



**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Victoria Clarke**

*Interviewed by Lois Donnelly over Zoom™
December 14, 2022*

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Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Victoria Clarke

Interviewed by Lois Donnelly

Conducted over the Zoom online platform

December 14, 2022

- Lois: I'm Lois Donnelly, interviewing Dr Victoria Clarke on the 14th of December 2022, over Zoom, and we're discussing their life and career in the context of feminism and its history within psychology. So first of all then, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about yourself, in terms of the trajectory of your career and the topics of your work, that kind of thing.
- Victoria: Okay, summarising briefly. So I did an undergraduate degree at Brunel University, I was really...I didn't choose great reasons for going to that university, I wanted to be near a boyfriend, which is never a good idea and I would never advise that, because of course, by the time I got there, we'd split up. But it was a happy accident, because Brunel at that time was full of feminist and critical psychologists teaching on the course, so it was a really wonderful experience for me that really captured my imagination, because I fear if I'd gone somewhere more mainstream, I wouldn't have fallen in love with psychology, I would have fallen very much out of love with psychology and my career would have gone very differently. So by the time I got to my third year, I thought, "I'm loving this and I want to do more," and so I thought, "Well, let's do a PhD," and I was at the time coming out as a lesbian; that's not how I identify my sexuality now, but it was at the time, and I thought, "Well, I really want to do something around lesbian and gay psychology," as the field was known then, it's more inclusive now. And so, I looked at, "Well, who are the names in the UK writing in this area?" and I kept coming across the name of Celia Kitzinger, and she'd written a book called *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*. So I think I wrote her a letter, because this was the 90s, and this is before I learnt how to use email, which I learnt during my PhD; Ginny Braun, my friend and colleague very grumpily showed me how to use email because she couldn't believe I didn't know how to use it. And so I contacted Celia and she phoned me and we had a really long chat, and there was lots of ESRC funding floating around, so Economic and Social Research Council funding floating around Loughborough at the time, so we applied for funding and got it, and I did my PhD on lesbian and gay parenting.
- Lois: Wow.
- Victoria: It was the late 90s and early 2000s, doing critical psychology on lesbians wasn't a great career move, but it's where...it's what excited me and it's what I found really interesting. So it was tough getting a job, but I managed to get a research fellowship at Exeter University, where I spent a year on a very different project, still focused on the broad area of family, but looking at straight marriage, first time straight marriage, and looking at money management, which was completely new to me, the world of economic psychology. And then I spent a year there and then got my job at UWE, which is where I've been ever since.
- Lois: Ooh, lovely.
- Victoria: And my research has... I've sort of continued to dabble in research on family and relationships, particularly notions of difference and how they intersect with family, so with my UWE colleague, Nikki

Hayfield, and Sonia Ellis and Gareth Terry, we've looked at the experience of women who don't have children, which was a really interesting thing to do as all of us involved in the project didn't have kids for various different reasons. But I've also developed new strands of research, so at UWE we have a Centre for Appearance Research, which is a leading research centre for looking at appearance, so two strands, so looking at visible difference and also looking at body image. And when I arrived, there was lots of enthusiasm for getting new staff involved, and I thought, "Well, I'm a critical psychologist, I don't think there is such a thing as body image, so I can't do research on that," and so I started to do research on clothing, supervising student projects around sexuality and clothing, and I've done various bits of research relating to appearance and embodiment around body hair, pubic hair and so on, as well as clothing, and I've got undergrads at the moment doing a really exciting project looking at physical disability and clothing, so that has continued to be a strand in my research. And I'm a bit of a...I get involved in lots of different kind of things, so I don't have a very...some academics have a really clear research narrative where they plough the same field and they develop lots of expertise in that, whereas I hop around and get interested in lots of different things, but gender and sexuality is a really consistent focus in my research throughout.

[00:05:14]

Lois: Yeah, that's so interesting, thank you. So you mentioned there that your PhD topic was perhaps not the best career move; did you know that when you started it? Was that something that you were aware of?

Victoria: No. I was just enthusiastic, what I really want to do is... I mean, I was so naïve, I thought, "Well, no-one would have done research on this," you know, which is famous last words, you know, starting to do bits of research and then you discover there's research going back to the 1970s, and of course loads of people have done research on this, but what people hadn't done was critical research on it, they'd done lots of clinical research, lots of quantitative research, and research largely motivated by the fact that lesbians were losing custody of their children when their ex-husbands were taking them to court for custody, and so lots of the research was in the "The kids are alright," vein, demonstrating that, "Kids are fine if they grow up with lesbian mums," which you know, of course, goes without saying, the ideas underlying that assumption are really problematic, but there was a real need for that research at that time. But there wasn't was critical research. And I didn't really...because I was at Loughborough and Loughborough then and now was a real hotspot for critical psychology, with, you know, people that had really founded and shaped that area of psychology there, it was a...we got the sense that we were at the centre of the universe, if that makes sense, not in an arrogant way, but in a, "This is what psychology is like now, it's this exciting place where people are doing critical research," and then you poodle off into the big wide world and go to conferences and meet people from other institutions, and you went, "Oh, okay, psychology is not like this, we're doing something quite fringe," and then there was the dawning realisation that, "Ah, okay, so you've screwed yourself for the job market, and it's going to be really difficult to get a job because you're a critical psychologist and because you're doing lesbian and gay psychology, and those two things together are going to be really challenging for people," and they were, and I imagine in many contexts they still are.

Lois: Yeah, do you have any examples or any experiences that come to mind where that was really quite explicitly happening for you?

Victoria: So, I won't name them, but a very famous feminist at a job interview that will always stick in my mind, I gave my presentation on my critical discursive psychology research, a piece looking particularly at documentaries where parents talk about the fact that their kids aren't bullied, so queer parents talking about the fact that their kids aren't bullied, or that bullying is just this normative experience of childhood, and looking at what that construction did. And I stopped, I smiled, I looked expectantly at the audience, and this very famous person said, "This is all that Loughborough shit, isn't it?" And the chair of the interview said to me, "You don't need to answer that."

Lois: Good for them, at least, I suppose. Oh, wow...

Victoria: Yeah, that's the example that really stays in my mind, but there were lots of other examples of, "Can you teach statistics?" "No." And, "Do you see any value in quantitative research?" and being very

disappointed or baffled when I said, “Well, not hugely, you know, describing things, counting things maybe, but mainstream psychology is quite a flawed project,” so yeah...

Lois: Yeah, that’s so interesting. So do you feel like that’s changed over time now, where you’re at now?

Victoria: It’s really hard to say, because I’m not in the job market and haven’t been on the job market for a long time, and when I do apply for – which I haven’t done for years, apply for a job, I’m taking a lot of experience with me. But I think that’s probably still true in lots of places, that unless you can demonstrate your publications are REF-able, so the Research Excellence Framework that we use in the UK to judge the quality of research, well, “quality” in inverted commas...and that determines the set amount of funding that universities get for research, you know, unless you can demonstrate that you’re REF-able, that you know, another metric within the REF is impact case studies, so case studies demonstrating the impact of your research, and also research funding, if you can demonstrate you’re doing all those things, I imagine there’s a lot less hostility. But if you’re a little critical psychologist who can do research without money and beaver away and do things that interest you, yeah, I don’t think academia is welcoming you with open arms. So I think it’s still fringe and I just, in the last two decade since I finished my PhD, yeah, I don’t think the world has changed that much. You know, when I have conversations with my mainstream colleagues, they’re still as baffled by things that they would have been baffled, you know, if I’d had this conversation two decades ago, they would still have been completely baffled by things. So no, I don’t think we’ve had an impact on the mainstream of the discipline.

[00:11:12]

Lois: I see what you mean, yeah. So I suppose in a way, you were quite lucky then to be in those little critical bubbles, both in Brunel and Loughborough?

Victoria: Yeah, absolutely, it was what made me love psychology and made me feel that all the frustrations I felt with mainstream psychology, there was something you could do with them, that you could challenge, you could critique. So I think for a critical psychologist, you have, you know, part of you is focused out there on the world, and part of you is focused on your discipline and how the discipline can change. But when you’re in that little bubble, that focus on the discipline shifts slightly because you’re with lots of like-minded people and you share the same language and you can have similar kinds of conversations, and that’s really nice, and I miss that in a way, being part of that world. I mean, obviously I have colleagues at UWE who exist in the same little bubble and we speak the same language, which is really nice, but being completely surrounded by everyone speaking the same language was this moment of something really, I don’t know, exciting, that you don’t know how good it is until it’s gone, and then you think, “Oh, okay, that was nice while it lasted, but now I’m in reality.” So yeah, and it took a while to adjust, I think, if that makes sense, to adjust to existing in this lovely bubble and then going into a mainstream psychology environment where the same things weren’t taken for granted, where the same attention wasn’t given to feminist concerns and lesbian and gay or queer concerns and so on. So yeah, it was an adjustment period, it took a while.

Lois: Yeah, I mean, that must have been quite difficult. So talking about feminism then, I’m wondering when did your feminist identity develop and how did that merge with your work?

Victoria: I really can’t remember not being feminist. I can remember being a young teenager and really clearly identifying as a feminist, and I just can’t remember a time when I didn’t think that way. I, from a very young age rejected a lot of the values and the ways of thinking that were handed to me. So my family was a churchgoing family, Methodist and United Reform, so that was, well, not quite...Quakers are more unconventional, but on the very unconventional end of Christianity. And I just...I cannot remember a time when I believed in God, and I was very young, in the single digits, I think, when I told my parents, “I don’t believe in God and I don’t want to go to church anymore.”

Lois: Right.

Victoria: I can remember sitting in the playgroup area of the church with the minister, who was a friend of my parents, and him asking me about it, very gently, very kindly, not in at all a pressuring way, just clearly curious about how this very young child had come to this conclusion that was relatively

atypical for children. And I can remember being really clear that, "I don't believe in God, and I don't want to go to church, because it doesn't feel right to me." And I think that sort of started the process of questioning things, so questioning the racism that was around a lot in the late 70s and early 80s in London, well the very outskirts of London where I lived. Then one of my teachers got me involved in antifascist activism because there was lots of fascist activity around that area, because it was an area with a relatively large British Asian population, so she got me involved in antifascist activism and standing outside...the video rental store, so this was way back, and handing out leaflets to people and trying to get people to engage in conversations about this. And so it all just crystallised together, feminist seemed part and parcel of that more critical approach. And then it really sort of crystallised for me when I did my A Levels. So I had quite a difficult time as a teenager, I had significant mental health problems, and I started out doing my A Levels at school, had what people often refer to as a nervous breakdown, and then you get into psychology and you realise that, "There's no such thing as a nervous breakdown, it's not in the DSM, it doesn't exist," but a really bad bout of depression that's quite common for teenagers. I had some inpatient psychiatric care, decided I didn't want to go back to school, because I found the school environment too oppressive, so I restarted my A Levels at a sixth form college.

[00:16:46]

Lois: Oh right.

Victoria: And sixth form colleges, were, back then at least, were amazing places, because the people teaching on them were sort of people that were rejected from other parts of the world, so they were people that had left academia teaching there, and they were such fascinating people, and my two sociology A Level lecturers were both really passionate feminists, and so taught sociology through a feminist lens, and a critical lens. And I think curriculums were less controlled back then, back in the 90s, so they had far more freedom in terms of what they taught us. So I can remember one of my sociology lecturers, Gill, showing us a documentary about Andrea Dworkin, the radical feminist and her campaigns against pornography and female violence. I just cannot imagine for the life of me that kids would be allowed to be shown something like that these days. And she lent me books, and in one of the books, there was a dedication from the author, and it said, "In lesbian sisterhood," and I thought, "She's telling me she's a lesbian," you know, this is when Section 28 was still in place, when the idea of teachers being openly queer just was unthinkable, and I never mentioned it to her, but it felt like such a precious gift that she trusted me enough to...because there was no way that would have been unintentional or unthinking, because people had to be so careful. I mean, I'm sure some of her colleagues knew, but yeah, that whole experience really galvanised feminism for me. And then in my degree, I was really interested in feminist perspectives and brought things in as much as was possible, and so by the time I'd got to my PhD, I knew feminism would be an integral part of what I would be doing, and my main PhD supervisor was Celia Kitzinger, and she was really brilliant, sometimes in a quite grumpy and frustrated way, which I can understand now as a supervisor, in getting us to engage with history.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: And getting us to understand the history of the feminist movement, the history of feminist thought, the history of the lesbian and gay movement, as it was talked about them. And it really ignited a passion for history and for understanding the contexts for where we are and how we've got to places. So yeah, it was...my PhD was both really exciting, learning about critical psychology, but also really exciting to learn about feminist psychology, to learn about lesbian and gay psychology, to understand how these areas in the field developed and evolved and changed, and all the different ideas within them. So yeah, I mean, Celia always thought we never read enough, but I did so much reading and it was such a wonderful experience, because it's given me the foundations for everything I do now, which is great.

Lois: Yeah, oh, that sounds wonderful. I really like that story about the teacher with the book, that's a really lovely story there. And yeah, so kind of, I suppose that all started quite early on in school then. And what made you make that first choice to go into psychology for your undergraduate? What kind of...

[00:20:34]

Victoria: I think it was because I'd had an experience of depression and lots of people who have mental health difficulties have a, "I will now save the world from mental health difficulties," and my FE college wouldn't let me do psychology A Level, they went, "No, it's too triggering, you can't do it," which I thought was a daft decision, because there's very little in the A Level curriculum that is triggering. So being denied the opportunity to study it made me want to study it even more, as an undergrad.

Lois: I see.

Victoria: I mean, I think in a way, that's a good thing, because I think the A Level psychology curriculum is so limited in various ways, and when I did my undergraduate degree, BPS [British Psychological Society] accreditation was a lot looser, so by the time I finished, I had a choice in what degree I graduated with. I could have graduated with a degree in psychology, a joint honours in psychology and sociology and I even think I had enough credits to graduate with a degree in sociology, because I did my undergrad in an interdisciplinary department, and the whole first year was interdisciplinary, so everyone did the same thing, and then you picked modules across the spectrum. But I settled on psychology, even though sociology in many ways was more interesting, because I had that interest, that practical interest in training to be a practitioner. So I did what's known in the UK as a thin sandwich degree programme, so you do a four year degree and you do two six month placements as part of the degree. When you do a whole year placement, it's called a thick sandwich, which I think is quite daft language. So my first placement was as a research assistant, and then the second one was in a psychiatric hospital, a really old, Victorian psychiatric hospital that didn't have many inpatients, but it was the centre for service provision, and that made me really want to be a clinical psychologist. Back then, the number of training places available was a fraction of what they are now, so of course, with just an undergraduate degree and a sixth month work placement, you've got no chance getting on a course.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So I wasn't successful, so I thought, "Oh well, I'll do a PhD then." So I knew I wanted to do more, I knew I wanted to learn more, but initially it was wanting to be a clinical psychologist, wanting to be a practitioner. But then the more I learnt about critical psychology, the less I wanted to be a clinical psychologist because I understood how it was an enactment by a large mainstream psychology in ways that are quite problematic for me. So...

Lois: Yeah, so those things might have clashed a little bit, I suppose, at that stage?

Victoria: Yeah, I mean, I did apply to the programmes that were positioning themselves as a bit more progressive, so UEL back then, which I think was run by Mary Boyle, a feminist psychologist, and Exeter, which had a community clinical psychology programme, so I did apply to the programmes that were a bit sort of more edgy, but I didn't get anywhere, and I think that's probably a good thing.

Lois: Yes. Yeah, so you're happy with having gone the PhD route and said...

Victoria: Yeah, I mean, I think...you can obviously get derailed into the conversation with all of the problems with academia, but I really enjoy my job and I really like what I do, and I'm happy with the choices that I've made, and I have happened to become therapy adjacent, because we have a professional doctorate in counselling psychology programme at UWE, and various psychotherapy masters across the years, and so I've taught on those, and I supervise on those, so I've got my closeness to the practitioner world that has been quite nice and an enjoyable part of working at UWE.

Lois: Yeah, that's lovely, that bit of both.

[00:25:09]

Victoria: Yeah, a bit of both, which is nice, which is great.

Lois: Yeah, lovely. Great, can I ask whether you had any key mentors or have any in sort of the journey of your career?

Victoria: Yes, well I think lots of people at Brunel were really helpful, I was taught by Karen Henwood, and she was really helpful and really supportive. There were lots of people that were at Brunel when I was an undergraduate that were really interesting. So another person I worked for is Corinne Squire, who I think is now Professor at UEL, and she was doing a project on HIV and AIDS support groups. I was ridiculously naïve and terribly precocious, but she was nonetheless hugely tolerant of me and very supportive and helpful, and I can remember her saying, “You’ll get on with Celia, she’s very rhetorical,” and I didn’t know what she meant by that, but now I do in the sense that Celia is a brilliant speaker, she’s very eloquent, she’s great at arguments. So even the head of department, Steve Woolgar, who’s a sociologist of scientific knowledge, was hugely supportive. He tried to persuade me several times to stay and do a PhD at Brunel, because I think he sensed someone else who was quite critical in their approach to things. And then Celia, and her now wife, then partner, Sue Wilkinson, were hugely supportive and brilliant people to do a PhD with, because they basically gave us a roadmap for navigating academia as feminist women, and in my case, as queer women; they were so supportive, not just academically, but also how to navigate this space that you’ve found your way into. And as I said, you know, Celia getting me to read and engage with history and everything, and they’re both brilliant communicators and brilliant writers, and I started my PhD really struggling to write. I shared an office with various people, including Ginny Braun, who had done a masters and was a brilliant writer, and she would do what we called sentence therapy, where she’d help me. And I think that cemented my sense that I’m probably mildly dyslexic, and so the first couple of years of the PhD were a really painful learning process, but Celia was enormously helpful, she’s such a brilliant writer, and she had this amazing stash of handouts that she’d put together on different aspects of writing. I’ve got one that I kept and I’ve typed it up and I still give it to students, about the colon and the semicolon. So that kind of support and mentoring I think is really important, because...and I never identify as a first generation university student or a first generation academic, but that, I mean, I’m the first person in my family to go to university. Both my parents left school at 15. I tend to be read as slightly middle class and maybe a bit posh, but that’s not my experience, you know, I went to a fairly rubbish comprehensive on the fringes of London, didn’t get the greatest education, had parents who didn’t have any understanding of the university system and how to navigate it, but I don’t tend to include that in my identity because it doesn’t...I mean, academia, or the bits of academia that I’ve inhabited feel very welcoming to someone like me who’s white and sounds kind of middle class and is, in many ways, middle class.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: I only feel out of place where I go to somewhere really posh, so one of my friends was, years ago, working at Bristol University, and she was organising a seminar on conversation analysis and medical interactions, so she said, “Come along, sneak in, come along,” so I did, and everyone there was so posh, I just thought, “Oh, okay, this is what it feels like to feel out of place in academia. I’m glad I don’t work in this bit of the sector.”

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: But you know, plenty of people I know, their parents were academics, their parents have PhDs, so that was, yeah, really new to me and having someone like Celia who was willing to work with me and support me and help me develop the academic skills I need was really good, because I think I would have sunk otherwise. I mean, some PhD supervisors are very, you know, “Just get on with it,” and would occasionally have a chat, and I think if I’d had a supervisor like that, I would have dropped out, because I didn’t have the skills I needed because of my educational background and possibly some kind of mild dyslexia in there as well. So I don’t know whether it was conscious or deliberate on her part to do that kind of mentoring, but I think that kind of mentoring is really important, to help academia be a welcoming space for everyone. Sorry, I’ve gone a bit off the rails there, but...

[00:31:08]

- Lois: No, it's really interesting to hear your take on mentoring in general as well. Yeah, it sounds like such an important role that Celia especially had for your journey, I suppose.
- Victoria: Yeah, and then when I was starting my PhD, Hannah Frith was just finishing hers, and then when I got my job at UWE, she, I think, had been there for a year or so maybe. And she was another very supportive person that helped me navigate UWE, but also navigate academia as well, and it was so nice having someone there who spoke the same language, who was also a feminist psychologist, who was also a qualitative researcher, who was also interested in critical psychology. So I think we might sort of pooh-poo the idea of role models or mentors in some ways, but I do think it is really important, just to know there's someone there, if you need to have a conversation with someone that speaks the same language as you, that gets the world the way that you do, I just think is really nice. So every time we lose a colleague that speaks the same language, that's a critical psychologist, a feminist psychologist, I do mourn that. We recently lost Helen Malson, she's moved to Australia, and it sort of... obviously you feel sad about losing the person, but you also feel happy for them that they're doing something really positive, but it sort of, I don't know, shakes up your world a little bit, because you're losing someone that there's so much shared understanding there and so much you take for granted, that it, I don't know, it reorganises things in a way that doesn't always feel comfortable.
- Lois: Yeah, there's almost one less person in your team, in a way.
- Victoria: Yeah, and people who get things, who have the same kind of reaction to things as you do, have the same kind of eye roll to things that you do, who, if you want to rant about something in academia, they completely, you know, if you want to rant about sexual harassment or something like that, they get it completely. So I do think that form of solidarity is really important, both from mentors and from peers, and just having a sense that there's someone else around who gets it.
- Lois: Absolutely, that's lovely. Yeah, thank you. Okay, we'll change gears a little bit then to talking more specifically about your work. So I'm wondering first of all, is there any particular accomplishment or piece of work that you're most proud of?
- Victoria: I think the thing, if people know my name, the thing that they will know me for is writing about qualitative methods, and that happened completely by accident. So my friend, Ginny, was in the UK and based at UWE for a sabbatical, and said, "Oh, why don't we write a paper about thematic analysis because we're both teaching it and we haven't got a good resource to give to students, and there's nothing really that captures our way of thinking about qualitative research, which is so fundamentally influenced by feminist methodology and critical methodology." And so we went, "Yeah, let's write a paper." So we wrote a paper, it got really lovely reviews, we tried to guess who the two reviewers were, can't – and it was published, and we didn't think anything of it, because back then, we'd we were both doing critical research on gender and sexuality, engaging with tiny, tiny audiences, me in particular really tiny audiences, because I was doing lesbian and gay research, as it was called then, Ginny was doing feminist research around cosmetic surgery and various things like that, so had a slightly bigger audience, I had a more niche kind of audience. So we were used to people not really, you know, talking to very small groups of people who spoke our language. And then all of a sudden this paper started getting noticed and it started getting cited, and I can remember being in the pub with a friend, who I think was visiting from Canada, and it was her, her husband, and I think a friend of her husband, who were all academics. And I sort of mentioned, "Oh, this paper's got, like, 100 citations," they were, like, "Wow, that's really good." And now it's got 140,000-something.
- Lois: That's a huge amount.
- [00:36:02]
- Victoria: Yeah, so this really shifted things for us, because you know, eventually we started getting asked to do book chapters and then to do collections and then talks and teaching and so on, and it does define what we do, it just contributes a large part of what we do now. And it's fascinating, because we've gone from having these conversations with other LGBTQ+ psychologists or other feminist psychologists about issues around gender and sexuality, to having a really big platform in a more

mainstream part of academia and talking to people from loads of different disciplines. But the thing I love is that they're getting a bit of feminist psychology and they don't know they are, because it is so integral to how we think about qualitative research, the wonderful feminist methodological literature that Celia and Sue made us read and engage with, and they themselves were producing and creating, so fundamentally shaped how we think about qualitative research, that it's in everything that we do. So even if we don't explicitly brand things as feminist psychology, it still is, and we're sort of getting that everywhere, which is enjoyable. And we also do that with examples that we use, to the extent that we had someone contact us about the first paper that we published, because we used examples from Ginny's PhD research, which was on the social construction of the vagina, and my PhD research on social construction of lesbian and gay parenting, and this guy contacted us and said, "Have you got any other examples? Have you written anything else? Because I've got male students who won't read the paper because it mentions vaginas and lesbians."

Lois: Oh wow.

Victoria: And we're, like, "No, sorry, we haven't got anything that's better than that," you know.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: The next thing we wrote was queer and trans students at university, and we did our textbook and we put a survey on pubic hair in there. So we do use our critical feminist and queer research as examples in all the methodological scholarship we do, and we've increasingly collaborated with students, and we get them to use their research as the examples. So again, we're getting feminist critical and queer psychology out to a big audience without them necessarily signing up for that. So that is nice. But we also try and provide some less threatening and challenging examples as well. It wasn't coming from a bad place, it was someone who was teaching quite conservative students, and really wanting them to engage in the material, and said that, you know, their cultural objections to engaging with this are so strong, and we just couldn't help.

Lois: Yeah, I mean, first of all, I really like that idea of the sneaking it in almost. But yeah, I suppose there is a balance in, you know, you want people to engage with it so you can sneak that in, and it not being too challenging for people.

Victoria: Yeah.

Lois: No, I really like that. Yeah, so I mean, that's such a big part of your work, I suppose, and yeah, has been for a while.

Victoria: Yeah, and we dabble on the side with things. Another thing we got really interested in was the story completion method, which is a method that has largely been developed in feminist research, so this is where you give participants the start of the story and then you get them to complete the story, and it is... I describe it as magical, because it almost is magical, the method and the way it works, it's just incredible. I'm endlessly fascinated by it, and the data that you get from it, and it started off being used in quite a problematic way by a feminist psychologist, I think in the US, called Matina Horner, who was looking at women's fear of success. So she took this technique from its psychodynamic, psychoanalytic origins as a projective technique, like the Rorschach, where you say, "Here's an ambiguous stimulus, what do you see here?" And story completion tended to be used in child development research, where you'd read off about children's attachment styles from how they wrote the story, and she decided to use it to look at women's fear of success. And her research was hated and there were so many critiques published of it, because she came to this conclusion that the reason why women aren't successful is because they fear success, because success is unfeminine, and you can imagine that that argument didn't go down well with lots of people, so there were lots of critical responses. And the disappointment is that tanked the method.

[00:41:20]

Lois: Right.

Victoria: So she brought in this technique that had been used in the psychoanalytic tradition, had been used mainly in child development research and clinical practice and thought, “Let’s do something interesting with this,” but what she did offended so many people that it turned people off the method. And then Celia, my PhD supervisor, ever sort of the methodological innovator, thought, “This is great, let’s all rescue this and turn it into something really exciting,” and she basically re-theorised story completion as something that could tell you about the discourses out there in the world that shape how people make sense of things, that it didn’t have to be a method that took you internally into people’s minds and their motivations and their unconscious, it could be a method that took you out into the world.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So she did this great project with an undergrad, Deborah Powell, and wrote it up and it was published in *Feminism and Psychology*, and I don’t know if this is unique and geeky to me, but when I was doing my PhD, I was obsessed with my PhD supervisor and everything they’d written, so I read everything that Celia had written, everything that Sue had written, and I read this paper and I sort of filed it away in the back of my mind, and then a few years later, I had an undergrad who wanted to do her undergraduate project on domestic violence in same sex relationships, and I said, “You’re never going to get ethical approval...” obviously nicely, said, “You’re never going to get ethical approval to do that, it’s just too much for an undergrad to do, it’s too sensitive, it’s not sort of appropriate for the participants to expose them to those kind of risks,” and then, I don’t know why, it just pinged into my brain, “Story completion, let’s do a story completion study. So you get people to write stories about domestic violence in same sex relationships and straight relationships, and then you can do an analysis of the stories people tell.” And it captured the student’s imagination, she wrote these brilliant story stems, she got great data, she did a brilliant project, and I thought, “Okay, that’s good,” and so continued to use it in undergraduate projects, then put story completion on the curriculum, so I started to teach it, so then it got other people who were supervising to get students to use the method, and it started popping up in various feminist projects. So Hannah Frith, who I mentioned earlier, was friends with the student that Celia did the original project and paper with, and so she knew about the method, so she published a paper on it, and we’ve used it to do research on body hair.

Lois: Nice, yeah.

Victoria: Which was really fun. We were inspired by Breanne Fahs’, I don’t know if you know about her work that she’s done where she got her students to do kind of an experiment with body hair – so she got the women to stop removing body hair and the men to start removing body hair, and to write a reflective diary about it.

Lois: Ah.

Victoria: And she’s written various kind of papers on this, and it was just amazing, and so, Ginny and I said, “okay, let’s do a story stem that captures this scenario,” so we’ve written up that. So most recently, we’ve used story completion to collect data on perceptions of someone with a physical disability, either dating, hooking up, having sex, being involved in infidelity, and it’s a fascinating method that I really love and feel really passionate about because it really gets at something interesting and it really captures participants’ imagination. I think some just write brilliant stories. And we’ve got other colleagues enthused about it and writing about it, so it’s snuck into all these different places. So that’s something else that I find really exciting, and it’s a way to do feminist critical research with, if you’ve got a bit of time, and you want to do a passion project, that no-one’s going to love you for, you know, that isn’t going to get...that isn’t about research funding but is about, you know, exploring your passions as a feminist researcher or a queer researcher, it is such a great method, because you can do it online, it’s relatively straightforward to collect data, and all you need is time. I mean, obviously time is a precious resource in academia, but you just need a bit of time and then you can do something really interesting and exciting. So my main work is around methodology but that also seeps into the kind of empirical work I do, where I do these little passion projects around gender and sexuality mainly.

[00:46:26]

- Lois: Yeah, I really like, I mean, the method sounds incredible, I would love to try that out, but yeah, it sounds kind of...I really like that idea that all your projects involve passion, I suppose, and real interest in that and kind of excitement about it, which is really nice. And so, any work that you're working on more recently then?
- Victoria: I've had a week of chatting through papers with students. I mean, one piece I really love doing and is a big part of my job is supervising student research. I love it when, I mean, whatever they do, it's great to help people develop their skills as a researcher, but when their interests coincide with mine, that's really great, or when their interests coincide with things I want to learn more about, that's really brilliant. So on my agenda for tomorrow is working on a paper with a student who is a music therapist, we have an MA in music therapy, I didn't know anything about music therapy, now I know quite a bit about music therapy, which is really interesting, having supervised students on that programme, on that programme for various years, and she did a brilliant project looking at how music therapists make sense of race and class in music therapy, how important it is, how it plays out, how it impacts on things. So when my interests coincide with theirs or where they're doing something that enables me to learn, I really enjoy, so to write that paper, I was reading lots about critical race theory, which I didn't know much about, but obviously knew it's demonised in the headlines and a political football in culture wars and so on, and that was really fascinating and I really enjoyed that. But the main sort of projects that I have burbling away at the moment are the story completion project, looking at disability and sex in relationships, so that's with Ginny Braun, and we've done some analytic work and we're going to write up a couple of papers from that, and as you might expect, that disability isn't viewed wholly positively within the context of relationships and sex, and there are lots of quite stereotypical narratives and so on, and that's really interesting. And that is fuelled by both of our experiences of becoming disabled by virtue of having chronic illnesses, so Ginny has post-treatment Lyme disease, I think that's the right way round, so that's where you get Lyme disease, you don't have treatment early enough and you just basically have it forever.
- Lois: Right.
- Victoria: And I developed chronic fatigue syndrome in 2006, and then my experience of disability changed radically in 2017, when – I didn't know it at the time, but I developed MS, and I didn't win the MS lottery, because I, before I was even diagnosed, I went to a progressive form of MS and experienced a really rapid onset of physical disability.
- Lois: Right.
- Victoria: And so for me and Ginny, we thought, "Well, maybe we should bring our worlds together, our personal experience of disability and our interest in critical sexuality research," and there is some work around disability and sexuality, most of it's mainstream psychology and doing, you know, "How do you feel about dating someone who's disabled?" So we thought, "Well, let's do story completion work on this and see what the kind of stories that people tell." So that's, I think, is a really interesting journey, because for lots of qualitative researchers and feminist researchers, your personal interweaves into your research, but our personal shifted and so we had to pivot our research to bring our personal into it. And then I decided that I wanted to do something around clothing, because I noticed that how I dress had changed because I use...I always pronounce it incorrectly, a rollator, so it's a wheely walking frame, so a walking frame with wheels when I'm outside, or a wheelchair or a mobility scooter, you need all kinds of kit, one thing doesn't work for everything.
- [00:51:09]
- Lois: Yeah.
- Victoria: And I noticed alongside that, I changed the way I dressed, I dress with a lot louder and more colourful, and I almost felt like I was dressing to the mobility aids in a way that I didn't...if I was really loud and colourful then people might see me, they might not just see the wheelchair, they might not just see the rollator.
- Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: Being a researcher, I had a, "Oh, I wonder if anyone's done any research on this," moment and I looked and there's very, very little research, but there was a fascinating sociological study conducted in the US, I think in the early 90s, and they found that most people with physical disabilities wanted to melt into the background as much as possible, but then they had this little discussion towards the end of the paper about this unusual subset of people that wanted to be really loud in their dress, you know, they were going to be stared at so they were going to take advantage of the staring by putting on this performance and being really loud, and I went, "Oh, okay, that's me then, that's what I'm doing." So I've got a group of undergrads this year doing their projects on disability and clothing and I've designed a group project, so I'll be able to bring the data together and write it up for publication with the students as co-authors. So that's where I'm at at the moment, in this new territory of disability studies, which is not entirely familiar, but trying, dipping my toe in by taking it into places that are familiar. So I've previously done quite a bit of work on clothing and identity and sexuality, and then for the story completion, you know I said I'd previously done lots of work on gender and sexuality but not in relation to disability, so we're not pushing ourselves completely out of our comfort zone. So again, those are little passion projects; no-one's going to want to fund research in those areas, but they nonetheless feel important, and it feels important to do something that brings your worlds together, if that makes sense.

Lois: Yeah, definitely, I was going to point out that those kind of personal things are making you interested in certain topics, which I think is really interesting. And I'm just wondering in terms of, you know, those little passion projects, as you say, do you find that difficult, that those...that that way of working, I suppose, for you, within academia, is that something that you've struggled with in any way?

Victoria: I don't think so. My main frustration is that methodological scholarship isn't valued in the way that I think it should be, because it is so essential to everything we do as researchers, but it's not REF-returnable, it's not something where there's a huge amount of funding. There's funding in psychology in relation to kind of various bodies and so on. So you know, that's my main main frustration, but also a broader frustration of what research we value and what research we see as important, and I think a lack of... We're not trained as academics about how to communicate and share our research with the people that help us do our research, we're not trained about how to communicate our research to a public audience, and I think that's a shame, because I think there's so much great research that gets done every day in academia that most people will never know about. And it is partly about platforms, it is partly about open access publishing, but it's also about academics being trained how to communicate their research with people and how to share the wonderful insights and understandings that they develop through their research. And I think that's always been a frustration with critical feminist research and critical sexuality research is, "This research is great, but no-one knows about it," then how do you communicate this to people and how can this have a real impact on the world?" And I think some of that has been solved for qualitative research through things like metasynthesis and systematic reviews, where qualitative research can influence health policy, but I do think that's a bigger question for feminist psychologists, queer psychologists, critical psychologists, is how can we share the work we do with the world. Because that, to me, is something that hasn't shifted much in the last couple of decades.

[00:56:08]

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: And I think that's a real shame, because we do really exciting things, and it's such a shame that all this research goes unread.

Lois: Yeah, I agree, yeah. Okay, we'll move on then to talking about the Psychology of Women and Equalities Section of the BPS, if that's okay with you?

Victoria: Yeah.

Lois: So yeah, if you could just tell me a bit maybe about your involvement with POWES [Psychology of Women and Equalities Section of the British Psychological Society]?

Victoria: I can't remember ever not being a member. I went to my first POWES conference when I was still an undergraduate, because it was at Loughborough, and Celia said, "You must come to the conference," and so a friend of mine, who was also going to do a PhD but was staying at Brunel to do a PhD, decided to go to the conference. And it was just amazing, it was so exciting and so...because you learn in conference, you know, the genre conference, as well as learning about the kind of things that people are giving presentations on. And Michelle Fine was one of the keynote speakers, I still remember sitting in a lecture theatre at Loughborough with her giving an amazing talk, I think on the legal profession and how women have to kind of behave like men in order to succeed in the legal profession. And it was just wonderful and really inspiring, and again, created that sense of, "This is what psychology is, psychology is this really exciting space," and creating that temporary illusion around what psychology is. So I think Celia encouraged us all to become BPS members, and encouraged us all to join the Psychology of Women Section, as it was known then, encouraged us to go to the conferences. So I can remember giving my first conference presentation as a young PhD student, being absolutely terrified, and the terror coming across. It wasn't, you know, because some people say, "Oh, I was so nervous," and you're, like, "You're fine," and you genuinely didn't notice their nerves. Yes, my nerves were very apparent. But I can just remember the absolute kindness that...I can remember Chris Griffin was in the audience, and I can remember just seeing on her face that she was, you know, "You can do it, come on..." It was really wonderful, it was such a lovely atmosphere, it was really kind and supportive and caring, and I'm laughing because I can remember Anne Woollett, when I had an absolute cracking hangover, bringing me breakfast at one POWES conference. But it was a really lovely space that felt safe, that there was camaraderie, that was supportive, and I think that's all down to the people who run the section, because that's not typical for academia, it's not typical for academia to have that atmosphere, and I think it's a real credit to the various different women and men who have run the section over the years because they've maintained that sense that was there when I first went, this being this warm, friendly, inviting space where people are doing really interesting and exciting work, and a space that feels quite democratic and not very hierarchical, where very famous feminist psychologists can bring you breakfast, when as a PhD student, you've got a hangover. So yeah, it was just wonderful, and one of the things I did when I was a PhD student, I was the editorial assistant for Sue Wilkinson, for the journal of *Feminism & Psychology*.

Lois: Oh nice.

Victoria: So that gave me a different access to academia, so I was taking my, no doubt hopeless minutes at all the meetings and stuff like that, and meeting lots of people, and that again was a really interesting insight into how things work. For me, those two things go hand in hand, because they were part of the same experience of being part of this feminist psychology community. So yeah, POWES, for me, is really a wonderful space, and I think when I first developed chronic fatigue syndrome, I stopped going to conferences because it just didn't feel possible, and then when it was possible to go to a conference, I felt like, "Yeah, I'm going to do it, I'm going to go to a conference, and even if I spend a weekend in bed, I spend a weekend in bed," I went to the POWES conference and it was still that really friendly welcoming space, so it's something I'm really grateful for and I'm really glad that we have.

[01:01:13]

Lois: Do you feel like it impacted on your work in any way?

Victoria: I think in probably from frustration in some ways, does that make sense? Because I noted how heteronormative the work often was. I mean, we're talking back in the 90s, work was often quite heteronormative, and I thought, "I don't want this space to be like that, I want this space to be more inclusive." So Liz Peel and I did some work at POWES, where we did a organised a symposium on sexuality and the intersections of sexuality and gender, and then we did a special issue with POWES-R of looking at these intersections. And the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section was being set up at around the same time as well, and probably out of some kind of similar frustrations.

Lois: Yeah.



Victoria: But I mean, everything feels a bit more harmonious now, which is good.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So it shaped my work in the sense of, “I want to bring these worlds together,” and, “I want POWES to feel a bit more inclusive when it comes to sexuality,” and, “I want lesbian and gay psychology to feel a bit more feminist,” because often it’s very mainstream, not engaged in criticality and not engaged with feminism, so it was, you know, I exist in these two separate spaces that aren’t really communicating with each other, and I want them to communicate,” so that was really motivating for kind of work that we did around the PhD, and really shaped the work that I did around lesbian and gay and then LGBTQ+ psychology and wanting that to engage more with feminist and critical perspectives, and making sure that I brought those two worlds together.

Lois: Yeah, that’s lovely, because I think as well with POWES, you know, members create those differences and kind of those changes in focus as well, which is really important. Yeah, so are there any other kind of feminist organisations that you’re a part of?

Victoria: Am I part of any more feminist organisations? I don’t think so. I’m trying to think. No, no.

Lois: That’s fine.

Victoria: No, my world outside of academia is, or was a very sort of gentle space, although I got really into crafting, so after I recovered from, or improved from chronic fatigue syndrome, because I had a whole year off work, and I can remember my mum saying, “Is there anything you want to do? You know, now you’re feeling a bit better, is there something you want to do?” and I remember saying, “Well, I’d quite like to do something crafty,” – I don’t know where this came from. And so she paid for me to go on a jewellery making course, so I did that, and then I did...everything you can think of pretty much, I have tried. I’ve woven willow very badly, I’ve done bookbinding, I’ve, you know, all kinds of stuff, done lamp work, where you have the Bunsen burner and the glass, and that’s very thrilling and exciting. And the thing I really fell in love with is needle felting, where you use a needle and stab in fluff and make things. And I thought, “How can I bring this together with feminism and activism?” And so I did, a few years ago at a POWES conference, did a designer vagina workshop, because Ginny had been at a conference in New York and someone was doing a needle felting designer vagina workshop, and I thought, “This sounds fun, this is how I can bring my worlds together.” And so I messaged her and said, “Get the instructions,” and then she replied and said, “There weren’t any instructions,” I said, “Okay, I’m going to figure this out, I can do this,” so I looked on Etsy to see if there was anyone making this kind of thing and there was a woman in Poland and there were various other things online, so I started making...and then I just kept making and I couldn’t stop, and I’ve made...oh God, close to 100, and they were all over the house. And then I thought, “Let’s do a workshop at POWES and bring my worlds together,” and I did the workshop and I also did a talk on craftivism, and it was the first time for me that activism felt comfortable because I think when...I would describe myself as an extreme introvert, and I think if you’re very introverted, there’s a lot about activism that’s quite challenging, because it involves talking to people, strangers.

[01:06:29]

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So you know, I’ve stood outside of the big Tesco’s in Easton in Bristol trying to talk to people about fish and why they shouldn’t eat fish caught in trawlers, and it’s just, like, there’s a part of me that wants to die a bit there, because it’s so much like hard work. And what I really liked about craftivism, as it’s called, is that it’s very gentle and non-confrontational, and if you’re an introvert, it’s a great way to do things. And it’s a form of joyful activism, because you’re trying to connect with people and, you know, there’s a wonderful quotation about creating small bubbles of joy. So doing that workshop at POWES, which was absolutely wonderful, where people made their little designer vaginas, and I encouraged them to sort of make two and leave one of them in the world as a present for someone. And I’ve also done that at UWE, so we have something called Feel Good February, and we’ve done sort of Feel Good Felting.

Lois: Nice.

Victoria: And then one of my colleagues runs a brilliant module on arts and mental health, Nicola Holt, and we did this action with students which we called Postcards for Strangers, which we based on the project in the US called Postcards to Voters, where people write personal postcards to people encouraging them to go out and vote, so it's a big community action around voting. And we thought, "Well, students on campus, lots of stress, lots of challenges around mental health, lots of feeling isolated, why don't we get students to create postcards for someone that say something nice or uplifting, or have a little picture on them, and then just leave them all over campus for people to find." And the students got into it, and they were amazing, and someone did artwork on the postcards and they were just absolutely brilliant, so that sort of gentle form of reaching out and connecting without necessarily having to have a conversation with a stranger that makes you feel really uncomfortable I think is really nice.

Lois: Yes. I love that kind of form of activism that you're doing there. And interesting story, I was at that designer vagina workshop in my first ever POWES conference and I adored it, and it was really fun and it made me feel very comfortable for my first time, so it was great, so thank you.

Victoria: Oh, I thought you were familiar, so that is where I know you from.

Lois: Yeah, probably.

Victoria: So yeah, so that was really lovely, so that's sort of how I brought my worlds together, because I think one thing I find challenging as an academic with a chronic illness, is it takes everything, and so finding something outside of academia felt really important, but then I slowly brought...you know, so I was on the evenings and the weekends doing these little craft workshops, and I don't know if I've got anything visible behind me...just the toadstools in the jar, I don't know if you can see those.

Lois: Yes.

Victoria: So yeah, doing stuff like that on the weekend, completely unacademic, but then I brought these bits of my world together, which was really nice. Yeah, but now, with the escalation of the MS, I mean, work really does take a lot of energy and activism isn't really an accessible space for disabled people in many ways.

[01:10:15]

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: I've noticed that recently with the strikes, the national strikes that the UCU have organised, because I do think, "Oh, shall I go on the picket line?" then I thought, "No, because there won't be any loos and how am I going to get there? And what if people just decide to move and change location and go to the rally? And how am I going to get there?" And there won't be any loos. So, I do think that's a challenge that feminist activists and other critical activists need to reckon with is how we make activism accessible for people who may not have the mobility or the energy or, you know, the way of being in the world that activism often relies on.

Lois: Yeah, that's such a good point. And I suppose in terms of, I don't know, have you struggled at all with the kind of environment that academia is in itself as well in terms of the workplace?

Victoria: Yeah, it's not hugely disability friendly. I mean, I think I'm very clearly positioned and branded as a feminist and a queer woman and therefore, "Don't say anything stupid around Victoria," which in some ways is helpful, but yes, it's not a space that...it makes a lot of noise about inclusivity but it doesn't act on inclusivity in any significantly meaningful way, and I think a lot has to change to make it a more inclusive and welcoming space for people, but how we do that, I don't know, when it is organised by sort of market forces and a commercially driven activity, I think the relational model of education needs, yeah, it can't be driven by market forces. So that's a uncomfortable thing about being an academic is, you know, when you're an educator, you're in a relationship, you know, and if

you commodify that, it becomes really tricky. So yeah, I think there's much that needs to be changed in academia at the moment.

Lois: Definitely. Okay, well, sort of going back to POWES more specifically, how do you feel that maybe it's developed over the years or that maybe it should develop in the coming years?

Victoria: I think it has in many ways become more inclusive, and the heteronormativity that used to annoy me and frustrate me as a PhD student isn't there anymore. But I do think it has a way to go, I think the decisions that are made need to be inclusive and, you know, for example, the conference venue was lovely, I've been there many times, I really enjoy it, but it's not accessible. There's only one accessible room, so one disabled person, well, one person with physical disabilities can go to the conference and that's it. So I think if POWES is really going to be true to its equality principles, then it needs to choose a conference venue that is fully accessible, that events need to be, I think, you know, there was this nice period during the pandemic where things suddenly became more accessible to disabled people because they were run online, and then we've all gone back to normal and gone back to face to face conferences, and you know, the risk of getting a Covid infection are different for different people, you know, the risks for me can be fairly profound, it could trigger another MS relapse, if the next relapse is anywhere like the last one, I would probably need permanent care and I probably wouldn't be able to work anymore. So the consequences can be pretty devastating, so I think that we need to... I mean, I completely get where people are at with Covid, it was a traumatic period and people just want to pretend it's over, and I get that desire, but people's ability to access that fantasy and live with the consequences of that fantasy are very different, and I would really like to see POWES taking a lead in promoting some degree of Covid realism and some equity around Covid, so making sure masks are worn at face to face events, making sure there's always online options for participation. So I think there are some really practical things that POWES can do to support disabled inclusivity, and I'd really like to see happen. And making sure that there is representation from people with different lived experience on the POWES committee I think is really important, and thinking about, I mean, the problem with being disabled and having a fatigue related condition is you just don't have the energy to do all the extras.

Lois: Yeah.

[01:15:59]

Victoria: And so it's thinking about, "How can we make this accessible for people so that they can get involved and they can participate?" So again, I mean, I don't like this as a buzzword because it gets misused so often, but I think intersectional thinking around feminism is really important, I think the priorities for feminism are different from what the priorities are often presumed to be, because I think the priorities are often shaped by white, first world Western agenda, and so I think climate change has to be a priority for feminism, because women globally are being disproportionately impacted by climate change, so I think that has to be very firmly on our agenda, and we have to think about what contributions we can make to it. So practically, I don't think feminist psychologists should be flying to conferences, I mean, that's an exceptionally unpopular opinion, but you know, the world is literally going to burn if we don't stop.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: I think we need to think about just small practical things, like when we host an event, the kind of food we serve, you know, and thinking about how we can make our bit of psychology more environmentally sustainable going forward is really important. I think the trouble is climate change isn't seen as feminist, people think it's something else, but I think if you look at feminism globally, climate change is probably the number one priority because of the impacts that climate change will have on women in the world. So it's shifting our focus away from a white, Western lens, to thinking about the interests and needs of women more from a global perspective. So I think there are some real huge challenges for POWES to tackle, and it would be great if POWES became a leader within the discipline, and pushing things forward, and getting psychology to engage with these really important global issues, because at the moment, it feels like there's these huge things happening, and we're just all in denial.

Lois: Yeah, it can definitely feel like that. Well, I mean, hopefully we'll be having a hybrid conference this year, fingers crossed, so that'll be one thing hopefully that we can do. But yeah, no, those are some really good points, thank you. So I suppose then in terms of feminism and psychology more broadly, what impact do you think feminists have made in psychology so far, and what is there to continue to do? I suppose you've answered maybe that latter bit with your last answer, but is there anything else to add?

Victoria: I mean, I think, depressingly, mainstream psychology is so insulated from feminist influence, and I still, you know, I think there's so much work to do there. I find it really fascinating that I have lots of mainstream psych colleagues who are very feminist in their lives, but not in their work, and it's, like, "Oh, don't you want to bring those two together, because things would be really cool if you brought them together?"

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So I think trying to shape the undergraduate curriculum feels really important, and I think there's the book by Hannah and Rose about...A Feminist Companion to Research Methods, that kind of book is really important for showing how feminism is relevant to core elements of the BPS curriculum is really important. I think getting in there and shaping how the curriculum is taught is really important, and I mean, students go in waves in their receptivity to feminist psychology and psychology of women; sometimes they're really hostile and then a few years later, things shift and they're far more open.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: We have run, well Helen Malson used to run, sadly she's left, but she used to run a gender course which was really quite popular with the students, and they did amazing work on it. She got them to analyse the representation of gender or sexuality in a piece of media, always my favourite thing to mark every year, because I could watch these music videos and it would be great to expand my music listening from marking this assignment, or watching adverts or films and stuff like that that they'd analysed, and it really inspired them, because they were taking what they were learning and applying it to their everyday lives, and that was great. So I think feminism can give a real spark to the psychology curriculum, so I'd really like feminist psychologists to be getting in there with the undergraduate curriculum and making sure that it's represented, and thinking about what we're teaching students and the stories that we're telling them about psychology. You know, one of the...unfortunately it's become a buzzword, the idea of decolonising psychology has become a bit of a buzzword, but I do think it's really important that we look at our curriculum and we look at the messages that we're giving students in relation to gender and in relation to sexuality, in relation to race and ethnicity and so on. So I'd really like to see feminist psychologists at the coalface thinking about how we can change our degrees and change what we teach, and get the students excited by the potential for psychology to contribute to social justice. But that's a huge, massive task and undertaking, but it feels like there's so much potential there, rather than us being siloed off in a separate part of the discipline doing our own little thing and talking to each other, I really would like us to talk to the people who need to hear what we have to say. But I think that's quite big. I'm conscious I'm listing things that are huge and massive but feel important, nonetheless.

[01:22:38]

Lois: Definitely important, yeah, I totally agree, and you know, maybe we'll see some shifts over the coming decades. Yeah, okay, well lastly then, what advice would you maybe give to feminist psychologists entering the field now?

Victoria: Don't. Think carefully about whether you want to enter academia, because it can be a very unkind place, so I'd think really carefully about that. I'd make sure you have a really good mentor, someone who's able to mentor you both in the research that you're doing, but also mentor you in the weird ways of academia. You know, we got such a great education from Celia and Sue about academic etiquette, about how things function, that really set us up well, and I think that's really important for when you are marginal in so many different ways within academia. So I think find good mentors, find good peers who can support you, because that was a really wonderful part of my PhD was being

part of a huge cohort of PhD students, I think about 80 of us at the time, but also being part of a cohort of critical psychology and also lots of peers doing feminist research. So we could have conversations with each other about our research, that we could give feedback to each other on our research; I cannot imagine how challenging it is to do a PhD when it's just you, when everyone else around you is doing something wildly different and no-one understands what you're doing.

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: So I think if you're looking to do a PhD, for example, get a really good mentor, and you want a mentor who is, if you, you know, thinking about the kind of support you need, who's going to give you the kind of support you need, but you also need peers, you don't want to be on your own, you want people that understand what it is that you're doing. Join professional networks, get to conferences, even if you're not presenting straight away, just, if you can, I mean, obviously there's the issue of money, which is complex, but if you can get to conferences, get to conferences and build your network, build your community, I think that's really important. Yeah, I mean, obviously there's the research and doing something that you love and that you feel passionate about but also being pragmatic about the fact that your passion may not be academia's passion, and so is there a way that you can do what's interesting to you that also ticks some of the boxes in academia? It might be that you do your research on gender and health, where there's plenty of funding, so it's thinking very pragmatically. But I'm also conscious that these are things that I know in hindsight, you know, I didn't know any of this, I didn't...there was no-one in my family that had been to university, let alone that had done a PhD, and so my experience might have been very different if I'd had people that could tell me about this stuff beforehand. So, you know, if you make the wrong decisions, don't worry about it, you know. You can muddle through, you know, it's never too late to figure things out and make things work.

[01:26:19]

Lois: Yeah.

Victoria: Yeah, if you have an unconventional journey, educational journey, yeah, don't worry about it.

Lois: Yeah, that's really nice. Yeah.

Victoria: I told one of my line managers once that I dropped out of my A Levels and restarted them and he was so shocked.

Lois: Really?

Victoria: Yeah, he was like, "I just, like, that doesn't fit with my image of you," and I said, "Yeah, well..." We should tell our students this stuff, you know, it's not the end of the world if things go badly, you can pick things up again. Sorry, that was a diversion.

Lois: Yeah, no, I absolutely agree, I think that's really good to make clear. Well, we're near the end, so is there anything else that I haven't mentioned that you'd like to cover about yourself or about feminist psychology?

Victoria: No, just that it's really important to me and something I'm really passionate about, and it informs everything I do, even if it isn't part of my explicit focus. It feels like it's in my DNA, if that makes sense, but I don't even need to name it, because it so goes without saying that it's part of how I think and part of what I do. Yeah.

Lois: Yeah, lovely. Brilliant. Okay, so just for the record then, could you state your place and date of birth.

Victoria: Place of birth, Hillingdon, 1973. So Hillingdon is a Borough of London.

Lois: Lovely. And your gender?

Victoria: I would say female, if I had to. Queer woman, if I got more choice, queer.



Lois: Yeah, okay. And occupation?

Victoria: University Lecturer, title is Associate Professor in Qualitative and Critical Psychology.

[End of Transcript]