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Heroes, Fools and Villains

University of Reading

ABSTRACTS

The Phil Salmon Memorial Lecture

will be given by

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Open University

on the topic:

I was not a hero after all:

Gathering my identities together

Phil Salmon Memorial Lecture

I was not a hero after all: Gathering my identities together

Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes, The Open University

Heroes are said to be people who are admired for their bravery, goodness or great ability to resist and perform acts of great courage under very dangerous conditions. But this is a very unstable and slippery concept; it is contradictory in relation to the stereotyped 'hero' and 'villain'. Equally, 'fools' think they can change and challenge these stereotypes but power, which is out of their reach most of the time, stops them in their tracks and makes them part of the trilogy.

In my performed presentation I will enter my own story of militant protester, and subsequent political prisoner under torture during Chilean dictatorship in order to explore the categories of the fool, the hero and the villain in relation to myself. Many people who have read my autobiographical stories think I am a hero and that the system and those who represented the system are the villains. But where is the fool in all this and how stable are the symbols of the hero and the villain? What do these concepts mean? Are they fixed or are they constantly changing?

I will first perform my story called *I wish I could...* with the help of some friends and then I will explore the relationship between my autobiographical self and the different categories that arise from the juxtaposition of the three concepts. I will be asking how these categories challenge and or change each other/the other.

I will argue that identity, embodiment and experiencing are under-represented in auto/biography and that what I am doing is auto/biography of transformation. By being the subject of my own story I go from being a hero to being a fool and a villain and so on in the endless spin of the wheel called my-self.

Heroes or villains ? Teachers and teaching, then and now

Josie Abbott, University of Southampton

It is probably true to say that everyone remembers vividly at least one teacher from their past education - but what memories do reminiscences bring with them? For some the remembered person may have been a hero who instilled in them a passion for learning or who helped them to fulfil their potential when others doubted them. For others it may have been a deeply unhappy experience in the hands of one person perceived as villainous who temporarily blighted their young lives and left deep scars in their psyche. Undoubtedly the role of the teacher lends itself to both these experiences in different people's narratives and revisiting them can provoke strong reactions.

This is, of course, nothing new and in this paper I want to look back at some past stories of ordinary teachers, taking the period soon after the introduction of compulsory schooling in this country and moving forward to the first half of the twentieth century. I compare the working lives of two head teachers over this period, the stories surrounding them and perceptions of their pupils about them. Do they fit either stereotype? Both were teachers in National Schools, one in an urban environment and one in a village school, representative of the majority of teaching and learning experiences of the general public at this time. It is then useful to compare this with modern reactions and to reflect that while experiences may differ, in the final analysis there may be no definitive answer and one man's hero may be another's villain or, indeed, yet another's fool.

Forever a school of freedom

Yvonne Anderson

Following Durkheim and Fauconnet, one may also see in heroization, vilification and fool-making, rituals of solidarity and norm-affirmation. People draw together to applaud a hero, fight a villain, or laugh at a fool. (Klapp, 1954, 62)

Burston school was the setting for the longest strike in British history (1914 – 1939) and since 1984, in the midst of the miners' strike, has been an icon for the British left and the site of an annual trades union rally.

The events that led to the strike and those that emanated from it have been documented in a number of books and articles, as well as by a BBC documentary and dramatisation.

This paper will explore the extent to which texts about the Burston school strike reduce the actors to the roles of hero, fool or villain, with a view to providing alternative readings. It is part of a larger work in progress that looks at the role of children as citizens and equal participants in society.

Klapp, O.,E., (1954) Heroes, villains and fools, as agents of social control. *American Sociological Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 56-62

Young, Black and Dangerous: reflection from my doctoral study exploring the African Caribbean community understanding and responses to gun crime

Geraldine Brown, Coventry University

In recent years, there has been growing political concern about the issue of 'urban gun crime.' This has resulted in a range of strategies and initiatives targeted at the African Caribbean community in response to a growing concern that Britain is under siege by Black young male youths within inner city urban conurbations. It is possible to suggest that, a message enshrined within both political and media discourse is one whereby young black men living in certain communities constitute a potential armed threat, this is reflected in a discourse that depicts young African Caribbean males as 'dangerous', 'criminal' and ultimately just 'villainous'. Consequently, the focus of my doctoral study reflects a personal quest to understand my own anxieties and confusion as a mother, sister and aunt of young Black male teenagers and as a member of the African Caribbean community. In addition, to explore the extent that 'gun crime' can be viewed as representing a contemporary British social phenomenon or be understood as reflecting aspects of 'moral panic', such as that detailed in the ground breaking work Policing the Crisis (Hall et al 1972). Drawing on data from my doctoral study, in this paper I explore the relationship between political and media discourse and that of members of the African Caribbean community living in two localities in the West Midlands.

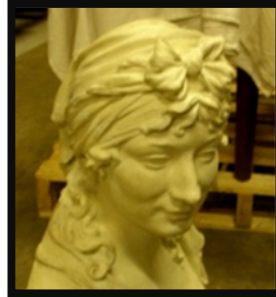
Telling hard-to-tell stories through song

David Carless, Leeds Metropolitan University

In this piece I explore how writing songs can allow the voicing of issues or experiences which – within particular cultural conditions – constitute hard-to-tell stories. My focus is on two of my own songs, written sixteen years apart, which touch on the experience of same-sex attraction and desire. My early experiences of same-sex attraction were marked by tension and silence, understandable in John McLeod's (1997) terms as a lack of alignment or 'fit' between personal experience and the culturally dominant (heterosexual) narrative. In addition to performing the songs, I consider how characteristics of the songwriting process – such as embodied performance at the moment of creation and a lyrical use of words – seemed to support the voicing of a story that was not otherwise shared. In this sense, songs – as opposed to other forms of telling – allowed me to 'touch' topics or content that was otherwise 'too hot to handle.' By way of a conclusion, I consider how the different culture/s in which I was immersed around the time of writing shaped or influenced both the form and content of each song.

**Maria Stella Petronilla Chiappini, Lady Newborough, Baronne de Sternberg
(1773-1843) A Hero and a Fool, but also a Villain ?**

Judith Chapman, Bournemouth University



Maria-Stella was a changeling. At birth, her French aristocratic parents exchanged her for the son of an Italian gaoler. On April 17th 1773 she was baptised Maria-Stella Petronilla Chiappini. But, as she later discovered, the certificate should have read Maria-Stella de Joinville. Would you consider her birth and 'foster' parents **villains**?

Maria-Stella's father died in 1821, leaving her a letter explaining that, given a large sum of money by a member of the French nobility, he had exchanged his son for her. Maria-Stella surmised that her real father was likely Philippe-Égalité. The Italian gaoler's son, Louis-Philippe, was soon to become the last King of France. Following the discovery of these facts, Maria Stella spent the rest of her life obsessed with the search for her true identity and the restitution of her rights. She died alone and in penury in Paris on 28 Dec 1843, unable to prove her claim to be a member of the French Royal Family. Was she a **fool**? Because of the fantasy of French Royal blood, many of our family view her as a **hero**!

The biographical research that I have undertaken of my 3x great grandmother, Maria-Stella, has identified numerous **heroes, fools and villains** in her story. My own opinions oscillated as I explored the historical, social and cultural background of a life lived at the turn of the nineteenth century. Maria Stella left an autobiography of her life written in 1830 at the age of 57. Why then? A play was performed, based on her life story, in 1889 and a biography was commissioned by her grandson in 1907. Nothing has been written since but the story continues to fascinate. My presentation will illustrate the difficulties in authenticating historicised claims and the uncertainties of seeking to contextualise a life in an unfamiliar time frame. I will discuss the conundrums associated with interpreting other people's lives where time and socio-cultural factors impact on the representation of the story and ensuing researcher interpretations.

The good, the bad, and the others: accounts of significant others in teachers' professional learning

Anne Chappell, Brunel University

This paper draws on my doctoral research into professional learning (often constrained by the title 'continuing professional development'). In the methodology I wanted to overcome the problem of policy and practice that fails to focus on the effective involvement and engagement of teachers who are 'missing persons' (Evans, 1999). I will share data collected as part of a collaborative process with three teachers who shared and analysed their narratives of professional learning through a series of research conversations. In this process I placed the meaning made by the teacher of their past experiences, and the way they understood them in the present, at the centre of the research (Kelchtermans, 2009). The research conversations facilitated space for them to discuss the people that they understood to be significant in influencing their professional learning. They provided detailed narrations and explanations to support their understanding of the significance and impact of specific individuals from both professional and personal contexts (Makopolou and Armour, 2011). Detailed accounts were offered in relation to their expectations of themselves, with links to their broader expectations of professionals and people more generally. They were able to indicate the way in which others influenced them positively, including those who they had negative perceptions of. The data challenge us to consider the complexity and contingency of teachers' professional learning through their interaction with, and response to, significant others.

Public Prejudice - Private Fortitude

Gill Constable, University of Chichester

This paper explores the 'villainous' identities that have been imposed and created for lesbian women and gay men within their historical, social and political context. It is argued that these identities continue to be stigmatised, marginalised and misunderstood irrespective of human rights and equalities legislation. This will be further examined by looking at the experience of dementia for lesbian women and gay men. Dementia is a neurological illness that has traditionally been viewed as creating 'fools' out of formerly cerebral and socially competent people. Findings are used from both primary and secondary research to illustrate the importance of lesbian women and gay men being involved in the care of gay people with dementia due to a shared understanding of the cultural and social impact of sexuality on the life course. It is argued that this creates 'heroes' of those lesbian women and gay men living with dementia and those supporting them to retain a positive sense of their personhood.

Individual Identity, Loss of Selfhood and the Palio di Siena

Hilary Dickinson, Michael Erben

Heroes, fools and villains in the theatricality of great rituals both command the stage and vanish from it. It is in examining persons engulfed in ritual where strutting performance is followed by a seamless absorption into the whole, that the very matter of personal identity can be examined.

Such happenings still occur in the 21st century. This presentation will examine one such example by an analysis of the Palio di Siena - the remarkable bareback horse race that takes place twice each summer in the main square of the City of Siena in Central Tuscany. This horse race with its attendant pageants, religious practices, pagan earthiness, medieval violence, civic virtue and supplication to the Virgin Mother has some claim to be, in and of itself, the most striking, complete and ideal-typical living discourse on the nature of social solidarity in Western Europe.

Each horse in the Palio race represents a district (*contrada*) of the city of Siena and competes against nine other such representative horses. In the encounter no quarter is expected and none is awarded. For the population of Siena, to be a member of a *contrada* is not to support its team, but to be (by topography, by birth, by primary socialisation) an embodiment of that *contrada's* totalised consciousness. The ferocity of the competition is only outweighed by the eventual coming together of all Siena's *contrade* to celebrate the beauty, longevity and benignity of the whole city (the *comune*). The paper will describe in detail (with illustrations) the character of the Palio and posit the question, "what happens to personal biography when social solidarity is at its strongest?"



Can women feminists be heroines of their own life?

Kathryn Dodd

Taking Sylvia Pankhurst's historical autobiography, *The Suffragette Movement*, as a starting place, the paper will argue that autobiography is not an easy form in which to tell women's feminist life stories. Traditionally the autobiographical form has been reserved for the story of 'great men' who have done exceptional things on the public stage. The subject has to be some sort of a hero, as recognised by the readership. Women had to fight for a physical public space before they could claim an autobiographical space. When some feminists, like Pankhurst, did find a voice, in the years after the First World War, they found it hard to incorporate the notion of 'heroine' into their narrative.

These early difficulties will be compared to contemporary autobiographical life histories. These will be drawn from work which is still at its early stages, but will concern the way both 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' feminists make sense of their lives. The evidence will not come from published writings but from qualitative, in-depth interviews conducted by Kathryn Dodd. The differences between written and oral accounts will be discussed, as will the methodology for the future 'writing' of feminist life stories.

Revised, reshaped and reclaimed: One athlete's story

Kitrina Douglas, University of Bristol

There is growing awareness that the self and identity are, in part at least, constituted through narrative processes and that it is through creating and sharing stories we make sense of and bring meaning to our lives. The self, however, is not a static entity, but rather, is revised and reshaped across time and in different contexts. For Mark Freeman (2010) and Arthur Frank (2011) exploring our own self stories has a purpose if it can 'reorient' our moral compass.

Using my experiences in professional sport and within academia, this performance piece explores some of the tensions, contradictions and consequences of 'hero' and 'villain' stories. Drawing on news media and television coverage (stories about me) alongside diary extracts, poems and songs (written by me), I attempt to shed light on how my life has been manipulated, edited, reclaimed and revised and what we can learn from this in researching others' lives.

Leaping Forward: from names and tags to young artists

Ronda Gowland-Pryde, John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton



Image taken of a participant exploring a John Hansard Gallery exhibition during the 2007 Summer Arts College

This paper discusses the social impact that gallery education has in the delivery of educational provision for young people within the youth justice system. Using the John Hansard Gallery as an exemplar – a publicly funded contemporary visual art gallery which has been working in partnership with the Wessex Youth Offending Team since 2007, this paper explores how gallery education can enhance this provision and contribute towards the future educational attainment of young people who have offended. Focusing on selected auto/biographical experiences of participants, the paper aims to highlight how valuable creativity can be for the long term personal development of young people, in an ever changing climate of central government funding for the arts and youth justice.

Heroes, Fools and Villains: taking a Freudian journey into Alice's Wonderland

Julie Greer, University of Southampton

"I can't explain myself, I'm afraid Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see!"
Carroll, (2006:44)

Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' and Sigmund Freud are frequently linked in academic thought and writing, but new to the delights, intricacies and contradictions of both, I resolved to find a way to play with the concepts and learn in the process.

Let us suppose that an adult Alice, grown from the imagination of Lewis Carroll, continued to be affected by her dreams. At 58 and of independent means, she seeks the help of Dr Freud in Berggasse 19, Vienna.

In presenting a transcript of an imagined psychoanalytical session between Sigmund Freud and an adult, (yet still fictional) Alice I hope to illustrate and explore some key elements of Freudian theory. I hope to present the heroes, fools and villains of Alice's dreamwork in a form which may also allow the listener to engage in the drama, whilst outlining how the process became a form of therapeutic writing, a means of Bildung.

Creating heroes – influence of professional models of practice on constructing narrative identity of service users

Jani Grisbrooke and Anne Fenech, University of Southampton

OTs understand that therapy requires creating a narrative with the service user which enables her to construct hopeful plots and positive self identity (Mattingly and Hayes Fleming 1994, Mattingly 1998). This narrative, crucially to OT, is enacted with and through occupation with the service user is positioned as autonomous agent and hero (COT 2010, 2.3 and 3.3.2).

Sennett has identified two kinds of occupation in relation to personal identity: 'Animal laborans', the toiling drudge, and 'Homo Faber', a socially situated person working with others, 'making a life in common' (2008, p6). OT is focussed on Homo Faber's heroic struggle for meaningful life and valued occupations.

Professional models of practice influence and guide OT interaction with service users occupational stories. This paper explores how two current models impact upon OT understanding of service user occupational narrative.

Whilst this topic is directed to OT, the issue of professional models explicitly and implicitly professionals understanding personal stories applies widely.

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A critical disability studies analysis of the notion of heroes, villains and fools

Jonathan Harvey, The Open University

This paper will attempt to problematise the (rather simplistic) notion of portraying members of society as heroes, villains and fools. I will use a critical disability studies framework to achieve this. This paper draws largely upon theories from poststructuralist social theory to question the practice of thinking in terms of opposition such as heroes versus villains, good versus evil etc.

In terms of disability studies, this is comparable to the way that many (particularly the media) often depict disabled people in terms of opposites. For example, in the media, disabled people are often viewed as a 'super crip' (someone who achieves something in life 'against all odds') (a hero e.g. *Daredevil*); a powerless, passive member of society who is to be pitied (a fool e.g. *Forest Gump*, *Born on 4th July*, *Of Mice and Men*); or sometimes an evil, twisted, hateful character (a villain e.g. *James Bond*, *Batman*).

I wish to use a collection of my own personal experiences to argue that, we as researchers need to bring more stories which detail the way individuals negotiate life to the fore. Only then can binaries such as heroes versus villains and good versus evil be disrupted in the field of disability studies and society in general.

Fool! If you think you're British! My naïve undertaking of adopting another identity

Marion Jones, Liverpool John Moores University

This paper provides a reflective account of my search for an(other) identity. It draws on my inner journey following my move from my native Bavaria to North West England. It is a story of contradiction and uncertainty, which focuses on three multi-layered themes: “departure and arrival”, “border crossing” and a disoriented “self in transit”. In relation to experiences of belonging, difference and attachment in social, cultural and political spaces I seek to elucidate a differentiated understanding of the self. Ultimately, I am making a case for allowing individuals to choose and own their identities freely, regardless of their cultural, social or national origins.

Heroes of Higher Education?: Stepford Wives, Non/Mothers and Academics

Gayle Letherby, Plymouth University and Deborah Davidson, York University, Ontario

The Stepford Wives is the name of a 1972 novel by Ira Levin, as well as two movies of the same name based upon the novel. In the book and the 1975 version of the film Joanna Eberhart is a young amateur photographer with two children who moves to the town of Stepford with her husband. Most of the married women in Stepford are obsessed with housekeeping and are always modestly and 'prettily' turned out. But Stepford wasn't always this way. It once had a women's group with a healthy membership, dissolved some years ago. Now the town seems to be under the control of the mysterious Men's Association and its ominous leader, 'Diz' Coba. By the end of the story, Joanna becomes convinced the wives of Stepford are actually look-alike gynoids (a robot made to look like a human female).

In this paper we draw on *Stepford Wives* and on the suggestion that both families and institutions of higher education are 'greedy institutions'. We reflect on the relevance of this analogy in relation to the current demands on and expectations of mothers and of female (and male) academics as non/mothers (parents). We suggest that what some have called the 'MacDonaldization of higher education' as a process by which higher education becomes increasingly rationalized through efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control and workers within it are judged by their performance, strongly supports a Stepford model. We also consider existing alternative approaches that include resistance to and management of a Stepford identity.

Bet you think this thesis is 'bout YOU': Striving for 'harmony' amongst a choir of complex voices

Geeta Ludhra, Brunel University

Engaging in a PhD is about the journey, not just the destination. It's not just about the vanity associated with the title of 'Doctor'. But we're so vain and want to be heroes in the narrative- don't we? To what degree is vanity a good thing and harmless and when can it provoke the villain? Within this journey, Geeta explores how both the researcher and participants 'play out' or get positioned in the role of hero, fool or villain and the associated emotions and consequences of each role.

Geeta's thesis is a narrative exploration into the perceptions and identities of twelve South-Asian girls studying in two West London secondary schools. When she started her study, she didn't plan to 'dig' so deep into 'herstory', her identity and past- it was not intended or considered academic enough at the time. However, the processes she engaged in as part of the evolving methodology made this inevitable.

Geeta will explore some of the encountered challenges of researching her own group. In seeking to take authority of the data and address the over-repeated mantra of 'giving voice' to young people, she strengthened her own voice and had to control the volume of the roar. As the conductor, she has strived to orchestrate and re-present the twelve (or rather thirteen) voices in 'harmony' but clearly this has been problematic.

Geeta will present some of the messiness and complexity of this process and draw on data from the 12 girls, including her research journal to illustrate characteristics and emotions experienced in the shifting roles of heroes, villains and fools.

When doctors become patients: challenges to professional identity, values and practice

Viv Martin, University of Bristol

As imagery within popular culture and medical discourse demonstrates, doctors or patients can act or be portrayed as heroes, villains or fools: the person who 'fights' cancer or the doctor who performs life-saving surgery as heroic; the non-compliant patient as fool; the insensitive doctor as villain. Patients and doctors are certainly positioned at opposing ends of the stethoscope. So, how do doctors experience serious illness? How does their positioning as patient-doctor affect their sense of self, their relationships with patients or colleagues? What impact does this have on professional identity? What stories do they tell?

This paper is based on an on-going narrative research project exploring the impact on professional identity and practice of doctors' personal experience of illness. Using a narrative methodology which draws on counselling practices as well as literary, arts-based approaches to representation and analysis, this paper focuses on the story of Sophia, a palliative care doctor and her reflections on having lymphoma, and the impact of this on her professional identity, values and practice.

Places of Intimacy: Personal Life and Relationships in Three Generation Coloured Families in Cape Town

Elena Moore, University of Cape Town

Many studies have used biographical methods for understanding family and personal relationships, highlighting differences and distinguishing features between one generation and the next. However few studies have focussed on the places where these personal relationships and intimacy occur. The link between homes and biography is an underexplored area in sociological inquiry. Life history BNIM interviews with members of three-generation Coloured families in Cape Town provide a way to explore the meanings attached by individuals to events and to their lives in a particular place. For many of the respondents, home in the past was a source of identity and stability, a key element in the construction of a 'coloured' identity. However the home and local community, once quite similar, have changed in different directions post-apartheid, particularly when social mobility has been achieved. The findings suggest that respondents incur increasing problems in holding together domestic and local relationships. The article contributes to understandings of the link between biography and the home and discusses the factors (heroes, villains and fools) which impact upon this experience.

Dr Beeching and Mr Thwaites: Constructing Villains and Villainy

David H J Morgan

The aim of this paper is to explore the processes by which villains are constructed and, more generally, the nature and significance of villainy in social life. I do this through the exploration of two persons who might plausibly earn the title of 'villain'. The first, Dr. Beeching, was identified with his 1963 Report on railway transportation in Britain and which recommended extensive cuts in mileage, stations and personnel. My second villain, is a fictional character who appears in Patrick Hamilton's 1947 novel, *The Slaves of Solitude*.

Despite the obvious differences between these two villains there are also overlaps and similarities. In considering these two characters and their statuses as villains, we are drawn into themes to do with gendered power and narrative practices. Behind these themes there are even more complex issues to do with the role of villains in everyday life.

Our Father which art in heaven?

Zoë Parker and Amanda Bell

Two sisters explore their different feelings and ideas about their deceased father. Amanda saw (in Zoe's email inbox, when looking over her shoulder) that the auto/biography conference theme this year is heroes and villains. She felt it would be an ideal opportunity to write together for the first time. Amanda, a sculptor and an art therapist, wanted to explore a different creative medium and to discover more about Zoe's feelings about Amanda and their father. Zoe welcomed the idea of writing together but with some trepidation about the subject matter and her usual suspicion of Amanda's therapeutic focus. Zoe immediately thought up the title as it relates to an anecdote from Amanda's early childhood. Do the sisters consider their philandering father to be a hero or a villain? Is it relevant that he joked that he **was** god and so had no need to believe in any further deity?

'European Heroes'

Marleen Rensen, University of Amsterdam

In the early 1920s, when European civilization was facing a 'spiritual crisis', writers were often regarded as heroes that could help redefine its values in terms of the new and more complex understanding that the Great War had brought. At the time it seemed a common practice to publish heroic biographies on literary men that had contributed to the fraternization of the nations of Europe. For example, Stefan Zweig portrayed Romain Rolland as a Master and an inspiring moral example that had dedicated his whole life to the promotion of a mutual understanding between France and Germany. This type of life writing and the connected search for new European Heroes fit into a broader cultural pattern that is highly characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s. By examining the profiles of Rolland and Erasmus, that were both written by Zweig, this paper aims to explore the meaning that was attached to the literature and to literary icons in interwar Europe. This will also shed light on the way the biographical genre served to (re)construct a European identity.

Dementia, the self and others

Mike Sheaff, University of Plymouth

This paper will draw upon interview data and autobiographical experience to explore changes in status accompanying experiences of dementia. Focusing upon the importance of social relationships to these experiences, the paper considers movement between the status of hero, fool and villain. Primary, but not exclusive, attention is given to the status of the person with dementia, but significant others – particularly carers and professionals – will be referred to.

Two aspects will form the principle focus for the paper. The first addresses the importance of the immediate social context in the construction of the status and identity of the person with cognitive impairment as hero, or fool, or villain. The second concerns the contribution of biographical knowledge to these processes, and the role of close personal relationships within this. Movements between these identities are discussed from these perspectives.

Doing Time: Radical Politicians and Avant-Garde Writers
Dennis Smith, Loughborough University

This paper is an exercise in comparative biography. I look at four cases: two avant-garde writers with radical political views (Oscar Wilde and Jean Améry), and two radical politicians who have written books (Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi). All four individuals spent significant amounts of time incarcerated, in conditions ranging from two years (Wilde) to twenty-seven years (Mandela). This paper examines some of the available biographical evidence to try and advance our understanding of the part played by their varying experiences of imprisonment in the development of their political and/or literary careers, including the meanings they ascribed to the humiliation imposed upon them. The paper also allows us to explore and illustrate the dynamics of humiliation and responses to humiliation in the auto/biographies of individuals.

Heroes of War - The Effects of Participation in Adaptive Snowsports on Quality of Life

Lauren Whittle & Maggie Boniface, University of Chichester

It has been suggested that when an individual becomes disabled their narrative of life is disrupted and the relationship between their subjective and objective body is lost (Seymour, 2002). Participation in adaptive snowsports has been growing since it first became popular as a rehabilitation programme for injured war veterans during the Vietnam War. At that time research established both the physical and the psychological benefits, however, although there is now the opportunity to participate at both recreational and competitive levels, research exploring outcomes is still in its infancy.

This research examines the meanings of participation in adaptive snowsports and effects on quality of life. A biographical method was employed to explore narratives generated through life story interviews that related to the nature, origins and impact of adaptive snowsports participation. Key themes focused on becoming disabled, discovering adaptive snowsports, maintaining a healthy body, establishing a sporting identity, significance for the social self and impact on quality of life.

Perceived benefits related to increased confidence and purpose in life, enhanced physical fitness and the development of a social identity. The routine and structure provided by participation had provided respondents with the opportunity to reform the relationship between their objective and subjective body. Disabled role models had been significant in strengthening belief in capabilities and challenging ableist attitudes. Participation in adaptive snowsports was associated with feelings of freedom and equality.