



a/b  
Auto/Biography Study Group

BSA Auto/Biography Study Group  
Summer Conference

Troubling Auto/Biography  
15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021  
Online



## Troubling Auto/Biography

### Welcome

Dear Friends

Welcome to the 29th BSA Auto/Biography Study Group Summer Conference, which was originally planned to be held at Wolfson College, Oxford in July 2020. What a year we have all had since then? It is great that we are meeting this year albeit online, and we have an inspiring line-up of papers and plenary from long-standing member of the group, Chrissie Rogers. Detailed below is the programme at a glance, followed by the list of abstracts and delegate list. We are really looking forward to the conference and planning the next one, when we hope to meet you all again in person. Thanks to all of you for your support and assistance in putting the conference programme together.

Very best wishes

*The BSA A/B study group conference organisers*

### The Programme at a Glance

<b>THURSDAY 15<sup>th</sup> July</b>	
<b>9.00-9.10 Zoom sign in</b>	
<b>9.10-9.30 Welcome and introduction Gayle Letherby and Julie Parsons</b>	
<b>9.30-10.20</b>	Academic presentations
<b>10.25-11.15</b>	Academic presentations
<b>11.15-11.45</b>	Coffee and networking
<b>11.45-12.35</b>	Academic presentations
<b>12.40-13.30</b>	Academic presentations
<b>13.30-14.20</b>	Lunch and networking
<b>14.20-15.20</b>	<b>KEYNOTE</b>
<b>15.30-16.20</b>	Academic presentations
<b>16.30-17.20</b>	Academic presentations
<b>18.00-19.00</b>	Pre-dinner drinks and socialising
<b>FRIDAY 16<sup>th</sup> July</b>	
<b>9.15-9.30 Zoom sign in</b>	
<b>9.30-10.20</b>	Academic presentations
<b>10.25-11.15</b>	Academic presentations
<b>11.15-11.45</b>	Coffee and networking
<b>11.45-12.35</b>	Academic presentations
<b>12.40-13.30</b>	Academic presentations
<b>13.30-14.20</b>	Lunch and networking
<b>14.20-15.10</b>	Academic presentations
<b>15.20-16.10</b>	Academic presentations
<b>16.10-16.30</b>	<b>Closing Comments Anne Chappell and Carly Stewart</b>

## Programme: Overview of Academic Presentations

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

0915-0930

Welcome Gayle Letherby and Julie Parsons

### 9.30-10.20 Academic Presentations

#### Break Out Room 1

**Sharon Clancy**

*Learning in liminality: contested 'community' and Tall Poppy Syndrome in a North East Midlands mining town*

**Chair: Anne Chappell**

#### Break Out Room 2

**Rebecca Twinley**

*Officially autistic at forty: a source of my auto/ biographical troubles*

**Chair: Julie Parsons**

### 10.25-11.15 Academic Presentations

#### Break Out Room 1

**Karen Hanrahan**

*Narrative navigatio of former nuns: Exploring stories of transgression, reflexivity and transcendence through life history*

**Chair: Anne Chappell**

#### Break Out Room 2

**Carly Guest**

*Reflections on an auto/biographical photo-voice project in the sociology classroom*

**Chair: Gayle Letherby**

### 11.15-11.45 COFFEE and NETWORKING

### 11.45-12.35 Academic Presentations

#### Break Out Room 1

**Alec Grant and Susan Young**

*Troubling Tolichism in Several Voices: Resisting Epistemic Violence in Creative Analytical and Critical Autoethnographic Practice*

**Chair: Tracey Collett**

#### Break Out Room 2

**Juliet Hall**

*'The trouble with being an insider': Troubling autobiographies of mothers' of autistic children*

**Chair: Chrissie Rogers**

### 12.40-13.30 Academic Presentations

#### Break Out Room 1

**Pat Eyres**

*The Trouble With Religion*

**Chair: Anne Chappell**

#### Break Out Room 2

**Jenny Byrne**

*Troubled, troubling and troublesome: William, The Duke of Clarence 1765-1837*

**Chair: Jeni Nicholson**

13.30-14.20

**LUNCH and NETWORKING**

14.20-15.20 **KEYNOTE**

**Chrissie Rogers**

*Troubling auto/biography: mothering, disability and care beyond the crime*

**Chair: Carly Stewart**

**15.30-16.20 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Amanda Norman**

*Maternal Voices from Past to Present*

**Chair: Pat Eyres**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Karen Fowler-Watt and Matthew Charles**

*From resilience to resistance: troubling young auto/biographies and intergenerational peacebuilding*

**Chair: Christine Lewis**

**16.30-17.20 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Dennis Smith**

*Boris Johnson: who is he?*

**Chair: Jenny Byrne**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Terry Martin**

*Roger Scruton: A prophet is not without honor save in his own country*

**Chair: Julie Parsons**

**18.00-19.00 Pre-dinner drinks and socialising**

**FRIDAY 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

**9.30-10.20 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Kate Manlik**

*'I Didn't Actually Think I'd Have Much to Offer':  
Lesbian and Queer Women's HIV Narratives*

**Chair: Carly Stewart**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Kate Woodthorpe**

*Exploitation vs Expertise? The ethical implications of  
writing autobiographically about my son*

**Chair: Yvonne Anderson**

**10.25-11.15 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Marija Grujic**

*Troubling translations? Situative agential positioning in  
biography and discourses*

**Chair: Louise Owusu-Kwarteng**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Maria Tamboukou**

*Troubling the archive: auto/biographical  
reiterations of the self*

**Chair: Julie Parsons**

**11.15-11.45 COFFEE and NETWORKING**

**11.45-12.35 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Julia Bennett**

*Lockdown Diaries*

**Chair: Maria Tamboukou**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Brian Rappert**

*Sincere Deceivers*

**Chair: Terry Martin**

**12.40-13.30 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Gayle Letherby and Tracey Collett**

*'Can't take a joke or a jibe? What a snowflake':  
auto/biographical experiences and observations of insults*

**Chair: Julie Parsons**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Katherine Collins**

*The trouble with knowing: on writing  
Southern lives*

**Chair: Dennis Smith**

**13.30-14.20 LUNCH and NETWORKING**

**14.20-15.10 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Christine Lewis, Julie Parsons and Carly Stewart**

*Estranged: troubling 'family' relationships*

**Chair: Gayle Letherby**

**15.20-16.10 Academic Presentations**

**Break Out Room 1**

**Suzanne Schneider**

*Is there anything left to eat? The diet and lifestyle  
challenges of a T1 Diabetic on Dialysis*

**Chair: Juliet Hall**

**Break Out Room 2**

**Louise Owusu-Kwarteng**

*Raves And Close Shaves - An autobiographical  
reflection of a young Black woman's experiences in  
the UK 1990s rave culture*

**Chair: Bex Twinley**

**16.10-16.30 Closing Comments Anne Chappell and Carly Stewart**

## Abstracts

### Keynote

**Chrissie Rogers**

#### *Troubling auto/biography: mothering, disability and care beyond the crime*

Research with prisoner's families, especially those who have a 'disabled' son or daughter as a result of learning difficulties or disabilities, an autistic spectrum condition or mental health problems, has in the past been side-lined. As presented here, mothering a 'child' who is incarcerated is undeniably challenging. It could be that the events leading up to imprisonment occurred because of an unexpected violent act, a 'one off' serious crime, or a lifetime (to that point) of aggression, drug use or anti-social behaviour. Whatever the reasons for a custodial sentence, caring for and about a son or daughter, before offending and then during imprisonment is painful – emotionally and practically. I cannot pretend to feel auto/biographically what the mothers (and their sons) in my current research have been through. I only have limited and partial knowledge of mothering a disabled adult daughter who has been through the criminal justice system. Yet my life story data reveals mothers experience emotional and physical harm and systemic abuse, as well as display unconditional love and care work. Mothers of offenders have experienced a life that is unimaginably demanding and conveys accounts of failure. Not their failure, but that of the systems (and sometimes people) around them. Via a sociological imagination and through the lens of a care ethics model of disability, I identify care-less and care-full spaces to explore how participants recall physical and emotional violent abuse, resulting in the collapse of their mental well-being as well as their resilience to these events.

**Julia Bennet**

#### *Lockdown Diaries*

The project aims to capture a variety of experiences of living in the UK during the Covid pandemic through a collection of 59 one-day diaries written by members of the public on 3rd March 2021. The diaries, along with media accounts and other supplementary material, are being used to create a series of fictionalised short stories of one day during the pandemic. Taking inspiration from Kathleen Stewart (2007: 9) the stories show how '[e]veryday life ... takes everything we have' but 'also spawns a series of little somethings' growing 'wary and excited'. How are people from around the UK spending their time during Lockdown 3?

Diaries allow the researcher a unique insight into the diary-writer's life-world – they can act as a way of conducting an unobtrusive ethnographic study of mundane aspects of everyday life. In not requiring any face-to-face contact (virtual or in 'real' life) this is an ideal research method for current circumstances. By creating composite accounts enhanced with data from the media and fictionalised details to create an account of the day this research explores how sociology can be made more publicly accessible through these fictionalised (auto)biographies.

I will present some of the stories together with an exegesis showing how they illustrate the relationship between history and biography, private lives and public issues. I hope to engage the wider public in this 'sociological imagination' in order that a better understanding of the social world can be developed.

**Reference:**

Stewart, K. (2007) *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

**Jenny Byrne***Troubled, troubling and troublesome: William, The Duke of Clarence 1765-1837*

Being troubled is a psychological state that causes an individual to feel worried, distressed and anxious. A troublesome life is one that causes problems for others; and a troubling life is one that creates alarm in others the reasons for which are often complex and unsettling. This paper will explore the troubled, troublesome and troubling life of Prince William, Duke of Clarence (1765-1837) who became William IV. William was the third son of George III and Queen Charlotte. He was not expected to become King and his life did little to prepare him for the eventuality when he succeeded his brother in 1830. Although he died without a legitimate heir to the throne, two daughters died in infancy, he fathered ten illegitimate children all born to the Irish actress Dora Jordan (1761-1816), the woman he lived with for twenty years and then abandoned. The ramifications of this long-term relationship with its threefold troubled, troubling and troublesome features and the consequences these features had for those involved will be the focus of this paper.

**Sharon Clancy***Learning in liminality: contested 'community' and Tall Poppy Syndrome in a North East Midlands mining town*

I will explore the tensions of balancing nostalgia for a vanishing world deeply embedded in my psyche - a pit community in North East Derbyshire - with the pain and discomfort associated with growing up in a place predominantly hostile to learning. This was an environment in which being a 'clever bookish girl' and seeking a life of the mind was equated to hubris and asexuality and was routinely met with hostility, bullying and physical and psychosocial aggression. I will locate this discussion within the contested frame of 'community', a word used often as a heuristic device for all that is good and valued in civil society, a space where "the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change" (Williams, 1961). I will explore through my own diary entries written as a teenager - funny and poignant by turns - how far was I able to access these 'common meanings' and how far my exclusion from 'common activities and purposes' was in fact the spur to 'growth and change', ultimately enabling my acceptance at Cambridge university. I will chart the growing schism between my outer persona and an interior life which engaged in a deepening auto-didacticism far beyond what was taught in school.

**Katherine Collins***The trouble with knowing: on writing Southern lives*

'[A]nticolonialism is an attempt to articulate a world that has yet to exist, which will likely never exist, and to do so without knowing it in advance.' (Kwame Dawes, 2018)

'[I]gnorance is an asset that says "we don't know so we should try to know". [But] what has replaced that impulse to recognise ignorance, and the quest to discover, is the arrogance of knowledge' (Daniel J Elam,

2020)

Boaventura de Sousa Santos posits that turning absent subjects into present subjects is the foremost condition for identifying and validating oppressed peoples' knowledges. At first glance, writing 'the Life' of an 'absent subject' seems an obvious solution: the subject of a biography is a present subject in that text. However, isn't the very notion of a biography - a written life, underpinned by 'Northern' notions of time, identity, and self - conditional on forcing these subjects to conform to the epistemology that actively produced that subject as absent?

In this talk I would like to present my unfolding ideas about embracing a radical ignorance, naivety, unknowing, as a personal methodology for writing Southern lives. I have two exemplars in mind: poet and Pacific Studies theorist Teresia Teaiwa on 'edges' and how we might write birth and death; and sociologist Akinsola Akiwowo on the Alásùwàdà doctrines and relationality in life-writing. Through these I will explore the notion of unknowing and the potential for the metaphor of translation.

**Patricia Eyres**

*The Trouble With Religion*

There are few troublesome topics that can compete with the challenges and complexities of religious practice; however, it remains true that globally many people affiliate with a faith group, and 'religion' is part of our everyday lives. For some people daily or weekly practice is very important, while for others engagement is occasional with attendance at a wedding, a carol service at Christmas time, or sadly a funeral. Occupational therapists work with people to optimise their daily activity, addressing issues of independence and agency tackling challenges within every imaginable valued activity or 'occupation'. However, as in wider society, religious practice continues to be a troublesome area within the context of health and social care, and it is an area of their client's everyday activity that occupational therapists frequently feel ill equipped to tackle. In this presentation I briefly explore some of the issues raised in my recent PhD looking at religious practice as a valued occupation and specifically focus on the barriers to participation that were expressed by participants in a study using co-constructed auto/biographical accounts. This work shines a light on the biographical disruption experienced by four people (one of them being me) and suggests that the deeper understanding offered is an opportunity for occupational therapists, and other health and social care professionals, to more closely examine lived experience and to question what exactly does make religion such a troublesome area?

**Karen Fowler-Watt and Matthew Charles**

*From resilience to resistance: troubling young auto/biographies and intergenerational peacebuilding*

The 'troubling auto/biographies in this paper belong to former child soldiers from the Cauca region of Colombia and young people at risk of being drawn into conflict. In 2019, these two groups shared their lived experiences within intergenerational workshops, engaging in a series of activities intended to build resilience in a so called 'post – conflict' context. The workshops, which took place in a 'safe space', in Bogota for children at risk, were facilitated by the young people from Cauca, and started with the screening of an animated film, that they made to share their life stories, which highlights the dangers of forced recruitment. The workshops were immersive and flexible in design in an effort to avoid top down, Western hegemonic models of peace building and focused on listening and peer-to-peer exchanges, inspired by watching the film. A sense of 'growing together' emerged, whereby notions of post-traumatic growth were manifested in the participants' ability to draw strength from sharing their lived experiences –

their troubling auto/biographies. In learning from each other, it is hoped that the young people at risk feel empowered to resist (criminal gangs, violence), to persist (in seeking peace) and to encourage those that threaten them to desist.

### **Alec Grant and Susan Young**

#### *Troubling Tolichism in Several Voices: Resisting Epistemic Violence in Creative Analytical and Critical Autoethnographic Practice*

In an influential and much-cited paper\*, the sociologist Martin Tolich strongly advocates the need for authors to always seek either anticipatory or retrospective consent from those storied in autoethnographic work, whenever authors perceive a risk that the latter group may be hurt or offended by what is written about them. In this presentation, I (Alec Grant) will selectively present from our critical response\*\* to this paper. We take the view that 'Tolichism', or dogmatic inflexibility around the need to secure consent, functions to promote epistemic violence. Epistemic violence - authoritarian sanctions over what knowledge should be written and shared - risks silencing many actual and potential authors writing auto/biography in autoethnographic and, by implication, other work. We argue that the Tolichist position is methodologically unviable, is tacitly misogynistic and patriarchal at institutional and disciplinary levels, and, to the extent that it functions to close down the authorial voice of those who choose to 'write to right' about people who have abused them or others, is in violation of relational ethics at a vitally important fundamental level.

\*Tolich, M. 2010. A Critique of Current Practice: Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers." *Qualitative Health Research*, 20 (12), 1599-1610,

\*\*Grant, A, Young, S. In press for 2022. *Troubling Tolichism in Several Voices: Resisting Epistemic Violence in Creative Analytical and Critical Autoethnographic Practices*. *Journal of Autoethnography*. 3 (1) (January 2022) or 3(2) (April 2022).

### **Marija Grujic**

#### *Troubling translations? Situative agential positioning in biography and discourses*

How to understand power relations that occur with a translation process? Does a translation reify social categories of difference – i.e., ethnicity/nation/religion – and gendered hierarchies? These were some of the questions that emerged during my fieldwork among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) that I conducted for my doctoral project 'Belonging in Unhomely Homelands'. In my presentation, I will discuss how translation raises questions about researcher's accountability and present some of the strategies that I employ in my writing.

My understanding of the agential positioning within the precarious settings (i.e. living in protracted displacement) and interview situation builds on modes of translation that I became aware of in the research process. To transmit biographical narratives to an imagined audience, my interlocutors engaged in various translations. They were translating to me (as a researcher who spoke their language) experiences that I did not inhabit and to an imagined others who - they assumed - were unfamiliar with the context. There is another aspect, namely, the translation of the untold – everything that is left out – silences, silenced content and what is 'lost in translation'. From an intersectional-biographical approach that I employed in my study, these empty places and troubles are a productive research 'sight'. Namely,

translation is a 'site' of power and thus constitutive to the research process and situated knowledge production about the Self and the Other in biographies.

### **Carly Guest**

#### *Reflections on an auto/biographical photo-voice project in the sociology classroom*

In this paper I consider the possibilities auto/biographical teaching and learning methods offer for creating a transformative and collaborative learning environment and for developing a sociological imagination. Drawing on interviews with students and on my own teaching diaries, I reflect on our experiences of an auto/biographical photo-voice project. The project revealed the challenges and tensions of using auto/biographical methods when contending with low attendance, differing expectations of the assignment and power dynamics in the classroom. Using auto/biographical approaches in the classroom requires negotiation, reflection and sensitivity to ensure that the power dynamics we attempt to critique and disrupt through critical pedagogies are not unwittingly reproduced. 'I-poems' composed from my teaching diary reveal how auto/biographical teaching methods allow me to 'enter the classroom with hope', as bell hooks compels us to, but can also expose the precarious nature of classroom utopias.

### **Juliet Hall**

#### *'The trouble with being an insider': Troubling autobiographies of mothers' of autistic children*

This paper draws on my doctoral research exploring the narratives of mothers lived experience of raising autistic children. These narratives were often troubling for the participants, their children and families and on occasion for me, the researcher, also a mother of autistic children.

Early findings suggest that mothers often feel unsupported and inadequate as parents. They refer to feeling desperate, like a 'fish out of water'; feeling physically and emotionally 'lonely' and that they have a 'stick' with which they regularly hit themselves with. In one interview, a respondent describes experiences fluctuating between feeling like an autism expert, being 'in the brain game' and knowing how to speak to brains, to feeling helpless and losing faith in themselves and their ability to provide care for their children.

As an insider researcher I found some narratives troubling. One mother described letting her young child go litter picking unsupervised, another let her son spend the day travelling on the buses reporting that the 'bus drivers keep an eye out for him' or on the seafront with the local 'drunks'. In one interview, I felt a sadness and empathy for the child as the mother described her actions to 'train' her child to behave in a certain way and conform to her expectations. This demonstrates the emotional impact of research on the researcher and the troubling aspects of auto/biographical practices.

### **Karen Hanrahan**

#### *Narrative navigatio of former nuns: Exploring stories of transgression, reflexivity and transcendence through life history*

Based on doctoral work in progress, this interdisciplinary project adopts a life history approach to explore the lives of former Irish women religious (nuns), one of whom is my mother. I consider the plurality of individual and social factors leading to the women's entry into a religious order in 1950s Ireland and how their testimonies shine a light on their hidden lives as religious prior to, and following, Vatican II (1962-1965). I explore how they subsequently came to re-imagine an alternative self and navigated the

transgressive process of leaving convent life decades later to re-enter the secular world they renounced as teenagers. I draw on the allegory of the 'navigatio' as a metaphor to interrogate dispossession/repossession as I explore how being a former nun shaped the overall configuration of the women's narrative identity, given that they are now in their eighties.

Investigating their life stories within the contemporaneous social and cultural context is central to this methodological approach. Hence, the women's stories speak to current discourses relating to historical institutional oppression in Ireland. The view of life history research as a pedagogic site for learning (Goodson and Gill, 2011) is key to this endeavour: narrative research can provide opportunities for both participants and researchers. It is associated with restoring individual agency, giving voice to marginalised, silenced lives and revealing the stranglehold of oppressive meta-narratives. My analysis draws on Goodson's (2013) research on narrative capital as a framework to explore the shift to a self-narrative which embodies an agentic life plot (Polkinghorne, 1996).

### References:

Goodson, I. (2013) *Developing Narrative Theory*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

Goodson, I. F. and Gill, S. R. (2011) *Narrative pedagogy: Life history and learning*. New York: Peter Lang

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1996) 'Transformative Narratives: From Victimic to Agentic Life Plots', *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 50(4): 299-305

### Gayle Letherby and Tracey Collett

*'Can't take a joke or a jibe? What a snowflake': auto/biographical experiences and observations of insults*

Exacerbated by the rise of social media and the shift towards celebrity, media driven politics, insults in everyday life have taken on added significance. Insults are seemingly 'everywhere': sometimes funny, sometimes cathartic, most times offensive. Insults are at the same time staid and dynamic in that they draw on well-worn stereotypes and also react to new meanings and events. Arguably, those with less power are more likely to be insulted and to have their concerns dismissed. Furthermore, insults from the more powerful can have troubling implications beyond the rhetorical, in that not only do they encourage, enable and essentially condone similar from others they can have profound consequences for both individuals and groups. Insults may negatively impact on mental health and wellbeing and can also inform institutional, even governmental, practice and policy. Yet, individuals who are seen as powerful, as 'influencers', may themselves be victims of insults. Although insulters are viewed as engaging in deviant behaviour some, perhaps mostly those criticising the powerful, may believe that they do so from a position of moral authority. In all cases it is fair to say that whether from a position of power or in an attempt to regain some control, insulting others is a performative act with intended audiences in mind, in which an individual(s) draws on societal and/or personal values in an attempt to put themselves forward/pull others back. In this paper we draw on both our own experiences of 'being insulted' and on our observations of the experiences of others.

**Christine Lewis, Julie Parsons and Carly Stewart**

*Estranged: troubling 'family' relationships*

Morgan (1996) makes a clear and important distinction between the families 'we live with' (reality) and the families 'we live by' (ideology). In this paper we will be exploring the implications of choosing to never 'live with' family members again, in terms of the act of becoming estranged or the processes and cycles of estrangement. We will draw on our own auto/biographical reflections and lived experience of estrangement(s), including the catalysts or epiphanies that lead to the ultimate severing of family relations and the significance of supportive witnesses to these decision-making processes. We will also examine the lack of narratives around estrangement and the difficulties in knowing how to respond, how to act and how to be in a social world that places a high value on close family ties. There is an apprehension and apologetic focus in the telling of these stories as they unsettle wider family narratives of kinship and belonging. The social significance of family occasions and events are heightened by an absent present, it is not just an embodied missing, but a material missing in terms of birthdays, Christmases and other markers of familial belonging. Becoming estranged therefore signifies loss, but also failure, as the estranged fail to maintain family relations. These failures or losses are tempered with feelings of guilt, blame, shame, grief, as well as release, relief and on occasion euphoria. Estrangement therefore troubles the lived reality of family relations and is troubled by family ideology which demands harmonious, supportive and enduring family ties.

**Reference:**

Morgan, D. (1996) *An Introduction to Family Studies*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Kate Manlik**

*'I Didn't Actually Think I'd Have Much to Offer': Lesbian and Queer Women's HIV Narratives*

Lesbian and queer women are erased from HIV discourses, as HIV exposure categories do not record their sexual practices with other women as (potential) sites of transmission. Despite this, lesbian and queer women often have diverse experiences with HIV: as activists, carers, friends, health professionals, and/or as people living with HIV themselves. This paper draws on the findings of a qualitative PhD project, which explores lesbian and queer women's place in Australia's HIV landscape. In particular, it will reflect on the challenges of collecting lesbian and queer women's autobiographical narratives of HIV and AIDS.

For this project, I designed a bespoke website where lesbian and queer women could submit short fragments of narratives that spoke to their experiences with HIV. This website-based research method, however, received quite low participation rates (n=7) when compared to the subsequent in-depth interviews (n=23) I conducted. This paper will explore a gap that emerged during the data collection phase, where several participants emphasised their lack of personal connection to HIV, before going on to describe quite complex, detailed encounters with HIV and AIDS in the in-depth interviews. In doing so, I will consider the difficulties involved in eliciting autobiographical narratives from marginalised and silenced groups and offer a path forward for when these troubles occur.

## Terry Martin

Roger Scruton: A prophet is not without honor save in his own country

The term 'world renowned conservative British philosopher' might be deemed oxymoronic for both Roger Scruton, and also for the predecessor to whom he was often compared, Edmund Burke. In his funeral eulogy for Scruton delivered at Malmesbury Abbey, on the 24th of January 1920, and reprinted in the Salisbury Review, a publication for which Scruton was the first Editor, Robert Grant said  
In our carping, mediocre times, the great man is an unfashionable concept. But reviewing Roger's achievement, and comparing him with great people in the past, I conclude that a great man is exactly what he was.

His greatness was acknowledged with many awards, particularly from former eastern bloc countries, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, in recognition of the courageous work he had done to nurture intellectual life in those countries in their deeply troubling times under communist tyrannies.

In 2019 Scruton naively agreed to an interview at the New Statesman, which when published was, in his own words, "a mendacious concoction of out-of-context remarks and downright fabrications." Thanks to the heroic efforts of his good friend and protege Douglas Murray his reputation was rightfully restored. In this presentation I will explore why he was the object of such disdain and indifference in this country whilst at the same time deeply honoured and revered abroad.

## Amanda Norman

### *Maternal Voices from Past to Present*

This paper examines British working-class women's autobiographies maternal experiences as a way of revealing their troubled personal identity, their discord in the family home and collectively their political positionality. The Guildswomen's Group, during the long nineteenth century were drawn on, specifically *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (1915). The letters revealed women's working-class lives during the numerous transitions to motherhood and their troubling identities, highlighting the tensions between the political and domestic spheres of family life. Collectively these drew on the reproductive body, gender and the socio/historical context. The autobiographies also revealed the emotional and maternal perspective of motherhood during a period of prevalent infant mortality with little support. The mother's roles written in the letters also demonstrated a shift in emphasis from the individual to a collective identity, which demanded the inclusion of national reproductive rights. In taking a contemporary lens, woman reading other women's autobiographical writings have experienced them as "mirrors" of their own positions. Drawing on the complexities of maternity (see, Gordon (2019) *The first Breath* and Knott (2019) *Mother*) connecting troubling autobiographies to inform personal and political movements continues to provide a powerful perspective, learning from the past in shaping the future.

### References:

Gordon, O. (2019) *The First Breath*. Bluebird books: London

Knott, S. (2019) *Mother*. London: Penguin

Llewellyn Davis, M. (1978) *Maternity Letters from Working Women*. London: Virago Press

## **Louise Owusu-Kwarteng**

*Raves And Close Shaves - An autobiographical reflection of a young Black woman's experiences in the UK  
1990s rave culture*

'Raves and Close Shaves' is an auto/biographical reflection of my experiences of the rave culture during the 1990s. More specifically, it charts my engagement in it as a young Black woman. In this context, I was very much the minority, as it was (and still is) considered as predominantly White space, especially in the Midlands. My account tells of how I was also considered a 'misfit' amongst my Black peers whose preference was R'n'B and Hip Hop, which was considered more 'appropriate' for Black people at the time. Referring to me as a 'misfit' was also my peers' way of suggesting that I was 'acting White' (Ogbu 1986) and transgressing what they perceived as norms of Blackness because I was not engaging in the types of popular culture that were deemed acceptable/normal for Black people. In order to analyse this, I refer to the work of Neal-Barnett (2001) who considers the generalisations and 'significance and meanings' attached to being Black, and Burrell (2013), who acknowledges that there are often 'fixed ideas' of Blackness, which are somewhat troubling. Through my story and with reference to Black feminists including, bell hooks, I seek to 'trouble' and disrupt the idea that what it means to be Black means engagement with particular 'aesthetics associated with Black culture' (Burrell 2013: unpaginated) (e.g. those drawn from Hip hop/rap/R'n B). Rather, there needs to be more recognition of diverse tastes, and engaging with them does not make a person 'less Black'.

### **References**

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## **Brian Rappert**

*Sincere Deceivers*

As part of a wider self-study of learning entertainment magic, this presentation examines how professional magicians portray the ins and outs of their art form in autobiographies. Such accounts are presented as troubled because of the manner in which they need to respond to competing demands. On the one hand, in general, autobiographies often rest on notions of authenticity and sincerity. Writers offer readers a backstage view of their lives, experiences and inner thinking. In contrast, much of the performance appeal associated with magicians derives from their skilful ability to use guile, dissimulation, and deceit, even while audiences are expecting guile, dissimulation and deceit. Through examining the writing of prominent contemporary magicians, this presentation examines two main questions associated with these contrasting demands: How do magician-authors fashion their life stories such that they can hold together evidence of their genuineness with evidence of their ability to mislead? How are truth and deception positioned as part of their accounts?

## **Dennis Smith**

### *Boris Johnson: who is he?*

Is Boris Johnson Benny Hill or Al Capone? Narcissus or Hercules? Johnson's hybrid attention-seeking persona was unchanging as he mocked Brussels for the Daily Telegraph (1989-94), became a UK TV personality (1994-9), mixed television, feature-writing and being an MP (1999-2007), served as London's mayor (2008-16), returned to parliament, campaigned for Brexit, became prime minister, won a large majority in a snap election, pushed through Brexit, and set out his programme (2016-21 and still going). The 'Johnson approach' is rooted in a dynasty stretching back through the male line to a successful merchant from Anatolia in the late nineteenth century. Equally imposing, the female line includes Boris's mother who came from the Fawcett family, leading campaigners for women's rights. This paper outlines a collective biography of this dynasty. After generations of sustained effort, was its political triumph finally made possible by populism's rise, democracy's disarray, and the progressive fragmentation of the British nation-state? Boris, the Great Entertainer, commands the national stage. But remember Archie Rice's warning: 'Don't clap too loud. It's an old building'. Political cracks have already appeared down the Irish Sea, on the Anglo-Scottish border, in the two-party system and in strained relations between government and judiciary. Not least, there's the existential threat of Covid with which Johnson has already had a close encounter. There may be more trouble ahead, for the politician known as 'Boris' and for the rest of us.

## **Suzanne Schneider**

### *Is there anything left to eat? The diet and lifestyle challenges of a T1 Diabetic on Dialysis*

Being diagnosed with T1 Diabetes is known to have a major psychological impact, initiating the start of a challenging life-long regime that is only partially effective at preventing complications such as kidney failure. Patients diagnosed with End Stage Renal Disease are required to alter their entire outlook on life, facing increased anxiety and fears as they await a lifesaving organ transplant. While many think of dialysis as a life-saving treatment, it is also a life-changing experience. Diet plays a big part in managing both T1D and kidney disease, and yet the guidelines for both diseases are at opposite ends – one promoting fresh vegetables and healthy fats, the other demonising those same foods. My auto/biographical research titled: *"Is there anything left to eat?"* looks at the existential and troubled challenges of a T1D on a dialysis diet. It aims to provide an insight into the stress of receiving conflicting dietary advice provided to dialysis patients, and to highlight the need for psychological support for dialysis patients who live with the fear that "this might all be for nothing" if a transplant organ is not found in time.

## **Maria Tamboukou**

### *Troubling the archive: auto/biographical reiterations of the self*

In this paper, I draw on my research of writing a feminist genealogy of automathographies, through excavating Sofia Kovalevskaya's auto/biographical documents. As the first woman to hold a chair in mathematics in modern Europe, but also as a novelist and playwright, Kovaleskaya is a figure that has inspired generations of women mathematicians, as well as feminist and literary scholars around the world. And yet, apart from the autobiography of her early years in Russia, her personal diaries, journals and letters have never been translated in their entirety and remain inaccessible to non-Russian speaking scholars. What has emerged instead from the significant body of secondary literature that has evolved around her life and work is a meta-archive of scattered auto/biographical documents with different and

often competing translations, fragments of lines, extracts and passages from her letters, diary entries, novels, and scientific writings, as well as striking quotations and some photographic images that create a palimpsest of auto/biographical reiterations of the self. It is my wandering journeys in the labyrinth of Kovalevskaya's meta-archive that I chart in this paper, as I move in between texts, images, and sounds.

### **Rebecca Twinley**

#### *Officially autistic at forty: a source of my auto/biographical troubles*

In October 2019, two months after my fortieth birthday, I received an official diagnosis that I am autistic. I joined all those other late-diagnosed women who were – prior to diagnosis – amongst the thousands of women in the UK who had been previously been undiagnosed and overlooked. I spent my years to this point being mislabelled, misunderstood, or misinterpreted. I dealt with feelings I did not understand, sensory experiences I could not bear to process, and feeling a need to cope with 'normal' aspects of everyday life. But all those years, I never knew why I experienced these troubles. In the discourse surrounding autism, this is referred to as the cost of camouflaging. In this paper, I present a critical discussion of predominant discourses on autism and gender, as I reflect on my auto/biographical troubles from my newly-acquired identity and perspective as an autistic forty-year old woman.

### **Kate Woodthorpe**

#### *Exploitation vs Expertise? The ethical implications of writing autobiographically about my son*

I am a Sociologist who specialises in death and dying, and a Mum to a three-year-old boy who has a life-threatening condition and is in receipt of Children's Palliative Care. Going forward I want to bring my professional and personal worlds together to write about my experience of parenting a child with complex medical needs, navigating health and social care systems, children's palliative care services, and the social and financial implications. Yet as I write about my experience, I find myself repeatedly grappling with the ethical question of whether I am exploiting my son, and what may happen if and when he reads what I have written when he is older. At the same time, I recognise that as an academic in this privileged position I have parental experience and expertise that could contribute to the literature and beyond. This paper will explore these troubles as I bounce back and forth between concerns about exploitation vs a desire to get 'our story' into the public domain, and dealing with the potential risks (namely, criticism) associated with doing so.

## Delegates

Yvonne Anderson, Independent

Julia Bennet, Independent

Jenny Byrne, University of Southampton

Anne Chappell, Brunel University London

Matthew Charles, Universidad del Rosario

Sharon Clancy, University of Nottingham

Tracey Collett, University of Plymouth

Katherine Collins, University of Oxford

Lyvinia Elleschild, University of Plymouth

Patricia Eyres, University of Plymouth

Karen Fowler-Watt, Bournemouth University

Carly Guest, Middlesex University

Alec Grant, Independent

Marija Grujic, University Frankfurt

Nina Veetnisha Gunnarsson, Jönköping University

Juliet Hall, University of Plymouth

Karen Hanrahan, University of Brighton

Gayle Letherby, University of Plymouth / University of Greenwich

Christine Lewis, Edge Hill University

Landa Love, University of Plymouth

Kate Manlik, Macquarie University

Terry Martin, University of Southampton

Jenifer Nicholson, Independent

Amanda Norman, University of Winchester

Denise O'Flanagan, Maynooth University

Louise Owusu-Kwarteng, University of Greenwich

Julie Parsons, University of Plymouth

Froukje Pitstra, Free University of Amsterdam

Brian Rappert, University of Exeter

Chrissie Rogers, University of Kent

Suzanne Schneider, Bournemouth University

Dennis Smith, Loughborough University

Carly Stewart, Bournemouth University

Maria Tamboukou, University of East London

Rebecca Twinley, University of Brighton

Kate Woodthorpe, University of Bath

Susan Young, Royal College of Art