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Auto/Biography Study Group

**BSA Auto/Biography Study Group
Christmas Conference**

Auto/Biography and Community

**4th December 2020
Online**



BRITISH
SOCIOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

BSA Registered Charity Number: 1080235

**Auto/Biography and Community
Programme**

0900-0910 Welcome

0910-1010 Keynote

Community at a distance and the coproduction of narratives of transition with those re/integrating into the community after punishment.

Julie Parsons (University of Plymouth)

Chair: Anne Chappell

1010-1055 Paper Session

"Can I have a quick word?" The lived experience of parenting autistic children.

Juliet Hall (University of Plymouth)

Chair: Carly Stewart

1055-1105 Refreshment Break

1105-1150 Paper Session

The same but different: Auto/Biographical accounts of university students from military families

Chris Ince, Ellen McHugh and Anne Chappell (Brunel University London)

Chair: Aidan Seery

1150-1235 Paper Session

Exploring a community of primary school teachers' stories of mental health and movement in the delivery of a mental health and movement intervention

Samar Shahid, Carly Stewart and Julie Turner-Cobb (Bournemouth University)

Chair: Jenny Byrne

1235-1250 Tribute

Tribute to David Morgan

Gayle Letherby (University of Plymouth)

1250-1320 Lunch

1320-1405 Paper Session

“Cricket was my escape”: Oral histories of women's cricketing lives

Raf Nicholson (Bournemouth University)

Chair: Judith Chapman

1405-1450 Paper Session

Loneliness in the Elderly in the Community

Terry Martin (University of Southampton)

Chair: Gayle Letherby

1450-1500 Refreshment Break

1500-1545 Paper Session

Being a Backwards Traveller – Soul mining in lockdown

Sharon Clancy (University of Nottingham)

Chair: Amanda Norman

1545-1630 Paper Session

Lockdown Scrapbook: walks and photos during April and May 2020

Julia Bennett (University of Chester)

Chair: Julie Parsons

1630-1700 Close

Abstracts

Lockdown Scrapbook: walks and photos during April and May 2020

Julia Bennett (University of Chester)

The Covid-19 lockdown in England began on 23rd March 2020. We were told to stay at home, other than for essential purposes, including an hour's daily exercise. On 17th April, shortly after the initial lockdown period was extended, I started to record my daily walks in photographs grouped by themes related to what was in the news and how I was feeling. I began with 'enclosure' and ended, 5 weeks later, with 'lost'. Walking as a method of research has become increasingly popular across the social sciences (Edensor, 2010; O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010; Pink et al, 2010). It has been shown to be a way of connecting to place through the body as well as a way of thinking through the body (Bennett, 2017; Low, 2015). For me, the act of concentrating on photographing details of my surroundings helped to ground me in this uncertain time. The story here is taken from my journal, news media, social media and my photos. What this tells is of a hiatus in everyday life. Life slowed down. Allowing the textures, the separate elements of our days, to become visible. The impact of the weather on mood and activities. The communal feeling as we smile and skirt around each other. The unstoppable continuation of the seasons seen in the gradual move through spring documented in the photos. And, of course, the enormous potential in exploring a small area to gain a feel for the place, a sense of belonging.

Being a Backwards Traveller – Soul mining in lockdown

Sharon Clancy (University of Nottingham)

I have taken Heidegger's statement "when the everyday falls away our authentic self is revealed" as the starting point for my own auto/biographical reflection during lockdown. The sense of liminality we all lived through created, for me, a "dream-time" state, a feeling of fluidity and timelessness, the past, present, and future embodied in one moment, manifesting as a blurring of possibility and loss. I have used poetry to reconnect with my history - my beloved father, a miner, now gone but ever-present; the pit community of Bolsover, a network of people and a way of life which is evanescent, except in old film footage, shared stories and memories. I have considered the role of oral history and storytelling as a means of looking backwards, with new stories emerging as our interpretative horizons shift, making strange what we accept as familiar and giving substance to what is lost. I will use poetry and reflection to engage with my own experience of dipping back in time and of reconnecting with the living and the dead, as if time has torn and has ceased to be the same construct. I will consider Raymond Williams' concept of structure of feeling - that art, film, poetry and literature, by transcending fixed or historically defined experience, forms and conventions, enable us to look beyond them, to our own lived experience in the moment, reconciling the individual and the collective, the social and the personal and acting as the locus through which feeling is expressed and embodied.

"Can I have a quick word?" The lived experience of parenting autistic children.

Juliet Hall (University of Plymouth)

Autism/autism spectrum conditions represent a range of complex developmental disabilities with unknown aetiology, which affect a person's social interaction, communication and presents as a spectrum of behaviours, including: difficulty with communication and social skills; repetitive behaviour; highly focused interests; and sensory sensitivity. The rate of diagnosis of autism is on the rise and considered to be due to the expansion in the operational definition of autism and greater public awareness. A diagnosis of autism in a child can lead to severe reactions for parent(s) and include feelings of loss and grief - for some comparable to a death in the family; fears concerning the long-term impact of diagnosis and "being robbed of dreaming of the future" (Werner Degrace, 2004, p.546). Parents are often vilified for being part of the 'pro-cure' biomedical movement as opposed to positively identifying with the condition and neurodiversity. Activists argue that these parents refuse to "accept the child's actual reality and needs" (Des Rochas Rosa, 2016). At the same time, parents report feeling othered and losing their sense of connection to their communities, often resulting in exclusion for them and their child. Whilst parents may try to join, or create new communities, they often feel isolated as a result of their child's diagnosis. This research shares the lived experience of parenting a child with autism using an auto/biographical approach. It highlights the impact of an autism

diagnosis on the parental biography and how autism influences the everyday life of parents/carers and the wider family unit.

The same but different: Auto/Biographical accounts of university students from military families

Chris Ince, Ellen McHugh and Anne Chappell (Brunel University London)

There is a growing interest in the community of university students and the ways in which they experience higher education. There is also associated interest in the barriers faced by some children in accessing and participating in higher education, one group of whom are those from military families (OfS, 2020: para 9). Given the dearth of knowledge about this particular group, our research focussed on asking students from military families about their educational experiences prior to joining university. We collected data from university students using online questionnaires and interviews. They shared accounts that included stories about moving schools, moving house, moving country and bereavement. They also talked about the associated educational, emotional and social experiences, some of which they felt were positive and some challenging. Experiences of transition, change, disruption and loss are evident across the university student population as a reflection of society, however the causes are very particular in the case of students from military families which sets them apart from the wider community. This research sheds light on some important considerations for universities in understanding and supporting this group of students.

Loneliness in the Elderly in the Community

Terry Martin (University of Southampton)

There is an important distinction between being on one's own (socially isolated) and the thoughts and feelings of being lonely. The two can certainly go together but it is also possible to feel alone in a crowd and to feel content on one's own. One of the most surprising findings of recent research on loneliness is the discovery that the experience and extent of loneliness is remarkably similar across age groups. However, the practical options available to address the issue vary considerably across age groups. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was set up following the murder of the British Member of Parliament, who had planned to find ways to reduce loneliness in the United Kingdom having herself experienced considerable loneliness growing up. Following the release of the Report of the Commission: Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time, in January 2018, the remit of the Minister for Sport and Civil Society was increased to include loneliness. Many media outlets referred to the then holder of this post, Tracey Crouch, as the 'Minister for Loneliness'. In order to sustain our own personal autobiographical narratives, we depend upon social interactions with others. Deprived of such interactions, through enforced solitude, these narratives are at high risk of decay and disintegration. In this paper I review and summarise the considerable recent literature and research on this subject, theorise from a psychosocial perspective upon it and offer some modest proposals to ameliorating the problem for the elderly in the community.

“Cricket was my escape”: Oral histories of women's cricketing lives

Raf Nicholson (Bournemouth University)

Historical and sociological studies of women's sporting and leisure lives have tended to focus on the constraints placed upon them by the expectation of marriage and child-rearing, with scholars arguing that women's preferences have generally been expected to be subverted to those of their husbands and families (Langhamer 2000). Additionally, sociologists have emphasised the importance of 'life-cycle' in women's lives, arguing that the freedom of youth generally gave way to a curtailment of opportunities to participate in sport in later life (Macrae 2016). My research challenges these conclusions. In this paper I will use historical methodologies (archival research and oral histories) to outline the biographies of a number of female cricketers. I will argue that for women across the 20th century, communities of sport could be a fundamental part of their life-long identity, across all stages of the life-cycle. As one woman put it, "my first love has always been cricket". Thus, for some women, cricketing communities offered the opportunity for themselves and their teammates to escape from heteronormative societal discourses about marriage and motherhood, and from ideas about the frailties of the female body. Cricket represented freedom.

Community at a distance and the coproduction of narratives of transition with those re/integrating into the community after punishment

Julie Parsons (University of Plymouth)

Since 2015 I have worked on a series of externally funded research projects with criminalised individuals as they progress through a resettlement scheme (RS) and into the community after punishment. The latest is a British Academy Covid-19 grant that draws on a range of methods to map the ways in which individuals engage with the charity during the pandemic, through texts and visual images. The success of the RS is measured in terms of its graduate's gaining employment (97%) and low reoffending rates (4%) (the national average is 48%). For the trainees and graduates of the scheme however success means something different, for many it is about being part of something, other than the criminal justice system, a 'making' community, that draws people together through a range of activities, whether it is art, cookery, horticulture, landscaping, pottery, or woodwork in order to build self-esteem. There is also wider community support, whether this is hands-on from regular interaction with volunteers, during supporters' days or virtually through comments on blog posts from its 1250+ registered supporters. This paper will reflect upon the ways in which community connections continue to be forged via a range of mediums such as blog posts, i-poems and films, in an effort to present criminalised individuals as other than risky and transgressive. These highlight the importance of nurturing positive relationships and a positive sense of self prior to release, as McNeill (2012) reminds us, re/integration into the community after punishment is not just a private business.

Exploring a community of primary school teachers' stories of mental health and movement in the delivery of a mental health and movement intervention

Samar Shahid, Carly Stewart and Julie Turner-Cobb (Bournemouth University)

Concern over children's mental health in the United Kingdom (UK) has prompted externally funded classroom-based intervention initiatives; many of which require a whole-school approach to engagement and delivery. This presentation explores stories told by a community of teachers and pastoral care who are part of a mental-health and movement intervention, Stormbreak, to achieve children's mental health and wellbeing outcomes in five primary schools in the South of England. Teachers are required to implement physical activity practices, informed by mental health concepts, however little is known about their personal experiences and associated perceptions of movement and mental health. Taking a narrative inquiry approach, we conducted individual in-depth life-history interviews with six primary school teachers to explore how past and present lived experiences of movement and mental health impacted on their confidence and engagement with Stormbreak, and associated pedagogical practices. We found that some teachers had positive and privileged stories of movement and mental health to live by, incorporating personal and professional identities, where others expressed fear and trepidation regarding their ability to be effective in Stormbreak delivery. We propose first understanding primary teachers as embodied pedagogues and their stories to live by is essential if intervention programmes are to produce the results wanted.

Attendees

Julia Bennett
Jenny Byrne
Judith Chapman
Anne Chappell
Sharon Clancy
Tracey Collett
Charlie Davis
Juliet Hall
Karen Hanrahan
Christopher Ince
Gayle Letherby
Christine Lewis
Terry Martin
Ellen McHugh
Mary Mckeever
Raf Nicholson
Jenifer Nicholson
Amanda Norman
Mich Page
Julie Parsons
Aidan Seery
Samar Shahid
Jo Stanley
Carly Stewart
Michael Thomas