

THE SOCIOLOGICAL OBSERVER

**REMAKING SOCIAL FUTURES
THROUGH BIOGRAPHIC,
NARRATIVE AND LIFECOURSE
APPROACHES:**

***STORY-MAKING AND STORY-
TELLING IN PANDEMIC TIMES***

EDITED BY LISA MORAN

PUBLISHED BY: SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND



Sociological
Association of
Ireland

THE SOCIOLOGICAL OBSERVER 3(1). REMAKING SOCIAL FUTURES THROUGH BIOGRAPHIC, NARRATIVE AND LIFECOURSE

Edited by Lisa Moran

First published: August 2021
ISSN 2737-7563

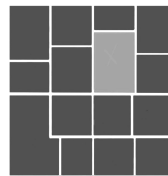
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Published by
Sociological Association of Ireland
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
Ireland

www.sociology.ie

email: sociology.ie@gmail.com

Designed and produced by John O'Brien



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

(RE)-MAKING THE STORYSCAPE: (RE)-WRITING LIVES POST- PANDEMIC AND DISCOURSES OF NEW FUTURES

LISA MORAN

This edition of *The Sociological Observer*, produced by members of the Biographical Narrative and Lifecourse Research (BNLR) Study Group of the SAI presents international sociological perspectives on the Covid-19 crisis and critical responses to the notion of futures. The study group, which was established in 2019, aims to discuss, critically analyze and exchange knowledge on innovations in biographic, narrative and lifecourse research, build research capacity through training and discussion, and support teaching excellence in these fields. Contributions to this volume underline the richness and flexibility of biographical, narrative and lifecourse approaches and facilitate further discussion on people's pandemic experiences, which is illuminated further through the diversity of approaches to conceptualizing and writing the pandemic presented in this volume. Chapters range from deeply personal accounts of pandemic lives (see for example, chapters by Byrne and Boldt), to reflections on positionality, inequalities and experiences of older people (Wright) and other seldom heard groups (chapters by Isaloo, Vathi and Foster), friendship as method (Nico, this volume), challenges doing interviews during social distancing (Caetano and Moran), public imaginaries of heroic nurses (Flynn and Corbally), and WWII letters that evoke the notion of home (and what 'going home' in this pandemic context means) (Kovačič, this volume).

To reflect the international and interdisciplinary character of the BNLIR group and the multidimensionality of the pandemic's impacts on people's everyday lives, I invited writers from Ireland, the UK, Europe, the US and Canada to contribute to this volume. Specifically, the initial brief was that the volume would capture sociologists' views on our own professional and personal positionalities to speak about the pandemic, to reflect on the notion of 'futures' and its meanings from diverse methodological and research perspectives, to offer insights into researcher's relationships with participants during Covid, capture methodological challenges and innovations and Covid-19's impacts on our participants. The chapters presented here engage with these ideas, illuminating the diversity of future imaginaries that prevail within our sociological research communities, and addressing topics that are of critical global importance such as education, ageing and community, migrant's experiences, family, work, public spaces, parenting, place and methodological innovations. The volume's significance is manifest in the diversity of sociological insights presented from international and Irish scholarly contexts captured at a distinct moment in time for how we understand ourselves as global actors, and how we adapt our research to suit changing epidemiological conditions and international policy context and contexts.

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Preparing this third edition of *The Sociological Observer* incited many of us to reflect on our own experiences since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020. Who were we before the pandemic? Are we still the same person? How might we have changed? If we have changed, has it been for the better or worse? Where are we going? Indeed, these questions formed a crucial part of the inaugural meeting of the BNLIR study group convened almost one year ago and has informed subsequent discussions at meetings ever since. In the first edition of *The Sociological Observer* published in summer 2020, the Irish sociological community was also asking similar questions and reporting on public discourse about the pandemic which was increasingly dominated by questions like when will it be over? What will we learn about ourselves during this pandemic? How will we cope? When will things go back to normal? Will there ever be a vaccine (see also Nurse and Moran, 2021). Despite scientific advancements in vaccination development, multiple lockdowns, social distancing and the proscription of touch (Green and Moran, 2020) these questions about where we are going and what we are moving towards still prevail in public and academic discourse. Indeed, they form the basis of much discussion in contributions discussed in this volume as well.

Sociology has always had at its heart, a predilection for pushing conceptual, methodological and discursive boundaries. Successive discussions with authors whose work is incorporated here that took place in 2020 and 2021 show the multifarious ways that our community is reflecting on what kinds of teaching and research futures we are facing and crucially, how we can take positive visions and experiences forward in post-Covid worlds.

The notion of 'going somewhere' implies movement, moving forward, pushing boundaries and going 'beyond'. Significantly, contributions to this volume underline that the social architecture we previously regarded as 'normal', and how we engaged in 'normal' life, constantly weaving the patterns of so-called 'ordinary' interactions and events, meant that some voices were frequently neglected and overlooked. We must not go back to what was perceived as 'normal' pre-Covid; rather, we must be reflexive about our experiences, understanding more about how we mapped, negotiated and (re)wrote our ways through a unique global 'storyscape' of 2020/2021 characterised by narratives of disease, vaccinations, uncertainty, risk and care. We must not lose sight of who we are as architects of a unique global story at a particular point in time and our role in creating positive futures for ourselves and for others. For those of us who have survived Covid, practicing gratitude, caring for and caring about others and ourselves, and creating archetypes of new societies where people are recognised, valued, heard and responded to, is critical.

One of the most important aspects of this collection is the emphasis on accessing 'concealed' aspects of everyday life and the richness of contributor's research engagements with persons who are often labeled as 'vulnerable' and/or 'hard to reach'. Furthermore, chapters in this volume underline the importance of creative methodologies such as walking (Vathi, this volume), photo elicitation (Liebenberg and VanderPlatt), and the potential of arts-based methods to reinterpret meanings of futures (see chapters by Flanagan and O'Grady). In addition, chapters by Victoria Foster and Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Sara Hayden underline that prevailing inequalities pertaining to economic and social disadvantage (Foster) and gender (O'Brien and Hayden) were perpetuated during Covid. While national and international headlines have been dominated by Brexit, Covid-19, the US elections, and vaccinations for the past 18 months, we must be mindful of how multiple forms of inequality and oppressions are made manifest Covid but remain largely hidden from view and are legitimised by pre-existing power structures, language, norms and values. Crucially, chapters presented here show the significance of narrative and biographical interviewing and other 'flexible'

methodologies in enabling people to articulate their own experiences in their own terms, and the importance of this for ‘lessons learned’ and building better futures post-pandemic.

HYPER-HYGIENISATION, SOCIAL DISTANCING AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE STORIES

Despite the predominance of overtly scientised discourses since the first lockdowns early in 2020 (Heaney, 2021) and the ‘hyper-hygienisation’ of society, this volume draws attention to the embodied and sensory elements of everyday stories told about the pandemic in other spheres; in the home, in communities, schools, universities, and among researchers themselves. These ‘storied’ dimensions that are interrelated with lay and local knowledge cultures tell much of where we have come from and where we think we might be going towards. Anne Byrne’s chapters on autoethnographic experiences in the sea and changes to teaching practice during Covid, further highlight the importance of ‘writing as method’ (see Richardson and St Pierre, 2005) and the importance of capturing ‘concealed’ aspects of everyday life. Stories presented here are ‘portals’ into people’s inner worlds (Connelly and Clandinan, 1990), and are imaginative, creative and living (Tamboukou, 2010; Squire et al, 2013). Stories break boundaries and it is through the process of story-telling about seemingly ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ experiences that people legitimise their own positionalities and voices. The stories presented in this volume are principally about people’s everyday lives and how people in different geographical locations, occupations, age categories experienced the pandemic. However, topics alluded to here break boundaries, questioning and opening up new conceptual and methodological avenues about who speaks legitimately in society and why some discourses and voices are routinely accorded greater emphasis than others and why others might be ignored. Examples of this include Oliver’s work on parents who experience child-to-parent violence in the family home; the chapter by Jackson on the pressures of pressures of parenting during Covid and female academics who were interviewed by O’Brien Hallstein and Hayden on how the pandemic further exacerbated imbalances in care work in the family home. To return to the questions of where we have come from and where we are going; we must not reify the past in our search for better futures. Rather, we must think critically about the lessons learned from the past and how we can use them to create better worlds.

OVERVIEW OF THIS VOLUME

The remainder of this volume is divided into five principal sections, all of which engage with themes and questions outlined previously regarding the nature of story-telling, the significance of everyday knowledge and ways of seeing the world that go beyond strictly scientised discourses. The question of what we know (or what we think we know) about the world, and the need to move beyond our previously-held assumptions about who we were and what we could be in pre-Covid times pervades the opening section. The first chapter by **Thea Boldt** conveys the shockwaves felt around the world after Covid first struck and opens up questions about what we know or what we think we know at any given moment in time. Boldt's work underlines the importance of sociological thinking and concepts from qualitative biographical extant literature to inform a deeper understanding of what this crisis is which can inform our understanding of future crises as well. Significantly, Boldt presents a work in progress analysis of the various phases of the pandemic, illuminating meanings of concepts of 'old normal' and 'new normal' across different contexts, which transformed as the pandemic unfolded.

Anne Byrne draws on personal reflections on waterbiography which takes us out of the strictures of the home and office and into the freedoms of the sea. Anne's childhood family memories are indelibly connected to water. Her work underlines how the space of the sociologist and sociological inquiry increasingly moved beyond the university during Covid times into spaces of profound inner reflection on who we are individually and as a sociological community. Moreover, Anne's reflections illuminate her own personal learning during the pandemic about human-environment interconnections and water as nurturer.

Letters from World War II soldiers are examined in the chapter by **Tanja Kovačič**, who engages with the notion of journeying home. As per Kovačič, letters have resonance for interrogating and understanding the past and the future; they show how our everyday, taken-for-granted practices are linked to the past, embedded in the present, and have resonance for who are into the future. Similar to Boldt, Kovačič, questions the meaning of 'what is normal', or what was considered to be 'normal' pre-Covid. Kovačič's insights are reminiscent of Wengraf's (2001) work on multiple subjectivities that are made manifest in and across time, which are amenable to methods of narrative inquiry and narrative analyses and the complexities and intricacies of letters for understanding people's everyday lives.

The second section of this issue focuses on family, work and emotions during Covid and post-pandemic. **Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Sara Hayden** illuminate the significance of work during the pandemic, illuminating how pandemic conditions further heightened existing gender inequalities which manifested through work. Drawing on interviews with four academic mothers, they show the complexity of how care work was negotiated in the home, further illuminating the multidimensionality of choice, sexism and the complexity of emotion. As per the authors, greater understanding of the complexity of gender relations in the home with regards to work is significant for appreciating the pandemic's impacts on couples and for creating fairer conditions in the workplace and in the home. The subsequent contributions by **Ashling Jackson** and **Louise Oliver** respectively draw attention to family life during the pandemic. Jackson's chapter illuminates the significance of greater supports for parents affected by the pandemic, the significance of narrative inquiry for understanding parents' experiences of life during Covid-19. More research on the lived lives of parents from low income families who are regularly subjected to multiple inequalities and oppressions is significant for understanding parenting during the pandemic and for planning supports 'that work' in post-pandemic times. **Louise Oliver** opens up questions about situations of domestic abuse and child-to-parent violence and abuse (CPVA) (Oliver, this volume) during Covid. These issues are exceptionally important as previous research documented that incidents of domestic abuse soared in several countries during the pandemic (see Evans et al, 2020; Corrigan, 2021). Significantly, Oliver argues that as society closed down during successive lockdowns, we needed to 'open up'. Overall, Oliver's work and insights from Jackson shine a light on topics that are often under-researched, and go under the radar in public and political discourse; the fear and stigma associated with CPVA and the economic and social barriers that affected parents' ability to do their best during the pandemic.

Susan Flynn and **Melissa Corbally** examine the notion of heroism during Covid-19 specifically in relation to nurses, and highlight the importance of the Biographical Narrative and Interpretive Method (BNIM) for further appreciating nurses' professional and personal lives which are part of the complexities of care work in the Covid age. While images of healthcare workers predominates in government advertisements and information campaigns on curbing the spread of Covid, research into their everyday lives exposing the intricacies of their work practices would contribute to societal awareness about the multidimensionality about their everyday lives. Given the scale of debates about allocating additional university places for student nurses, pay and working conditions for medical

professionals in Ireland (see Flannery, 2019) and internationally and the mass exodus of junior doctors and nurses from Ireland to other countries, biographical research into healthcare workers' lives seems especially significant.

Piotr Szenajch's work is both a love letter and an elegy to a space that was pivotal to his professional and personal development as a sociologist – the Warsaw University Library building (BUW) in Warsaw, Poland. Szenajch reflects on how public and private spaces were transformed during Covid, affecting how and where we work. This building long inspired him to think sociologically but transformations of these spaces and multiple closures during Covid lead the author to question how future pandemics might affect academic knowledge production and how we use and conceptualise public spaces. These questions are highly pertinent given the emergence of new variants and constant reminders of the fallibility of scientific thinking and political decision-making during Covid (see Craig and McGuinness, 2021).

The third section on educational futures comprises four papers on educational futures, three of which focus on the pandemic. Reflections from **Anne Byrne** are a testament to the struggles that lecturers and students faced in the sudden move to online learning. Anne's reflections recall the deeply emotive aspects of teaching practice; we worry about our ability to keep up with technological innovations. We worry about our students' personal welfare, their academic and professional development. These concerns last far longer than most classes do. Significantly, Byrne's work highlights the importance of inner reflection on our positionalities as educators but shows the challenges associated with this in the context of the neo-liberal university. **Jacqueline O'Toole's** work continues with the theme of reflections from Higher Education educators on the challenges of online learning. Importantly, Jacqueline's reflections discuss the notions of visibility and presence in online settings. Moreover, she shows the importance of autoethnographic work on students' and educators' experiences of online learning during the pandemic.

Grace O'Grady reflects on findings from an arts-based participatory research project with young people, illuminating that the notion of future is indelibly tied to matter, meaning and embodied realities. O'Grady's chapter highlights the efficacy of narrative, arts-based inquiry for understanding how young people make sense of identity, their past, present and future and imagining their future selves. Importantly, O'Grady highlights that these self-portraits challenge Western dualisms and positioning of the body (e.g. black as ethnic difference, shyness as

weakness), opening up further empirical and conceptual discussions of how young people use the arts to challenge taken-for-granted knowledge. The highly creative nature of futures in educational spaces is further accentuated in the work of **Denise O'Flanagan**, who shows that young people's interpretations of futures as expressed through art, are creative, imaginative and indeed, heroic. O'Flanagan draws on the findings of an arts-based project with young people in schools located in economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland. O'Flanagan illuminates how the arts enabled young people to forge relationships in the classroom and to co-create understandings about what their futures can be.

The fourth section encompasses chapters by **Hazel Wright, Erica Masserano, Martin Laheen** and **Lisa Moran** underline the importance of hearing the voices of vulnerable people during and after the pandemic, charting some creative and highly innovative methodological approaches to understand pandemic experiences. **Hazel Wright** recounts her experiences as an informal carer for an elderly relative during Covid-19, illuminating how older people who lack access to technology and public spaces were increasingly marginalised during strict Covid lockdowns. While scientifically speaking, lockdowns saved lives by curbing disease transmission the human costs for elderly people require greater research and policy prioritization. Significantly, Wright engaged in a process of fictionalization and Impressionistic Research, creating narratives of what life might have been like from the perspective of her elderly relative and from conversations with older people. Wright's work underlines the complexities of stepping into our participant's shoes doing research and the importance of the human imagination and narrative methods for creating new, more equitable futures. **Erica Masserano's** contribution elucidates aspects of the CityLife project in the UK, showing the significance of community-based workshops and research on writing that was co-produced with community elders during Covid. Comparable to Wright, Masserano illustrates the loneliness and isolation felt by elderly people during Covid and the importance of co-constructing narratives of experience that are grounded in place.

Subsequent work by **Martin Laheen** continues the themes of ageing arguing that discourses of 'ageing well' are part of broader government strategies to manage risks to human health, thereby affecting costs to the exchequer. Laheen interrogates the concept of chronological age, showing that gendered understandings of ageing pervade debates about men, women and ageing in contemporary societies. Significantly, the chapter shows that perceptions about chronological age may work in favour of older women in comparison to older men, in the extent that they

are 'taken seriously' in society as they get older. This opens up questions of course about the social legitimacy accorded to younger women's voices in determining social futures, and indeed, legitimacy accorded to other populations with regards to age (e.g. younger men, elderly men).

Lisa Moran's chapter on the pandemic's impacts on the Catholic Church in Ireland argues that the church has adapted to the new social architecture by utilising cloud-based technologies to engage audiences during lockdowns. While Church attendance has fallen nationally, the church still has an important role to play in fostering community and providing social supports for people who still ascribe to Catholic teaching, most notably the elderly and people living in rural areas who may lack access to other forms of sociability (e.g. via the internet). This chapter raises questions about the provision of support for older people in rural Ireland, given shortfalls in transport links and lack of investment in high-speed internet services by successive governments.

Contributions by **Isaloo, Vathi, Masserano et al** and **Foster** underline the importance of community in pandemic times, underlining the Covid-19's impacts on groups that are already economically and socially marginalised. **Amin Sharifi Isaloo** outlines the dire consequences of the pandemic on asylum seekers in Direct Provision (DP) in Cork, Ireland. Despite a plethora of literature on DP and previous studies which warn of reinforcing marginalization of asylum seekers in Ireland (Guscuite, 2020), DP systems are slow to change. Isaloo gives a powerful first-hand account of life in DP, illuminating the importance of walking during the pandemic as a release from the realities of living in DP. Isaloo engages with concepts of identity and identity transformation, arguing that DP further enhances the liminal status of asylum seekers in the DP system, further highlighting the need for systemic change. **Zana Vathi's** work on green spaces and multiculturalism in Toxteth, Liverpool illuminates how human-environmental interactions are especially important during Covid-19, in areas that have already endured multiple types of socio-political and economic traumas for solidifying sense of community, belonging and for empowerment. Significantly, Vathi's work underlines the importance of walking methodologies and engaging with outdoor spaces for physical health and emotional wellbeing during and after Covid, highlighting the importance of these methodologies for future research on migrant's lives and communities, more generally. **Erica Masserano et al** outline an innovative project initiated by Prof Corrine Squire to elicit narratives from migrants at the UK border (the Calais Jungle) through storytelling. Showing the value of these narrations and those of students for critical pedagogy, Masserano underline the complexity of student and migrants'

narratives about the pandemic's impacts on everyday lives. Significantly, this project has very strong resonance for teaching and research in narrative inquiry in the UK and internationally for understanding people's real experiences in liminal spaces (e.g. at the border). **Victoria Foster's** chapter underlines the importance of community-based wealth generation projects in areas frequently labeled as socially and economically disadvantaged in the North West UK. Foster underlines the importance of participatory approaches and 'buy-in' from local organisations and citizenries to create demonstrable change for more equitable futures.

The sixth section of this issue showcases some methodological innovations and reflections during the pandemic. **Ana Caetano** and **Lisa Moran** offer critical insights on challenges and opportunities for interviewing during pandemic times. Drawing on professional experiences of interviewing before and during Covid-19, the authors focus on the contingencies and contextualities of interviewing using cloud-based technologies. Caetano and Moran speak of issues that are central to biographical research which includes building rapport, trust and conveying emotion in online arenas. Furthermore, this chapter addresses issues pertaining to power, asymmetrical relationships, reflexivity and the emotional impacts on researchers. **Linda Liebenberg** and **Madine VanderPlaat** discuss the importance of resilience research during Covid, illuminating the richness of narrative research and image-based methodologies for capturing lived realities. As per the authors, further narrative research on resources and threats that shape and reflect people's resilience is exceptionally important for understanding how families and individuals negotiate different forms of risk in everyday life. Photographic methods can capture people's momentary experiences, leading to further questions on why they chose particular images to represent themselves and/or their experiences. Photography is a popular method of data collection during Covid and is proving important for understanding children's lives as well as lone mothers.

Magda Nico's contribution details the importance of family and 'friendship as method' (Tillman-Healy, 2003) when conducting biographical research with families in Portugal during the pandemic. Nico details ethical considerations pertaining to the *Linked Lives* project, the emotional impacts on researchers, the importance of reflexivity, reflecting on the positionalities and shared experiences of researchers in the team. These, along with openness and a willingness to engage in families' every day, lived experiences led to deep narratives elicited from participants about their wellbeing during pandemic times. Nico's work further underlines that taking selfies and sending photos to loved ones during the pandemic are

further indicative of the multileveled dimensions of people's pandemic experience, further underlining the complexity of (extra)-ordinary interactions during Covid times.

Katarzyna Waniek and **Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas** raise very significant issues in biographical research, arguing that there is a trivialising tendency among some researchers. This manifests in several ways which include interviewees being disappointed with the narration, interjecting during interviews, confusing then narrator's self-theories with those of the researcher's, and researchers taking on emotionally sensitive topics that they are unprepared for. Significantly, Waniek and Golczyńska-Grondas underline marked differences that exist between various schools of thought on biographies and what it means to do biographical research. They conclude that open discussions between researchers on intricate aspects of biographical research are extremely important for overcoming these challenges.

The final chapter in this volume, by **Anne Chappell** and **Carly Stewart**, co-convenors of the BSA's Auto/Biography study group underlines the importance convening a study group during the pandemic. Anne and Carly give a historical overview of the founding of the group, challenges emerging from online meetings and reflect on the future of the group. One of the keynotes of BNLR over the past 12 months has been forging new relationships with other networks (e.g. the BSA Auto/Biography group, ESA RN03 and other networks). We look forward to further engagements with you both Anne and Carly.

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**PART 1. RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS ON
PANDEMIC TIMES: WATERBIOGRAPHY,
DISCOURSES OF HOME AND KNOWING
WHAT WE DON'T KNOW**

PANDEMIC DIARY: BIOGRAPHY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

THEA D. BOLDT

“Now only an expert can deal with the problem,
only an expert can deal with the problem,
because half the problem is seeing the problem,
only an expert can deal with the problem,
only an expert can deal with the problem.”

Laurie Anderson

POINT OF DEPARTURE

Sometime around the beginning of the Pandemic in March 2020, shortly after the introduction of the first lockdown in European countries, I had an interesting conversation with my mother¹. We sat at the kitchen table in our house in Northern Poland when she suddenly said: “Who would have thought that the world can be put on hold all at once, just like that?” My mother was clearly in a state of shock, and she was not alone. We were all in a state of shock. While the television news was showing the pictures from Bergamo on repeat, we realized that we didn’t understand what was going on. We were in a personal and collective state of torpor about the otherwise obvious: Knowing That We Don’t Know.

What we didn’t know at that time was *what* was happening exactly and – most importantly – *how* it was happening; we didn’t know how to define medical as well as social causes and consequences of the spread of the virus SARS COV2 and the disease that has since been named Covid-19.

¹ Since the author of this article lives in the EU, most recently mainly in Germany and in Poland, the article incorporates a particular spatial perspective on the problem at stake that is not without an impact on the content.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The state of shock leading to the sudden interruption of everyday life routine, accompanied by the reinterpretation of the past and future from the standpoint of the (uncertain) present, is known in biographical theory as a state of crisis (Boldt 2012a: 180ff.)². Alfred Schutz defines crisis as a process in which 'thinking-as-usual' becomes impossible, 'acting-as-usual' unworkable (Schutz 1964: 96). Crisis brings about a change accompanied by the disorganisation and destabilisation of the common sense system of knowledge. It is a process of reorientation of meaning that initiates the reorganisation in the field of 'thinking as usual', brought about by the questioning of the system of meanings, the contestation of its organisational principles and underlying cultural patterns. Crisis concludes if and only when new routines are being established within a new system of knowledge.

Anselm Strauss while addressing the notion of crisis in the biographical context points out that the process of change might be provoked by (and organized around) a single incident or a series of incidents called *turning point(s)*. In biographical experience, the turning point is the moment when one realizes: "I'm not the same as I was, as I used to be" (Strauss 1959: 95). In their research, Strauss and his colleagues place great emphasis on the gradual development of change constituted by the experience of a turning point, which they call *trajectory* (Glaser/Strauss 1968; Strauss/Fagerhaugh/Suczek/Wiener 1985; Corbin/Strauss 1988). Thus, crisis is not a static phenomenon, it is rather a trajectory of change, a dynamic process of becoming something other than what one used to be, often accompanied by experiences of "misalignment, surprise, shock, chagrin, anxiety, tension, bafflement, and self-questioning" (Strauss 1959: 95). Strauss' empirical analysis shows that while the changes penetrate, subvert, and disorganise one's everyday activities and system of references, the person's experience of the loss of capacity to act autonomously, caused by external circumstances and the experience of suffering rooted in the person's lack of control over the developing changes, affect his or her life-organisation system on multiple levels.

Change manifests in different dimensions concerning as much time as it does concern space. Trajectory is an expression of change, in which

² Whereas it is possible to see crisis as an exceptional state that disrupts everyday life, it is also possible to see it as a normal case of biographical experience of change (Boldt 2012b). Since the concept of biography is built around certain turning points, there can be no biography without the notion of crisis.

space is what is to be changed (or what is changing) and time is what (itself) changes (Soeffner, 1991: 5). Therefore even though the concept of trajectory has been mainly developed around the empirical study of illness and dying (Strauss and Glaser, 1968, 1980), there is something general about the term that leads to further implications such as may present themselves in processes developed around sudden, often unexpected individual and collective change, which doesn't have to be accompanied by suffering, but often is. Developing Strauss's approach further, Fritz shows how the concept of trajectory can be applied to the more universal phenomena of collective and biographical identity transformation (Schütze, 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1995; Riemann and Schütze 1991). Analysing the progression of trajectory, Schütze suggests that we should distinguish between its socio-structural dimension, its sequential order, and the distinctive features framing its development. Finally, he proposes a typology of different variations of trajectories, and he also discusses the potential of adopting the term trajectory to refer to collective processes of transformation (Schütze, 1989).

WORK-IN-PROGRESS ANALYSIS OF THE PANDEMIC PHASES

While the current analysis of the Pandemic concentrates mainly on plain numbers and metrics, the concepts described above can be useful in order to comprehend the social causes and effects of the Pandemic as well as in uncovering its underlying sequential structure.

Whereas the first phase of the Pandemic began with a shock, individual as well as collective, the time between March and June 2020 was dedicated to finding the commonly shared definition of the situation. The virologists and epidemiologists became public figures with immense political and (pop)-cultural gravity. By concentrating on empirical research on virus cells under laboratory conditions, a certain portrait of what we are dealing with socially has been established throughout the TV news, on social media and via political actions taken by the European governments. All this was met with widely shared solidarity and support by the general public. Following the example of China's lockdown policy, the social and political life has been shaped by hygienisation (Guerot, 2020), demobilization paired with social distancing, and hyper-digitalization. Under the circumstances, the span of our collective awareness shrunk dramatically. There was not much thinking about the future going on, the public attention was focused solely on the present. And in this present, the main focus has been brought to holding on to the past, to wondering when it all comes back to how it was before, hoping that soon everything will be 'as

usual', as it used to be. Thus, coming back to the past became the main focal point for the future.

The summer of 2020 marked the second phase of the Pandemic, which precipitated a relative level of relaxation in terms of mobility and infused daily life with new future horizons. While there were thousands of people going on vacation, restaurants and bars reopened, and the European and national aids were disbursed (with more or less efficiency), the *new normal* became the 'talk of the town'. Even if the term remained fuzzy, it became clear that the *old normal* had disintegrated and that *something* will permanently change. Nobody could fathom what would take the place of the *old normal* and by which certainties the *new normal* would be shaped. The *new normal* thus simultaneously became a promise and a threat, a threat that rivaled the threat of the second wave of infection.

The beginning of the so-called second wave of infection in the autumn of 2020 also marks the beginning of something which I call the third phase of the Pandemic in Europe – characterised by reverting back to lockdown as a primary political mechanism of crisis management and by strengthening of the top-down state-driven homogenization of the discourse, which in turn challenged the pluralisation of the debate about the reasonableness of Covid-19 measures that unfolded in the social networks and on the streets of some biggest cities in Europe. While at the beginning of the Pandemic there was a shared understanding about it being a global phenomenon that affects us all, it has now become clear that the Pandemic affects us all in completely different ways. Due to the new socio-economic circumstances the social inequalities began to grow rapidly on the global scale and the socio-economic gap started to widen in an unforeseeable manner.

With the introduction of the worldwide vaccination roll-out in December 2020 the fourth phase of the Pandemic began, bringing about the hope that it will all be over soon. This phase, the one we are in right now, is marked by the vaccination successes and failures of different countries, which result in various reopening and lockdown scenarios that in turn engender differing future outlooks. Whereas the lockdown strategies of European countries were rather similar during the third phase, now a diversification becomes apparent. While Germany opts for further restrictions of fundamental rights, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom will increasingly open up, in spite of incidence rates that are comparable to German numbers, or – in the case of the United Kingdom – as a result of the success of the vaccination campaign. In Germany, the crisis no longer seems to be an exceptional state, but rather

appears to be the *new normal*. The measures taken to tackle the state of emergency brought about by the rapid spread of Covid-19 were initially conceived of as being of a temporary nature, but may per chance become a permanent solution. Legislative amendments, empowerment of national governments and a corresponding weakening of federal structures, the restriction of individual freedom and similar phenomena points towards a retreat into centralisation. Meanwhile, the socio-economic gap widens magnifying old and producing new forms of social problems. The question remains, as to how much of a permanent impact on our social environment and every individual's future these *temporary* circumstances will have.

CONCLUSIONS

This brings me back to my point of departure, to the discussion of the impact of experts – scientists, and social scientists in particular – when it comes to forecasting. On the whole, it can be observed that prognostication is not the forte of the social sciences – they leave divination to the weather forecast – rather, they excel at in-depth, empirically founded analyses of the present state of affairs. This is the core business of the social sciences. The Chicago School of Sociology has been broadly interested in the analysis of disorderly social processes and the mechanisms of coping with them. Many of the empirical studies tackle the disintegration of everyday life order caused by different social problems, like poverty, migration, homelessness, gangs' life or drug abuse. Migration studies in particular have been influenced by these works for a long time. Znaniecki and Thomas (1918-1920/1923), Stonequist (1937/1961), Park (1928/1950) and others have pictured the migrant as an 'ideal type' of change, brought about by movement in time and space – a case of identity transformation process par excellence. However, Strauss' trajectory concept can be used as a general concept of spatial and temporal structure of crisis since it expresses the constant interlinkages between the social and the subjective and allows us to analyse the dynamics of the social construction of crisis and its sequential organization. Generally speaking, trajectory is "the contingencies involved in working with people who go through and endure something that cannot be totally controlled or even managed but merely shaped by the different participants in the unfolding drama (Strauss et al. 1985: 20 quoted by Riemann/ Schütze 1991: 334). Trajectory focuses on sequential order of actions based on planning, anticipations, co-operations, conflicts and, last but not least, results (Soeffner 1991: 10) and thus lets us concentrate on the sequential organization of crisis as a process and on

the perspectives on different participants, bringing together public events and personal experiences (Riemann/ Schütze 1991: 334). At the same time, trajectory of crisis is not only the matter of dealing with the present.

As a result of crisis, our imagination of the futures and interpretations of the past are being affected greatly (Boldt 2012a: 180ff.). As a matter of fact – as briefly exemplified before - different visions of the future might be produced in different stages of the trajectory’s progression alongside with different reinterpretations of the past. In order to understand the social causes and effects of the Pandemic, the times before and the (possible) times after, the briefly sketched collective Pandemic phases must be specified and brought together with an overlay of individual, biographical recollections, with a narration of the changes that people go through in their lives at this moment. As of now, we’ve encountered many specialized definitions of the current crisis based on the virological implications as well as plenty of politically applied strategies of crisis management. What the biographical perspective on the problem might bring about – and most certainly will – is the understanding of both, individual dimensions of the collective dismay as well as personal knowledge on how to deal with it. Since the very foundation of biographical theory lies in seeing every person as an expert in terms of dealing with his or her biographical situation, it might be suggested to shift the focus from the specialists to everyday life ‘professionals’ in order to fully understand the Pandemic crisis.

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MOVING ONLINE AND INTO THE SEA: A SHORT WATERBIOGRAPHY

ANNE BYRNE

It is unusually quiet. The early morning sky begins to lighten. The rocks will be here as soon as the sun rises, I think. I am aware of the sounds of tumbling stones as the waves wash the shore, the shrill cry of a gull, a dog barking in the distance and the wind shaking branches of the trees overhead. I am shivering. The longer I stand here, the worse it will be. The first bite of cold sea water flushes my skin pink, red then patches of blue spread across my arms and thighs. My fingers turn white at the tips – all blood rushing away from the extremities to the body's core. I plunge on, deaf now to all sound except the beating of my heart, gasping for breath as I force myself to swim, counting the strokes, one, two, three. I must get to a count of thirty before I can turn homeward. Can I stay more than a minute in this temperature? I test myself. I resolve to endure another five strokes and begin to lose my breath. I find ground beneath me and stand up, gulping air and wade home. Wrapping my coat around me, I sit and watch the sun rise over the water, as streaks of white and silver light the sky and sea. I breathe. My heart settles into a regular, steady rhythm. I become still.

I listen to the sounds around me and notice the absence of that early morning hum of constant traffic on the motorway. I sit with this particular silence of lockdown, a consequence of the global pandemic of COVID-19. The morning air no longer carries the voices of children getting ready for school or sounds of adults hurrying to catch a train, bus or favourite parking spot. Restrictions on movement and travel, the forced closure of local businesses, colleges, schools and childcare facilities have brought us to this moment. I move on-line. The transition is difficult. Adopting new technologies provokes intense anxiety as I barely navigate my way across a screen towards students, who are equally stressed. It seems improbable, a project bound to fail given the technical and pedagogical challenges, but somehow I keep going, day by day, week by week. Communal solidarity and expert advice shore me up, as I prepare the next

class, read assignments and think about accessible ways of connecting with students, many of whom I can no longer see or hear. I understand the reluctance to turn on a camera or switch on a microphone; this new mode of engagement is somehow more personal, more intimate and more intrusive than I expected. The collective and relatively neutral space of the classroom is replaced by exposure to the diversity of settings in which we teach, write, learn and study – a kitchen, a bedroom, a sitting room, an attic and sometimes the car. The hours on my machine become days, months, semesters and now a full academic year has passed. I have adapted to this on-line indoor home-work environment, immersed in a habit forming, routinised, necessary practice.

My mind travels back to childhood, learning to live by the swift flowing Shannon. I could swim in that green river water as could my siblings. We were taught to swim in Galway by Tess, our grandmother. Every summer afternoon, household chores finished, we caught the bus to Ladies Beach in Salthill, with towels, togs and swim hats in tow. A daily sea swimmer, Tess led us into knowledge of the ever changing tide, its ebb, flow and cross currents, teaching us how to float, do the butterfly, breast stroke and how to live by the dangers and pleasures of water. We learned about Jellyfish and their stings and waited for Limpets to move. I remember her women friends and companions as they sat huddled close to one another, backs to the sheltering wall taking in the sun, in constant conversation. Some women swam with us children, others bathed, standing waist water deep in the waves or paddled in the shallow waters. I observed my grandmother and felt the importance of the daily immersion in the sea with her friends. ‘You never regret a swim’ – her words linger still.

As COVID-19 continues to change the shape and contour of our lives, I recall the winter of 2019 when I read and devoured biographies of swimming. I urged friends to read a book about a teenager who swims alongside a separated baby whale or another about a woman whose personal challenge was to swim in fifty-two lakes near Berlin over a year, despite thick ice and a broken heart. Or what about this one, my favourite biography of the trials of an academic who joined a pod of sea swimmers, seals, gulls and orcas in Orkney? Inspired by Ruth Fitzmaurice’s memoir, *I Found My Tribe*, on swimming and living with her husband’s fatal diagnosis of Motor Neuron Disease, my sister and friend took to daily sea swimming. I was an ardent reader, passionate even about these powerful new ‘waterbiographies’ and puzzled at the time. What was once the chosen pastime of a few, swimming throughout the year in Irish cold water has become a social and sociological phenomenon as thousands of people take to the sea. This is captured by newspaper reports, radio and

TV documentaries and the proliferation of on-line swim meet-up groups. Sales of all-weather swim gear soar as newcomers embrace the tide and join free associating, self-regulating swim groups throughout the country. It is an anarchic moment. As the usual recreational gatherings and participation in contact sports are no longer accessible, the swimmers, adults and children of all ages and ability move into nearby waters and find companionship, the physical and mental benefits of outdoor exercise, observing the rhythm of the seasons and tides, experiencing the pleasures of immersion in water. A new vocabulary appears in print 'cold water swimming', 'wild swimming', 'open water swimming'. Some critics of the unanticipated surge in the numbers of outdoor swimmers describe the phenomenon as a form of 'hydromania'.

Newcomers become devotees, encouraging others to join this spontaneous and rapidly expanding tribe. As communities of swimmers grow, testimonies of overcoming feelings of fear, anxiety, grief, depression and loneliness emerge. Building physical strength, recovering stamina and tolerance of weather and water conditions also enter the conversation. Themed full moon, equinoctial and night swimming meet ups are organised. Swimming groups mark the passing of the year with a Christmas Swim, a New Year's Day swim (with drumming, dancing and fundraising), St Patrick's Day, St Bridget's Day and Easter swims, observing COVID-19 guidelines, when on land. Photographs of swimmers entering or leaving the sea are shared across continents and time zones, traces of visible lines of belonging. I and my siblings send encouraging images of our daily immersions to each other and friends. The power of blue spaces for health and wellbeing are empirically investigated and evidence-based findings on the benefits of immersion in water are widely reported (see Britton and Foley, 2020). Swimming as a pathway to emotional balance permeates many accounts on the benefits of water as free therapy, available to all. Worries dissolve. My sister advises me to wear a bright orange float around my waist so that I am visible to others in the water. Information on the best places and times to swim is sought out; top tips are discussed for beating the cold, health and safety guidelines are shared; learning how to swim 'properly', 'getting fit' or simply 'relaxing in water' become personal aims for some. Swim groups adopt brave or humorous names, claiming collective identity, while displaying a spirited tenacity and a desire for sociality. As swim capacity develops, members encourage each other to swim for longer, swim further, setting weekly and monthly goals to extend water capability. Contemplating an Arctic Circle or Irish Channel swim, swimming consecutively for a month or a year become new possibilities. Newcomers are now welcome all are treated as equal in the water. Swimming dissolves difference and invites inclusivity

and diversity – water is largely an open, welcoming and egalitarian environment. The desire to be near water is keenly expressed by Margaret Riordan in her letter to the editor (*Irish Times*, February 22, 2021) as level five travel restrictions limit access to a local beach. ‘It would be delightful to fill my lungs with sea air and enjoy the incomparable coastal light’ she writes.

I think of the universal significance of water rituals for life, birth and death: we stood on the banks of the great river Shannon watching our parents’ ashes sink into the deep waters. We swam with them to say goodbye. Traditional beliefs in the cleansing and healing properties of river and well water are widespread. *Tobar na Súil* - a cure for the eyes? Much needed now as I stare at the screen, short-focused, seeking out the meaning of things. While my work environment switches from campus to the home place, from classroom space to screen space, I move steadily into the space of the sea. Through a habitual solo swimmer, immersed in my own thoughts and preoccupying concerns, my water sense expands. I recognise or so I think, that despite travel and meeting restrictions, the swimmers have found room to manoeuvre, creating spontaneous networks of support. In the face of personal and political trauma and existential threats of environmental decay and a global pandemic, acts of swimming in community appear to build resilience. At least for now. I pick up green strings of plastic entangled in seaweed from the shore. I am more aware of the quality and vulnerability of our waters, spaces of life that feed and nurture the whole earth. We are hydrophilic.

My solo swims in this winter of lockdown are tests of self-acceptance, self-resolve combined with physical endurance. ‘If I can do this, I can do anything’ I repeat, as I take the next step and plunge into the grey-green, sea weedy tide, despite the howling wind, pelting rain, stinging sleet and purple goose-bumped skin. The sounds of other swimmers, laughing, reach me from across the bay, as minds and bodies experience the sensation of being in water. Submerged in my water home, perception alters as I view the world around me, above me and below me. This is the gift of the sea. Water is a space in which can I think, explore an idea, to imagine the day ahead, unencumbered. The sea is a problem solving liquid. I return to land, to my screen, to my work, positive, energised and open to future possibilities.

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MEDITATING ABOUT EPISTOLARY SPACES AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: HOW IS THE JOURNEY “HOME” GOING TO LOOK LIKE (IF THERE IS HOME)?

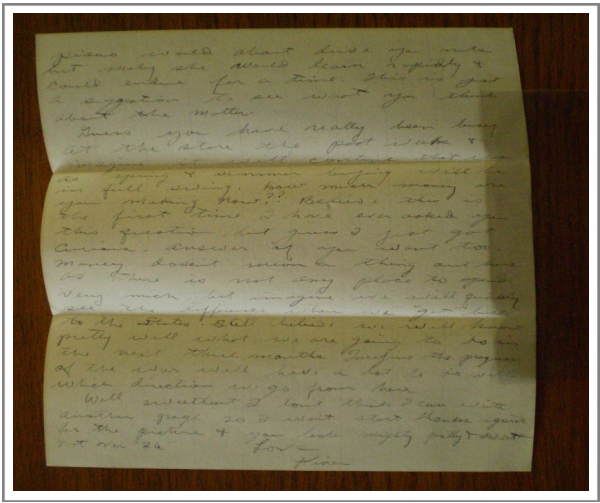
TANJA KOVAČIĆ

Biography and narrative, personal and social, become intertwined in extreme circumstances as at the current time of the Covid-19. Once taken for granted and rarely questioned, daily practices, routines and relationships changed overnight and became hardly remembered and unimaginable to all of us, agents of lives. However, in such unprecedented times, a different space for the agency is created: an area of processing and survival. In the middle of the Pandemic, we are in the process of travelling home, anticipating that there is home. The war letters written during the crisis can serve as a point of reflection about individuals' responses to uncertainties at the time of writing. Specifically, they can help to reflect on the meaning of home during the Pandemic.

Letters are documents of life and historical artefacts, which offer an insight into personal emotions, feelings and thoughts, and provide a window to the social (Stanley, 2010). Correspondents' lives, friendships, romantic or family relationships are represented and interpreted in letters (Halldórsdóttir, 2020). However, letters should not be studied as the truth about the past. They instead 'tell stories centred in the experience of historically real individuals and depend on the context in which they are read' (Decker in Halldórsdóttir, 2020: 190). As artefacts from the past, they tell stories about social practices, and they are snapshots of everyday life. Epistolary spaces can serve as an example where new action arises –

they provide a space for processing here and now and anticipating the future. Letters (epistolium; i.e., Stanley, 2004) written by two soldiers serving in the U.S. Army during the Second World War serve as a basis for my epistolary reflection of home and returning home during Covid-19. The notion of home refers to both geographic and symbolic place.

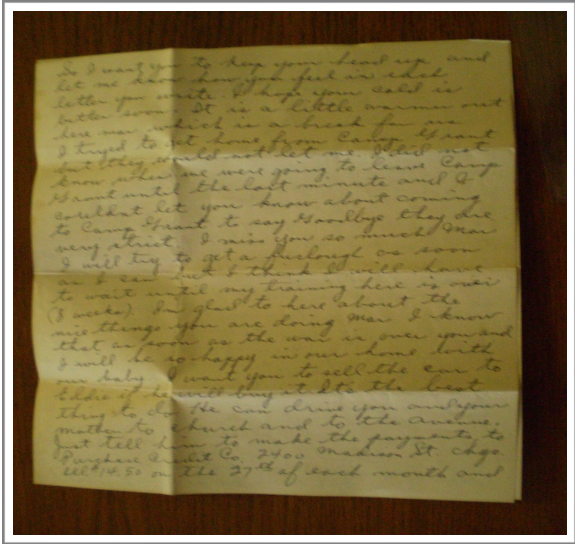
Gene and Woody were recruited in the U.S.A. Army during the Second World War. They both sent letters regularly to their spouses, Emily and Clara. Soldiers' accounts suggest that the routine, time of writing (early in War or towards the end of it), macro-political events, and structural mechanisms of support (e.g. a furlough and financial supports provided by the Army) hugely impact their processing and survival strategies. Within this structure, they both navigate and negotiate (Ungar, 2008) their new and old roles as husbands, fathers and soldiers. Even though letters are censored, and silences prove to be as relevant as the written words, the epistolary spaces show how their biographies and more comprehensive macro events are interlinked. Returning home serves as a point of commonality between the two sets of letters.



The two soldiers' writings show that their responses to the War differ based on their personal, geographical and time context. Gene wrote his letters to his newlywed wife Emily in 1942 and 1943, first from the training camps in the U.S.A. and then from the front in Northern Africa. These written accounts corresponded with when the U.S.A. entered the War with no clear sign when the War will end. Gene was just recruited to the Army

when Emily informed him that she is pregnant. Separation is at the core of Gene's writing, developing around themes of loneliness, intimacy, care, support, and encouragement. His main preoccupation is to be released from the Army and to go back home. A release from the Army is one of the popular options among the Second World War soldiers, but almost impossible to get (Fuller, 1990). Gene looks for alternative ways of adaptation, trying to apply for a leave. His attempts prove unsuccessful. Gene's last letter suggests that he reconciled himself with the idea of *A job to be done* before returning home.

Woody's letters are available from mid-1943 till the end of the War in 1945. Set in a different geographical context, in the Pacific, Woody serves with the SeaBees and shares his correspondence with his wife Carla, to whom he is married for several years. Woody's letters provide an insight into everyday duties and strict routine in the Army. His mood depends hugely on the news about the Allied forces' progress. Woody's letters contain information about participating in different social activities and networking with other soldiers. He writes about attending shows organised by the U.S. Army. Turning points seem crucial in changing the soldier's attitude towards the War and processing daily events. Global news about the Allied Forces' victory in 1945 provides Woody with hoping that the War will end sometime soon. The idea to possibly *finish the job* and to return home preoccupies his mind.



During Covid-19, when we have been advised to stay at home, our biographies became indistinguishable from the more comprehensive macro events. Our private and public lives merged into one, and the margin between the two seems to be thin. We have processed and responded to new normal depending on our circumstances; however, similarly to the above examples, we are constrained by the structural rules and regulations. Despite the repetitive mantra that 'we are all in the same boat', people's lives have been differently affected by the Pandemic. Rules, such as working from home, prove easier to follow by some but difficult to implement by others. How can one work from home if they do not have a home? New writing spaces such as social media provide a snapshot of people's responses to social rules and political decisions across the Globe. If early reactions to the Pandemic seem to be oriented more towards the expression of solidarity and standing behind slogans, such as *Stay at home!*, the prolonged lockdowns, changing rules and unclear political communication undermined people's trust in the ways how the countries cope with the virus. Like epistolary examples, turning points have played an essential role in directing people's attitudes towards the Pandemic. Hopes connected to vaccines' development have been overturned with the slow vaccination process across the EU and stories about possible adverse side effects of the vaccines, resulting in many vaccination sceptic cases.

What is striking in the Second World War letters is how the two soldiers engage with the current war uncertainty by building on their past, uncertain present and projecting their hopes for the future. The idea of returning home serves as a point of certainty for both soldiers. This can be interpreted as both a physical and symbolic return to home (e.g. Gene's unsuccessful attempts to be released from the Army and Woody's waiting for the War to end). The former can be read in the soldiers' orientation toward the future when writing about reunifying the separated couples, building their homes, buying a farm, and relationships that were disturbed by the War. At the same time, the home presents a point of certainty connected to how things were *done before* the War. Soldiers' longing for belonging reflects this symbolic conception of home. A critical question remains if these hopes and projections materialised after the soldiers' return from the Fronts (archival data shows that both soldiers survived the War) or better how did home look like for them after the period of separation, uncertainty and disturbance?

Going back (home) is prevalent in the current discussions during the Pandemic, which is mainly associated with the idea of returning to normal.

Contrasting views about how a home (if there is home) shall look like is recognised in more or less optimistic visions about the future. Some commentators remind us that returning to normal may be problematic from at least two perspectives. First, back to normal would entail that the way we lived before the Pandemic was an example of a *good life*. A year into the Pandemic, we have learned that we can replace some practices and routines (e.g., long hours of commuting to work) with better ones. Second, returning to normal suggests that this Pandemic was just a disturbance to our regular (linear) way of living. Like Gene and Woody, in a snapshot of *here and now*, we cannot foresee the future, but it can be said with certainty that going back home does not mean returning to the known (Andrews, 2006). Unprecedented events instigate people's imagination which serves as a strategy to paint the future, and letters serve as spaces to look at "unforeseeable and uncontrollable" life as it passes by' (Halldórsdóttir, 2020: 185).

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PART 2. FAMILY, WORK AND EMOTIONS

ACADEMIC MOTHERHOOD DURING THE PANDEMIC: LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE FUTURE

LYNN O'BRIEN HALLSTEIN AND SARA HAYDEN

C OVID-19 has been hard on mothers. As schools across the globe shuttered and education moved to remote or on-line delivery, it was mothers who picked up the bulk of the home schooling and care-giving activities. For academic mothers this shift exacerbated an already unequal playing field when compared to academic fathers (Van Dam, 2021). As motherhood scholars, we were interested in exploring how academic mothers were coping with the demands of the pandemic. To that end, in May and June 2020, we interviewed fifty-four academic mothers across the United States about their experiences. For this forum, we discuss a small but interesting group of four heterosexual mothers' stories. Two of these mothers found themselves in highly unequal relationships as they took on the bulk of caretaking and homeschooling responsibilities. The other two mothers and their partners established a more equitable division of labor. Through our analysis, we point to some of the structural, social, and interpersonal patterns that contributed to these differing outcomes. Our hope is that we can learn from these couples so that in the future, we can better negotiate the challenges of establishing gender equity in a world that continues to push us into traditionally gendered, inequitable roles and family configurations.

FALLING INTO UNEQUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Connie and Leslie described the pandemic as bringing into sharp relief the inequality in their relationships. For Connie, this realization was a shock. She explained:

Like, it's strange to me that this is our situation and it's not what I want, or would expect for myself. And also, I think if you'd asked on the face of

how are we going to manage things? Nobody would have said it's going to be like this.

Leslie, on the other hand, was understandably angry about the sexist division of labor in her household. As she put it:

It's a [. . .] I would say sexist I mean some would say traditional, division of labour. Like, he'll do the lawn and stuff, mostly because I'm not, I'm never going to mow the lawn. And, it's not that like I couldn't. It's just that I feel I've enough jobs, and I'm not stupid. I'm not going to take that on and have that be my job too.

While these two mothers were surprised and upset about the inequality in their relationships, the reasons for this inequality is not a result of what they 'chose.' For Leslie, some of the inequality was rooted in the impact of the pandemic on both of their jobs. A lawyer, Leslie's husband recently opened his own law firm. Declared an essential worker, he continued to leave each day for work. Describing her friends whose husbands participated in caregiving more, Leslie noted:

Some of my friends definitely do have more help than I do. . . .They're all heterosexual couples. Their husbands are more hands, hands on or they're [at home during the pandemic] because . . . one is a teacher, another is a pilot. So the pilot is furloughed, the teacher is at home. Also, another one of my friends, actually, her husband's a police officer, but his hours are more, um, he's been home more. So, things like that [influence their ability to help more].

Unlike Leslie, Connie's slippage into inequality seems more related to previously existing gendered patterns of caregiving. Also an academic and working from home during the pandemic, Connie's husband still did not do more caregiving. As Connie noted with some frustration:

Like none of that workload of the things that Sam has done has shifted. And the workload of the things I've taken on has shifted, and it's just [pauses] I guess I keep saying it because it keeps surprising me that, it, this just didn't change things as much as I would have thought. It just made bigger the gap that we already have.

Both mothers realized that some of the equality that they thought they had pre-pandemic was a result of their children being in school rather than due to gender equity. Once their children's schools shut down, not only did these mothers realize that they lost much-needed space and time for their own work, they also shouldered the additional burden of having

to manage and monitor their children's remote education. As Connie put it:

So, I mean, I think the fact that my partner and I seem to have structured our lives so that I do most of the caretaking and now it turns out the teaching of the kids and things that probably we could have expected, but it didn't ever quite feel like this: that it was most of my day taken up with [teaching her children] because school was taking care of that part. So, all those extra tasks, most of those extra tasks have come my way, and some of that's been really hard because I just don't have the structured time to get my own things done.

Connie goes on to describe her pandemic life as now including a "third shift" of education labor. Connie explains what she means by noting that, "*once they turned five, it got so much easier because at least there was a good chunk of the day, or neither of us had to take that [be responsible for the children]. So, I could handle doing that second-shift leader.*" She added, "*I am now, like I'm three shifts a day when he's still primarily on like one, maybe one-and-a half.*"

Similar to Connie, Leslie also shared her realization that her children being in school prior to the pandemic not only lightened her load, it also was her primary means for getting her own space and time for her professional and household work. As she put it:

This has just been, I mean . . . this is just a whole level of hell that, you know, I would at least get a break before if they went to school. And I could throw some laundry in or do some dishes on the day I wasn't going to work or, you know, sit down and get some work done. But it's just, like, sometimes my youngest will be up at five and I'm like, ugh, this is a lot, you know, to be on your toes from five to, or, or, you know, say hit snooze and wake up, and then I hear her feet hit the ground and I'm like, [emphatically:] oh my god, like, this is like, my time and there's, I have no time.

The pandemic further confirmed sociological work that shows that young men and women today understand that shared parenting and equitable relationships are ideals and, as such, are what Gerson (2010) calls 'Plan A'. Because they already understand that Plan A is an ideal, young men and women also have what Gerson (2010) calls 'Plan B', which is the 'fallback plan'. Both Gerson's (2010) and Pedulla and Thébaud's (2015) recent research reveals that many men's fallback plan is rooted in "modified traditionalism," with the men being the primary breadwinner and the woman being the primary caregiver, even if she works. Drawing on this work, O'Brien Hallstein (2017) has argued that neither marriages nor

shared parenting will “just work out” because both partners believe in gender-equitable partnerships and shared parenting. Rather, shared-parented marriages and/or partnerships take work to enact and actually practice’. The couples that have gender equity confirm that the pandemic has further revealed the need for ongoing and continuous work and conversations to achieve equality and to prevent fallback plans that overly burden mothers with caregiving responsibilities.

ESTABLISHING GENDER EQUITY

For the mothers who established gender equity in their relationships, the key to their success was deliberate decision making and open communication. Moreover, their decisions and communication were informed by feminist theory and values. As Sadie explained:

We have a very long standing and very deliberately feminist determination to share our childcare equally in terms of the hours that we spend tending to our kids and . . . we have upheld that practice [during the pandemic].

Sadie’s spouse is also an academic, and she described their “swap on, swap off system” wherein one day, one parent takes care of the children while the other works in their shared attic office; the other day they switch roles. She explains:

We are so assiduous about this division of labor that, you know, we bring each other lunch. That we really try and help the person who’s upstairs in the attic feel sequestered and feel actually without dependents.

Katherine, who is also partnered with an academic, described a similar division of labor. She teaches Mondays and Wednesdays and her partner teaches Tuesdays and Thursdays. She explained: *“And so, Monday, Wednesday I work and basically like try to shut myself away with headphones on. And Tuesday, Thursday, he does the same.”* They strive for equity in other aspects of their home life as well, and this doesn’t happen by accident. She told us: *“In terms of household management, we have weekly conversations about who’s doing what [. . .]. So we’re just really trying to keep those lines of communication open to make sure that nobody’s feeling resentment.”*

Like Sadie, Katherine explains that their decisions are rooted in an understanding of feminisms. Katherine notes that she has been reading

about the impact of the pandemic on academic women's productivity and she stumbles as she reflects on the fact that this hasn't been the case for her. Noting that her partner has a background in gender theory, she offers

Personally I've been very, [. . .] I don't want to say lucky because I feel like it shouldn't be lucky, but I've been like, not impacted by that because my partner's aware that just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I should be the sole caretaker of small humans.

Yet in spite of the explicit efforts these couples put into establishing gender equity in their homes, external forces sometimes lead them into less equitable arrangements. As Sadie reflects:

I think there are forms of emotional labor and organizational labor that were mine and have emphatically remained mine and have expanded. So, and some of those are to do with the gendered patterns of the world we live in, not just gendered patterns within our household. In fact, they're more to do with who, on my street is doing the labor of talking about, how we can help the kids play together and do we want to form an island, all that kind of work has come to me, not just because of my temperament within my marriage, but also who are the other people on the street who are already in conversation, who already do that kind of work. And they're all women. Every single one.

Katherine similarly related how her partner had to push back at assumptions that she was in charge of scheduling their children's appointments:

He noticed very early on that, even for things like medical appointments, dentist appointments, teaching meetings, they're always like, well, we'll check with his mother, and then we'll set up the schedule. And he's like, no, that's me. You're checking with me.

As Katherine notes, their ability to establish gender equality in their home related to the kinds of work they do. She says "We're really fortunate because we don't have to balance like a dual career in which one of us is expected to be out of the house as an essential worker or something like that." Thus while Katherine and Sadie have been able to establish relationships based largely in gender equity, they acknowledge the structural advantages they have as academics with somewhat flexible jobs and they point to the pressures they experience to fall into more traditional gendered patterns and roles.

CONCLUSIONS

The gender inequality that marks many heterosexual parents' lives is not new to the pandemic; rather, the pandemic has brought into sharp relief long standing patterns, assumptions, fallback plans, and norms. What we learn from these four couples, then, is that even people who assumed they would establish gender equity in their families sometimes struggle to do so, especially without ongoing and repeated conversations about how to insure and enact equality. There are many reasons for this, including deeply ingrained beliefs of the individuals involved as well as pressure from outside forces, including other parents and professionals and the differing demands of workplaces. The pandemic has taught us that eliminating gender inequity in the future will require sustained efforts to change institutional structures and social norms. Parents in relationships like those of Katherine and Sadie illustrate that one step in those efforts can begin at home, with sustained, deliberate, and continuing conversations that lead to concrete actions based in feminist principles and goals.

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HOW PARENTS' PARENT IN A PANDEMIC: THE VALUE OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH APPROACHES

ASHLING JACKSON

Understanding how to strengthen parents and families in this situation [COVID-19], with the aim to protect children, represents an important goal that researchers should have in this period because it is possible that other future pandemics will affect humanity (Cluver et al. 2020 as cited in Morelli et al. 2020, Introduction section).

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the circumstances in which parents' parent. Parents are simultaneously trying to co-ordinate childcare, home-schooling (during lockdowns) and work (Statistics Canada, 2020), while mitigating a heightened health risk for themselves and their children. They are doing this in a confined environment - the home, without their usual supports. As a result of confinement, parents are faced with increased income expenditure on food, energy and home-schooling (Brewer and Patrick, 2021), which is likely to be more challenging for parents experiencing pandemic related unemployment (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020) and those in low income households (Eurofound, 2020a and 2020b). Low income households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity (Power et al. 2020) and digital poverty (Blaskó and Schnepf, 2020). Furthermore, the adverse effects of the pandemic are being disproportionately felt by one parent families (Hertz et al. 2020), parents with children with additional needs (Parenteau et al. 2020), ethnic and minority groups (Villani et al. 2021) and parents parenting in homelessness (Dorney-Smith et al. 2020). For many families, all of these issues are inter-connected.

In tandem, how parents are parenting is changing. Survey research to date shows that this has manifested in various ways from parents being more flexible with children engaging in oppositional behaviours (Menter et al. 2021), allowing children longer screen-time, with less physical activity (Kovacs, 2021) to more use of non-nutritive food and snacks for children (Jansen et al. 2021). In more extreme cases, children have experienced 'neglect, verbal aggression, and physical punishment' (Lee et al. 2021b, Introduction section). Research using mixed methods, such as questionnaires and telephone interviews highlighted increased stress for parents and possible negative parenting practices towards children (Calvano et al. 2021). Weaver and Swank (2020) in their qualitative interview study of 11 parents' lived experiences in the pandemic in the US drew attention to the complexity of parenting in a pandemic and competing time demands on parents. However, in spite of all of this, there are positives to parenting in a pandemic. Parents and children are now able to spend more time together (Calvano et al. 2021), with parents showing increased affection towards their children and hugging them more (Lee et al. 2021a).

The above is a snapshot view only of the type of research on parenting practices in a pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on parenting practices. So far, the majority of research is quantitative or mixed methods based. Qualitative research is less common. Within this again, narrative research, using for example, interviews, autobiographies and/or oral stories is very limited. However, it is now starting to emerge. This is important because if we really want to understand the depth and breadth of parenting in a pandemic, then narrative research methods, with their focus on how human beings experience the world (Gudmundsdottir, 2001) can provide a true 'observation window' (Heinz, 2003: 82) into the parenting life world.

Our narrative or our storied experience, whatever that is, is an inherent part of who we are (Polkinghorne, 1988), and a way for us to share our joys, trials and tribulations as the storyteller. In this way, we are the protagonist and our stories are always innately personal and yet collective, reflecting our broader social context (Elbaz-Luwisch et al. 2005; Moen 2006). Narrative research can facilitate parents to share their parenting narrative or their storied experience by focusing on both small stories (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008), examples of the everyday and ordinary aspects of parenting in a pandemic, as situated in the big story (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008), the COVID-19 pandemic. Essentially, this is the space where day-to-day pandemic parenting practices take place. The more we can learn about how parents' parent in

a pandemic through how they narrate parenthood, the more that we can ensure future preparedness for parents and children, in the event of another pandemic. Insights from a sample of emerging narrative research studies are provided below to illustrate the value of using this approach.

The complexities of parenting in a pandemic were considered by Beech et al. (2021), in the sharing of their personal narratives and reflexive accounts of an academic and two doctoral students in the US managing motherhood and professional responsibilities. However, this comes 'with the caveat, based on your identity, these complexities will look different for different women' (Beech et al. 2021: 629). This emphasises the value of acquiring multiple parenting perspectives to authentically reflect the heterogeneity of parenting life situations. They highlighted privilege, positing that the dual roles of motherhood/professional work and already acquired coping skills are actually an asset in coping with the uncertainty and stresses of parenting and working during a pandemic (Beech et al. 2021). A different perspective on privilege was provided in Weaver and Swank's (2020) interviews with parents. In their study, parents identified privilege as having a home, employment (if still in work) and good health. It would seem then that the experience of privilege is not even for parents, as it is being appreciated in different ways.

Donoso et al. (2020) used autobiographical narratives of 3 academic mothers, two living in Chile and one in the US, to explore adapting and adjusting to research and teaching during remote working, confinement, and caring for children. They provided an additional perspective on parenting and continuing to work professionally during a pandemic. 'Intertwined in these narratives are themes of disruptions, responsibilities, and discoveries' (Donoso et al. 2020, p. 587) in creating a new work life balance. Competing time demands for mothers emerged here (similar to Weaver and Swank, 2020), but so did the value of increased positive time with children (similar to Calvano et al. 2021). The autobiographical narratives, however, provide very personal and reflexive accounts of the experience, further contextualising that experience to what is happening in individual parents' lives in a pandemic.

Real time survey evidence from the UK, US and Germany showed that mothers are more likely to be responsible for home-schooling, while working from home (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). Asril et al.'s (2021) narrative inquiry explored the experiences of a full-time Balinese father managing his children's remote learning during the pandemic. The research demonstrated that 'a balanced parenting style creates good communication between children and fathers, fair conflict resolution in the

family, greater confidence in parenting, and good learning routines for children' (Asril et al. 2021: 62). In this study, how a father parents his children was directly linked to a positive online educational experience for the children. The use of narrative inquiry, with its focus on (a) temporality (past, present and future experiences), (b) sociality (experiences as a social phenomenon) and (c) space (experience happens somewhere) (Estefan et al. 2016), means that this research can be framed within traditional and modern notions of masculinity and fatherhood in Balinese society.

Support as a key issue for parents of children with additional needs arose in Reis et al.'s (2021) narrative interviews with families in Germany. They interviewed families with no mental illness ($n=4$), families of children with a mental illness ($n=12$) and families with parents with a mental illness ($n=3$). Restrictions were the biggest challenge for parents of children with a mental illness and for the children themselves, while a lack of social support was problematic for families with parents with a mental illness. Reis et al. (2020) advocate for bespoke supports for families with additional needs in times of crisis. This will, in turn, contribute to parental well-being.

Evaluation of the online delivery of the Circle of Security-Parenting™ (COS-P) programme (early intervention programme for parents of children, 4 months to 6 years) in Australia, used semi-structured narrative interviews with parents ($n=6$), along with post-programme interviews with staff ($n=2$) (Cook et al. 2021). It demonstrated the perceived positive value of parenting supports to parents, even when delivered online. Parents reported on 'the positive changes in their parenting confidence, understanding of their own linchpin struggles, and greater responsiveness towards meeting their children's needs' (Cook et al. 2021, p. 113). This further emphasises the importance of targeted support provision to parents to facilitate positive parenting practices in times of crisis. It also shows how parenting support is valued within the life world of a parent with young children.

The parenting circumstances in the studies above, as well as how parents' parent fundamentally reflects individual parenting life worlds and how they are being shaped by parenting challenges and opportunities in the pandemic. It is clear that narrative research approaches can provide access to these worlds, as well as to those personal and subjective parenting spaces. In this way, nuanced insights into the reality and diversity of parenting experiences in a pandemic can emerge.

The potential scope for future narrative research into how parents' parent in a pandemic are significant. It is also very important. Parenting is always about learning on the job (O'Doherty and Jackson 2015). This has become even more apparent, with the pandemic presenting a distinctive set of parenting challenges and opportunities which parents must navigate both for themselves and their children, with no previous frame of reference to draw from. To genuinely understand how this plays out for parents in their unique parenting life world and, from there, develop meaningful immediate and future parenting supports to alleviate parenting pressures and stress, the continued gathering and analysis of parents' storied experiences is essential.

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CHILD-TO-PARENT VIOLENCE AND ABUSE: WHY FAMILIES NEED TO OPEN UP WHEN THE NATION LOCKS DOWN

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INTRODUCTION

This article will critically reflect upon how the situation in which children are aggressive, violent and/or controlling towards their parent/s, known as child-to-parent violence and abuse (CPVA), may have been exasperated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The particular focus is upon CPVA and familial problematic communications.

It is understood from the emerging data that family violence has increased during the pandemic (UK Parliament 2021). To date, however, there is limited quantitative analysis regarding CPVA during the pandemic, but it could be assumed that there is a similar increase. There are media reports suggesting that there has been an acute rise in CPVA (Lee 2020; Dias 2020) with reported incidents such as; “violent outbursts, verbal attacks and even cases of sexual abuse have been reported by families” (Dias 2020, p.1).

Drawing upon a UK study regarding family experiences of CPVA during the covid-19 pandemic, conducted by Miles *et al.* (2020), who found that 70% out of 104 parents already experiencing CPVA, reported a rise in violent episodes during the first lockdown and practitioners reported a 69% increase in referrals. CPVA, therefore, is something that needs further attention, not only now, but as we come out of the pandemic, to enable the provision of targeted support for affected families.

WHAT IS CHILD-TO-PARENT VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

To give further context, CPVA, as defined by Holt (2016) is ‘a pattern of behaviour, instigated by a child or young person, which involves using verbal, financial, physical and/or emotional means to practice power and exert control over a parent’ (2016: 1). CPVA impacts the whole family, having long-term negative effects. For example, for parents, relationship breakdown and financial difficulties (Clarke et al. 2017) and they may need to be safeguarded. For the child, behavioural and emotional problems, such as depression and school maladjustment (Ibabe *et al.*, 2014a; b) and they should be recognised as vulnerable. As Miles *et al.* (2020) address the tensions between recognising the parents as experiencing abusive behaviours from their child and the vulnerabilities of the child who is being violent and abusive, makes it harder to respond meaningfully. CPVA is complex and multi-causal, with mental ill health, substance misuse, trauma, family violence and abuse and familial problematic communications all being linked.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PROBLEMATIC COMMUNICATION?

Problematic communication can be understood as parents withholding information from the child, and/or being extremely critical, including a lack of parental warmth and low levels of emotional support, across the family life course (Paulson *et al.* 1990; Pagani *et al.* 2004; Contreras and Cano 2014; Jiménez *et al.* 2019; López-Martínez *et al.* 2019). When this is linked to CPVA, the child perceives a lack of emotional warmth and low emotional support from their parent, leading to the child feeling stressed and frustrated, as well as silenced, resulting in a cycle of problematic communications and abuse (Jiménez *et al.* 2019; López-Martínez *et al.* 2019; Oliver 2019).

WHY IS PROBLEMATIC COMMUNICATION IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER DURING THE PANDEMIC?

This cycle of problematic communication and abuse could be exacerbated by lockdown stresses. Examples of which have been reported by WHO (2020) as: deteriorating mental wellbeing, health problems, bereavements, financial worries, unemployment and employment uncertainty and feelings of isolation and fears associated with the impact of this pandemic on individual and societal levels globally.

Miles *et al.* (2020) found similar fears and anxieties were linked to aggression. Therefore, it could be supposed that these stressors in conjunction with lowered communication efficacy may have problematic results, and the potential to intensify CPVA, due to children unable to communicate worries and anxieties, and feeling emotionally unsupported by parents who in turn feel unable to talk freely and openly to their children.

WHY SHOULD FAMILIES 'OPEN UP' DURING LOCKDOWN?

Positive communication within families has been shown to be a protective factor for prosocial behaviours (Ibabe and Bentler 2016; Jiménez *et al.* 2019). Jiménez *et al.* (2019) found that a protective factor against perceived stress by adolescents was open communication. Therefore, children need to feel listened to, so that they can open up discussions and express their feelings, and parents need to feel, not only safe to listen to their child/ren, but also to hear their child's needs, while being listened to in their turn by the family.

This notion, of being able to 'open up' is complex because of the different factors that influence positive communication, such as, the confidence to talk about problems or respond appropriately to others and maintain the quality of relationships. As López-Martínez *et al.* (2019), noted in their research regarding problematic communication and CPVA if a child is experiencing offensive or avoidant communications within the family, then they are likely to internalise these communication processes and consequently their thoughts and feelings become inhibited, leading to anger and frustration and in turn, CPVA.

Opening up, therefore, seems to be critical to breaking this cycle of negative communication and CPVA, and therefore it can be assumed that both internal and external family support is required for this to occur. For example, for families where problematic communication is an issue, they would need encouragement to work towards having more open communication with one another, leading to building a better quality of family relationships. In order to facilitate this, support services need to work alongside families, to help them develop positive communications while safeguarding vulnerable children and their parents.

The inconsistent and/or lack of specific professional support for families experiencing CPVA has been addressed in literature over the years (Miles *et al.* (2020). The lockdown restrictions however, led to further barriers in

accessing such support and this affected families when they most needed it. This may have negatively impacted upon the opportunity for families to 'open up' and therefore, further exacerbate the already existing difficulties.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE?

More recently, there has been a surge in CPVA research, but there have been very few studies focused on communication patterns, especially studies that investigate the perspective of each family member, including learning from the lived experience of children. In fact, Holt and Lewis (2021) note there are gaps in research with detailed accounts of children's experiences.

The pandemic has made it harder to undertake qualitative research, not just for risk assessment and safeguarding purposes, but also because holding in-depth interviews requires developing a rapport, as well as observing paralinguistic expressions, all of which may be difficult to achieve virtually. The implications of this are that family members and especially children's voices, may continue to be further silenced. Gaps will remain in policy and therefore practice because the tensions of how best to effectively respond to families experiencing CPVA will continue, and these will affect the roll out of effective professional training and resources.

Guidance promoting positive communication patterns, both in early help and tailored towards families experiencing CPVA, may go a long way to help families open up to each other and reduce the stress and frustration perceived by children and their parents. Unless the cycle is broken by more effective communication, this will continue and become an intergenerational legacy.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To conclude; this article proposes the need for further research on the short and long-term impact upon the systemic functioning of families experiencing CPVA. A method that uncovers these interactions and influences on the different systems across the life course, including the impact of problematic communications, would support this. The use of

longitudinal biographic research provides a good fit to review the whole family system by interviewing children (including siblings of the violent child), the parents and the wider personal and professional support networks. Such a biographic systems approach may result in a better understanding of the lived experience of those experiencing CPVA and the twists and turns they need to navigate in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When thinking about families in need of tailored support and assistance, we still have to overcome the stigma attached to CPVA that effectively silences many people.

Therefore, the nation needs to open up these conversations as well, in order to shine a light on this form of family violence and abuse.

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NARRATIVE AND REMAKING SOCIAL FUTURES IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC CRISIS: THE STORY- MAKING AND STORY-TELLING OF THE HEROIC NURSE

SUSAN FLYNN AND MELISSA CORBALLY

INTRODUCTION

Heroes come in many forms. We propose that through times of Covid-19 pandemic crisis, practices of story-making and story-telling have radically reconceived contemporary archetypes of heroism. Many health and social care professionals have been challenged in frontline practice within the pandemic. Our focus is on the casting of nurses into the limelight as everyday heroes and arbiters of hope within pandemic crisis. Of interest to question is how (auto)-biographical and narrative methodologies may revisit and reframe otherwise silent intricacies of these stories. Specifically, we make the case for the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) as a productive methodological possibility for sociological questions such as this. As such, two exemplary conventions of the method are taken up within critical discussion, which are respectively: Generalising whilst particularising and conceptual attention to biography, narrative and interpretation.

Stories of health and healing, illness and recovery permeate into our lives. Stories, by their very nature, assist in communication and sense making processes for us all. This human tradition of oral story-telling which casts otherwise meaningless experience into a coherent plot, is often conceived of as 'narrative' (Riessman, 2008). Within the social sciences

and academy beyond, the term narrative refers not only to such a phenomenon, but in a separate respect, to a method (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). In this paper, we loosely deal with both, focusing specifically on the utility of the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2020). The proposition is that BNIM lends itself powerfully toward sociologically reimagining and rendering visible, the heroic nature of the nursing endeavour, during times of Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

One example of nursing heroism in the pandemic has been nurses' alleged bravery in working with patients where they face potential exposure to coronavirus thereby "risking their lives" (Bauchner & Easley, 2020, p.1). Unlike many other methods, BNIM is calibrated to highlight narrative contradictions, which occur when the meta narrative of nurses as heroes of the pandemic due to this significant risk (Cox, 2020; Stokes-parish et al., 2020), is at odds with biographic lived experience, for instance, the frontline lived experience of nursing. Stokes-parish et al. (2020) illustrate, for instance, how the narrative of heroism due to virus exposure within the pandemic is a falsification of nurses' biographic reality, as nurses are always exposed to health risks in this way. Therefore, to wed their heroism to the pandemic implies that the risk of becoming sick due to exposure to contagious illnesses is simply an acceptable part of their job in all other instances (Stokes-parish et al., 2020).

It remains the case that narrative inquiry, in the form of BNIM, does not relate directly to heroism per se or to nursing. Rather, we suggest that it does provide a method by which one can reveal important intricacies and complexities of any kind of narrative or biographic phenomena (Wengraf, 2020), and specifically we contend, the case of nursing in the pandemic is a particularly powerful example by which we can illustrate this. Many health and social care professionals, such as social workers, doctors, personal assistants and health care assistants, have shown heroism and commitment within practice during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Bauchner & Easley, 2020). Notwithstanding this, a powerful public narrative specifically pertaining to nurses as health care heroes is our focus (Bauchner & Easley, 2020; Cox, 2020; Stokes-parish et al., 2020). This is because literature demonstrates that this narrative affects the lived (biographic) reality of nurses (Stokes-parish et al., 2020), making it a strong example by which we can illustrate the productive capability of BNIM. There has also been tangible public acceptance of the veracity of the nurse as an icon of heroism in pandemic conditions such as the 'clap for nurses' initiative (see Ford, 2020) and acclaimed artist Banksy's painting for the Southampton General Hospital called Game Changer that

depicts a nurse figure as a superhero (Goldstein, 2020). Specifically, the potential of BNIM as a viable method of further understanding narratives of nursing in the pandemic are presented in this paper.

In this context, the triadic focus in BNIM on narrative, biography and interpretation (Wengraf, 2020) can help to powerfully illuminate complex phenomena, such as nursing in the context of Covid-19. Firstly, BNIM is concerned with the phenomenon of narrative as the act of crafting lived experience into storied form (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). Narratives of nursing within the pandemic, as continually recounted in popular media, speak to the heroic archetype of the nurse. Yet, BNIM helps us speak to the question of whether these narratives authentically reflect actual nursing practice. This leads us to the second important focus, referred to as biography. Biography in BNIM tradition is concerned with the life that one has lived, which may be at odds with the story told. It may seek to capture one's entire life trajectory from cradle to grave, or a life story that is thematically knitted through it, such as the participant's lived experience of performing nursing (Wengraf, 2020). Finally, the third element is interpretation. Here it is not just the life that is lived, nor the story told about it, but the interpretation of both that comes into play.

NURSING AND NARRATIVES

Nurses have been saving lives every day for centuries. This extraordinary (heroic) practice is an everyday feature of nursing work (Catton, 2020; Stokes-Parish et al., 2020). Listening to and interpreting stories of patients is an inescapable facet of nursing practice (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). There is a tenuous relationship between the actuality of nursing and the challenges of 'telling stories' due to challenges of confidentiality and professional responsibility and sustaining employment. Here, the sophistication of BNIM as a method is helpful as through mechanisms such as what BNIM calls 'twin track epistemology', both the actual life that is lived, and the way that life is explained through narrative, are of concern (Wengraf, 2020). Although the practice of nursing requires understanding of the biographies of individuals, making sense of the complex work nurses do remains challenging (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). BNIM is ideally suited to unraveling such complexities due to its comprehensive (intensive) analytical perspectives.

Within the interdisciplinary field of narrative more broadly, Flynn (2019) outlines that there is a continuum of narrative methods available. The continuum ranges from highly analytical approaches that heavily process

narrative such as BNIM (see Wengraf, 2020) to methods based on simply presenting 'raw' or 'unprocessed' narrative with no concern for the 'reality' behind them, such as the ground-breaking work of Louis 'Studs' Terkel (2013) (Flynn, 2019). In particular, two exemplary conventions of BNIM are of interest to consider further; Generalising whilst particularising, and triadic conceptual attention to biography, narrative and interpretation. Whilst these are expounded upon further below with reference to nursing, it is worth also dwelling momentarily on why these aspects demonstrate how one can do more with BNIM, than with some other more generalised narrative approaches.

Thematic narrative analysis, for instance, as a popular general method, performs structural analysis of stories and assumes that it is helpful to catalogue commonalities across varied narrative accounts (Riessman, 2008). With BNIM, a thematic offering is also available within analysis but this is coupled with a powerful commitment to retain particularity and individuality of cases (Wengraf, 2020): seeing both the wood and the trees. Whilst the practice reality for many nurses in the pandemic may be thematically represented by the notion of heroism (Cox, 2020), the particularity of this heroism in each nurses' story may have profound difference. Here BNIM researchers often take a smaller sample and apply to it deeper and more complex analysis which includes but is not predominately concerned with generating thematic insights (Wengraf, 2020). In essence, BNIM could be likened to a holistic approach used by nurses in the conduct of care.

GENERALISING WHILST PARTICULARISING

Particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the global presence of nursing and its criticality to world recovery was at the forefront of media reports (Bauchner & Easley, 2020; Catton, 2020; Cox, 2020; Stokes-parish et al., 2020). A concept of relevance here is the notion of situated subjectivity which is taken up by BNIM but not exclusive to it, and refers to the subjectivity of actors (such as researchers and research participants) as being always situated in a particular context that is instrumental to that subjectivity (Kelz, 2016; Wengraf, 2020). Linking this back to its relevance to research on nurses' lives, it is clear that narratives told by and about nurses are subjective, and occur in a specific time, place and context, and this must be accounted for. Whilst Stokes-parish et al. (2020) refer to the hero narrative of nursing, it is noted that narratives of nursing in the context of Covid 19 are tainted by public misunderstanding about the risk of pandemics, as though the present pandemic is simply a once off

nemesis rather than reflective of a reoccurring foe (Catton 2020, Stokes-parish et al., 2020).

Understanding the situated subjectivities of nurses practicing within unprecedented situations is ideally suited to BNIM due to its capacity to both attend to the particularities of nursing work whilst simultaneously acknowledging the effect on the general societal context. Whilst nursing transcends all levels of society, much of the 'heroic' aspects of nursing work remain largely invisible in a generalising sense (Stokes-parish et al., 2020; ten Hoeve, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2014). Measuring vital signs, washing, suctioning, repositioning and indeed resuscitation of patients for example is done behind curtains with only the patient and a handful of others witnessing these practices. Indeed, there remains debate within the profession regarding how to make the complexities of nursing more visible. The world knows nurses do good work but knowing 'how' this is done is a challenge which BNIM has the potential to assist in unearthing. Generating case accounts which highlight the intricacies and intimacies of care nurses perform become known, not just to the profession, but to others. One way is through 'case accounting' where the generalising and particularising techniques interface (Wengraf, 2020). It is also of note that BNIM arose from endeavours to make sense of a previous world crisis (namely World War II) when particular lives lived and the rationale for the living and working in these lives could only be understood within the broader context (Schutze 1992 Fischer-Rosenthal 2000). It is our belief that BNIM again has a unique capacity to capture what are heroic acts, living and dying, and the conduct of care within this overarching world crisis we are all currently experiencing (Carron, 2020).

TRIADIC CONCEPTUAL ATTENTION

In this pandemic, it may certainly be the case that nurses have been heroic (Bauchner & Easley, 2020; Catton, 2020; Cox, 2020; Stokes-parish et al., 2020). This is also the case for cognate professionals such as social care workers who work along similar lines but are rarely afforded due acknowledgement in this capacity. Yet, the biographic reality not yet narrated here, is that nursing pay remains pitifully low, leaving nurses who must place their own health and that of their families in jeopardy, tending to formidable practice demands under conditions of paltry remuneration. This relates to the second aspect of BNIM worth particular attention. That is, the triadic focus in BNIM on narrative, biography and interpretation (Wengraf, 2020). With regard to the latter, in BNIM the paradigm of interpretivism holds sway. The contention is that the truth of a matter is

contingent upon one's interpretation of what is true (Wengraf, 2020). In this sense, the BNIM analytic method takes account of subjectivity. If the archetype of the heroic nurse is interpreted in a manner that makes poor conditions and pay more permissible, then the everyday lives (biography) of nurses are accordingly affected.

This links to the wider notions of voices and legitimation that have powerful currency in narrative research more broadly (Riessman, 2008) and in BNIM particularly, which is claimed to be a method that can expose and legitimise otherwise marginalised narratives (Peta, Wengraf & McKenzie, 2019). Narrative researchers understand that some voices and narratives are accorded legitimacy above others (Riessman, 2008) and in the pandemic the narrative that nurses are healthcare heroes has certainly gained currency (Bauchner & Easley, 2020; Catton, 2020; Cox, 2020; Stokes-parish et al., 2020). BNIM can arguably illuminate, however, less legitimised narratives that occur concurrently such as that acknowledging nurse's heroism is simply not sufficient to compensate for the risks in practice, such as the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) made available to them in the pandemic (Catton, 2020). In this sense, it is arguably conclusive, that the sophistication of BNIM could helpfully expose otherwise embedded and invisible accounts.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of what nursing is and ought to be is a question deserving of greater attention than could ever be afforded here. We have, however, made headway toward showcasing the utility of BNIM in answering questions of sociological importance such as this. Arguably now conclusive is our proposition, that through times of Covid-19 pandemic crisis, contemporary archetypes of heroism have been reconceived. Here, the intention has been to illustrate how (auto)-biographical and narrative methodologies have the potential to make the invisible elements of nursing more visible. In focusing on two conventions of BNIM, we have been able to demonstrate the potential of the scope of this analytic method.

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AN ELEGY FOR PUBLIC WORKSPACES: THE POSSIBLE FUTURES OF SOCIOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING

PIOTR SZENAJCH

THE OASIS

I am writing this in Warsaw University Library (BUW), late in the evening, in a stiff bentwood chair, under an expansive glass roof. Rain is rattling on the huge window panes. I am wearing an irritating KN-95 mask and my hands burn from the frequent use of alcohol disinfectant. The monumental building is mostly dark; only a few desk lamps throw harsh light and shadows on the concrete walls. It took seven metro stations to get here and a walk in heavy rain and gusts of freezing wind, though it is May, and spring is long overdue. I adore this. I can finally work.

The jury is still out on the measurable influence of working from home on worker ‘productivity’ (Birkinshaw et al. 2020, Gorlick 2020). It is probable, though, that I am in the minority of knowledge workers who cannot work at home at all. At least when it comes to sustained cognitive workload like reading or writing academic papers. I have been coming to this very same library since 2001 when I studied for my *matura* high school leaving exam. Then, I came for all my university exams. I wrote most of my MA thesis here and large swaths of my PhD dissertation.

There are more such magnificent institutions in my city – all glass, aluminium and reinforced concrete, lots of greenery, book novelties in open access, reasonably priced coffee, and an atmosphere of deep focus. These are public co-working spaces, *avant la lettre*, resembling the likes of WeWork, minus the corporate cult rhetoric, and open to everyone, free of charge. The brightest minds of Polish human sciences frequent these

halls, and heated academic discussions tend to erupt during coffee breaks. The post-modern architecture of BUW, with its columns and symbolism, is not my favourite. But the botanical garden on the roof, the surrounding park, and the Vistula riverbank nearby, more than make up for it. Furthermore, at the moment, BUW is the only “oasis” – as one recently met student called it – still open, under strict sanitary restrictions, during a practically full pandemic lockdown.

This is a love letter, but perhaps also an elegy for such public workplaces. Should other strains of COVID-19, or other deadly viruses, haunt us in the future, the way these places used to function might permanently change. This already happened to the coffee places and cheap eateries nearby, most of them out of business.

The pandemic interrupted my trusted daily routines, deprived me of a favourable environment and reduced my living and working space to a rented 30-square-metre bedsit. The fieldwork of my new research, soon to begin, had to be halted. Only a year previously, I had started teaching again and joined an inspiring team of researchers after years of mostly solitary analysis and writing of my dissertation. I travelled 150 km to another city by train for this, two days a week, which neatly scheduled my time to read and prepare classes. All these stimulating prospects were lost for the foreseeable future or rather reduced to a two-dimensional grainy screen of a glitchy videoconferencing app.

TORN APART

It seems like I needed this heterogeneous ensemble of books, desks, glass ceilings and quietly focused scholars to produce what my employer expects of me – academic knowledge. All these can be interpreted as collective, material, prosthetic, non-human, extra-individual and extra-corporal components of cultural production. They came to my attention during the analysis of autobiographical-narrative interviews with renowned Polish visual artists.

One of my interviewees described how the unpleasant greasy touch of oil paint made him realize the urge to be a painter. Much was said about family attics, lockers and shelves, stuffed with paintings and old books on art. There were detailed descriptions of manual techniques, tools and interiors of ateliers. Perhaps I would have omitted all this as noise if it were not for the open-coding strategy of analysis and catching up, at the

same time, with the anthropology of things, actor-network theory and *new materialism*.

Who would a sociologist be without his voice recorder, notebook, digital cloud archive, reference manager or writing studio application? What could his *agency* achieve without his glasses, wallet and clothes?¹ Humans are actor-networks or perhaps *rhizomatic processes of subjectivation*. A large part of the heterogeneous entanglement that I always needed for work was suddenly cut off. Hence, what constitutes me as a scholar or author, my entangled self, became torn apart and partially broken, for almost a year and a half.

LOOKING INWARDS

This has been an experience of many. Perhaps it is why interest in autoethnographic studies seems to be on the rise. Though not new, in the last two years, it has resulted in several books and public discussions in my local field. Autoethnographers, coming from many disciplines, turn their scholarly eye inwards, observing their own circumstances, habits and hardships, including deeply traumatic marginal experiences. They claim the approach is not merely a method but rather a form of communication. It entails expressing and integrating all layers of the self. It provides a way of turning social studies into a ‘non-alienating practice’, a ‘more human form of human sciences’ (Bochner, 2013). On a shortlist of priorities of autoethnography, we will find activities such as ‘illustrating’, ‘showing’, ‘describing’ and ‘foregrounding’. One of the ‘fundamental reasons’ for using the approach is ‘making research accessible to multiple audiences’, including non-academic readers (Adams et al. 2015).

Judging from the feature set above, the promise that autoethnographers might be after does not lie in the ‘auto’ but in the ‘graphic’ part of the word. In my research so far, I preferred to stay with the supra-individual troubles – describing collectives, structures and processes, or providing insight into stealth social worlds. However, the possibility of finding new captivating and evocative ways of writing sociology, as well as reaching audiences with complex sociological insights – that never ceased to intrigue me.

¹ The roots of this line of thinking are in the notion of *dispositif* by Foucault and the rhizomatic anthropology in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. It is particularly interestingly developed by one of the actor-network theory authors John Law (1993) or philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2013).

SOCIOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING

In my work, I have found the term *sociography* a preferable guideline. This coinage of Daniel Bertaux refers to a postulate that sociologists should strive to discover forms of discourse through which 'sociological knowledge will find a way into living cultures'. 'We should tell stories,' advised Bertaux, of social relations, institutions, but also 'our own story as research workers' (Bertaux, 1981). Most of the examples of good sociological writing that come to my mind seem to at least partially fit this recipe. Dieter Eribon chooses a form of literary autobiography. But he does so in order to write a story of the social and cultural advancement of a gay teenager from a poor small-town conservative working-class family to a position of a recognised scholar in Parisian academia. While at it, he does not hesitate to introduce complex Bourdesian terms every few paragraphs (Eribon, 2018).

Eribon's inspiration was the famous essay by James Baldwin, who used his autobiographical memories, including those of difficult family relations or intense emotional states. Like the one when he comes home after many years to see his tyrant father feeble from a terminal illness. Or when he becomes infuriated and starts a fight in an upscale restaurant after being denied service. These are literary scenes and sociological reflections at the same time. They make for one of the most elucidating insights into the experience of a Black man living in the post-war USA under racial segregation (Baldwin, 2018).

An essay of anthropologist Renato Rosaldo haunts me, with its visceral description of how he lost his wife in a climbing accident during fieldwork. Rosaldo used a literary reconstruction of his own experience of rage from grief to understand and explain the practice of headhunting in the Ilongot culture he studied (Rosaldo, 2004). Christa Hoffmann-Riem also chose to write about herself after gaining insight into a relatively rare experience – of 'losing a symbolically significant part of the body', namely, her right eye (Hoffmann-Riem, 1994). Yes, the author's voice, introspection and first-person perspective are present in all these examples. But there are far more literary techniques used in these texts. Others being short scenes, refined, expressive descriptions, careful dramaturgy of the story or even character portraits.

The tangible presence of the author's voice does not seem necessary to create an intriguing sociographic piece. Examples of sophisticated uses of literary techniques by sociologists can be found in canonical works such as Garfinkel's depiction of Agnes Torres, a transsexual woman, or the

collection of anecdotes and snippets from the popular press regarding the experience of disability in Goffman's *Stigma*. In my field of biographical research, it is customary to dedicate a whole article or a long chapter to just one life story, while analysing it and describing it as in depth as possible. The works of Fritz Schütze are perhaps the best example, such as the story of Hülia's migration from Turkey to Germany (Schütze, 2003).

For me particularly, the tradition of literary reportage is also a major inspiration, as it mixes interviews, vivid portraits of characters, in-depth descriptions of events, but also social, political and cultural commentary. All this while crafting prose worthy of high literature status².

MONTAGE

Leon Anderson suggests distinguishing 'evocative' and 'analytic' autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). While the former is sceptical of any attempts to represent experience other than one's own, the latter advises not to 'lose sight of the other' and to 'seek informants beyond the self'. While the former 'refuses to abstract and explain' – as Ellis and Bochner explicitly write (Belting et al. 2013); among the key tasks of the latter are 'developing a theoretical understanding of broader phenomena'. Theoretical developments, discovering theory, innovative modifications of the human sciences discourse or, simply put, new concepts. This is the key stake of our work – here, Daniel Bertaux, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser meet Deleuze and Guattari as well as Michel Foucault. In the thrilling intensity of evocation, this stake can also be easily lost from sight.

The library scene I started with is decidedly not autoethnography. Nor did the experience of being cut off from public workspaces lead me to theoretical ideas riffing on Deleuzoguararian rhizomatic ontology. These concepts were theoretical proposals developed thanks to a careful analysis of 100-page narrative interviews along with the guidelines for discovering grounded theory. They were, at the same time, *modifications* of the pre-existing discourse, an old philosophical debate on agency, subjectivity or socialization.

² Classical works of the "Polish school of reportage" by Ryszard Kapuściński, Hanna Krall, Teresa Torańska, and Wojciech Jagielski have been translated to English. The works of Belarusian reporter and oral historian Svetlana Alexievich are similar in style.

My writing practice reflected these origins. I privately called it “weaving”, “entwining”, “braiding” or producing a “montage” from distinct strands. Among these were reconstructions of academic debates, long verbatim quotes from the interviews with their analysis and interpretation, and finally, my theoretical proposals, grounded in research material but formulated and distinguished at the backdrop of the human studies tradition.

SHOW BUT DON'T TELL

It is worth mentioning that visual studies and visual sociology projects also flourished under the pandemic, usually conducted remotely online. I planned to incorporate photographic interviewing techniques into my new research design for a while. However, the everyday practice of amateur street photography has become my retreat from the forced isolation during the pandemic. Showing and not only talking about your findings, in ways engaging to the audience – that is another way to frame the autoethnographic and sociographic postulates alike. Showing can, of course, be also done through images. Much has been written on the advantages that photographic documentation, interviewing techniques and visual analysis offer to social scientists (Pink, 2001, Harper, 2012, Olechnicki, 2003). However, despite the *pictorial turn* in humanities and establishing photography as a legitimate technique of gathering qualitative data, images still seem to hold less value than text and are sometimes met with hesitation in academia over ethical considerations.

Street photography is in some ways still a lowly art among photographic disciplines, done by enthusiasts after hours. But it has developed workflows, techniques and aesthetic stakes distinct from those of commercial, documentary or press photography, and it has grown to be a separate legitimate genre. *Ethos* is perhaps the right choice of word, as for practitioners, it is as much an art form as a lifestyle. The key rule here is to always have your camera on you, turned on and ready for the stroke of serendipity and a great shot (see Gharaei, 2020, McLaren, 2019, Meyerowitz, 2020). In the times of overflowing visual self-representation, and constantly curating one’s visual public portfolio, the intense attention street photographers give random pedestrians seems commendable. This ethos resonates with my sociographical disposition. I think it also resonates with the remark of Leon Anderson, not to “lose sight of the other”.

Once a researcher develops a photographer's eye – or embodies techniques of perceiving visual patterns, quickly adjusting the frame for better composition, reducing the visual chaos in sight, controlling the depth of field and shutter speed etc. – it seems a waste not to complement one's scholarly perception with it. Therefore, also while working on this short text, I decided to complement it with a photo essay on my workplace under lockdown, captured at the same time as these thoughts.

What are those photographs exactly? How can the reader benefit from seeing them? Is this visual sociology or just amateur snapshots? These are questions worthy of another essay, but a few field reflections may be worth jotting down:

The stakes of photography, as a distinct medium, are different and, at times, contradictory to those of social research. While shooting these images, my “photographer's eye” was drawn more to the young faces than the mature ones, to the conventionally pretty ones than to other types of beauty. Saturated and contrasting colours of clothing make for a better composition than those that are understated and similar to the background. I adhere to the old rule of thumb in photography that if there are no people in the picture, there is no picture to talk about. So the reader will see the faces of students rather than books, foliage or architecture. My eye was drawn to what seemed rare, unique, idiosyncratic or out of place, rather than to what is frequent and common. These may not be the things that are most interesting, unique or elucidating to the reader and viewer, particularly if they live outside Warsaw and Poland. Furthermore, all these aspects had to be the implicit guidelines for my final selection of photos. It is worth underlining that the photos were not taken as part of a larger, well-developed research project. The decision to produce and include them was spontaneous they were made *ad hoc*, of random visitors, based on serendipity.

These photographs are an intrinsic part of my work and my pandemic experience. Seeing the glass ceilings and concrete walls I wrote about, the faces, clothes and gestures of the visitors – or rather, seeing them again, through another technique of representation – has cognitive value on its own. The very ostensiveness of visuality, its idiographic concrete and detail, can help in sociological understanding and make the

experience of transferring reflection richer. It can become another strand to be entwined in this sociographic narrative³.

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³ Please see <https://piotrszenajch.myporfolio.com/library>] to access the photographs referred to in this paper.

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PART 3. REMAKING EDUCATIONAL FUTURES: CREATIVITY, PERFORMATIVITY AND PERSONAL STORIES

TEACHING ONLINE IN COVID-19: THIS IS MY STORY

ANNE BYRNE

This academic year, I have missed the random meetings and everyday conversations with my colleagues at work, as we pass each other walking to or from class, sitting for a cup of tea in the staff room, arranging to meet for lunch or queuing in the corridor to use the photocopier. Remember how we used to be with each other? Remember how we talked back then? Walter Benjamin (1936) writes that the ability to exchange experiences lies at the heart of storytelling. But I am not sure where to begin in telling you this story. Perhaps the present moment is best. It is level 5 lockdown in Ireland.² I hang a DO NOT DISTURB sign on my front door. I am about to put on my microphone and ear set, turn on the computer, adjust trailing wires, block out the light from the window, find my cushion, check the sound, video and internet connection, launch the local virtual learning environment (VLE), navigate my way to a module on biography, *The Power of Story and Narrative*, click on the link, find the virtual classroom, join the room, load my slides and images and wait for students to show up on the screen as icons. Forced on line by ‘the emergency’ of a global pandemic last March, of necessity this is where I and students now reside together. Vocabulary is indicative of the change – I am transformed from digital ‘visitor’ to ‘resident’. Something is deeply awry. Converting a classroom and campus based third year undergraduate social science research methods course to the digital environment is technically and pedagogically challenging. My instinct was for flight. Feeling overwhelmed, mixed with potent doses of doubt, anxiety and stress, a vein of stubborn resistance appeared. ‘Never give up’ I muttered. This meant signing up for numerable online courses over the summer of 2020, painfully picking my way through the basic technological skills and communication platforms required to sit in front of a screen and teach ‘remotely’ from my desk in the attic, alone. I needed to understand something that I did not. Stay safe. Stay safe. Stay safe.

There is irony at work here too. The ‘emergency’ over, I make the ‘pivot’ to online teaching and learning. I sign up for a semester long course ‘Learning Technologies’ as a student. Teaching and learning have never

seemed so connected, close and entangled. A strange ambiguity emerges – I am student and teacher, both and neither. I am no longer surrounded by the structures, titles, roles and relations of the material university nor bolstered by the physical presence of colleagues and students or the architecture of corridors and classrooms. I reflect on my professional identity as teacher, educator, pedagogue, and lecturer. Who am I now and where do I fit? The scholarly community to which I belonged for many decades appears to recede. Will virtual realities supplant memories of strong bonds and displace collegial ties? But such philosophical distractions do not last long. The labour of preparing new courses and examination materials, the rhythm and repetition of teaching live online, recording lectures, listening to and working with students every day, writing individual and group emails, talking by phone, meeting in the virtual classroom is absorbing and preoccupying. There is no time for reflection, no opportunity to share and exchange the profound individual experiences of the transformation of teaching and learning. How do we connect and empathise with each other in this setting? Our interior lives appear to be more available online but I am not sure. I taste each new word that I use to describe the actions for online work; ‘blog’, ‘pivot’, ‘link’, ‘upload’, ‘launch’, ‘submit’, and ‘embed’. Peculiarly empty, these words fill me with foreboding. How are you coping? What is your experience? What have you learned? Please tell me.

I worry about students who are not writing assignments, who cannot find the virtual room and those who no longer turn up for class. I worry about how accessible or inaccessible course materials are now that they are digitised. I worry about students’ working and living conditions. Some don’t have access to a laptop or have to share a computer with a sibling or parent, or have poor internet connections or use a phone to read PowerPoint slides. Living alone or with friends, returning to live with family, doing paid work – each must bring their own particular challenges for students. Controlling the spread of the virus by personal contact is a national priority. Restrictions on physical movement, separation from friends and intimate others, the removal of all external entertainments and social interactions are reported as impacting adversely on young people’s mental health. I think about the mental and physical health of colleagues and know that for some this disruption is unbearable. There is no escape from the present moment.

Students tell me they ‘pine’ to be with friends on campus and long to live anticipated lives. Continued isolation is not a comfortable condition for many. I know this. These are far from ideal living or studying conditions. I worry about the extent of student anxiety and their expressed sense of

hopelessness about a future. We share favourite techniques for relaxation and dealing with stress, how to take time away from the screen, the importance of exercise and being in nature. Before class starts, I play music and post images to the VLE module page of burning candles, restful images of the sea or domestic animals. We laugh about this strange sharing. I am regularly catapulted from contemplating existential questions of existence to the practical responsibilities of responding to student distress and complaint about deadlines and workload. The burden of continuous assessment across all modules is a particular stressor. This is what they tell me. We have not done enough – yet. I too feel this. We resolve to find better solutions. The task of grading hundreds of assignments and giving feedback in a short period of time does focus the mind and sitting body; in ‘emergency’ mode we created intense teaching and learning conditions which are neither sustainable nor pleasurable. The administrative weight of academic oversight, coordination and programme management is all consuming of time and energy. Last September, a wise colleague advised us to fasten our seat belts. We were going for a ‘rollercoaster ride’. I know what they mean now.

Was it like this ‘Before Covid’? The radical shift to online teaching and learning has precipitated an altered connection between students and me. Inadvertently, I know more now about students’ living and studying conditions. An unexpected outcome of the necessary removal from campus and classroom? I see twenty-five student names and icons on a screen, grouped together in a module as a class. In the virtual class space, students are reluctant to be seen or heard. Chat messages connect us. The residual image and sounds of students outdoors, walking across campus, conversing together, carrying bags and books, climbing the stairs, making their way to Room 2001, settling into the class, exchanging greetings, commenting on the weather, asking after the other, still lingers. Casual conversations develop into friendships. Sometimes for life. But their connection to each other in that ordinary, taken for granted way is no longer available. There is no occasion now for casual, happenstance, easy meetings with peers. I too cannot rely on physical presence to know how to teach, to assess the collective mental atmosphere or mood of the class, to discern where we might take a discussion or consider what we might risk next. *I am not sure if you are OK. Are you?*

Students are more isolated from each other. The line of attention is between me and each student rather than dispersed across the group. While the group may exist in a code or title, the collective dynamic is

muted. It cannot take flight in this structure. I show images and videos of the town, rivers, coast and campus. I encourage on-line discussion and design collaborative practices with VLE tools. That energetic high that can arise after teaching a class or the feeling of being in the presence of others in community is there but diminished. We are all disembodied and more vulnerable in this universe. The loss of habitual visual, embodied cues and familiar ease of non-verbal communication in teaching is unsettling; I try to adapt to the loss of these senses. Can you see me? Can you hear me? Somebody please let me know? I speak into the ether. I wait for a thumbs up. Online teaching and learning readiness is the priority task of the organisation. Weekly supportive messages from the university leadership encourage staff and students to forebear, to endure, to be resolute and be prepared to take on the challenges ahead. These online communications provide information, timely updates on health and safety, remind us of our professional responsibilities and government guidelines on Covid-19, affirm what was accomplished, recognise achievements, showcase the work of staff and student frontline volunteers, mark the cycle of the academic year and seasons while preparing us for the next wave of unanticipated events. The content brings some comfort, certainty, clarity. A shared understanding of our plight, to caring for each other, our families and communities creates a sense of purpose and commitment to the work. Online initiatives such as 'Share Your Story', posting images and writing notes of appreciation to colleagues commence, building connection and solidarity. 5 Professional teaching and learning staff provide hundreds of hours of training, technical support and expert VLE advice to lecturers and students. Colleagues with experience of online teaching respond to my never-ending queries for technical instructions. There is a sense of being held by and in the virtual institution. For all this I am grateful. But I cannot relinquish that feeling that something else is happening in this highly compressed, intense online work environment – I just don't know what it is. Yet.

The biography module is drawing to an end. We have pondered the words of Virginia Woolf (1939) and John McGahern (2005) as writers and biographers. We have looked at archives of letters, diaries, photographs, films and audio recordings of life stories. Students blog about the therapeutic effect of writing letters and diary entries, analyse images and have listened attentively to interviews. We consider academic articles on biography from humanities and social sciences. The art and craft of creating, presenting and preserving biographical research projects on line preoccupies us now. I relate a behind-the-scenes account of technical, editorial and aesthetic decisions I make when representing own biographical research work in writing, in exhibition, in film or radio

documentary. They are interested. I tell the story of why and how I designed the social science biographical course with Virginia Woolf in mind; of colleagues I consulted; of how to translate principles of course design into curriculum and content, practices, assignments and assessments; how to pay attention to different learning styles and learning objectives. These student social scientists want to know much more about what happens in the background. I am curious. What precipitated this interest? It is a research methods course in which we practice skills to invite and interpret personal narratives. But I realize that I too have been behind-the-scenes with these students, communicating into their private, personal and domestic spaces, as they have been in mine. The import of teaching and studying in isolation and solitude has blurred the distinction between back stage and front stage performances (Goffman 1956). I am caught between the rise and fall of a wave. Working in my old and most comfortable clothes, feet ensconced in slippers and woolly socks, my appearance is of little concern. The public reality of the online space is perplexing. As professional educators and students we enter into the limited and time bound virtual institutional space while remaining in the private, physical, embodied spaces of kitchen, study or bedroom. *What kind of public is that? What kind of private is this? Is there a word for it?*

More questions remain. How does the lived experience of teaching and studying in this yet to be named space alter the student-lecturer relation? It feels as if we are brought into closer alignment with each other. This change too may be connected to the biography course. Following Bruner's (2003) ideas on narrative and thinking, we explore why we need to tell stories, the role of story in making sense of experience and in our search for meaning. For Bruner 'stories are a culture's coin and currency' (p.16). In their research projects, some students choose to tell autobiographical stories of facing fear, taking on new challenges, encounters with strangers, transformational experiences or overcoming adversity. Others delve into family histories changed by random events or the biography of an ancestor, parent or sibling whose lives were disrupted by illness, war, love, poverty, forced migration. Biographies of sports heroes and creative artists feature. Integrating these stories into their own story is almost inevitable. Feelings and thoughts on the disruption of a global pandemic and the personal impact of Covid-19 are corded into student accounts. They do not flinch from what is difficult to say or hard to admit. I am humbled by their words. The medium of story becomes available to all of us open to multiple points of resonance and multiple interpretations of what is at issue.

I think that the reality of living and studying in lockdown has forged a different sense of scholarly community, collective understanding and empathic connection in this online academic teaching and learning environment. Some of this has to do with the institutional, professional framing of our collective story and the behind-the-scenes work of colleagues creating diverse points of belonging and connection since March 2020. Of this I am sure. But something else is clear. I listen closely to students. Yesterday, unprompted, two class members spoke of their realisation that they have become adults, ready to assume adult responsibilities for themselves and for others. In revealing behind-the-scenes stories of their lives in the online environment, working in solitude, reflecting through biographical work and in actively living through the past pandemic year, I am tempted to interpret the recognition of the arrival of adulthood as evidence of self-efficacy, a form of wisdom and new understanding of self. It is a resolution of sorts. I accept for now this challenging, narrow, hybrid space of teaching and learning while still wishing for a sociological word for it. I do not have the language for what I already sense. I want to believe that story will help me and you find a way to the source of our troubles. I want to believe that spontaneous, unique, diverse and collective practices of authentic communication that are the heart of storytelling will not fade or be forever flattened in these multiple virtual reality universes.⁶ Understanding the plight of the present, what is 'humanely possible' (Bruner: 16) and conceiving fresh possibilities for teaching and learning may well depend upon it. And now? And now? Tell me your story...

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'YOU SEE ME, BUT I CAN'T SEE YOU!' EXPERIENCES OF HYPER-VISIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MAKING A CASE FOR ACADEMIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

JACQUELINE O'TOOLE

In April 2018, Uachtarán na hÉireann, Michael D. Higgins commented that there exists a new 'ideological fad' that dominates Higher Education in Ireland that is underpinned by an overreliance on what he described as 'an abuse of metrics'. Framed by the behemoth of neo-liberalism I posit that this 'ideological fad' is underpinned by money, marketing, numbers, and techniques of surveillance that serve to frame the institutional stories told within Higher Education. Indeed, these stories demark the conditions of possibility to both narrate and practice my own work as a lecturer and researcher. The pandemic has destabilised and rendered uncertain the normalcy of everyday life in Higher Education as we have moved rapidly into remote working, teaching and learning spaces. An interrogation of these spaces is apposite albeit currently at a nascent stage.

UNFOLDING NARRATIVES AND STORIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education can be conceived of as a narrative landscape. Narrative inquiry provides the necessary tools to engage in a theorisation and empirical investigation of narrative landscapes, defined as storied terrains in which narratives and stories are crafted and told (O'Toole, 2018, 2019). To investigate narrative landscapes is to engage an exploration of institutional storytelling and its relationship with personal narratives. Institutional storytelling implies that narrative work is organisationally embedded and 'localised configurations of meaning and related narrative

practices are mediated by organisations' thereby allowing organisational voices and preferences can be heard (Gubrium and Holstein 2009: 174). Institutional storytelling has a profound impact on the what and how of story-telling and indeed on whose stories can be told and heard in Higher Education.

Framed by the question of the critical relevance of narrative inquiry in the complex study of the intersection of our narrative environment and the stories we tell about ourselves and our experiences, in this brief precis, I reflect on my working experiences from both before and during the pandemic as to sketch out the potentiality of autoethnography as one methodological tool from within the cannon of narrative inquiry that can usefully be deployed to excavate and interrogate institutional and personal stories. In a similar vein to Cooper (2017), I propose that autoethnography can serve a transformative purpose, one that wrestles it away from its critics who proffer that it often provokes self-indulgent and self-absorbed research that in turn, may produce a 'romanticising of the self' (Atkinson et al. 2001 : 10). Instead, stories can be told that have the potential excavate and disrupt aspects of the narrative landscape of Higher Education in Ireland increasingly dominated by quantification, metrics and surveillance.

'IS THERE ANYONE OUT THERE?' A CONSTANT REFRAIN

In terms of positioning and identity work, I am a feminist sociologist, an academic practitioner, an activist and an educationalist. I am also a career lecturer meaning that apart from some part-time work as a student in factories, shops and youth work, I have spent most of my working life to date inside classrooms both material and virtual. My career spans the era from 'chalk and talk' through to writing on acetates during lectures to the current configuration of online and blended learning. My first active engagement with online teaching and learning occurred in the early 2000s during a 'strategic planning' meeting with colleagues. I was fascinated, if somewhat discombobulated as the planning conversations unfolded. I was told of the endless possibilities attached to new pedagogical practices associated with online learning. A colleague commented on the fact that learners could now complete their learning while walking along Stredagh Beach in Sligo. Suppressing disquiet, I gently mused that the beach 'was certainly good for the soul but surely not for online learning?' Fast forward to 2018 and I am actively involved in designing and delivering a research methods module for an online, part-time postgraduate programme: Masters in Social Care and Social Justice.

This is a carefully planned and well-designed blended learning programme, combining online asynchronous, synchronous, and face-to-face in-class learning. I embraced the challenge and immersed myself in curriculum design and delivery using this format.

On March 12th, 2020, no such forward planning or self-reflection was available however, as Ireland entered lockdown and Higher Education campuses were ordered to immediately close due to the uncertainties and dangers of the spread of Covid 19. We sent our students home that day and told them we would reconvene online 5 days later. Remote working, teaching, and learning began apace the following week. I have not returned to campus to teach face-to-face nor to meet any students / colleagues since then. In the past thirteen months, I have struggled with the use of technology and dodgy WIFI; navigated the liminal space between being seen and unseen, between visibility and hyper [in] visibility; embodied discomfort around email communication; engaged in constant cajoling of myself and others; learnt new skills; provided ongoing feedback; and adapted how I teach, sometimes 'on the fly' during individual lectures. But a list of concerns and uncertain accomplishments cannot fully capture the challenges and experiences of working in this new terrain. A list does not generate 'evocative storytelling' (Smith, 2017) nor fully enable a theorising of the emotional and embodied experiences (Trahar, 2013: 375) and practices of remote working, teaching and learning. It does not speak to identities, to habitus and to the changing roles I must now play as I perform my lecturer role in this ever-evolving online teaching environment. Lists cannot convey the messiness of aspects of this / my new working 'reality'¹. My constant refrains: 'is anyone out there?'; 'can everyone see me?' 'Can you hear me?'

On screen, I am hyper visible, to both myself and to the students. To myself, I am constantly drawn to the tiny version of speaking and gesturing 'me' in the corner of my screen that has a weird split second delay; and to the students, the newest of whom have only gotten to 'know' me through a screen. In addition, the potential exists to reframe my

¹ Two national surveys on attitudes to remote working have been conducted since March 2020 led by NUI Galway and the Western Development Commission with a third one launched on April 19th. Most responses indicate a positive disposition to remote working. Following the survey results, an announcement by the Irish Government on January 15th, 2021 states that it intends to legislate to give people working in the public sector the legal right to ask their employer to allow them to work from home beyond the end of the current pandemic. The Government has set a target of 20% of public servants working remotely by December 2021. For some professions in the public sector (including education) where full time remote working may be more challenging, the Government is promoting the idea of 'blended' work arrangements; the right to disconnect; and development of working hubs to curtail lengthy travel to and from workplaces.

role as all my lectures are now recorded and uploaded to my employer's server and theoretically could be made available to any number of student cohorts – I would not need to be even present. This impacts in other ways in that the increasing importance of the 'biographical project of the self' carries with it a powerful (and new) form of governance (Rose, 1999) where the authentic and fully realised self is subject to continual (self-) surveillance, transformation, and improvement. If one behaves in ways that are taken to be irresponsible, or undisciplined, then this could be constituted as a moral failure of the self (O'Toole 2019). I have a deep sense of being constantly under the spotlight, being watched and under surveillance – the brave new world of teaching and learning in Higher Education.

EXPLORING HYPER-VISIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What can autoethnography bring to the conceptualisation, understanding and critique of these experiences of remote working, teaching, and learning? Autoethnography can be positioned as a novel methodology within a range of narrative inquiry approaches, with Smith (2017: 507) stating that:

'it refers to a highly personalised form of qualitative research in which researchers tell stories that are based on their own lived experiences and interactions with others within social contexts, relating the personal to the cultural in the process and product'.

It offers a set of analytical tools and research methods to illuminate how unexpected and complex social change affects people's everyday lives. An autobiographical genre of writing is one where the self is always present in the writing (Coffey, 2000), a self that is contextualised within social contexts (Ellis, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is usually written in the first-person voice. Ethical considerations are paramount (Smith, 2017) and these include the nature of how consent is given and continually checked, the inclusion of multiple voices and multiple interpretations, and a keen understanding that one does not own one's story such that one's story is also bound up with other peoples' stories. Theorising of the self and representing the self are necessary albeit complex (Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012).

There are few academic autoethnographies of teaching and learning experiences, one central reason for this suggested by Trahar (2013) refers to the risky business associated with laying bare innermost concerns and the likely consequences of being perceived as both vulnerable and atheoretical – neither framed as best practice among academics. Such

concerns have the potential to undermine the autoethnographic project among academic practitioners to avoid displays of what might be perceived as messy academic practice. Learmonth and Humphreys' (2012) autoethnography of academic identity and conferences points to the Jekyll and Hyde nature of contemporary identity work in academia. Wilkinson (2020) deployed autoethnography to uncover hidden experiences of imposter syndrome as an early career lecturer and how HEI's might offer better support through mentoring and other initiatives.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: ANALYTIC OR PROVOCATIVE?

Neo-liberal concerns with metrics, with self-surveillance, with visibility and responsabilisation are enmeshed within the narrative landscape of Higher Education. In person lectures and meetings are rarely paused by the demands of childcare for example, or at least not obviously paused. But in the past year how many online lectures and meetings were interrupted and paused by crying children, by phones ringing, by pets scratching at doors, by parcels being delivered? Yet, how can I/we speak to this messiness of academic practice and the experiences of these new modes of visibility and surveillance? Where is the space to uncover and centre the untold stories and the hidden narratives of these experiences²? The complexities of the pandemic have exposed deep chasms that exist across all aspects of Irish society including those found within Higher Education. My argument is that academic autoethnographies will elucidate and interrogate these and other experiences to generate a deeper understanding of the embodied experiences of remote working, teaching and learning.

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ENGAGING SPACES OF THE POSSIBLE: PERFORMATIVITY AND CREATIVE IMAGINING AS EMANCIPATORY NARRATIVE INQUIRY

GRACE O'GRADY

INTRODUCTION

Engaging spaces of the possible (Sools, 2020) foregrounds imagination in creating possible narratives of the future. This paper maps a brief moment of engaging with future possibilities, as a pedagogical space is created for a young person, Kate, to creatively imagine beyond fixed images/stories of self. I draw on textual materials, vignettes of conversation and creative artifacts from a previous study (O'Grady, 2012) and some of my more recent reading and reflections, to highlight the performative and emancipatory intent of this creative narrative inquiry. A central aim of the inquiry was to explore with young people (30 students aged 17/18 years in one Irish community school) how they constructed their identities through talk and image. In particular, it attempted to assist them to make visible cultural norms in how they spoke and imagined themselves, and to hold open a space to find movement out of fixed, limiting notions of self; to imagine possible selves. These aims are congruent with the emancipatory intent of Narrative Arts-Based Inquiry (Finley, 2005) and what McLaren (2003) and Denzin (2005) respectively call "Revolutionary Pedagogy" and "Critical Performative" praxis. Denzin writes that now in the second decade of this new century we must "struggle to connect performative qualitative research to the

hopes, needs, goals and promises of a free democratic society” (Denzin, 2018: 3).

While imagination is required to enable future thinking, not all narrative meaning-making generates possibilities. Elicitation techniques are required to imaginatively create what is to become. Drawing on the work of Glaveanu, Freire and Abensour respectively, Sools (2020: 5) posits that creative engagement with the future requires pedagogy of the possible, of hope and of desire. As part of the research design of this inquiry, I facilitated twelve two-hour workshops that explored with the young people their identity narratives using arts-based educational activities such as drawing, collage-making and journaling. The students selected their own media to work with as they creatively constructed and *audienced* portraits of themselves in their world (see O’ Grady, 2012, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). I view image-making itself as performative; images of future selves constitute reality they have real material effects on the body, body politic and body of work. The desiring body, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 156), will always form new connections, new possibilities that can be enacted in practice.

The notion of Futures as ‘Entanglements of Matter and Meaning’ (Tutton, 2017:10) makes sense to me as I revisit how Kate reads her images as embodied realities. The creative narrative vignettes that I re/present below are lines of movement, re/territorializations that move away from organization and stratification, to releasing the body towards future possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 232). In these short performances, I consider the art pieces as active participants in the subject’s becoming as they too produce effects, thereby altering situations (Monforte, 2018).

KATE'S MOVEMENT TOWARDS IMAGINING A FUTURE SELF

Kate’s first self-portrait was created, read and experienced as an inflexible identity category which stratified her as a ‘far-away foreigner’. Her second image below creates movement, barely perceptible, as we “stammer in [our] own language” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 4), to deconstruct and re-construct “our self-creation” (Randall, 2014: 234).



One-to-one Conversation Kate's second self portrait

Kate: *Well I'm building a wall over here [centre left of portrait]. It's like if I'm going to make it to the top I have to block people out... I think the achieving side stops me being the happy, penniless person. I stop myself by being different also...I'm from Finland and Protestant...I'm conflicted.*

Grace: *And the question mark?*

Kate: *Yeah, it's in red, kind of like an alert sign...mmm...yeah...mm...maybe that the conflict isn't set in stone.*

The question mark superimposed on the jagged division of this image provides an opening out of Kate's binary thinking and positioning. The collage articulates a questioning of her position which Kate then reads as an opening. Every utterance positions and repositions the body in discourses that work on the body, creating shifting bodily positions/ desires that are constantly in play and constantly open to re/inscription (Malins, 2004). Kate's sedimented position is loosening as she prepares, some weeks later, to engage in creatively imagining her future self. Her audiencing of her creative collage below discursively positions her as moving beyond male/female stratification and towards accessing power that is momentarily liberating.



Conversation in Group/Kate's final Collage – 'Fe/Male Freedom'

Grace: *When you look at the image now Kate, how are you feeling?*

Kate: *It's kinda what I am and strive to be. Erm... Erm... It's kind of an opening up feeling. I feel lots of possibility and like I don't feel confined to any category, the box is opening up and I know I can go back into it if I need...Like I'm not going to go yayaya in the middle of class. I'm also happy I left the man in the middle holding the flag...*

Mary: *Ahh, you were embarrassed when you were drawing it.*

Kate: *Yeah, the big muscly man ...mmm... but he's powerful; a kind of Joan of Arc figure. So yeah, I think the collage shows that I am not only the 'Faraway Foreigner', I can be lots of different ways depending on who I'm with, where I am like what's going on. This picture gives me a wow feeling, yeah.*

The act of imagining, the opening up of herself to movement is a way of engendering connectivity and acknowledging multiplicity. Kate's embodied reading of the collage above allows desire to flow in different directions, producing new possibilities and potentials. This is a brief moment, a move away from stratification to what Deleuze and Guattari (1987:153) conceptualize as a body-without-organs (BwO); a body that de/stabilizes its existence as either this or that and responds to multiple rhythms and vibrations in ever-changing ways. Imagining beyond the male/female dualism constructs gender and power as contingent.

AND SO...

Finding movement out of fixed/limiting stories of self was the focus of my work with Kate and the other students in the research. There was a temporary shift from our habitual dualistic way of speaking, to creating new metaphors with which to articulate ourselves. These might be summarized from the study as:

Fe/male power
Robust delicacy
Vulnerable strength
In/visible colour
Playful shyness
Rebellious obedience

The dominant western discourses that work on the body – hegemonic masculinity/femininity, white as invisible, black as ethnic difference, vulnerability as weakness, shyness as personal inadequacy and good student as obedient – were temporarily challenged and openings created through image and metaphor. These new metaphors speak to individual experiences that can be re/membered as the young people re/position themselves in future engagement with the world.

Patterns of power and powerlessness inherent in dualisms such as male/female, adult/young person, teacher/pupil, heterosexual/homosexual, white person/black person, need to be addressed as old cultural patterns, if we hope to move beyond oppressive forms of human relations. According to Davies and Gannon (2006) all of these - gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age status, are implicit in acts of learning to talk, read, becoming a competent person and so are largely invisible. As teachers, school counsellors and educators we need to facilitate young people in making visible cultural norms in the construction of their 'personal' identities, and to actively encourage movement out of fixed, limiting identity stories.

This is revolutionary in that it is counter cultural. A critical performative pedagogy that works towards 'unveiling oppression and transforming praxis has the potential to implement new visions of dignity, care democracy and other postcolonial ways of being in the world' (Finley, 2005: 689).

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WORLD-TRAVELLING INTO A FUTURE – STORIES OF RUPTURE AND HOPE IN A SCHOOL LIBRARY PROJECT

DENISE O'FLANAGAN

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on a narrative inquiry carried out in a school library from 2018 until its interruption by the Covid-19 virus. The research is 'An Arts Based Narrative Inquiry into student experiences of the Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP) Library Project and whether this engagement can help students to develop the Junior Cycle Key Skills'. This paper describes how students navigate questions of morality and heroism through the arts-based curriculum and suggests that these student voices story resilience and optimism for the future.

Between 2018 and 2020 I carried out an arts-based narrative inquiry into student learning experiences in a school library which is part of an Irish Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP) Library Project. These libraries are situated in post-primary schools which are part of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), a national programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from designated disadvantaged communities. The school in question is located in a large urban area. It is co-educational with almost six hundred students. The students I write about here were in third year at the time.

The libraries provide access to the creative arts through engagement with authors, storytellers, artists, poets and other members of the arts community. Under the DEIS Action Plan it was envisaged that the JCSP Library Project would expand to fifty disadvantaged schools by 2010 (2005: 86). Currently thirty schools have such provision.

TRAVELLING ACROSS INQUIRY LANDSCAPES

I borrow Lugones's (1987) metaphor of world-travelling to describe entering into student worlds and how students negotiate the world through curriculum, culture and community. It may be particularly relevant today as we seek to heal rupture and closure in society.

My journeying on research and world-landscapes was interrupted in the spring of 2020 as mesmerised, the world awaited the inevitable, insistent reckoning of Covid. Looking on, stunned, as country after country across the world closed its borders, some wondered if the European dream would be able to withstand such an assault. As all eyes turned to the suffering of Bergamo I thought of these words of Pineau:

'When grieving calls down the darkness and no one is present to witness, we confront the limits of language, crossing over to the place of no words' (2000: 13).

As the doors of the library closed, I considered that research – witnessing - was never needed more than at times like this when social and economic inequality are so starkly highlighted. If, as Turner (1993: 501) posits, 'rights arise from the fact that human beings are ontologically frail and that social institutions are precarious', acknowledging these rights and the joining the fight for equality is indeed timely – perhaps morally inescapable?

Gioux (2013: 157) speaks of a critical pedagogy that 'opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens ... a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and assert one's convictions is made central to the purpose of public schooling and higher education, if not democracy itself'. I believe that such a pedagogy flourishes in the library I was inquiring into. During autumn 2018 and spring 2019 the students participated in a series of writing and visual art workshops co-created and facilitated by the librarian, in conjunction with poet and author Colm Keegan and visual artist Jole Bartoli. The texts they created were drawn together in a story published on the Dublin Epic website (<https://epicdublin.com>), a website that provocatively asks us:

What would you do,
if you could do **anything**?
Choose your world...
Such challenge, such optimism.

Listening to the stories they were composing here I was reminded that:

‘We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed’ (Polkinghorne, 1988: 60).

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Colm reminded the students that, ‘You are writing about your possible futures. Think about yourselves as heroes.’ As their stories took flight, I realised that these student voices storied resilience and optimism. During the art workshops the text unfolded itself onto a map of the world. When I asked if art was difficult they told me that, ‘Not everyone is good at art but eventually ... it’s more encouraging ... It doesn’t matter if it’s bad ... it’s good in a way.’ In words such as these, in the sharing of paints and laughter, they came together in respectful ways.

They drew worlds – full of strong colours, noise, danger – in which zombies roamed and in which their characters had to fight for survival. The co-mingling of text and art created a vivid map that displayed ‘by a structural analogue, relationships in space that provide a useful image of the world we wish to navigate’ (Eisner, 2002: 11). Perhaps the students were mapping their futures.

The sheets of paper on the floor resembled a fiery map, flames leaping from buildings and dark shadows flinging themselves across the pages. In a startling foreshadowing of the conflagration which would burn across the world, flashes of red and black – dangerous, flame-filled – emerged from the work. The students told me that it is, ‘Winter, because the dark comes quicker’. Later, during the hideous future darkness I think about this map and remember the violent unleashing it depicted. And yet, and yet ...

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Pelias reminds us that:

‘The story ... makes its compelling case by creating space for productive consideration and potential action. In short, the story allows our lives to take form’ (2015: 609).

The story that the students co-composed was a morality tale set in a futuristic world. It is a fable, in the telling of which students took on the mantle of writing responsibly for others and themselves. Their comment that, 'If you're writing for yourself you can write anything ... but if you're writing it as an author you need to know what you can say and what you can't say', may augur well for their willingness to negotiate futures with others.

As they mapped their way around their fiery world, I was struck by the way in which they worked together, united in the belief that good would triumph. The ending of their story, nested in both reality and fantasy, was a call to optimism, to possibilities. Here they agreed that goodness and heroism would triumph as one character gave his life so that the others might live.

Inspired by these students as they co-composed brave new stories in a library, I must surely join with Giroux (2006: 225) and 'refuse to live in an era of foreclosed hope'.

Alive to the challenge of what it means to be heroic they told me it meant being good and I applauded their wisdom. Their young voices call us to take up the challenge, to believe in future possibilities and openings. As I move forward along the inquiry path to the present, I hear their voices yet, in the 'stillness sometimes heard in choral music when several voices hold the same note for a moment' (Bhabha, 2009: iv).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I think often about how this JCSP library, through a framework of multiliteracies pedagogy, supports students to express themselves in linguistic, creative, artistic ways and 'see themselves as intelligent, imaginative and talented' (Cummins, 2009: 243-244). Looking back I feel renewed hope for the future, when in places such as this library, this 'field of wild flowers, the seeds of student empowerment are sown' (Fels, 2002: 1).

And I wonder again why libraries such as this one are not offered to all students in all schools.

In his foreword to 'Pedagogy of Solidarity' Giroux suggests that

'Hope for Freire is a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination... Hope demands an anchoring in transformative practices, and one of the tasks of the progressive educator is to 'unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be' (2014: 10).

Let us hope for such curricular practices to be lived in more schools, mindful of stories composed in a library landscape, which 'continually told and retold in good faith' might 'lead us to the future' (Pelias, 2004: 58). As the promise of another spring beckons, I realise gratefully that, inspired by my participants:

'In the midst of winter, I found within me an invincible summer' (Camus, 1991: 201-202).

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PART 4. LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF ELDERLY PEOPLE DURING AND AFTER COVID-19: MARGINALISATION, COMMUNITY AND METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE ELDERLY: LIFE UNDER LOCKDOWN OR WHAT TO AVOID IN FUTURE CRISES

HAZEL R. WRIGHT

In this chapter I share how I adapted my normal methods of biographical interviewing and areas of interest to work within the confines created by the Covid-19 pandemic, devising a form of ‘Impressionistic’ research. Finding myself thrust into the position of informal carer by the need to keep a formerly independent elderly relative isolated and safe, I focused my narrative gaze on the plight of older people, finding ways to collect pertinent data that was only minimally bounded by ‘social bubbles’ and social ‘distancing’ despite the ‘new normality’ of non-contact. Importantly, I found a way to provide a voice for the very old, who – unable to use digital media, forbidden to sit around outside or mix inside with others, stripped of their customary local social activities – became largely invisible to the outside world.

During the first lockdown, it rapidly became clear that *just* being ‘old’ reaped no benefits. A ninety-year-old with no additional health problems, without a history of social support who did not take regular medication was not considered vulnerable in any useful way. It seemed to be up to family, neighbours, someone in the local community (no-one?), to notice that there was a problem and deal with it. This, in itself, is shocking given the difficulty that even the young and media savvy experience when seeking help in a world that is ‘working from home’. In that circumstance, what is the likelihood that anyone would even ask old people living alone how they find life and how they are coping at this time? Yet an official source (ONS, 2020:3) claimed that ‘those aged 80 years and over’ (alongside those aged 16-29) ‘were the least likely to be worried’, ‘about the effect that the coronavirus (COVID-19) was having on their life’.

However, the distribution of participants to the source survey was skewed, for despite random selection of households, within a household, younger people had a 'higher selection probability than older people because of under-representation' (ONS, 2020:17). From this information, I infer that the elderly people contributing to this, normatively online, survey were those who live in a multi-generational household with digital support at hand: so are not typical of the people who concern me.

Initially, I focused on how *my* relative was finding life during the pandemic, but I soon realised that there were rich additional sources of data available if one constructed new ways of collecting it. I could have simply gathered the views of this one individual, recording our regular interactions in a journal, but this would have led to a narrow single-person perspective, heavily influenced by my own actions in creating opportunities to do things. Ethically, it would have been difficult to disseminate as anonymity around a single case is not easily maintained. Instead, I took advantage of the possibilities of lockdown (people had time to spare) *and* avoided entering the homes of elderly citizens to talk to them directly. I collected views through conversing in the street and hearing the socially distanced (overly loud) conversations of others; walked with people, ever ready to listen and observe, ever alert to the incidental comments that endorsed or challenged the understandings I had formed from chatting to my own elderly relative and hearing the views of her friends with whom she had regular phone contact. I chatted to younger people and academic colleagues with older relatives, but also, gained insights from taking *my* elderly relative out. After a while, when I ventured outside alone, I could see the world through a different lens, embracing an 'elderly gaze'.

I engaged in a combination of social 'eavesdropping' and 'spying' using my ears and eyes to make sense of what I heard and saw, was told or shown, as I went about my daily life: a case of making the strange familiar rather than the 'familiar strange' (Van Maanen, 1995). This was not immersive ethnography, and I chose to fabricate narratives from the data rather than provide a descriptive account. The fabrication went beyond Clough's fictionalization, the altering of detail to conceal identities (Clough, 2002). Rather it was a form of Impressionistic Research where I used my imagination to blend the many insights I had gathered and expressed them in the words of a generalised 'other', trying to create narratives that conveyed to the reader what it was like to be an elderly person in a given situation. Instead of relying on the *story as told* (Mishler, 1995), I blended this with the *story overheard* and the *story observed* to create the *story imagined*, that of the 'elderly other', unwittingly becoming

a role-taker in Mead's original sense, defined by Coutu (1951:182) as 'thinking and feeling as one believes the other person thinks and feels – a form of empathy or of what might be called synconation'.

To illustrate the process, I present here a brief section of 'the story imagined' from a piece on 'going out' during the hot summer months.

"She's insisting on another walk but it's hot and there's nowhere to go. The café is shut, and she won't let me take the bus to get my own shopping, and there's no library van. At least I won't need a mask. Wearing that with my hearing aids and my glasses is a bother. The loops keep getting caught in my earrings, but I need to wear my jewellery. I have to make an effort if I'm going outside – people might see me. What if they talk to me? If they get too close? Better take the mask in case. I can hold it in front of my face if someone comes too near and then I can take it down to blow my nose; it will drip if it's windy. But why must we go out? It makes my back hurt and it's not as if we are going *somewhere*. I don't mind walking to my friend's. We have a nice sit in the warm with a cup of tea and talk and I get a rest before I walk back. But if we *just* walk, she'll keep telling me to stand up straight and look ahead but I have to see where I put my feet – the paths are really uneven. I could fall and break something and then where would I be? And there will be dogs (people think I should like their dogs, but I don't – they yap and jump up). And those runners who just stare above my head as if they can't see me. And the children. I like children but not whole families of them on bikes, all sizes and ages. With parents who don't keep up to tell them to slow down and let people pass. If they pedal up behind me, how do I know they won't run into me?"

Going out for daily exercise is a key permitted activity during lockdown but this 'story' shows how going out is really challenging when your horizons are already confined to the local and this is suddenly crowded with others who usually have 'better' things to do. For the elderly, their customary world is both diminished and overpopulated when things close down. Meaningless walks with no hope of 'a sit-down' hold little attraction for those with aching joints who find the weather too hot, too cold, too wet or too windy, to be enjoyable. Even shopping – the garden centre, perhaps – is a dubious treat when all the chairs in the aisles have been removed to enable free-flow of socially distanced customers, the place is full of signs and arrows that simply add to the confusion as extra 'noise', the toilets are closed off, and no-one gets near enough for you to hear what they are telling you.

But do the elderly have alternatives to going out? In an increasingly digital age, where use of money is discouraged to reduce the shared touch, where online food and clothing purchase is becoming the norm, where increasingly paperless contact requires a modern 'device' and a good memory for numbers, codes and prices – how are the elderly included? How can they have an independent life when cheques and coins and face-to-face contact are discouraged and those who live alone can see only one other person, of necessity someone who can meet their every need? How are they included when the number of family members that can meet together is restricted and, rather than the top priority, they may be the 'lone' extra who displaces another couple?

In this paper, I identified and illustrated some problems faced by our older citizens rather than suggest solutions, believing that this is a necessary stage when thinking about social futures; and aware that issues of (in)dependence, isolation and functionality are not unique to the elderly. I focused my narrative gaze to see life through the eyes of an imaginary older 'other' and found this to be a transformative process (Mezirow, 1975) for the alternative vision still hovers in the periphery, intimating what my own 'social future' holds in a way that was not anticipated and is not altogether welcome. In sociological terms, this is not the past 'haunting' the present as proposed by Avery Gordon (2008) but an intergenerational entanglement of present and future 'ghosts'. Nevertheless, I believe the process worthwhile for even an imaginary voice can ask for 'recognition of the something more' (p.206) required to better include the elderly when shaping social futures.

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STORIES OF COVID-19: SOCIAL PASTS AND FUTURES IN THE CITYLIFE PROJECT

ERICA MASSERANO, SAM DODD, STEPHEN MADDISON AND TESSA MCWATT

“The lockdown was tough, didn’t leave the house as much as I used to, just stayed in really, though still made it down to the corner shop to buy my fags and crossword books. I had my hair done a couple of weeks ago, hadn’t had it done for months. Felt ever so fancy. [...] My mood goes up and down a bit recently, with all this virus stuff going on. It can feel a bit frightening. I have my days when I feel down – and the grey weather doesn’t help. I just keep going though, best way I can.”

Dodd, S. (2021) ‘Joyriding Down The Roman’

When the pandemic began, elders became the single population most at risk from Covid-19. By now, many elders in the UK have been “shielding”, curtailing their social relations to lower exposure, for over a year. However, loneliness has been documented as a risk factor for mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al, 2015). Systemic marginalisation also contributes to the dangers they face. Ageism is a psychosocial burden decreasing resilience (D’Cruz et al, 2020); elder social exclusion impacts morbidity and early death (Waldegrave and Cunningham, 2017). Age is of course not the only factor in social exclusion; governmental studies (Public Health England, 2020) confirm that people who are racialised or live in working class areas are at higher risk for Covid-19. Finally, medical findings state that chronic social adversity leads to a lower immune response (Cole 2015).

In a nutshell, our elders are in an impossible position. They are at increased risk for Covid; shielding is meant to address that, but can decrease their mental and physical resilience; and the marginalisation

they already experience in varying degrees makes all of these factors more complex and challenging.

CityLife is a project that is particularly suited to respond to the current situation by fostering intergenerational connection through a combination of public engagement, creative practice and research. It was founded in 2014 by Tessa McWatt, Sam Dodd and Stephen Maddison at the University of East London and is now based at the University of East Anglia and University of Brighton. It connects Creative Writing, History and Journalism students with elders from London communities through storytelling workshops in organisations and day centres.

“I’ve been joyriding down the Roman on my mobility scooter. Gets me about alright, that thing does! Went to Toynbee Hall today – wasn’t able to go there all through lockdown. They’re so lovely there. You know, I’ve got a terrible memory. You may not get a lot outta me. But let’s have a nice chat anyway.”

(Dodd, 2021)

The writers conduct unstructured life story interviews with the community elders. The interviews are processed into literary non-fiction pieces and paired up with autobiographical pieces by the writers. The pieces are mobilised as qualitative research, and the findings aim to ethically voice and represent the lived experience of populations which are not invited to the discussion about the future of London. The project has received very positive responses from the participants and generated an archive of 96 stories at citylifestories.co.uk.

Half of our participants are therefore elders, living in the aforementioned intersection of the risk of Covid, loneliness and marginalisation. All our community storytellers are over 50, with the vast majority between 60 and 80, and come from communities we are either part of or familiar with; it is no mystery to us that they have been hit the hardest.

“I grew up in Stoke Newington originally, and when I was very young, we moved more into the centre of Hackney. [...] My mum worked in the same warehouse department store in Shoreditch High Street as me and my cousin, it was called Spencer Rotherham. [...] Textiles warehouse – fabric, home decoration sections, all that. I worked there for a long while, in the curtain department. When I was a child, I wanted to be an air hostess! I never did get round to that.”

Dodd, S. (2021) ‘Joyriding Down the Roman’

Previous phases have focused on the city, place and identity and evidenced alternative geographies of belonging, “negotiated *geographies*, through which diverse actors work to reconfigure notions of who and what belongs through the ontological, epistemological, and material struggles of everyday practice” (Mee and Wright, 2009) and the spatial, “in its role of bringing distinct temporalities into new configurations sets off new social processes.” (Massey, 2005) Narratives are never established and always in progress and are crucial component of the process of constitution of identities, which in the city has deep implications for minority communities, in terms of systemic oppression, cultural wealth and more.

Because of the close relations we have to these communities, it became paramount for us to think how our participants could be better supported. Loneliness and the discourse around it was already one of our concerns, so it became paramount for us to think how our participants could be better supported through a time where their isolation would increase. We believe the situated knowledges of our participants should shape improved response, and so we decided to ask them what their experience of the pandemic has been. We redesigned our methodology to function remotely, including close collaboration with our partner, London East End charity Toynbee Hall, in matters related to safeguarding and sensitive information, and more well-being checks with staff and participants.

Our lockdown stories present us with a repository of knowledge about what the day to day of the pandemic looks like for our elders, what forms of assistance they are receiving from whom, and what they need, framed in powerful, intimate ways that go beyond statistics.

“Toynbee Hall provided me with colouring books and fiction books through lockdown, and the pharmacy delivered my medication. I went out for food when I had to, thought I could sort that myself and I didn’t mind. [...] Anyway, Toynbee Hall sorted me out with a laptop! I’ve never used one before. Just getting used to it – looking at the weather, the news, some pictures, all that. I’ll never put my bank details in that thing. [...] My housing association even called to check I was alright - I thought that was lovely.”

Dodd, S. (2021) ‘Joyriding Down The Roman’

The study of narrative has been a crossroads between humanities and social sciences. (Andrews et al, 2008) CityLife positions itself in the fields of life writing as it creates non-fictional writing dealing with the recording of experience, and cultural studies as it is concerned with the production of knowledge as an activity which is always at the same time political

(Hall, 1997). Its interdisciplinary approach is inspired by disciplines and methodologies including history from below (Scott 1991), participatory action research (Fine 2016) and narrative research. (Squire et al. 2014) We are also indebted to critical sociology: Back's (2007) focus on active listening is foundational for our writers' ethics training.

Because of this project's unique approach to fostering connections between participants, the process can spill beyond the page and into everyday life. Our feedback tells us that participants felt that this opportunity to cultivate intergenerational relationships, some of which have been ongoing for years, was fruitful and improved their quality of life. Often, the participants whose wellbeing we are most concerned for, for example because they report having particularly traumatic histories, are the ones who report high levels of satisfaction. Participants have also noted their preference for one-on-one intergenerational conversations, even long-distance, to interaction on social media, which can feel fraught and polarising.

CityLife creates spaces where the right to narrate (Bhabha, 2014) is upheld so that transformative relations can arise, produces literary work that encapsulates and frames those exchanges and reads it for insights that might help us critique what is current and imagine what is next. As we conclude our storytelling sessions and begin to sift through our stories, we will take advantage of being at this unique interdisciplinary juncture. We will reflect more on where the stories sit on the spectrum between voice and representation; what changes in spatial relationships our participants have experienced during this year; and finally what we can learn and apply in the future from their experience.

"I watch the news a lot – the numbers were frighteningly high. They still are. The NHS response to COVID is amazing. Unbelievable. The nurses and doctors are so good at what they do. Nobody in my neighbourhood did the clap for carers, not that I saw or heard myself anyway. [...] My priority in life now is trying to stay healthy and listening to doctors."

Dodd, S. (2021) 'Joyriding Down The Roman'

In a time of great need, our storytellers and writers seemed to chiefly lean on health services, community organisations, family networks, and other informal connections such as the one we have with them. We will be interrogating these stories for clues about how we can foster and strengthen these connections beyond the neoliberal project of shifting the duty of care from state to communities, as well as who should be held

accountable where they haven't been supported, more so during the future developments of a continuing pandemic.

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“NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN (OR WOMEN)”: THE RISK MANAGEMENT OF OLD AGE AND THE IMPACT ON OLDER ADULTS SENSE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY & PERSONAL AUTONOMY

MARTIN J LAHEEN

When the American novelist Cormac McCarthy published *No Country for Old Men* in 2005, he could not have imagined that in 2021, the title would feature in an article on social identity in older adults’ and all without the presence of a psychotic hitman. In this article, I consider two viewpoints that influence social identity in older adults; political and social (macro) and individual (micro). For the purposes of sociological reflection, an older adult constitutes an individual of sixty-five years plus. While political strategies aimed at addressing an aging population are felt mainly through policy implementation, this type of impact is more external to the older adult. On the other hand, everyday social perceptions and the social “value” of the older adult are “closer to home”. This type of gaze is felt in everyday social interactions where an older adult’s appearance, physical ability, and patterns of consumption inform how they are situated in a social landscape. What is also important to consider is the impact of living in a social landscape where ‘anti-ageing cultures of consumption’ (Latimer, 2018, p.832) have to a large extent, socially legitimised a version of older adult identity based on *aging well*. Some might say the older adult does not have to internalise socially objectified way to age, that older adults can freely choose the parameters of their social identity. The reality however is a somewhat different as older adult identity is ‘not freestanding, but is shaped by and formative of

society' (Warren, 1998, p.12). First, let us consider macro level understandings and approaches to aging populations.

In western societies, as far as aging populations are concerned, we are to a certain degree, victims of our own success. With the exception of specific demographic cohorts, generally speaking, people in western societies are living longer lives. As an example, 'people born after 1950 can expect to live, on average, twenty to thirty years longer than their parents or grandparents' (Gusmano and Okma, 2018, p.57). There are a myriad of factors that contribute to this increased longevity. Foremost among these factors are some of the provisions of the Welfare State: access to a centralised healthcare system, and the provision of the old age pension (among others). While western governments have cause to celebrate their aging populations, they now have to consider how to finance old age per se.

Government concerns over financing old age are not a recent consideration. As far back as the mid to late 1990's, there was a political discourse around the aging 'bombshell' (Asquith, 2009, p.255). For western governments, the concern was not the inevitable explosion, as much as finding ways to prepare for the explosions aftermath. Over the ensuing years, policies around aging in western societies would become increasingly aligned to public health discourses emphasising the aging process as a life stage that required a risk managed approach at political, societal, and more importantly, at individual level. Rather than seeing aging and old age as a normative stage of physical decline (Warren, 1998), aging would be framed around a biomedical discourse that associated aging with decay (Latimer, 2018).

As a result, governments were (and continue to be) keen to include older adults as key players in risk managing their own "decaying" body. Rather than being passive recipients of the welfare state to fund their old age, older adults were (and continue to be) funnelled into internalising a 'healthy ageing' (Faß *et al.* 2020, p.1) identity as a deterrent to growing old "badly" (Latimer 2018). As a result, growing old has been 'transformed from a collective social responsibility to an individual experience' (Curryer *et al.* 2018, p. 251). What does this mean for older adults' going about their everyday lives? Can it be said that older adults' have to manage their own identity in a way deemed politically and socially acceptable, that we now live in social landscapes where you aspire to any social identity, just do not act, look, or *feel* old. I have often considered aging as a process with two distinct understandings. One understanding of aging is chronological age which is a 'basis for regulating and organising social

processes' (Wanka 2020, p.494). While chronological age has to a large part, escaped intense political and social debate, the impact of Covid 19 has put chronological age to the front of the political risk management debate (Daoust, 2020). At a micro level, older adults also have their own perceptions of chronological age based largely on 'expectations internalized during the lifetime' and through 'encounters... in everyday life' (Moser *et al.* 2011, p.675) although saying that, internalised expectations of ways to act in old age differ are not universal and differ depending on geographic region (Amin, 2017).

In western societies, there is a tendency to celebrate older adults who manage to live independently in their own homes. In contrast, evidence from South Asian countries shows that 'older adults' adaptations to changing bodies, co-residing with children, being financially, physically, and emotionally dependent on family and receiving their care are viewed as normal and 'appropriate' (Amin, 2017, p.191). It is worth considering the possibility that living independently in old age is valued more in western societies because your identity is less scrutinised. For the older adult, independent living means having more agency to determine your own social identity. Dynamic attempts to determine agency in old age came through in interviews with older military veterans with limb loss. Narrative analysis showed that maintaining independence acted a way to distance oneself from being socially minimised and been seen as a victim (Caddick *et al.* 2018). Based on my own experiences, I have noted that older women are celebrated more for living independent lives compared to older men. I do not have a definitive explanation for this. As a reader, what are your impressions in that regard? On another level, independent living in old age results from an investment in preparing for old age (Kornadt *et al.* 2019). While the idea of preparing for old age may appear aspirational, preparing for old age is a reality in western societies today. Research has shown that preparation for old age often begins at the mid-life stage in the life-course. Preparation is multifaceted and takes in aspects such as physical preparation (maintaining a healthy diet, taking regular exercise), financial preparation (achieving home ownership, having a good health insurance policy, and contributing to a private pension plan). Working on addressing these consideration in mid-life serve as a means to improve one's ability to deal with 'the challenges and changes of aging' (Kornadt *et al.* 2019, p.609). Preparing for old age is quite gendered in terms of expectations for men and women.

In western societies, compared to older men, old age is a more of an issue for older women, especially when it comes to their physical appearance. Given that 'old age is considered to bring older bodies into

focus as objects of shame and self-scrutiny', there is also of pressure on older women to meet the 'social requirements of being a woman' (Thorpe, 2018, p. 207). While there has been research conducted on the impact of gender on social identity in older adults, much of this research has focused on the female experience, although identity in older gay men is an exception (Kertzner 2001; Hajek 2014). Narrative analysis of social identity construction in older adults has shown that temporal positioning; who I was in the past, who I am in the present moment, but who I aspire to be in the future (Cook, 2018) is often used as a gauge to determine social identity. The temporal dimension was a factor for retired professional women whose social identity was found to be 'mediated by relationships to time, work identity, friends, family, and body' (Loe and Johnston 2016, p.419). Interestingly, the temporal dimension has been a positive for some older women who feel that they are 'no longer subjected to a sexualized gaze and are taken more seriously' (Isopahkala-Bouret 2017, p.267). For older adults who feel that they have not *aged well*, so what! Maybe you had a difficult life where you did not have the resources to meet social aging expectations. Life dealt you a hand of cards and you played it as best you could. Having self-compassion has the potential to enhance psychological health, as it 'focuses on self-acceptance as opposed to social comparison and self-evaluations' (Bennett *et al.* 2017, p.72).

CONCLUSION

This article has provided a superficial analysis of political and social perceptions of aging in western societies and the impact of these perceptions on social identity in older adults. I say superficial because aging in western societies is a very broad topic with an enormous amount of factors to consider. I have tried to engage with the topic through looking at a small number of macro and micro level factors that influence that social identity in older adults. As I write these words, and you are reading these words, these factors are being felt among older adults and shaping their social identity. Recently, I had a number of conversations with my mother on this topic. She is seventy-eight years old. When I told her about this article, her response was hugely insightful; "there are no old people anymore". I have interrogated the essence of that statement many times over. Being able to hear and listen to older adults is becoming ever more important given that social "futures" are becoming increasingly mediated by legitimised political discourses with decreased manoeuvrability for individual agency. No Country for Old Men (or Women) indeed.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND: TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT WITH NEW AUDIENCES

LISA MORAN

The increased secularisation of Irish society, indicated by declining participation in Catholic religious services, regular family prayer and sacramental (dis)-engagement is noted by several commentators (Inglis, 2007; Halikiopoulou, 2008; O’Flaherty, 2018). The falloff in regular church attendance in Ireland is discernible since the mid-1990s, which corresponds to a period of unprecedented economic growth, increased immigration (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2020) and the emergence of several scandals involving Catholic clergy. However, since Covid-19, the increased adoption of internet technologies by the Catholic Church such as *Church Services TV* and *Facebook* opens ceremonies up to new, international audiences. Such technologies potentially appeal to people who want to experience community and belonging associated with church membership, albeit through flexible, hand-held devices and cloud-based technologies as opposed to face-to-face ceremonies. This brief commentary discusses how the Catholic Church in Ireland responded to the new social architecture emergent during Covid-19, what kind of church we might expect to emerge after the pandemic and outlines some of the human costs of church closures and restrictions on ceremonial attendance, such as mental health issues experiences of social isolation and loneliness among rural dwellers and the elderly.

The Irish economy experienced a period of unprecedented, rapid growth between 1995 and 2008 ('The Celtic Tiger') which was subsequently followed by years of austerity, mass emigration, and fiscal consolidation (O'Flynn et al 2014). By March 12th 2020, the date of the first Covid-19 lockdown in Ireland, some sectors of the Irish economy were experiencing higher growth levels, particularly internet-based companies and an emergent 'property bubble' discernible in the Dublin housing market, which was a key contributory factor to homelessness and rising rental costs. The 'Celtic Tiger' further corresponds to a period of accelerated modernisation in Ireland which Keohane et al (2003, p. 45) conceptualized as heralding an 'uneasy co-existence of traditional and modern forms of life in contemporary Ireland'. Irish social policy frequently deployed concepts such as 'the knowledge economy' and 'information society' from the mid-1990s onwards, emphasising the expansion of science and technology in the Irish economy, education and society (McDonald and Nix, 2005). This is commensurate with increased governmental investment in STEM industries from the early 2000s onwards, and the enhanced promotion of STEM subjects in primary and secondary school curricula. These initiatives (amongst others) were seen as critical to advancing more progressive images of modern Ireland as a hub of technological endeavour, that was both open and responsive to international business and 'progressive' thinking. Despite the continued influence of the Celtic Tiger on Irish society in relation to social class, mass emigration and the impacts of 'ghost estates' on the social fabric of the Irish countryside, governmental responses in terms of well-resourced social support services to offset mental health issues associated with loss of status, property, loneliness and emigration in rural communities are generally sparse.

The Celtic Tiger further corresponds to a period of rapid diminution of church power in Ireland, and to a final separation of church and state on familial and moral issues. Despite key ideological differences, the ruling parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael adopted a liberal stance on abortion and same-sex unions, culminating in referenda on same-sex marriage in 2015 and abortion for non-medical purposes in 2018. The Catholic Bishops of Ireland advocated for voting according to conscience in the run-up to both referenda; however, most clergy spoke only briefly about such issues at religious ceremonies, which was further indicative of waning church power to speak about and intervene in such matters. The Covid-19 crisis heightened the falloff in regular church attendance due to social distancing (SD), extended closures and ceremonial postponements; however, internet technologies ensured that regular services were broadcast and were relatively accessible to global audiences through

smart phones, tablets, and other mobile devices. Ireland's lockdown, the longest in the European Union (EU), precipitated church closures, substantial restrictions in numbers attending weddings and funerals, cancellations and postponements in First Holy Communion and Confirmation ceremonies. Regular confession to cleanse the soul from sin was once an important element of Irish Catholic life. However, falling vocations meant that this was offered in fewer churches in recent years; and since Covid, confessions and penitential services at Christmas 2020 and Easter 2021 were cancelled in most communities. While online broadcasting opens ceremonies up to wider, global audiences, it may yet precipitate further decreases in regular attendance and sacramental participation. However, during the second lockdown, several priests documented that they said mass live in front of parishioners, albeit using SD measures, while others spoke out against what they saw as scapegoating in national media by a so-called 'pagan government' (McDonagh, 2020).

During the pandemic, priests also reported feelings of heightened loneliness and isolation, financial difficulties and loss of connection from parishioners' everyday lives (McGarry, 2020). Other religious events that previously took place face-to-face and were cancelled during Covid include prayer meetings in private houses which were key sources of support for older people and those living alone in rural communities. When churches reopened across the country, most recently in May 2021, the fall-off in regular church attendance appeared to be especially marked among teenagers and young adults; however the number of middle-aged persons attending mass regularly also seemed to have decreased. Numbers attending ceremonies regularly seems to be substantially higher among elderly people, although there are decreases in this cohort as well. There are clear gaps in fast-speed internet access across rural Ireland (Burke-Kennedy, 2020), largely due to shortfalls in governmental investment in rural communities, which further highlights prevailing inequalities in accessing church services online (along with many other support services as well). Despite challenges of reaching the masses, the Church has displayed remarkable resilience and is a source of hope for many people, with Pope Francis delivering an emotional appeal to Catholics globally in April 2020 which was broadcast live on internet and television. Similarly, regular Twitter posts from the Pontiff consistently call for hope, the need to address multiple oppressions wrought on the world's poorest people by Western governments and inequities with regards to vaccination access by people in the Majority World.

What kind of church can we expect to emerge post-pandemic and what type of legacy will Covid-19 leave on the Catholic Church in Ireland? This pandemic irrevocably transformed religious practice in Ireland and internationally. In Ireland the fall-off in church attendance which began long before Covid-19 is likely to continue after the pandemic ends. This is most noticeable among young people, and is not a new phenomenon. However, discernible declines among older age cohorts, further underline feelings of disengagement from the church among Irish citizenries. Research published during the first lockdown in March 2020 suggested that rates of alcohol consumption, substance abuse and domestic violence spiraled out of control in Ireland and the UK rendering many people at increased risk of abuse and neglect in their family homes (O'Regan, 2021; Naughton et al 2021). Despite economic difficulties post-Brexit which were further exacerbated by Covid, it is important that well-resourced support services are available and accessible to people of all faiths and none, that are reflexive and responsive to the complexities and unique social and emotional territories wrought during Covid times. The practical influence of the church by way of support services has waned (Fahey, 2007). However, church-based supports still have a role to play in Irish life for people who identify strongly with Catholic teachings and who may lack access to other services due to geographical location and lack of state investment.

The Catholic Church has much to offer with regards to informal and professional supports (e.g. counseling services) and fosters deeper sense of community, participation and belonging for many people. However, the rate of societal transformation in Ireland and the scale of abuse allegations continue to precipitate a deep schism between Irish citizenries and the Church, with regards to the perceived moral authority of the clergy to comment on familial issues and personal morality (Inglis, 2007). The continuing influence of Covid-19 on Irish religiosity will also depend on the success of the vaccines internationally, the rate of adoption, the direction of international government policies (e.g. mass vaccination vs. 'herd immunity'), the emergence of new variants and the perpetuation of the 'fear factor' around congregating in indoor spaces (amongst several unimagined and perhaps unimaginable factors). Similarly, transformations within the Church itself and its future direction on issues of personal morality will also affect religious teaching and patterns of (re)-engagement. With the move to online ceremonies, it seems likely that occasional participation in face-to-face Catholic mass might increase, and sporadic engagement with online ceremonies might continue, with congregations turning to mobile devices for greater flexibility with regards to where and when they watch mass and other services (e.g. 'Mass on

Demand’). The decrease in mass attendance and pilgrimages to Catholic sites globally has also exerted tremendous financial curtailments, not alone to the Church but also to businesses that largely depended on religious tourism (Ali and Cobanoglu, 2020). Indeed, the recent closure of Joe Walsh Tours after 60 years in business is indicative of the broader impacts of the pandemic. The Covid-19 virus, and our responses to it as a global community therefore presents serious challenges for the long-term sustainability of Catholicism and other faiths both in Ireland and in the wider world. However, the fact that the Catholic Church continues to exercise an important role in education systems, the media and healthcare, is indicative of its resilience and its continued global impacts. However, current debates about the moral, medical and social implications of continued involvement of church authorities in national maternity services is further indicative of the reconfiguration of the Church’s role in Irish society.

This current pandemic has wrought a deep blow on regular church attendance and religiosity in Ireland. While current participation rates since Covid are indicative of a progressively downward trajectory in the Catholic Church’s history in Ireland, the growth in online ceremonial participation further signals opportunities for church groups to engage new audiences, although the long-term impacts on regular church attendance and sacramental engagement are as yet unknown. As Europe begins to open up, it is likely that the style of church that emerges from the pandemic will be more technologically-oriented, responsive to novel modes of communication, flexible delivery and virtual engagement. Research into the impacts of the pandemic on the Catholic Church and specifically, the attitudes of the clergy to technology adoption, sacramental engagement and their perspectives on the quality of supports they offer to parishioners using mobile technologies instead of, or as complementary to direct engagement, would greatly enhance extant literature and has important societal implications. Most importantly, research into the effects of church closures and curtailments on attendance at services on mental health, isolation and loneliness of priests, lay religious and parishioners who previously relied on the church for forging and maintaining regular social contact, could potentially affect positive change for clergy and lay citizenries alike, especially for the aged and persons who lack access to viable transport links and online technologies.

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**PART 5. NARRATIVES OF INEQUALITIES
AND MARGINALISATION: DIRECT
PROVISION, COMMUNITY WEALTH
BUILDING AND EXPERIENCES IN
NATURE**

LEAVING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN LIMINALITY: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND DIRECT PROVISION IN IRELAND

AMIN SHARIFI ISALOO

INTRODUCTION

When I was living in Direct Provision, everything was repetitive and boring. The presence of CCTV cameras and security personnel, rooms, beds, toilets, showers and queues for getting food and blankets made me feel like I was in prison. There was nothing to fill the emptiness of my times or days. Because of eating, waiting and doing nothing I had to spend my time and energy for thinking about my problems in past and present. My daily conversation with other asylum seekers was usually limited to refugee status, appeals against the negative decision, deportation, and leave-to-remain on humanitarian grounds. As there were asylum seekers, who were living for a long period in the Direct Provision Centre and were suffering from the health problems, I could foresee the psychological and physical consequences of the situation. Therefore, I decided to do something to make myself busy, but asylum seekers were not permitted to work and to pursue their education. So, I started to walk up the hills near my accommodation in the daytime and sometimes at night. After a few months, the walking method worked for me and my two short stories 'A walk in the country' and 'New Ireland' were published in the book '*A Safe Harbour*' (2005). Walking keep us healthy, awake and aware, and it is just such wakefulness in concrete, embodied movement that renders walking as an experience so uniquely rich, outside self-consciousness (Szokolczai and Horvath 2020; O'Neill & Roberts 2019: 23; Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 1). Due to its

experiential component walking has strong affinities with the autoethnographic method (Szokolczai and Horvath 2020; Frey 1998).

After about fifteen years of getting my refugee status, I used the autoethnographic methodology in my book chapter 'Liminality in the Direct Provisional system - Living under extreme rules and conditions', which is published in the book '*Direct Provision: Asylum, the Academy and Activism*' (2020), to show the living conditions of asylum seekers in Direct Provision. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Ellis 2004; Maréchal 2010). In this chapter, I will use a similar method to illustrate the living conditions of asylum seekers during the Covid-19 pandemic and to foreground the voices of asylum seekers who are isolated, excluded, discriminated and marginalised in our so-called modern society.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

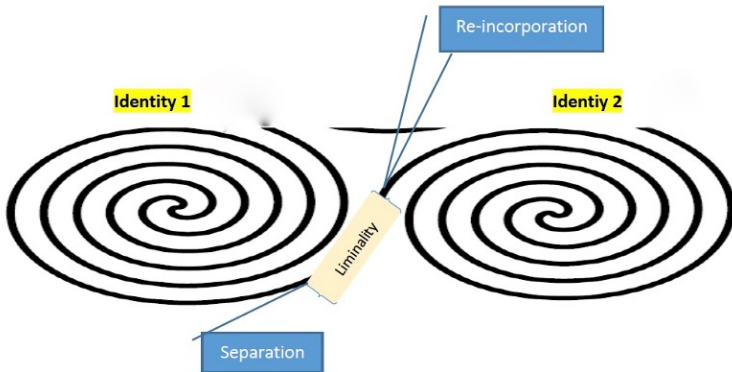
The key concerns before the pandemic are highlighted the safety and overcrowding of the physical environment, family life, social exclusion, barriers to accessing and participating in education, diet, access to play space, and significant protection concerns (IRC 2012). The main findings of Arnold's (2012) infamous report show that vicarious worry experienced by children, child poverty, lack of language support, dietary problems, families incapable of providing toys and outings for special occasions, lack of family privacy, inappropriate or non-existent space for play, inability to have other children over to visit and financial barriers to integration in schools.

My own experience and research, and other researchers such as Arnold's report (2012), Fanning and Veale (2004), Joyce and Quinn (2014), Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2016), Gusciute (2020) and Murphy (2021) illustrate that the asylum seekers and their children living in and growing up in Direct Provision are isolated and they are subjected to enforced poverty, discrimination and social exclusion. In other words, they are left in liminality.

LIMINALITY

Turner (1967) defined the term liminality as any situation or object being 'betwixt' and 'between'. In other words, liminality is being in a transition stage and a temporary break from the normal and everyday activities (Isaloo 2017).

The spirals below, which I have designed to show the rites of passage, indicates three stages in our social life that Gennep (1960) introduced them as 'separation', 'transition', and 'reincorporation' stages. Several of these spirals, which illustrate the different stages of our social life, are engraved on stones in Newgrange Passage Tomb in Meath, Ireland dates to about 3200 BCE (DK, 2019: 16). The first spiral (Identity 1) shows asylum seekers' identity before arriving to Ireland. Liminality indicates the period that asylum seekers are living in Direct Provision. The second spiral (Identity 2) illustrates asylum seekers' identity after receiving their refugee status. In fact, when the re-incorporation happens they are no longer called asylum seekers and they are legally identified as a refugee and they gain all legal rights that Irish citizens have. We all have liminality in our social life. E.g., when we are attending our graduation ceremony we are in liminality which means we are not more undergraduate students and we are not yet postgraduate students. Liminality is not negative if it is for a short time or period, but it can be dangerous when it turns to be prolonged or permanent.



The last stage of rites of passage, 'reincorporation', takes place when liminars exit from temporary liminality and everything normalises again. Otherwise, the enduring liminality can lead to a period of uncertainty, fear, and chaos. Asylum seekers are forced to live in liminality, belonging

neither here nor there (Isaloo, 2020). When I was living in Direct Provision I experienced and saw how uncertainty together with fear of receiving a negative letter and deportation are psychologically torturing asylum seekers. The only thing that could somehow help me to escape from this situation was walking and writing. I was lucky and very happy for getting refugee status so quickly (after a few months) and exiting liminality, but at the same time I was very sorry to see so many people were being turned down. I am not sure whether I could continue with walking and writing (or survive) if I would be kept in a prolonged liminality.

DURING THE PANDEMIC

The term ‘liminality’ can help us to understand and analyse the liminal period that asylum seekers and their children experience currently during the Covid-19 crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic arrived when asylum seekers were in a liminal time and created another yet another form of liminality for them in Direct Provision. The lockdown has already increased mental health issues and has put the families in a much more difficult situation for keeping children at home (OCO 2020). The situation for asylum seekers and their children became worse than ever and the pandemic created further negative consequences for their safety and education (ibid), which were precarious even before the outbreak of covid-19. The discrimination, exclusion and isolation of asylum seekers at this challenging time increased sharply. For example, after a few weeks of the lock down in Ireland, the government announced that asylum seekers living in Direct Provision who worked pre-pandemic are not eligible for Covid-19 support (Pollock, 2020) and will not receive the State’s Covid-19 pandemic unemployment payment (€350 per week). I could imagine how difficult is living in Direct Provision with two children during the lock down with the €38.80 weekly allowance, but I could not find a right or at least a convincing answer to the question ‘why asylum seekers who were working before the pandemic are discriminated’.

Before the pandemic I could easily meet asylum seekers and refugees and walk with them. In my experience, walking and talking is the best method to know each other and to understand the real individual and social problems and narratives. Indeed, it creates a healthy and participatory conversation and activity. Due to the pandemic and the Irish government restrictions, it was very difficult to meet asylum seekers and to talk about their living condition. I could sometimes meet them briefly when I was going for a short walk, but it was not enough to conduct biographical research. Particularly, as I did not introduce myself as a

researcher to them, using covert observation and interview could encounter ethical issues and concerns. Therefore, in this part of the chapter I use narratives of asylum seekers and their children published in two reports. The first report was published by the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) in August 2020 and entitled “Powerless”. By conducting research with 418 people living in 63 different Direct Provision and emergency centres the report assesses mental health, stigma and racism, children, schooling and parenting of individuals and families living in Direct Provision during the pandemic. The second report is published by the Ombudsman for the Children’s Office (OCO) in December 2020 to reflect children’s views and experiences of living in Direct Provision during the Covid-19 pandemic.

PANDEMIC NARRATIVES

Reviewing narratives of asylum seekers published in these reports illustrate that during the early period of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of asylum seekers were unhappy about lack of adequate emotional support, lack of information, transport cut off, and lack of consultant who knows their language; but later, during the school closures period, they were more unhappy about not having devices, particularly laptops or computers, for the children to connect to their school, English language issues, wellbeing and health, and lack of emotional connections. Below are a few of quotations from asylum seekers and their children.

‘In the Direct Provision Centre it was hard because they stopped buses and everything... We just had to stay at home which made me feel so lazy’ (OCO 2020: 4).

‘My experience is so saddening. There are 22 Covid cases here. We cry out to be moved for safety in vain. I am still living in an infected room with my roommate tested positive of Covid... I am always in a state of fear’ (IRC 2020: 39).

‘If my mum knew English that would be great because I would understand it way better. My mum could explain it, the homework...’ (OCO 2020: 5).

Asylum seekers with children are living in a small bedroom without bathroom, kitchen and toilet. It is extremely difficult for children to concentrate on their online education, even if they have access to a laptop or computer. This becomes very serious when there are two or

more children in the room and they need to access online classes at the same time.

'Plenty of adults and children living under the same roof, people share a lot of facilities that may not allow proper social distancing' (IRC 2020: 19).

'Now our children... do not receive education and cannot study remotely because we do not have the opportunity to do so. It is impossible... where there are 4 people in a locked room' (IRC 2020, p. 47).

'They (children) are going bananas. Mental health is compromised. Showing signs of distress living in one room' (IRC 2020: 51).

'I had class online but it was very hard to do it because of the WIFI. I could not log in most of the times...' (OCO 2020: 4-5)

'It (internet) was bad... I would hear the questions late so I would answer late...The internet sometimes really messed with us' (OCO 2020: 5).

Living in Direct Provision and the uncertainty associated with it causes different forms of physical problems and illnesses but also creates mental illnesses (Weigersma et al. 2011; Gitterman 2014; Isaloo 2020), which according to Costello et al. (2003) might work similarly to the theory of vicious cycles of poverty. Living in liminality together with poor living conditions and the Covid-19 pandemic makes the life of asylum seekers and their children unbearable. Normally, asylum seekers suffer from psychological and physical consequences of being in liminality, which equates to belonging nowhere and doing nothing (Isaloo 2020). These difficulties and problems in the life of asylum seekers got further multiplied during the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions.

Due to the restrictions, children in Direct Provision cannot go to sport and leisure places and they are bored and stressed. It is very difficult for children to learn their parents' culture, arts and skills. For example, in some of the Direct Provision centres it is impossible for parents to cook for their children and/or to teach them how to cook. Parents who already have refugee status cannot find places to rent because of the rejection of the rent allowance by landlords, the housing crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, there are not any support systems to help them. 'Like all children globally, refugee children deserve a fair chance in life, and to see their rights fully realized. Though their lives have been disrupted by violence, displacement and now a pandemic, their chances

for a dignified future will be bolstered if they have equitable access to the support and services they need' (UNHCR 2020).

The Covid-19 virus does not discriminate its victims, but policy makers do. Indeed, the pandemic is regularly used as a scapegoat mechanism to slow down asylum seekers' applications. Asylum seekers and their children who have received a refusal or a deportation letter are stressed, depressed and faced psychological issues. These harsh policies and short sighted decisions violate the right to seek and receive protection, and children's human rights. Some stories of asylums seekers are heart breaking, particularly their fear of persecution in their home countries. Indeed, these inhuman polices create a schismogenic process which can result to the walling of asylum seekers, particularly during the deportation that usually intimidation, force and violence are involved.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the impact of Covid-19 in the economic, political and socio-cultural areas, vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers have suffered more than ever and they have experienced immediately the negative effects of the national and international policies. We are living in liminality, between pre Covid-19 and post Covid-19, which is a fundamental cause of uncertainty. If the uncertainty in a liminal period develops into a long-term or prolonged uncertainty, it can lead to pathological mental health consequences. Asylum seekers have experienced this before and particularly during the spread of the pandemic.

The Covid-19 crisis, along with the negative effects it has, also strengthened the sense of caring and sharing, which are the bases of understanding solidarity in our society. For example, a group of asylum seekers living in Direct Provision in Cork have started to manufacture washable masks for use in combatting the spread of Covid-19 (Roche, 2020), doctors and nurses worked hard to help others, and people donated much by way of time and money during the Covid-19 crises. When caring, sharing and gift giving are repeated by people and encouraged and praised by others, over time it becomes a social norm and valued and then a belief which is necessary to keep social relations and life healthy and to expand social solidarity. Thus, caring and sharing must become a cultural element and social value in order to expand. To defeat the Covid-19 pandemic and also to rebuild in post Covid-19 times, policy makers and decision makers must show genuine care for the whole community, without any discrimination and exclusion, and must strengthen

the sense of caring, sharing and gift giving to reduce inequalities and create fairer systems.

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RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE AND RE-IMAGINING SHARED URBAN FUTURES: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN RESEARCHING MULTICULTURE IN THE COVID-19 ERA

ZANA VATHI

INTRODUCTION

The importance of green areas and grassroots community gardens has increased due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wellbeing and community life. There is now a greater need to restore social contact and cohesion, particularly in ethnically diverse areas that have suffered from other urban and socio-political traumas and are more likely to feel the consequences of the pandemic. This paper explores the potential of biographic and narrative methods to realise fieldwork in green spaces in marginalised urban areas, with a focus on multiculturalism and the impact of COVID-19. Regenerating urban areas have a fast changing landscape – both of their material features and social relations. Green areas and grassroots community gardens are even more important in disadvantaged neighbourhoods as they counter some of the negative effects of poverty and environmental degradation. Taking the cue from empirical research in this area and a project on Toxteth, Liverpool that focused on these themes, this paper engages with the following questions: how can common, community-related narratives develop in the context of urban diversity in the COVID-19 era? To what extent can they

uncover differing attitudes or new recognitions towards difference, interaction and belongingness in fast transforming urban communities? In what ways can narratives be engaged with in combination with other methods? The paper advocates for biographical and narrative methods that are underpinned by explorations of place through walking interviews and visual material engaging both native and migrant locals.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND NARRATIVE METHODS IN MIGRATION RESEARCH

Biographical and life course methodological perspectives are long standing approaches in migration research. The Chicago School developed classic urban research through the life-course narratives of migrants, which were then utilized to exemplify and further analyse societal facts at different scales. An increased interest in the subjectivity of migrants' accounts and in the interrelation between varying contexts and lives kept the biographical and life course methodologies in the mainstream migration studies since the 1970s onwards (Gomensoro and Paredos 2017). At a deeper level, these methods have the potential to uncover the complex relationships between individual consciousness and the cultural, social and material frameworks within which people live their lives, including the links between the private and the public, the intimate and the political (Vathi and Burrell 2021). Their focus on historical time and place, linked lives and agency make these methodologies not only excellent tools to understand society through micro-level narrations, but also powerful political tools in recognizing migrants as actors of social presents and futures, countering the dehumanizing effects of restrictive immigration regimes and various forms of discrimination at societal level.

Understanding the role of biographical and narrative research methodologies as tools to conduct migration research should take into account two key temporal dimensions, alongside the wellknown focus of these methodologies on diachronic time (Finlay and Stockdale 2003). First, the future is critical to migrant imaginaries and aspirations, underpinning migration decision-making, the journeys and migrants' strategies in the host country, as well as the way they perceive their relationship with the second generation. Indeed, biographical approaches have long recognised that migration is a critical and transformative part of a person's biography as it is dynamically linked with a person's past, as well as their present and future (Halfacree and Boyle 1993).

Secondly, these imaginaries are embedded and, at the same time, challenged by the historicity of context where migrants are located. And even though a key principle that underpins biographical and narrative research is that individual lives are set within their wider historical and social contexts (Roberts 2002), in the context of migration narratives, these lives are best situated and understood in place. This is particularly important in the COVID-19 era. Despite its global dimensions, the impact of the pandemic materialize very differently in national, regional and local contexts, but the latter can be easily overshadowed. Critical early analysis of the effects of COVID-19 warns that as the pandemic threatens the existing regimes and systems across societies, long-standing issues, especially those linked with race and ethnic inequalities, are overlooked (Kallio et al 2020).

BIOGRAPHIES OF MIGRATORY LIVES, NARRATIVES OF PLACE: GREEN AREAS AND MULTICULTURE

Place is closely linked with the emergence, experience and analysis of multiculturalism – or ‘living together with difference’ (Neal et al 2013) - in urban areas. Important in the study of ethnic and migrant relations, it also enables the study of materialities and the everydayness of diverse localities. Nonetheless, the focus on green space is recent. In the UK, interest in green areas and social relations has been predominantly focused on parks (Neal et al 2015). The focus on community gardens enables the study of place, conviviality, materialities etc. as these gardens afford the encounter in the conditions of banal micro-socialities (Amin 2002). Community gardens are a particularly interesting research area within this umbrella of community green projects and are “widely recognised as an effective grassroots response to urban disinvestment and decay” (Kurtz, 2001). Ultimately, green spaces are seen as an important site to study conviviality – as Neal et al (2015) put it, they enable the study of social relations and the study of the role of materialities and environment. The concept of ‘elective practice’ denotes the enabling effects of parks in terms of intercultural contact. But parks and community gardens can also be very unsafe and sites of exclusion and racial harassment.

Research has found that green areas are essential for migrants’ footholds in the city (Rishbeth et al 2019); for the newcomers, green areas can relieve the negative effects of the bureaucratic constraints of asylum and refugee process. Across the board, they majorly benefit by finding

connectedness, respite and restoration, as well as developing familiarity. However, this is also the area where tension is mostly observable in local communities where migrants settle. The positive contribution of green areas to migrants' lives is closely linked with the 'hostile environment' policies, as they encourage daily mobilities and development of belonging. Yet, there is little understanding of difference as informing experiences of urban outdoor environments (Rishbeth et al 2018). The pre-COVID research has uncovered tensions in the way migrants and locals engage with green areas, with the former experiencing anxiety when attempting inhabiting and mixing in these areas.

Rishbeth et al (2019: 127) developed the term 'curated sociability', in part to highlight the varied strategies, technologies, and projects that can be used to support asylum seekers and refugees in visiting and benefiting from urban green space, with particular consideration given to the high levels of social isolation of migrant groups. Curating refers to '... different forms of mediating green space experiences that involve engaging in social practices that have a purpose of providing some type of connection (be that person to person, or person to place)'.

CASE STUDY: MULTICULTURE AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN TOXTETH, LIVERPOOL

Research conducted in Toxteth, Liverpool has demonstrated the value of biographical and narrative research in uncovering native and migrant locals' narratives on multiculturalism. Toxteth is a particular locality with its own distinct historicity – the time dimension is complex here due to the urban trauma and remembrance of the 1981 riots (Vathi and Burrell 2021, forthcoming). A neighbourhood approach has been primed for the study of ethnic diversity at local level (e.g. Pastore and Ponzo 2016; Wimmer 2013). Biographical and narrative research consisted of sitting and walking interviews, combined with visual ethnographic research, and took place in May-October 2015.

Walking interviews are increasingly used in research focusing on dwelling and inhabitation of urban space (Myers 2008), and are considered an optimal method to study the way that physical environment, such as buildings, streets, and neighborhoods, is 'mediated by ongoing interior dialogues and life-worlds rooted in a person's current existential concerns' (Irving 2010: 24). Walking interviews have been successfully

employed by research conducted with migrants (Rishbeth and Powell 2013).

Visual material in the form of photos was collected, documenting the qualities of urban space and aspects that talk about the links between place identity, material space and belongingness. The main method employed was photo taking and elicitation. Chaplin (2004: 36) maintains that ‘a photograph is “taken”, but at the same time it, “made”. It does constitute a trace, but how that trace is visually presented is the result of many subjective – often “aesthetic” – decisions’.



Photo 1. ‘Growing Granby’ initiative

In combination, these methods generated narratives of different temporalities of migration by bringing biographical material that plays a role in terms of appreciation, belongingness and wellbeing. Walking interviews embedded narratives of local belongingness in place and, at the same time, generated new cognitive registers of the relationship with the materialities and the physical environment of localities where migrants settle. They revealed that the way the native locals relate to the physical environment is closely linked with the discursive aspects of place – with

the riots and significant state-led regeneration being key to these (Vathi and Burrell 2021). In the case of migrants, these interviews revealed the developing sense of place attachment based on the significance of key urban infrastructural areas for their connections in the area.

These combined well with sitting interviews that employed retrospective methods to uncover the biographical and life-course perspectives of migrants. Social capital – the capital in the countries of origin prior to migration and the capital accumulated as part of interactions with the local environment following migration – appears to play a major role how links with the area’s materialities and urban infrastructure, including green space and community green projects are related to; for example, the way they utilised parks, the extent to which they were interested in green community projects. Their experiences appear also as gendered; a group of migrant women suggested that the way they relate to parks has to do with their motherhood and child rearing responsibilities, despite the overall aesthetic of the physical environment there:

M: This is nice. Very nice, it's tranquil, it's lovely getting back to nature.

A: I was pleasantly surprised that Princes Park – because I'd never been, you know, especially at the back end with all the Georgian houses, it's a beautiful area! Really, really nice, I liked it.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND NARRATIVE METHODS IN GREEN AREAS AND COVID-19

The distinctions that the project uncovered between and among the local natives and migrants in terms of their relationship with urban space and green areas and projects warrant further explorations. However, isolation and constrained local lives as a result of lockdown render green spaces as key urban infrastructures to realize these local mobilities and connections during the pandemic, despite the noted inequalities of access and enjoyment of parks pre-Covid-19. Research in these areas has the potential to enable, channel and thread local narratives that go beyond the divisions based on ethnic and social diversity.

Community ‘green’ projects are linked to the interrelated concepts of social inclusion, social health, social cohesion, community participation and empowerment. Therefore, there is potential that could be harnessed to develop common community narratives on (re)-claiming public space and (re)-imagining shared urban futures. The importance of gardening as

a mental-health activity is well documented (Wiseman and Sadlo 2015), not least because of the physical benefits of exercise and the community benefits of doing things together which help with trauma recovery. Coming together in narratives of healing following COVID-19 would best be realised through biographical and narrative methods.

The practices of curating (Rishbeth et al 2019: 127) are particularly important in the Covid-19 era as they would allow for common narratives on green areas, following the positive effects of 'elective practice' (Neil et al, 2018) as parks and green areas have been essential to the pandemic strategies of survival and resilience. Social isolation coupled with the extended periods of lockdown makes narratives important, but also more difficult to access and for the participants to articulate. Unlocking common narratives of (re)claiming public space can then generate a more holistic research on inequality and participation in the context of urban social relations. As it is well known in biographical and narrative research, the intersection between an individual's life and a specific historical moment 'provides insight into the ways that particular lives take the shape they do and how each woman makes sense of her world' (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 21).

The engagement of biographical and narrative methodologies in this area has clear research and policy importance. There is a lack of data on the importance of green areas pre-Covid-19 (Neate 2016). The Foresight Future of Cities project makes a case for 'the delivery of comprehensive multifunctional green infrastructure' for UK citizens as 'they need places close to home [...] where their physical and mental problems can be addressed' (Kirby and Russell, 2015: 1), and this has been essential throughout the pandemic.

A Global Society on Migration, Ethnicity, Race and Health Conference (Gruer et al 2021) has shown that the approach of nation-states towards migrants' wellbeing during the pandemic has been that of bio-security and not that of a right to health. Facing various issues of access to healthcare before the pandemic, economic migrants and refugees have not been meaningfully included in the emergency resource allocation during the past 12 months. Furthermore, the attitude of nation-states towards measuring the impact of COVID-19 in relation to race and ethnicity varies greatly, and sometimes there are also differences between states and local authorities. Biographical and narrative methods would therefore be useful to the grounding biographies of (im)-mobility and disruption and the temporalities of these in place, generating shared narratives of healing.

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TRANSFORMATIVE STORYTELLING WITHOUT BORDERS: THE CASE OF OLIVE

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PHIONA ACHOLA, ASHEN FERNANDO, PEARLGIN
LINDIWE GOBA, THABO MAKUYANA, JOEL MORDI AND
LANDISWA JESSICA PHANTSI

“Sawubona, hello

You, and you am talking to. Listen: once you were a zygote in the womb, barely visible to the human eye. At three weeks, embryo formation initiates. The eye, brain, spinal column and nervous system develop and are virtually complete. At four weeks, guess what? The muscles, arms and legs bud and WOW, the neocortical cells develop. The organ feature requires food for nourishment to develop.

Consider this, a womb, a place for learning. You contain more information than 50 sets of the 33-volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica.”

—Pearlgin Lindiwe Goba

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Professor Corinne Squire started a university course in the Calais Jungle called Life Stories (Hall et al. 2019), using narratives to engage refugees stuck at the UK border in storytelling. This took the form of reflections and dialogues about finding a place and voice and the future of our common existence in Europe (Godin et al. 2017).

Professor Squire's award-winning work inspired further refugee education projects by the University of East London including the Open Learning Initiative (OLive) course, funded by the Erasmus+ programme and aiming to support refugees and asylum seekers to access universities. What Freire (1968) identifies as a traditional relationship between teacher, who narrates, and students, who are narrated to, was clearly not fit for purpose. Storytelling has tremendous value as a form of critical pedagogy.

*"When you were much younger, your Mother said
'My darling daughter Elizabeth,
Myrrh, silver and gold I do not have, but I will give you an Education.'
Considering she didn't go to school herself,
You remember crying your dear heart out.
Your love for boiled eggs, sweets, writing and favourite A B Cs
Never minding the skies
Never minding the jacaranda and acacia trees
Education felt like chasing and catching the wind
Like rising up from the ashes and coming out of the shadows."
—Elizabeth Phiona Achola*

While the central aim of OLive is to develop the students' academic skills, support them through the university application system and inform them about funding, it also endeavours to provide a space for intellectual and creative exchange in lives that often do not have one because of structural barriers and pressures. In addition to academic English and IELTS preparation, IT and academic skills and subject-specific lectures, it has always incorporated multi-modal narrative pedagogies, using poetry, drama, photography, public speaking and creative writing to root education in life stories.

The Life Writing course attempted to offer approaches to processing experience that were ethical and safe (Esin and Lounasmaa, 2020) and provide tools to organise the sometimes fragmentary narratives arising from the potential trauma of forced migration. Education is a subject that comes up often during these creative practice sessions, no less because the UK university application system requires students to craft a statement detailing their personal journey. This is in itself a complex issue as the students have to evaluate whether and how to present themselves as marginalised or traumatised in narratives which will have an impact on their right to stay, a process which can be approached strategically but also have psychological consequences. (Schuman and Bohmer, 2004)

*"Standing still
feeling trapped in a prison, halted by the regime*

*Imposing treacherous margins, living within borders.
Opining vociferously!
Dismissed by the oppressive regime every time.
Unable to navigate my way out.
My eyes watching the sunrise and sunset, the clock ticking away and
away
time passing me by
like sand passing through the hourglass.*

*My life standing still
and halted.*

*Different oppressive regimes taking turns in rulership
dominating my life and using their position of power.”
—Landiswa Jessica Phantsi*

The relationship between autobiography and history explored in Calais is key in the autobiographical approach as it allows students to situate themselves in the context of their experiences of conflict, colonial power and resistance, identity-based struggles and the current, hostile political situation in the UK (Bhattacharyya et al. 2021). Being able to construct, own and share one’s narrative on their own terms can help students take stock of and develop coping strategies towards the structural barriers and psychosocial needs embedded in their lives and their educational experiences (Lounasmaa, Esenowo and OLIVE students, 2019) and frame often fraught experiences in their society of arrival. As many of the students found themselves closer to their goals than they ever had been, but still in many cases barred from reaching them, they found and consolidated ways to express their experience and voice their concerns.

The Life Writing course led to a student group presenting creative work at conferences in the UK and Europe, including in other locations where OLIVE programmes exist. Students from this course have also contributed to the Refugee Education Initiatives teacher training guide about creating and promoting welcoming learning environments, utilising their unique insight about critical pedagogy in practice to frame what needs students would need covered by future teachers. (Masserano et al, 2020) Thus, narratives are shown to be productive, shaping the social as well as being shaped by it, producing situated and embodied knowledges which may yet have an influence in microsocial and micropolitical ways. (Squire et al. 2014)

“You’ll remember the smell of the teargas every time you pass a smoker.

You'll remember the sounds of a grown man being tortured, every time you hear an adult scream.

You'll remember the smell of burning flesh, every time someone starts a barbecue.

You'll remember the smell and sound of live gunfire, every time someone lets off a firework.

You'll remember the loud roar of the crowd, every time someone scores a goal.

You'll remember that beautiful sunset and sunrise of Mama Africa, when the sun goes down at 3pm instead of the predictable 6pm.

In the U.K. you'll not be allowed to learn.

In the U.K. you'll not be allowed to communicate.

In the U.K. you'll not be allowed to work.

In the U.K. you'll not be allowed to travel.

In the U.K. you'll not be allowed to have friends.”

—Thabo Makuyana

In 2020, the 8th OLLive course was ending when the pandemic hit. Covid-19 might look like a leveller; however, researchers such as Winston Morgan (2020) point out how the pandemic and the measures introduced to contain it have highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities, as the plight of many has now become a public health issue. Among others, people living in crowded accommodation, in need of domestic violence services or homeless, as well as children living in two households or receiving free school meals, saw their plight, which did not begin with the pandemic, become a public health issue, highlighting the disadvantages already woven into societal structures. While the full impact on refugees and asylum seekers in the UK remains to be documented, it is clear that pre-existing poverty, the impossibility to socially distance in lodgings, lack of documentation preventing them from accessing healthcare and other barriers have been worsened by the pandemic. Some find the now generalised curtailing of freedom of movement a bitter irony.

“At the beginning it may have sounded like a Hollywood movie. You will even watch some post apocalyptic movies during lockdown to relate to what’s going on. You will stock food and toiletries for weeks, wash your hands for 20 seconds frequently, get scared for your life.

As an asylum seeker, you will see non-asylum seekers experiencing the same as us through lockdown: they will have to stay at home, they will not be able to travel and work legally.

Just because the government changes laws whenever they want, we are the ones who get crushed. And as an asylum seeker this applies hugely.”

—Ashen Fernando

When OLIve began again in October 2020, it was organised online. While it could not provide physical access to university campuses, which was a trademark part of its approach to fostering inclusion, it still provided the same classes as far as possible. Staff were concerned that digital poverty (Esenowo, forthcoming), the difficulty of finding space in often cramped living conditions and similar issues would impact attendance, but the students showed extraordinary perseverance: numbers were similar or better than in the past. They shared stories of continued and deepening isolation while remarking on the political context. Narrative and the imagination play a key role in critical thought: “no less is at stake here than our freedom, which relies on our ability to see things not only as they are, but as they are not.” (Andrews, 2013 p. 5)

*Access to education is weaponized against you
Only a few can access education as 2020 highlights their scheme of
systemic exclusion
Digital poverty is the new normal for us
Awakening of disparities, Black Lives Matter will go global
For George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and more
Healthcare even more political, who gets to receive what, always has
been
Especially PoCs, in record numbers ye shall fall
Brace yourself, this theme park is packed with highs and lows
Be brave, you've always been
And count yourself lucky*

—Joel Mordi

We cannot reflect on the ways in which the pandemic impacted us without acknowledging that the person who inspired this work was made compulsorily redundant while we were writing this paper. The University of East London is one of many UK universities using the guise of the pandemic to cull staff and programmes no longer deemed profitable. After 25 years of service supporting and teaching thousands; mentoring junior scholars like ourselves; contributing to establish the field of narrative research and founding and running the internationally

celebrated Centre for Narrative Research with Professor Molly Andrews, who was also made redundant, Professor Corinne Squire was told her work is no longer required. We hope that these voices show otherwise, and their work in co-constructing spaces of transformative story-telling continues.

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COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING: STORIES OF PEOPLE, PLACE AND INSTITUTIONS

VICTORIA FOSTER

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses research carried out in Skelmersdale, North West England. Skelmersdale is a new town which was designated in 1961. Located in rural West Lancashire, it was intended to house tens of thousands of people who had been living in cramped conditions in local Liverpool following the post-war baby boom. Compact housing and industrial estates are built on a complex roundabout system, and the 1960s admiration for Brutalist architecture can be seen in the exposed concrete and stark, geometric shapes of the buildings. The fusion of cutting-edge architecture and green spaces held much promise, but elements of Skelmersdale have arguably not stood the test of time. The late 1970s saw an economic downturn which led to many large industrial employers leaving Skelmersdale. Since then, poverty has increased, as have the associated issues of crime and drug misuse. Its seven wards are not only the most deprived in West Lancashire, but also the most deprived in England (Collins, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in further social and economic damage.

Funded through the Research England's QR-Strategic Priorities Fund, the research employed a community wealth building lens to explore the benefits of supporting small local enterprises. Community wealth building is an ethical, people-centred approach to economics which involves growing wealth in local communities and keeping it there. The research, which fed directly into the development of the local council's strategy on community wealth building, took a qualitative, participatory approach and focused on participants' stories. These stories drew attention to the processes, practices and relationships involved in the economy. In

particular they highlighted the role of the university in its locality. Edge Hill University is located 5 miles away from Skelmersdale and is one of the West Lancashire's anchor institutions.

The article begins by outlining some of the principles of community wealth building and the necessity of supporting a 'generative' economy. It then describes the methodology employed and explains why this was a good fit with the project. This is followed by the presentation of some of the research findings which suggest that small yet thoughtful changes to processes can have a big impact on people's lives. This has never been more important given the COVID-19 pandemic which can be understood as much an economic problem as a health one.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

This method of progressive economics began in the USA and is currently gathering momentum across the UK where the 'Preston model' is the best-known example (Preston City Council, n.d.). The Centre for Economic Strategies (CLES), a Manchester-based think tank, has been at the vanguard of UK approaches, motivated by the 'part failure' of traditional approaches to economic development which involve the assumption that as the economy grows, 'wealth for all will flow' (CLES 2020). Instead, it is the few who are gaining incredible wealth at the expense of the many; wealth that is generated in one location is extracted by large national and international – and often offshore – companies (CLES 2020). A community wealth building model aims to mitigate this and identifies a number of ways of keeping wealth in communities. One is to focus on the economic power of an area's anchor institutions which, as well as universities, include hospitals, local authorities and large businesses. Another is to develop the local SME, social enterprise and co-operative sector. Plural models of ownership can be understood as rich in biodiversity, unlike the monoculture model of industrial-age ownership (Kelly, 2013). They provide foundations for a 'generative economy' which generates 'the conditions for life to thrive, an economy with a built-in tendency to be socially fair and ecologically sustainable' (Kelly, 2013).

Small businesses are more adept at meeting local needs and enable communities to 'regain a measure of local economic democracy and control' (Dubb, 2016: 141). The FSB (2012) identified that for very pound spent with a local SME roughly 63p is recycled in the local economy versus 40p spent with a larger company. SMEs and social enterprises also tend to have a social conscience. Power to Change research into

community businesses – a sub sector of social enterprises that are strongly rooted in their communities - found that many of these organisations serve the most marginalised groups in society, such as those who are disabled or have learning difficulties (19% of businesses) and the homeless community (7%) (cited in CLES, 2019: 5). Wellbeing is the *purpose* of an economy that is focused on community, rather than ‘a hoped for and, at best, secondary outcome’ (Community Economies Collective, 2019: 56).

METHODOLOGY

The research aimed to highlight some of the work of Skelmersdale’s small local enterprises and the contribution they make to community wealth building, and to better understand the range and scale of barriers that small local enterprises face, including participation in the supply chains of major organisations. It employed a participatory methodology to prioritise local perspectives and interests, mirroring the ethos of community wealth building. It also aimed to make positive change. Such a stance is contrary to ‘top-down’ approaches (Humphreys, 2008: 51) and those which claim to be ‘value-free’ (Foster, 2016). The storied approach of the research emphasises that economics is not an objective science, but rather is ‘embedded in social relations’ (Community Economies Collective, 2019: 56). Two local women with knowledge and experiences of small local enterprise were recruited to contribute to question design and data collection and were given an introduction to research methods and ethics. The project also funded two bespoke half-day training sessions led by CLES, one to provide the project team with grounding in community wealth building, the other to deliver an introduction to the local council.

A purposive sample was employed in the research, and participants (*n*14) were recruited because of their involvement in the sector. They included leaders of SMEs and social enterprises as well as representatives from the area’s anchor institutions. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants. These were loosely structured and aimed to draw out participants’ stories. Stories offer new ways of knowing and enable identification with other lives (Ledwith and Springett, 2010: 108). They do not have to be remarkable to do so, and although we were told tales of transformation, we also heard more mundane accounts that might be understood as ‘small stories’ (Bamberg, 2006). Whilst these stories might contribute to the larger goal of creating a kinder, more caring approach to economics, they could also be seen as stressing the need to understand the economy in an everyday sense. McInroy (2014) notes that the word

'economy' can be traced back to the Greek word *oikonomos* – 'one who manages a household'. This idea of the economy as 'intimate and social' has for the most part been lost in discussions of modern-day economic; indeed, the ever-expanding capitalist system has consistently undermined such social relations as mutual care and interdependence (Community Economies Collective, 2019: 56).

STORIES OF PEOPLE, PLACE, AND INSTITUTIONS

The overall theme of the interviews was participants' passion for the local area and their desire to see it flourish. The everyday stories told encapsulated the human energy involved in the SME sector and suggested that not only there was there a will for developing new ways of local economics using community wealth building principles, but also that some of this work was already taking place. It just needed establishing more firmly into the culture of the area and its profile raising. One participant, a local small business owner, told a succession of stories about the lack of visibility of small businesses in the area and how he had recently introduced a group of acquaintances to a local diner which they had not known existed. He had made another trip to the eatery immediately prior to his interview and his description of his lunch experience encapsulates the idea of community wealth building:

I was just eating it thinking this is so amazing, and it cost me like £3. Like I would have paid more for a Big Mac. And one, the money's going to stay right here in Skem and boost the local economy, and the other one is basically just going off to a multinational.... And I got to have a really good conversation with the owners of the business. We discussed the future, plenty of different stuff, had a laugh and a joke. You just don't get that same level of interaction with McDonalds.

He is working on an online local business directory to spread the word about these businesses, but believes the council also has a role in their promotion given the economic and social benefits they offer. The council officers we spoke to discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic had drawn their attention to smaller businesses because they were involved in administering the government's business grants. These businesses had previously, according to participants, 'flown under the radar,' but they expressed commitment to nurturing these new relationships.

All of the businesses and enterprises involved in the research spoke ardently about their desire to improve local people's lives materially and

socially. One social enterprise, *The Sewing Rooms*, trains and employs local women to make soft furnishings for several hotel chains and for IKEA. During the pandemic, they have produced fabric face masks for large organisations. The money from these enterprises goes directly to funding a host of social programmes including one aimed at new and young mothers where participants are shown how to make baby mats and papooses. When the papooses are finished, they are put to good use during guided walks for mothers and babies through the local nature reserve. Another programme, *the Silver Sewers*, aimed at women over 50 who may have had physical or mental health struggles, be out of work or bereaved, has become a much-needed peer-support network. The enterprise fits with Swersky and Plunkett's (2015: 5) definition of a community business:

[T]hey have a deep and rich understanding of their local areas. They are founded out of passion for community improvement. Their leaders, volunteers, and staff are deeply embedded in their locality. Not only does this mean they are well-placed to address their community's needs, but also that they are able to tap into local sources of knowledge, expertise and funding.

The owner of another local social enterprise, which uses dance to work with people with additional needs, attributes much of its success to the fact that she has reached out and accessed as much support as possible: 'If I don't know the answer, I'll ask for it. And I ask for support and I'm able to tap into what's out there.' She has managed to navigate a range of formal and informal support networks available to small businesses and enterprises. These tend not to be well publicised and one of the recommendations of our research is that clearer signposting is needed. She has also accessed support from Edge Hill University which is funding her to undertake a leadership qualification with the Chartered Management Institute. This programme, part funded by the European Social Fund, is open to Lancashire-based leaders of SMEs, particularly women and those from other unrepresented groups. The university is also offering SMEs student placements that are intended to be mutually beneficial.

At Edge Hill and the other anchor institutions we spoke to, there was an understanding of the need to prioritise social value in procurement strategies. A participant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner told a transformational story of the building of a new police station. The multi-million-pound contract was heavily weighted with social value. A North West firm was engaged and was set targets in terms of

how many apprenticeships it had to offer. It had to engage with the local college, specifically with groups of unemployed young people and ‘give them a trade’. The company was also set targets for where they recruited their plasterers, electricians and plumbers from: they had to be within a 10-mile radius of the town. The project had a significant impact on the local economy for a good two years.

Environmental issues are becoming increasingly important to Edge Hill University’s procurement strategy, and this means buying local where possible to reduce the carbon footprint. Buying local also supports the local economy, and the member of staff we spoke to who leads on procurement in Facilities Management, recognised the fit with the principles of community wealth building after attending a knowledge exchange event that the project team had delivered in Skelmersdale. In the research interview, he discussed the need to better support smaller local businesses to apply for valuable contracts. Unlike larger companies who are likely to have dedicated staff to complete paperwork, small business owners have to find time in the evenings, usually after working all day. He noted the difference it had made to small businesses when he experimented with increasing the length of time for tender returns to a 6-week period incorporating Christmas and New Year (when most organisations would be working less). The experiment was a success and a number of local SMEs responded to the exercise. The words of another participant, who works for the Council, describe the potential benefits that such seemingly insignificant changes could produce:

[I]f you've got local businesses, or if you've got smaller local enterprises, then ... as they grow, they will naturally grow within the community, like a tree really... bringing hopefully more employment from, you know, local young people developing skills, and then it's that kind of almost like self-fulfilling prophecy as well.... Business and organisations are people, and if they invest in the local area, then do you know what? You're going to have a better, more successful and vibrant area.

Community wealth building provides very tangible suggestions of how economics can be practised to benefit communities. Understanding that an unjust economy is neither inevitable nor ‘natural’ creates possibilities for intervention and positive change. Universities, as anchor institutions, have the potential to make powerful differences to their local communities through applying ‘their long-term, place-based economic power, in combination with their human and intellectual resources’ (Axelroth Hodges and Dubb, 2012: xix- xx). In our research, the narrative process itself can perhaps be seen as an exercise in building community. We

found that a sense of solidarity ensued through participants opening up and telling their individual stories, not least because the research team included women with experience of social enterprise and in-depth knowledge of Skelmersdale. This solidarity was only strengthened by the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that we found ourselves in: participants described how it had created opportunities for doing things differently and intensified their desire to help others. As we start to rebuild our society and economy in the aftermath of the pandemic, community wealth building offers a way forward, not just for Skelmersdale, but also further afield.

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**PART 6. METHODOLOGICAL
CHALLENGES, INNOVATIONS AND
DEBATES IN SOCIALLY DISTANT TIMES:
REFLECTIONS ON INTERVIEWING,
BIOGRAPHICAL COMPLEXITIES AND
'FRIENDSHIP AS METHOD'**

BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF PANDEMIC TIMES: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF ONLINE INTERVIEWING

ANA CAETANO AND LISA MORAN

In biographical interviewing, building strong relationships characterised by rapport and trust with our participants, through direct face-to-face interactions, is critical. However, the emergence of Covid-19 calls into question the continuity of co-presence research as researchers increasingly adopt online interviewing techniques. The mobilisation of digital inquiry is by no means new in social scientific research (Fielding et al. 2017; James and Busher 2009) nonetheless, the need for Social Distancing to control virus transmission means that cloud-based video conferencing is being more frequently utilised in qualitative research (Dodds and Hess 2021; Lupton 2020). This presents serious challenges in how we ‘do’ biographical research, how we forge trusting bonds with participants whilst negotiating unprecedented social and temporal distancing that characterises the current context.

Given that the switch from co-presence to mediated presence happened rapidly, it is crucial for researchers to question if this transition changes the very nature of biographical research. Is it still possible to do biographical research in a pandemic context under the same theoretical principles? As previous practices of studying biographies are replaced by technologically-mediated approaches, what kinds of opportunities and challenges emerge? Also, is it ethically permissible to do research that frequently evokes complex and sometimes negative emotions among

participants in online spaces when we are more physically distant from interviewees than ever before? In this article we reflect on these questions by highlighting some limitations, possibilities and challenges to biographical research in pandemic times.

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH REALITIES IN THE COVID AGE: NEW ENTANGLEMENTS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

The new Covid realities irrevocably transform our research praxis. The SARS-CoV-2 virus creates novel discursive, emotional and physical entanglements, transforming our understandings of non-human impacts on human sociability and interspecies relationships. The word 'Covid' became embedded in people's daily conversations, infiltrating how we travel, work and move, in a short space of time (Nurse and Moran 2021). Policies to curb the spread of the virus based on Social Distancing transformed human-to-human touch; skin coverings like personal protective equipment regularised 'touch avoidance' everyday (Moran and Green 2020). As a result of Covid-19, researchers now face serious challenges with regards to accessing participants and communicating with them. Unlike pre-Covid times when we could explore people's lived spaces, we are now substantially limited in terms of circulation. This is even more pressing for studies that usually rely on direct face-to-face human contact, such as ethnography and biographical research.

In these changed and challenging contexts, mobile technologies have come to the fore as the most viable (and sometimes the only) solution to qualitative data collection. They offer greater flexibility in how, when and where we enter into participant's 'lived lives' (Wengraf 2001). Videoconferencing software (e.g. Skype and Zoom) and social networking platforms shorten the distance between researchers and participants and enable connections to be established during severe restrictions which regulate physical co-presence and distancing. Similar types of mediated communication were widely used in research pre-Covid, so its possibilities and limitations are already identified and reflected on (Fielding et al. 2017; Jenner and Myers 2019). Nevertheless, on-going research in a pandemic context that switches to technological data collection tools faces different challenges from studies that originally plan on applying digital methodologies. Methodological research strategies are intrinsic to study design, in theoretical, epistemological and analytical terms. Thus, a (forced) methodological switch may imply fundamental

changes to the research design itself, thus affecting all stages of the research.

HOW FAR CAN WE REACH? THE HAZARDS OF BIOGRAPHICAL ONLINE INTERVIEWING

Conducting interviews online removes the tactile, as well as some visual and shared elements of our work which is fundamental to biographical research. As biographical researchers, we can recount multiple instances where a shared glance, a seemingly uncomplicated exchange or comment led to the elicitation of narrative that not only provided valuable information on protagonists' biographies, but increased the emotional connection. There are significant relational questions emerging from online technologies in biographical research too, which scholars are already engaging with (Lobe et al. 2020). Building rapport, displaying empathy and establishing trust are central aspects of our ethical commitments to our participants and to our praxis as researchers. However, this may be more difficult in online spaces, when our exposure to participants' body language, and thereby, our 'making sense of' the specificities that characterise each research encounter, is more limited. Even in video interviews over Skype or Zoom, that more closely resemble face-to-face interviews, we usually see people's faces and upper bodies, which narrows our observation of the rich palette of gestures and postures that characterise autobiographical encounters (Seitz 2016). The same is true for participants, regarding their interpretation of our body language too. Network connection problems can also impact negatively on the flow of the interaction (Howlett 2021), thereby causing 'disruptions' in the narration, which can adversely impact data analysis and reliability.

The situation is even more complex when engaging in ethically-sensitive research involving experiences of domestic violence, the meanings of complex incidents of abuse and/or neglect, and biographical crises in general which affect how participants make sense of previous life events and expectations about the future (Seitz 2016). While ethical protocols regulate our research encounters in virtual and face-to-face settings, we are limited in what we can do if a participant becomes emotionally upset or if they divulge that they might harm themselves or others because they relived traumatic memories in an interview and cannot cope. Extant methodological literature makes practical suggestions on what researchers can do to alleviate emotional harm; explaining the purpose and scope of the research prior to interviews, stopping the recording

altogether, showing empathy, or explaining to participants that they might experience uncomfortable emotions (Bryman 2016). However, methodological strategies appearing in textbooks which were written pre-Covid frequently rely on face-to-face engagement and do not correspond fully with the present research context.

It is also more difficult for researchers to display empathy in online forums and even when they are empathetic their display of positive emotions may be limited if the internet signal is weak or if they must switch off their cameras. This does not mean, however, that empathic relationships cannot be built with participants. Rather, alternative strategies are required that are cognisant of the current context. Cameras may also be unreliable but they are the primary method by which we come to see and know our participants in pandemic times. Empathetic displays need to be anchored in different interactional strategies, more focused, for example, on facial rather than bodily expressions in video interviews, and vocal cues in audio interviews.

Another important issue emerging from online interviewing is that the researcher loses a substantial degree of control over the interview environment in terms of location, external interferences and privacy. In face-to-face interactions we are able to see what surrounds us and what may affect the encounter. In online interviews we can only see what participants and their electronic devices permit us to observe, or in the case of audio interviews, we are not able to see anything at all. We cannot ensure that the location of the interviewee is the most suitable and comfortable place to share intimate matters and we cannot be certain that there is no one else in the room, which raise concerns over privacy, data reliability and if interviewees are under duress. Also, we cannot offer an alternative place to conduct interviews with current restrictions which vary markedly across countries. Anonymity and confidentiality are problematic in recorded video interviews, as participants are exposing more than their voices; they also share the privacy of their homes, private spaces, and appearance (Lobe et al 2020). Even if we ensure anonymity and confidentiality in research design, through Informed Consent protocols, participants may feel they are at risk of (inadvertently) revealing intimate aspects of their lived experiences that they may not want us to know if we can see the interior of their homes, their partners, children or pets.

Access to technology and online interviewing platforms is also critical (Deakin and Wakefield 2014). The use of videoconferencing during Covid-19 may further exclude populations with limited, or without any, internet access, as well as individuals less familiarised with social

networking apps and software. This has serious implications for research and necessitates utilising alternative ways of contacting people, for example, through phone calls or even postponing research.

CLOSING DOORS, OPENING WINDOWS: THE POSSIBILITIES OF VIDEO ONLINE INTERVIEWING

Despite being, in many research contexts, a forced alternative, online interviewing should not be exclusively regarded as negative. Recent accounts from the field suggest that researchers and participants are adapting well to the new context. Pre-Covid-19, biographical interviews were frequently conducted in participant's homes so that interviewees might be more comfortable in environments they could control, and was a way for researchers to observe their living contexts. During lockdown, biographical interviews still take place at participants' homes; the main difference is that the researcher is not physically present, but instead is in their own home. This can have two interconnected effects. First, it can reinforce the informal, relaxed nature of the interview context, making interviewees feel more comfortable to share their lives and intimacies with the researcher (Jenner and Myers 2019). Second, it may be pivotal to developing more symmetrical relationships between researcher and participants (O'Connor and Madge 2017). They are both confined in their homes, experiencing the pandemic's impacts, albeit in different ways, and they are both exposing, at least partially, the privacy of their living spaces. Additionally, the researcher cannot interfere directly in the interviewee's material space. This can increase rapport and deepen emotional connections. The domestic environment may also have important triggers, facilitating the flow of biographical narrations and may allow researchers to observe biographical elements that would remain concealed using audio interviews (Howlett 2021). Furthermore, the use of videoconferencing enables participants to share relevant materials to understand their life stories, including photographs, videos or other relevant objects they may wish to show us. Platforms like 'WhatsApp' and other messaging applications can extend contact with the interviewees through the exchange of short messages (e.g. saying hello, showing concern) that sometimes require minimum effort, but can exert powerful emotional impacts, strengthening research relationships in and across time. This is particularly important in biographical, longitudinal research designs.

There are several ethical issues in conducting interviews during Covid-19. Researchers may consider it 'risky' to interview people in such difficult circumstances, considering that participants or someone close to them may have contracted the virus, or passed away. However, ethical obstacles can also transform themselves into timely research opportunities. In the face of crises, people tend to be more reflexive as they lose major points of reference, inciting greater reflection on life events, subjectivity and behaviours (Caetano 2019). This increased reflexivity can manifest in biographical interviews, as a space for people to make sense of current contexts. Instead of being a burden, interview encounters can, therefore, be enjoyable moments of sharing and unburdening. In the same way, the negative limitations of domestic confinement can positively affect research because some people (e.g. youth, retired, unemployed people) may have greater availability to share their experiences and subjectivities, with fewer time constraints.

WHICH BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH?

The answers to the questions posed throughout this paper will only be realised in the medium to long-term. In the immediacy of this pandemic moment however, researchers need time to process, observe and experiment (Nico, 2020), remaining mindful that there are many ways of adapting biographical research methods, whilst staying faithful to the core principles of biographical interviewing (e.g. rapport, trust, empathy). Even in these changed research circumstances, we have at our disposal a myriad of scientific tools to analyse relationships between individuals and society. However, we must adjust how we observe and understand these relationships. Online interviews via videoconferencing platforms are still interviews, despite the differences in format and place (O'Connor and Madge 2017: 428). We can still interact meaningfully with participants, establish rapport and develop empathic relationships. Nonetheless, the changed context requires increased reflexivity on our part to monitor our practices, as an epistemological surveillance tool (Bourdieu 2004). We must be aware of the implications of Social Distancing to data collection processes in online environments; what videoconferencing tools enable us to observe and what is potentially hidden from view.

We face unprecedented challenges as biographical researchers. However, the immediate changes and our responses to them, appear to be more methodological in nature, in how we connect and form rapport with participants. There is no way of knowing now if, in the long-term, the increased adoption of online platforms becomes an established trend

after Covid, or how the pandemic might substantially change biographical research in other ways. For now, we can only testify how novel and creative biographical research is (Caetano and Nico 2019), enabling us to adapt methodological toolkits to understand how human and non-human lives are entangled in new ways in these complex and risky times.

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UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE PROMOTING RESOURCES THROUGH BIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE RESEARCH AND PHOTO-ELICITATION

LINDA LIEBENBERG AND MADINE VANDERPLAAT

CCOVID-19 has exacerbated the existing gaps between rich and poor, augmenting existing marginalisation. However, the epidemic has also highlighted the importance of community and the resilience promoting resources it provides to those facing adversity. However, if we were to move towards a different future, one that better supports greater social justice and healthier outcomes for greater groups of people. In that case, greater attention should be given to community development and the advancement of its resilience related resources (such as formal and informal services and recreational resources). Importantly, however, to meaningfully support improved outcomes through the use of contextual resilience resources, these supports need to be aligned with community members' needs. Research can play a crucial role in supporting such change and development. Biographical and narrative methodologies for example, can be central to identifying community-based resources that would support improved psychosocial outcomes. It is vital to remember, that often the resources required to support improved outcomes are not at the forefront of people's minds. Accordingly, photo-elicitation methods that foster deep reflection on lived experience would add strategically to these research designs. This article will review how elicitation methods embedded within biographical narrative research can enhance our understanding of community-based

resilience resources as supports for improved social justice and related psychosocial outcomes.

UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE PROMOTING RESOURCES THROUGH BIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE RESEARCH

Narrative research focuses on the stories people tell about their lives. These elicited stories reveal people's identities and are 'strategic, functional and purposeful' (Riessman 2008: 8). We use narrative inquiry to explore lived experiences as reflected through people's stories. These stories represent people's meaning-making, how they understand themselves, the world they live in, and the experiences they have there. Concomitantly, however, people's meaning-making is powerfully shaped by their micro and macro environment (Kunnan & Bosma 2000). Accordingly, narrative research accounts for both internal motivations and the social context in which knowledge is created (Riessman 2008).

Consequently, narrative inquiry facilitates a deeper understanding of how individuals experience their lives as impacted by larger socio-economic structures (Moran, Reilly and Brady 2021). However, people are seldom aware of either of these aspects of their storytelling or the interaction between the two. This absence of greater insight into the interaction between person and context in the telling of personal stories is essential when conducting resilience-focused research. Resilience is understood as an interactive process, drawing on individual capacity and contextual resources in ways that foster better than expected outcomes for individuals (Masten 2014). Indeed, much of this research highlights the importance of relational and contextual factors in supporting improved psychosocial outcomes including improved mental health, interpersonal relationships and life outcomes (Tol, Song and Jordans 2013). Consequently, exploring and understanding how social situatedness supports wellbeing is essential in this research (Liebenberg 2020).

In this regard, researchers using image-based methods have argued its value in enriching narrative interviews (Liebenberg 2009; Mannay 2016; Rose 2016). Specifically, the intentional use of these elicitation techniques can foster a deeper understanding of lived experience, enriching resulting narratives. Such insight is necessary when we seek to understand the resilience processes supporting people during the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic and the evolution of their lives in a post-Covid-19 world.

RESILIENCE AND COVID-19

Resilience research across disciplines such as psychology, sociology and neurology, has highlighted core aspects of resilience as it pertains to human functioning (Masten, in Southwick et al., 2014). To summarise, resilience is an interactive process that integrates individual, relational, and contextual resources. Individual resources include aspects inherent to the individual such as sense of humour, executive functioning, and agency. Contextual resources include for example, services, recreational resources, and educational opportunities. Relational resources include relationships with others such as family, friends, colleagues and mentors. These resources integrate into a developmental or ‘cascading’ cycle (Masten and Cicchetti 2010), where feedback from relational resources following engagement with both relational and contextual resources informs personal resource development. Personal resources, in turn, shape future interactions with relational and contextual resources. Interactions result in either maladaptive or adaptive patterns of managing stressors that facilitate better than expected or positive outcomes (Liebenberg 2000; Masten and Motti-Stefanidi 2020). Importantly, resilience processes occur in chronic and/or acute stress contexts, such as those currently experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to these core resilience characteristics, research demonstrates that it is further shaped by temporal, contextual and cultural factors (Theron and Liebenberg 2015). These larger influences implicate macro-level systems, such as global economies, national laws and leadership, in the functioning of micro-level systems, including families and local communities. Similarly, macrosystems underpin the resources embedded in micro-level contexts, such as the availability and health of relationships, and the availability of contextual resources. These latter aspects of resilience serve to shape what counts as both a risk and resilience promoting resource for a particular person, within a specific sociocultural context, at a specific point in time. The same can be said for how ‘good psychosocial outcomes’ of individuals and their communities are operationalised and understood across sociocultural contexts and temporal periods (Theron, Liebenberg and Ungar 2015). For this reason, we see considerable heterogeneity in how resilience manifests despite the core understanding of this phenomenon (Masten and Motti-Stefanidi 2020).

Against this larger understanding of resilience, there have been various academic publications during the past year reviewing the relevance of resilience theory to how people and communities can better manage the

challenges they are facing during COVID-19. Given the suddenness, urgency and magnitude of the pandemic, many of these publications understandably align existing knowledge of resilience with the risks associated with COVID-19 (see for example Kaye-Kauderer et al, 2021; Masten and Motti-Stefanidi 2020; Prime, Wade and Browne 2020; Walsh 2020). Concomitantly, many COVID-19 related resilience publications report on quantitative findings, establishing a better understanding of the prevalence of particular risks as well as components of people's wellbeing during the pandemic (see for example Killgore, Taylore, Cloonan and Dailey, 2020; Ferreira, Buttell and Cannon 2020; Kocjana, Kavcic and Avseca 2021).

This literature is critical in establishing a broad understanding of what is needed to support the global population effectively as we adjust and move through these unprecedented times. However, given what we know about the variability of effective resilience processes, as shaped by sociocultural context, qualitative investigations of resilience promoting processes within specific contexts are also needed to inform the development of impactful policy and practice (Teti, Schatz and Liebenberg 2020). Many of these findings, however, highlight the need for more in-depth research on resilience promoting factors related to freedom of movement and sustaining personal wellbeing while providing support to others.

These questions underscore the value of integrating biographical narrative research in informing our localised understanding of resilience resources and their functioning. More localised and detailed understanding of how people are engaging with resources in relation to the multi-systemic risks they are facing (Masten and Motti-Stefanidi 2020), stand to result in more effective supports for positive psychosocial outcomes during and following the pandemic (Liebenberg 2020). Consequently, as researchers, we need to consider effective but time-efficient approaches to supporting deeper reflection on lived experiences.

Authors such as Chase (2018: 549) conclude that personal narrative is simultaneously 'meaning making through the shaping of experience; a way of understanding one's own or others' actions; of organising events, objects, feelings, or thoughts in relation to each other; of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions, events, feelings, or thoughts over time....' This understanding of narrative research underscores the need for deep reflection on lived experiences, resulting in rich narratives, echoing requirements in resilience research. Additionally, when gathering 'small' stories (Bamberg 2006) in which people tell of their experiences, there is

a need to account for the larger social embeddedness of these experiences and the socio-economic-political 'big stories' underpinning them, again echoing requirements of resilience research. Here, Chase (2018) provides an insightful discussion of the need for awareness of the social contexts in which stories are shared, and the various aspects of systemic control that surround these narratives. Collectively, this aspect of narrative research together with the requirements of resilience research, point to the need for deep reflection by participants in order to share rich narratives. The question then becomes how this deep reflection is facilitated in the research context.

THE ROLE OF PHOTO-ELICITATION IN NARRATIVE RESEARCH

lisahunter (2017: 97) notes that 'As narrative researchers and inquirers we are looking ... to what visual texts can provide beyond what written or oral texts do or can'. Just as with narrative, images are produced, socially shaped and constructed by the maker (Riessman 2008). Moreover, their meaning is subjective and, again, socially constructed by the viewer (Mannay 2016). However, they stand to add more to our understanding of lived experience than words alone. This is because images can augment the verbal narrative by making statements which cannot be made with words (Harper 2002). Research such as that of Young and Barrett (2002) demonstrates the powerful role of images in supporting our understanding of participant narratives because cameras can go into places that we may be unable to enter. In this way, images support our verbal stories, allowing us to see 'in order to make something visible, understanding in order to make something understandable' (Schultheis and Frisinghelli 2012: 5).

Additionally, images bring a different and richer layer to the narrator's understanding of their lived experiences that are then relayed via oral storytelling. Indeed, the past four decades have seen a proliferation of research highlighting the valuable role of image-based elicitation methods in stimulating deeper reflection on lived experience, scaffolding new insights and resulting in richer narratives (Mitchell 2011; Rose 2016). Researchers have found that, especially when asking participants to make or collect photographs for the research interview, the act of capturing a moment in a photograph stimulates deeper reflection on every-day taken-for-granted moments: *why did I photograph that? Why is it important to me?* This critical reflection is integrated into the interview setting where participants can introduce topics of importance to them and discuss these issues more richly given their prior thinking on these topics as stimulated

by the act of capturing the moment in an image (Liebenberg 2009). Often these topics may be ‘unknown unknowns’ (Noyes 2008) for both participants and researchers further enriching the interview focus and content.

Moreover, images together with the insights and related interview topics they stimulate create a space for participants to re-present themselves, their lives and their experiences in ways that are more closely aligned with their lived experience. These re-presentations provide insights into participants’ narratives, and the systemic factors underpinning their experiences and their understanding of these experiences (Liebenberg 2009). Consequently, these interviews tend to be more engaged and emotional when compared to other interviews (Bagnoli 2009).

We see these benefits of photo-elicitation in the emerging body of COVID-19 related literature. Studies exploring the experiences of teacher-mothers (Crosslin and Bailey 2021), children (Lomax and Smith, n.d.), students (Khumalo, Singh-Pillay and Subrayen 2020), and mental health professionals (DiGiovanni, Weller and Martin, under review), for example, are integrating the use of participant-made photographs with virtual interviews to augment reflection on lived experiences and illustrate the context of these experiences. What these studies demonstrate is the flexibility of photo elicitation when combined with video conferencing software. Goldstein, Vasques and dos Santos (2020) present an excellent example of a research program deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study of street-involved youth working at a cooperative organisation, originally included interviews, observation and ethnography with the youth. Social restrictions due to the pandemic impacted not only their field work, but also their ability to access participants. They hypothesize that they could conduct their research by sharing mobile phones with participants to capture their experiences during the pandemic. Their remaining challenge however is to physically access participants to provide them with the equipment. Consequently, their research remains incomplete.

Khumalo and colleagues (2020) conducted research of differently abled students’ challenges with online learning amidst the pandemic and subsequent lockdown in South Africa. The authors made use of Zoom to conduct their interviews. Their choice was motivated in part by the security the platform offers and in part by the ability to share screens during the interview. Additionally, they asked participants to wear their face masks during the interviews to further protect participant identities. In commenting on their findings, the authors conclude that the approach

facilitated an understanding of the nuanced exclusionary experiences of students who are differently abled, and the ways in which the pandemic has augmented these experiences.

The value of photo-elicitation flexibility is further seen in the discussion of Hensen et al, (2021). In reviewing ethical considerations during the time of COVID-19, they argue that approaches such as photo-elicitation allow participants to reflect on the research question in their own time and at their own pace. Additionally, they note the value of this approach in allowing participants to tailor the data to their own personal experiences. Findings by Lomax and Smith (n.d.) illustrates this. Children (aged 9-11) in their study were able to discuss the importance of including children in communication and decisions around the pandemic. In driving the data collection with their own photographs, participants were able to highlight the negative impact of adult-focused communication regarding COVID-19 regulations on their own wellbeing.

Additionally, as ethical concern for participant wellbeing is currently expanded and additionally challenged (Coverdale, Meckin and Nind 2021; Hensen, et al, 2021), researchers using creative approaches such as photo-elicitation, have found it to have a therapeutic effect for participants. Specifically, the approach appears to promote emotional wellbeing, and provide participants with a 'sense of purpose' by documenting the pandemic (Jones et al, 2020).

INTEGRATION OF IMAGE-BASED ELICITATION METHODS WITH NARRATIVE RESEARCH AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL FUTURES IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

As Moran and colleagues (2021: 3) conclude, 'narrative inquiry provides a space to understand difference and the wider socio-historical, political and cultural events that shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion' for participants, pointing to its value in understanding how various groups of people are managing during this pandemic and in the time to follow. Furthermore, narrative analysis accounts for the temporarily and socially situated nature of narrative data (Khumalo et al, 2020; Moran et al. 2021) aligning with the contextual nature of resilience. Added to this reflection on effective research methods, is the value of photo-elicitation in enriching understanding of personal experiences (Harper, 2002; Lomax and Smith, n.d.). Integrating this visual approach into biographical

narrative research focused on the resilience resources necessary to support positive psychosocial outcomes during and following COVID-19 stands to effectively enhance the richness of narrative data. Taking photographs of incidents or moments in a day is facilitated by the ever-present cell phone camera. The act of making the image, however, can trigger reflection on why and how that moment mattered to participants, together with the impact of the broader context in which that experience was situated. Following this reflection, images are easily shared in virtual interviews together with the enriched narrative. The active engagement of the listener (researcher) and storyteller (participant; Mishler 1986) further enriches the narrative, as the researcher asks probing questions of both the image and oral content. In addition to practical challenges such as those highlighted by Goldstein et al. (2020), using elicitation strategies virtually requires a feminist ethic of care (Gilligan 1982), especially with participants living in more vulnerable or marginalised contexts. Here, Jones et al, (2020) note the importance of being flexible in the application of methods, the timing of data gathering and prioritising participant choice throughout the process. Such ethical cushions stand to strengthen research, rather than limit it, as participants find their own value in the process (Coverdale, Meckin and Nind, 2021).

In conclusion, as we continue to navigate the challenges of our new socially embedded research environment, considering ways to integrate visual reflective practices seems to offer a means of bridging the physical limitations and distance COVID-19 regulations have introduced into our work.

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EVERYONE IS HOLDING A MIRROR. MULTILEVEL BIOGRAPHIES OF FAMILIES DURING AND AFTER THE 2020 AND 2021 LOCKDOWNS IN PORTUGAL

MAGDA NICO

Let's consider one of the likely dozens of screenshots people took, received or appeared in, during the first lockdown in 2020, while keeping physical distance from loved ones and remaining as much as possible in different bubbles and/or households. Apart from the obvious differences – these are photos not taken in co-presence, unplanned, perhaps even not shown to some of the *models* or *figurines*. Furthermore, these pictures are distinct from other family, reunions and party pictures for another important reason. In these photos, people are not looking and smiling in the same direction, but are looking at each other, and, at the same time, looking at themselves. It's like people are holding mirrors up to one another. Could these pictures serve as metaphors for the *multilevel* characteristics of their pandemic biographies? Could these pictures thus illuminate the various levels of existence our biographies are nested in during pandemic times and help us to unravel their meanings?

To elaborate on these questions, I will use experiences and some data from the *Linked Lives* Project, a spin off project developed in two stages: during the lockdown in April-May 2020 and in April 2021. The *Linked Lives* Project is based on the collection of family histories which consist of individual biographical interviews, co-production of life calendars, and the construction, and elicitation of, family trees. In 2020 we, as a team,

decided to design and carry out a spin off project which in its turn consisted of a four-round application of qualitative online surveys to each member of the previously interviewed families, while also asking for photographic or written accounts of their daily lockdown lives from April to July 2020. In April 2021 the pandemic and difficult context endures. Despite this, we are re-contacting the families and persisting in our research process. At the same time the virus' multiple waves continue to strike at the core of everyday, social living.

The stories behind this process – of deciding, designing and dealing with the data and participants implies *holding multiple mirrors*, all of which display the importance of inter-personal relationships, and the awareness and acknowledgement of each other, the need to admit, more explicitly, the importance of linked lives generally (Nico et al. 2021; Carr, 2018). After all, “mobility restrictions created by physical distancing measures have left people painfully aware of how much their wellbeing is linked to others and how much they take for granted the ability to be with others” (Settersten *et al.*, 2020). This has happened at different yet relatable levels – in the team, between the team members and the families, and within each participant family. It is as if we found ourselves un-nesting Russian dolls. These levels are now presented chronologically, not necessarily by breadth, as it is hard - and perhaps useless - to define, with clarity, the proximity of these layers/contexts between each other and with the individual. They are surely overlapped and interrelated in many aspects.

“WE ARE FAMILY. I GOT ALL MY SISTERS WITH ME.”

As a joke, we thought of using this music as our peers and colleagues entered the first *Linked Lives* conference, in February 2020. Although we ended up not using any music, this song was suggested as it has a double meaning. One meaning, of course, relates to the very topic of the project which is based on the collection of family histories and in the dynamics and relationships and histories pertaining to these stories. A second, and perhaps less obvious reason to everyone outside the team, is related to the team work, to the peer ethics, to the transparent and open discussion *modus operandi* of the project, the “friendship as method” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) starting from *within* the research team. As a GIFF I ended up using the lyrics ‘*we are family*’ in messages during several moments of the spin off *Linked Lives* Project during the first lockdown from March to June 2020.

It was this “friendship as method” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) from *within* that made the discussion about the very possibility of developing a spin off project so vivid, demanding and reflexive. Initially, in Portugal we could pinpoint that in mid-March, we shared the astonishment and inquietude with what was happening with us, with everyone, and with the world. We had no filters among each other to share these feelings, or, on many occasions and for periods of time, to be *explicitly silent* about them. In the end, we believe, it was these mixed feelings of frustration, surprise but also sociological will and imagination that compelled us to do at some point what we felt was inevitable – the Spin Off Project. What else could we do, sociologically speaking?

But the decision to develop this spin off project was complex and was not impetuous. We found it emotionally difficult to open ourselves up to this possibility, since the lockdown pushed each one of us to a deep introspection and to coping mechanisms that objectively and subjectively, we had to deal with as persons, non-sociologists, but in the other roles we have in our lives such as friend, sister, neighbour, partner, teacher, mother, citizen, among so many others. We debated internal aspects such as the objective conditions to work from home, the feasibility of the projects, the emotional vulnerability of each one of us, and our sociological will, on one hand; and ethical issues such as the emotional fragilities we might be exposing when asking questions during lockdown experiences, about our right to do so, and the strategies to “do no harm” during this spin off research. This encompassed introspection about the privacy and safety that we could provide to participants; and as our own preparedness to provide assistance or information when asked questions about financial aid, health services access, or safety. We made a point out of imagining ourselves in each other’s shoes, both from within and outside the team. Never before did the very concept of linked lives – a key theoretical principle of Life Course Theory – become so vivid, and its inseparability from agency (Landes and Settersten, 2019) was so immediately clear in our daily lives.

Having found common ground on the possibilities, the constraints and the will to advance this project, we designed it mainly according to two aspects. One, more practical aspect, had to do with formats we could use to guarantee the aforementioned ethical issues (which ended up being a non-anonymous qualitatively-driven online survey, repeated in four rounds in 2020, and in 2021 in two rounds – the last one in July). Another had to do with the identity and character of the project. Would the deviation we were planning to make to the initial project damage its initial sociological purpose?

This kind of biographical, intimate and almost cathartic approach to research designs and development during the pandemic is not at all unique to this research experience or project. We witnessed in several journals similar issues, talks, webinars and other formats, stories of sociological adaptations that were more personal or stated more explicitly than ever before (Danko, 2020; Sociological Association of Ireland, 2020; among others). Sociological reflexivity has also been renewed as an interpersonal process. It is a process that takes time, to listen and to digest what is being told (Nico, 2020). The pandemic's urgency reminded us as sociologists, of the importance of listening, and the time that is required for that. We tried to take our time, each of us in our own time, to reflect upon and discuss the risks and potentials of reconnecting with the families in such unique and harsh moment in all our lives.

FROM ONE "FAMILY" TO ANOTHER

We invited members of the 15 families to respond to our qualitative survey and then anxiously waited for the replies to fill the lines of our Excel file. Not long after that, the answers started to arrive, to a pace we did not expect, with virtually no missing answers, and in some cases with extended text as a response to our open questions. The response rate was around 90% of the participants, and the problematic attrition typical in many longitudinal studies was very small, due in part to our somewhat close and personalized communication with each participant. Our ethical concerns about perpetuating fear among participants about pandemic experiences were somewhat eased. And our relationships with these families strengthened. The will to participate and share was explosive and contagious. The sense of being a community of individuals during a global crisis rendered the differences in the roles performed in the research less relevant than before. The mutual curiosity and concern between equal, ordinary people spilled out through the boundaries that regularly constrain relationships between research teams and participant families. These participants were generous enough to share their lives with us; its changes, their fears, feelings, and concerns. But this generosity also emanated from a need to construct meanings about pandemic experiences, and that includes taking time to reflect, on the sincerest answers possible and organizing one's own unique biographical accounts. It is explicit from some of the participants that although the format of the research was quantitative, it still performed the role of helping the individuals reflect upon their lives, their feelings, and to

organize their narratives on the pandemic, as the following quote illustrates.

I want to thank this opportunity to answer your survey, which I am happy to do and has also helped me. (Round 3, June 2020, the first lockdown, with some easing measures).

Participants' desires to share their unique biographical narrative on pandemic experiences are evident in many of the participant's writings. However, this is certainly not exclusive to this project or these kinds of projects, but this research during the pandemic added different layers to the relationship between us, as researchers and the researched. The historical landmark that the world is experiencing simultaneously although in a socially stratified manner leveled some aspects of relationships between our research teams and participant households.

BETWEEN ONE "FAMILY" AND ANOTHER

Even if influenced by the fact that we have known each other since 2019, in the first and only period of face-to-face interviews, our shared interest in grasping, understanding and envisioning futures after the pandemic and first set of lockdowns around the world was transversal to the usual research roles performed. As such, at the same time we – the "research family" - asked questions about well-being, feelings, relationships, changes and adaptations to work and family situations, among other topics. The participants also asked us questions themselves which further solidified our relationships with them. In 2020, for example, some participants were eager to know if we could share some insights about how we thought the future was going to unfold. "*What is your provision for freedom, work, health and quality of life?*" one participant asked. Another said:

Thank you for your concern and I hope the study reveals something about living in society (round 1, April 2020, during the first general lockdown).

I really liked this follow-up. Congratulations on your work (round 5, April 2021).

There was a shared – and consciously shared – curiosity and inquietude towards the pandemic. This common ground may have affected a boost in social empathy and the sociological inquietude around the pandemic. It was, in that sense, a unique sociological synchronic feeling. This might

begin to explain why people asked us, in 2020, almost maternal questions such as “*Have you been protecting your selves?*”, or in 2021 “*How do you feel mentally?*”

Hi! We’re ok, Hope you’re too. We miss you [plural]. Kisses.

(between 4th and 5th rounds, February 2021, during the second general lockdown)

I wish you are well, keep well, and always better. I hope you can feel the peace I fell not having the urge of going to bars and crowds, malls, shops, restaurants, noises, discussions. Peace and quiet (round 5, April 2021).

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FAMILY (WHERE DOES IT GO?)

The third level of the chains of individual and inter-personal attitudes and feelings we want to underline is of course within the families themselves. All the questions in the qualitative and quantitative tools can be analyzed individually and responses are also nested and situated in families and family dynamics. Emotional wellbeing is one of the topics addressed. The average family well-being in the period of March to July 2020 measured in a 5-point scale is around 4 (below 3 only in one case, never higher than 4.6). This is relatively stable across the sample. The variation per family across the 4 rounds is also residual. The difference lies, hence, between and within families. The differences in the self-reported well-being between the families lay in the social and structural conditions of life that we were made aware of in 2019, before the pandemic. Nonetheless, it’s important to state that although the well-being starting point is lower in some families, even in these cases, it seems to increase between March and June 2020. This, we think, might reveal adaptative strategies of the dynamics of the family and the reestablishment of a new balances and *chains of resilience*. Some studies have indeed shown that during and despite lockdowns, relationships within co-residing families have become stronger and reinforced in pandemic times (Perelli-Harris, Brienna and Walzenbach, 2020; Prime, Wade and Browne, 2020).

These chains of resilience may gain strength precisely in the family dynamics that transcends differences in personality, gender, age, objective conditions of living, but relates to other observed and other unobserved (and sometimes unobservable) factors, within each household. People holding mirrors to each other. These mirrors were visible to us in many ways. The way people helped each other to complete their surveys, the similar comments they would share in the open questions, and also the identification of different roles to specific

people in the family: the vulnerable, the leaders, and the pragmatic person in a household. Establishing a new dynamic took time, but on average by the third round (two months into the lockdown) almost every family found it easier to co-exist and get along in the household environment. The individual and inter-personal features co-explain the process of adapting, enduring and resisting the pandemic context. As such, what happens in the family does not stay in the family. And where would the family dynamics go if not straight to the individual (again)?

I am hopeful that slowly we will be able to have a normal life again. But I think that this lockdown has also led us to some introspection and that we can change some not so good attitudes in our lives. Being confined at home makes us more creative and more open to new knowledge, like reading more, cooking more, talking more, enjoying nature, like listening to the birds singing in the silence of the morning. (Round 2, May 2020).

The stories behind research projects have always been biographical and inter-personal, even if omitted from conferences and publications, and left to the intimacy or privacy of each research team. The pandemic context has placed these biographical and inter-personal features into high-definition modes, and pushed sociologists to explicitly and loudly rediscover them. A shared, transparent, and open disclosure of how each research member positions and wants to position oneself in relation to the research design and research subject, especially in a challenging historical moment like pandemic, can define the nature, content and sustainability of qualitative-driven research. “Friendship as method” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) but from within the very team, may as well be the stone responsible for the ripple effects of taking the personal and the inter-personal seriously and emphatically in sociological research.

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SOME NOTES ON TRIVIALIZING TENDENCIES IN BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

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In the social sciences the declaration of sticking to the rules of a chosen theoretical and methodological approach is treated with some suspicion, as close to dogmatism and as an out of date method of practicing sociology. It is often criticised for being boring and uncompromising. Since the early 1970s, when methodological purism began to be ousted by the triangulation of theories, methods and techniques (Denzin, 1970) a reverse tendency was promoted, allowing the postmodernist 'blurred genres' (Geertz, 1980) – often based on intuition – combining techniques and weaving together different orientations, and/or free treatment of analytical categories. One may ask, however, whether such practices always bring a specific cognitive and intellectual gain or the expected freshness of view? It should be emphasized, however, that the following remarks are not about questioning the value of practicing interdisciplinary studies or denying the right to interpret empirical materials using particular techniques. It can and should be done, but with caution, whilst being mindful of theoretical and ontological foundations as well as methodological awareness (e.g. empirical and analytical implications underlying various methods and their triangulation). Doing any research without critical reflection on the above-mentioned issues inevitably leads to “obscuring the methodological and theoretical consistency of the method, its simplification, almost caricatured perception” (Dopierała, 2013: 158). We refer to the case of biographical research, in particular the technique of autobiographical narrative interviewing, arguing that the rise in popularity of biographical methods contributed to their trivialization and banalization (Kaźmierska, 2012a). The

issues discussed below reflect our approach to the social sciences and as biographical researchers in contemporary society¹.

Biographical research is uniquely grounded in social reality, drawing on the familiar and practiced traditions of people telling stories of one's own or another's life. This gives rise to the misconception that even biographical methods are relatively easy and pleasant. As a result we observe an increasing number of research projects, conference speeches, scientific articles and books, where biographical methods are reduced to the technique of empirical data collection or the illustrative function separated from a coherent and sophisticated research procedure and its ontological foundations. At the same time, collections of carefully gathered, transcribed and stored (auto)-biographical materials often function as an archive of multi-coloured exemplification confirming certain theoretical assumptions and enlivening 'dry' scientific reasoning. Paradoxically, the distortion or oversimplification of analytical techniques offered by biographical methods results from the appreciation of the subjective perspective of the individual in mainstream sociology and 'selective mainstreamization', which reduces biographical research to 'the status of auxiliary science' (Czyżewski, 2013: 15). We may also consider to what extent the trivialization and banalization of biographical research is influenced by current cultural trends: individualism (Giddens, 1991), self-care (Rose, 1999), confession, (Bauman, 2004), and exposure (McNair, 2004) that contributed to an autoethnographic turn. The researcher once focused on the scrupulous analysis of life histories of the 'Other', empirical data depicting multi-level, complex social phenomena, narcissistically turns to his or her experiences, making them the primary object of his or her research.

The autobiographical narrative interview method is also not very well suited to institutional settings of contemporary science. It is extremely time-consuming and requires extensive analytical skills, which places it not within the ubiquitous and harmful 'grantosis', or the constant journeying from one project to another, but in the realm of slow methods, where just a few cases can constitute a long-term project of a single researcher. The example of autobiographical narrative interviews shows that biographical methods are advanced and highly demanding techniques for gathering empirical data and are sophisticated analytical

¹ This problem was widely discussed *inter alia*, during our project that received funding from the National Science Centre, Poland under grant agreement Number UMO-2013/09/B/HS6/03100 'Experience of the Process of Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspectives'.

procedures². This autobiographical narrative interview was introduced by Fritz Schütze in the early 1970s and was subsequently tested and refined by him, his students, collaborators and followers (Kaźmierska, 2014).

As biographical researchers trained in autobiographical narrative interviews we observe situations where some researchers criticized this tool or point to its deficiencies, without having sufficient knowledge. Therefore, in many studies we come across either a trivializing approach to autobiographical materials, or seemingly innovative and ‘corrective’ treatments concerning both the technique of empirical data collection and analytical procedures. On this basis, it is possible to create a catalogue of the alleged vices of biographical methods and to reconstruct a wide spectrum of often illusory ways of dealing with its so-called ‘limitations’. Kaja Kaźmierska – one of the most recognized representative of Fritz Schütze’s school – concludes that:

Currently, a great deal of biographical research is being undertaken often without due methodological and theoretical consideration, which often leads to their devaluation. It also raises a false and illusory belief that everyone can practice biographical research because it does not require in-depth knowledge and special skills, and that everyone, being the carrier of their own biography, has sufficient competences in this field to be able to deal with them. Due to the growing number of research / biographical texts and the “polyphony” of research based on the analysis of biographies, today we can talk not only about the methodological and theoretical diversity in this field, but also about the chaos prevailing in this field and the increasingly frequent domination of the stereotype based on a simplified image of the biographical method (Kaźmierska, 2012: 10)

Obviously, biographical methods provoke reservations and doubts. We are aware of the need for critical reflection and discussion on their use in the social sciences, but it should be founded on reliable knowledge, skills, field research experiences, etc. We do not, of course, deprive adepts of the biographical method of their right to follow their own ideas, but criticism and attempts at ‘repair’ should have a solid basis. Below we briefly discuss how inexperienced researchers’ actions sometimes result in the trivialization and banalization of the biographical method/ autobiographical narrative interview.

² Obviously, in the history of the sociological biographical method from its very beginnings, we will find many examples of how sophisticated techniques of material collection and analysis were used to gain a picture of the whole and of social phenomena. E.g. research on young delinquency. (e.g. Shaw, 1966).

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND TRIANGULATION AS 'TRAPS'

Since 1970 it is commonly believed that the combination of different theoretical approaches, techniques, and analytical tools carries a cognitive advantage over the rigorous and reliable application of just one methodological approach (Denzin 1970). Consequently, the trend has intensified based on assumptions that only the “fusion” of methods, techniques, analytical procedures ensures the reliability and validity of research results. However, in many cases researchers do not use research instruments and conceptual apparatus carefully, or pursue in-depth reflection on the consequences of such research practice. In contemporary social sciences – as Kaja Kaźmierska states – there is a ‘misunderstanding of the idea of interdisciplinary research understood as a postmodern manner of mixing all possible frames and means’ (Kaźmierska, 2014a, 2018). It is not about questioning the values of interdisciplinarity and its benefits, but about emphasizing that practicing it in an arbitrary and unreflective way can lead to distorted illusionary images of social reality. For example, the unproblematic usage and experimental application of a conceptual framework or the combination of methods and data collection techniques may, on the one hand, contribute to revealing undiscovered potentials and possibilities of various methods or tools. On the other hand, especially when the researcher does not have well-developed knowledge of methodological approaches or chosen analytical traditions, all or part of the conducted analysis may have a superficial character, and the status of generated categories and descriptions becomes questionable. The reasoning based on such an analysis gives the impression of inadequacy and inconsistency in methodological decision-making and methodological application.

It is not uncommon for some biographical researchers, especially beginners, to assume ‘just in case’, that they may need to rely upon in-depth interview techniques. This is often due to the interviewer’s presupposition that the interviewee will not develop spontaneous narration due to the lack of communication skills, or is based upon insufficient pre-established relationships with participants. Remedial actions done by researchers as a remedy for an ‘unsuccessful’ interviews are often counterproductive and are in contrast with ‘strong situational and competency conditions’ (Czyżewski, 2013: 25) that must be met in order to obtain a ‘valuable’ narrative interview. Piotrowski underlines that:

(...) from the times of Florian Znaniecki to the times of the early Fritz Schütze, we were dealing with the search for a clear biographical

method, a clear narrative interview, etc. Today, people using this method, for example biographical interviews create a kind of mix. It has been a long time since I read the narrative interview text that would meet its *lege artis* conditions and I notice that now research is being designed essentially biographical and based on a narrative interview, but with a strong tendency, intention or inclination to transform this interview into an in-depth free interview (Piotrowski 2016: 32).

We take the position that interviewers' shortcomings or mistakes doing biographical interviewing (Hughes, 2009) often stem from the inability to build trusting relationship, keeping the narrator's focus on the research problem, inappropriate formulation of the opening question, asking questions prematurely, or the researcher introducing her/his own way of understanding or interpreting the informant's experiences which leads to the interviewee withdrawing from the linguistic scheme of the narrative. As a result, it is not only the meanings and interpretations that are in question, but the hierarchies of importance and orientation systems that are recreated (Każmierska & Waniek, 2020).

Although experienced researchers can cause harm when interviewing, despite adherence to ethical protocols, the taking up of very difficult research topics by inexperienced researchers who are not yet fully methodologically or emotionally prepared to implement them is contentious and ethically dangerous. In the case of more advanced researchers, it is worth mentioning the lack of self-reflection, self-criticism, and reluctance to accept feedback. In such situations it is often easier for researchers to attribute failures to the shortcomings of the method or the shortcomings of the narrator rather than taking responsibility for their own roles in the research.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE NARRATION

Our particular attention is drawn to the disappointment of many researchers when, during an interview, the narrator, does not take up the expected topics, and does not talk about events in his or her life in a fluent and consistent manner. It is worth considering this in the light of a well-known distinction between biography as a means (answering 'classical' sociological questions – what is going on in social reality?) and biography as a topic (how does the narrator present her/his life with its many orders and disorders) (Helling, 1990).

As for the problem mentioned firstly; the expectation that the informant will take up certain threads, the logic of the classical method of biographical documents which treats biography as a means echoes through this. Here, autobiographical accounts are gathered according to guidelines dictated by a set of working hypotheses and social processes under study (Becker 1966: vi; Szczepański, 1971: 578). Close to this is the approach of Daniel Bertaux; his interest in collective experiences and social processes, social milieu, and socio-historical realities that exist independently from the conscious minds of social actors (Bertaux, 1996). The French sociologist claims that by collecting a sufficiently large collection of empirical materials in a specific milieu, in a specific historical time, the researcher reaches patterns of experience and actions conditioned by social processes and phenomena, and thus gains objective sociological knowledge. Schütze offers a different approach: the narrator's own life story becomes the topic of autobiographical narrations. It is the protagonist, not the researcher, who decides what and how the story will be told. This very decision of the informant is an important analytical thread. It happens, however, that impatient interviewers start asking questions prematurely that would direct the narrator to the expected researcher topic, regardless that such a possibility might exist in the next parts of the interview. The "knocking out" of the informant from the process of recalling subsequent events in his or her own life usually ends with the narrator or the interviewer abandoning the narrative and undertaking argumentative-theoretical commentaries, and prevents the closure of the history of life as a whole (Schütze, 1976). Referring to the linguistic knowledge of the narrative Schütze stresses that what and how should be analysed inseparably. This is the epistemic power of his approach and also of strategies used by Gabriele Rosenthal, Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne.

Some interviewees resort to a strategy which, they believe will enable them to 'force' the narrator to focus on the research problem that interests them. Then, instead of asking about the history of the whole life, they ask them to tell it from a specific moment in time or they switch to semi-structured interviews. Of course, they are entitled to do so, and a lot of valuable research is based on this strategy. However, such a premature abandonment of stories about the whole life makes it impossible to fully answer the question: how specific socio-biographical processes came about. Moreover, some researchers do not take into account what is seemingly insignificant, concealed, unsaid, and camouflaged in narration which hides a tremendous explanatory potential. It also happens that by not finding the assumed topics in the collected material or recognizing that they are not told in an exhaustive way, the researcher simply rejects

the interview without any preliminary or deep analysis. Working with autobiographical narrative interviews requires delving into time-consuming recordings, detailed transcription and tedious (comparative) analysis, which, with modern ways of practicing science, few scientists can afford. We can say that the main disadvantage of biographical methods is the relatively low net profit which requires a huge gross outlay. This creates the temptation to take shortcuts, which opens up the possibility of subordinating the informant's story to the research topic.

As for the second point, if the interview disappoints the researcher and is rejected because it either uses language that allegedly militates against reflection on one's own life (Bernstein 1971) or it is presented in a chaotic, foggy, torn form. Omissions of such data leads not only to disregarding important analytical information, but also to squandering interesting analytical material and, as a consequence, not noticing or ignoring certain problematic areas of social reality. Autobiographical narrative interviews are based on the cultural competence of each person to tell their experiences (no matter what code/language they use). The *ex tempore* history of life captures the way the informant understands the world and patterns of narrative organization (even if it seems limited to us). After all, narratives reveal not only the social features of the language user (Hymes, 1972), but also their knowledge, how they define situations of action and interpretations of life, including patterns of behaviour, meanings and values, social relations, and sources of knowledge which are important to them. Furthermore, we emphasise that eliminating experiences of suffering from the field of research interests, is a kind of falsification of social reality. Situations in which the narrator does not actually start the story and responds to questions asked in succession with monosyllables may pose a problem (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2019). Such a situation, however, may result either from an apparent inability to form a good rapport with the respondent in a reasonably short time.

CONFUSING THE NARRATOR'S SELF-THEORY WITH THE RESEARCHER'S THEORIES

Another practice that distorts the method of autobiographical narrative interview is a 'dangerous confusion of the narrator's auto-theories with the theories of the researcher' (Marciniak, 2016: 192). Biographical researchers frequently refer to the theoretical and argumentative statements of informants as explanations of both their own actions and specific socio-biographical processes. By doing so, they not only give up

references to authentic experiences captured in the linguistic narrative scheme, but at the same time remain at the level of meanings and interpretations of the narrator himself – recreating the emic dimension (Pike, 1967). The option of using informants' statements as commentators of everyday reality seems tempting; indeed they are often 'neatly' formulated and allow for a quick explanation of social phenomena and processes. However, in Schütze's approach a formal analysis of an autobiographical statement enables us to go further than the findings on the (otherwise extremely important) emic level. The procedure of pragmatic refraction requires constant reference of linguistic communication schemes (e.g. argumentations and descriptions) to the relevant narrations, larger text segments and narrator's utterances through the prism of whole life histories. This enables us to discover the sedimented layers of meanings contained in language schemas, revealing the often different (and sometimes contradictory) attitudes of the narrator towards him- or herself and the 'experienced experiences' at various stages of the biography. Moreover, the analytical procedure of the autobiographical narrative interview allows the researcher to distance her/himself from the categories introduced by the informant and move to a more general concept, which may significantly differ from his or her understanding of their own experiences or entanglements in specific socio-cultural processes (Treichel & Schwelling, 2003). Therefore, it should be emphasized that it is the language scheme of narration is most important and the function of other communication schemes should be determined against it. The analysis of the narrative interview cannot therefore be a simple summary of what the narrator said or the use of her/his words as a valid interpretation of certain social phenomena. In fact, it is a stop at the beginning of the road in presenting social realities by the narrator. Moreover, there is still a strong conviction that limiting the role of a researcher to the function of an editor or summarizing selected statements of informants is a sufficient scientific move. Let us follow here the opinion by Sacks and Czyżewski that instead of freeing the conceptual apparatus of the researcher-sociologist from uncontrolled common knowledge (Czyżewski, 1984: 114), such knowledge is reproduced in a more or less conscious way.

CONSTRUCTED OR ILLUSORILY MIRRORED SOCIAL REALITY

Unfortunately, many researchers entering the field of biographical research do not take into account its inner epistemological and ontological differentiation. The names of Schütze, Rosenthal, Bertaux and Wengraf are often quoted next to each other as if they represent the

same approach. This is not true, and the differences between them are overwhelming.

Many readings of Schütze's method are intertwined with the erroneous epistemological assumption that the autobiographical story 'like a mirror' reflects the narrator's everyday life and the social reality in which s/he lives (Schütze, 2008). The point is, however, that this is neither Schütze's methodological or epistemological positioning, but a position of Bertaux (1981; 1996), who – referring to the tradition of the Chicago School – treats biography as a means, contending that it proffers verifiable factual data and can be used as a documentary source of knowledge about external reality (Bertaux, 1996). This is accompanied by the conviction that this reality exists independently of the awareness of the narrators, who in turn, reflect it in their stories (ibid: 2). Therefore, in order to avoid distortions in this reflected image and reliably describe collective cultural patterns, the dynamics of changes or social mobility paths, one cannot stop at one case. It is absolutely necessary to collect a sufficiently large number of relations in a specific environment or among people belonging to specific social categories.

In turn, many researchers applying the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) developed by Wengraf and Chamberlayne on the basis of Gabriele Rosenthal's approach, formulate an opposite objection to Schütze's approach (and often also to the method of biography in general). It emanates from the belief that an autobiographical account is always exclusively constructed; experienced experiences, so that accompanying feelings and thoughts are distorted or reformulated depending on the context, which includes, among others: the timing of the story, the place of meeting the researcher, attitudes of the listener, or, as Piotr Filipkowski describes it, 'the context of individual and collective memory' (Filipkowski, 2010: 12). The main focus of BNIM interpretative procedures are attempts to develop the most accurate understanding of the experiencing, interpreting, acting subjectivity of the biographical subject of action in the continuously developing history of her/his life: subjectivity in a historical position, situation, and processes (Wengraf, 2012: 351–352). At the same time, one of the most important considerations for BNIM researchers is the distinction between the lived-life and story-telling. As per Wengraf and Chamberlayne, stories about life can be 'extremely seductive and persuasive' (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2013: 64). They are reconstructions of events; however, they are only partial and dependent on local contexts and historical moments. In order

to avoid excessive and unconditional seduction by the respondent's story, the mentioned authors emphasize that for their proposed approach:

[I]t is crucial (...) that the researcher/interpreter separately gathers together and considers as much hard biographical and contextual data as they can in order to understand the 'dated situated subjectivity' of the story-teller and of the history that they lived. This involves an approach that needs to be characterized by both psychological and sociological sophistication: same form of psycho-social thinking. But it starts from thinking about actor's accounts (Wengraf, Chamberlayne 2013: 64).

In such approaches to biographical methods we deal not only with the voice of the experiencing individual, but with the polyphonic voices of the experiencing individual who, telling her/his life stories in different circumstances – each time brings to life different versions of reality and different pictures of social processes. Such an approach to the matter is close to Leoński's interpretation:

[C]ontemporary personal documents understood as biographical documents are most often defined as "acts of social awareness". Particular attention is paid to the sub-point which says that in connection with this: "the interpretation depends on the moment when the document was created, its content reflects how the author interprets himself and the whole described reality at a given moment, and not in the past, even if it describes what he once felt and thought (Leoński, 1999: 208).

Schütze takes a special ontological and epistemological position which is crucial to his method: the narrative interview discovers how the informant actually experienced the events in her/his life and how s/he interpreted them in the moment. In other words, by recreating the course of one's own life, a person does not (re)-construct past experiences, from the situational 'here and now'. Biographical interviewing places them in the moment; that is, consistent with how the participant lived through them at the time (see Schütze, 1984: 78-79). This means that by sticking to the linguistic schema of narrative, s/he remains faithful to the truth – facilitating deeper insights into what actually happened. This is one of the basic assumptions of the narrative interview, derived from the research of linguists Labov and Waletzki, who showed that the linguistic presentation in improvised spontaneous narrative is not arbitrary, but is homologous between past experiences (e.g. structures of experience) and ordering of stories (Labov & Waletzky, 1967: 20-21). To simplify it; the sequence of life events reflect the intertwining of ways of experiencing life (e.g. process structures) which are always recreated in the same way. However,

this does not mean that the narrator will present the story of her/his life at a different time or to another researcher in exactly the same way). Theoretical and argumentative comments might be changed or added with reference to public or popular discourses and/or reactions to the listener. This does not mean that the informant changes her/his mind or deliberately misleads us. Schütze writes, *inter alia*:

Grosso modo, one can state – and this is empirically corroborated by the study of autobiographical narrative interviews that have been repeated after one or two years –, that the basic grid of the representational structure of extempore narration of personal experiences is quite stable in various situations of storytelling; only some of the argumentative commentaries are drastically transformed according to the change of life situations (Schütze 2008a: 36).

It should be added that this assumption in Schütze's approach was not fully adopted at first, and many biographical researchers to this day reject it (e.g. like Wengraf, 2012).

The point is not, that autobiographical account is Parrhesia or from external influences (for example, social discourse), but that to qualify the entirety of an autobiographical statement as either realistic or constructivist, the necessity to choose 'either or', is misleading. Schütze argues that the analytical procedure he proposes, grounded in sociolinguistic analysis of the text, makes it possible to distinguish between these two aspects of the narrative. The cognitive figures of an autobiographical story are 'phenomena that belong both to autobiographical narrative texts and to the everyday world of existence' (Schütze, 2008a: 177). In other words, in a spontaneous story about his/her own life, the narrator, as event carrier recreates her/his experiences there and then, but at the same time they are aware that their embedding in the biography is influenced by specific contexts. Furthermore, narrators might change biographical situations and attitudes to their surrounding realities in relation to social expectations and conditions in which here and now (in the situation of an interview) which affects how they might presents her/his life story (Schütze, 2008a, 2008b).

CONCLUSIONS

We are dealing with a vicious circle. The actions, attitudes, phenomena and processes documented in this paper contribute to the trivialization of

biographical methods by researchers. The illusory ease of its application attracts researchers that might be insufficiently prepared to apply it and who are untrained to apply complicated analytical methods. It causes interpretation errors, errors in pattern recognition, inadequate construction of schemas and models, and errors in theorizing. Additionally, reflections on ethical dimensions of the method are critical, with regards to optimising methods of interviewing. Therefore, we take the position that analytical workshops, during which empirical data are openly discussed by the team comprising researchers with different levels of experience, are an essential and indispensable component of the research process in biographical method.

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THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THE BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S AUTO/BIOGRAPHY STUDY GROUP

ANNE CHAPPELL AND CARLY STEWART

The year 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the British Sociological Association's (BSA) Auto/Biography Study Group. It is a poignant moment in time for the group and for social life in general amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, witness to public and scholarly interest in lives and stories (Chappell and Parsons, 2021). This article shares a brief history of the group, its distinctiveness and place in sociological research, and a look towards the future as current work seeks to ensure its legacy and ongoing relevance for sociology.

THE PAST

The story of the study group began in the 1990, at a critical time in the narrative "turn" towards biographical research in sociology. Stanley's pioneering *The Auto/Biographical I: The theory and practice of feminist auto/biography* was published in 1992, and that same year she and, the late David Morgan founded the Auto/Biography conference. This conference, in collaboration with Michael Erben, led to the publication of the 'Auto/Biography Bulletin' and the subsequent formation of the Auto/Biography Study Group.

The group was formed at a pivotal time when the relationship between sociology and narrative was emerging, complex, and changing rapidly. Hyvarinen (2016) points out that it was 'biography' and not 'narrative' that was a core theoretical concept for sociologists at this time. The term

remains a stronghold in the title of the group today though we acknowledge the more abstract concept of narrative, with its own scholarly history, is commonly entwined in qualitative sociological research endeavours today. We draw upon the earlier writings of Stanley and Morgan to reinvigorate the importance of our group name Auto/Biography that retains a focus on the personal life, both biographical and autobiographical, as sociological material. Importantly, Stanley indicated the importance of the forward-slash (“/”) between auto and biography in disrupting the distinction between ‘biography and autobiography as well as the divisions between self/other, public/private, and immediacy/memory’ (1993: 42). Its significance came through ‘a principled and concerted confrontation to conventional views that ‘works are separate from lives, that there can be an epistemology which is not ontologically based’ (Stanley, 1994: i).

This said, Auto/Biography is then both a verb and a noun. As noun, Auto/Biography is evident in the accounts that ‘make explicit the links or otherwise between the individual and the social, the public and the private’ (Parsons and Chappell, 2020: xv). As verb, undertaking auto/biographical research requires methodological considerations where we carefully consider our position in relation to our research participants, their stories, the process of analysis, and our resulting conclusions, thus seeking to theorise our subjectivity (Letherby 2003). As researchers, when we work auto/biographically to tell stories about the lives of others, there is an imprint of others and the social in the telling, as well as ourselves in the resulting re-presentations.

Since the early 1990s, the Auto/Biography group has regularly published its own evolving journal and monographs, as well as running annual conferences. Across the decades, international membership of the group has grown as has its membership ranges from doctoral researchers (as we both were in the 2000s), early, mid, late-career, and retired academics. The group has taken pride in a unique composition that speaks to ‘whole person’ academic lives and identities based upon mutual trust built up over time (see Sparkes, 2021).

THE PRESENT

In 2019 we took the places of Michael Erben and Jenny Byrne as the study group’s convenors, and Carly the place of Andrew Sparkes as journal editor for the *AutoBiography Review*. Carly noted ‘feeling the weight of this privilege’ (Stewart, 2020: para 3) given some 20 years of

editorial legacy, a sentiment that we shared concerning the fine balance between developing the group, its membership, activities, and publications whilst remaining sensitive to the group's make-up and history. Giddens' (1991) discussion of 'biographical continuity' as a necessary for sustaining personal identities is pertinent.

However, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic brought auto/biographical discontinuity to lives globally and so too to our group endeavours. As we all felt the realities of an uncertain world in March 2020, we had to cancel the annual summer conference held at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. The summer conference is a crucial marker in the calendar year for the group community, it is highly regarded, and many members attend year on year. We were concerned about the cancellation not least because it coincided so seamlessly with the change in group leadership and, returning to Giddens (1991, p. 54), impacted our "capacity" as convenors "to keep a particular narrative going".

Given that our community is diverse in geography and in generation we recognised the importance, and the challenges, of helping the community to stay connected in a new Covid-19 pandemic world. For one, part of the group's charm is that it has been decidedly less digital in organisation and practice than others. For example, the journal still existed only in print copy (see Stewart, 2020) and it is common to see scholars read from an actual paper, the conferences marked by a distinct lack of PowerPoint slides. Social technologies and networking sites have certainly not been part of the whole group agenda. One issue facing the group was access to digital media—for scholars still working in institutions a quick transition to online teaching gave rise to university paid licenses and a rapid upskilling in digital literacy. We observed that, for some, digital technologies were not an essential part of their working lives as academics, and a few members understandably felt sceptical of recent technologies or perceived that they would be difficult to use.

We set up a monthly series of online events hosted via an institutional license on the platform Zoom. In the lead up to the first seminar, we received several positive emails which included comments such as:

'it's good to know that I'm not toooooo old to learn new tricks - hey?'

'thank you so much for holding our wonderful group together in these very difficult circumstances'

However, these were not without technical hitches, for example those that required attendees had the latest versions of Zoom downloaded on their devices and we certainly had some email exchanges about these too:

'Still says 'password error' and will not let me join. F**k it! Give my apologies and have a good meeting.'

'I'm sure I'm causing you a disproportionate amount of bother when it comes to my technological ineptitude! However let me make up for it by wishing you a very happy New Year.'

Despite these challenges, we discovered important strengths that bridging the digital gap and engaging with technologies brought to the group. These included increased digital skills for some with follow-on benefits in terms of their personal choices and connections outside of the group. It also facilitated empathy where other group members, and in some cases family members, reached out by providing technical support for those using new devices or platforms for the first time. Having learned from these small events we progressed to hosting the one-day Christmas conference after which a longstanding member of the group emailed:

What a triumph! There were few technical hitches; the papers were intriguing and inspiring; people weren't shy to ask questions or comment etc.... I'm not so disappointed at the thought of the summer conference having to be the same!!!... Anyway, let me close by adding my accolades to those of others and say how much I enjoyed the conference and THANK YOU BOTH SO MUCH!

The feedback we received was affirming and we made the decision with confidence to host the forthcoming two-day summer conference in July 2021 online led and organised by Gayle Letherby and Julie Parsons.

We have yet to fully understand the long-term impact the pandemic has had on human interactions and social systems, but our working observations here may make a small contribution to the debate. For now, we feel content we have played a part in providing some stability for our group amidst wider narrative and auto/biographical disruption:

If we learn anything from this, one thing will surely be the importance of being not only connected but also really and physically present to one another. Warm wishes to you both for good health, perseverance and resilience and thanks again.

THE FUTURE

We close with some future directions for the group. First, that we have been afforded the opportunity to write this reflective piece signals new beginnings. We thank Lisa Moran of the Sociology Association of Ireland's (SAI) Biographic and Lifecourse Research Group (BNLR) for taking the initiative to reach out to us. We hope that this is the beginning of a fruitful collaboration and a valued relationship between the two like-minded groups. We look forward to the conversations that will follow.

Second, we will undoubtedly be part of a future that sees the increased use of digital technologies. *Auto/Biography Review* will be relaunched in electronic form in the coming months alongside a new editorial board. We also hope that our members will embrace recent technologies as wholeheartedly as they have engagement with our online events which may have acted as an important stepping-stone in the group's more digitally savvy future. Importantly, reflections on the past year have illuminated the unique character of the group and the need to create space for those at the start, middle, and end of their academic careers to support one another.

As convenors, we want to pursue an 'intricate welding of past, present, and the future' (Stewart, 2020: para 5) to sustain and further grow this rich and important community of committed and supportive interdisciplinary scholars. We are constantly reminded that we are 'personally involved in every intellectual project in which we work' (Mills 1959: 216).

Further information about the Auto/Biography Study Group, including how you can join the community and submit an article for publication in *Auto/Biography Review*, is available on the BSA website: <https://www.britsoc.co.uk/groups/study-groups/autobiography-study-group/>

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