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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Hi everyone, welcome back to the podcast. For our first episode of the series, we’re in conversation with author, educator and activist, Dr Stephanie Davis, based at Nottingham Trent University. In this episode, we discuss growing up as a teenager in the ‘90s and Stephanie’s journey to Critical Psychology. We talk about queer activism, in particular the grassroot organisation Rainbow Noir, decolonising gender and sexuality, and, last but not least, Stephanie’s newly launched book called ‘Queer and Trans People of Colour in the UK: Possibilities for Intersectional Richness’, which is available to purchase now. To find out more information on Stephanie’s book and where to purchase it, check out the podcast episode description or visit the Pedagogies for Social Justice website.

How are you doing today?

Stephanie: Yeah, I’m good, thank you. Thank you so much for inviting me. I’m really excited to be a part of this and I’ve been listening to the podcast previously so, yeah, thank you.

Kyra: Amazing. So, I like to start things off with our guest just sharing a little bit about themselves, so where did you grow up and where are you currently?

Stephanie: So, I grew up just outside Luton in Bedfordshire, just outside London, and, yeah, I lived there up until I was like 18, and then, after that, I’ve moved around everywhere, like the life of an academic [laughing]. So, yeah, I moved...I went to Birmingham, to Manchester, to Brighton, all for studying, and London and now I’m in Nottingham for work. So, yeah, I live in Nottingham now, so yeah...

Kyra: How would you describe your upbringing in terms of like how race was kind of seen and felt in your household?

Stephanie: So, we lived in a small town just outside Luton. If you know Luton, it’s very mixed, it’s like...lots of black people, lots of South Asian people, but where we lived, in Dunstable, just outside, was like a very small like white working-class town, so...yeah, so I



grew up mostly around like the white side of my family. So, I'm of mixed roots, so black and white heritage. So, yeah, a lot of my work is around that really actually, so in my work, I talk about...I'm really taken with the idea of the commitment to racelessness in...in the UK and Europe particularly – [that's Goldberg], and so he, yeah, talks about how race is everywhere but is also nowhere, and it's this idea that race is really kind of foundational to our society, modern society, and yet...yet there's a denial of its existence. And so, yeah, kind of...sort of strange time in the late '80s, '90s, when I was growing up... We didn't really talk about race in my household that much, and we...you know, we were one of a few like...interracial families, I suppose, at the time. So, yeah, we didn't talk about it much, and even with my black family, like we didn't talk about it much, and I think, yeah, that's something that my work is really interested in, like that experience of living in the UK, growing up in the UK, with mixed roots, and it not being talked about, yeah...

Kyra: No, I actually had quite a similar kind of upbringing because I'm also...I'm half-black and half-Asian, so...and it was the same for me, like on both sides, like race wasn't something that really came up and it wasn't really talked about, and especially because me and my sister, my younger sister, she looks more Filipino, I would say, than I do. I mean, as soon as people see me, like I'm racialised as black. I have to tell people like I'm half-Filipino. So, I think, me kind of feeling like the only person in my family that...felt like I was kind of bang in the middle and looked kind of in the middle, it was, yeah, it was definitely kind of like a weird experience. I think you don't really realise until later on in life as well, like how that kind of affects the way you think about race and think about identity, but yeah...

Stephanie: Yeah. For me, growing up, I always felt like there was something going on, but I didn't know what it was [laughing]. So like, you know, I was...me and my sister were like... maybe a handful of like black and brown like children at our school, and both of us talk about, you know, like...something was...something was going on but we couldn't put our like finger on it. We didn't have the language for it. And, yeah, there was like, at the time, and still now, like colour-blindness, that, you know, people just want to just like pretend like...that doesn't exist, there is no difference, and...at the same time, where you are being racialised as black and as "other". And so, yeah, I think as...yeah, as a child, it was like...there's something...there's something strange... I internalised it as "something strange about me" and...yeah, and that did a lot to my psyche, and so I think that's why I've been drawn to Psychology as like...what does it do to your psyche when you're racialised [...].

Kyra: So, what kind of shows and books did you watch and read growing up and, I guess, what kind of representations were you exposed to?



Stephanie: So, I think I have like...interestingly enough, like having said that we didn't talk about race, I feel like, growing up in the '80s and the '90s, there was like some...some quite good representation or like it felt like there was more black people on TV than there is now. So, I think like me and my dad – so, my dad is Jamaican, black Jamaican, and my mum is white English-Polish – and my dad and me and my sister would watch a lot of like Desmonds – I don't know if you know Desmonds – or the [Real McCoy]. Desmonds was about...was about a black family in Peckham, em, in the '80s and '90s. The Real McCoy was like a...a comedy show of like black British and South Asian people. And so, yeah, there was...I feel like there was a lot around, a lot more than there is now actually, strangely.

Kyra: I think British shows, for sure, yeah, not that many black British shows...

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And so, yeah, so in terms of representation, there was like...stuff like that, but also, at the same time, more widely, yeah...I'm trying to think who I looked up to... Like I think I definitely...even though it wasn't named in the house, it was like people like Neneh Cherry, I looked up to, I could see myself in her, and I loved Whoopy Goldberg as a kid as well. I thought she was like beautiful, and seeing someone with big hair, like I had big hair, you know, was...was like really important to me. So, yeah, that...that kind of...as a very like young child, that was kind of the representation for me. But then, as I got older, as a teenager, like I got really into like punk, em, like Riot Girl, and I think that was me trying to make sense of my otherness...because there was that language... So, this is at a time of...can I say it, like [Napster], I don't know if you know [Napster], but like...like, you know, downloading music...

Kyra: Oh right, yeah, yeah.

Stephanie: So, I'd download lots of music. [I always wonder how I] got into like punk from like the ['70s] and '80s, but also feminism, so through punk, I learnt about feminism, and, for me, someone who was so important was Poly Styrene from X-Ray Spex. X-Ray Spex was a punk band, and Poly Styrene was like a...a woman of mixed roots as well, so black and white, and she...like all of her music was about...kind of like about capitalism, about being different, and her style as a punk was about kind of embracing...being like unconventionally attractive...attractive and unattractive. So, I think, as a woman of mixed roots, she was...strangely seen as like unattractive but she was really beautiful. It was really interesting. And so she kind of leant into like, you know, wearing lots of braces, quite ugly bright colours, and like...big hair and... [I suppose] it meant a lot for me to see her, and she just sang a lot about kind of...belonging or non-belonging, em, and like living in like a capitalist society and what that means, and she was like [pretty] ahead of your time. She [was singing in] the '70s and I was listening to this in the early 2000s, you know, and getting into it. But that meant the



world to me, to see someone like that, and so, yeah, as a teenager, like punk, indie, em, kind of goth stuff was all [about] exploring my difference, still without the language of...of race, em, to fully...to grasp my experience, but feminism was a really important part of that for me. Yeah, I was a little baby feminist [laughing] and I was [...] quite early, just...yeah, I was just like grasping to...to understand my lived experience, em, yeah...yeah...

Kyra: So, when did you start kind of thinking critically about race then? So, obviously, you said how you were kind of introduced to feminism through kind of music and the kind of entertainment industry and media, but when did that kind of tip over into kind of thinking about race?

Stephanie: I think it wasn't until like my...early...very early twenties, and like I found myself at uni, with a lot of white friends, and still this like...this nagging thing like...what's going on, like why do I not fit and...what's my experience, like, yeah...so trying to find a language for it. And so, I think...I've always kind of...so like from the punk era as a teenager, but also as a child actually, I was always concerned with like social injustice. So like, as a kid, I did a fast for Oxfam when I was like eight or something because I would just...I would see things in the news and I would get really impassioned by it. And I think, again, that might be...might have been a way of me kind of expressing what was going on for me, but [...] it, so it was connecting to other struggles. So, yeah, by the time I was in my early twenties, I was...yeah, connecting more to like the struggles around me and...I think it was in uni I began to... There was a lot of work around gender in...at uni, in my Psychology degree, and sexuality, and then...it was still missing, was race, and I began to...yeah, I think it was through feminist work, again, I began to read more around race and began to...to get a name for things. So, things like bell hooks' work was like really important to me, as an introduction, you know, *Feminism is for Everybody*, that was a really important book, and *Ain't I a Woman*. So, that was like, you know, getting...understanding gender and then I was like, well, hang on, the stuff that I'm being taught around gender doesn't quite fit...okay, so then it was black feminism. Black feminism was like...was like just a pure joy, to be like...finally to feel like something is...I'm being seen, something's connecting with my experience. So, it was, yeah, it was my early twenties, in university. And I've always been a bookworm as well. I think, as an academic, I suppose that's maybe...that's the road I took but...reading like theory and reading...always offer like [different] worlds, new ways of imagining the world, and seeing yourself. So, yeah, bell hooks' feminist literature was my kind of way in, into that.

And then, in my kind of mid-twenties, when I was living in Manchester, I just began to get more involved in more local activism around racial injustice, so particularly around the police, deaths in custody. It was like...I think it was...yeah, it was Troy Davis, I don't know if you remember him? Troy Davis was a black man who was on Death Row in the US and it was very clear he was innocent of what he'd been charged with, and there was like this huge



campaign to stop him being murdered by the state, and nothing...it didn't stop. I stayed up the night that it happened and there was like a final kind of stay of execution and then...and then it ended up going ahead, and I just...just the pure devastation at that and suddenly being like...like...it just sort of...unveiled something for me, em, about white supremacy. And I began learning more about the police and the state and where I was living at the time, in Moss Side in Manchester, about police harassment, and just being like...how does the world carry on when, every day, people are harassed by the police and...there's people in the UK who like die in police custody, you know? So, I ended up going quite...quite full throttle into...into like activism around deaths in police custody, and police harassment more generally, and was involved in the very start of the development of the Northern Police Monitoring Project. At that time, it was...I was just connected to a lot of black and brown folks in Manchester, doing all kinds of work, and it just...that was my kind of activist education really in Manchester, connecting to all different kinds of folks around Moss Side and committing to work together, you know, and it was... That was exciting as well as, you know, em...it was, yeah, some of the work was heart-breaking but also it was...just felt so important, and it felt...very important to be connected to that. And it meant a lot for me for my identity as well, so to be in a black community, to be...to go to like...to community groups, to be a part of what was going on, and to feel like I could make change was just really powerful, and like there's nothing like being together in a room with folks who all want to make change. And, for me at the time, it was...it was a real mix of people and... I know political blackness now, there are definitely critiques of political blackness, but at the time, it was a...a sort of politically black setting so it was people who identified as politically black together, people who...South Asian as well as black British as well as Somali and so on, people connecting through that kind of struggle. And for me, being in Manchester, Manchester felt...I felt like this...the radical roots of Manchester were just...throughout the city, and so, you know, like the uprisings in the '80s and the Pan-African Congress way earlier, in the early like 1900s, that was, you know, it just felt like you were part of a continuum. And so, yes, that is really where I kind of really developed my like race consciousness and also finally felt like I could understand what was going on in the world and with myself too. That was really powerful for me.

Kyra: Yeah, no, that's amazing, and I think Manchester really does still have that like really radical spirit, like to this day, and I think I'm always so inspired to kind of see the work and kind of the movement that happens. So, you were studying in Manchester as well?

Stephanie: Yeah, that was my Master's in Manchester. I went to Manchester Metropolitan. I did my undergrad at Aston Uni in Birmingham and then my Master's in Critical Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan, so, yeah, at the same time, I was getting involved in activist work, in movement work. I was, yeah, doing a Critical Psychology Master's, which is a bit... Critical Psychology is...and that's where I situate myself, Critical Psychology, is...is a discipline that... basically, it's a critique of traditional psychology. It questions the way that mainstream



psychology individualises everything, so it's about the individual, and removes the individual from the wider context, so the way in which the historical, political, economic, social context shapes all of us, and of course, you know, one of the main things that Psychology doesn't want to look at is like white supremacy or coloniality. It completely removes that. And so, in my undergraduate degree, there was really nothing on race, and, you know, I like...I cringe at this... It was called Abnormal Psychology, one of the modules, and so it was about, you know, different kinds of disorders and there was literally no discussion about social context, right, of...of how mental distress might develop, how it might be connected to the social, political, economic, historical contexts. So, the Critical Psychology Master's at Manchester Metropolitan was just really transformative for me, made a space where I could bring together, you know, the activist with the academic, and that they could have this interplay, you know, that I could, you know...they didn't have to be separate, and, actually, you don't have to be an objective, neutral scientist to be a psychologist. So, yeah, that was really exciting and there's a really great group of critical psychologists at Manchester Metropolitan, so yeah...

Kyra: So what did kind of taking like a critical psychological approach do for your research later on in kind of lived experiences of queer and trans people of colour, like what did it allow you to maybe spot that perhaps like a purely psychological approach might have missed?

Stephanie: Yeah. I suppose, firstly, I should say, when I was in Manchester, so part of the work that I ended up doing was about developing Rainbow Noir, which was – which is, rather, a queer and trans people of colour social space, and, next year, it will be 10 years old. That was just...that came out of me and three other black queer women who were like... there's no space for black queers in Manchester and why don't we just create something, and, again, at the time, we managed to meet an older black lesbian who'd been involved in organising in the '80s and '90s, like a black lesbian network in Manchester. I was working at the BHA at the time, which was formerly the Black Health Agency, and in the library they had downstairs, the resource library, they had a book called 'Making Black Waves' which is about black lesbian...the history of black lesbian activism in the UK, and there was just like this huge list of different organisations and spaces that had existed previously, and so, again, it was like, oh, I'm like part of this continuum of folks doing this work and I'm not alone, you know, I'm not the only black queer person to have existed – actually, I connect [to all the] history. So, yeah, so that...so Rainbow Noir like merged out of that and this desire to be together to create community.

And then the PhD came along, a...a studentship that wanted to look at queer life, em, and so I applied for it. Again, my focus was on what does it mean for queer and trans people of colour to connect within these kinds of community groups, and there's like a wide network...



a wide network was emerging within the UK at the time. And so, yeah, from a critical psychological point of view, I felt that, while the previous literature was all...a lot of it was like a very [deficit] approach, was, okay, so people who are at the intersections of like minoritized race, gender and sexuality are going to have poor outcomes, they, you know...it's all about what they don't have, you know. And so, that's important to acknowledge, yep, there's issues around like social support, em, mental distress and so on, but also I was interested in what are the possibilities of community, so looking beyond the individual. What about people when they come together and what does it mean to be together in community, but also, from a critical psychological standpoint, looking at the wider context. So, Psychology isn't great at addressing race, at addressing race as a structural issue rather than an individual issue. So, the research ended up focusing on...a lot around belonging, around what does it mean for queer and trans people of colour, within the context, within the British postcolonial context, to...to understand their lived experience, and how...framing it in terms of coloniality and the very particular British context, and also, particularly, the narratives around LGBT people. So, there's a kind of strange...strange thing, both with race and kind of queer and trans life, is that...that the UK can, in one hand, be...completely awful [half-laughing], completely racist, homophobic, queerphobic, transphobic place, and, at the same time, there are these narratives of progressiveness, so, you know, we're progressive, we are the bastion of like liberal human rights in the world and we need to protect the world, and you can see that going on right now with like Qatar and this idea that...that everything is great here and it's just everywhere else that's the problem, and it's like no. So, what it means to experience that... And like a typical psychology approach wouldn't want to address that wider context; it would want to just focus on the individual, and individualise the problem. And...my participants actually did talk a lot about, before being in [?] community, about how they often felt like they were the problem, so they internalised, em, being "other" as their problem, and it wasn't until they came into community with other queer and trans people of colour that they realised that they had been...they had been subject to "othering", a process of "othering" that was structural, that was bigger than them, that was shaping their lives. So, a Critical Psychology approach addresses like the...the processes and the work at play that shape how we experience the world, how we move in the world, but also how...what constraints are put on us in the world, and, without that lens, it becomes about the individual being the problem.

Kyra: And I think even I feel like sometimes I internalise this feeling of kind of being "other" but then, you know, that means you end up kind of feeling like you're almost drawn to other people who feel the same way, but then it's like how do you kind of reverse that, in a sense, where you're not in just community because you all feel like the other, and how do you make...turn that into kind of like a positive – does that make sense? Yeah.

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it does. So, yeah, in my research in the book, I talk about the possibilities of feeling together in difference so...and like the erotic potential of that, the joy



of connecting with others. And so, my participants talked a lot about, you know, what it meant to just be in a space with another person who just...got it, who wasn't, you know, assuming, oh, you're Muslim therefore, you know, you can't be queer, or you're queer so therefore you've probably stopped being a Muslim because you obviously can't be both, and so a space where... So, my book is called 'Queer and Trans People of Colour in the UK: Possibilities for Intersectional Richness', and so I was really taken with this idea of intersectional richness as...spaces where folks can be all of themselves and it's not a question – they don't have to fragment their identities or their experience of the world, and just the possibilities about the joy that can come with that and how we can utilise that experience to build community but also connect across difference.

Kyra: And that kind of word, like “intersectional richness”, like what does that mean for you, like is there a reason for that kind of like particular word choice?

Stephanie: Yeah. So, in the literature, people talk about intersectional failure, so like people not...failing to address the intersections or people falling through the intersectional gaps. So, without intersectional analysis or understanding, we fail to see people's full experience, and so...yeah, when I was writing the book, it kept coming through about the importance of...for queer and trans people of colour to have these spaces where they were seen in their fullness and sort of embraced in their fullness. It might not mean that everyone fully understands each other's differences, but it's...there's a different starting point in those spaces, rather than having to justify these different parts or... So, a lot of participants talked about being in majority white LGBTQ spaces and feeling like they had leave one identity at the door, so, you know, the race at the door, that, here, you're queer but you leave your blackness at the door, you know? That isn't...like how can people live...how do people live like that...? They can't, and they...they want spaces where they can be their full selves, and also where queerness isn't coded as white, queerness can be, you know, the queerness of blackness, and the blackness of queerness, can be celebrated and lived, yeah.

Kyra: I'm so excited to read this book! How did you actually find like the writing process of it in itself? I guess, what were like some of the best things and were there any challenges that you came across?

Stephanie: I mean, I loved the PhD, so the book is a monograph, so it's based on the PhD. It was a real joy to spend three years researching and studying this. The writing process of transforming it from the PhD to the monograph, em, has been...definitely had its tough parts, you know, being an early career researcher and early career academic, you know, juggling it with work., em...[?]. It's, yeah, taken a while for me, and also, with Covid, em... I mean, it did make me sit down and write in the mornings, during Covid, but that was really



difficult. But for me, there's been real joy because I feel like I've been able to sit with...it's felt like I've been able to sit with the participants for like...like seven years now. I've been really able to sit with words, and their words mean so much to me, and, yeah, I read them and I've learnt so much from the process, and, em, I get real joy from that, and, for me, part of the research process, I talk about the black feminist methodology of...part of feeling one's way through the research, and that has an erotic process of connecting with and...connecting with what the participants are talking about and reflecting on my own experience and...sort of a dialogue between me and the text, in terms of the analysis. So, it's not a piece of work that is...like neutral or like disembodied or anything, [and] as a like qualitative researcher, but also, more than that, I suppose, part of decolonising, but also as a black feminist, I'm not detached, you know, [I was] connected, connected to and embodied and have felt my way through this research, as well as doing like the academic, intellectual work. It joins together for me.

Kyra: Yeah, I mean, as it should, like this is...I think research, in so many ways, is like a relational kind of thing and I think, you know, for you to be kind of sitting with this and working with the participants for almost, I mean, 10 years, like of course it like...you live and breathe this kind of work and like your analysis and... Yeah, I think that that, in itself, should be something that like all researchers should really...like it's something to embrace, I think.

Stephanie: Yeah. [And it is also embracing [some] vulnerability] actually, in doing work [like that].

Kyra: Yeah, absolutely. So, just thinking about decolonising more specifically, like as you kind of mention, I also wanted to hear your take on what it means to really like decolonise the knowledges that we've inherited about gender and sexuality. I feel like these are areas that we're still...we're still yet to kind of deeply unpack, especially in relation to higher education and pedagogy. In what ways are our understandings of gender and sexuality particularly kind of colonial?

Stephanie: I talk about this with my students, about...about how...gender and sexuality, our modern conceptions or constructions of them, have emerged out of a very particular historical context, and we're talking about 500 years of slavery and colonialism and genocide and, also, Western knowledges of what it means to be human. And so, these histories, you know [sighing]...there's a grief, and, in the book, I talk about like racial melancholia, is the concept I use, the kind of grief of what has been lost through colonialism in terms of...what it means to be human but also gender and sexual diversity, what we may have lost or what we have been disconnected from. And so, my work is about questioning our modern concepts of gender and sexuality and where they've emerged from. So, they've emerged



during a historical period where race, as a concept, emerged, so race is a modern concept, and race, gender and sexuality all co-construct one another, right, and so ideas...the binaries of who's human and subhuman, or inferior/superior, they also map onto types or categories, classifications of human, and that includes gender and sexuality and race, and they're co-constructed, as well as things like, you know, ability/disability, neurotype, [?] and so on, right? So, it's...intensely...political and I think it's... When I've talked about decolonising before, people have been confused by what I mean when I talk about decolonising sexuality and gender because, again, like I was saying earlier, there's this idea that, in the West, you know...the West is a kind of bastion of progressive, liberal values and so LGBT people are really free [laughing] and not oppressed and don't experience queerphobia or transphobia, em...and of course that's not true. But, also, these very categories of being LGBTQ have emerged directly through coloniality, right? They've emerged as ways to understand ourselves in response to colonialism's classifications of heterosexual as the norm, you know, the cisgender person as the norm, and everyone else as "other". And so, I...my work in the book would talk about what does it mean then to unpick that...? How do folks begin to think about the intersections of race and gender, or race and sexuality, or all three? And so, in the book, one of my participants talks about decolonising, as a trans person of colour, as intersecting with what they called their cis-deprogramming, so decolonising and cis-deprogramming intersected, for example, or thinking about the ways in which African and Asian countries have these legacies of homophobic laws, and how has that impacted the way people understand themselves, and also the ways in which the hidden...the histories of gender diversity and sexual diversity. There's a lot there, and that's like a key part of my work, is getting folks to think about...really drilling into we've only...we've only understood ourselves in terms of, say, sexual identity, as having a sexual identity of like heterosexual, homosexual, for example – homosexual, I'm using as a historical term – over the last 150 years or so. Before that, it wasn't...you weren't a type of person. You talked about sexual behaviours, for example, in the West, but you weren't...that didn't become a whole type of person until 150 years ago. So, these are really modern terms and they've done something to the way that we understand ourselves in the world, and also shaped the way certain people are dehumanised, you know, and "otherised". So, there's a whole lot of question around what it might mean then to decolonise gender and sexuality. Does it mean maybe trying to unearth like histories of gender and sexual diversity, or is it about dreaming other ways of being beyond the current paradigm, beyond the kind of...colonial classifications of humans related to sexual and gender identity – not to get rid of them completely but question where they emerged from and question whether the West is best...?

Kyra: Thank you. And I guess...I mean, you talk about how you kind of articulate that within your book, but how does that almost like manifest in your teaching, like in the classroom? How do you...what kind of pedagogies, I guess, do you use to show that to your students?



Stephanie: With my teaching? I've actually just been teaching like the psychology of sex and sexuality this term. So, I really wanted to do something that would...just [sighing]...disrupt, I suppose, disrupt the kind of "taken for granted" knowledge that is...you know, that is being taught, and disrupt, yeah, disrupt "taken for granted" and pose...pose questions. So, problem posing is a way that I teach, so really influenced by Paolo Freire, and dialogue. The teaching that I've been doing on the psychology of sex, for example, they're sessions where [we] really centre dialogue, discussion, people having space to think through concepts like sex, so going back to the start, thinking about what does sex mean, what does sexuality mean, when did we start thinking about sexuality as a particular concept, and like talking about the history of...the invention of sexuality in the West in the 1800s and the early 1900s, and posing questions about what does it mean, when did it emerge, why did it emerge, so getting students to think about what was the context in which knowledge has been produced about sexuality, for example. And the students have found that really...kind of enlivening actually, [have had great classes], because, I suppose, students often are taught ideas or facts but not asked to drill into the contexts in which that knowledge was produced and why it was produced. So, lots of conversations! I say to them I don't have all the answers, but I want to hear what you think – what's your response or what are you feeling about this? What does it mean? What does it mean for us as a discipline that...that sexuality was invented at this point, and how has that shaped what we know now? And students are drawing parallels between...between sexuality as we understand it now, how Psychology understands sexuality now, so, for example, biological models of sexuality that people still use today, and earlier kind of historical understandings of, you know, people talked about inversion and homosexuality as a...biological product, you know? So, just a space that encourages questioning...and also like wondering...em... So, the first two sessions are about the invention of sexuality, and then the psychology of sex, and the next two sessions are about then this decolonial and queer critiques of the psychology of sex, and then the fourth session, which [is] the final one with me, will be about imagining otherwise, so creating space for sort of thinking about how might we transform this, how might we...think otherwise, how might that change our practice or change our understandings of ourselves? So, for me, having space and time to dialogue, to get into it, to hear from students – I'm really, you know, I'm excited to hear what people think about...about the stuff I'm presenting [laughing], so...and suggesting that we discuss, em, and that just...that, yeah, just enlivens me, and that's...that really enriches my life, yeah.

Kyra: Yeah. I mean, who do I have to speak to so I can like sit in on one of these sessions?!

[Laughter]

Kyra: So, I guess just linking back to Psychology just more broadly, what do you feel like Psychology lecturers can do, or begin to do, to like decolonise their pedagogy and practice,



especially if they don't necessarily have that kind of background in Critical Psychology, so thinking and learning about these kind of topics?

Stephanie: I suppose thinking about like the [banking] model of education, so what's [our] traditional approach to education, what does it mean...like what does it mean...how we position ourselves in the...in the classroom and how we see our students? Are we seeing them as, you know, empty vessels? Are we seeing ourselves as the knowledge-producers, as the experts? That's such a colonial and capitalist model and...it makes me sad when students aren't given the space to share their knowledges and their experience and their expertise. So, thinking about how you position yourself in the classroom, how do you respond to students, you know, just thinking about that power dynamic, and I mean we're already... we're already constrained by being in, you know, the neoliberal universities, right, but how do we subvert or how do we disrupt some of that? So, making space to connect and dialogue with students, not see ourselves as the person with all the knowledge in the room. That's like a sort of place to start.

And then, yeah, if you really value students and working with students, then how do you create a classroom that engages folks and supports folks to contribute but also like collaborate with you in [really meaningful] ways? And I wouldn't say...I don't think it's clear-cut within the context that we're in, especially in the UK, but I think that they're good ways of starting down the avenues.

And then, obviously, also, thinking about what knowledge are you focusing on and how are you positioning it – are you saying that what you're teaching is universal or are you telling people that this is...it has emerged from a particular context and are you talking about other knowledges there? Why are your knowledges based on, you know, white, cis, heterosexual men or middle-class ideas of being in the world? There are other ways of being in the world and there's other ways of knowing. So, pushing yourself to engage with that...pushing yourself to sit with discomfort is a huge thing in decolonising. It's not...it's not meant to be easy, and I think, also, discomfort is like a...can be a learning tool...for all of us, all of us, [me included], yeah, yeah...

Kyra: No, for sure. And I think that's one of the major, I think, misconceptions about decolonising, like I think people just assume that it's a lot of new things that we need to learn, but there's so much unlearning that needs to be done. But what do you think you are still learning, like in terms of, I guess, your position in the university or, you know, as an educator?



Stephanie: Yes. Oh, I think it's, you know, I...what I sort of alluded to earlier is like...it's how... how to be in the university and do this work, em... I feel like I'm in the university but not of the university, if that makes sense, that it's a...it can be a difficult place to be, to do this work, and I wouldn't say... Yeah, what does it mean to decolonise...? And...yeah, I don't think we can [fully] decolonise anything in the West, you know, without, you know, destroying capitalism, you know, for example, and so what does it mean to try to be doing decolonising work? So, for me, I think it's...I'm trying to create pockets and cracks of decolonial potential in the space, you know, possibilities to disrupt, with troublemaking, em, in the university, but it's...it's a learning and an unlearning, definitely, like you say, because there's no...there's no guidebook for decolonising. There needs...you need to have a lot of space to reflect...and also to be brave enough to experiment. Sometimes things won't go the way you'd like them to, but you learn from them. But also, being a black queer woman in the Academy, em, the pressure to...never like fail or always have answers for everything, you know, to...to, I suppose, to calm everyone's nerves about decolonising when I'm not sure I...I want to calm your nerves about decolonising [laughing]. That's [all part of the]...that's part of it, you know, is...is the disruption.

Kyra: Yeah. Mm.

Stephanie: And I think people want it to be comfortable or made easier, and it's not going to be, and so, yeah, the pressures on you as an academic, and as a black academic, em....it's hard figuring out...figuring your way, I think, yeah...

Kyra: No, for sure. I mean, you've just touched upon so many things there but like I agree like...especially the kind of idea of like how can I be in the university but not of it, like I think... I don't know if you know Sharon Stein, she talks a lot about kind of like decolonising in the university and how we all each have our own kind of like...individual investments in the coloniality of higher education, and, you know, sometimes the system rewards us and it's like...when we have so many ties, how can we kind of do this work in the university when we're essentially kind of relying on like the master's tools and we're in the master's house? So, I think, yeah, like there's so many questions involved in that, and I think, again, like I agree in terms of being like a black academic in an institution, like it's almost... I mean, when I was doing my undergrad – well, I should probably go back a bit, when I was doing my A Levels, like I was taught Sociology by two women of colour, and, then, obviously, coming into the university where all my lecturers are kind of white, I think I underestimated how much that representation just was so important to me. And let me just say, like you kind of doing the work that you do and, you know, being a black academic in an institution, like, you know, your presence and like what you do, like that representation, like it means so much to like students like me, and I know probably the students that you teach as well, so...yeah, thank you.



Stephanie: Oh, thank you! That means so much to me, honestly, because I was going to say on that, about the figuring your way, part of it...part of the work that really sustains me is collaboration and comradeship, so [being comrades] and having folks like you...like it really does mean the world to have...have links, have solidarity with each other, and there's no other way of doing this work than being in collaboration with folks. So, you and Jennifer as well, students that I teach, and also PhD students, and my colleagues like from all over, some in and out of the university as well, just...you can't do this alone. You definitely can't [do this] in isolation. So, yeah, thank you!

Kyra: So, I guess, what advice would you give to students who are kind of entering the university, or already in the university, and also want to demand social justice within that space?

Stephanie: I'd say...as a student, like...you do have power. Sometimes it can feel like you don't, but you definitely do have power. And find...like find other students, particularly, like union is really important, to connect with, but also find...find academics, find academics like me. You know, I always want to connect with folks who want to do this work, and I don't...I think...whether you're just starting out on it or whether you're further down the road, people are always keen to connect and, again, like I said, have that solidarity. You can't do this alone. So, seeking out other folks...em...I wouldn't say mentors but...yeah, just reaching out. So, I've always found that really helpful in the past. As I say, it wasn't until my PhD, like during my university education, it wasn't until my PhD I was taught by a woman of colour – well, not “taught”, one of my supervisors was a woman of colour, and that meant so much, and, then, during my career so far, I've met kind of more senior women of colour and...just seeing them for the first time, you'd be like, oh my gosh, like...wow, I didn't know how much I needed to see...see them, and reaching out to folks can mean a lot to them as well as you, you know? So, connect, connect, em...yeah, I suppose building community is...is what I'm talking about. And what was...I was going to say...?

I think, if you can, you know, agitate for change in the university, like it...because there's academics who want to do this work, and if there are students also saying they want this, you know, it makes it much easier for us all to connect in that way. And like I've been...I was a part of like the student movement when I was doing my Master's and that was also quite life-changing too, so around the time when the fees went up in 2010, so part of like student occupation, student protest and marches, and the black student campaign, the NUS, and they're really great spaces to be in and [to then more into] connect with folks. So, yeah, just connect, connect, collaborate [laughing]...!



Kyra: Find your people!

Stephanie: Yeah, and they're definitely out there, definitely out there...

Kyra: Amazing. What is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

Wow...

Kyra: Another big question!

Stephanie: As I say, a real commitment [for] like black and brown students and racialised students, em, [to have] their place in the Academy and to be supported and their experiences...to be...to be heard and to be addressed, as well as black and brown staff too, em, and a real, serious, em, serious engagement with coloniality and decolonising, em, in good faith.

Kyra: So, like I said, the book will actually be available to purchase by the time this episode airs, so for everyone listening, be sure to check it out! And a link on where to grab it will be available in the description. But thank you so much for just sharing your thoughts and ideas [of our space], Stephanie, like I'm so happy that we got to have this conversation, and, yeah, just thank you again for being open to this and joining me.

Stephanie: Thank you so much for having me. It's been so good to talk, and I really just appreciate this podcast and all your work.

Kyra: Thank you.

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