

to think is to experiment

Wednesday, 28th April, 2004, Barking Campus, Room:N025

Abstracts

Lose your head and see who you really are: Douglas Harding's "headless way" - implications for psychology.

Toni Brennan & James Walsh, University of East London

Our research explores the implications for psychology of "Headlessness", a method of enquiry discovered by the English philosopher Douglas Harding during World War II when, with the possibility of impending death, finding who he really was became his main priority. Harding, who is, inter alia, an architect, a Buddhist teacher and a lecturer in world religions and has published articles in psychology journals, has spent the rest of his life touring the world to share his discovery.

Some workshops were conducted at UEL to present this method of enquiry and to invite participants to try some of the simple "experiments" devised by Douglas Harding to enable people to see who they really are. Preliminary analysis of the mainly qualitative data collected indicates that there appears to be some general interest in "Headlessness" – and postgraduate students currently in training in Counselling Psychology and in Clinical Psychology programmes expressed some cautious interest in the possibility of incorporating Harding's perspective and "experiments" in their work with some clients. In addition to reporting the findings of this pilot study, which indicate that there is scope for forming a "headlessness" focus group, the presentation will include an interactive part and everyone is welcome to try Douglas Harding's experiments and... to lose their head.

Confinement in Context: Four Generations of Childbirth Stories

Ruth Silver, University of East London

Family stories have always been an integral part of my life. Being in the unusual position of still having my mother and grandmother alive when my daughter gave birth to my grandson, I decided to explore our four generations of family childbirth stories. Using narrative analysis, I look behind the content to the structure of each story - not only at our differing experiences, but also at what we say, and how we say it. Working from the premise that childbirth is ultimately a gendered experience, set against the backdrop of changing women's rights over the last 60 years, I investigate how each story simultaneously draws out an individual, yet surprisingly social vision of childbirth and womanhood across the generations. As my personal story is included, my study is partially autoethnographic, and I therefore additionally reflect on the process of research from the dual perspective of being both researcher and participant.

Affective Structures of Emotional Disclosure. A study of some of the possible psychophysical and linguistic modifications due to repeated emotional disclosures.

Darren Ellis, Loughborough University

This research project is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the modifications due to repeated emotional disclosure. It is posited within the emotional disclosure study (EDS) paradigm pioneered by James Pennebaker and his colleagues. The EDS paradigm usually asks participants to write about negative emotional experiences over a number of occasions. This form of disclosure has generally been found to be associated with improved health outcomes. However the paradigm lacks a comprehensive, theoretical substantiation as to why and how this transformation occurs (see Pennebaker, 1997). This project hypothesises that this transformation may be explained through a concept developed by Antonio Damasio. Damasio suggests a process through which affective experiences are transformed by being transposed from a “body loop mechanism” to the “as if body loop mechanism.” This is a complex neural process through which highly affective experiences facilitate: non-conscious – raw - somatic emotions; to facilitating: worked through – cerebral feelings. This project is concerned with this process which it nominates “asification”. To look at this process this project focuses on whether there are any significant linguistic fluctuations within and between the narratives that are recorded, in conjunction with fluctuations of GSR metering. Damasio suggests that the more asification occurs the less the autonomic nervous system is activated. According to the EDS paradigm two general propositions can be applied to this procedure: one is the inhibition model the other is the cognitive reappraisal model.

The EDS paradigm tends to ask its participants to write about highly charged negative experiences in general as opposed to focusing on one experience. In order to look at cognitive reappraisal and the release of inhibition in a more precise methodological way it would be more beneficial to look at a single story told on a number of occasions. Thus fluctuations in the language style become much more visible. Linguistic studies within this paradigm previously, have tended to quantify the narratives through such content analysis as categorical word count. However it is argued that this form of analysis de-contextualises words from their relativistic structures. The form of narrative analysis that is conducted in this study is more able to look at the various ways in which an individual story may vary as well as quantify and perform categorical analysis. This is achieved by using a linguistic word count analysis software and an adaptation of Labovian narrative analysis; which focuses on Labov’s understanding of “orientation, evaluation and complicating action.” This analysis incorporates in part the hypothesis that the complicating action is that from which the emotions/feelings within the narrative emerge. The overarching complicating action does not change throughout each of an individual’s set of disclosures; however in each narrative there are also sub sets of complicating actions which may vary throughout disclosures and thus portray differing emotions.

The body in psychopathology

Ian Tucker, Loughborough University

This paper is drawn from a wider project focused on identifying and analysing some of the ways that the ‘body’ is made salient in psychopathology. It seeks to analyse how people diagnosed ‘schizophrenic’ make sense of and relate to their bodies through the narratives they use to account for their ‘illness’ experiences. For example, what is the relationship between their bodies and their medication? How do they assign meaning and decide how and if their medication is working? How does it function and how do they relate to it? One cannot think or conceptualise the body without recognising that it is in a constant relationship with our social world. Our bodies are unfinished products of both social and natural processes (Shilling, 2003), and these processes need

to be addressed and analysed as inter-relational rather than distinct factors operating in isolation. The focus then is on the natural and social processes that 'produce' the body in psychopathology, and how people diagnosed 'schizophrenic' relate and make sense of their bodies in terms of these processes. Through analysis of mental health service users' narratives, this paper draws from recent work in social theory (e.g. Shilling, 2003; Burkitt, 1999) that has sought to conceptualise embodiment as part of a matrix of different relations. It attempts to further understanding in psychopathology and add to the growing field of 'body work' in social theory.

Desiring dissent/dissenting desires: the politics of negotiating everyday spaces, geographies and inner worlds in the art of the Chinese diaspora.

Diana Yeh, University of East London

The politics of resistance was the organising dynamic of the so-called 'black arts movement' in Britain during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In today's climate of cultural diversity however, forms of power and resistance have become more dispersed and shadowy, operating on multiple fronts and in diverse directions.

In this paper, I argue that the concept of resistance as a framework for debates over art and cultural difference is problematic. As it is commonly conceived, resistance is locked in a dichotomous relationship with power and can only articulate itself in terms provided by that power. How, then, might a critical practice both engage fully with and speak beyond various forms of resistance in the works of cultural practitioners?

By focusing on the dynamics of space and place in the works of two artists, I seek to uncouple resistance from domination in order to show that resistance may be constituted not only through opposition to authority but also through the articulation and affirmation of experiences and ways of seeing or being that lie outside those defined by dominant powers. Fiona Tan, born in Australia, of Chinese-Indonesian descent, based in Amsterdam and working in Berlin, uses the moving image to create installations that explore personal, intensely physical, experiences of occupying and moving through space. Anthony Key, born in South Africa, of Chinese descent and living in London, works with objects, activating their surfaces as disputed territories and their edges as contested boundaries. At the heart of their work lies a tension between fixity, groundedness and abstract conceptions of place on the one hand and metaphors of flight and weightlessness, and an intimate, bodily awareness of space and place on the other.

How do such concepts impact upon a subject's perspective and positioning? What implications do they have for these artists, who find themselves variously positioned as 'Chinese', 'Chinese Indonesian', 'British Chinese' or 'culturally diverse' within the international art world? Focusing on the haptic qualities of the artists' works, I explore resistance as a politics of negotiating everyday spaces, geographies and inner worlds.

Participatory Action Research in a community development setting – obstacles and opportunities

Stefanie Buckner, University of Central Lancashire

This paper draws from a project that evaluates the work of an arts-based healthy living centre (the 'Centre'). Located in a deprived inner-city ward, the Centre has developed innovative models of health care delivery in the context of a wider remit of community development. Community involvement and ownership are crucial aspects of the organisation's philosophy. In line with the participatory ethos of the Centre, the qualitative methodological framework of the evaluation combines biographical and observational with participatory action research (PAR) methods.

This paper focuses on the PAR component of the evaluation in the form of the so-called Development Group. Consisting largely of members who manage community activities and groups at the Centre, the latter was originally intended as a reflexive self-monitoring circle that would exemplify the development of a group in the Centre, and help to embed research in the organisation. The paper examines this group in relation to central tenets of PAR as outlined in the literature. At the same time as revealing obstacles to PAR through the Development Group (e.g. negative connotations of research in the organisation; lack of a shared language between researchers/researched), it elaborates opportunities that eventually arose from the group (e.g. members' enhanced recognition of the need for research; training and involvement in other aspects of the evaluation such as interviews). Through presenting these obstacles and opportunities that might not be specific to the particular setting of the Centre, the paper provides insights of potential relevance for conducting PAR in other organisations or community settings.

Why should I care? An educator's personal narrative in a climate of political spin

Jayne Osgood, London Metropolitan University

In this paper I combine an analysis of one early years practitioners' personal narrative with a broader critical discourse analysis of the recruitment drive the Sure Start Unit that was waged on government webpages.

I argue that the messages inherent within the Sure Start Unit's rhetoric are laden with classed notions about who should enter the childcare workforce. By deconstructing several key issues, attention is drawn to normative classed assumptions made about status, equal opportunities, pay and conditions and education and training which mask the reality of working in an unstable and poorly respected employment sector. I then contrast this analysis to the individual narrative of a practitioner (from a working-class background, who undertook an Early Childhood Studies degree at a post-1992 university on a part-time basis, has several children of her own and sought to balance the competing demands of study, employment and domestic responsibilities). The paper highlights the lack of authenticity of government discourses juxtaposed personal narrative.

Fertility Related Discourses and Female Subjectivity: Narratives of Professional Women

Merryn Smith: *University of Cardiff Wales*

As more women have entered the professions there has been a proliferation of fertility related discourses concerning maternity leave, child-care, and birth rate trends etc. Often made manifest through public debate, such discourses have given rise to the consolidation of female subject typologies, such as the 'stay at home mum', 'childless professional' and the 'superwoman' etc. Accordingly, fertility related discourses act to situate women in relation to an apparent subjective choice. As such, women are discursively positioned and female subjectivity is discursively constituted through a set of fertility related discourses that are inscribed with specific conceptualisations of choice and operate as though women have unlimited choice in regards to fertility, work and family. Such conceptualisations of choice, I propose, rely on a specific ontology and language of individualism that finds its locus within the ideals of Neo Liberalism.

Although there has been much personal/anecdotal exploration of issues pertaining to women in relation to fertility related discourses, there appears to be little specific current or prior research involving the narrative analysis of women regarding the discursive positioning and production of female subjectivity and fertility discourses. Female interview participants in the 'Fertility Discourses and Female Subjectivity: Narratives of Professional Women' research project illuminate deep contradictions between their lived experience and such discourses. The research project demonstrates how such contradictions are made invisible by Neo Liberal discourses of choice and through psychological discourses of the self, at this present historical conjuncture.

Feminism, Women's Organisations and Civil Society in Turkey

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The last two decades after the military intervention of 1980 have witnessed several debates in Turkey on the emergence of a contemporary civil society, which is conceptualised as a sphere of voluntary organizations which keep their distance with the state and mainstream politics in their attempts to constitute a public opinion that is supposed to have transformative potential in the democratisation of the society (Habermas, 1997: 52-3). The politics and activities of the feminist movement, and women's organizations have played an important role in the emergence of this "new" civil/public sphere, which also has constituted a space for women with different political affiliations where they have participated as civil/political actors. This presentation will overview the impacts of politics and activities of the feminist movement and women's organisations with different political agendas on the development of a new civil society in Turkey.