

...with Lois Holzman

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One moment that set the course of your career

Every moment of my final undergraduate course, Modern English Grammar. This course introduced linguistics to me, not only the discipline but the word itself. I'd always been fascinated and puzzled about language – If you spoke well and easily, did that mean you were smart? And if not, were you dumb? Where did words come from? How did anyone ever become a speaker, a reader, a writer? I was overjoyed to discover that there were people who actually spent their lives exploring, investigating and discovering things about language. I got hooked on language development, and that eventually led me to getting a PhD in psychology.

One book that you think all psychologists should read
Philosophical Investigations by Ludwig Wittgenstein. This unique, eccentric and brilliant 20th-century philosopher takes apart nearly every

concept that underlies contemporary psychology (and puts just a few of them back together). This book and other of his later writings are a valuable tool for psychology to examine its language and assumptions – the big ones, like causality and essence. Sadly, such self-reflexivity is missing in most psychology programs.

One challenge you think psychology faces

Giving up trying to be a hard science. So many colleagues I speak with and hear about are deeply unhappy – they feel that their chosen profession is at odds with their humanity. Human beings are far more complex, unsystematic and uncategorisable than the dominant psychology instructs us they are. Fortunately, hundreds of alternatives that take a social, cultural, relational approach to psychology are being developed, studied and practised. The East Side

Institute, which I founded with philosopher and therapist Fred Newman, developed one of these alternatives, social therapeutics.

One alternative career path

Dog trainer.



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One thing that you would change about psychologists

The too common tendency to overstate, predict and hype the public. So much of what psychologists do is worthy and important in 'non-glamorous' ways. Far too many conclusions about what people are and implications for how people should live are being drawn. This goes on in

all areas of research, but psychology has more of a moral imperative to stay close to the data, since human beings are the 'objects' of its investigations, and human beings make meaning.

One cultural recommendation

Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There by Lewis Carroll (in which I first discovered the magical creativity and playfulness of language).

One hero from psychology

Lev Vygotsky, the brilliant and loving revolutionary scientist who discovered the zone of proximal development and much, much more.

One great thing that psychology has achieved

Humanising craziness.

One hope for the future

That psychology would recognise the significance of play and performance and turn its focus to the becoming-ness of human beings.

One proud moment

One month after September 11, 2001, convening the first Performing the World conference, where several hundred people from dozens of countries came together to share the power of performance, play and creativity and begin to create community. The eighth is in October this year.

One final thought

If you're troubled by the institutional and conceptual constraints of psychology, don't be discouraged – transform it!

resource

The Overweight Brain – How Our Obsession with Knowing Keeps Us from Getting Smart Enough to Make a Better World: 'It's is a popular book I'm writing socially online, chapter by chapter. See loisholzman.org.'

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