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Interpersonal narratives and mental health

Locations	Park House
Date(s)	Thursday 13th June 2013 (10:00-16:00)
Contact	Workshop leader: **Professor Lisa Bortolotti (/staff/profiles/philosophy/bortolotti-lisa.aspx)**
Download	**Add to Calendar (/research/activity/ias/workshops/2013/interpersonal-narratives-and-mental-health.aspx?ical=true)**

We are all narrators. The diverse experiences we have in our lives are gathered in a story that is supposed to make sense of those experiences, give a sense of direction and purpose to our lives, and shape future actions and decisions. Self-narratives are being studied by philosophers and psychologists because they seem to have powerful effects on wellbeing and on the sense of identity, autonomy, and responsibility we develop as agents. There is an increasing interest in the study of self-narratives in the context of mental health, as many suggest that psychiatric disorders are at bottom 'disorders of the self'. Do the narratives of people with a psychiatric diagnosis lack correspondence with reality or internal coherence? Can interventions aimed at restoring correspondence or coherence, contribute to recovery and increased wellbeing?

We would like to explore these issues, and the role of narratives in the understanding of mental health service users' sense of autonomy and responsibility, by proposing an investigation of the interpersonal dimensions of narratives, which involves gathering narratives from family, friends or carers of service users and comparing such narratives with the self-narratives service users themselves develop. This collaborative investigation has the potential to give rise to a fruitful and innovative multidisciplinary approach, incorporating research questions and methods from philosophy, psychology and law, and generating new theoretical hypotheses about the links between narratives and wellbeing, narratives and autonomy, and narratives and responsibility for action. More significantly, it will lead to concrete suggestions for revision of current agendas for clinical intervention, healthcare policy and mental health legislation.

Participants

Zoë Boden is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the Psychosocial Research Team at the mental health charity, SANE. Her research focuses on phenomenological approaches to emotion experiences and mental health. She is currently researching the experience of suicide from the perspective of those who have attempted suicide and those bereaved by suicide, and looking at the role of self-disgust in experiences of self-harm.

Lisa Bortolotti is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Birmingham. She is interested in the relationship between the coherence and correspondence in service users' self-narratives and their capacity for autonomous thought and action. For this research she received funding from the Wellcome Trust: a Research Expense Grant on "Rationality and sanity: Implications of a Diagnosis of Mental Illness for Autonomy as Self Governance" (2010) and a Small Grant in Ethics & Society on "Moral Responsibility and Psychopathology" (2012).

Gregory Currie is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham. He has published extensively on the nature of delusions and their relation to narrative, sometimes in conjunction with psychiatrist, Jon Jureidini (Adelaide) (e.g. Art and Delusion, Monist 2004). He is also the author of a recent theoretical treatise on the nature and function of narrative in general (*Narratives and Narrators*, OUP 2010).

Rosie Harding is a Senior Lecturer at the Birmingham Law School. Her research explores the place of law in everyday life with a particular focus on legal consciousness studies, resistance and equality struggles. Her primary interests are in family law, particularly the regulation and recognition of caring and intimate relationships. Her broader research interests are in the gender, sexuality and law field, and also include human rights, discrimination and equality, labour law and the intersection of law and psychology.

Stephen Jeffreys has experience of mental distress and mental health services and is secretary of Suresearch (www.suresearch.org.uk). He has personal experience of life story writing on therapeutic writing workshops and narrative exchange. He is currently involved in a variety of mental health research including identity, music and recovery, and is studying Open University courses on psychology and literature. In a previous life, he worked as a legal aid solicitor.

Michael Larkin is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Birmingham. He has focused on the relational and institutional context of 'illness' and 'recovery.' He is running a large project funded by the NIHR, and collaborating on others funded by Epilepsy Action, Breast Cancer Campaign, NOTA, and Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Partnership Trust. He is involved in the final stage of an innovative project which brings together managers, clinicians, service-users and families to redesign inpatient care for young people with psychosis, in the NHS in Warwickshire.

Leon McRae is a Lecturer at the Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham. He is interested in the 'recovery accounts' of those suffering from mental disorder, and whether, if at all, the narratives correspond to those given by care givers. In 2007-10, he received an ESRC grant to undertake novel qualitative research within the NHS on psychopaths detained in a forensic psychiatric hospital and their treatment team. The findings of this research have wide-reaching international implications for our understanding of the complexities and potential instabilities of 'recovery narratives', and for legal policy and practice in England and Wales.

Nell Munro is a former mental health advocacy worker and her primary research interest is in how legal systems can make use of evidence from mental health service users when reaching decisions which affect their lives. She is currently studying the tension between the practical barriers to including service user perspectives in legal decisions reached under the Mental Capacity Act with the normative justifications for doing so derived from theories of human dignity and human rights. Her published research work to date has focused on the challenges of medical treatment decision-making with people with mental health needs and on the practical barriers to involvement of people with mental health needs in law and policy making.

Andrew Papadopoulos is a consultant clinical psychologist working for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust. He started work in the NHS in 1985 and has specialised clinically and academically in both mental and physical health in adult working age and older adult populations. His PhD was in Gerontology at Kings College London specifically exploring older people's perspectives on wellbeing. Andrew's main interests include: Wellbeing and recovery, Gerontology, Existential psychotherapy, neuropsychiatry and psychology, organisational psychology, Theology and Leadership.

Paul Roberts is a person with lived experience of mental ill health and services. An important part of his recovery has been sharing his narratives with mental health nursing and social work students, and trainee Psychiatrists and Clinical Psychologists both in Birmingham and Worcester.

Victoria Tischler is a Lecturer in Behavioural Sciences, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences, at the University of Nottingham. Her research focusses on exploring the lived experience of individuals with mental health problems including older people with dementia and adolescents with Tourette syndrome. She has expertise in using phenomenological and visual methods of enquiry to understand the experiences of mental health service users.

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