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Event Review: The British Psychological Society Psychology of Women Section 30th Annual Conference: Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor, United Kingdom (12th-14th July 2017)

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Event Review: The British Psychological Society Psychology of Women Section 30th Annual Conference: Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor, United Kingdom (12th-14th July 2017).

Alison Mackiewicz

ACCEPTED to present my research at the Psychology of Women Section [PoWS] event this year meant returning to Cumberland Lodge and this filled me with a huge sense of pleasure and anticipation. Not only would I be able to bask in the delights this wonderful historical building has to offer, but also revel in listening and talking to a global and diverse gathering of feminist researchers, teachers and practitioners. I was also so excited to be attending with a work colleague, a PoWS 'virgin', with whom I could share this experience! Needless to say, we were not disappointed!

We arrived early on Wednesday morning, taking a slow, meandering drive through Windsor Great Park, and then a relaxing stroll in the grounds of the Lodge. This conference venue is quite unique; unlike the commercial, somewhat lonely aspect of staying in a hotel or university accommodation when attending a conference, Cumberland Lodge is special... it is like a family retreat, and I highly recommend the historical talk and tour while you are there.

This year, the outgoing chair, Professor Marcia Worrell

(University of West London) opened the event and introduced the first keynote, Professor Sue Wilkinson. Who better placed to walk us through her personal reflections on being a founder of PoWS and celebrating its 30th birthday! This was followed by three parallel streams: (1) Family Violence; (2) Feminism and Neoliberalism; (3) Pregnancy and Birth; and two equally engaging workshops: (1) Gemma Ellis discussing some of the considerations for teachers who work with children where there has been domestic abuse; (2) PoWS committee members reflecting on Feminism & Psychology [F&P] and PoWS future involvement. The first stream presentations were by: Mia Scally, Dr. Miranda Horvath, and Professor Joanna Adler (Middlesex University London) who spoke of women's experiences of child custody in the context of intimate partner violence and abuse; Tanya Beetham (University of Northampton), who reflected on her PhD research with children who have experienced domestic violence; and Jo Neale (University of Bedfordshire), who also talked about her PhD work, exploring the kinds of 'remote control' perpetrators of domestic abuse exercise after separating from their

partners. This first day ended with fascinating presentations from the PoWS Undergraduate prize winner: Jessica Rooney (Leeds Beckett University), on discourses of choice surrounding prophylactic mastectomy; and PoWS and F&P's Postgraduate prize winner, Shamini Sriskandarajah, a recently qualified integrative therapist, on her autoethnographic research into eating disorders. Both these talks opened my eyes, and mind, and reminded me why I enjoy attending the PoWS annual conference. Listening to such engaging research from a feminist perspective is powerful and empowering and always leaves me eager for more.

Thursday morning saw four streams of individual papers, (1) Sexual Violence; (2) Parenthood; (3) Feminism & Social Media; and (4) Health Experiences, plus a collective symposium discussing topics on various feminist interventions in neoliberal times. I plumped for stream 1, where Dr. Laura Kilby and Donald Swinney (Sheffield Hallam University) presented a thematic analysis of female students' constructions of 'lad culture', followed by Chelsea Murphy and Hebe Phillips (LGBT Activists in North West of England) insight on lesbian and bisexual women's sexual violence, and Drs. Kate Milnes and Tamara Turner-Moore's (Leeds Beckett University) paper entitled 'Boys will be boys' which explored sexual bullying. This second day of PoWS is also the fullest, and the first round of papers was followed by the second keynote speaker, Professor Janet Sayers (University of Kent), who provided an engaging and

intriguing talk about feminism and psychoanalysis in the modern day.

After the usual superb Cumberland Lodge luncheon, consumed in the balmy sunshine, the streams continued with sessions ranging from 'gender, power and resistance', including Neus Segui's (Kingston University London) paper on British Muslim women's power; to 'methods', and Dr. Panteá Farvid and Mariam Mousa's (Auckland University of Technology) introduction to visual motif analysis using Tumblr data as their example. Running parallel to these streams was a symposium of four papers, chaired by Professor Erica Burman (University of Manchester) in the Library, and a much tweeted about and thoroughly enjoyed 'Design-a-Vagina' craftivism workshop led by Associate Professor Virginia Clarke (University of West England).

Streams continued throughout the afternoon, including Dr. Meg-John Barker's (The Open University) brilliant talk on analysing current self-help books on sex & gender, and doing sex-self-help differently. This was followed by three workshops, one of which was an opportunity to ask questions about publishing feminist research of the editors from F&P and PoWS Review. The PoWS annual general meeting convened early evening, instating the new Chair: Professor Katherine Johnson (University of Brighton). And the evening featured a 1987-ish themed disco to celebrate 30 years of PoWS; this was a huge success and wasn't over until the last few boppers retired at some 3am I believe!

Expecting a rather subdued

start to Friday morning, I was amazed at the number of people who attended the sixth parallel sessions of the conference at 9:30am. This was the time I was presenting on a co-authored study about female experiences of sex with partners surviving uro-genital cancers. As a result I missed all the great presentations on gender, health and embodiment; on sexual practices; and the five paper symposium on qualitative surveys as a feminist method. The conference closed following the final keynote by Professor Paula Nicolson (Royal Holloway, University of London), herself a PoWS 'foremother', who explored the lessons PoWSees have learnt during its history.

PoWS is a 'must attend' for those of you interested in feminist health and wellbeing research. I find most of the conferences I sign up for enlightening, but PoWS has the edge and this is because everyone involved in the event is so encouraging; it does not matter whether you are a well-established keynote or a fledgling undergraduate, the atmosphere at the conference is one that is supportive and nurturing. I left feeling inspired and reinvigorated; my somewhat waning need to write up my research had become a desire once more, not an obligation, and I am already looking forward to PoWS next year which will focus on Equalities [11th – 13th July 2018].

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Call for Next Issue...

The theme for the Autumn Publication (*Volume 1 – Issue 3*) will be:

“Social & Legal Acceptance of Non-Binary Genders & Lifestyles”.

Submission deadline for the next issue is: **20th November 2017.**

Contributions are welcomed for all three sections of the next issue which shall be published on: **20th December 2017.**

All contributions should be submitted via e-mail to: Silveris@edgehill.ac.uk