

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**  
**Interview with Dr. Della Mosley**

*Interview by Zoë Martin*  
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DM: Della Mosley, interview participant

ZM: Zoë Martin, interviewer

AR: Alexandra Rutherford, interviewer

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ZM (0:01): Ok, I'll start recording now. [inaudible] So my first question is, what is 'queering psychology' according to you? What does the idea of queering psychology mean to you?

DM (0:12): Yes, thank you. Yes, it means answering questions in the way that feels just right and so when someone says words that just make up your heart smile, and I say yes, that's queering psychology instead of coming with some psychology definition of what queering psychology is. Um, it's something that makes my heart smile. Queering psychology to me, it's like making psychology relevant, making psychology useful, accessible, and inclusive and taking it back and away from this white, Western, white supremacist, male dominant B.S. that doesn't serve us, the majority of us, and making it useful and and going back to some going back to some original Indigenous ways of healing and also queering and coming out with the future of what healing could look like what the kids need and want and are dreaming, you know, so it's like about possibilities for wellness and healing... that's mindful of power, I think.

ZM (1:22): There are already so many things in there like five threads that I want to follow immediately. Um, one thing that I'm thinking about a lot is like, what the connections are or like how overlapped is, um, looking at queerness in terms of gender in terms of sexuality, how much that overlaps with um, like Indigenous ways of knowing and Blackness. And like anti-racism, like, that's a very complex question but how are those things related? Can you separate them?

DM (2:02): Probably yes and no. What comes to me is, is the connection, being around grounded people being like, and like actual like the majority people right so that's like, what, what ties them together to me and then focus on freedom and wellness.

ZM: Yeah absolutely.

DM (2:27): I think that like, think about queering and queerness, and especially around gender, it's like we're everything about anti blackness we think about all these 'isms' and where this all stems from is like trying to create space to be trying to question these new norms that have been created and break them down to go back to something that's more useful and that allows more freedom more play, more people to live in their truth, whatever that is. And so, for gender expansive person to be the gender expansive self doing their work in their way. And helping folks to, like, question the

ways that they're doing and performing all kinds of stuff but especially gender, but like, allowing all of that wisdom that comes from that act that process that knowing that a gender-expansive person has or the knowing that a dark skinned black person has to like disrupt so that things can be like yeah like that's like, this is, this is a space where psychology, like this being psychology is a space where healing can happen for all of us, and the best healing can probably happen because we're pulling from the wisdoms of those who have lived through so much who have had to fight for their way of being who have had to define themselves and like push back against society's way of being, and saying that's not actually what wellness feels like for me. Let's get to what wellness actually feels like, and I've been able to question that and these other ways and now I'm questioning it in this way, and this way, and this way as well... [4:00] Yeah, that's what it makes me think about.

ZM: Yes, it feels like, all of this is an antidote to imposter syndrome. Like, in one sense when you enter academia or whatever you're like, Okay, how should I be? How should I be acting like what parts of myself, am I allowed to bring here? Versus... Like, why do I feel uncomfortable here like, what parts of myself, or you like trying to silence? I don't have a question in there... That's just what it made me think of.

DM (4:35): [snaps fingers] Yes [laughter]. I love that! I love it so much.

ZM: Yeah, thank you for that idea. That's one thing that I feel like it's really important in terms of like being able to bring yourself to something is like so many more ideas are possible if you're in conversation with a whole person.

DM (4:55): Yeah. Yeah. It's like we can make psychology work for all of us I think we can make academia, we can make counselling, we can make mental health, we can make all that work for more of us, if we allow each of us to show up as ourselves for it... but that has that has never been the case. Like and so getting real about who it's been for who's been excluded from it, who's been contorting themselves bending. Some people able to bend some people breaking to try to fit within it, and instead if we can just allow all of ourselves to be, to stretch, to like be to see ourselves reflected... to have the part that is, I don't know, like, there's so much of us that, that we like I just there's so much possibility I think, available to us through authenticity, which I think queering psychology and queerness, and liberation psychology and all of that gives us the pathway and allows us to like re-center around that. [5:49] But it's really so basic so human, so just for everyone. To me, like, and so beneficial to everyone, if, if folks can show up as their authentic selves like, because who is this working for? Who is the way that we're doing counseling working for? Who is the way that we're doing psychological research working for really? Like, does the peer review process that we're currently in? Does the work cycle, does the work day, does the hustle and flow, does the call for performativity work for you or any of the people you know? It works for like maybe two people that I know. And its cis-white men and that's it. And, and there's other men in that group who it doesn't work for as well so it's just like, Let's get off that!

ZM (6:33): Yeah. Agreed. I mean, I, it doesn't work for me. I think it's easy to assume that it works for other people because you're pushed to act like it works for you and you know fake it till you

make it kind of thing. Um, so how, how did you know that for like, how did you come to decide that you were going to make space for yourself in psychology, rather than saying, like, f\*\*k this, I'm going to do something else, or like find another place that already has space.

DM (7:12): Yeah. Um, I came to psychology from working at a job course center in DC with, you know, lots of black and brown queer and trans youth and so me going to grad school was I started with my master's in school counseling and then went on to get my PhD in counseling psychology, but from the day that I went into that interview for the master's program. It was like, I had just seen anti-Blackness trans negativity bi-phobia all this stuff play out in ways that were just diminishing people's emotional wellness, their financial wellness, their everything... their sense of self, their ability to get jobs, and so it wasn't ever... It was like I'm here and it just has to work for the reason that I came here and I, and I'm going to take what works for it and I'm going to go the other places that I need to go to get what I need in order to be able to do the best work for these communities that I'm trying to do work for and to to like push back against these problems that I'm seeing getting in the way of people's wellness and there's so much goodness available within psychology, within school counseling, and within Counseling Psychology for me to use from the research methods to do some of the healing modalities and incredible mentors and people who have so much expertise in working with queer and trans folks, working with black folks etc., so there's a lot of goodness there and then a lot that I had to like, it's like no but doing it this way is not gonna work for these babies [8:45] like I'm holding the students from job or in my head with every class that I'm taking with every project that I'm starting and like, is this going to serve, Caleb? Is this going to serve Paul? Is this going to harm them? Okay, what piece is actually useful here and then I go talk to some other folks to fill some gaps like okay, like yeah there's two pieces of like cognitive behavioral therapy that might work with working with these with black students who are, you know, having trouble, like 'making sense' of some of the like their time and sell some things that are not helpful, but there's also aspects of this that are so deeper, so much deeper than that then let me go find some, some black queer activists who has another way of thinking about motivation, that's I don't have to take the CBT approach to this but I can take that and mix it together and so it was always just like it has to be useful for the people. And, and I want us to queer psychology to the point where we're not only like teaching, like we're decolonizing ourselves by already colonizing our programs. We're doing all of that work, we're bringing in so many more scholars who are excluded But who do healing work, but in addition to that we're helping folks who are training to be psychologist to understand the different ways of getting resources that are outside of this instead of acting like this is the be all end all like, let's put money into the healers in the community to the people who are who are doing healing and these different ways. Let them educate us... Let's go to them and get the job like... how do we teach folks how to find the knowledge that is going to be useful for the folks they want to serve? So it's just always been what I needed and why. And where I'm pushing for for us. Yeah.

ZM (10:16): Yes. Beautiful. So that makes me think of... So Alex has been teaching me about Indigeneity, not as like Indigenous peoples of Canada but as like in Indigenizing psychology... like making it really local. Is that so, when you were talking about finding resources like within your community, how is that involved with queerness? Like, Is that part of your work? I don't know if I have a question. I just want you to talk more about that.

DM (10:49): Oh and I want to hear from Alex. I love that this is the conversation. But yeah, I think that I don't know if I'd say it's, yeah it's part of my work it's part of my work I guess I don't think about as part of the work. But, yeah, I'm very much talking about using your local resources and connecting with the community and whatever. So it's like if you know if it's a student who's coming from New York to come to school at the University of Florida to learn Counseling Psychology, but who intends to return to New York to do the work. It's like, while you're here in Florida, you can learn their practices of community-building of connection of like how to have long term relationships and to be in deep relationship with people, how to work through the challenges that come with that being an outsider coming in, not being extractive all those things, learn all those processes here, and then yesterday, go back to your hometown and do your thing. And I think that's very, very queer because like, like we are always having to find the find collectives find community, find the spaces where it's safe to be, find the spaces where you can get the gems of knowledge, find the spaces where your needs can be met [11:53]. So, like, I don't know, I remember being... When I was working at that job course center so this is like in between my, I got my bachelor's degree hadn't decided to go to grad school yet, and I'm in DC and I'm working with these young folks but I'm also a black queer woman, and in this new area with a small group and so it was always just like journeying around trying to find the, the queer communities the spots that will allow you to allow me to feel like home in some ways, and if that's like not what healing and psychology is about then I don't know what is. So yeah, how do we help folks to find the healing spaces that feel like home for them and that can help them to get the pieces that allow others to receive them as a healing home for them?

ZM (12:47): A concept of home is new for me to think about in terms of psychology or in terms of queerness but it feels so obvious now that you say it. Yeah, like it's about finding home and like, accepting that finding home can be a goal within like, other disciplines. Speaking of which, are you from DC? I'm from DC!

DM (13:15): Oh you are? I'm from Rockford, Illinois, but I just spent like 10 years there probably

ZM: Oh nice, cool.

DM: I love your home!

ZM (13:20): I love it too. I miss it. Um, okay. I don't have an elegant segue here... but I wanted to ask you is queerness changing psychology? Is it, is it happening?

DM (13:40): [pause] Is queerness changing psychology? Maybe. I think the... that the inclusion of more folks who are willing to show up as themselves, and the shift to where spaces are being either forced to or choosing to be more accepting of queerness within psychology is, of course, maybe it's shifting cultures I don't know like change... I don't know... [14:20] these systems are so powerful. These systems are so damn powerful! And so, there's queerness within them. And folks who are trying to queer psychology, and yet. I think, you know, in general to still be successful in psychology

there's a small range of the smaller range of possibilities. And so to say change, to change psychology would be such a big thing like, I would say changing psychology is like fundamentally changing, like I'm thinking big systems change. So I think that is, I think small change matters a whole whole lot and useful small change happening I would say that, that there is... that queerness is changing psychology at the small scale but the systems like big APA, big psychology, big programs big research big grants. I don't know that's the hope but there is a long way to go. And so I think celebrating all of the the small, the small places where the change is happening, and amplifying it and connecting people who are doing those kinds of changes is so, so important, and getting more folks in power, higher up in different levels and spaces and all those areas that I just named is going to be important to actually change psychology [15:42]. And also, I don't know, I think there's a question of is queerness creating something else? Is queerness returning to itself, and, and, or is, I don't know like I think there's lots of ways to play with this question is, psychology changing queerness? Is there something else happening with queerness and psychology like there's another — like, healing justice, for example, feels like the queerest space I know in psychology and it's just like, oof... yes yes yes yes. It's like for all the people, for all the wellness, for all the folks who are fighting for, for the world that is that is good for all of us right and that feels like a queer psychology that's not psychology it's doing something else it's like, I don't know but there's a lot of psychology in it, but psychology is still centering for using psychology even as the term if we're if we're grounding and making psychology or jumping off point, then we're jumping off from something that's not queer, right.

ZM (16:40): Mhm.

DM: So, I don't know.

ZM: That sounds like a good answer! Yeah. Can you like — how would you define healing justice?

DM: Gosh, that's such a tough question I would say, check out Cara Page's work, and people who does... the guy from the Embodiment Institute, I am missing their name but, um, yeah those the folks who are have done a lot of the foundational work in healing justice, I think, Adrienne Maree Brown and others could probably define it a little bit better. My research team and I are doing a study though working with, trying to really understand what the boundaries of healing justice is and sort of isn't and in that work so far well we're coming up with some like preliminary data as we're doing this deep dive with these, we interviewed a ton of activists who do social justice work around a broad range of issues. We kind of asked them about healing justice and what it's like for them [17:43] and how they're moving towards it and what draws them to and that sort of thing and some of the things that are coming up that I would say is maybe a beginning definition of healing justice that's coming from the the Wells Lab at UF, so far is like, making sure that healing is center to all of our work, making sure that as we fight against any oppression that the healing and wellness of the fighters is centered, that community, and is that community and collectivism is process and outcome, and it's about finding a way of being, and living and being in relationship with self, with others, with the earth that acknowledges a relationship, or that strives to be in like, [pause] an honest and health promoting and holistic relationship with, with each other. I don't know, it's like

this. When I'm talking to them I'm hearing about how working on how working on an activism project with a with a team of folks and seeing someone go hard for you [18:56] for the issue that you care about is healing for them like just to be in relationship and watching someone else do something whether or not they have that identity. Either way it matters a lot, but to watch and know that you're not alone in that, that is, I think, I think healing justice is about... Both the stereotypical like traditional healing work that happens in activism type spaces or the folks who are fighting for a better world. But it's also about how those relationships those communities that knowing that I think like a hope installation that happens through being in process is something that we're starting to understand about healing justice [19:33], but there's a lot more people who are a lot more articulate about it but I'm really curious about what we can do and how we can use research to, to help expand and define and share some of the goodness that is in the healing justice community that's not quite in some of our other spaces yet.

ZM (19:50): Coo. Yeah, so like opposite of the like sterile objective psychology research?

DM (20:02): psychology research where the process of they're doing the research the research team the participants, everyone's getting some healing and goodness through it. So I think there's a lot of lessons, so maybe we don't all need to be healing justice folks, I think there's a lot of lessons from healing justice that could be really helpful as we do our research as we do our healing work.

ZM (20:22): Well, I definitely need to do more research on that, that's really exciting. I wrote that down. I have a million more questions, and I've taken a lot of your time up so I don't want to, um, yeah do you, do you want to be done right now? Can I ask you one more question?

DM: I'm fine until 10 to...

ZM: Okay. Okay, um, how will I frame this... Okay [20:51], I'm gonna say a sentence and there will be a question at the end of it, it just I need to think it out loud. So, I'm really interested in like, stories and, like, personal stuff and I noticed that you did your undergrad in English and like I did a minor in English as well. And that feels really important like my relationship to like fiction and stuff like that. And so I guess I'm, I'm curious about how stories are important to you in queering psychology and like Black feminism. Yeah.

DM (21:36): Thank you so much for that question. So yeah I love, I love the English the fiction-writing, all that piece that you're just bringing in and asking about. I feel like this last year has been a lot of work around stories for me, one because the, the theory that I'm most working with right now, from my like dissertation work the critical consciousness of anti Black racism model it like these activists who I interviewed for that made it really clear about this concept of storying survival which is just maps into so many other storytelling is a Narrative Therapy, so many other pieces that we have in the psychology world. And just the oral history of like Black communities but or the oral traditions of Black communities, so I've been working with this, like smaller theory that's within it is called storying survival, and it's Black activists saying that like very clearly how survival can be facilitated through telling your story in a particular way, how you silence how you take space,

how you practice vulnerability, how you choose with whom to be vulnerable with how you do a look that is, that is a story, and a non answer to a question that is a story in itself it's just like, oh my gosh. Yeah, it's a masterful thing, and the story is that there's survival and all of it is survival and what you're advocating for, or having someone bear witness to, or in the silent stance with an attitude that preserves you and your wellness and allows you to survive... like there's just so much magic there. So I love it [23:09]. I gave my, I gave a TED talk on Sunday and it was telling the story of... And it was very much a storytelling session that we have together like this research but also personal stories and it was healing for me and my inbox is flooded with Black folks who are talking about "thank you for that" and that they're experiencing healing and then it's also filled with non Black folks saying okay like the way that you, the way that you told that story and let me see you and gave me the next step of where to go, it's like, thank you I'm on it, I'm signed up I'm in and I'm just like, yeah, so I think storytelling is super super powerful... I love qualitative research I love stories my background was in journalism like in high school, I was a newspaper and in college, one of my side hustlers was working for the entertainment section of our newspaper and just I love finding ways to use words pictures the layout, how do we do, how do we put all this stuff together to tell a beautiful story? And so it was really fun to get to do that in a different way with TED like how do I story, how does this contribute to the story and as you told me about your vision... your brilliant vision for this project, it's like, that's there's so much curation curation in it that is like so many beautiful nuanced elements of how you can tell a story and and the psychology of storytelling that allows people to move towards change right [24:30]? I think that's an area that we need to dig into and that we will be that we can use more of, if we, can queer psychology and stop thinking it's stats or nothing [24:44]!

ZM: Wow, thank you so much. That's beautiful and this is making me emotional a little bit um... these conversation have... What are you saying, Alex?

AR [24:53]: It's like, we gotta change, we gotta change the hegemonic story, right? We've gotta counter-story, we gotta counter narrative.

DM: That's right.

AR: And it's so powerful to do that.

DM: It's everything! And creating spaces for folks to do that. It's so... that's healing justice.

ZM: Agreed. [25:14] I think we're done the recording question [inaudible], or Alex did you have anything to say or Della did you?

DM (25:25): [shakes head] Thank you.

AR: thank you.