

## **ABSTRACTS:**

### **Understanding Partner Abuse in East London: a Qualitative Study Carol Rivas, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry**

My PhD is based around a qualitative study of domestic violence. I have commenced the first of three 5-monthly semi-structured interviews with currently abused white British and African Caribbean women. I am particularly interested in the interfaces of abuse with social, family and service provider support, and culture. As a fledgling qualitative researcher, I am keen for feedback. I still need to recruit half my target 30 women, so please pass my details to anyone who might be interested in taking part. The data collected so far are rich with description and subtext, but cannot represent the body language and subtle nuances of speech of the women, which I try to add through reflective phrases. The planned analysis will look at themes across interviews and also each woman's story in space and time.

I am learning valuable lessons about both the homogenization and the reification of culture. The women's stories show me how the nature of interpersonal conflict can change both within the same relationship and when a woman enters a new relationship, and how they cope, through their own statements of identity, (false?) autonomy and moral justification. It is emotionally challenging (and also role-challenging for me as non-judgmental researcher) to consider contradictions such as how women normalise lives in which their daily activities are tightly controlled.

The women interviewed so far have talked about the influence of local rather than societal factors such as patriarchy on the abuse. At the same time they describe how their abuse is located within the wider social structural context. Many aspects of their stories seem to challenge the overtly feminist approach that most domestic violence researchers adopt. Having stepped into the women's stories, I am rethinking what lived abuse and lived support mean, and the timing of intervention. I realise how value-laden are terms such as rape, and also the items in the closed questionnaires I am also using. I have found it challenging to produce good qualitative work, coming from a strongly quantitative background and at the same time have become increasingly exasperated by quantitative studies that need but do not contain a qualitative element. My natural leaning is to mixed methods, and I am augmenting the narrative data with self-administered questionnaires for the women. This gives me a "comfort zone" but also provides triangulation and contextual information (e.g. that the woman is depressed) that is not clear from the interviews themselves. Nonetheless, my focus is on the rich harvest of the narratives themselves.

### **Thinking through the Fabric of Life: Textiles, Text, Texture Solveigh Goett, Textile Artist and Researcher**

Textiles are our second skin, an integral part of human life: essential for survival, they accompany us through the journey of life. From direct sensual experience comes a shared tacit knowledge of textiles, reflected in language through the use of metaphors and informing thought patterns through an understanding of material connections and properties. The links between textiles and human experience as well as between thinking and making underpin a practice-based research project investigating the role of everyday textiles in the narration of the self. Different strands of textile narratives are tentatively linked in search of patterns; ideas are articulated as visual and tactile propositions through images and objects. This presentation aims to give a feel of the initial stages of exploration and play with possibilities.

## **The Politics of Late-Modern Colonial Occupation: Al-Aqsa Intifada and the Question of Palestinian Agency**

**Laura Junka, University of East London**

The aim of this paper is to critically examine current conditions of Palestinian agency, and open a field inquiry into the very nature of the political in Palestine. In order to do so, I examine, from the perspective of poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, some of the key political questions that have characterised the ongoing Palestinian uprising, the al-Aqsa intifada. Unlike the first intifada, which is remembered nostalgically and as a heyday of Palestinian resistance, the al-Aqsa intifada is most often understood as a moment of crisis of Palestinian agency and central to the al-Aqsa intifada has been the emergence of increasingly violent aesthetics of Palestinian resistance, epitomised in the disturbing figure of a suicide bomber. What I argue is that this perceived crisis of Palestinian agency must, in part, be understood as symptomatic of the belated and ruptured process of Palestinian decolonisation; a decolonisation which exists amidst wider socio-political processes associated with late-modernity, and which has also been affected by the premature institution of semi-autonomous Palestinian state authorities during the Oslo interim arrangements. As such, I suggest that the al-Aqsa intifada presents an event, or a *differend*, which cannot be understood properly within existing idioms of anti-colonial and national struggle. Finding new ways in which to think about politics in Palestine is therefore increasingly important.

## **Can These Bones Live?**

**Anthea Williams, University of East London**

Life narratives told in the context of hoping to enter a professional training – for ministry in the Church of England - are being examined in the light of concerns expressed by Michel Foucault in his final lectures at the Collège de France in 1983-4.

Foucault's increasing preoccupation towards the end of his life with the 'problem' of the relationship of human subjects to truth led him to the idea that a return to the self could result in spiritual transformation. This 'care of the self' goes beyond self-knowledge and self-awareness, and allows the absorption of truth by the subject.

This short talk explores how far a content analysis of ordination candidates' stories supports the idea of a pocket of survival of Foucauldian spirituality, in view of the pressure on these self-identified religious subjects to view the self as an object which must be consciously moulded to fit institutional requirements.

## **Identities of Islamic Women Entrepreneurs: Determined by Discourse or Constructed by Free Agents?**

**Barbra Wallace, University of East London**

For researchers, working with marginalised groups, narrative approaches offer an increasingly popular way of exploring identities. The Foucauldian perspective, with its emphasis upon difference and the micro-political, combined with a wider analysis of societal power relations, is particularly seductive, enabling the researcher to link the personal with the social. So too, the 'storied' approach, with its ability to 'give voice' to excluded groups and recognition of their experience, is equally appealing.

My research examines the relevance of business discourse(s) for Islamic women setting up in business in London. A key aspect of the study is to explore their identities

– as women, as members of ethnic, cultural and religious groups, and as entrepreneurs. Both the aforementioned approaches are well-situated to address the research objectives. However, there are some significant methodological tensions to consider in combining them. For instance, the Foucauldian approach lends itself to a more limited sense of agency, located in a subject determined by liberal-humanist discourse, thereby resulting in fragmented, transitory, multiple identities. In contrast, the 'storied approach carries a stronger sense of agency and of self-identity, typically incorporating a liberal-humanist view of the individual.

This paper asks: "Can these approaches be combined to produce an internally coherent account of the identities of Islam women entrepreneurs?"

**Narrative, Social Skills and the Programmer**  
**Johanna Hunt, University of Hertfordshire**

In this paper I will present a discussion around the stereotypical archetype of computer programmers as lone 'geek' figures lacking in social skills and with a preference for typing in darkened rooms.

Using observations from a recent field study of a small 'New Media' software development company in the South of England, including data from narrative interviews, I will present a situated example of the social concerns of computer programmers in the workplace including narratives of communication and team-working. I aim to also integrate some initial observations on humour and socialisation in practice, and relate this to the company team-members and how well they fit with the computer programmer archetype.