

University of Washington

Women Who Rock Oral History Project

Transcript

**Sheila Jackson H.**

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**Interviewed by:** Angelica Macklin

**Interviewer Association and Role:** Women Who Rock Project Committee Member and Lecturer for the GWSS 590/HUM 595 Women Who Rock Digital Scholarship course, Winter and Spring 2012.

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Sheila Jackson H. (SJH): My name is Sheila Jackson H. I am a writer and biographer who is turned filmmaker. I have a production company in Los Angeles called Eve's Lime Productions where I produce commercials, documentary, and integrated media and I am currently working on a documentary called Nice and Rough about Black women in rock.

Angelica Macklin (AM): Fantastic. How would you describe the music community that you are a part of?

SH: Hmm. Well the music community I am a part of now is super eclectic because I grew up in Memphis Tennessee where I had just a really strong blues influence and a strong influence of soul music with Stax records. Growing up with Stax records in my neighborhood. And all of those sounds have come to create a fusion of all sorts of music you know as I've grown over the years. So I listen to some of everything and I sing as well. And I just appreciate all kinds of music. When people get in my car they never know what they're gonna hear. Anything from rock to jazz to you know, neo soul to you know muddy waters. You never know what you're gonna get when you get in my car [laughter]. I've always been surrounded by music.

AM: And you're also a part of the film community and you're putting together music and film to do this documentary that you're working on. Can you talk a little bit about how you fit within the film community and the music community together?

SH: After writing a book on the Harlem renaissance I started to discover how you could tell history you could share stories of history through biography and then I started to explore

how you could use other things as a vehicle to share histories. Because I hated history growing up in school and I never thought I would be able to call myself a historian of sorts but I am and I have a passion for sharing the history but I want to do it in ways that are interesting and engaging for people and I feel music is this amazing vehicle for sharing history. And particularly for me I'm fascinated with the history of the 70s because that was my coming of age time and I think that Nice and Rough lends so powerfully to the 70s because that was when a lot of the legends of Black women in rock emerged was in the 70s with the dialogue of the Black Power movement and the women's movement.

AM: Can you talk a little bit more about that era and like who the people were that were particularly influential to you in music scenes and other activists at the time?

SH: Oh wow. In the 70s the big influence for me and I was not even quite a teenager in the early 70's but that's when I really started burgeoning as a writer and a huge influence on me in the 70s were the poets the African American female poets Nicky Giovanni, Ndsaki Shungay, Maya Angelou, and I used to my mother used to take us to the library every week and I would check out the books over and over and over and over again the same collection of books and I was always I remember being so impressed by their boldness and their ability to put their feelings out there in such a raw and powerful way which was a first because when you think about the Harlem renaissance a lot of the poetry was they used poetry to express a lot of their feelings about what was happening in society but it was masked in these beautiful words and you know verses and you had to kind of give it a little extra thought to understand hey this poem is about lynching or hey this poem is about racism. But in the 70s it was different, they were just bold they were just out there you know Ndsaki Shungay in Somebody Almost Stole All of My Stuff you know [laughter] it was just out there and I think the music paralleled that and one of the people who emerged during the 70s was Betty Davis and Betty Davis is known when you look her up she's just known in history the muse of Miles Davis which is how of course they cast women historically. [laughter]. She was the muse of Miles Davis she was his first wife and they say she was his muse because she is the one who introduced him to Jimi Hendrix and Jimi Hendrix, once he connected with Jimi Hendrix, had an impact on Miles Davis that caused him to create Bitches Brew which was the turning point in his jazz career because he kind of expanded his sound from traditional jazz to this you know funkier you know sound that just became quintessential Miles Davis. But she really pushed him to kind of you know push the boundaries with his music but at the same time Betty Davis was a rocker herself. She was heavily influenced by Sly Stone and other people of that era and she was heavily influenced by her grandmother who had this huge collection and love for the blues. So you saw kind of that kind of integration of this really funky sound of the 70s and this old school blues that and you bring that together in terms of the story telling and then you bring together the power of sexuality and women discovering themselves in the 70s and taking control of their image and being in control of themselves sexually and that sort of thing and you have Betty Davis. Who was totally ahead of her time. She was like the Madonna of the 70s. She wore lingerie on stage. She talked about sex and she talked about being in control in relationships you know it was just her music was just. The NAACP tried to ban her music from the radio because it was just so out there. It was so edgy. But Betty Davis was a huge influence at that time also, even pre-dating Betty Davis, well, probably concurrently around

that same time Nona Hendrix was out with Patti LaBelle with the Blue Belles. They were the Blue Belles during that earlier phase of LaBelle. But that music was considered rock n roll at the time and they used to be out there touring with Otis Redding and Joe Tex and that sort of thing and that was considered rock and roll music you know even before Betty Davis. But Nona Hendrix also she left Labelle in the mid to late 70s to pursue a career in rock because that was always who she was and is still is as an artist and how she defines herself as an artist.

AM: So can you talk a little bit more about when and where you were born and how that connects to your growing up. I mean you talk a little bit in the teen years but maybe influence from your family and the scene that you were in or the city of Memphis in particular.

SH: Mmm. I was born and raised in Memphis, Tenn. during the 60s and 70s and it was a very... When I look back especially now especially then after having chronicled the civil rights movement in my last book being about a collection of biographies about the civil rights movement. When I look back its like wow I was super insulated from a lot of the things that were going on. Memphis was and still is, largely African American community with a huge African American middle -class and I believe when I was growing up it was probably 50 or 60 % African American but it was so super segregated. Just a very segregated city. But I think in terms of influences growing up for me the culture was very-- we were very driven. You know I came up during the Black Power movement and this concept of Black pride and went to an African American catholic school where we said the pledge of allegiance to the Afro-American flag every morning. Just a super kind of militant kind of upbringing kind of juxtaposed to the old southern traditions. You know I went to charm school and my great aunt used to take us downtown and buy us dresses every week you know being lady like and knowing your hollow wear and polishing the silver. You know that sort of thing kind of juxtaposed against this Black Power movement and the women's movement and you know bra burning and watching these things on television. Gloria Steinem... It was such a mixture of just a clash of all of these different traditions and new thoughts emerging you know between the 60s and 70s that it definitely has shaped who I am. And in terms of music you know the really powerful force of music in Memphis when I was growing up was the blues and Bill St. and especially as I came of age and I was able to go out and do things. I used to go out when I was in high school and listen to the blues. You know we'd go to Bill St, and I would listen to Ruby Wilson and you know go to B.B. Kings and listen to the King B's play you know his house band. And just people on the streets, you know if you go to Bills St. you just have someone with a guitar sitting on a bucket or they've got an electric organ plugged into an amp and they're just out there doing their thing. And just the rawness of the music I think has always had a huge impact on me and just the soulfulness of the music. And its storytelling of the experience of the human experience and the African American experience has had a powerful influence on the work I do now and I feel its so important for us to tell our own stories because there is a huge missing gap in the literature and in film in terms of these wonderful stories. My story's not been told. You know, I can see tons of movies about you know the hood and the wood and the this and that and I see nothing that reflects how I grew up. I see its like we glossed over the whole period of the 70s. And its interesting I was telling someone you know I wrote the book on the

Harlem renaissance and the civil rights movement and then I sent an email to my publisher saying now I'm ready to explore the 70s, I think the world is ready to explore the 70s. Can I do a book on the 70s? And I heard nothing. I still haven't gotten a response. [laughter] that was four years ago. And I think that there's been a fear around how to deal with that era. You know, "Black Power Mix Tape" is a documentary that has just come out this year where these Swedish filmmakers had come and gotten all of this footage-30 years ago during the Black Power movement. Amazing interviews with Angela Davis and you know the Black Panthers and Hewie Newton just incredible documenting of that era. And I only hear about that film in certain circles. It's like we still aren't quite ready to decide: were the Black Panthers good? Were they bad? Are they heroes or villains? How do we treat this period in our history so there is still kind of a discomfort with it but I think we're moving toward a period where we can finally talk about that. That's why I think it's a great time for "Nice and Rough" because it is the lyrics of the music. The energy of Black women being bold enough to do rock. To be out there. To be unlady like. To push the norms in terms of fashion in terms of the way they wear their hair. You know, I think it's time for that. And that's all, to me, it's all kind of cloaked in a lot of the themes of the women's movement in terms of being able to define our own concepts of beauty instead of having it put upon us that beauty means your body is shaped a certain way, or your hair is in a certain style or that you even have hair to begin with. You know, [laughter] I mean of Grace Jones and how she was drop dead gorgeous but she would shave her hair and just do all of this crazy stuff geometrical designs and shapes in her hair. You know people didn't know what to do with that and I think people still don't know what to do with Black women in rock and you know I wanna show them [laughter] through this film.

AM: Why do you think that that is? That its been both the 70s has been something that people cant deal with and also why there hasn't been a focus more on women, Black women who are rock like real rockers, you know? When you use the word rock, cause you said that you use the word rock as in rock in roll for real.

SH: Yes, I just blogged about that because I got so sick of seeing things that said you know Black girls rock. You know I appreciate those movements and those causes but there is a confusion about the term so when I use the term I wanna make sure that I clarify it. And I had a blog that says you know "Nice and Rough" is really about you know Black women really Black women in rock, like really really rock. Rock music and I clarified it like I'm not saying that we're awesome even though we are awesome. It's not an adjective to describe. It's specifically about hard guitar rifting rock music. And I really want to make that the visual association in the film and just the auditory association of just the music and the Black women. Because people just don't get it. When I even tell people that it's about Black women in rock. I've had people go really? Have you found many? There are some? Like yes they really do exist and if nothing else this film will show that Black women in rock are out there and they do exist. And now I'm blanking out on the question.

AM: Well I think I said like 3 questions that lead to that

SH: [laughter] Awesome

AM: But I think I'm just trying to figure out if there are things that you've thought about through doing this work that have emerged that sort of have given you clues as to why this story hasn't been told before?

SH: Oh. Hmm. I think this story hasn't been told for a complexity of reasons and especially in looking at, it's so interesting to look at our society right now and how... and you know and I joked and now it's not a joke anymore that are we gonna have to get out there and march again and have another civil rights movement and another women's movement? Because there is this huge just... move toward oppressing women. Again. [laughter] It's like you know we're having to go back on things that we thought were resolved and things that we already marched and fought for in the 60s and 70s and you know. Birth control and just control over our own bodies and now this invasive procedure thing without your permission. I mean I find these times just insane... but its all a part of what has to happen to this paradigm shift that we are in. We are in a paradigm shift and there is a huge group of people who are in denial of that and this is what we're seeing is them kicking and screaming all the way down cause they are going down [laughter] but its them kicking and screaming fighting against what they see happening as a paradigm change. So, I think that a lot of the reason that these topics haven't been explored is because of that force of people who don't want to give women the idea that they can be like this. Because they don't wanna see a lot of African American women or women even in general you know lets face it, just women in rock is a topic in and of itself. Because rock is a white male dominated genre. So when you get to Black women in rock even further marginalized so there is obviously an intention that was set somewhere along... you know, our historical time line, of wanting this to be exclusive to white males. It's not a coincidence that throughout all of these years that all women and you know if you talk to I think Sheryl Crow and you know Bonnie Rait and you know different white women in rock, they would share a lot of the same sentiments as you know African American women or Chicana women in rock it's the same you know very similar journey in terms of being difficult based on gender. And it's just so unheard of to I just think its just so unheard of uh I cant even think of the word. Its just so insane to imagine that we still have those kinds of beliefs right now because I think we've been living in this fantasy land that things had changed. And the attitude that because things have changed, attitudes have changed, and now we see these attitudes are still there. Those forces and energies are still in our institutions and I think that that's kind of the last bastions of racism and sexism is what's been kind of simmering still in our institutions that kind of has to be you know, really revealed and released [laughter] you know from our society. So, I think that that's why there's just a lot of there's just been a lot of resistance because when you talk about why it hasn't been talked about you're talking about institutions you're talking about record companies and you're talking about large corporations that have had control but now with the internet and that whole control being decentralized its becoming a different ballgame.

AM: I'm gonna switch the conversation over now to film because I, being a woman producer myself, I see a lot of parallels to both women who are both filmmakers and producers and directors and also I am imagining Black women who are producers and directors. What is the parallel experience to that and Black women in rock?

SH: Oh okay. Well you know as I mentioned the other day, you know I was told when I started a screen writing program a few years ago that you know whatever projects you decide and whatever you decide to be involved in you know you need to always consider the connection that you have to that project because there is a connection. It's not that you just decided to do it because it was cool or it sounded interesting. That it's important to really search yourself to understand what piece of you is in it. Because its going to come through in the work. And I do definitely see pieces of me in the journey and in this project and as a woman and as a woman of color in film... I mean some people just think I'm just totally insane even in the career path that I've chosen in doing commercials for instance. In commercials and documentaries in the commercial world in particular is another all white male dominated field where you see very few people of color male or female and just a huge absence of women. A very obvious absence of women in that field and I find myself now in 2012, you know, working to break into a field like that. And in the thick of this project about Black women in rock who have been working for years to break into this genre of music that has been set aside for white males. So there's definitely a parallel... parallels in the journey and I do see a lot of myself in these women as I interview them. There's, that's the beauty of the title of the film being "Nice and Rough" and it comes from the first part of "Proud Mary" where Tina Turner is talking and she's asking you know how they want them to do the beginning and you know do you want it nice and easy or rough [laughter] and she says but then she offers the options and then she switches on everybody and says but we can only do it one way, nice rough and that's how I feel. I feel like you know my life has been like that of being in these spaces of saying ok maybe I'll try the traditional way, maybe I'll try this way and go get a real job [laughter] but then I can only do it one way, I can only be who I am. And for some people the traditional way overwhelms the being who I am. And I have a lot of friends like that, they're like "are you crazy" you know and I think that you know for these Black women in rock that it's the same thing. That they're making a choice that a lot of people think wow you could have been the next Whitney Houston you could have been you know an R&B diva you could have had a record deal doing jazz, because you had those connections you had that have that talent and you could be rich and you could sing rock as a hobby. You know there a lot of women who had that option. Of the women I've interviewed there is one who has a strong background in opera a lot of these women are classically trained and they chose rock. And it's a very fascinating thing, it's almost like exploring myself in some ways and looking at the different reasons and motivations that they've had for pursuing this and its interesting that the very end of my trailer Joyce Kennedy says in a totally exasperated [laughter] tone she's like you know, "you know, I don't know why anybody would ever choose to do rock." And its interesting because one thing that has come up is that a lot of the women say rock chose me the music chose me. I didn't say I wanna do rock. This music chose me because it's this really natural expression of who I am. And that's the thing in the film is that I wanna show people that journey that rock music is a natural thing for African American women to do. It comes from the root of our presence in this country and our journey in this in country. It comes from the root of the spirituals, from call and response that you see Mick Jagger doing on the stage, or the Rolling Stones. It comes from the blues and that story telling tradition of the blues and it comes from soul. Soul music and it's a combination of those things and it's a way of it's a mode of expression that is a very natural thing for an African American woman and I think the story that I really wanna tell its that it's not this weird thing.

Everybody thinks "ooo Black woman that would do rock that's so odd," but its not it makes perfect sense. And that's the story that I want to tell. I think it makes perfect sense. So that's what I really want people to see and feel when they see this film.

AM: Can you talk a little bit more about how you switched from writing into the medium of film, like did film choose you? Was that like a particular form that you felt like this had to be told through?

SH: That's a kind of crazy story. [laughter] I think that I uh, ooo, I started out originally as a marriage and family therapist. And I would always find ways to incorporate writing in what I was doing. I was writing self help articles. I was writing books. I was writing brochures. I was just always try to figure a way cause I've always been a writer and um I got sick one year. And after my father died and it was just stress related because I was just down from just total exhaustion. And from running cross country back and forth for months when he was ill and I stopped doing therapy for a few months and stopped being a therapist and it was like the best time of my life. And I was bed ridden and I started writing again. I started journaling and I figured that I wanted to that I really wanted to write full-time. So I started writing full-time and started working as a journalist and had an opportunity to write a history book which is another story in and of itself I don't wanna make it too much longer but I had an opportunity to write a history book about the Harlem renaissance and it was surprising to me because it started out as a biography about Augustus savage that I was asked to write and I became so fascinated with her life that I sent a proposal to Children's Press, which is now owned by Scholastic, to write an entire book about the Harlem renaissance because the whole era was just so fascinating. And in writing that book there was just so many untold stories you know there was so many people that I had never heard about that were so amazing that could inspire a whole new generation of people, adults and children. And I though what a shame, and even when I went on to do a collections of biographies about the civil rights movement you know the one critique that our book has received over the years has been, and positive critique is that it's a book that shares stories of people that you never knew about that you don't hear about from the civil rights movement because the civil rights movement was more than Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. And that became... it emerged as a passion for me and a mission from me to share the little known facts of history and to really champion the untold story. But once I finished those two books I felt like people are not reading books like they used to anymore, how can I really connect people with these stories and I thought film is the obvious way. I need to learn how to translate my writing into scripts into screen writing. So when I moved to Los Angeles, when I moved back to Los Angeles. I started a... I went into a 2 year screen writing program and really perfected that craft and once I finished that program. The program was called writers boot camp, so its not like going to AFI where you're in the writing program and you're exposed to other producers and directors and cinematographers. You're just with writers. And, you know, I love my people, but we cant do anything for each other other than read each others scripts [laughter]. So I left that program not knowing anything about film still, so I was in a position where I had never been on a set. I still didn't know anything about the process. I just knew how to write a script. That's a very isolated bubble of information and so I started going on sets. I started just any opportunity that I could get to be a part of a film set and I joined Women in Film in Los Angeles and started

volunteering and somebody said “oh I think Sheila would make a great location manager...” and I was like huh? [laughter] where did you get that from? And my first my first gig as a location manager which we had like three different locations it was insane it was like the most complex location management thing that even looking back now that I have seven years of experience I was really thrown into the lions den. But I pulled it off and its funny because I was on set and one of the people who was volunteering as a grip was talking to me and he looked at me and he was like so you’re the location manager is that what you normally do? Cause a lot of people volunteer on these shoots and they may be big ups in the industry or people just wanting entry level wanting experience and I said I’m a writer and he said GOOD so now you know when you’re writing all this stuff what it takes to make it. What it takes to create all these things and the money and the budget you’ll consider all that now maybe that you’re working at this level. And oddly enough that same guy ends up being my DP he’s like my right hand man now of my production company.[laughter] he was so right because it really gave me a perspective working as a location manager working as an associate producer on several projects and then ultimately starting to produce. I really began to appreciate and learn what it takes to put the whole picture together. And I’ve always had an entrepreneurial spirit. I’ve always loved having my own businesses and I decided that you know I wanted to start my own production company as a result of those experiences and that I wanted to be a part of you know the other side of the work I do is I wanted to be a part of helping to create cause related media and media that serves to educate and create awareness. Which is also, you know, I guess my drive in terms of sharing histories is just educating and creating awareness and creating media that just has a larger impact than a few moments of entertainment. I think it’s important to help people to dialogue and think critically. I like to create even with commercials I like to make the commercial that people run out of the kitchen to watch instead of muting the TV or you know changing the channel to see what else is on. I wanna make the commercial that people run oh that commercials on with that girl [laughter] you know” so I just thrive on creating media that causes a stir I think that was what the for Women in Rock what was it?

AM: Making scenes. Building communities.

SH: Making scenes. Building communities. That’s what I loved about the Women in Rock project. I think we should make a scene. I think it’s important to shake people up and just create some critical dialogue instead of. Because I think we’ve had a long period of sleeping. A long period of passivity in our society and I think it’s very important for us to understand that its okay to shake things up. It’s actually what we need to do so we can wake up so we can understand what’s really happening around us and be a part of it.

AM: So we shook things up a little bit with the film festival. What did you think about participating and being part of that film festival.

SH: I always love... I love the film festival because I really love short films... and I really should make one. I really should do a short because it just gives film makers just that little chance to dip your toe in the water of creating a feature but they come up with the most fascinating topics and the most interesting things and it’s so wonderful see people share



what's really in their hearts and what's important to them. The one film about the midwives and...

AM: Catching Babies.

SH: Catching Babies. That's a very powerful topic even though you might look at it. Oh it's about birth... but it's really so heavily political and personal just about you know the medical system and how it has controlled the process of birth and which I have a lot of views around that but it's just amazing and wonderful to see people and young filmmakers young women who are discovering their voice. It's a very powerful thing to discover your voice. I think I first discovered my voice when I got my first writing job. Which I had sold articles. I had done some work with Essence and other magazines, but I wrote an article for Essence that actually helped me to get a job as a Sunday columnist at a news paper in Barbados West Indies and I went back there and lived for four years. And the column was, I called it "wake up call" and my goal with the column was to take events that were happening and to humanize them to connect people to these events that were happening in a global way. And for us to understand that these little things that happen really are related to us. It's not just little news you read in the paper, there's a connection and a human issue and connection that we need to be aware of and critically thinking about. And I could write whatever I wanted every week. I could write life observations. I could get political. I could write about something that happened in our world. It was just open. So with all of that you know in my late twenties and early thirties, I really discovered, over a four year period, I really discovered my voice and I really discovered just the through line of what's important to me you know through that whole body of work you know through every week for four years, I really discovered the things that I'm passionate about and the things that are important to me and we don't always get that opportunity in life. And when you can find that thing that allows you that opportunity that vehicle through which you can unfold you know as a woman it's a very powerful thing so looking at those young filmmakers on the panel who are just starting out. And even the one Home Alive they're just getting started I just know that that documentary in particular the subject you know is just so intense that it's really going to open them up in ways that they probably never imagined by the time they get to the end of it. It's a personal journey as much as its "oh I'm making a film" no you're unfolding. It's the same process.

AM: So you were in Barbados for a while and also you have a son. Do you wanna talk about your son?

SH: Yeah. I lived in Barbados for four years because I can only do it one way [laughter] I decided that I needed to live in the Caribbean. I travelled to the Caribbean. Once... the first time I travelled through the Caribbean I said I just wanna be one of those people... I used to remember the movies from when I was a little girl and the woman would say "send for my things" and that's how people moved in the old movies they would just go "send for my things" and next thing you know all their stuff is there and they're in a house and I used to think oh I wish I could do that. That always stuck in my mind from childhood and the first time I went to the Bahamas I was like oh I wish I could send for my things [laughter] and I said I've got to do this because I want to live like this. I wanna know what it feels like to live

on the ocean to be able to swim everyday to be able to be in a culture that's laid back and that's more in rhythm and in line with how I like to move through out my days. That was a huge experience for me. And I had gone to different islands every year my husband at the time and I, we travelled to different islands every like every six months we'd go somewhere and check it out and Barbados was just somehow the place that felt like home. We got there and the people felt like my family. They looked like my relatives it was very interesting and interestingly Barbados is the first stop. It's the first body of land that you come to off of the West Coast of Africa. So it was a point of dissemination for slaves and you know to the Americas and throughout the Caribbean. So there are... that is why there are a lot of people there who look like my family. Because there probably is a little bit of you know my ancestry there in Barbados. But um, I ended up being able to live there as I said because of an Essence article I wrote about my visit there. And the week before I was leaving there was this article that the managing editor of the nation wrote and the caption read "Where is Sheila Jackson H.?" and it discussed this article about... that I wrote about Barbados and how you know she said "if she feels that way about Barbados I don't know if I agree that the men are this and its like this and you know but call me I wanna know where you are." And I called her and she took me out to dinner and offered me an opportunity to be a Sunday columnist and at the time I was the only female Sunday columnist for that newspaper which was interesting as well. And my byline was Sheila Jackson H. is an American journalist" [laughter]. For a long time I didn't know how I felt about that but to be cast in that way. But it was a wonderful and interesting experience to live in another culture and I thought that I wanted to stay there and raise my child there. So when I did become pregnant with my son, Solomon, I considered staying there but family just they just beat down on us, you know "you have to come home. You can't have your child in another country... they won't know their aunts and uncles..." So we came back for that reason and because at the time the book on the Harlem renaissance was coming out. I wanted to be in the states to promote that book and I was starting to have the inklings of the idea that I really want to take my work to the next level in film. And in order to do that, I need to be in Los Angeles. You know where else, where better to be than in LA if I wanna learn about film and move toward screen writing and that sort of thing. So my husband at the time and I we returned to the states in 2000 when I was pregnant with my son Solomon, who's now almost eleven years old and he's been in a couple of my commercials and he thinks he wants to act and he's an amazing musician, interestingly. There is something that he has picked up and it's interesting because I don't, well I do sing a little bit in my life, but I'm more of a dancer, I dance with an African dance troop. But I do also sing, but he has developed this love for music also that has just been a part of... it's a huge part of my life and my sisters life who's a professional singer so it's fun to watch him kind of grow into himself and really now helping him discover his own voice and who he is. It's been a fun journey but now I'm seeing how I can I'm constantly working ways to weave him into my journey you know because this is a busy crazy life. And balancing that with parenting can be a huge challenge. And I just, I love the way you guys do it. But you can cut that out if you want to [laughter]

AM: How do we do it? There's Nico. But how DO you do it? I mean I think that is one of probably part of the reason why some women feel intimidated to go into these kinds of

industries because it is so fast paced and built on that kind of single white man life style of just being able to go do stuff all the time

SH: Because the wife is at home

AM: Because the wife is at home

SH: Holding it all down

AM: So how I mean what kind of tools do you think there are for women to be able to succeed in this kind of with their children and working with their children?

SH: For me spirituality has been a big part of it, and I pray to do it, to be able to do it all, is always my prayer. To pray to find a way to do it all and have balance at the same time and it's interesting because when I started really getting active on Facebook a lot of my friends from back home would be like "oh my god, how did you do all of that in one day, don't you have a child?" you know its like, "and you're doing what now? Where was Solomon?" and people, a lot of people have their reaction to my life, and especially now that I'm divorced and you know I still have I have some days that I don't know if you can really call it a day off cause you don't really get a day off from motherhood, but I have him half of the week but I still pretty much have him most of the week because he's homeschooled for half of the week and I do all of the homeschooling in addition to having a business. It's a little crazy right now. But I just set my day and I just move through it and things just have to happen and they have to fall in place and I honor myself especially more so now than being divorced than when I was married cause I have to honor myself or I'm gonna pass out somewhere and end up in the hospital. I really honor myself in that if I don't feel like cooking, if I really have a head ache, then we'll go out to dinner or I'm teaching him how to cook so he can help put things together. Just really welcoming him into my life and my process. Whereas I think when I was growing up, you were the child, and you know, your parents life, their work life was this big separate thing. And we just can't do that anymore. My mother is three thousand miles away and you know...

AM: There is Nico now feeling her love

SH: [laughter] My mother is 3000 miles away. I don't have family that I can drop him off at in LA. I mean I do have some extended family now just from living in LA over the years. I do have some support but, it's really working with Solomon and telling him that you know we're partners in this. Because I have to be able to be able to work so we can eat, you know, and this is a partnership and this is a, you know, a relationship where what you do influences what I'm able to do, and vice a versa. So I think he really gets that because I pulled him into that process and I've been very honest with him, you know. Even though some of my friends that are more old fashioned you know you only tell your children so much. I just don't believe in that I don't think I need to burden him. I don't bring him into things in a way that he feels burdened or stressed out about it, but just to understand the realities of a typical day and what has to happen. So it is a lot sometimes, but I'm really blessed in that I have friends that we switch off nights you know " you go out this night" "I'll

go out that night” “ I have to work” “can you pick up my child from school” and you know even in the homeschooling situation even though with LAUSD schools being so bad right now a lot of people have chosen these other alternative options and I thought they were gonna be other stay at home moms who would be the other parents who were homeschooling and they’re women with businesses and people in the film industry who work sixteen hour days who are doing this half the week home-schooling. And we all pull together to really support each other in that. So I think the way to do it is really finding. You find your community as you step out on that leap of faith. You find the community you see the other people who are teetering out there with you and we all kind of lock hands and say let’s do this. And it has really been, that’s exactly what its been. You know just going... almost feeling around in the dark until you find somebody else out there and say okay lets do this I can help you get through this, we can get through this . And it’s really been just a wonderful testament to what can be done. And every time I move forward and especially with “Nice and Rough” whenever I move forward with this project not knowing how I’m gonna pay for it, not knowing how I’m gonna have time to do this this this and that the ground just forms under my feet. With every step I take forward and that has been my experience with parenting as well as with this film and I think it’s just a testament to the fact if we put the energy and the intention out there that the universe will support what you do. Which comes back to the oh spirituality thing. Because it’s about what you believe. Do you believe things are falling apart? Or do you believe every thing is coming together? And that’s that glass half empty / half full thing. But sometimes we feel and you know I just told someone that I mentor the other day I said, “the path to success looks exactly like failure” It is not this beautiful clear pristine glorious enjoyable way that you get there. It looks like hell. You know so we really have to decide from in here what we feel is really happening and what we think is really going on. And it’s nice when you find other people in your environment who can reflect that reality and everybody around you is not saying “the sky is falling” “you’re failing” “you need to go teach” “you need to go get a job as a waitress” “you need to stop following that pipedream” you have to have enough people in your life that understand and hold your vision too. So I think that’s the way to get through it.

AM: Have you ever had speaking of that is a great way to think about moving forward but have you ever had specific situations where there were real barriers where people told you specifically like you can’t do this but you sort of went for it anyway and said “yes I can”?

SH: The last twenty years [laughter]. The last twenty years have been like that for me actually because once I left the field of counseling. Once I stopped being a psychotherapist I think in a big way, my mother turned her back on me, in terms of my career, I mean we still have a relationship and that sort of that thing but in terms of my career, she just doesn’t even listen to anything “oh I won an award for my commercial” “oh did you get blah blah blah” you know it’s like like I didn’t say anything. There’s really no acknowledgement or support for what I’m doing because she doesn’t feel its viable. And I think that that’s an issue that a lot of that’s just a parent/child issue. Your parents want you to be successful. They want you to pursue viable paths and they respond in different ways and depending on the generation [laughter] when you step off of that path and I think I’ve been out there kind of on the fringe for a long time for about twenty years now and it’s a very interesting space to exist in long term because I really had to to dig deep you know to really understand who

I am and to believe in what I'm doing and if I do fail I'm okay. And if I do succeed. You know just by continuing on, I'm succeeding, for me [laughter] and you know because I've had such an opportunity to have an impact. And that's the thing is I've always said I don't think that we were born to have jobs with good benefits and retire. We have to make an impact while we're here. We're here to do something more than just to take resources. So that has kind of kept me on the fringe for a long time.

SH: I think that the biggest obstacle is that our society is not set up to support creative professionals on so many levels and in so many ways. And you know in a lot of instances our families and our traditional support systems aren't set up to support us in these creative professions either, so it can be a very challenging space to be in. That's why its so important... someone said the other day "find a mentor." That is such an important thing to do, is to find someone who's doing what you wanna do and see if they'll kind of take you under their wing. You know I went to an event celebrating a tribute to Paris Barclay who is you know produced and directed over twelve hundred episodes of television. You know African American man who's done everything from NYPD Blue to now he's executive producing and directing "Son's of Anarchy" and the one thing that a fellow director said of him was that he was the one person who I went to him after... she felt like she had failed, had this huge failure, and was kind of like where do I go from here and she called him and he said "just shadow me." She shadowed him for three years and got a job just from being on his set. And I can't imagine what that meant to her to be able to shadow another African American director which is a rarity, male or female, in this industry. To just be able to be in the energy. Sometimes we just need to be in the energy of what we want. So I think one strategy is finding a mentor. Putting yourself in the energy of what it is the area that you wanna work in and just really surrounding yourself with people who support your vision. You know a lot of times that's the hardest part because sometimes the people who support your vision are not your family or your childhood friends or those people who were the nucleus of your life earlier on and you have to create a larger community and maybe even a different community to survive in and to be able to thrive and grow in because you can't be the one person in this pool of naysayers. That's just a heart attack and high blood pressure waiting to happen. You know you really have to find loving spaces for ourselves and I think that is the most powerful strategy that a creative can have. Especially in this society, because it is possible, because there is an exception to every rule, because there's that person who did it anyway. There's always someone you can point to who did it anyway, who is there to prove to you that all the naysayers are wrong, that it can be done. It really can be done, but it's all up here (pointing to head). It's all about what we believe, you know, and I've always... I have this quote... it's my one quote I'm proud of that gets re-Tweeted all the time... and it's just a thought that I had that has been very life-changing for me, and it's an affirmation that I wrote is "my life is a manifestation of what I believe." And that's what it's all about. That's it. That's it. That's all we have. We don't have any thing. We just have our beliefs. That's all we really hold, you know, in this life is what we believe, and what manifests around us is a function of that.

AM: So, I'm just going to ask quickly about the conference again because we had the Goddess Medusa and Alice Bag together for the keynote session and they talked a lot about some similar things about how you build that community around you and how you really

try to find... you know master your craft and find people who are doing that... so what messages came out of this conference for you in particular from them.

SH: I absolutely loved Alice Bag and Medusa. I felt like... I have these moments when I go to different events where I feel like "oh I've connected to my sisters," you know "I've connected to my community." And I was Facebooking and Tweeting and, you know, everything through the whole conference... and the one thing I kept saying was "I connected to these wild women." It's just so nice, it's like seeing a sister on the road or a relative when you travel across country and see somebody you know. It's been a feeling of that, you know, coming to this conference. It's just nice to connect with other people who have discovered that... who have discovered those truths. And, I don't know... I think that the most impactful thing that Alice and Medusa brought for me was just that they are still going and reinventing themselves. You know, Alice wrote a book! And she's never seen herself as an author... and I can't wait to read it, and it's so wonderful because I know what it's like to try and tell this huge story in only a few pages... how do you share a life of fifty some odd years in a hundred and some odd pages? Or, you know, how do you pick what to share. How do you, you know... and the vehicle she decided to do it through was through her Violence Girl blog. So you can definitely see who she is and get a feel for who she is through looking at these blogs, because they are chronicling a certain period in her life and capturing an intimate space, you know that she's writing in. But I think it was so courageous of her to decide to do it, because she could have easily held on to those pieces of herself and said "oh I'm not a writer... I can't do it." And, I think that's what inspires me about her. With Medusa, I was so impressed by the work... by how she saw her work in relationship to inspiring other women, and also in helping... you know her connection, I can't remember the non-profit she spoke about, but she works a lot with causes also. And I love it that individual artists now and performers are starting to connect with causes, because they are in such a powerful position. These are the people we admire and the people that we aspire to be like, or wish we had the groove or the rhyme that Medusa has. The ability to convey our feelings in that way... in a smooth way. But, to have somebody like that to be kind of hands on with you in a space, in a setting like that, I think is so important and I just really love that... to be able to see that in both of them, that they are really starting to... it's not just about the music... it's not just about me performing and being in front of an audience and doing my music that I want to do. It's a bigger... they are seeing a bigger picture and a bigger world that they are being a part of and really engaging and touching lives. That was the thing I really enjoyed about both of them. Because, you know, when I was younger, it's nice to meet people, to meet musicians or performers that you admire and you just are in that shallow space of "I love your music!" (laughs). But it's another thing to really have them humanized... you know, these are the issues I care about, these are the things I want to impact in the world. So, I loved that they were accessible like that and were able to share.

AM: Is there anything else about the conference that brought up anything for you, or inspired you further?

SH: I think the only thing I haven't touched on, and I still keep talking about it, and I told Michelle this as well, is I really... You know, the question came up at the beginning of the

conference, I believe Scott Macklin brought it up, about “how can the University connect more, and connect better with the community?” And I thought that that component was a wonderful part of the Women Who Rock Conference... for me as a non-PhD... I mean I have a Masters degree, and I have some... I’ve done some lecturing, but I’m not a college professor, and I’m not of that ilk, so to speak, but for me to be able to be there and be present in the graduate seminar... to be able to hear the papers of the... read the papers of the PhD students and see their proposals, and just understand what’s going on behind the hallowed walls, you know, of academia, what is the discourse? What is the school of thought? What’s being pursued and thought of as important? You know, to be a part of that was so powerful for me. And I was like... oh sure I’ll be a reviewer... I didn’t think about what that really meant until these women... you know and I talked to the different women at various points before the seminar happened and they were all so nervous about their papers and they aren’t finished yet, and it’s really... I can’t imagine presenting something that’s not finished... especially as a writer... I know that feeling and that insecurity. So they were really sharing something, you know from a really intimate space that was unfinished, and that they are passionate about, and it was just some really cool radical stuff. I mean it was so awesome to hear about... to finally hear somebody address the fact that the museums have, you know for instance totally excluded people of color, you know, in a history museum! And it’s not about inclusion, it’s about accuracy. You know, there’s no history that existed without people of color. Not in this country. Or really anywhere. And the relegation of histories of people of color into specialized museums and what that does in terms of funding and access and just all of those questions... it’s just so wonderful to know that the things that I’m thinking about are being thought of somewhere else in the universe, and that somebody is addressing them, and they are addressing them in a way that’s gonna be lasting and meaningful and a dissertation that will be in the library, hopefully that’ll take the form of action in the future and just to understand what the concerns are. And for me to really dialogue with such an amazing group of Chicana women... you know, which I don’t always have the opportunity to do, not to dialogue on this level, and about these sorts of issues. It really helped me to understand... I’ve known it on some level, but to really understand in a more palpable way our shared journey and our shared struggle... you know, they may look a little different, or come in different forms but we share a lot of the same struggles just as women, and it was really nice to kind of bond over that... and then be able to just exchange information and give my opinion or feedback on their papers and to dialogue with the other reviewers there... It was a wonderful opportunity. And I think it’s a great way to... it’s important for academia to be grounded in reality... because it’s easy to be within those walls and pontificate and theorize about things, but to have that grounding of John Q Public in there saying “what about so and so?” And to have an opportunity to offer critique and feedback on what you are thinking, I think is the incredible opportunity on both sides.

AM: And you had mentioned Noralis who is doing a... she wants to do a performance as part of her dissertation.

SH: Yes.

AM: You had mentioned something about how the University might reshape the way it thinks about writing in general and other forms.

SH: Yeah. I... Since we are in this... I mean the world has become this interactive space. So, how can that be reflected in the school system? And at the University level, and especially with dissertations, because it's such a sterile process with the... you know, like you said, down to the font that you type it in... it's very, it's so structured. Which has it's value I'm sure, (laughs), but at the same time, you know, you have to go back to purpose... "what is the purpose of this?" Where does it have a lasting value and an impact? And, I think that the concept of having a dissertation that is part paper and part performance that can be for the public where you can get comments back and feedback and some type of... create a discourse... then that for me is even a greater good... anytime you are creating discourse, you know, and you are getting people to talk about an issue and you are getting feedback on an issue that you are studying and exploring... and you are exploring these issues through different theories, you know, so you gotta test the theory out in the real world, so it's nice to have that component. You know, the concept of making a documentary and having that be a part of a dissertation... because it's something that comes outside of the walls of the University and you plunk it right down into this human space, into this public space, you are going to get feedback. You know, you are gonna get something back. So it's almost like seeing if it has sea legs, you know if it has legs to go, and it's not just all these wonderful thoughts in my head, but here it is in a very real way. Here it is in practice. I think that's a great opportunity for students as well as for the University, to change its... to change the image of education and to open it up and make it a more transparent process or journey. That's not been done before, especially at the PhD level. That's like this little secret box when it comes to the public, and if you make that a transparent experience with the public, I think that could have a huge impact. And it opens up things just for people in the community to see that as an option for them, that I can find this area that I'm passionate about and research it and explore it... cause you were saying the other night.. to really delve into it, and really make it my life's work to answer this one question I've always had... this stirring question... and to dialogue with people about it - not just answer the question in my mind and in my paper, but to dialogue with people about it. You know, I think that's a... that has a stronger impact than me just writing a paper that goes in a book that goes in a library and nobody knows it's there. That's the "if a tree falls in the forest, did it really happen" you know (laughs). I think it could have a huge value, I think it could transform the University's place in the community.