



## Being an Ally: Dr. Evelyn Hooker

### Introduction

Dr. Evelyn Hooker was a pioneering psychologist who was awarded a Ph.D. in 1932 by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Her career ranged from researcher to teaching professor. In 1945, she was approached by one of her students, a gay man, who encouraged her to conduct research to challenge the assumption that homosexuals were by nature mentally ill. A decade later, Dr. Hooker did exactly that with a landmark study that disputed the American Psychiatric Association's classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder.

Dr. Hooker's story provides an opportunity to consider allyship, advocacy, psychology, and research methods. In this lesson, students learn key past and present LGBTQ+ terminology and diagnosis classifications. They will also gain knowledge of some of the barbaric treatments to which gay people were subjected when homosexuality was pathologized.

**This lesson was created as part of the Making Gay History / National Education Association Teaching Fellowship.** Each lesson specifically uses a podcast episode and related resources from the *Making Gay History* podcast. These lessons have been created so that teachers across the country have the context and tools to bring archival audio from the *Making Gay History* podcast into middle and high school classrooms.

The *Making Gay History* podcast brings LGBTQ+ history to life through the voices of the people who lived it. We strive to create a world where everyone understands, respects, and honors the experiences and histories of LGBTQ+ people by providing engaging and accessible entry points to their largely hidden history. The podcast is hosted by historian and journalist Eric Marcus, who has been documenting LGBTQ+ history for more than 35 years.

### Grade Level

Grades 10-12.

## Disciplines / Unit Recommendations

This lesson was created for an AP Psychology course.

### **Unit: Psychological Discrimination Based on Gender or Sexual Orientation**

- Review of the history of homosexuality as a mental disorder
- Introduction and research methods
- Treatment of psychological disorders

National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula (American Psychological Association, 2022)

### **Multiculturalism and Gender Content Standards**

After concluding this unit, students will understand

1. psychological constructs of culture;
2. psychological constructs of gender and sexual orientation.

### **Content Standard Two**

Psychological constructs of gender and sexual orientation.

Learning targets: Students will be able to

- 2.1 compare and contrast sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation;
- 2.2 describe diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation;
- 2.3 describe the psychological effects of privilege, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation.

### **Development and Learning Pillar Integrative Themes**

- A. Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.
- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in the pursuit of a more just society.
- E. Our perceptions and biases filter our experiences of the world through an imperfect personal lens.
- F. Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.
- G. Ethical principles guide psychology research and practice.

## Estimated Time

This lesson was created as a two-day lesson for block scheduling of 73 minutes. Time may vary based on student background knowledge.

## Preparation

Note: It is recommended that you double-check all links as some may shift since they are not hosted by Making Gay History directly. If you come across any broken links, please let us know at [hello@makinggayhistory.org](mailto:hello@makinggayhistory.org).

- Listen to ***Making Gay History, Season 1, Episode 4: Dr. Evelyn Hooker.***  
[bit.ly/mgh-hooker](http://bit.ly/mgh-hooker)

Note: As the teacher, you know your students and teaching situation best. It is always advised to listen to the full podcast episode individually before playing it for or assigning it to your students, just as you would review any text for classroom use.

- Optional: Make copies of the [episode transcript](#) for students to read/reference while listening or prepare to make it available to them digitally.
- Review the [slide presentation](#).  
Note: This lesson was created for an AP Psychology class. Modifications may be needed for lower grade levels or for those with less familiarity with psychology terms and concepts.
- Review and make copies of the [student handouts](#) or set them up on a digital platform.  
Note: Teacher guides are included for the timeline (p. 2) and key terminology (pp. 8-9).
- Prepare to use the “Key Terminology” cards in the student handouts (pp. 5-7) by means of one or more of the following:
  - Make sure students will have access to scissors to cut the cards themselves.
  - Copy the key terms and definitions on different colored paper.
  - Cut the cards yourself so that there are enough for students to use individually or in pairs/groups. Envelopes can be used to keep the cards organized.
  - Make laminated card sets so they can be used in multiple class periods or in future years.
- Have art supplies available for students who benefit from non-verbal journaling.

## Background

In 1945, Dr. Evelyn Hooker was approached by Sam From, one of her former students, to study “normal” homosexuals in order to show the world what they were really like—to challenge the commonly held belief that gay people were by nature mentally ill. With a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, Dr. Hooker conducted a groundbreaking study in which she compared a group of 30 gay men with a group of 30 heterosexual men. Her findings were evaluated by a panel of esteemed psychiatrists who were confident they would be able to identify the homosexual participants based on the results of the standardized psychological tests Dr. Hooker administered—but they could not. Dr. Hooker published her findings in 1957. Her study, titled “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual,” was the first major step in the campaign to remove homosexuality as a mental illness from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Note: Students may be curious about the beautiful graphic of Dr. Hooker used throughout the lesson slideshow and on the student handouts. It is an illustration created by Christopher Ikonomou (xe/he) to accompany an article in UCLA’s *OutWrite Newsmagazine*, the oldest queer college publication in the United States. See the “Extension Activity” section for more information about the artist and a prompt that could be used with this artwork.

## Lesson Plan

### **Day One**

1. Opening activity: activating prior knowledge:
  - a. Welcome students to Dr. Evelyn Hooker’s world of advocacy and allyship through experimental and research psychology methods (Slides 1-2 of the [slide presentation](#)).
  - b. Brainstorming worksheet: prior knowledge of key concepts ([student handouts](#), p. 1):
    - i. Have you ever heard of Dr. Evelyn Hooker before?
    - ii. What is an upstander?
    - iii. Describe courage.
    - iv. What is oral history?
    - v. Are you considering a career in psychology? If yes, list the area of study in which you are interested.
  - c. Class discussion about students’ answers to the “upstander” and “courage” questions to confirm understanding and clarify inaccuracies (“oral history” will be discussed later in Step 3). For a quick scan of the room, students could be invited to raise their hands in relation to questions (i) and (v).

2. Introducing Dr. Evelyn Hooker:
  - a. Go over key events in the biographical timeline for Dr. Hooker (Slides 3-5).
  - b. Have students take notes on the timeline worksheet ([student handouts](#), pp. 3-4). Invite them to add to the worksheet over the course of the lesson.
  
3. Dr. Hooker in her own voice (Slide 6):
  - a. Class discussion: What is oral history?
  - b. Play the *Making Gay History* [podcast episode](#) featuring Dr. Hooker (15 min. without credits).
  - c. Optional: Share the [episode transcript](#) if needed for accommodation/scaffolding.
  - d. Instruct students to write down three talking points from the episode.
  - e. Class discussion after listening: What were your takeaways from the episode?
  
4. The approach to homosexuality at the time Dr. Hooker embarked on her research:
  - a. Class discussion: How did the mental health profession regard homosexuality in the 1950s? (Slide 7)
  - b. Slides 8-9 frame what students are about to learn about treatments for homosexuality used at the time (Slide 10).
  - c. Share the dangerous procedures that were used to “cure” homosexuality (Slides 11-14); define and discuss:
    - i. Lobotomy: A discredited surgical procedure once used to treat severe mental health conditions that involves severing connections in the frontal lobe of the brain.
    - ii. Electroshock treatment: A brief electrical stimulation of the brain. Early applications of the treatment were often performed without anesthesia.
    - iii. Chemical castration: The use of chemicals or drugs to stop sex hormone production and suppress sexual desire.
  - d. Dr. Hooker’s study (Slides 15-16):
    - i. Ask: Who can conduct the type of study Dr. Hooker pursued?
    - ii. Answer: Research psychologist.  
Define, or have students define, the term depending on prior knowledge.

## Day Two

1. Review of Day One:
  - a. Allow time for students to look over their notes and reflect.
  - b. Class discussion: Can you review what we learned from the last class?

2. Resume going through the slide presentation, and remind students to add notes to their timeline worksheet over the course of the lesson.
  - a. Dr. Hooker’s study (Slides 17-21):

Introduce the research Dr. Hooker conducted, including:

    - i. Study participants
    - ii. Tests conducted:
      - Thematic apperception: Psychological test that asks a participant to create stories about ambiguous scenes on picture cards in order to learn more about their hopes, fears, desires, needs, demands, conflicts.
      - Rorschach: Method of psychological testing in which a person is asked to describe what they see in 10 inkblots. (Hermann Rorschach; assessment for schizophrenia.)
    - iii. Results
  - b. The declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder (Slides 22-24):

Discuss DSM classifications and changes of language.
  - c. Recognition for Dr. Hooker (Slide 25).
3. Activity: “Key Terminology” matching cards (25 minutes):
  - a. Group students in small groups. Give each group one set of the cards on pages 5-7 of the [student handouts](#) or allow time for the students to separate them with scissors themselves.

Note: You may also ask students to complete this activity individually or in pairs.
  - b. Task: Match the key terms with their definitions.

Note: Have students take a picture of their answers in case you run out of time for a full discussion.
  - c. Class discussion of the terms, with students sharing their understanding:
    - i. Use Slides 26-32 to assist with reviewing the definitions.

Note: The “Key Terminology — Teacher Guide” on pages 8-9 of the [student handouts](#) may also be helpful for reference.
    - ii. Invite students to take notes about the correct definitions.
    - iii. Respond to misconceptions or additional questions.
4. Upstanding and courage:
  - a. Student journal: Offer an open opportunity for students to journal in reflection of the lesson, including the feelings and moral questions raised by this history.

Note: This might be offered as a private journal option—space for students to reflect and collect their thoughts, knowing they will not need to share. Alternatively, if you

think your students would benefit from oral processing and there is trust in the classroom, you could invite students to have small group conversations about their journal.

b. Class discussion:

- i. Ask a student to read the quote on Slide 33:  
“Evelyn took many risks to stand up for a community she was not a part of when it would have been easier to study something else.”
- ii. Open discussion or small group discussions and share-back afterwards:
  - Why do you think she did this?
  - Would you do this?
  - What would hold you back from taking the risks she took?
  - Are you an upstander?
  - Do you have the courage to explore the unknown?

c. Final reflection:

- i. Ask a student to read the quote from Dr. Hooker on Slide 34:  
“What means most to me, I think, is... excuse me while I cry... If I went to a gathering of some kind, gay gathering of some kind, I was sure to have at least one person come up to me and say, ‘I’ve wanted to meet you because I wanted to tell you what you saved me from.’ I’m thinking of a woman, a young woman, who came up to me in a meeting and said that her parents, when they discovered that she was a lesbian, put her in a psychiatric hospital and the standard procedure in that hospital was electroshock, but that her psychiatrist was familiar with my work and he was able to keep them from giving it to her. She said that with tears streaming down her face.”
- ii. Optional: Give students a few moments to add to their journal with final reflections on what they learned from this history.
- iii. Class discussion: Reflection on the whole presentation and what students have learned.

### Extension Activity

The graphic of Dr. Evelyn Hooker used throughout the lesson slideshow and on the student handouts provides an opportunity for extended exploration of Dr. Hooker’s impact and the inspiration she continues to provide.

The graphic was created by Christopher Ikononou (xe/he), who describes himself as follows: “I’m a 23-year-old trans and disabled artist, writer, and filmmaker with a particular interest in production design, representation, and advocacy. I’ve enjoyed a lifetime of speaking up for my

and others' marginalized communities since being diagnosed with Marfan syndrome at a young age. I love involving intersectional activism in my artistry and hope to use my voice to make a positive impact in the entertainment industry. Learn more [here](#)."

1. Share Ikonomou's self-description. Have students create a simple Venn diagram to serve as a graphic organizer for their notes, then provide them with the following prompt, asking them to write their thoughts in the appropriate circle or overlapping space of the Venn diagram:

After learning about Dr. Hooker and reading this brief description of Ikonomou, compare/contrast Dr. Hooker and Ikonomou as upstanders.

2. Let students know that Ikonomou's Dr. Hooker graphic was first published in 2020 by UCLA's *OutWrite Newsmagazine*, the oldest queer college publication in the United States; it accompanied an article written as part of UCLA's centennial celebration. Share [the article](#) with your students, then offer the following prompt for discussion or as a writing assignment:

In addition to the impact on the field of Psychology explored in the lesson, how is the impact of Dr. Hooker's work seen?

Note: Much of the content in the *OutWrite* article has already been covered in the lesson. You could have students skim the article for new information (especially regarding legacy), or if students need the content reinforcement, have them read it more thoroughly.

### Additional Resources

- Training guide, ["Allyship in Action"](#) (GLSEN).
- Follow-up podcast episode, *Making Gay History*, Season 13, Episode 3: "Dismantling a Diagnosis — Out of the DSM & into the Present: A Conversation about LGBTQ+ Mental Health," [bit.ly/mgh-out-of-the-dsm](https://bit.ly/mgh-out-of-the-dsm) (50 min.).
- Condensed classroom version of the documentary [Cured](#) (37 min.) and related materials (History UnErased).
- YA book, [Evelyn Hooker and the Fairy Project](#) by Gayle E. Pitman, Magination Press/American Psychological Association, 2021. The book is a good read for young adult learners and provides background information.
- Article, ["How a Colorado Psychologist Proved Being Gay Isn't a Mental Illness"](#) (CPR News).

## Image Sources / Permissions

- The illustration of Dr. Evelyn Hooker in the student handouts and on Slides 2, 3, 5, 18 of the slideshow presentation is used with permission of Christopher Ikonomou, [cpiko.art](http://cpiko.art) / UCLA's *OutWrite Newsmagazine*, [outwritenewsmag.org](http://outwritenewsmag.org), the oldest queer college publication in the United States.
- The other slideshow illustrations of Dr. Hooker are taken from the YA book, *Evelyn Hooker and the Fairy Project* by Gayle E. Pitman, *Magination/American Psychological Association*, 2021, [apa.org/pubs/magination/evelyn-hooker-fairy-project](http://apa.org/pubs/magination/evelyn-hooker-fairy-project), and were created by Sarah Green, [sarahgreenillustration.com](http://sarahgreenillustration.com). Reprinted with permission.

## About the Author: Kimberly A R D'Auria MPS

As a high school educator, I am more than just an ally for students. I am also an advocate for those with learning disabilities, for those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, and for promoting fair and equitable social change on a national level. I am drawn to advocates like Dr. Evelyn Hooker as we share the same drive to fight for the rights of people whose voices may not always be heard.