

## CNR

### Centre for Narrative Research, UEL

Narrative Workshop IV: **Narrative and Health**  
**Thursday, November 14th, 10:00 – 5:00**  
**King's College, Cambridge**

The Centre for Narrative Research is organizing its fourth one-day workshop, this time focussing on the relationship between narrative and health. The workshop is primarily geared to post-graduate students working in narrative research, but is also open to interested others at any stage in their career.

The day-long event will focus on presentations from four researchers working with narrative and health. The researchers will 'walk through' one piece of data, explaining how their data was gathered and their perceptions of narrative analysis as it applies to their work. Trish Greenhalgh (University College London), David Harper (University of East London), Catherine Riessman (Boston University), and Vieda Skultans (Bristol University) will be presenting, with Phil Salmon (Institute of Education) as discussant.

In addition to the four presentations, there will be considerable time for the questions and comments of workshop participants. A portion of the afternoon session will be conducted in small groups.

The workshop is limited to fifty participants. **The deadline for applications is October 1st.** If there are remaining places after this date, applications may still be considered. The cost for the workshop is £50, and includes registration, morning coffee, light buffet lunch, and reception. There are a small number of £25 bursaries available for graduate students. Applications must be accompanied by a cheque or money order, made payable to the University of East London.

If you would like more information on the workshop, please contact any of the co-directors of the centre: Molly Andrews ([M.Andrews@uel.ac.uk](mailto:M.Andrews@uel.ac.uk)), Corinne Squire ([C.Squire@uel.ac.uk](mailto:C.Squire@uel.ac.uk)) or Maria Tamboukou ([Tamboukou@uel.ac.uk](mailto:Tamboukou@uel.ac.uk)).

**CNR details can be found at: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/home.htm>**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find my cheque [  ] money order [  ] for £50, made payable to the University of East London.

Please send all application forms by October 1<sup>st</sup> to Linda Talbot, Department of Human Relations, University of East London, Longbridge Rd., Dagenham RM8 2AS.

Abstracts of presentations (listed alphabetically)

**Trisha Greenhalgh, Primary Health Care, University College London**

**Narrative based primary care: theory and reality**

Academic primary care is rightly interested in the emerging discipline of narrative. Narrative theory offers exciting scope for new approaches to the dynamics of the consultation, the nature of clinical decision-making, and an understanding of the biographical and contextual dimensions of illness. But we should avoid taking a sanitised and uncritical view of what narrative is and how it might help us. It's easy to think of narrative as filling the epistemological gaps left by evidence-based medicine - whereas EBM is (perhaps) reductionist, fiercely objective and insensitive to the quirks of the individual, narrative is (so the argument goes) holistic, coherent, patient-focussed, co-constructed through productive dialogue, and richly contextual. When we look at real transcripts of real consultations, however, a 'good' narrative is hard to spot. The authentic and coherent illness story, couched within the wider life narrative, is an 'ideal type' that is only found in textbooks. Real consultation narratives are fragmented, inconsistent, paradoxical, incomplete, presented as a staged 'performance', sometimes confrontational, and often frustratingly devoid of context. This workshop will explore a real consultation transcript and ask where we go from here.

Trisha is a part time GP in north London and professor of primary health care at University College London. She is interested in the organisation of services for people with diabetes, especially minority ethnic groups, and to the illness narratives and life stories of people with chronic conditions, and she has developed research programmes based on both these themes. Her team was awarded the Royal College of General Practitioners' Research Paper of the Year Award in 1998 for her qualitative research work in exploring the experience of diabetes in British Bangladeshis. She currently leads a multidisciplinary team in the Diabetes Storytelling Project - a development initiative based in East London, which aims to extend the role of the health advocate/interpreter in promoting education and group support in the Bangladeshi community through traditional storytelling methods. Trisha has contributed actively to the establishment of evidence-based medicine in the UK and in 2000 she became the first person to receive the Order of the British Empire from Her Majesty the Queen for Services to Evidence Based Medical Care. She has written or co-written four textbooks on evidence based health care and critical appraisal, one of which, *How to Read a Paper*, has sold over 50000 copies and been translated into seven languages.

**David Harper, School of Psychology, University of East London**

*Risky talk: Constructing narratives of danger in mental health*

Recent proposals to reform UK mental health legislation have been partly justified on the grounds of public anxiety about homicides committed by people considered to be mentally ill. In this presentation I will be focusing on the link between popular and professional notions of mental disorder and concerns about the risk of violence. I will draw on texts from two projects: one involving interviews with psychiatric service users and health professionals; and one from government policy statements surrounding proposals to reform the 1983 Mental Health Act. I will examine how these texts mobilise narratives of danger and describe some potential consequences of these narratives. One effect, for example, is that the psychiatric service user subject becomes an object of mystery and unpredictability. Another effect, as Nikolas Rose has noted, is that such narratives influence discourse in mental health settings,

reshaping the obligations of mental health professionals from consensual collaborative work to protection of the public.

David Harper is Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology and is an Academic Tutor on the Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London. Prior to this, David had worked in NHS mental health services as a clinical psychologist for nine years. He completed a part-time PhD entitled 'Deconstructing Paranoia' from Manchester Metropolitan University in 1999 and was a co-author of *Deconstructing Psychopathology* (Parker et al., 1995). He is interested in critical and social constructionist approaches in mental health. David is a member of the Critical Mental Health Forum and has become involved in campaigns to influence UK mental health legislation.

**Catherine Kohler Riessman, Department of Sociology, Boston College**

***Illness Narrative and Performance: Audience and Reader Response***

The illness narrative has gained great popularity in recent years--personal stories of illness--but issues such as the audience for these narratives, and responses to them, are rarely explored. Part of an on-going project of looking back at narrative accounts I have analyzed in the past, I will interrogate the research relationship that provided the context for an illness narrative, told by a man severely disabled by M.S. Recent theoretical attention to reflexivity and performativity provide new ways to interpret the materials.

Catherine Kohler Riessman is Research Professor, Department of Sociology, Boston College, where she teaches post-graduate courses on "Health, Gender, and the Body" and "Narrative Methods in the Social Sciences." She is Professor Emerita at Boston University School of Social Work, and taught for many years at Smith College. She has authored 3 books, including "Narrative Analysis" (Sage 1993) and "Divorce Talk" (Rutgers Univ. Press 1990), and numerous book chapters and articles on narrative research. Her current research examines the performance of identity in narrative accounts of disruptive life events, including infertility, divorce and chronic illness. Professor Riessman received her Ph.D. in 1977 from Columbia University, completed a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in 1988, and was a Fulbright Scholar to India in 1993-4. She was Chair of the Medical Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association in 1998. Currently, she is a British Academy Visiting Professor at the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London.

**Vieda Skultans, Department of Sociology at the University of Bristol.**

***Authority, Dialogue and Polyphony in Latvian Psychiatric Narratives***

Social and economic changes in post Soviet Latvia have affected medical and psychiatric services and have influenced lay and professional narratives of mental distress and illness. There have been three major dimensions: firstly there has been a move from a somatic to a psychological language of distress; secondly there has been a move from illness as characterizing national and social groups to illness as an individual attribute and thirdly there has been a move from the individual seen as passive victim to the individual as responsible agent. However, changes are not clear-cut and earlier and later narratives jostle together in a shared space. We will be reading the narrative of a depressed patient, identifying the voices within the narrative that complement and complicate the narrative and asking ourselves whether coherence can be achieved by such narratives. For Bakhtin narrative offers the possibility of keeping the voice intact with the idea. By looking at the responses of psychiatrists we can ask ourselves which clinical and research practices enable this voice/idea integrity to be maintained and which practices cut off the voice from the idea.

Vieda Skultans is reader in Medical Anthropology in the Department of Sociology at the University of Bristol. She has published in a wide range of Anthropology, Sociology and History journals. Her first book *Intimacy and Ritual. A Study of Spiritualism, Mediums and Groups* was published by Routledge in 1974. Her most recent book *the Testimony of Lives Narrative and Memory in post Soviet Latvia* was published in 1998.

**Discussant: Phil Salmon**

Phil Salmon worked for eleven years in the NHS, before entering academia. She currently works for the Open University and for Birkbeck Continuing Education, where she offers courses on Narrative and Identity. She also works as a psychotherapist at the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture. Phil's most recent publication is 'Using multiple voices in autobiographical writing', in Horrocks et al, eds. (2002) *Narrative, Memory and Life Transitions*.