

Editorial

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This 'special' edition of the *Journal for Psychosocial Studies* is in many ways an historic document. Even though there has been a steadily increasing grouping and activities around psychosocial studies over the last 5 years or so, it is now we can celebrate the birth of the Association of Psychosocial Studies. Now there is a recognisable academic presence and discipline; now we are formally a 'Learned Society'. Now there are members and conferences, a board and a chair, a web-site and tweets and blogs and e-presences. Now also a growing network, more fora for debate, and that magical element: - potential for new growth and development.

This journal, part of the initial 'trickle' of psychosocial initiatives now culminating in the Association, is very happy to be integrated with the new association, and in that role is presenting this edition as a record of the launch event of the Association.

The launch day: - an observation....

There was a palpable air of excitement in the foyer of the British Library as the members and friends of the brand new association of psychosocial studies gathered for the day of the launch. The setting itself seemed to offer the occasion something of an intellectual benediction: its (academic) blessing. Friday (June) 13th might have seemed like a piece of unnecessary risk taking, but its beginning was more auspicious than ill-augured. The occasion was a celebratory one, where academics, practitioners and researchers representing the range of perspectives that find a home in Psychosocial Studies came to continue the on-going

conversation that describes the genesis, history and modus operandi of the field: dialogues about what it is, what it's for and how to do it.

The structure of the day was organised along a call and response format. The steering committee of the APS invited a number of people to present who come from a range of psychosocial 'positions' who have made and continue to make a significant contribution to the field. The remit was fairly permissive and presenters talked variously about how they came to psychosocial studies, their psychosocial biographies if you like; some focussed on the state of a field that finally seems to be coming of age, others debated contentious issues or presented the ideas of theorists that were influencing their psychosocial current work. Each presentation was then responded to by a speaker who had already seen that particular presentation and by the audience, who were also invited to reflect.

We wanted to capture the feel of the conversations that were had and so we have included the presentations and the responses to them more or less as they were spoken on the day and in the order they were presented. Sasha Roseneil, the Chair of the APS and who has worked tirelessly with the steering committee to achieve Learned Society status of Psychosocial Studies was first up. She gave a lively, funny and enlivening account of the history of the field that included the many voices in her head, BIG data, fancy graphs and a poodle. Funnily enough, Paul Stenner's presentation also featured dogs: Aesop the fabler's dog and Paul's childhood dog called Badger. What is it about dogs (and their owners) that is so psychosocial? Wendy Hollway responded to Sasha's talk in a way that made very clear the differences between an intellectual, pre-prepared, response to something, and what can happen when one is open to the here and now and the possibility of not knowing. Valerie Walkerdine's presentation was perhaps the most conventionally 'academic' of the day, as she

focussed on the work of Felix Guatarri and the ways his ideas are influencing her current work.

Stephen Frosh's description of the process of developing the Palgrave series, *Studies in the Psychosocial* illuminates many of the issues of a field that is still in a pre-disciplinary state whilst simultaneously and perhaps inevitably acting to define and delimit the field. There is a theme in Stephen's and several other presentations of *Psychosocial Studies* representing a kind of refuge for the academic and practitioner who struggles with the strict border controls of other disciplines, in particular psychology and sociology. In his response to Stephen, Karl Figlio picks up the theme of the work of drawing and maintaining boundaries in the context of mental health services. He engages with an ongoing debate in psychosocial studies about the status of 'subjectivity' arguing that this is an idea he wants to retain and which has value in the NHS where there is no room for talk of 'subjectivity' or the person, because decisions are made on economic or 'evidence-based' grounds.

There are a lot of personal, political and institutional histories behind the development of psychosocial studies and both Paul Hogget and Mike Rustin in their presentations told us about these histories from their vantage points. Paul offered an example of psychosocial lives: again offering a chance to think about what psychosocial it. Can we live it? How can we live it? Is activism at the heart of this project and what does that mean? The paper offered a very personal and profound account of where Paul's psychosocial journey had travelled, and where it is still going. It invited the audience perhaps to contemplate their own. Mike Rustin also reflected on a psychosocial development: here is academic journey through the university system of (such a) interdisciplinary field. A careful comparison and examination is made in the paper with other transitional subjects and the growth of, for example, cultural

studies from its roots in sociology and literature to the final demise of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is offered as salutary exemplar. Psychosocial? Good idea, but needs to be careful about whether/how to progress...A lesson from which we could all learn.

The final panel of the afternoon had asked for further contributions to thinking about the psychosocial, and Caroline Bainbridge (whose paper unfortunately could not be included here, Paul Stenner and John Adlam offered thoughtful and dynamic presentations. Paul Stenner, shamelessly stealing a framework from David Byrne, smartly dissected mainly Freudian psychoanalytical thinking on 'inner and outer': the paradox of the psychosocial. A canny and erudite dissection of the relationship between consciousness and the 'error of illusion' took the audience into mainly uncharted conceptual territory, with a guide dog (mentioned above) kindly leant.

John Adlam wove a sophisticated and intriguing psychosocial metaphor for us all to think with. He too addresses a personal journey, presented as a story of working in the NHS now, of working/ being alone, of working without food (in an eating disorders setting) of coming to the table, of becoming part of a group. Interspersed with thinking about socio-narcissim and psycho-social-ism, the paper wove a dazzling display of possibilities for understanding, for learning, and for further creative possibilities: a pertinent, rich and optimistic conclusion to the formal proceedings of the day.

The presentations overall are exactly what we had hoped for: the psychosocial in common, but everything else idiosyncratic, diverse, surprising, creative: a day worth taking note(s) of.

And after, we ate, drank and discussed; drank, ate and discussed some more. What a positive start! This bodes so well for the Association. Thanks everyone and well done us. Well done us.