



Being an Ally: Dr. Evelyn Hooker

Introduction

Dr. Evelyn Hooker was a pioneering psychologist who was awarded her Ph.D. in 1932 by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Her career ranged from researcher to teaching professor. Her story provides the opportunity to consider allyship, advocacy, psychology, and research methods. In 1944, she was approached by one of her students, a gay man, who encouraged her to study homosexuals in order to challenge the assumption that all homosexuals were by nature mentally ill. A decade later, Dr. Hooker did exactly that, and her findings challenged the American Psychiatric Association's classification of homosexuality as a "mental disorder."

In this lesson, students learn key past and present LGBTQ+ terminology, diagnosis classifications, and about treatments in the mental health field. Students will have an open discussion on present diagnoses and treatments that, thanks to Dr. Evelyn Hooker's advocacy, are safe and affirming. Students will gain knowledge of the history of the treatment of gay people by the mental health profession, and by society in general, in terms of their civil liberties.

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 its 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

10th -12th grade

Disciplines / Unit Recommendations

This lesson was created for an AP Psychology course.

Unit: Psychological discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation:

- Review 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 understand:

1. Psychological constructs of culture.
2. Psychological constructs of gender and sexual orientation.

Content Standard 2

Psychological constructs of gender and sexual orientation. Students can (learning targets):

- 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

Created as a 2-day lesson for block scheduling of 73 minutes. Time may vary based on student background knowledge.

Preparation

It is recommended that teachers double-check all links as some may shift since they are not hosted by Making Gay History directly.

- ☐ Listen to **Making Gay History Season 1 Episode 4 Dr. Evelyn Hooker.**
<https://bit.ly/mgh-hooker>

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

Optional: Make the podcast [episode transcript](#) available for students to read/reference when listening to the podcast.

- ☐ Review [slide presentation](#).

Note: this lesson was created for an AP Psychology class. Modifications might be needed for lower grade levels or for those with less familiarity with psychology terms and concepts.

- ☐ Review and make copies of [student handouts](#) or set them up on a digital platform. Note: teacher keys are included for timeline and key terminology.
- ☐ Prepare to use the “Key Terminology” cards by means of one or more of the following:
 - ☐ Making sure students will have access to scissors for cutting them up themselves.
 - ☐ Copying terms and definitions on different-colored paper.
 - ☐ Cutting the grid as instructed so that there are enough for students to use individually or in pairs/groups. Envelopes can be used to keep them organized.
 - ☐ Laminating 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

Dr. Evelyn Hooker was approached by one of her students, Sam, 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, she 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 claimed they could identify homosexuals from standardized psychological tests—but they could not. Dr. Hooker published her findings in 1957. Her study helped advance the campaign to remove homosexuality as a mental illness from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

The photograph/graphic of Evelyn Hooker you see in the worksheets and slide presentation is used with the permission of Christopher Ikonou, <https://www.cpiko.art/> for UCLA’s OutWrite Newsmagazine <https://outwritenewsmag.org/>, oldest queer college publication in the United States.

The other illustrations of Evelyn Hooker come from the children’s book, [*Evelyn Hooker and the Fairy Project*](#) by Gayle E. Pitman, and were created by artist Susan Green, sarahgreenillustration.com.

Procedure

Day One

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

2. Introduction of Evelyn Hooker
 - a. Go over key events in the timeline for Dr. Evelyn Hooker. (Slides 3-5)
Note: there are additional dates/information on the teacher's key for timeline, and students will be able to add notes to the timeline over the course of the lesson.
 - b. Students can take notes on the timeline handout.
3. Evelyn Hooker in her own voice (Slide 6)
 - a. Class Discussion: What is oral history?
 - b. Listen to: **Making Gay History Season 1 Episode 4 Dr. Evelyn Hooker** (17:33)
<https://bit.ly/mgh-hooker>
 - c. Optional: Share transcript of episode if needed for accommodation/scaffolding.
 - d. Instruct students to write down three talking points from the podcast.
 - e. After listening, class discussion: What were your takeaways from the listened-to passage?
4. The approach to homosexuality before 1950 and after
 - a. Class discussion: Can you name three treatments that were used to cure homosexuality?
 - i. *Note: if class has not included content that would allow students to access this as prior knowledge, the teacher could share Slides 8 and 9 first, and then ask for discussion about what types of treatments might have been considered, given these beliefs about homosexuality.*
 - b. Slides 8-9 frame what students are about to learn about the treatments used prior to the 1950s.
 - c. Share treatments for homosexuality. (Slides 10-13) Define and discuss:
 - i. Transorbital Lobotomy - A surgical procedure to treat severe mental health conditions.
 - ii. Electric Shock Therapy - A brief electrical stimulation of the brain while the patient is under anesthesia.
 - iii. Chemical Castration - The use of chemicals or drugs to stop sex hormone production.
 - d. Dr. Hooker's study. (Slides 14-15)
 - i. Ask: Who can conduct the type of study Evelyn pursued?
 - ii. Answer: Research psychologist - define, or have students define, 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. Dr. Hooker's study
 - a. Introduction of the research conducted (Slides 16-20), including:
 - i. Getting people to participate in the research.
 - ii. Tests conducted:
 1. Thematic Appreciation - Responses were recorded by behavior and verbalization through story cards.
 2. 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 long time it took to remove homosexuality from classification as a mental illness.
 - i. Go through additional dates. (Slides 21-23)
 - ii. Have students add to timeline notes: 1973, 1980, 1987.
 - iii. Discuss DSM classifications and changes of language.
 - c. Recognition for Dr. Hooker. (Slide 24)
3. Activity: Key Terminology matching cards (25 minutes)
 - a. Group students in small groups. (1 packet per group)
 - i. Give each group a set of Key Terminology cards.
 - ii. Allow time for students to separate with scissors if needed.
 - iii. Task: match the key terms with the definitions.
 - iv. Note: Have students take a picture of their answers in case you run out of time for full discussion.
 - b. Class discussion of the terms, with students sharing their understanding.
 - i. Use Slides 25-31 in presentation on " Key Terminology" to assist with going through these definitions. Teacher answer key of definitions may also be helpful for teacher reference.
 - ii. Students can take notes on 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 on the lesson, including the feelings and moral questions raised by this history.
Note: this might be offered as a private journal - space for them to reflect and collect their thoughts, knowing they will not need to share their response.

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 on upstanding and courage.
 - i. Ask a student to read the quote on Slide 32:
"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 discussion and share back afterwards:
 - 1. Why do you think she did this?
 - 2. Would you do this ?
 - 3. What would hold you back from taking the risks she took?
 - 4. Are you an upstander?
 - 5. 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 33:
"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 that 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, 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 they learned.

Additional Resources

How to be an ally: [Allyship In Action](#)

Follow up: Making Gay History podcast, Season 13, Episode 3, “Dismantling a Diagnosis — Episode Three: Out of the DSM & into the Present — A Conversation about LGBTQ+ Mental Health”: <https://makinggayhistory.org/season-thirteen/>

Documentary: [Cured](#), and related from [History Unerased](#).

Pitman, G. (2021) *Evelyn Hooker and the Fairy Project*. Washington, DC: Magination Press. 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”](#)

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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 Evelyn Hooker, as we share the same drive to fight for the rights of people whose voices may not always be heard.