Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Dr. Katherine Hubbard

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KH: Katherine Hubbard, interview participant
ZM: Zoë Martin, interviewer

ZM: What does queering psychology mean to you?

KH: Queering psychology, to me, means disruption. It means doing something a little bit different. It means doing something against the kind of standardized norm. It means looking at psychology, or psychologies, from perspectives of affirmative, feminist perspectives, affirmative queer perspectives, thinking about LGBTQ people in a new kind of way.

And not only seeing queer people as the kind of objects that psychology studies, but coming from a position of being queer and actually using psychology as a tool. And so kind of like turning the lens sometimes back on psychology. That's - to me, that's what queer psychology is all about.

ZM: Cool. So, is critical psychology more likely to be queer than other psychology?

KH: Yeah, I think so. I think that - I think critical psychology isn't necessarily queer, but I think queer psychology is kind of inherently critical. So there's that Venn diagram, I think of coverage. Um, and I think core psychology at its root is critical, and it is looking at things from different perspectives, and I think because of that back can contribute so much more psychology.

01:35

ZM: How important is queerness as like a sexuality or gender identity in queering psychology?

KH: Oh, that's a toughie, because I don't think... I don't think it's like... A main ingredient that's necessarily required, but it's a main ingredient that really, super-duper helps. And so it's got something to do with trust, I think. So psychology has obviously had quite a pathologizing and difficult history with queer people, and continues to do so. So I think that we need to be careful not to think of that history as over. It's very much still a present concern. You know, in Britain and in the U.S. and Canada, there's a range of conversations at the moment happening around conversion therapy and stuff.

So this is an ongoing history, and one that hasn't ended. So I think at its core, there's trust issues between queer populations, queer people and psychology as a discipline. And so coming from a lived experience and a queer identity yourself and contributing to psychology, or coming from a psychology perspective, you are managing to kind of bridge those trust issues a little bit. And I think that there is so much to be said about having a lived experience and understanding of something. I know that from

coming from kind of positivistic perspectives in psychology, this idea that you must be separate and far away, and that makes you objective, and "I'm not biased because I've got nothing to do with this thing I'm looking at."

I think at its core, that's deeply problematic. And actually, I think that in order to come from an, an area of real expertise, often that comes from your own lived experience, your own knowledges, and, you know, thinking about - as I often do, thinking about the work of Donna Haraway and the idea that we have situated knowledges, and, you know, there's no ability to have all knowledge over something.

So valuing the situated knowledge that comes from queer people in psychology - I think that's really important.

ZM: Yeah. That brings me to like, two kind of forking off ideas. One of which is about: How public should your or does your lived experience need to be, in order to be helpful in queering psychology? And the other of which is like, That Evelyn Hooker and - Oh, I already forgot the other person's name. Macintosh. Macintosh.

KH: Yeah. Mackintosh. Yeah.

ZM: Evelyn Hooker and Macintosh's relationship as... a presumably not queer person and a queer person and their relationship in queering psychology. Okay. That's two separate things. I don't know if you - if one of them is more interesting?

KH: And so I guess the first one is kind of, like... almost like: how 'out' do you have to be to be within this kind of perspective? And I don't think that's, like, a requirement of any kind of thing. I think that there's ways to do things in smaller or subtle ways. And I think that you don't have to have like, set identities and yourself to be queer. That's the wonderful thing about the word queer, is that it is so broad and ambiguous.

And for me personally, it includes ideas around gender. It includes ideas around sexuality, and it also has that kind of political leaning around its reclamation. And so that's the wonderful thing about the word queer, is that it means so much, but it doesn't actually directly attach itself to anything specific. And that's the value of that word for me. I know it has different connotations for other people, but for me, that's where it's really positive. And it's kind of a useful term.

The second part of your question, I've been thinking about Evelyn Hooker compared to Mary Macintosh. Yeah. So Evelyn Hooker was not only - She framed herself and understood her position to having to be so deeply heterosexual. And, you know, in her words, had to be "as pure as the driven snow" in order to be able to do the research she did in 1957 and the late 1950s. And so her identity in that regard is crucial to her work because it has to - she has to demonstrate that apparently objective position that psychology at the time - I mean, arguably still kind of wants - to have. Whereas Mary Macintosh Tosh was so... so embedded within activist circles at the same time that she was, you know, beating her PhD and doing her academic work, that - actually that by that point had framed differently. So, see, the timeframes are

a little bit different between the two and those identities were crucial to both of them for very, very different reasons.

ZM: Am I remembering correctly that that's in *Queer Ink*? I think, I don't know if you remember the chapter numbers, but I think chapter six, where you look at letters between them [Hooker & Macintosh]... and how Evelyn Hooker is kind of a mentor for Mary Macintosh, and there's this interesting dynamic where Hooker's, assuming that Macintosh is straight, and just being like, "you'll be okay with the queer people." Like, "that's fine."

KH: Yeah! My favorite bit of that is how she's kind of like, "I don't know how easily *you* have access to these communities....."

ZM: Yeah (Laughs).

KH: And she's kind of talking from someone who had access to these communities, you know, through relationships and friendships and things. But at the same time, Mary Macintosh isn't able to — Even though she knows Hooker's perspective and history on this, she still isn't in a position where she can write a letter and say, "Oh, here'," - you know, she can't out herself. And then also say, like, " don't worry about it; I'm down at the Gay Liberation Front, you know, every other week, and it's all going to be fine. I know loads of lesbians!"

So it's, yeah, it's about all of that kind of thing. The — the dynamics of outing and situatedness within the community is quite complex.

ZM: That's so stressful. I feel like that's something that comes up, like, not just in terms of queerness, but in... in terms of, like, professionalism, and yeah — Just having to balance who you are, and being a genuine person and using, or talking about, your lived experience, and also being the type of person who is... respected, or who is 'appropriate' for this type of job or career or field.

KH: Mm. It's really hard, yeah. Because you want to change the system, so that psychology is a place for everyone. And at the moment, psychology isn't a place for everyone. It's like, super great if you're, like, a middle-aged white man. You know, there's, like, straight and cisgender. That's the kind of roadmap, you know: you don't face any barriers. And that isn't what we want it to look like. And then in order to do that, we need there to be greater representation, but then that requires all of this work for people, to do all of this outing and recognition and looking at different perspectives and saying how valuable it is, and it's tiring! And it's a lot of emotional labor doing all of that. Yeah, it's a bind.

09:20 People Queering Psychology

ZM: Yeah. How do you feel like — can you think of any examples of how people have been doing that work in a very visible way? Like, how have people queered psychology lately?

KH: I mean, I was so lucky to have Peter Hegarty as my PhD supervisor, and he taught me as an undergrad, and, you know, he taught me... From, you know, really influential days, and he was such a fantastic - and continues to be such a fantastic mentor, that like, he — I feel like he has done academic work, he's done that personal work, ... he's done so many different areas to kind of do this good,

affirmative queering and psychology, and to... you know, the way in which he has worked with, junior colleagues and his PhD students and stuff to really kind of like lift them up and help... to me, he's like one of those people that has done it really fantastically... both in his publications and in the way he is, just as a person teaching, how he is at conferences, how he is in organizational meetings. He's so aware of, you know, different intersections that are going to affect people or their ideas, and how to turn things on their head.

It's just incredible to go to a meeting with him, to suggest an idea and to see his enthusiasm for your absolutely bonkers career idea. And he just lets you run with it and just helps you in all the ways that you can. So, um, I think he's one of the people that has been really influential on me and certainly has helped kind of queer psychology and do good queer psychology, for sure.

ZM: Cool. So, yeah. Soft skills are something that I've been really focused on since starting this Masters (I'm doing a Master's at York University). and I feel like there's not as much of a place for it, or... that feels like an important thing to focus on or ask questions about. And it doesn't seem to be... like, when I say things like that — like, talk about how a meeting is going or how we talk to each other, I feel like it often gets redirected to what the content is. Or what our tasks are supposed to be. Do you feel like the relationships among academics... is that an aspect of queer psychology, or queering psychology?

KH: There's definitely those elements to it. That's really, really important. So, I think being queer in psychology and academia — I'm actually in a sociology department at the moment. And then I've been in psychology up until about five years ago. And so I still do psychology, but from very much a perspective of looking *at* psychology... the interdisciplinary kind of boundaries between psychology, sociology, and history. And so I kind of sit within that gap, really.

So for me, it's been really important and really vital to find queer communities whose work I am similar to and I'm situated within, and finding your people can be so important. I think that's one of the key factors that mean that people can continue on in psychology and produce good work and, you know, be valued and find the place that they feel comfortable, within academia. So yeah, my interpersonal kind of friendships and relationships and my mentor relationships with other queer people — you know, lovely, lovely, you know, trans affirmative people, people who are just embracing of queerness and difference has been absolutely crucial.

So those interpersonal relationships, and, like you say, those kinds of soft skills have been really vital for me in terms of survival. If we think about our kind of Sara Ahmed, like, feminist survival kit... For me, in my survival kit are the friends and colleagues that I work with, who are queer, who are fabulous, and who are so supportive in kind of recognizing general sexuality, and what it means to kind of bring those things about yourself, to your work.

ZM: Do you think that those relationships or soft skills are less important to white cis male psychologists, or...?

KH: Yeah. I think the fact that we have these networks and these networks of women and, like, gender non-conforming people... you know, nonbinary people, and everyone kind of is connected in some way.

You know, you're sort of like... six degrees of separation... and you have these kind of queer clumps and queer communities and queer networks. It is... those things are vital for survival because the system isn't set up completely for those things to exist easily on their own and in isolation. And I think that that support network is needed because the system isn't... completely fair. There are substantial issues and institutional racisms and all sorts going on that those networks and — that sense of community is just - feels really important.

ZM: (sighs wearily) Agreed.

KH: Laughs.

15:03 ZM: How do you find it? How do you find queer community in the psy disciplines?

KH: Um, I have found it easier, kind of slightly - really on the edges of psychology. In my interdisciplinary world I have found it really much more comfy, and I'm finding more of my people.

So I have like, you know, like a little academic book club, where we look at loads of, like... It's mainly historical, but we're also touching onto fiction, and we do lots of like, trans histories and sort of like, we look at gender from really diverse perspectives. And that kind of thing has been really helpful and really wonderful, and I really enjoyed those meetings and all the books that we read, but they're very much not psychology.

And same with sociology. I've found some of my, you know, closest friends right now within my current department, and my collaborators. And so they come at, we might've worked on something about psychology together, but I'm coming from the psychological perspective and they're coming from a kind of like, cultural studies perspective.

And actually, that's been so valuable to share that knowledge across those boundaries. So yeah, I definitely find the interdisciplinary, uh, places where I fit best.

ZM: Nice. Yeah, I agree with that too. Same.

KH: Do you feel like you've got your little - do you have a little hub? Do you have a little network of people?

16:36 On Narrative

ZM: I don't think so. So yet, but I feel, I feel like my eyes are peeled for that kind of thing. And, like, all the best conversations I've had are kind of like, again on the edges of multiple disciplines. So one thing

that I've been really interested in is storytelling and narratives, and I'm not yet sure how well that can intersect.

I feel like reading Queer Ink was a helpful way of sort of feeling that out, or figuring out, like, into it. History is not generally very accessible to me. Like, the format of it tends to feel - it just goes through my head really easily because it often doesn't feel like a story, but I feel like the way you do history is like storytelling, or like narrative building.

And so that's interesting that you're doing a book group that includes a lot of fiction. Like, that feels really important to me in the realm of Queerness and querying things and feels like a good way to queer psychology or other sciences. And I was wondering: What role does narrative or storytelling play for you? Why is that important, or how is it important?

KH: Yeah, I think, I think narrative and storytelling are absolutely crucial and absolutely critical. Mainly because I think that often it's really easy to think about history as if it's just literally the things that happened in this order, and they cause these other things. And I think it's really important to recognize that actually, who gets to tell history: who decided when the start, middle, and end of that history was? What is the overall tone of that history? Are we like, "whew, this great thing happened!", or are we like, "tragic thing happened."? Are we saying "This thing did cause this thing,"? All of that isn't... That is all narrative. That's all storytelling, that has all, kind of like author perspective, author interpretation. This is - that's all, it's all made up. It's just all constructed. It's all made up. Things have happened, but the ways that we talk about them, you know, colloquially, or just kind of chatting to one another, it's written down in text... All of that is narrative.

And the way that often history is written attempts to strip and pretend like that isn't there. And I think that's really problematic. Again, going back to kind of our Donna Haraway, like we need to have our positionalities, and you need to be clear about what your perspective is. You know, there's no such thing as 'The History', what we can have as a collection of 'Our Histories'.

And that tells us something about what happened. And so for me, narrative is really important. And I think that it's also what makes us interested as people, as humans, you know? We are interested in stories and we want to know things that happen to real people. And so hopefully in the book, I'm really clear that it's our history and it's from this perspective, and there's the ways in which I've asked questions and interpreted things.

But also, I've tried to introduce people to the, the wonderful, incredible individuals that I met in an archive, and kind of bring them to life a little bit as best I can, but also to kind of give them up to other people and say, "Oh, I found this," like, "What do you think of this?" And I think that that's a really important part of it.

And so, yeah, in all, I just think narrative and storytelling is effectively what we have, it's all narrative. And yeah, we need to just be open about the perspective that we share. Because, I mean, the problem is that often when the perspective isn't shared and it's seen as this objective view, that's this is the God trick. It's this idea that like, no one wrote it, and that's really problematic. We need to... I think we need to really identify where perspectives are coming from much more regularly. And shift away from this idea that if you have a perspective or a particular experience that it's in any way bias, like, remove that idea

completely. Pretty much everyone is biased, and we've just been listening to like, you know, like I said, all, white, straight, cisgender dudes being apparently 'objective' and 'non-biased' the whole time. And we can look back at that and say, "Oh, that was really biased and really problematic." And then contribute something from our own perspectives in a more useful way.

ZM: Yeah. I feel like creative writing is an important skill to have as a historian or a psychologist or something like that. Like, I don't know what defines what delineates like creative writing versus other writing skills. But I - I feel like the balance between being clear about the... your positionality and where your information is coming from, and also being engaging and personal is such a fine balance. Like, I noticed, I was rereading one sentence - because I was sleepy - from your book, and I realized that you were saying something like... "she said that they said that she said this", and, and yet, like, when I first read it, it was just very naturally... Telling me what these words were, and what this person's story was. And I feel like being able to do that is really important. And I guess I'm kind of deviating from asking you about what querying psychology is to just talking about the process of what an effective or like, engaging psychology is that's not objective and straight and white and cis. Is there a question in there? I don't know.

KH: I definitely found the writing challenging. So during my PhD, I had someone say, "Well, I think you might be dyslexic." And I ended up signing to go through dyslexia tests, and then not going through with them for a number of different reasons. I received some bad advice, and so I actually didn't get a formal diagnosis until, like, I've been a lecturer for a couple of years. And so I've had to kind of really relearn how to write and how to write accessibly. And because when I write what's in my head, it's just an absolute mess for other people to read.

And so I've had to really kind of like, learn basic structure and thinking about... maybe that's why I think about narrative more; because I really am trying to work out very consciously, because it's not automatic for me: What is the story I'm telling? What are my key points? What are my topic sentences? Where's my evidence? How do I structure this entire thing? And so that was a very kind of practical skill that I had to pick up. So when I was writing the book, I had this A3 sketch pad open. Where I was like: what are my titles? What order they go in? Like, trying to make it much more visual because it's not the kind of thing that I can just look at a blank page in that.

But yeah, I really, it's very sort of clearly structured and organized around those things to try and do it. Because it's, it's hard to do, and there's definitely going to be areas in the book, I think, "Oh, I could've done that differently" now, but it's something I'm really proud of because it was a big challenge.

ZM: Good! Yeah. I don't know if this is more for me or the interview now, but I really appreciate hearing about people's processes. Cause I think... especially as a student, do you have the sense that people write like brrrrRRRP! [speedy sound] on a blank sheet of paper? I doubt that's actually how it happens.

24:23 On Queerness Changing Psychology

I think you've sort of answered these questions, but I want to ask them more specifically: Do you feel that queerness *has* changed psychology, or that it *is* changing psychology?

KH: It's certainly contributed to psychology in really important ways, and I think that it has the potential to do so more and more. Um, I think at the moment it feels difficult to kind of imagine, because of the ways in which power within disciplines all functions and works.

And so it's kind of difficult to comment on the kind of futures of it and what it might do later on. You know, fundamentally huge disciplines that are powerful, like psychology and like other disciplines and medicine... You know, they do want to maintain the status quo, and queerness at his absolute core is about disrupting those boxes, those categories, that organization. And I think that psychology is just so keen on a nice, clear categorical box that actually queerness inherently is about removing those kinds of boundaries. And so actually, fundamentally they might not always get on that well, but I think that historically we've seen that queer approaches have had huge advantages and has moved psychology on new and interesting and more kind of creative ways. But I'd be interested to see how it moves in the future.

Because... I sort of recently been reflecting more and more on how social change happens and how things change within disciplines. And it's becoming more apparent to me that often that change doesn't happen from within. That change often has to happen from outside. And so I don't think that psychology will fundamentally become incredibly queered from its own organization. I think that it might become incredibly queered through outside groups. You know, making sure that psychology is beginning to make changes, to be more inclusive and to change the systems.

Fundamentally of course, all disciplines are not... they're not like these things out in the world from a realistic - from a realist perspective, they don't grow on trees, and they're not like rocks, like a geologist study. We have such a strange discipline in the ways in which as psychology, we study psychology or psychologies. So I like to use the distinction between the 'big P Psychology and the little p psychology, which is the Richards distinction. Um, so thinking of big P Psychology as 'the discipline', 'the formal organizations', 'a psychologist'. And then, um, the little p of psychology is actually the psychology that each of us have in our minds and psyches.

And so the looping between those two, I think, is vital to recognize. And we need to also remember that the discipline isn't something you can block off a tree and then exist in the real world; it's made up of individuals. And so a discipline can change through those individuals, but it's just challenging to do from within all the time. The structures are there to maintain what it is, and not necessarily to have a kind of anarchist shift in direction.

ZM: I hadn't thought about that. I liked the way that you framed that - psychology fundamentally, at its core, is a discipline that wants to maintain order and simplicity and status quo, and queerness is fundamentally opposed to that. So, I guess I can imagine psychology being improved by queerness because queerness comes in and messes it up a little and, then it has to figure out how to organize itself in any way. That's pretty impersonal in terms of a way of conceptualizing it. Does that make sense?

KH: Yeah, to be honest with you, like you said; you hadn't thought of it like that before? I don't know if I thought about it like that before, it was just like, as I was talking, I was like, well, actually I think that these... and it's not just psychology that is maintain(ing) the status quo. Like all institutions and disciplines are trying to do that in some way.

I can't help, but reflect on all the things that have happened in the last year or so that I'm just so hyper aware of. As, you know, just, it feels like we're getting bombarded with examples at the moment that show that institutions do not want to fundamentally change, um, for good social reasons. They are being forced to try and recognize the issues because of social activism and the work of amazing people, but that... there's just been so many examples lately that I think I'm becoming a little bit of a pessimist about changing things from the inside. I think that we maybe need a more of a radical approach.

29:24 On Disruption

ZM: Agreed, but I think that somehow this conceptualization makes me see more possibilities for change. Like, the idea of, kind of, in the same way that, like, when you have like a toddler who's having tantrums and you understand that tantrums are a function of who they are and their anxieties or something like that, like, understanding a scientific discipline or whatever, as something that's inherently seeking order and like, "Okay, buddy, that makes sense." It feels like conceptualizing of it that way makes it - gives more potential for figuring out how to mess it up with queering and other like forms of disruption, like yeah. Anti-black racism or Anti-racism, not anti-black racism.

KH: Yeah. I know exactly what you mean, yeah. And I think that's why finding your communities within your kind of workplaces, within your, you know, professional kind of area within academia. That's why that community could be so important. Because if you are trying to do that disruption, like a lot of queer people in psychology, you're trying to do - or people coming from queer perspectives are trying to do... it can feel very isolating, but having that community and that connection with other people, it bolsters you, it gives you that support.

And we also need to kind of like... Share the responsibility and the baton sometimes, you know, like, burnout's a real thing, and we need to make sure that when we're trying to make good change, we're doing so in a way that our resilience doesn't get worn down too much. You know, the importance of self-care, if anything, in the last year, you know, it's taught us that we really needed to look out for ourselves and we need to look out for our fabulous communities as well. Our friends, you know, people around us.

31:27 The Benefits of Queering Psychology

ZM: Agreed. Easier said than done, but agreed.

KH: Yeah.

ZM: Yeah. What is queering psychology?

KH: I think queering psychology is about disrupting a kind of cishetero sort of norm within the discipline and recognizing that we need to come from perspectives that... I think that it's important to basically remember the histories of psychology and queer people, and how problematic they have been. Psychology has enacted violence upon queer people in the past and continues to do so in some ways, or at the very least psychology is used as a tool by others to enact violence.

And so we need to - we owe it to queer people to, you know, do some of that work to make that up as best we can, you know, to, in order to kind of really reframe things in future and make things better. So I think that we need to recognize that history. We need to value queer perspectives as being vital and important. And I think it's important to, you know, disrupt to the norms within the entire discipline.

ZM: So you talked a little bit about how psychology can benefit queer people. Kind of like, we can do better than we did before, like undo harms or - not undo harms, but rectify harms, potentially. But can you think of... can psychology offer queerness or queer people positive things beyond rectifying past harms?

KH: Hmm. So I think the important thing is that it's not about psychology attempting to give queer people something that psychology thinks is important. It's instead about offering up the tools that psychology does have, and seeing which ones queer people themselves want to pick up, and want to use, and will find helpful themselves. So if we open up psychology, if we push, you know, the boundaries a little bit, and if we become more interdisciplinary, if we think critically, if we kind of push on these things and we are more inclusive, it means that queer people will be able to have a little look inside the toolbox and pick up what's helpful for them.

I think that's what we need to do. Psychology has had, you know, centuries of history and has things to offer people. Let's make it accessible, so people can find what is going to work for them. Whether that's, you know, a pickaxe so they can chip at psychology itself, or whether it's a therapeutic tool, or whether it's, uh, a strange Rorschach inkblot, like I used[1]. If it has something that queer people can find helpful, then that can be good. But it's not about dictating to queer people what they should take from psychology, but opening up and allowing queer people to take what they want and what will be useful for them.

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[1] In the book *Queer Ink.*