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Auto/Biography Study Group

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

**Celebration**

**2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022**

**Friends House, Euston, NW1 2BJ**

<https://www.friendshouse.co.uk/>



## Programme

0900-0915 Arrival and Registration with refreshments

0915-0925 Welcome

0925-1025 Keynote

**What's love got to do with it? Some sociological reflections on meanings, experiences and celebration of love both in and outside of the academy**

Gayle Letherby (Universities of Plymouth and Greenwich)

Chair: Anne Chappell

1025-1105 Paper Session

**Celebrating volunteers: An autoethnography of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games**

Raf Nicholson (Bournemouth University)

Chair: Carly Stewart

1105-1130 Refreshment Break

1130-1210 Paper Session

**Celebrating I-poems: How I-poems saved me from drowning in a sea of words**

Juliet Hall (University of Plymouth)

Chair: Gayle Letherby

1210-1250 Paper Session

**Walking narratives: Community celebrations through nature events**

Geeta Ludhra (Brunel University London)

Chair: Yvonne Anderson

1250-1350 Lunch

1350-1430 Paper Session

**Navigating intimate practices and celebration under the spectre of inherited variants of dementia**

Mel Hall (Manchester Metropolitan University)

Chair: Geeta Ludhra

1430-1510 Paper Session

**#DryByChristmas: Celebrating women's leaky bodies in a comedic social media campaign**

Rosie Harper and Carly Stewart (Bournemouth University)

Chair: Chrissie Rogers

1510 Close and Refreshments

## Abstracts

### **Celebrating I-poems: How I-poems saved me from drowning in a sea of words**

Juliet Hall (University of Plymouth)

Auto/Biography aims to increase understanding of the human experience via our interwoven biographies, providing an opportunity to 'voice what might otherwise remain invisible' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p. 141). My doctoral research uses Auto/Biography to explore how mothers describe their experience raising autistic children. I interviewed 30 mothers, for around two hours, which provided a wealth of rich, deeply personal stories. I was committed to analyse this data in a way that would do justice to respondents' words. I initially adopted Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun *et al.*, 2018). This resulted in an immense list of categories and themes; the sheer volume of which left me feeling confused, overwhelmed, and dissatisfied with the process. I felt as though I had too much information which left me fearful of how to approach the data; concerned that I would fail to give authenticity to respondents' voices. I sought alternative ways to engage creatively and productively with my data. Listening for the 'I' during the second listening/reading of interviews as part of the Voice-Centred Relational Method, developed by Mauthner and Doucet (1998; 2003) helped me to overcome these challenges. I-poems helped me to engage with the essence of respondents' voices by privileging their position within the narrative and eliminating redundant data 'noise' to reveal the complexity and ambiguity of their stories. This paper celebrates the advantages of creative research methods and how through I-poems I reconnected with my data to bring it to life, making it more accessible for both analysis and presentation.

### **Navigating intimate practices and celebration under the spectre of inherited variants of dementia**

Mel Hall (Manchester Metropolitan University)

Dementia is the umbrella term for symptoms associated with brain function deterioration. Rates are increasing, including 'classic' older age Alzheimer's disease and young onset variants. It is degenerative, terminal and for some, has a genetic component. Previous research drawing on biographical approaches has established the impact parental dementia has on young people's time perspectives, relationships, life planning and life course (Hall and Sikes, 2020). However, this is compounded by medical advances which identify who is at risk of dementia through genetic testing and assisted conception. This presentation draws on 8 biographical interviews conducted in the UK and US as part of an ongoing study with people who have experienced familial dementia attributed to a genetic variant. Some have undergone genetic testing and have a positive or negative result (they do or do not carry the gene), while others have decided against it, or are considering it. The pursuit of intimate relationships is often challenging. This is exacerbated by dementia which occupies an absent presence when dating and considering family planning. The prospect of genetic testing can impact life course celebrations. Meanwhile, a negative result is not necessarily a straightforward celebration. Data suggest that plans to have children or not are influential in terms of testing decisions. This is reflective of pro-natal society and the moral imperative attached to testing. Findings suggest a need for timely testing and a need for greater awareness in general medical practice.

### **#DryByChristmas: Celebrating women's leaky bodies in a comedic social media campaign**

Rosie Harper (Bournemouth University)

A third of women suffer from pelvic floor dysfunction at some point in their lifetime, resulting in vaginal prolapse and urinary incontinence. This topic is shrouded by a taboo of silence and shame evoking embarrassment or distaste. #DryByChristmas is an online social media campaign by comedian Gusset Grippiers that seeks to normalise symptoms of vaginal prolapse and encourage pelvic floor exercise through comedy and exposure. This presentation explores the core themes in women's responses to the campaign through online comments. We contribute sociological thought by addressing the function of humour in the online activism space and appreciate discourse as an important social and psychological process for women's relationships and self-empowerment as leaky women. We consider that humorous digital reminders could effectively reduce stigma and reinterpret and reframe how women relate to taboo women's health conditions in ways that inspire behaviour change.

## **What's love got to do with it? Some sociological reflections on meanings, experiences and celebration of love both in and outside of the academy**

Gayle Letherby (Universities of Plymouth and Greenwich)

Although I have only just started to include it in my 'research interests' BIO much of my research and scholarly writing has long included a concern with love and with loving relationships. Perhaps this is most explicit in my work focusing on non/motherhood(ing) and that on death, loss and bereavement, two areas of auto/biographical interest that I have researched and written about for more than three decades. But in other areas also, including that of working and learning in higher education and of the experience of solitude, love has featured in my auto/biographical reflections. Eight years ago, when leaving my full-time university position, I trained as a civil celebrant and alongside continuing academic work I now on occasion officiate at funerals, weddings and namings. During this time my involvement in voluntary work and political activism has also significantly increased, as has my non-academic writing (specifically fiction and memoir). In all these activities love has a meaningful presence. As bell hooks has written there are 'not very many public discussions of love [beyond romantic/erotic love] in culture' (2001: p.xvii). Nor in sociology. This is, I think, a lack and with this in mind in this paper I reflect on some of the meanings and experiences of love in my academic and non-academic work. Like bell hooks I am interested in more than romantic or erotic love; that is also non-sexual love between individuals and 'living by a love ethic' (2001: p.87), with love embedded in a commitment to social justice. With reference to the conference theme then my concern is with both celebrations of love and also love itself as something to celebrate.

## **Walking narratives: Community celebrations through nature events**

Geeta Ludhra (Brunel University London)

"When I lace up my walking-boots, my feet smile and get ready to embark on new countryside adventures. It's like a monthly party in nature, without the frills". Geeta leads a countryside walking group called 'Dadima's' (Hindi noun for grandmother). Dadima's social enterprise celebrates the ancestral wisdom of Mother Nature across cultures and people, building intergenerational connections through walking and story-telling/sharing. As a South Asian woman living in the White space of the Chilterns countryside, building momentum and enthusiasm has taken time, effort and energy, as people explore a new green space. As community spirit has built momentum, these monthly walks have taken on a celebratory dimension through surprise snacks, guest speakers, creative walking routes and new friendships. Every walk/hike is a celebration of lifestories through nature, where people lighten their loads. Walking and talking as a community is a powerful way of celebrating lifestories of joy, challenge and trauma through movement. This presentation explores one of Dadima's walking celebration events in nature, where British South Asian histories and community stories were centred on a nature reserve. People sang, danced Punjabi and Sri-Lankan forms, ate Indian food together, shared cultural rituals and discourses. As a father and son brewed fresh masala chai with herbs and spices, we reminisced the 'good' old days of our ancestors, whilst acknowledging our traumas and roots, taking pride in how far we've come. Dadima's walking group celebrates the narratives of people of colour in nature.

## **Celebrating Volunteers: An Autoethnography of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games**

Raf Nicolson (Bournemouth University)

In July and August 2022, I spent three weeks in Birmingham, working at the XXII Commonwealth Games - the biggest sporting celebration ever to take place in the city. In this paper I will reflect on my experience, using autoethnography to bring to life the experience of working alongside an army of 13,000 volunteers to make the Games happen. The challenges of volunteer management at sporting mega-events are well-documented in the academic literature (Downward and Ralston 2006, Benson et al 2014). A good experience for volunteers at a sporting mega-event like the Commonwealth Games is important because it can translate into future volunteering (Doherty, 2009; Bang *et al.*, 2019), as well as generating other less tangible social legacies for those involved (Cashman 2006). However, there are few studies which utilise an autoethnographic approach to assessing the experience of volunteers at these events. The value of autoethnography is that it enables researchers to use stories of their own experiences to understand broader

cultural phenomena (Ellis 2004). I am new to autoethnography, but as a researcher who is interested in sports volunteering and who was given the chance to work alongside and manage a small group of volunteers at the Games in Birmingham, I was keen to use this experience to inform my research. During my time working at the Games, I therefore kept a daily journal. In this paper I will read out a series of extracts from that journal and use these to reflect on my experience in Birmingham as a whole and what we might learn about volunteers and volunteer management at mega-events.

## Conference Delegates

Yvonne Anderson	Mind of My Own
Anne Chappell	Brunel University London
David Clark	London Metropolitan University
Juliet Hall	University of Plymouth
Mel Hall	Manchester Metropolitan University
Karen Hanrahan	University of Brighton
Rosie Harper	Bournemouth University
Amanda Kale	University of Nottingham
Gayle Letherby	Universities of Plymouth and Greenwich
Geeta Ludhra	Brunel University London
Raf Nicholson	Bournemouth University
Amanda Norman	University of Winchester
Louise Owusu-Kwarteng	University of Greenwich
Chrissie Rogers	University of Kent
Ewa Sidorenko	University of Greenwich
Carly Stewart	Bournemouth University
Anne Wihstutz	Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany