how am I going to negotiate this? Does that make sense? I know somebody who went to a school in North Dakota, and I was like [slight grimace], but she's like I'm going in for this, and I'll make sure I do this. She knows she's going in and coming out. I think a lot of times we go to grad school, and we think this is who I want to work with and this what I work on, you have a life and even if you don't want a life you need to figure out what will be my life after. So you have to think about where you're going. So that's where I was picking… I'm ending up and I wasn't going to take jobs in places where I didn't feel safe. Because I also wouldn't want to do the work. I wouldn't want to build the community, and I wouldn't feel happy there. So there are the choices you have to think about absolutely.

[0:52:30]

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AR: Yeah. Especially if you are doing community-engaged, community-based work, is what you want to do, right?

DS: Right. I will say this now. Right now we are in a very strange political time and I'm in Florida [laughs]. It's 2025, November 2025 if people are looking at this later on.. If I didn't like Miami, I would be extremely devastated right now. Like if I didn't like where I was. For example, I could say this right now, so my husband is from Iowa, and I always use that as an example, he gets mad. But like Oklahoma, I have no interest, but if I were in Oklahoma right now going through this I think I would be depressed. I don't know how I would be surviving. I probably would walk away from academia. And there were periods too where at one point during COVID, there was some bullying going on in my department that I was getting ready to do some activism. But the thing that made me okay was that I was in Miami, Florida. Does that make sense? There's going to be periods where no matter where you are, even if you love York, there's going to be a period where you're going to be pissed off about being at York. It's just like any corporation. But at least I have my social space. I feel safe and comfortable. So no matter what, I like being in Miami. Even with all that's going on. And there are people like me in Miami, with my value systems, etc., and my community groups are there. But if I hated Miami and all of this was going on… cause things are going to change. There's going to be times where it was wonderful, and times are bad. It is important to think about that. And also for your career, for your job. My work is being monitored very differently, so all of that, I better like where I am… and this is also being strategic. I have to be strategic now. I'm a full professor because of what's going on… in a different way. So nothing is going to be perfect. You have to learn how to negotiate these things… always. Earlier I'd be angry about it now it's just like, yeah, what do I need to do? And that's just age. Before I'd be like we're gonna fight the system—I'm pushing the system, but I'm also gonna be protective of my well-being and I'm also going to be protective of the long term. I need to make sure my students can land when I'm finished. Because if I'm gone, they're screwed. Yeah.

AR: Yeah. Now we've taken up well over an hour of your time [laughs]. So I'm trying to kind of sort of bring us to the conclusion, but I have at least two more questions. One of them is what in your career, what of your accomplishments, achievements do you feel most proud of? **[0:54:57]**

DS: At this point of my career? All my students. I love my students. I will say, my students come stay at my house. My husband doesn't have his students like that. He's in physics. They come over for parties… [laughs] But my students look after my pets. If they need a place to stay, they can stay. But that's me because I'm also… that's how I was raised, that you take care. When I say that I'm proud of my students, some of them are mad at me now for stuff because they don't all love me. Like we get along, but there's periods where they're pissed at me, at things I do. But they always know I always have their back. And what I'm proud of in my students is that I can see that they did better than what I did. They always say things, but I gave them the space to do things. I'll clear the space to let them do things and they've taken it and run. My students are doing all of these amazing projects. Not to talk about prestige but they were trained by me, and they're at Stanford, they're at Yale, they're professors. And that's because they did the work and they hustled and they're doing it for their communities. They're all doing community work. They're still working in Columbia or doing stuff on immigration. And they're at the schools that are supposed to be "whatever" [air quotes]. I'm proud of that. And when they left—one of my students last year—I remember when he left, I was like "I feel sick" and I didn't know why. I realized I'm going to miss him. I am going to

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miss our weekly meetings. And so I'm proud of my students in that when I look at my experience as a grad student, that I can say that I gave my students the best of the best experience that I got. Does that…?

AR: Yeah.

[0:56:23]

DS: What I got is my best, I might not have done it perfectly. Earlier on it would have been the awards and stuff, which I'm very proud of my awards because that matters and I hustled for those. But I'm proud of my students. And I got that from another professor, he says Dionne, when I'm sitting on the boat, it doesn't matter how many publications I got… it doesn't matter how many publications I've got… this is Bill Cortinas who has passed and I've got to thank him… or how many grants I've received, and he had millions of grants. What's going to matter is that I can call up a grad student and talk to them. Nobody cares about all of that but my relationships matter. I remember when he said that I thought, what are you talking about? I gotta get tenure [laughter]. But I understand that now, he's absolutely right. It doesn't matter with all the tenure people. I look at the people who are retired now or retiring… nobody's going to their retirement party. But with my students, I'll go visit them at Cartagena and India and stuff. And that's what I'm proud of… I'm still going to be in touch with them.

AR: Yeah. You've built a family.

DS: Yeah, yeah. I love my students. I love my students. Even ones that I haven't seen in years. My first student, Alan Meca, is doing amazing at University of San Antonio. I follow him and now he's got his own student.

AR: Uh huh.

DS: It's great to see them all.

AR: Absolutely. Okay, so here's kind of the wrap up question.

DS: Okay.

AR: And that is, is there anything we haven't talked about?

DS: I think we talked about… [laughter]

AR: … that you would like to share or put in the interview?

DS: No, you know, I would say that one thing we don't talk about is that… a lot of, we talked about in academia, but I also know that I stand on the shoulders of others… You know my grandmother was a cleaning woman. My mother was a secretary. My dad was a sheet metal skilled worker. A sheet metal worker. I never had to worry about—I mean they weren't rich but—I also recognize that I'm here because of them, you know what I mean? If I needed money for school somehow my dad was gonna get the money for school. I wasn't living fancy. I drove old cars, etc. But they recognize the importance of making me be the next generation for doing things. Like when I was young, my parents showed up for every soccer game, every PTA and stuff. I look back and I'm like—I don't got kids, and I don't got time

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for that. Like I come home and I say, let's order in. My mum would come home from on the GO train and cook dinner for five and then make sure I got homework done. I don't look at these things, and my dad used to get up at six in the morning. He would drop me here at York sometimes and go off to work in Oshawa or Hamilton and come back. I look at that and even though it's because of them that I'm here, I think all of that is important… especially I think for everybody, but especially for first generation people, women of colour and immigrants. That is what puts us where we are. I remember there's periods where I went to quit and I was like, oh, I can't. They'll be pissed, right? [laughter] And they would have been pissed but they would also… for all they put into their… unless I was being abused, there was no reason to stop. So I also think that it's important to think about, it's not just who's in our space here, but the people who are our space. Who created our space. So when you ask what I'm proud of, these are about our families. This is my grandmother. Everybody. My grandmother used to cook me food and ship it to me in Buffalo, just so that I didn't have to cook and stuff like this. Those are mine, but that's what I would say. It's important to recognize, even with my students, their families are important parts of their narrative and celebrating them. So I'm here because of that. **[0:59:55]**

END

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