

PodMag June 2016

The PodMag

Karen Foley:

Hi and welcome to the PodMag, the audio news magazine for Social Sciences at the Open University.

In this special edition we'll be focusing on the Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance which we call CCIG. I'll firstly interview Elizabeth Silva the Director and find out what CCIG is all about and some of the interesting methodologies that they're using. I'm then going to interview Paul Stenner and Naomi Moller about the Psycho Social. I'll talk to Liz McFall about Digital Citizens and Peter Wood about Dissemination.

First I'm going to talk to Elizabeth Silva, the Director for CCIG to find out about CCIG's overall remit.

Elizabeth welcome. Firstly could you tell us a little bit about CCIG? What's happening?

Elizabeth Silva:

Thank you very much Karen. CCIG is the oldest centre in the Faculty of Social Sciences. We have been doing research and informing the teaching in the Faculty for 13 years now. And, you know, as the name goes we have done a lot of work on Citizenship, on Identity Formation and on Practices on Governance.

We have researchers from the six disciplines in Social Sciences, from Sociology, Psychology, Politics and International Studies, Economics and Geography and Social Policy and Criminology. The work in CCIG is very much interdisciplinary and it is marked by methodological innovation. We have five research programmes at the moment and you are going to be talking to the Directors of some of these research programmes. They are Intimate Relationships, Digital Citizens, Psycho Social, Enactments and Migration and Belonging.

These five research programmes share an understanding of the social and its research agenda that is interdisciplinary, that is immersed in the culture and committed to social change.

Karen Foley:

That's wonderful, thank you. I wonder if we can also talk a little bit about some of the methods in motion because of course one of the interesting things about CCIG is that you are using a lot of creative methods. So can you tell us about those?

Elizabeth Silva:

Yes, very happy to talk about those because that's something that has been, as I said, very strong in CCIG since its inception: methodological innovation. And what we do is be very attentive to what we know and the ways in which we know things. So the idea of in motion is indeed about us moving with social reality in order to capture it. A crucial idea is that methods constitute social worlds as much as we come to learn about social worlds via methods.

And all our research programmes have innovated in that from looking at how the digital affects the ways in which we know via engagements with big data and our own engagement in electronic life. Like migration and belonging, the issues of identity and the ways of capturing very subtle nuanced cultural issues that demand something like participatory theatre methods or working methods which are very innovative ways of capturing this. So we are always looking at this, and all of our work has been very important for the cutting edge teaching the Open University does. Because we inform with our work on certain topics but also about ways of learning about social life.

Karen Foley:

And finally as the Director for CCIG I wonder if you can briefly tell us something about the future? Where are you taking things and what are you most excited about?

Elizabeth Silva:

We are going to have a major event about the transformation of CCIG. As I said we are always changing. We are always moving. The key thing for us is critical Social Sciences and we are continuously revising our research programmes to respond to our major signature and interventions in learning, in knowing and in teaching about the social world.

Karen Foley:

Elizabeth Silva, thank you very much.

Elizabeth Silva:

Thank you Karen.

Karen Foley:

I'll now interview Paul Stenner about the Psychosocial. Paul Stenner thank you for talking to me today about the Psychosocial. So can you give us a brief overview of this research programme?

Paul Stenner:

So this research programme is about looking at the interface between the psychological and the sociological or the Social Sciences and Psychology. So it's not just Social Psychology it's also, if you like, Social Scientists who are becoming interested in the experiential dimension and subjectivity as well as Social Psychologists who are wanting

to engage more with the Social Sciences. So we're interested in the psychological dimension of social issues and experiences.

Karen Foley:

Wonderful. There are a lot of researchers who are involved in this but can you tell us about some of the work that's being done?

Paul Stenner:

Yes. There's interesting work being done by David Kaposi, for example, who was interested in the Palestine Israeli conflict. And he's interested in the way in which that conflict gets talked about not just in Israel or Palestine but also in the UK amongst the newspaper broadsheets for example. And he's interested in the points at which it looks like you might get a change in the way in which people talk about that issue. Because the problem with the issue is how polarised it becomes and how repetitive the perspectives become, so there are interesting questions of when you get something different emerging in the talk.

Karen Foley:

And of course using innovative methods as something like in David's work that also is relevant to other areas. Can you tell us about some of those?

Paul Stenner:

Yes we do use innovative methods. We tend to use by and large although not exclusively qualitative methods. We tend to want to talk to people to get in depth accounts of their experiences and perspectives on social issues. And so we use for example, forms of discourse analysis. So Dr Stephanie Taylor for example, is very much an authority on the use of discourse analysis and narrative forms of discourse analysis to look at the way in which people talk about their sense of identity. So she's interested in people who work in the creative industries and the way in which they tell stories about themselves and their identities which relate to their own creativity. Where their creativity comes from, why they might be more creative than other people, whether it's a natural thing or something that they learnt from experiences early in their life and so on and so forth?

So she adopts a discursive perspective which is very much looking at the function of those sorts of utterances. What it is that you do when you say those kinds of things? How you position yourself in relation to other people and so on and so forth. And that's a very sort of dynamic way of studying social interaction. It recognises that people are sort of constructing versions of themselves moment by moment as they're engaging in talk.

Other research methods include, for example, phenomenological approaches the phenomenological perspectives which are more interested in going in to depth in the experiences that people have of particular situations. So Darren Langdridge, for example, is very much an authority on phenomenological approaches. So he will do

depth interviews with, for example, a recent study he did with some colleagues in Scandinavia was looking at men's experiences of bereavement. And so he would talk in depth with men about the issues that they faced in going through a bereavement. And he would then do an in depth analysis based on what people say in those interviews which in interesting ways comes to challenge the stage model of the bereavement process.

Karen Foley:

And finally can you tell us about some of your work and in particular how that's feeding in to teaching?

Paul Stenner:

Some of my work has fed in to our new module dealing with research methods and how to do a dissertation, how to do a piece of empirical work of your own. And there I drew up on some of my work on jealousy, for example, and that work takes a psychosocial approach to jealousy. So instead of starting from the assumption that jealousy is something that if you like begins within the skin of an individual that people might have different personality characteristics that make them prone to jealousy and so on it starts from the recognition that jealousy is already a social process.

So if you use the word jealousy the chances are already you're talking about a scene involving three distinct people. You're talking about the person who's feeling jealous at that moment. You're talking about some sort of rival and you're talking about the object of the jealous person's affections. It may be sounds a bit mean to call them an object but you know what I mean the person about whom they're jealous.

And jealousy always has this interesting triangular structure involving at least three people, usually they're people, and so we start from the assumption that jealousy is some sort of feeling that goes on within the context of this triangular arrangement. So that displaces attention from the actual nature of the feeling. You could be feeling angry. You could be feeling upset. You could be feeling worried and anxious. All of those feelings could be called jealousy if they are embedded within that triangle, if you like. So it's not the form of consciousness or the form of psychology that's pertinent that is if you like decisive. It's its involvement within this triangular seat.

So we talk a little bit about that in Chapter 7 of the book from D300 and we do a little analysis of some extract from Simone de Beauvoir's, one of her novels where she describes jealousy in very interesting depth.

Karen Foley:

Paul Stenner thank you very much for filling us in then on the Psychosocial.

Paul Stenner:

Thank you Karen.

Karen Foley:

I'll now interview Naomi Moller. Naomi Moller I'd like to talk to you about Intimate relations. So firstly can you tell us a little bit about what this research programme's all about?

Naomi Moller:

So the IR research programme is about doing research to do with relationships. So that means couple relationships, family relationships, any kind of relationships that are important to people.

Karen Foley:

And what are some of the main projects that are happening right now?

Naomi Moller:

So I think two projects that I want to talk about relate to the ESRC funded project Enduring Love. This was a piece of work that was focused on couple relationships and the research has already been done and the data analysed. And this piece of work that they're currently doing is about taking those findings and purveying them to the broader audience.

So there are two things that are happening. One is a book by M J Barker and Jacqui Gabb called Secrets of Enduring Love. And the second is a piece of work that Jacqui has done with Brook which is a nationwide charity that does Sexual Health and Wellbeing for Young People. And she's helped them put together a web based resource on Relationships for Young People. So those two things I think are a really interesting piece of impact around a big research project.

Karen Foley:

And of course you're also feeding a lot of this into teaching and working I know very hard on a lot of Level 2 and 3 and postgraduate modules. Can you tell us about how some of this work is impacting and being taken into those?

Naomi Moller:

OK. In terms of the postgraduate MSc in Psychology which hopefully we'll be launching in 2017 we're deliberately planning to use and to showcase some of the research that happens in the Department of Psychology what's going to be the School of Psychology. So we're going to try and use parts of the Enduring Love findings and also some of the work that Andreas and I do around infidelity because we really want to show students in this Masters programme actually what the department is doing in terms of research right now.

Karen Foley:

Naomi Moller thank you very much.

Naomi Moller:

Thank you.

Karen Foley:

Next I'll be talking to Liz McFall about Digital Citizens. Liz McFall could you tell us about the Digital Citizens research programme please?

Liz McFall:

Oh absolutely. So Digital Citizens was a programme started by myself and Simon Carter, one of my colleagues in Sociology, which was started with the concern to look at how individuals are in the social world increasingly finding their experiences mediated by digital technology.

Digital technology we understand is not really something that's out there, that's technical, and that's scary. It's increasingly something that is absolutely essential to all sorts of things that people do every day. And we wanted to look at particularly how that affects the relationships between individuals and the communities and associations and organisations that constitute their lives.

So Facebook communities, Twitter profiles, Instagram, etc. increasingly become how people live socially. How they shop, how they bank, how they travel, how they study is increasingly done digitally. So we wanted to look at all those sorts of things and what the implications were. How does this change the relationship and what ways does it change the relationship? And how do things like laws and employment legislation, and data protection have to change in order to keep up with the pace of technological change.

Karen Foley:

Wonderful. And can you tell us about one of the projects that the research programme are involved with?

Liz McFall:

So one of them called Ensuring Healthcare in a Digital World. It started when I was on a trip to the US and I started to see more and more attempts to encourage people to be healthier by taking responsibility for their own health. Often mediated through things like messages they were receiving on Facebook, on Twitter but also mediated through the attempt to get people to wear fitbits and jawbones and now Apple watches to monitor their movements. And their healthcare providers were starting to issue incentives, and their employers, and even in one case universities, were starting to give incentives to students to wear wearable devices that tracked their movement and made them responsible for their own health and their own movement. But not only made them responsible in their attempt to make them more aware of their health and their behaviour, but made them financially responsible for it. So insurance companies in the US

started to advertise that they were issuing their policy holders with fitbits and if you met your step targets each day you would get a reduction on your premiums.

And this fascinated me and I wanted to look at how that applied in the UK through the NHS. And I discovered that in the UK the NHS does have pilot schemes to get patients say suffering from some of the chronic preventable illnesses, heart disease, diabetes, to wear devices that could collect data that their healthcare providers could see but they could also motivate them to move more, be more active, monitor what they eat, monitor how they sleep. And this fascinated me as to how healthcare would be transformed. And the relationship between the individual and the healthcare provider becomes transformed.

So one of the parts of that that's most exciting is the patient becomes the expert. The patient is encouraged to take control of their own data and present their healthcare provider with the expertise and the diagnosis. So in a spoof video Eric Topol who's a very famous voice in this area has a video that says The Patient Will See You Now. And that's very much the direction of traffic. So the digitally literate patient who's in control of their data knows their condition better than the provider.

Karen Foley:

Liz McFall that sounds not only very interesting but also incredibly useful. Thank you.

Finally I'm going to interview Peter Wood who is responsible for supporting CCIG's research culture. So it's his job really to make sure that the centre is an efficient and vibrant forum for conducting academic research. Welcome Peter.

Firstly can you tell us what is CCIG's mission?

Peter Wood:

CCIG's mission is to make academic knowledge available to as wide an audience as possible. To create new collaborations with non-academic networks and to invent new ways of conducting research.

Karen Foley:

So can you tell us little bit about your role within that?

Peter Wood:

A key part of my role in CCIG is to make sure that our work is disseminated as widely as possible. This means making sure that the lessons of our research do actually influence how people act. And this is the bit that Open University students can most easily get involved with. If there's an academic whose module materials you like, then following CCIG is the best way to find out what they are investigating at the moment. That includes work that's so new, it isn't even in the syllabus yet.

Karen Foley:

Now of course a lot of, the central place that you store this is your hub, your website, and that's where people can primarily find out about all of the work that CCIG are involved with. So can you tell us a little bit about why that's such an important aspect of dissemination?

Peter Wood:

If you're listening to this Podcast on a computer there will be a link to the CCIG website on your screen <http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/> otherwise you can find us by searching for the Open University and the Centre for Citizenship Identities and Governance.

From here you can see all the different ways in which we try to tell people about our work. The Twitter account @CCIG_open will let you know what some of our academics are thinking, doing and tweeting about on a day-to-day basis. Our blogs and podcasts allow researchers to summarise and publicise their recent work in a bitesize form.

This can have a massive effect. Dr Meg-John Barker is particularly dedicated to informing the public about their work and has been named one of the most influential LGBT figures of 2015. There are many other academics looking to highlight their recent findings on social media and the CCIG website.

If you want to know more about research that Open University academics have done on a specific topic then our current and past research projects each have a dedicated page. This collects all the different outcomes of that investigation into one easy to understand place. We also have links to something called Open Research Online or ORO which has free to access versions of all the research done by our academics.

In this way CCIG supports the Open University's academics to get noticed and to make sure that our research can be read by everyone, not just people who can pay to access academic journals.

Karen Foley:

Now the website is obviously such an important hub of activity but that's not all that you do there are other ways that people can interact with CCIG. Can you tell us about some of those?

Peter Wood:

If you look at the CCIG's events page then you can see the conferences, seminars and public talks hosted by the Centre. In most cases these are free to attend and they take place across the country. This academic year the research programme Intimate Relationships has held events in Cambridge, London, Manchester and Bristol, whilst Professors Jacqui Gabb, Janet Fink and John Dixon travelled to Belfast for the Northern Ireland Festival of Social Science.

We also collaborate with academics from across the world and regularly host visiting fellows at the Milton Keynes Campus.

Karen Foley:

That's all we have time for in this edition. I hope that it's been an interesting introduction to the work for the Centre for Citizenship Identities and Governance. And if you'd like to know more you can check out their website using the link on this transcript or follow @CCIG_Open on Twitter.