

**Centre for Narrative Research in the Social Sciences**

**&**

**NOVELLA ESRC Research Node,**

**Institute of Education and University of East London**

***To THink is To eXperiment***

**Wednesday, 1st May, 2013, Docklands Campus,  
Room: EB. G.10, East Building, Ground Floor**

**Abstracts:**

**Narratives of 'parenting' and social support in three popular websites**

**Joe Winter, Institute of Education**

Poor parenting, especially by mothers, has long been singled out by researchers and practitioners as determining a range of problems in children. Over the last two decades public policy responses have focused on the delivery of skills-based parent support programmes prioritised in government policy. Such forms of support are based upon normative ideals of 'good parenting' that do not reflect the realities and complexities of everyday family experiences and their diversity in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender (Edwards & Gillies, 2011).

As online social networks and mobile technologies continue to proliferate and embed themselves in everyday practices, parenting websites are an increasingly popular resource. My research explores the different narratives of parenting and social support foregrounded in three popular parenting websites: Mumsnet, Dad.info, and Netmums. Loosely structured telephone interviews have been conducted with the managers and founders of all three websites. The rationale for conducting interviews is to explore these individuals' narrative identities - as parents themselves, their ideas about parenting, and their intentions in shaping the websites' ethos and content. The mixed-methods design of my Ph.D project as a whole (Multimodal Discourse Analysis, telephone interviews and subsequently online and face-to-face interviews with parents who use the forums) will provide the opportunity for an innovative methodological comparison between different approaches to analysis that are pertinent as social scientists seek new ways to conduct research relating to online contexts.

## **Narratives of Adult Mathematics Learners**

### **Tracy Part, London Metropolitan University**

Teaching mathematics to adults is different to teaching children. Adults bring lived experiences of mathematics, beliefs about the purpose of mathematical knowledge and (per)formed constructs and expectations of teaching and learning practices. Thus, when an adult learner returns to education, they do so with unconsciously (per)formed and durable learning habits, often (per)formed around an expectation that they will 'learn' a series of mathematical 'truths', rules and procedures that they will be learn to reproduce to solve mathematical (usually exam based) problems.

However, research projects (Swan, 2007; findings from OFSTED (2006); NRDC 2005; Smith, 2002) investigating into the ways in which adults most effectively learn mathematics, have repeatedly converged around the findings that to encourage an adult learner to construct their own mathematical maps, drawing from their existing funds of 'common sense' knowledge, tends to encourage greater direction and purpose, thereby making learning more meaningful (and effective) in the classroom.

On entering the contemporary (collaborative learning) classroom, learners are often surprised (confronted) by the expectation that they should develop their own mathematical reasoning not by being taught to repeat prescribed rules and procedures, but through being encouraged to discuss, construct, articulate, and value their own mathematical ideas (Swan, 2007). However such demands for agency can all too easily conflict with, and restrict individuals approach to learning mathematics.

The upcoming discussion "narratives of adult learners" is to use insights from participant adult learners in an attempt to wrestle with Bourdieu's analytical toolkit of 'habitus' and 'field' to provide a brief critical analysis of learner positioning within the field, before applying aspects of the notion of performativity, through the contextualized works of Mendick (2005; Mendick, Moreau, & and Hollingworth, 2008) to reach a more textured understanding of how narratives of 'doing' mathematics exhibit inherently gendered, classes and raced practices and perceptions of 'being' a mathematician.

### **Emotion as a specific aspect of higher education**

#### **Eva Mikuska, University of Chichester**

Emotion as a phenomenon in education has long been recognised; however, it can be argued, that it has never been fully acknowledged by the higher education institutions. Therefore, the findings of this research project offer an opportunity for the audience to 'enter the world of the student's emotion'. The project explored the relationship between the emotion of eight mature female students and their academic performance, and the impact on their work related life by the end of the three years full-time study. Participants agreed to share their views through a written task and a follow-up structured interview. Their narratives was analysed

using the feminist post-structuralist approach, which highlights the ongoing debate between emotion and education, reflecting on the dualism of 'rational/emotional, mind/body, public/private, masculine/feminine split' (Leathwood and Hay, 2009, p. 429). Each account revealed the participant's own point of view and personal experience. In this paper I share some of the challenges I come across in my research particularly the ways in which the narratives was analysed.

### **The Situatedness of London Queer Diasporic Narratives: The Tool of an Ethnographic Lens in Reviewing the Literature**

**Luca Bartozzi, Birkbeck College, University of London**

In this paper I critically examine the two major gaps in the literature dedicated to the concept of "queer diaspora" and its multiple manifestations. Drawing theoretically on a "queer diasporic" framework, I aim to strategically focus on its situated narratives, explored as a range of diverse and collective phenomena, captured through an ethnographically-derived methodological lens.

Firstly, the interaction between queer diasporic subjects is intended here as a site of resistance to homonormative discourses, via social practices which people engage with in cultural and grassroots political settings, as seen in the geographical context of Greater London.

Secondly, I focus on the gap in the literature on "queer diaspora", by looking at how this shows an overtly North American bias, not only in the geopolitically assumed object of study but also in the individualising politics that it risks to let prevail. I point to 'cultural involvement' rather than 're-appropriation', putting emphasis on the processes which understand "queer diaspora" as a set of on-going dynamics of creation and meaning-production, rather than narratives of loss and relocation.

Ultimately, this paper wants to enhance the "situatedness" of London "queer diasporic" settings, undermining globalising accounts that stress the lack of identity of "cosmopolitan" cities.

### **Survivor Narratives of Men with Chronic Prostatitis**

**Nick Wood, University of Hertfordshire/CNR**

There is a shortage of research and resources for men suffering from chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain syndrome (CP/CPPS), despite having a high prevalence rate. Seven detailed narrative interviews were carried out with members of a CP/CPPS online support forum, including one as an 'expert interview', i.e. an author who had recovered and written about his illness experiences (Parks, 2010).

Major narrative themes uncovered were (1) the struggle to make sense of diagnosis and medical information; (2) inability to predict or influence the illness; (3) impacts on quality of life and (4) how to make meaning and keep going. Narratives also had a degree of structural incoherence, perhaps reflecting partial and fragmented understandings of this condition. Furthermore, narrative performance indicated a particular discomfort around discussing aspects of sexual functioning affected by the

illness, influenced perhaps by wider masculine stereotypes around the 'need' for sexual vigour. The importance of men talking about this illness and being heard (including the medical community) as well as uniting with narrative medicine to meaning make around illness accounts - which are often marginalised or discounted - is emphasised.

### **Giving voice to men's stories of caring through narrative analysis**

**Ann Stokes, Trinity College Dublin**

Traditionally, informal caring has been linked primarily to women and in Ireland care-giving has largely existed in the private sphere of the family home. However, with male carers' requirement to provide informal care specifically in dementia set to increase over the coming years, there is an urgent need to increase understanding and knowledge. The aim of my study is to explore and give an initial understanding of the experiences of male carers providing care to a loved one or close relative with dementia from a narrative perspective. Ultimately, I hope to gain an insight into how male carers make sense of their experiences, and in so doing allow them to tell their story.

I would like to present, articulate and situate my own developing narrative approach to my study. In particular, I will outline both the potential challenges and benefits I have faced as I embark on the data analysis phase from narrative approach

Through situating my own developing approach to narrative inquiry, I will be able to show how I am in the process of understanding how men construct the stories they tell about their experiences of providing care to a loved one with dementia.

### **Designing research methods for story-telling: eliciting narratives through enactment and performance.**

**Linda Naughton, Staffordshire University**

This presentation looks at how research methods were designed to elicit narratives from a group of cultural and creative practitioners talking about their social networks and the social capital exercised within them. These methods employed a mapping exercise as a way to enact the everyday practices of the participants. These enactments were filmed as participants performed/narrated the story of their network. Creative methods which encourage performance challenge the researcher to switch between the roles of director, producer, supporting actor, and audience at different stages of the process. This means giving up control of 'the script'. The research demonstrates the new possibilities and challenges for social scientists looking to engage with narrative through a creative process.

### **Archetypes: the structuring of narratives of collective memory by collective imaginaire.**

**Rónán MacDubhghaill, CNR/CEAQ Sorbonne**

My doctoral research focuses, amongst other things, on the theme of collective memory. Following such prominent researchers in the field as Jens Brockmeier, I

take a narrative approach to understanding the processes of memory on a social, cultural, and collective level. This paper intends to demonstrate the compatibility of this approach with 'la sociologie de l'imaginaire', a tradition founded by Gilbert Durand, and developed by others, notably Michel Maffesoli. In this paper, I aim to demonstrate how anthropological structures, mythologies, and representations in the collective imagination play a key role in structuring the way we understand our collective pasts, and consequently, our presents. As a case, this paper will explore this phenomenon as it has and continues to occur in the narrative tradition of Irish folk songs, structured by the collective imaginaire of violence, excess, and deprivation.

### **When narratives become masks: A multi-sited ethnography of asylum request**

**Elisa Mencacci, CNR/University of Trento, Italy**

The aim of this contribution is to reflect critically on the relationships between institutions engaged on the process of asylum request recognition and the psychiatric context. The object of this reflection is born from a double experience; on the one hand clinical and on the other hand of research. A particular service focused on asylum seekers' and refugees' suffering is present in a mental health center in Bologna. This service is composed by two different gazes: one medical-psychiatric and the other one anthropological. In a first phase of research, I tried to apply with asylum seekers patients the narrative as tool that can give them the opportunity to explain and to reflect on their exile experience, following an anthropological perspectives on illness. Narrative, in the clinical practice with asylum seekers, is thinkable as a critical and strongly ambivalent tool. The narratives were composed of rigid plots and in repetition, as if these were the product of media and political imaginaries at the base of social construction of refugee category. This last aspect, added to the ambiguity of Ptsd certification requests (Post traumatic stress disorder) that came from asylum institutions, guided me out from clinical context to follow the different institutional phases where the asylum narratives' were treated and handled. The research goal is to understand the different political practices that are inscribed on asylum narratives, through a multi-sited ethnography. This is an ethnography that goes out from psychiatry and goes back to the psychiatry, with the intent of problematize the role/position of psychiatric context in the asylum request process and in the social construction of refugee category.

### **Constructing identities through narrative: stories told by people diagnosed with bladder or kidney cancer about the time commonly labelled as delay.**

**Jennifer Yiallourous, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine**

The research was a qualitative study where I interviewed 13 people who had been diagnosed with either kidney or bladder cancer about their experiences. I analysed the transcripts using narrative analysis; drawing on Goffman's concept of stigma, I have categorised the respondents' stories into narratives of moral worth, narratives of uncertainty and narratives of blame / responsibility. I found that these narratives

worked to construct a retrospective pre-diagnosis identity of non-blameworthiness in which there is no possibility that the respondent could have known sooner that they had cancer or that their help-seeking behaviour was inappropriate.

### **Golden Slippers in the Sand**

**Mary Lodato, University of East London**

This paper draws on a practice-based PhD that includes my autobiography, called Golden Slippers in the Sand as well as an exegesis.

What began as an academic exercise turned into a journey of discovery revealing insights which have transformed my life at the deepest level. This educational journey has not been about the conventional tools and skills of research or of learning to read and write. It has been about exploring and healing the self by connecting with the sacred aspect of the feminine.

I use visual and text narrative to explore the link between education and what I call 'the sexual self'. Previously, this sexual realm was completely unattainable and closed off to me. This part of the self had developed whilst growing up in Ireland however; it developed in isolation in the extremely repressive environment of an Industrial School in 1960's Dublin.

Education and the writing process was instrumental in my sexual awakening. It was the key which enabled me to engage with the wounded sexual self. Not being able to read and write until the age of 37 years old had denied me the ability to analyse and question my sexual identity.

It's a story that runs from the negative to the positive.

Impoverishment to Enrichment.

### **The Scientific Tradition and Belonging at a South African University: Is There Space For An Outlier Group?**

**Sabrina Liccardo and Jill Bradbury, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa**

Women scientists are living at a critical time in South Africa as the socio-political landscape is changing rapidly, effecting changes in many dimensions of identification, particularly, 'race', gender and class. We propose that Black women could be viewed as living at a cultural crossroads by virtue of their coexisting membership to a marginal and an elite group. On the one hand, the lingering effects of apartheid have resulted in the continued marginalisation of Black women. However on the other hand, globalisation and the transformation project for Higher Education in South Africa have simultaneously placed women in science in a unique position of power in both the production of knowledge and the functioning of

society. This paper draws on data from in-depth interviews with a cohort of BSc (Bachelor of Science) students who are recipients of a prestigious scholarship programme. We investigate the practices that have contributed to their experiences of alienation and belonging at their university. These young women encountered various practises of exclusion at the university, which contributed to the failure of their course/s. Their narratives reveal the intricacies involved in reinterpreting their self in relation to failure. The data suggest that particular forms of elite cultural capital in the sciences at university inform arbitrary criteria of assessment that rewards dominant culture related competences instead of the students' academic performance (Bourdieu and Patterson, 1977). These dominant forms of cultural capital include the possession of background knowledge, English proficiency and scientific terminology. The data also suggests that establishment of affective bonds with particular places and people at the university stabilises their sense of self and belonging. These young women demonstrate how belonging is maintained through their experiences of social inclusion and narrated from particular social positions and identities that are informed by differing locations and contexts (Anthias, 2006).