

**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 (0:00): What is 'queering psychology' according to you? What does the idea of queering psychology mean to you?

DM (0:11): Yes, thank you. Yes, it means answering questions in the way that feels just right and so when someone says words that just make 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 original Indigenous ways of healing and also queering and coming out with the future of what healing can 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 (1:21): One thing that I'm thinking about a lot is like, 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. That's a very complex question but how are those things related? Can you separate them?

DM (1:45): Probably yes and no. What comes to me is the connection, being around grounded people being like... and actual, like, the majority people. That's what ties them together to me, and the focus on freedom and wellness...

ZM: Yeah, absolutely.

DM (2:09): I think that when you think about queering and queerness, and especially around gender, everything about anti blackness ... we think about all these 'isms' and

where this all stems from is like trying to create space, 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). For a gender-expansive person to be their gender-expansive self doing their work in their way. And helping folks to 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, this is, this is a space where" — '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 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!" I've been able to question that in these other ways, and now I'm questioning it in this way, and this way, and this way as well. Yeah. That's what it makes me think about.

ZM (3:45): Yeah! 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? What parts of myself am I allowed to bring here?" Versus... Like, "Why do I feel uncomfortable here? What parts of myself are you trying to silence?" I don't have a question in there [*laughs*]... That's just what it made me think of.

DM (4:16): [*snaps fingers*] Yes. [*laughter*] Love that! I love it so much.

ZM (4:23): Yeah, thank you for that idea. That's one thing that I feel like it's really important in terms of 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 (4:37): Yes. 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 of it work for more of us if we allow each of us to show up as ourselves to it... but that has never been the case. 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 see ourselves reflected... to have the part that is, I don't know... there's so much of us that... there's so much possibility available to us through authenticity. I think queering psychology and queerness and liberation psychology and all of that gives us the pathway and allows us to re-center around that.

But it's really so basic, so human, so, just, *for everyone*, to me, so beneficial to everyone, if folks can show up as their authentic selves. 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? For any of the people you know? It works for like maybe two people that I know. And it's cishet white men and that's it. And there are other cishet men in that group who it doesn't work for as well, so it's just like, let's get off that!

ZM (6:15): Yeah. Agreed. I mean, 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. 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 (6:51): 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 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, 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'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 push back against these problems that I'm seeing getting in the way of people's wellness.

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, "nope, doing it this way is not gonna work for these babies." Like, I'm holding the students from Job Corps in my head with every class that I'm taking with every project that I'm starting and I'm 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, yeah, there's some pieces of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy that might work with these with Black students who are having trouble, like, 'making sense' of

some of the ... like, they're telling themselves some things that are not helpful. But there's also aspects of this that are so much deeper than that. Then let me go find some, some Black queer activists who has another way of thinking about motivation, so 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 I want us to queer psychology to the point where we're not only teaching... so we're decolonizing our syllabi, we're decolonizing 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 psychologists to understand the different ways of getting resources that are outside of **this** (*institutional/hegemonic psychology*) instead of acting like **this** is the be all end all. Let's put money into the healers in the community to the people who are doing healing in these different ways. Let them educate us! Let's go to them! How do we teach folks how to find the knowledges that are going to be useful for the folks they want to serve? So it's just always been what I needed and what I'm pushing for for us.

ZM (9:54): 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 in Indigenizing psychology... like making it really local. Is that...? So, when you were talking about finding resources 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 (10:24): Oh and I want to hear from Alex, too! This is awesome, I love that this is part of 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 it 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 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 the practices of community-building, of connection, of how to have long term relationships and to be in deeper 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 yeah, still go back to your hometown and do your thing. And I think that's very, very queer, because [*laughs*] we are always having to 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. So, like, I don't know, I remember being... When I was working at that Job Corps center so this is like in between my, I had gotten 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 in this new area with a small group and so it was always just like journeying around trying to find 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 in 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 (12:23): That 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 (12:48): Oh you are? I'm from Rockford, Illinois, but I just spent like 10 years there probably

ZM (12:53): Oh nice, cool.

DM (12:54): I love your home!

ZM (12:58): 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 (13:16): [*thoughtful pause, repeats*] Is queerness changing psychology? Maybe. I think ... 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 going to be shifting cultures... but I don't know, like, "*change*"...? I don't know... these systems are so powerful. These systems are so damn powerful. And so, there's queerness within them, ...

ZM (14:07): Mm, right.

DM (14:09) : ...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 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.

I think small change matters a whole, whole lot and I think that there's a lot of beautiful small change happening. I would say 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. And also, I don't know, I think there's a question of is queerness creating something else? Is queerness returning to itself? 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 good for all of us. That feels like a queer psychology that's not psychology; it's doing something else... There's a lot of psychology in it, but psychology is still centering... if we're using psychology even as the term, if we're if we're grounding and making psychology our jumping off point, then we're jumping off from something that's not queer.

ZM (16:19): Mhm.

DM: So, I don't know.

ZM (16:23): That feels like a good answer! Yeah! How would you define healing justice?

DM: Mm. Gosh, that's such a tough question. I would say, check out Cara Page's work, and people who do... the guy from the Embodiment Institute, I am missing their name but, um, yeah, 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 isn't and in that work so far what we're coming up with is some 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 asked them about healing justice and what it's like for them, and how they're moving towards it, and what draws them to it 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 Wells Lab at UF, so far, is making sure that healing is central 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 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 [pause] an honest and health promoting and holistic relationship with each other. When I'm talking to them I'm hearing about how working on an activism project with a team of folks and seeing someone go hard for you, for the issue that you care about is healing for them. 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, 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... I think, like, a hope installation that happens through being in process is something that we're starting to understand about healing justice. But there are 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 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 (19:29): Cool. So like, the opposite of sterile, objective psychology research?

DM (19:37): Yes, yeah. 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. I think there's a lot of lessons, so 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 (19:59): So, I'm really interested in stories and personal stuff, and I noticed that you did your undergrad in English, and I did a minor in English as well. And that feels really important. My relationship to 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 (20:38): Thank you so much for that question, Zoë. I love the English, the fiction-writing, all that piece that you're bringing in and asking about. I feel like this last year has been a lot of work around stories for me. One, because the theory that I'm most working with right now, from my dissertation work: the critical consciousness of anti Black racism model, these activists who I interviewed for that made it really clear about this concept of **storying survival** which maps into so many other... storytelling pieces, Narrative Therapy, so many other pieces that we have in the psychology world. And just the oral history of like Black communities, 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 very clearly how survival can be facilitated through telling your story in a particular way, how you use 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 in itself, and a non-answer to a question that is a story in itself, and it's just like, oh my gosh. You know, it's such a masterful thing, and the story that there's survival in 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. 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, 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.” 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. In high school, I was in the newspaper and in college, one of my side hustles was working for the entertainment section of our newspaper. I just, I love finding ways to use words, pictures, the layout — 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 does the look 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 in it that is like so many beautiful nuanced elements of how you can tell a story and the psychology of storytelling that allows people to move towards change, right? I think that's an area that we need to dig in to and that we can use more of, if we, you know, queer psychology and stop thinking it's stats or nothing!

ZM (23:46): Wow, thank you so much. That's beautiful. This is making me emotional a little bit. Um... these conversations ... What are you saying, Alex?

AR (23:56): We gotta change the hegemonic story, right? We've gotta counter-story, we gotta counter-narrative.

DM (24:02): That's right!

AR (24:03): And it's so powerful to do that.

DM (24:04): It really is. It's everything! It's everything. Creating spaces for folks to do that. It's so... *that's* healing justice.