

Review of the talk *Off Air with Jane and Fi* at the *Women of the World Festival*, by Jane Garvey, Fi Glover, June Oscar and Meera Syal

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On the 10th of March, I was fortunate enough to attend a talk titled *Off Air with Jane & Fi* at the *Women of the World Festival*, held in the Royal Festival Hall, in the Southbank Centre, London. I was drawn to this event by the names of former BBC broadcasters Fi Glover and Jane Garvey, who had kept me amused during lockdown with the *Fortunately* podcast — light-hearted chatter about everything and nothing. I found their podcast comforting because I had so much in common with them (middle-class mums who had been discombobulated by the pandemic) and valued the strength they gained from female friendship. So, when I came to this live show, little did I expect such a thought-provoking exploration of multi-faceted experiences of womanhood, which placed me straight into my educational psychologist mindset — thinking about the power of language, storytelling and community psychology. Above all, it made me think about the children we work with, considering what the future looks like for young people growing up in our society in 2023.

The conversations flowed easily between humour and debate about the most serious problems pervading society today, including misogyny, bullying, racism and deprivation. Alongside Fi and Jane were two inspiring speakers — the first was June Oscar, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who spoke movingly about the work she has done to raise awareness of the problems facing her community and the support they need, especially with helping women to recognise the dangers of foetal alcohol syndrome, which she explained is particularly prevalent in the aboriginal community.

The second guest was actress, writer and comedian Meera Syal, who delighted the audience with tales about some of her most famous characters. What struck me most was when she spoke about storytelling as being at the heart of our humanity and a powerful tool for antiracism and social justice. She explained why she personally opposes the recent movement towards removing colonised perspectives from art and culture, instead favouring the addition of layers of rich description, by telling all sides and especially valuing the narratives of those who have been marginalised and discriminated against. This resonated for me as being the reason why participatory epistemologies are such a vital part of EP research, as creating opportunities to promote the stories of the people we are working with, especially children, whose voices are

so often unheard, is one way we can fulfil our duty for social justice.

The overwhelming strength of the event was the focus on inclusivity — although focused on celebrating women and non-binary people, there were several men in the audience who were greeted warmly by Fi and Jane. The whole talk was subtitled, while a British Sign Language interpreter signed the whole show and added several moments of humour with some well-timed gestures. The audience even had opportunities to shape conversation through microphones and spotlights throughout the auditorium.

The only moment of discord in the evening arose from a question from a young audience member, saying that as a representative of “Gen X” she felt that “Boomers” didn't respect men's rights. This was greeted by an audible inhale from the largely over-50s female audience — a very British expression of disapproval. While Fi and Jane protested that men's rights had been given plenty of respect for centuries in our patriarchal society, what occurred to me, was how such nominal labels as “Gen X, Y and Z”, “boomers”, “millennials”, “Brexiters”, “snowflakes” and so forth are so often used to signify and create division, adding to the conflict underpinning much of the debate around issues currently facing our society. Throughout our work, EPs look for opportunities to use language which promotes shared understanding, rather than dismissing others, and so we need to consider how we can promote mindfulness of the impact of such words.

It was June Oscar who addressed this question most eloquently, by suggesting that in Western society perhaps we spend too long thinking about our rights, whereas in her aboriginal culture, responsibilities are of primary importance — encompassing what we owe to our family, our fellow citizens, our planet and ourselves. This message made me reflect on the systemic nature of responsibility and how EPs are well-placed to build these connections through our work with community psychology. In fact, after having gone to hear Fi and Jane speak, it was actually the opportunity of hearing June Oscar, whom I hadn't heard of previously and who came from a completely different background to myself, that I really valued the most and whose work I plan to follow more closely in the future.

Events like this offer opportunities for us to get out of the echo chamber and lean in with curiosity to listen to a per-

spective we may not have considered before. One of our responsibilities as EPs is to keep learning about the world, different cultures and the myriad of experiences young people might be facing. And so next time I am looking for an evening's entertainment, I will look beyond the familiar and instead seek out new stories.



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