

## Prof. Elizabeth Peel

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### **What is your current position?**

Professor of Psychology and Social Change, and Director of Research for the Institute of Health and Society at the University of Worcester. I also Chair the BPS Psychology of Sexualities Section.

### **Could you say a bit about your career trajectory so far?**

Trajectory suggests an upward path. Circular routes, peaks and troughs, and variety in role are just as important. For instance, I spent a lot of time working to support the (then) BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section in the early 2000s and I'm trying to do the same again now.

Potted career history: I did my PhD in social psychology under the very able guidance of Profs Celia Kitzinger, Derek Edwards and Sue Wilkinson in the late 1990s/early 2000s. My PhD topic was driven by my community work. I then worked as a research fellow in health at the University of Edinburgh in a completely different area, before lecturing at Aston University for nearly 10 years. I moved to the University of Worcester in 2013 to take up my current position.

### **How did you get to be where you are today?**

In terms of getting where I am today I have been, and continue to be, very fortunate to encounter passionate and inspiring colleagues and mentors. Following the feminist perspective that the personal is political I have also tried to embrace (difficult) personal experiences in ways that have positively informed my academic work. This has meant that my research has included a focus on diversity training about lesbian, gay and bisexual sexualities, same-sex relationships and kinship, reproductive loss, and dementia, particularly focusing on informal carers' perspectives, regulatory frameworks, and communication in various contexts.

Although I identify as a psychologist much of my work is interdisciplinary and in collaboration with social scientists from disciplines such as socio-legal studies, sociology and anthropology. Occupying space on the margins of a discipline and looking outwards is not only intellectually and personally rewarding but invariably expands the reach and potential impact from academic work.

I have published widely and regularly over the last 15 or so years, and have experienced funding success, most notably from the British Academy. The British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship I held in 2011/12 for the *Dementia Talking: Care, conversation and communication* was an excellent opportunity, and timely one. That the first introductory textbook in the field of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Psychology (with Victoria Clarke, Sonja Ellis and Damien Riggs, CUP 2010) won the 2013 BPS Book Prize was a real marker in the sand for the sub-field and for the British Psychological Society.

### **When did you decide to be an academic? What was it that prompted this decision?**

I don't think it was ever a conscious decision. I didn't believe I would ever complete my PhD until it was done! I did have the opportunity to pursue a career in clinical psychology, which I didn't ultimately take. Despite many, varied and often competing pressures I'm largely (still) convinced that being an academic is the best job there is.

### **What have been the challenges so far in your career in academia?**

I took my first lectureship for personal rather than career reasons and that proved challenging in many and unexpected ways. Others' reactions to the topics, methods and theories I draw on can sometimes be challenging, but equally that tells me that they remain important. There have been many times that I have encountered challenges borne of heterosexism, sexism, ageism, and their intersection. Having a period of maternity leave, for example, felt challenging because of explicit and implicit assumptions from colleagues and managers that becoming a mother meant that 'career' and full-time work would no longer be important to me. Being in the privileged position of being a 'Professor' for the last few years acts to a certain extent as a 'buffer' against some of the challenges I experienced earlier in my career. But with this comes a wider responsibility to others which may be felt less acutely by Professors occupying a different demographic (white, male, heterosexual, older etc.), in part because there are more of them.

### **What advice would/do you give to other female academics?**

Take the opportunities that are offer to you and run with them. If you're not offered opportunities, or are offered opportunities that don't fit with your hopes and aspirations collaborate with other people to create different and better ones.

Cultivate a 'can do' but not an 'I can do everything' attitude (and follow through).

Seek out peers and mentors whose opinion and perspectives you trust and value. And grow and nurture your wider networks.

There are many and varied indicators of 'career success' – try to pursue those that are valuable to you, and be mindful that these will vary over your life-course in the academy.

Take pride in yours and colleagues achievements, and try and bounce back quickly from the inevitable failures and rejections – they are just part of the process.

Have a least one 'passion project' up your sleeve – be it research, teaching or service related - it will keep you going through tougher times.

Delegate!