Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Sylvia Lewis, Class of 1974

Interviewed by
Nina Goldman, Class of 2015

May 17, 2014

Abstract

In this interview, Sylvia Lewis discusses her experiences as a member of the class of ’74, which had the largest amount of admitted African American students in Smith’s history. Lewis discusses her first experience at Smith, a party thrown by Smith’s Black Students Alliance to encourage newly admitted Black students to come to Smith. During her time at Smith, Lewis was part of a very active student group who were instrumental in the formation of the African American studies program. Lewis mentions the other contributions of her class, including a Black theater group, the Mwangi Cultural Center, and the Black Alumnae Association.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded using Sony EX1R camera, XDCam format.

Videographer

Video recorded by Kate Geis.

Transcript

Transcribed by Andrew Smith, Audio Transcription Center.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Lewis, Sylvia. Interview by Nina Goldman. Video recording, May 17, 2014. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Sylvia Lewis, interview by Nina Goldman, transcript of video recording, May 17, 2014, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Lewis, Sylvia. Interview by Nina Goldman. Transcript of video recording, May 17, 2014. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Sylvia Lewis, interview by Nina Goldman, transcript of video recording, May 17, 2014, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 17, 2014, with:

SYLVIA LEWIS
Northampton, Massachusetts

by: NINA GOLDMAN

LEWIS: OK, well I have — I do have a very diverse, multi-ethnic family. My mother's people, I call them the Shanghai side, is that they're Chinese West Indian. And they're from Trinidad, and Guyana, and Venezuela, but they're Chinese. And in my film, *From Shanghai to Harlem*, tells the story of how they all ended up in Harlem. So my mother's side is this Chinese West Indian people, and on my father's side, they're black, African American. Creole, they call them. Which means they're African American, Cherokee, and French, I think. So, or European. And so, I was tracing my family story, and making, you know, like a story of it. Tracing, I had heard a lot of stories, and I have a lot of photographs that I inherited, so I used that to create a story. Yeah.

GOLDMAN: Very cool, very cool. (inaudible) All right, I'm just going to give a little intro. This is Nina Goldman, and I'm conducting an interview with Sylvia Lewis, Class of 1974, on May 17th, 2014, for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. So Sylvia, thank you for agreeing to participate.

LEWIS: Thank you, thank you.

GOLDMAN: And in terms of this interview, I would just love to hear how you ended up at Smith.

LEWIS: Oh, OK. Well there's like, I have two stories about that, OK? We always say the class of '74, as you may know, is a historic class. It's historic in terms of African American women. We are the largest ever in Smith's college history. I think over a hundred of us were accepted, 75 of us came and graduated. And so, so the short story of how I actually came to Smith was that when I was applying for colleges, my guidance counselor suggested that I apply to Smith. And so, that's why I applied.

So when I got accepted, the other part of the story is that the women, black women who were in their — there from the early classes, like the two classes before mine, they had recruited us, and tried to get us interested in going to Smith. So that's how I knew about Smith, because other Smithies had been talking to me about Smith. So, they

had a party, the black girls at Smith decided to have a party to entice us to come to Smith. So all of us black girls who were accepted at Smith all decided to come for this quote "pre-freshman weekend." So, and when we came, it was the party of all parties. And back then, and this was — I was still in high school, back then, it was single-sex schools. So there were men everywhere, boys, you know, just all of the schools, all of the surrounding schools. So, it was really a wonderful party, we had such a great time. They put us up in the dorms, and they gave us a big sister, so we felt so welcome and so at home, and we came to this campus, it was just so wonderful that I couldn't even remember what other schools I had applied to, I don't even remember. And when I see some of my high school friends, and they'll say to me, "Oh weren't you supposed to go to Cornell?" And I said, "Really?" I couldn't even remember that, and I said, "Yeah, I guess I was," but I couldn't even remember, because Smith had just taken over my mind. (laughs)

So that's how I ended up coming, is because — and those girls that I came to that pre-freshman weekend, we were all high school seniors, we're still the best of friends. So we've gone through so much together, you know, we came to Smith together for a pre-freshman weekend. And then we came to Smith, and received our wonderful education, and we like to say that we learned a lot from Smith, and Smith learned a lot from us. And we've gone through everything, you know, just becoming — coming into young womanhood, adulthood, getting married, having children, getting divorced, parents, the death of our parents, moving, many careers, I mean just everything, you know. We've gone through all of that together.

GOLDMAN: Can you tell me more about (break in audio)

LEWIS: All right, because I have a list of all the things that we say that we did. You know, I like to say that we changed Smith, Smith changed us.

GEIS [videographer]: Ready when you are.

LEWIS: Oh, OK. So, as you may know that when — during the '70s, especially my class, we were the class where we became very — I guess you would say we had our own self-governing kind of situation. That's when the students became in control and self-governing themselves, and so there were no more parietals, I guess. You know, I don't know if you know what that is, but that means that the guys could go — come into the dorms, you didn't have a curfew. These are things that we had — that we no longer had. But also, with that came that we wanted to self-govern in terms of what we were learning.

And we didn't like what was happening here, Smith College at that time was kind of old-school in that it was still — it was at the end of the civil rights era, so a lot of my classmates, we were seriously radicalized as children, because we were the children of the civil rights era. So we spent our high school years, many of my classmates had to

be escorted to school with armed guards and stuff like that. So, I mean some of — and had to sit in the colored only, and drink from the colored fountains, so some of my classmates had that kind of experience. So when we came to Smith, we did want to start a black studies department. And that was happening on campuses all over the country. And so, we did — I was part of that group, one of the cofounders of the black studies department. So the group of my class, class of '74, we do consider ourselves as the founding students, the student founders of the black studies department. And I did participate in the interview for the chairman of the department, when he was being interviewed, I remember sitting through those interviews when they were looking at candidates. And can you imagine that? We're students, but we are deciding who's going to be the chairman.

And another thing that we formed was the Black Students Assoc— BSA. We started that, and I talk to a lot of the young black girls now, and I tell them, you know, we didn't have a separate black Caribbean group, African group, international group, it wasn't like that. It was really us and them. It was the white people, and just everybody else. So in our group, we had all of the international students, all the gay students, all the — just anybody that was just different was in our group. So it was really an interesting experience.

So, I think that what Smith learned, what we learned from Smith was the whole reimagining and reinventing of ourselves, and exploring what self-governing means, and I think what Smith learned was about how they should embrace change, or can embrace change, and that it really is good, and will be something that would be very impactful and very positive for the future generations. And when I look around the campus now, I see that it was good to do all the things that we did, to do the black studies department, to do the Five College dance company, we started that. To do the Black Alumnae Association. I was the president of the Black Alumnae Association, to do — we had a black theater. We had a, you know, we had — and we were in the theater last night, and we were looking for our productions, we were saying, "Wait a minute, where are our productions?" So I think that we're going to write letters and say, "Well where is all of those productions that we did?" Because that was very dynamic, that was happening at Smith campus, at Smith's campus, it also happened at UMass, and Mount Holyoke, and Hampshire. And we were very engaged with the Five College department, too — Five College community, rather. And I think it's because many of the colleges were just starting their black studies department, which is really a concentration of really American history, but a concentration of — including black American history, and also including African history, and including kind of Caribbean history, too. So.

GOLDMAN: Thank you. I'm just listening, it sounds like an immense amount of responsibility to be a student trying to organize these, you know, Five

College Consortium things, and then interviewing a chair of a, for a department.

LEWIS: And doing our own government, setting up our own government, writing our own bylaws, all of that. And that's — so we always say that we had to spend a lot of time being activists, and being an activist and an advocate is a lot of work. And I would say that it did take away from engaging with the rest of the students, I would say almost engaging with the white students, because when I talk to some of my white classmates, they had no idea that we were like, the first largest black, you know, group of students at Smith, they had no idea, they just thought this was normal. I mean, you know, how else would you know that? Because no one told us while we were there that we — but anyway, it was a lot of work, and I don't even know how we did it. But we did it, because we were very committed, and it was the era, the era of student activists wasn't just at Smith College, it was everywhere. So, we really felt very fortified and really strengthened, and we didn't do it alone. That was another thing, we had groups that were committed to change, and really wanted to do it. So that was really good. So–

GOLDMAN: Which groups were there?

LEWIS: Well, meaning the students, you know, the students were just kind of — I guess you could say we had committees, so say like the students who — I don't know what part of the archives you looked, did you look at the archives when we–

GOLDMAN: I looked at some of the BSA boxes.

LEWIS: And what did you see?

GOLDMAN: I looked at the formation of the cultural center, the — oh I'm forgetting the name, it's–

LEWIS: Oh, the cultural center? OK. Believe it or not, the first cultural center that we set up was in a — it was in a building called Lily White Hall. (laughs) Can you believe that? That's so good. That's like, you know, finally they gave in, and gave us blacks, you know, a multi-cultural center, and it's like OK, you get Lily White Hall. And we're like oh, great, you know, this is just so ironic but, you know, that's Smith. So, it was beautiful too, you know? So we had Lily White Hall, and we had a beautiful sound system, it was a wonderful place for us to engage with each other, and share our culture and everything.

So, and there was another thing that was happening was the food, we had issues about food. We wanted all Caribbean food and soul food and African food. Housing, too, was an issue, where I remember even this reunion, some of us were sitting together and we were saying, oh here we are, you know, we're doing this again, we're sitting, like all

of the black girls are sitting together, but I mean, we missed each other, so — and back then, where we felt — when we felt there was a lot of racism at the school, we really had to bond together to strengthen each other, and to feel supported by each other. So, and we even had a store on Green Street. We even had our own store to raise money to do the activities we wanted to do. We had fashion shows, we had jewelry, we sold our own clothes, because back then everything was Afro-centric, so we had dashikis and things like that. And beads and jewelry, all kinds of things, you know, that we had. And that went with the whole self-governing, self-sufficiency thing going on. So.

GOLDMAN: I think I read a letter from the center coordinator that described the cultural center as a land of blackness in a sea of whiteness.

LEWIS: (laughs) Yeah, it was, it was. And I think that we all had to take turns taking care of it. And we used to cook there, we used to have parties there, we had, you know, just everything, it was just a cultural center, just very much like Mwangi or I see the other affinity groups have cultural centers, but that's the other thing, we were the first affinity group. They never even heard of that. I think that we, meaning the black students of 1974, we identified like that, too, it's like you never heard of us? We're the class of 1974, the largest group of black women ever at Smith, you know, you need to wake up, because if it wasn't for us, you wouldn't have this, you wouldn't have that, da-da-da. So, you know, we have a whole list.

So that's why I said we had — OK, Otelia Cromwell, OK. Now we believe we started it, even though I know you're having your twenthy-fifth anniversary of Otelia. I'm here for my fortieth anniversary, so we believe we started it, which we did, we know we did, because we were the largest group of black women. We wondered about all of the other black women that ever came through here. So we did research, and we found out about Otelia. And of course, you know, her niece also went here, too. So we talked to her, and we found out that that's who it was, and so we would walk around with t-shirts calling — that said the Otelia Society. So we had started this, and we actually kind of — I won't say we confronted, but we tried to make it kind of like a real society, and I don't think we — we didn't get too far with it, but I was really glad to see that years later, I think it was a white male professor that really got it going, which was great because it was something that we wanted to do, we felt that she should be honored, and she was honored, so that was really nice. So that's just like an example of something that we were doing that the college decided to do maybe years — twenty years later, but they're still doing it.

So let's see, what was the other thing? Black studies, Five College, jazz piano, BSA, SACSA [Smith African and Caribbean Students Association], [ALAS?], black theater. Oh, we used to have – I would say this. We had, the black students had a kind of a parallel life. Because we were like, kind of separate from the rest of the students.

And we had our own reunions, believe it or not. So we would come back to campus, we would make our own reunions, because we had our own black alumnae group that was very informal, but formal, where we had our own chairs, vice chairs, secretaries, treasurers, everything. And hardly any budget, but we just made our own budget. And many times, we would bring like at least three hundred people back to campus. And we'd have our own events, and we'd have our own programs, our own agendas, everything. Entertainment, the works.

And so, that's really what got a lot of the — I think that's what got the college more interested in kind of making affinity groups, because they saw that we had this very strong affinity for the college, this really big love for the college, but we felt like we were kind of marginalized from the college, so the college was really making efforts to try to include us in more things. So that where we started out as being really separatist, but into diversity and affinity groups, and really trying to give like the gay women, the Hispanic women, the intern— we were trying to give, make sure all of us had our way of being, and our way of enjoying each other, and sharing with each other, and caring about each other. The college eventually started doing that kind of thing, but before, we were really kind of marginalized and kind of, you know, swept to the side. So.

Yeah, what else did you see in the archives? Because I was wondering if you saw any of the demonstrations that we had? Because our way of having a — well, we didn't have social media, so our confrontations were direct, in your face. You know, we went right up to the president, who was Mendenhall, we went right up to the deans, financial aid, whoever else, whoever was running the school. We confronted them and said, You know what? We don't like this, and we want you to change now, you know? And that was very distressing, I'm sure, for the college. And they were like, oh my God, you know, what's going on here? But we felt very strong about what we wanted, and what we wanted to see. How we wanted to shape our own education, and how we wanted to impact the college. We really wanted to make the college a better place. And I think it really is a good place now. It was a good place then, too, but we just wanted to make it better.

GOLDMAN: Were those demands, how were they usually met by the administration? Did you see change right away?

LEWIS: Well, some — I would say some demands were. Like, for instance, I mean when you think about it, you know, we wanted to go — well say for instance the going to church. We changed that, how your chapel is really very diverse, and very open to everybody but, you know, if you go to a black church, we wanted to go to a black church, and we wanted to have the experience that we — and we couldn't, so we asked the college if they could give us a van, and so they did. And that wasn't hard, you know? They didn't find any problem with that. So some things were easy, like getting — giving us a van to go to church, that

was easy. Including soul food and collard greens in our menu once a week, or once a month, or something. You know, it wasn't hard. So some of the things weren't really that difficult.

Even getting black studies wasn't that difficult. They really embraced it. At first, I think they didn't — and this was before there was women's studies. And it was a mostly male-oriented — I would say we had a male president, we had male teachers, so, you know, it was not really the feminist school that it is now. So in that sense, and when we were challenging some of the things that we were learning in some of the curriculum, that was a battle, because when you have faculty who are male and they feel that, you know, what I'm teaching is the way it should be taught, and then you have these black girls saying, I don't like how you're doing this, they — you know, I remember a professor was saying, I don't even know what you're doing. I majored in psychology, and he said, "I don't even know what you're doing here because, you know, you can't even handle this." And I couldn't believe it. I mean, they — so there were some people, some of the professors we had I — you know, I don't know what planet they were from. But most of them were really very good. Were very flexible.

So I was going to tell you this story about majoring in black studies. I ended up majoring in black studies, a double major in black studies because of the activism. So this is what happens when you protest that you want something, and you get it, then it means that you have to do it, right? So I was studying, kind of studying psychology and thinking I was going to major in it, and I was very radical about getting it, and then when we got it, it was like all of us who were part of that group of students who wanted it said, that means we have to major in it, because, you know. (laughs) You know, we wanted it, we just can't get it and then go on and major in something else.

So anyway, so I said OK. And I think I was a sophomore when we got the department going. So I went to my advisor and I said, "Well, I'm going to major in black studies." And bless his heart, he really — I won't say — he wasn't being racist but was saying, "You know, Sylvia, I don't really think that that's going to be a good major for you, because what are you going to do with it? No one's going to value that education, who cares that you know black history, there's not going to — no one wants to know anything." He just felt like there was no value to that knowledge. And so, he said, "Well, I think you should double major." So I double major in psychology and black studies.

Now, fast forward, I became a journalist, that's what I, you know, my career was. But fast forward, I ended up starting my own newspaper, and it was the largest black newspaper in New York City, it was called the *Caribbean-American News*. And what was it about? Black history, Caribbean history, African history. I mean, it was about all of those topics that Smith embraced and let me study, so all of it, that's what I loved about Smith is that they didn't really, you know, they didn't really know what I wanted, I didn't really know what I wanted to do and why I wanted to do it, but I just wanted to. I was passionate

about learning those topics, about this is my heritage, so I really wanted to know more about black history, Caribbean history, Latina history, women's history. I wanted to learn more about that, and even though the job market was saying, well we don't care about that, you know, but Smith still embraced it and said OK, we'll go for it, and so I'm glad that I did study those topics because, you know, how could I run a newspaper and not have a background like that? So, it really did come in handy. Yeah.

GOLDMAN: Wonderful.

LEWIS: Yeah.

GEIS [videographer]: I have a couple of questions, but let's find out if our next person is here.

GOLDMAN: Do you want — should I run out and–

GEIS: Maybe you should just go check and then I'll just ask one question, and when you come back, we can (inaudible).

GOLDMAN: Great, great.

GEIS: One question I have is what you know about — so you guys were the largest African American class at the college.

LEWIS: Ever.

GEIS: Ever. Can you, do you, what information were you given about what lead to that decision to bring so many students, just the — what they told you, yeah. Is somebody here?

GOLDMAN: No.

GEIS: Oh good, good. So I was just asking about what they were told about the decision making process to admit a hundred women who were of African American descent.

LEWIS: Well, you know, I'm not sure. We weren't really told, all right? It's — because I'm an admissions volunteer, you know, I do a lot of — I'm a very active Smithie, I volunteer, and give, and all that stuff, so — and I know that when, especially since I'm very interested in recruiting and retention, and that was our like kind of code words, that we wanted to recruit black students and retain them. And not only black students, but faculty and staff. That was like our demands when we were students, we were saying, we want more black students. And we didn't just pull this out of a hat, this was something, a platform that the black students, the class before mine, had set up, and classes before them, too, to kind

of maintain our presence. Because we did have a tradition of black women coming to Smith, attending Smith and graduating from Smith.

But, we weren't told exactly, you know, how it happened, but we knew that the admissions will — the admissions department will admit a certain amount of students, just in general, and then not everybody says yes. But we were told though we didn't expect all of you to say yes, that's what happened. All of those Smith women who happened to be black who were accepted all said yes. That's what happened. It doesn't happen like that anymore, because I recruit a lot of black high school kids, women to come to Smith, and a lot of them say no. They get accepted, and a lot of them say no. So, you know, I know that it's a little bit more competitive now, too, so I don't — you know, I don't know, I think it was like some kind of, something in the air or something. So.

GEIS: Second question I have is, you talked about Otelia Cromwell Day. There's a documentary being made, you're probably familiar with it, it's going to come out next year.

LEWIS: I heard about it, but I didn't know anything, you know, about it.

GEIS: I'm interested in what you know about the history that lead up to the creation of the day, and what the — what was the inspiration for it also, aside from, even though you guys had done that research and were already creating a history about, learning more about her, there was incidences that happened on campus that ended up sparking the decision to make this an annual event?

LEWIS: Well yeah, I guess you should understand that there was, when I was a student, I guess today's students too, maybe you hang things on your door, so that was during the, you know, kind of Black Power time, and so you would normally see like, Malcolm X, or Martin Luther King, or kente cloth or whatever. And the students, the white students, would set it on fire. Or deface them, and this is the kinds of things that were happening at Smith during my time. Even after my time, because that's why we kept coming back and having our own separate black reunions, because we wanted to make sure that the black girls who were here, we wanted to hear what was happening, and how they were treated, so we always knew what was going on, from the time that I was here in the '70s, because we were always coming.

And so, I don't know, because I don't know how the — you know, the people who put together the Otelia Cromwell, because no one has ever said anything to me, you know? That's the way it always happens, too, it's like, you know, the people who really started it never get the credit, never get consulted but, you know, we all know, you know, how that got going. And we know that the college was not interested in supporting that. And I was so glad that it probably did take a white male to get it going, because that's how things happen

sometimes, you know, or took just another time and era. Maybe that time was just too polarizing. I'm not trying to make excuses, but I know there was no interest in us doing that, and — but the black students, in fact, I think that two of my classmates still has a t-shirt that says "Otelia Society" so I mean, it's — and we had our own store, and we sold them, so it's not like — and it would be great if whoever's doing the documentary knew about that, because they would know, it was because our class was so large and we were treated so bad, we were like I can't believe this, like what about, you know, the first, you know, who was the first? I mean, where did Mwangi get the name? You know where that came from? So it's just like, that's why we named, you know, the culture center Mwangi Center.

I mean, you know, so we were very interested in our history at Smith. And in fact, some — I had an advisor who actually told me that, you know, we let Negroes in Smith before we would ever let Jews. I mean, I had people tell me that in the administration, you know, people who worked for the college. So, I mean it was just like a different time, we were just like — and it was a different kind of school, too. The school has grown and expanded in so many ways, and it's become so enlightened, when at the people like my group, we were activists and trying to change everything, and wanted to bring down things, you know, now we're the main ones who are on committees, and volunteering for everything, and writing checks to Smith, and sending our daughters here, and things like that. I mean, things did turn around, but while we were here, that's why I tell people, I say, you know, it's OK to say that you love Smith, and then we hated Smith, I loved Smith, and then I hated it, and then I loved it again. So, you know, we kind of went around like that. So.

GEIS: Well, we can share in this material, your interview with the person who's making the documentary, she's right downstairs, so I've been helping her shoot some of this, so.

LEWIS: Yeah, yeah, you could share — I'm fine with that, you can share it with her, because I think that well, one of my classmates, I know she, when I saw her at the last reunion, she had an Otelia shirt that we had from back then, and they also have some of the theater, some of the, you know, the productions that we did in the theater, it used to be that you couldn't be — the students couldn't be on the stage, we had to use the little theater, so we had major productions here, so we're like, where are our posters, you know, so yeah.

GOLDMAN: Well thank you, thank you.

LEWIS: Oh, it's over?

GEIS: Well actually–

LEWIS: Oh, but I was going to tell you that — so we, you know, I wanted to tell you that we, my class is the class that started the Women of Color Emergency Fund.

GOLDMAN: I did notice that.

LEWIS: Did you know that?

GOLDMAN: I saw that on, I think your LinkedIn.

LEWIS: Right.

GOLDMAN: But it sounds like Kate (inaudible).

LEWIS: OK, so I wanted you to know that, because — and the reason why we started, I don't think people realize the reason why we started that, and it had a lot to do with classism. One of the black students here, during one of the times when we came, alumnae came, black alumnae came and visited with the black students, she was very upset, because her mother died, and she didn't have enough money to go home. And she went to, I'm not sure what dean or what office, whoever she spoke to, they made her feel very ashamed, like what, you don't have enough money to go to your own mother's funeral? And so, she was crying and everything, and they passed the hat, and they raised the money to get her a bus ticket. And so, when they told me that story, we were all in tears, we couldn't believe it.

So then we said, You know what? We don't think that's right, and if you feel like the administration is not sensitive to say your cultural whatever, then we'll do this new fund. So, that's kind of like one of the stories behind what made us do it. And also is that we also wanted to do a tribute to Ruth Simmons. So, you know, she — we told her that we were trying to do this, and so she kind of helped us. We — she knew what we were trying to do, and she advised us, and knew we were doing that. So I was really happy about that, and so there was a group of us all in a class, it was just six of us actually, over a weekend, we raised I think about $60,000, and then a white alum had died and left her whole fortune to educate women of color, because she had been a teacher in Washington, D.C., during the civil rights era, and so those funds got put together, so now we have this huge fund, and so now we're not in charge of it anymore. (laughs) Now it's not a little, you know, volunteer committee doing it now, the college is doing it. But we feel really proud of that, because that really helped the college, I think. Because now so many other, you know, girls get a chance to get a Smith education. Or at least have some support. It's not like paying for a scholarship, but it's to pay for those emergencies that come up. So that's, yeah.

GOLDMAN: A question we ask about advice, if, with your experience here, what advice do you have for students today about welcoming people who have different backgrounds?

LEWIS: I think that — well I'm very concerned, today is what, 2014? I'm very concerned that I feel that the college needs to be more diverse. I'm just looking, I'm just here for the weekend, and I'm looking at some, who works at the college. I mean, the college, I think that the administration of the college should be more diverse, and I think that the students, it is getting more diverse, but I think that you should just keep doing that, and keep growing the whole diversity inclusion of your student body, and I'm so glad to see that. I always tell the black students that, you know, my group, we always feel like we didn't get a chance to meet our black class— our white classmates because we were so busy doing this activism that was really retaliating against racism and sexism, and all the -isms you can think of. So we always would tell our, you know, young sisters to make sure you make friends with everybody because, you know, don't get so caught up in your activism, in your affinity group, that you're not friends with everybody because I became more friendly with say, my classmates, the rest of them, really as alumnae, when we would go to events, and I would meet my classmate, and I'd say, You were in my class? I didn't even know you and, you know, so that's what our advice — that's what one of my pieces of advice is. And so that's only one piece.

Or we said, and don't do the sex change until you get to be, you know — I always say that, I say don't do that until you're thirty years old. Don't get married until you're thirty years old, wait before you do anything radical. That's my other advice. And — but I can't help it, I'm just going to say it, you know, just whatever you're going to do, don't do it too radical. Like the tattoos, I know you're going to do the tattoos and the, you know, piercings, but I always say no, just do the henna, you know, just don't do that, you know, but that's just my generation, I guess.

GOLDMAN: All right.

LEWIS: So it's–

GOLDMAN: Well thank you so much, Sylvia.

LEWIS: Yeah, thank you. Thank you. I hope you liked it. I was trying to — I made notes here, I said oh, like OK, we had–

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Andrew Smith, June 2014.