

Editorial

Liz Frost and Helen Lucey

Welcome to the newly launched Journal for Psycho-Social Studies, also referred to as the Journal for Psychosocial Studies. This is the first volume of the re-launched journal under its new editorship and we hope that it encapsulates and demonstrates the aims and style of future editions. Our overall intention for the journal is to create a virtual research environment in which the field of psychosocial studies can flourish. We want to provide a supportive space for new and established researchers to publish and share their work, to build a forum where fresh ideas can be aired and debated, and to create a valuable resource of papers, book reviews and ideas for scholars and practitioners. An important part of this will be the editorial: a space in which invited guest contributors will discuss their own views on ‘the state of contemporary psychosocial studies’. You’ll have noticed already the presence or absence of a hyphen in the spelling of ‘psychosocial’ – just one area of contestation in the field, with divisions within the psychosocial ‘community’ about what the hyphen and its’ lack signifies – something that Paul Hoggett speaks to in this edition. Even though the journal name is currently registered with a hyphen, the current editors prefer it without, so that is something that may change in the future. Perhaps the journal will also provide an arena in which to discuss this and other issues – we’re happy to hear people’s views on this. For this first edition though we thought it a good idea for us, the editors, to begin by introducing ourselves.

Dr. Liz Frost is a principal lecturer in applied social theory in the Department of Health, Community and Policy Studies, and is a Fellow of The Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at The University of The West of England. To switch to the first person briefly, after a first degree in history I changed to postgraduate social science, and then became a mental health social worker in Central London in the 1980s, and moved into academia at the end of that decade. My research interests and research/publication record moved from mental health, through women and mental health, young women and mental health, young women and the body, theorising young women and the body, theorising identity, applied identity theory, to, finally, applied psychosocial theory, which is where I am now. I

mainly teach applied social theory to social work students, some management students, and on a taught doctorate, and research and write in the same subject area. I also work with organisations, mainly in social services, on development and training needs.

Dr Helen Lucey is senior lecturer in social psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Bath. My first degree was in sociology at what was then North East London Polytechnic (now University of East London) in the early 1980s and as part of that course I spent some time at British Rail conducting a study of women managers. This set me on the road to researching and writing about feminine subjectivities and social class, which I later developed through research with children, young people, parents and teachers that focused in various ways on identity, education and schooling. This included work on class and the regulation of mothering; the production of educational success and failure; children's transitions to secondary school; school markets and social exclusion; children and the regulation of urban space; and most recently siblings. Through this empirical work I've been concerned to theorise the psychosocial dynamics of classed and gendered intersubjectivities, defensive processes in educational policies and the structuring of education markets, the psychosocial dimensions of learning and schooling, and families and the importance of siblings in the development of individual and group subjectivities.

Just looking at our short biographies highlights the broad dimensions of psychosocial studies, in particular the diversity of topic and field of enquiry it applies itself to and the bridges between thought and practice that characterises much psychosocial work: in our cases those links are with education, mental health, children, families and social care.

This flagship volume typifies the aims of the journal and exemplifies the breadth of issues which the editors understand psychosocial studies to encompass. This exciting and diverse collection of articles offer explications of contemporary theory which are complex and dense: for example Julian Manley's paper eloquently discusses the philosophical grounding of a psychosocial approach through the work of Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Arne Naess. The thoughtful and thought-provoking contributions of Hayley

Berman and Claire Eddington centre around reflections on difficult personal experiences in community and political sites and draw on the social, psychic and creative for meaning. Hayley Berman's powerful piece focuses on her involvement in community art therapy in a context of continuous trauma and loss for refugees in post-apartheid South Africa. The location of Clare Eddington's insightful exploration of the nature of compassion is a Bristol charity that works with street sex-based and the volunteers who worked there. Paul Hoggett's discussion of 'perverse social structures' demonstrates the breadth of understanding that can be achieved when the psychosocial is applied to 'the big picture' in the framework of contemporary corporate life and the psychic shifts in capitalism. And Paul Gurney gives a delightfully personal account of his psychic, social and cultural journey from working class boy to psychotherapist with all the twists and turns of experience, language and meaning that involves. This edition, like all future ones, also includes a book review undertaken by the consumer: in this case John Fellenor, a doctoral student at the University of Bath.

There is no particular contribution in this volume on psychosocial and the arts (loosely defined) but this is something that we are keen to develop as a regular feature of the journal. The editorial 'opinion piece' below, will, as suggested above, be a regular element, and web pages for ongoing discussion of psychosocial issues and announcements of psychosocial events can be found on this site.

As this implies, psychosocial studies have a broad theoretical commitment to the notion that psychological issues cannot be validly abstracted from social, cultural and historical contexts and to the task of accounting for the social shaping of subjective experience without deterministically reducing the psychic to the social. Equally, they have a parallel commitment to the notion that social and cultural worlds have psychological dimensions and to the task of accounting for the ways in which the latter shape these worlds without deterministically reducing the social to the psychic. Psychosocial studies draw inspiration from a range of sources including critical theory, post-structuralism, philosophy, feminism and psychoanalysis, and various 'dialects' are in the process of emergence.

Is there any common identity in relation to contemporary psychosocial studies?

The journal is being re-launched at a time of boom for psychosocial studies within the UK. But it must be acknowledged that a suitable and inclusive statement that can encompass the range of academic positions, interests, practice leanings and creative engagements within the field has been the subject of debate for some time. A particularly fruitful discussion is ongoing amongst the members of the Psychosocial Studies Network, on its website and at its yearly conferences. The inception of courses in the field also lead to self-definition and statements of aims and intent for the subject(s). Much of this work is in the public domain for readers to access, and will not be rehearsed here. What is more of interest here is the notion of a (collective) psychosocial identity: whether one can claim a community of the psychosocial, and on what basis.

The range of interests and commitments, practices and research currently reflected in any psychosocial 'event', real or virtual, is extremely broad, and by no means always in agreement. For example, does 'psycho' only mean psychoanalytic, or more broadly psychological? Should/must the psychosocial researcher be situated as subject within empirical studies or can traditional academic 'distance' be maintained as with any other discipline? Can we square the (arguably) essentialist nature of some core psychoanalytical theory with post-structural anti-essentialism, or must they always be at incompatible arms-length? These kinds of differences (far more numerous than these three examples) might suggest that there is little of a common identity at work here. That is, 'little of common identity' until the notion of identity is in itself subject to some critical examination. Identity is a slippery and complex issue, about which more has been written academically in the last two decades than is imaginable. However this has offered some very helpful theoretical material for the analysis of, for example, group and community identities. Whereas modernist notions of identities might, for example, have suggested that the 'site' of identity is to be found by looking inside at more or less fixed traits, post-modern versions suggest that the contextual and that which is in process might be more useful ways of understanding what there is. So then, for instance, in relation to 'is there a collective identity here?' (eg European, working class, academic, psychosocial), the question ceases to be best addressed by 'what is there that we all have

in common?’ and more ‘what is being undertaken in relation to the notion of a particular (European, working class, psychosocial) identity’? What processes are being engaged with, what forging of links, what making of meetings and calling of conferences, what joint courses and journals, what titles and departments and so forth. The concern here is not what we have in common, but what we are seeking to build. The forming in itself, the evolving and developing - this is (a measure of) identity. And with this shaping and developing the notion that there is clearly currently a psychosocial identity, a psychosocial community, comes into focus, in which post-modernly pluralised, psychosocial *identities*, can conceptually co-exist.

Is there currently a UK psychosocial studies identity, a psychosocial studies community burgeoning in a range of locations and spaces? Certainly, and it is hoped that this journal will make some contribution to the development of this.

We would be interested in your opinions and viewpoints in relation to the above or indeed, anything else that you find in this journal. There are various possible formats to allow for this kind of reader-involvement, and we’d be grateful for your suggestions as to how best to facilitate this. For now, email us.

Liz and Helen