

...with Jane Ussher

Professor of Women's Health Psychology at the University of Western Sydney

One inspiration

Janet Sayers. When I read her 1982 book *Biological Politics* as a nascent PhD student I was inspired to engage in critical feminist writing about the reproductive body, which released me from a lifetime of conducting experiments on physiological arousal and performance change across the menstrual cycle – the focus of my PhD.

One moment that changed the course of your career

Valerie Walkerdine asking me to join her in setting up a Department of Critical Psychology in Sydney in 1997. I fell in love with Australia on my first day, and have never looked back.

One book all psychologists should read

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1967, Tavistock).

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Follow your passion – not what's currently in fashion. Over the years I have been advised not to position myself as a feminist psychologist, not to do qualitative research, and not to research sexuality. I ignored all of this advice, and seem to have survived.

One thing that you would change about psychology

The focus on experimentation and quantitative methods to the exclusion of all else. Australia and the US are worse than the UK in this regard.

One challenge you think psychology faces

Maintaining relevance in a multimedia world where psychological theorising is popularised and simplified, whilst refereed journal publications only speak to an elite, and can take years to appear in print. Open access journals that offer

immediate publication are one obvious solution.

One regret

That I didn't start painting until I was in my forties – it's



Jane Ussher
J.Ussher@uws.edu.au

one of my greatest pleasures in life, and a complete antidote to academic research and writing.

One heroine from psychology past or present

Mary Parlee, a US feminist psychologist. I read her 1973 paper 'The premenstrual syndrome' as a third-year student and it was a revelatory

moment, the first time I felt engaged with psychology as a discipline. Here was something of intrinsic interest, something that related to my own life, and something written by a woman (when all of my lecturers were men, as were the authors of the work they cited). Most important of all, it was a very smart feminist critique, published in one of the most respected psychology journals. This paper directly inspired my PhD and subsequent research on the construction and experience of PMS.

One cultural recommendation

I play 'Everything But the Girl' very loud when I paint – their whole catalogue, from the early 80s to today.

One reason women are more likely to be positioned as mad than men

Fear of the feminine – and fear of women who transgress femininity.

One alternative career path you may have chosen

My father didn't believe in girls being educated, and thought I should be a hairdresser. Crime novelist would be my alternative option today.

One thing that makes you laugh

My dog, Barney, trying to catch fish in the shallow water at the beach. He never succeeds but will try for hours at a time.

More answers online at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

resource

The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience (Routledge, 2011).
'This book is the culmination of 30 years of research and theorising about women's greater propensity to be diagnosed and treated as mad.'

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