**SWiM Inspiring Stories**

**March 2021  
Professor Dame Til Wykes**

NATALIE HANNAN

I would like to start by acknowledging that today I'm on the lands of the Wurundjeri people who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years. And I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and also the traditional owners of the lands that you are situated on today. And welcome to all of you. I'm Associate Professor Natalie Hannan. I'm the Associate Dean for diversity and Inclusion in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry, and Health Sciences. And I believe we have the right to a fair and equitable workplace where gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, disability, mental health issues and an individual's background or race should not be a barrier to reaching that full potential. We are surrounded by accomplished and impressive women breaking barriers and challenging the status quo regarding women and what women can achieve. Yet still in 2021, we remain, women remain underrepresented in the leadership level within our faculty. And so I hope that by having conversations like this today will inspire leadership from within and will not only move towards supporting our talented women in our faculty but help them also reach their full potential and also shine a very important light on the barriers that we were faced.

I'm absolutely delighted and honored to welcome an incredibly inspiring woman. Professor Dame Til Wykes the Vice Dean of Psychology and Systems Sciences. A professor of Clinical Psychology and Rehabilitation, and the head of the school of Mental Health and Psychological Sciences, the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's college, London. Throughout her career Professor Wykes has shown tremendous commitment to involve people with lived experience of mental health issues in both developing the studies as well as the important questions to be asked. She is the founder of the Service User Research Enterprise, acronym SURE, a service which employs experts in research who also have had experience of using mental health services. And that's not all, she is also the editor of the journal of mental health, and she holds a Guinness world record for the largest mental health lesson. The queen bestowed a damehood which is a knighthood for women, to professor Wykes for her exceptional work in mental health research and among many other eminent awards. In 2014, professor Wykes was awarded the British psychological society award for promoting equality of opportunity. And last year she was awarded the Helen Boyle prize for outstanding achievement by a woman working to improve mental health care in Europe. Professor Wykes you are clearly a shining light and inspiration.

TIL WYKES

Well, thank you Natalie for inviting me.

NATALIE HANNAN

You're very welcome. Thanks for accepting my invitation. I'm so very grateful to be able to share this conversation with you. And first I just wanted to ask you how you are doing right now. It's a tough time for many, but I think in London, there's certainly very hard times now.

TIL WYKES

Well, yes, it's piling on, although there is you know, a way out with the vaccines now. So I've had my first jab.

I think that the problem with lockdown are all little things. You know, it was exciting at the beginning as it was a challenge and trying to work out what we should do next how we were gonna get toilet paper which I know was also a problem in Australia. And those are learning about home haircuts. So luckily, I managed to have an account just before Christmas. So I've only just recently had to sort of do my fringe which is carefully arranged. So you can't see that I'm a left-handed person when I use scissors. So I think we're doing okay. I think there has been for our relatives certainly it's been tough, you know not being able to see my parents or hug my children. I think that's been really tough. And I that's the one thing I'm looking forward to is seeing my family and actually being able to give them a hug.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yeah. I think the same feeling was echoed for us last year in the peak of lockdown, where, the biggest number one thing was people just missed that connection and just the hug of their loved ones. And so I think it's something we will go forward after all of this, after the vaccines rolled out and we get ahead of this, I think it's something that we might hopefully not take for granted ever again.

TIL WYKES

I think that the one thing that I've noticed more than anything else is that at the beginning, we thought we were working at home but actually we're living at work at the moment because work has no beginning and end, it doesn't have you know, your computer is still on at 10 o'clock at night. And you know, you're on Twitter and on email, you know come seven o'clock in the morning. So there is really no break in the working day unless you really make yourself have a break which I think is tough for a lot of people.

NATALIE HANNAN

I couldn't agree more. And I think particularly for women there's been these blurred lines of work and home because we've often had to do, have caring responsibilities at home and then work but I don't think it's ever has been as profound as it is at the moment. And I totally agree there's no real boundaries between work and living, so you're right. We are actually just always working at home in many ways. So yeah, I think to take that break and commit to actually taking time away from work is probably really important right now.

TIL WYKES

Yeah, I think I can only measure it in the number of binges of various video series that I've been watching on TV.

NATALIE HANNAN

So your work has had such a strong focus on rehabilitation and recovery for people with severe mental illness. And this has led to the development of services and advances in the critical evaluation of treatments. How important do you think it is to focus on rehabilitation and recovery mental health?

TIL WYKES

I haven't just done the end point of implementing treatments. I think you need to do the beginning point, which is the so more basic end and the people don't really think what the basic end is. So in my view, you should be asking the people who have the problem what it is that they want to achieve in terms of what we might call recovery, which for some people might mean doing more things than they did before. For others, It may be just getting skills back or living their life as they used to. So I, you know, I've done some of that and also looked at the kinds of specific factors which affect the process of recovery and then again, involved people with lived experience to understand how we should develop services I think it's now called the impact pathway rather than the translational pipeline but having the impact pathway absolutely clear that you know, where you want to go and you go from one place to another. And the reason that I've done a lot of work at the sort of, what I think of is the sharp end of actually getting services developed, evaluated and moved out and moving out is not a simple thing at all. That's a more complex way of working. And I think, and a more political way you do have to engage with not just with the science but with people who will make decisions about whether services will be implemented or not.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yeah, and it shows in this conversation, but also in some of your work that I've looked at that you're clearly committed to involving those individuals with lived experience in your research and the processes and things that you develop. How important do you think it is for the inclusion of these people and as you say, you're working in collaboration with them really, rather than studying them and trying to, I guess, as some people would say fix that's not the agenda here. It's, how important do you think it is that they're included? And do you think other areas of research could also benefit from this type of collaboration with, I don't really wanna say the stakeholder, but you know the patient or the community that we're trying to work towards supporting and helping

TIL WYKES

I think it's really important. I mean, it's important because, well just thinking about medicine in general. So if you're developing two drugs it may be that one is far more acceptable and therefore more likely to be taken by a person with a particular condition than another one but they may be, have very different fixing so you need to build accessible and feasible services and treatments. So the only way to do that is to involve the target audience at the beginning. And often that's not what happens. So I do do some work in digital health. And what is astonishing to me is that when people are developing tools for people who have depression or who have other disorders they actually test them out on groups of people who are like slightly anxious university students.

Or that isn't the target audience. And you have no idea what the target audience might think of it, but that's the way that digital tools have previously been developed. Not in Australia, I can say. Cause I think, you know, people at the Black Dog Institute, have actually developed a proper pipeline for how they developed digital mental health tools, but certainly many of the commercial ones have not been organized in that way.

NATALIE HANNAN

So we recently had a Royal Commission into the state of Victoria here in Australia's mental health system and there's 65 recommendations. I won't go into all of them today obviously but there is one that recommends that Victorian government should be developing roles across the system for people with lived experience of mental illness and psychological distress. And I wondered if you think this is a good way for us to be going so that we can make sure that we're developing policies and programs for those that are directly affected and have them involved in the process itself?

TIL WYKES

I think having them involved in the process itself is really important. The problem is involvement does not mean that anybody pays attention. So there's often a kind of tokenistic way of involving people, you know, by saying, Oh well you need two people on your steering committee. Two people on the steering, well, it's usually one person on the steering committee actually. But there's no, and then they are criticized for not representing their community. So I do think that that's important, but it's also the process is important. It has to be not a tick box exercise, and that is a study in itself.

So if you say at the beginning that you are going to evaluate how much does the involvement of people with lived experience affect the services, that it's more likely to affect the services. So if you collect data on it and sort of shine a spotlight it's more likely to have an effect, but there are things that you could do. And certainly I now do. So I have in my studies, for instance, I start out by involving service users in focus groups and workshops to find out what the main problem is and how to think about the main problem. But then as the management of the project goes ahead I have groups of service users who all act as advisors together, not in any other meeting. And then I have two people who are on my steering committee, but they refer back to other service users and people with lived experience. So that is an important part of the process is that there is a group of people that you refer to and you show that you have involved them throughout the whole project

Where they, I say have you got, you know three peer support workers? Yes, tick, but they're all working in separate teams. They never get to meet. They don't have a support system for themselves. And you know what I have in, cause I employ a lot of people with who have a background in service and using services and are now called, cause I fought with the HR department they are called service user researchers. So identifying them as having more experiences than just a researcher. And for them they need support as well. They get offered the chance to write a crisis plan so that if there's, a problem we can recognize it and we can do something about it If nobody else is doing something about it. As workers say that we're their therapists, we're not.

You know I'm their line manager. And I act as their line manager despite also being a clinician. You know, my management is clearly affected by my professional training, but I'm not being their therapist because I think they need to keep work and the rest of their life separated

NATALIE HANNAN

And so kind of shifting tact a little bit now I just wanted to get your thoughts on we now know that it's well recognized as gender disparities in health outcomes within countries, and then across the globe with inequity, especially disadvantaging women, but it's perhaps less understood the impact of gender discrimination and mental health for women in the workplace. What are your thoughts on this? And perhaps more specifically in Academia where we see serious under-representation of women in those senior leadership roles.

TIL WYKES

I don't know that I've had serious gender discrimination. After all I am here. I have currently got this position. What I've still noticed is, you know these small comments that people still make usually middle-aged or older men, not usually young men now because they know they'll get their head bitten off, but they, you know, well my daughter is an academic. She's an engineer. She is now an lecturer in engineering. And we have something called ATHENA SWAN which is a kind of a Kitemark. Well, within two weeks of my daughter joining the engineering department at Cambridge, they asked her to be in charge of the application for Athena SWAN award. She is one of like three women. And you just think, surely this is a male problem, not our female problem. My advice was say no, by the time she told me, had already said yes, and thought it was a good thing to do but of course it wasn't because for, you know two years of her life she has been writing the Athena SWAN application and collecting information, which is a huge amount for a very junior person to be doing.

And we hear about this from all, you know, for women, for gender equity, for other marginalized groups, you know racism and other issues that we have. And it seems that we always want the people who are being marginalized or the people who are suffering to actually do the work. And as you say, surely, it's not her responsibility to fix this. But, the thing is we do find that unless we bind together and actually work towards this we actually won't have that movement towards equity.

I think what has been interesting is comparing my time and my daughter's time, you know I don't know whether you have programs like Mad Men which was in the 1950s-60s New York advertising world and it shows the incredible discrimination that there was. And my, I have two daughters, my children just say you know, how could that happen? It was poorly you know, the way that person was treated. And actually when I think about, well, about the you know, later decades, there was, you know there was a fight for feminism and for some parity of esteem, which is fact what we absolutely need. But seeing, but they tell me they still have some of that discrimination happening to more junior people. And certainly, my daughter throughout her current career, she was in New York at NYU. And one person said to her, Oh, I say, not just a pretty face then, because you know, which would never be said to a man, never, ever be said to a man and so I have been in situations where there has been these discriminations a lot, well sort of little things like micro things that build up over time though. I go away and think how, if only I had a good thing to say back to them, but when people have begun to go too far, the one thing that has saved me has been my colleagues. So male colleagues have, helped me and female colleagues have helped me by their comments. And actually if you, you know, have a giant back at them for what they've said, then, you know, you're too woke. You're too, you know, I mean, it's just, you're being too peacefully,

NATALIE HANNAN

Yeah I meant it as a joke. I meant it as a joke is the often what they've said and it's not a joke,

TIL WYKES

You know, I think that it needs that doesn't happen as often, but I don't know whether that's just because I'm a lot older and nobody thinks that to suggest those things, but-

NATALILE HANNAN

Well they may see how eminent and you're now so senior in your position, you're an expert you're world-renowned, they might not make comments to you any longer but it's probably the emerging women that are coming through that still possibly face these comments. But it's interesting that we noted and it happens all around us and yet some people think there's no issue and then other people think there's great issues. I wonder if you, you know with your psychology background and, you know your immense wealth of knowledge on this, in mental health, how might we better support women when they, you know might have these issues happening?

TIL WYKES

Well, the obvious one is to speak out. That's the same for anybody who's been discriminated against. They need to know that they there is a community that is supportive of them. And so, you know, and that's the same for racial discrimination as well as gender discrimination.

I think we just need to, say something at the time. And as I said, that's where I really valued my colleagues. And I can think of times when men have spoken up and I can think of times when women have spoken up, when you know, a sort of micro Hassell has appeared. or somebody has just stepped over the mark cause one of the problems is that there is, you know there are relationships between men and women and sometimes men just step over the mark and, you know it's sort of a flirtatious comment is just too flirtatious.

And you really feel uncomfortable and you really would like to say something but as soon as you say something and bring it to the surface, everybody gets embarrassed but it's okay for people around you to say things like that. So critically important that we support as peers, we, you know, as you mentioned, your colleagues, men and women if there's bad behavior and you know it's happening, you support the person, call it out and then support the person throughout that process. I think that is gonna be one of the key ways we're gonna shift culture in just changing the way that we're allowing conversations to occur. So if things are, as you say, overstep the mark just if there's a peer support, you know you need to not say things like that, that's that's discrimination or, you know whatever words we would use but I think it's really critically important that we support our colleagues in times like this when they need the most support.

NATALIE HANNAN

I guess the thing I'm also interested in is whether or not the pandemic if you think we see that there's been disparities with how women may have had to take on more caring responsibilities we see more women have had job losses as a result of the pandemic or a reduction in full-time employment. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how we might support women in the future as we, you know hope that things start to improve, but you know really to try and mitigate that long-term mental health consequences but particularly for women, but I guess for anyone with increased caring responsibilities?

TIL WYKES

I think all that the pandemic has done is highlight the discrimination there always has been.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yeah And they, you know, the, I heard somebody on the news saying, Oh, yes, it's been terribly hard. You know, my wife has had to do homeschooling and I kept thinking, hang on a minute, surely yeah yes, there are two people who could be teaching times tables or whatever the school day was and, you know, it's highlighted the gender disparities and roles that people have had to play.

TIL WYKES

I don't know about long-term mental health. I mean, clearly for anybody losing your job has a massive effect on your mental health. We know that it does for both men and women, you know poverty is associated with poor mental health and worse wellbeing because you just lack opportunities when you are poorer. So for people like me, I've been fine in this I have, you know, reasonable relationship with my partner. We, you know, in fact, so reasonable that I do no cooking. Well in that, you know, cause he's a better cook and I've invested in that, but also we've had discussions about, you know, what our roles are. So you know, my role is to do the shopping and the laundry and the worrying and whenever we've swapped jobs, the worrying never gets done half as well by my partner, you know but worrying is also about, you know, our social life and organizing the calendar and he's in charge of cooking and shopping and that sort of works out fine. But there are many old fashioned, I think, ideas about roles and about who should do them. It's a bad thing for men as much as for women and that needs to be recognized too.

NATALIE HANNAN

There are more over this period of time in locked down, I've thought about the responsibilities that fall onto men shoulders because of how what society thinks they should be doing. You know, the men have gone out and done, you know, being taxi drivers when they knew it was dangerous. I've seen delivery drivers when they knew it was dangerous. So there has been many an order that they should bring in resources. So we need to also think about how to help men as well as how to help the women. Because you know, parity means thinking about support for everybody.

You know, I don't know what the long-term consequences will be. I get very irritated by these cross sectional studies that come along and as a journal editor, you know I must have 10 week section of studies of convenience samples carried out online showing that people's mental health Isn't great. Well, what would you say if you said, you know, did you feel a bit more anxious now than before?

That doesn't necessarily mean that I am always going to be anxious. And I think we need to, you know, I'm very pleased that we're talking about mental health much more. And I think partly that's because of the pandemic, and about some of this research that's come out including in the UK, we have the Office for National Statistics, and they do longitudinal studies and actually have shown changes in the same group of people over time, which I think is important. So that's helped us to talk about mental health and the resources that are needed for mental health. And as I said, if you wanna get your science implemented, you need to talk to the people who hold the purse strings for that money. But I don't know at the moment we should look at Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong and well, and the countries where Ebola was. Where that was a very scary time because, you know, particularly for Ebola, because, you know, it changed the whole way in which people integrated with each other. A lot of the villages used to play football, they couldn't do that. Their mode of saying hello was a hug, they couldn't do that. And this was one where touch was absolutely vital and that if you got Ebola, the chances of dying were very high.

So we really need to know what happened to those communities afterwards. You know, I'm sure they were scared and anxious but we need a proportionate response to that. And that's not to say that means no response but we have to be sensible.

NATALIE HANNAN

And I think what you're highlighting now as well, is that at least our awareness is increased around mental health. So hopefully some good can come from that. But as you say, we have to look at other places where they've had pandemics, epidemics and other things. And also, I think only time will tell because we don't know what will be next year and the following year. So, I guess it's an interesting question and we've got time well in the future, we'll see what what will come of that.

TIL WYKES

I think we need to, just following up on that, we need to start with the economy is going to have an effect on people's jobs, on the ability for people to work and get financial compensation. So I think that is also a big issue in the future is knowing what effect that's going to have on mental health. But at the moment, I think if you're balancing up the economy next to dying, you choose the not dying as being most important. And as long as you can realize that that's all well and good.

Yeah. So, because of the time difference, we decided to ask some of our faculty colleagues who will be coming along to the session to send some questions. And so one of the questions that we received from the faculty was, if they could ask they'd love to know your reflections on International Women's Day and know what your thoughts are on this day. Yeah.

TIL WYKES

Well, on International Women's Day, this year, there was a very important interview ad on the Sunday in the US and on Monday which was International Women's Day in the UK, by Meghan Markle. And I think what was interesting in that, was the reactions of some people and to what she was saying, particularly about mental health. So, I actually think it's important to highlight women in science on that day. And certainly that's, you know, there was a name 10 women in science on International Women's Day. And that was a good thing to do because I learned that a lot more people were on Twitter than I thought. And, but also it does highlight the issue of women. I mean, it's International Women's Week and there's a you know, the day is important as a focus but lots of things happen on that day and don't happen on any other.

And I think that's the issue that I think we need to consider is you know, there's Black History Month maybe there needs to be, more of a focus over a period of time, rather than on one 65th of the year. That would be my reflection. I think it's something to aim for and to highlight.

I think we'll be highlighting women like you're doing with your with a series of interviews that you're doing with people.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yeah and we try and do that monthly because as you say it's not one day of the year, but it's also, we don't want it concentrated on one day of the year. We should be moving towards supporting women and gender equity every day. And that's, as you say, it's a men's and women's issue. So hopefully collaboratively we can use these conversations to bring up what the issues might be and how we can move forward together.

But another question we had I'm not sure if you might've seen in some of our media in Australia recently there's been some very distressing reports and allegations of sexual violence and assaults being reported by the media. So the question from our audience is, media reports of sexual violence can trigger sexual assault survivors to become retraumatized. Do you think that they should come with a warning?

TIL WYKES

I’ve never thought about that. I think, we preface virtually everything by saying some people may be distressed by when it comes on to the news. And I think that's the general warning that people ought to have. I think one of the issues is, it gets a bit I don't know whether you call it this but in the States they call it kind of yellow journalism, we call it tabloid journalism where there's a sort of sensational aspect to it and people want to read what happened. And that will make people who have previously experienced trauma feel a bit queasy. However, they won't feel queasy. if it's described in a way in a reasonable journalistic way where the tone of it is not sensational. And it's, you know, it will raise with people just as you know, I haven't had that kind of experience but I have lost people to AIDS for instance, and I get a lump in my throat and feel slightly sick when there are discussions about HIV now on television. But I know that that's going to happen. And I do think that more exposure helps people actually to feel better. And at least if they've got the option of turning it off they can turn it off.

NATALIE HANNAN

So perhaps more than a warning, maybe it's making sure the journalists and the media report things less sensationalist and more factual and more truth. Like it would possibly be a better solution here so that, the message is still getting across but it's not just to sell newspapers. It's not just to people to tune in.

TIL WYKES

Yes. It's not Clickbait. I think that's what they call it. You know when they're putting so much news on the internet. I think there are rules for science journalists. I don't, and there are, you know, there's the sort of in the UK, there's the press council that you can ask people to stop you know, doing something and that people do take note of that.

In fact, on Monday, there was a discussion of the interview with Meghan and Harry you know, and the one of the journalists on an early morning program, highly paid journalist for half an hour effectively said he didn't really believe what Meghan Markle was saying. 42,000 people complained to the office of communications and on Tuesday he was gone. So there are, you know, when things are sensationalized or are, you know, where one is over the top,

and offensive, then, you know, things can happen.

NATALIE HANNAN

That's good to say, I guess consequences for all responsibilities of reporting. So, before we finish I always finish these inspiring stories by asking my guests, would you like to impart on and maybe give us a takeaway a Pearl of wisdom for our faculty. So is there anything that you might like to leave with regards to either mental health or gender equity?

TIL WYKES

I think in gender equity, you just have to be fearless. I know that's really hard. I've spoken with my daughter on, we both went to a group of academics to talk about the imposter syndrome. You know, somebody starting out and somebody, you know, the two of us together. And at the end, my daughter said, I don't think you ever had the imposter syndrome. And I think that's because you kind of grew through it and so effectively you should just not take it from men that and certainly looking back, it definitely is so much better now than it was, but that's definitely not to say it's perfect, you know, I haven't got a single gem, I suppose. It's just it's not gonna be easy, but you must persist.

NATALIE HANNAN

That's great gem. Well finally, if I could just ask you one last question and that is if you work tomorrow, and you were appointed leader of Earth what is one thing you think would be important or that you would do to enhance diversity equity and inclusion?

TIL WYKES

I could tell you what I wouldn't do. That should be simpler than telling you what I would do. So, I wouldn't insist that everybody goes on multiple diversity training programs. I think I would have some way of monitoring behavior so that people knew that the spotlight was on it. And I think the ability to complain about people's behavior and call them up about that behavior is more important than sending people on endless diverse - I mean, I must have been on five or six of these training courses in the last four years. And, you know, I know a lot now and there's sometimes there's one gem that comes from a training course. Often I am just dismayed by the other people. Usually men, not always, but usually men at the course who say things, and you just think where did that come from? I think you know, it would be a great help to me not to have to go to a meeting with that sort of people.

I would definitely put, I would do more about monitoring and showing how people are not being moved on. I'm doing something which I've labeled women in pubs in my cause it's about female authors in publications and where they are. And at what point, you know, because it's really important for early career researchers to embark on being senior authors on papers. And it's really, I'm investigating that for the World of STEM in general, but also I'm gonna look very carefully at our own institute’s publications over time and see whether we've made a difference and how far we need to go. So I think the goal is really vital.

NATALIE HANNAN  
 And I think as you say, evaluation of the action as opposed to the more and more training, 'cause in some ways, many people think it's actually preaching to the converted and really we need to actually evaluate what we're doing and how are we progressing to equity, diversity and inclusion rather than training more.

TIL WYKES

We also need just to finish that point we also need to make sure that when we have - and this is a big problem for universities 'cause they never quite know how to handle it - when you actually have clear complaints against people for the bullying and harassment we need to do something about it. And none of this, you know allowing people to resign, succumb to the rock let them move on quietly, no. that, you know that means it's gone, done and dusty, we don't have to do anything. But actually that just means you've passed that problem onto another university.

NATALIE HANNAN

Exactly right. And that's exactly is what happened in Australia with someone and yeah, I think we need to be more accountable and calling out bad behavior, is calling out bad behavior and there needs to be consequence. Thank you so much for your time. It's been amazing to share some of your incredible insights with us, particularly around mental health and also gender equity. So thank you again for your time.

TIL WYKES

Thank you very much, all right. Bye.