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This issue of the Irish Journal of Anthropology contains a special section on Suicide in Ireland, which draws primarily from papers delivered at the Ethnographic Approaches to Suicide Conference held at NUI Maynooth in March 2012. Less than 3% of all research in the three leading international publications on suicide are qualitative based studies; and few of those are ethnographic accounts. The conference and papers in this volume attempt to address the dearth of ethnographic accounts of self-harm and suicide. This section is introduced in a piece by Dr Jamie Saris, the keynote speaker at the conference, who emphasised the intimacy gained from the acquisition of colloquial terms, the understanding of social and cultural scripts, and the ethnographic skills required to retrieve and analyse data. These works add to the field of suicidology, and show the need for further ethnographic studies, even in the changing world of anthropology, where classic approaches have been replaced by multidisciplinary research.

In December 2012 our annual conference celebrated 25 years of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. Ethnography from Margin to Centre: A Conference Celebrating 25 years of the Anthropological Association of Ireland, brought together a range of speakers from the island of Ireland and beyond, whose papers reflected on the nature and progress of anthropology and ethnography in Ireland. Many of the proceedings of the conference will appear in a special issue of the Spring/Summer 2013 journal, however the Murphy & Tsioukalis paper in this volume is, in effect, a forerunner in that it engages with anthropologists throughout the island of Ireland and contemplates the future direction(s) of anthropology and its place within, and beyond, the academy.

The prize for this year’s essay competition was awarded to Carol Wrenn for her work on the complex relationship between state level policies and indigenous governance in India. Karinda Tolland was awarded the prize for best thesis from NUI Maynooth, and deals with the ‘living gift’ of organ donation in Ireland. We are delighted to include the work of both of these young scholars here, and wish them both well in their continuing academic careers.

Our final paper in this volume is an interview with Loïc Wacquant, as he reflects on the legacy of Pierre Bourdieu. This interview was conducted with Mark Maguire, Mary Gilmartin and Gavan Titley on the 10th anniversary of Bourdieu’s death, and has been appearing in multiple languages and countries throughout 2012.

Notes on Contributors

Dr Jamie Saris is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at NUI Maynooth. He holds advanced degrees in Social-Cultural Anthropology from the University of Chicago (MA and PhD), and he has completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Clinically-Relevant Medical Anthropology in the Department of Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School (supported by the National Institute of Mental Health). He has been working for more than fifteen years in medical and psychological anthropology in Ireland, North America, and parts of Africa, where he has researched and published on such diverse issues as the social life of mental hospitals, the experience of major mental illness, colonialism and its aftermath, poverty and structural violence, drug use and abuse, and HIV risk and treatment. He sits of the Editorial Board of Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry and Reviews in Anthropology.

Dr Audrey Bryan is a Lecturer in Sociology at St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, where she teaches courses across the range of programme offerings on the Humanities and Education degrees. She is also a Visiting Faculty member of the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA) at SciencesPo University and at University College Dublin. Audrey has published nationally and internationally in the areas of development studies and citizenship education. She is currently working on an ethnography of youth activism in an era of neo-liberalism.

Dr Paula Mayock is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work and Social Policy and Children’s Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin. She is a qualitative methodologist with a particular interest in biographical and qualitative longitudinal research methods and is currently Course Director of the Masters in Applied Social Research. Her research focuses primarily on the lives and experiences of marginalised youth, covering areas such as homelessness, drug use and drug problems, sexuality, and mental health. Paula is the author of numerous articles, book chapters and research reports and is an Assistant Editor of the international journal Addiction.

Dr Cormac Sheehan is a HSE funded researcher with the Department of General Practice, UCC and Mallow Primary Healthcare Centre. Sheehan’s work is focused on Primary Care Teams, reducing emergency admissions for older adults, dementia, and cognitive and depression assessments.
Felicia Garcia is a PhD student with the Department of Anthropology at NUI Maynooth. She is a Swedish national who first arrived in Ireland in 2008 to conduct a field study on cultural conservatism and masculinity for the University of Uppsala where she obtained her second Masters Degree in Developing Democracy. In 2006 she concluded her Masters Degree in Social Anthropology for the University of Stockholm based on a field study on gendered self-destruction and violence amongst the malandros (gangsters) in a Barrio in Caracas, Venezuela. She had previously studied related topics on gang culture and machismo as an exchange student at Universidade Federal Fluminense in Niterói, Brazil. Her main interests are gender studies, ethnography, and practices that affect health and ill-health within particular demographics and specific cultures.

Mary Rose Walker is a social worker at Wicklow Co Council. She has been working with Travellers since 1995.

Carol Wrenn is currently completing her PhD in Anthropology in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, focusing on the political empowerment of Santali women in Orissa, India. She is also an Equality Advisor for Concern Worldwide.

Dr. Fiona Murphy is an anthropologist working in DCU business school. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the marketing department and is working on a number of projects in the area of sustainability. She received her PhD in 2009 from the Department of Anthropology, NUIM and is co-author of Integration in Ireland: The Everyday Lives of African Migrants (Manchester Uni Press: 2012).

Dr. Ioannis Tsioulakis is a lecturer in ethnomusicology in the School of Music and Theatre at University College, Cork. He completed his PhD (2011) specializing in anthropology of music, at Queen’s University Belfast. Ioannis’s research focuses on the Athenian professional music industry and it’s connection to cosmopolitan aesthetics and national politics. He has also worked extensively as a pianist, arranger and composer.

Karinda Tolland is a PhD candidate in the School of Nursing and Human Sciences at Dublin City University, where her research focuses on physical activity play and recreational activities in children and adolescents across differing spaces in Ireland. Her research interests extend psycho-social health and personal rights as well as concepts of the body and identity, including body image and self-representation.

Dr Mark Maguire is Head of the Department of Anthropology, National University of Ireland Maynooth. His recent research has focused on the areas of migration and security, where he is concerned with exploring international migration through ethnographic research on everyday lives. He has a growing interest in the technologies and processes of securitization, especially counter-terrorism, biometric security, affective computing and the detection of abnormal behavior and ‘malintent’. Maguire is the author of several books exploring the everyday lives of refugees and migrants in Ireland. He is co-Editor of Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale – the professional journal of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA). (http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0964-0282).

Dr Mary Gilmartin completed her PhD at the University of Kentucky in 2001 and joined the Department of Geography, NUI Maynooth, in 2008. Her research interests lie at the intersection of political, cultural and social geography. Her current research focuses on migration, in particular contemporary migration to Ireland. In addition, she also engages in broader debates about the nature and practice of geography, informed by social theory.

Dr Gavan Titley has been a Lecturer in Media Studies in NUIM since 2005. His current research interests centres on racism and ‘multicultural crisis’ in Europe; media, migration and transnationalism, and the mediatization of political thought.
Suicide have tended to fit into fairly conservative
the sovereign, kill the body or, at the very least, fail to
concede the presence of a greater power that could, like
Durkheim argued, the Hobbesian individual needed to
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suicide, for example, that Durkheim could find the
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theoretical fecundity for that part of the Western
This non-rightness of suicide, of course, explains its
meliorated, then no ending of life would have been
accepted stance – that if this dis-ease could have been
was somehow sick – physically, psychologically, and/
or morally. And, of course, we have the corollary
to this stance – that if this dis-ease could have been
ameliorated, then no ending of life would have been
contemplated and/or carried through.

Suicide and Social Explanation
This non-rightness of suicide, of course, explains its
theoretical fecundity for that part of the Western
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suicide, for example, that Durkheim could find the
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as its own, self-generating order of reality. That this
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times demand or, at other times, through its breakdown,
allow, the dissolution of that individual. On this terrain,
Durkheim argued, the Hobbesian individual needed to
concede the presence of a greater power that could, like
the sovereign, kill the body or, at the very least, fail to
restrain its self-destructive urges.

It is hardly surprising, then, that analyses of
suicide have tended to fit into fairly conservative
political agendas. Emile Durkheim is rightly credited
in making suicide an object of social scientific study
(as the ‘Father’ of Sociology), but as Lisa Lieberman
(2003) points out, he was heir to several decades of
francophone work on suicide statistics that had already
seen the ways that variability in suicide rates across time
or across the population could be mobilized to focus broad
anxieties about social change (and the supposed
loosening of social mores) in particular, largely
reactionary, directions.

At the same time, of course, there has always been
a way of calculating suicide, within reason, a reckoning
that is often an unwelcome ghost at the banquet of
grief that the suicide prepares for his or her loved ones.
First, there is the undeniable planning (and very often
accompanying deception) inherent in many acts of
suicide. Such preparation (and the seeming disregard
for the consequences of the act) can be an object of
strong moral critique. Ireland recently had this critique
publicly produced by Dr James McDaid in 2002. While
the now-infamous ‘Selfish bastard’ comment (see Mac
Giolla Bhain 2008:ch 7) was fiercely criticized from the
standpoint of suicide as an ‘obvious’ manifestation of
mental illness, and therefore not an object of moral
choice, this construction of the suicide as the ultimate
egoist did garner some support from the Irish public.
At the same time, there are also those suicides that can be
grimly acknowledged as principled protest, ones,
indeed, that we grudgingly admire: historical figures,
such as Socrates, many Romans who used to be an
important part of moral instruction in the West, such as
Cicero; even the dénouement of the fanatical defense of
Masada (in which the Zealots engaged in mass murder/
suicide to deny the Roman army their victory parade)
have all been used in Western education at one time
or another as moral examples – the triumph of moral
principle over life itself.

Suicide and Ireland
Few people in Ireland are unaware of the so-called
suicide ‘epidemic’ – complete with ‘at-risk’ populations
(young males), in specific demographics (working
class in rural and peri-rural settings), and generalized
warnings alongside targeted interventions aimed at
addressing this issue. There is an eerie familiarity in the
form (and indeed in much of the substance) that these
arguments take – the population at risk for schizophrenia
and asylum committal in the literatures bemoaning the decline of rural Ireland in the 1960s and
1970s, for example, overlaps tolerably well with this
demographic (e.g., Brody 1973; Murphy 1975;

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Scheper-Hughes 1982). The same term, *anomie*, appears in both these explanatory frames. While Durkheim imbued this term with its specific sociological meaning – a disconnect between individual expectations and social realities – it appears in most Irish work as a synonym for devitalization. It is here that ethnographic engagement with suicide is stressed most productively, where the experience-near engagement with a human subject, who is perceived to have plans and motives, confronts an experience-distant explanatory term that conceived suicides as objects of forces largely beyond their understanding. In this case, the ethnographer can expect little help from the Psychologist, insofar as suicide is understood as an evident manifestation of severe mental illness. These studies do not pretend to resolve this issue, but they do explore this complex interface between agency and its lack.

The Papers

Garcia’s contribution is drawn from her thesis ‘Suicide and Self-Destruction Amongst ‘the Lads’: Expectations of Masculinity in Post-traditional Ireland’. Suicide is presented as one of many risks of self-harm that are part of the lives of these ‘lads’. Alcohol use and abuse, risky, potentially self-destructive behaviors (such as, reckless driving, often under the influence), and a seeming unconcern for the health consequences (physical or psychological) of their activities are all part of so-called ‘lad culture’. Garcia did not attempt to construct a psycho-social autopsy of any one suicide but, instead explores local gendered understandings of risk and vulnerability that the self-directed violence of some of the ‘lads’ invokes.

Walker’s paper is based on her work ‘Suicide Among the Irish Traveller Community 2000-2006’. This was the first nationwide count of suicides among the Irish Traveller Community. Conducted over seven years the study focused on the collection of testimonies from social workers from all over the country who were in contact with Traveler Communities. Walker presents interesting insights into the high levels of suicide after a death within the Traveller Community, especially during the time of funerals, and cultural specific death and grief rituals. She focuses on gender differences, the continuing problem of social exclusion and alcohol abuse.

Sheehan’s essay is based on his PhD thesis, ‘An Anthropological Exploration of ‘Suicide’ and ‘Self-harm’ in Blanchardstown, Co. Dublin’ (2003). This study was based on a collection of narratives from those bereaved by suicide, people with a history of self-harm, alongside the testimony of health professionals and coroners. For his paper Sheehan compared narratives of men and women, and explained the subtle differences in the concepts of death, risk, self-harm, and suicide, which were evident in these gendered narratives.

Bryan and Maycock move their analysis in a different direction, challenging the universalizing narrative of ‘at risk’ LGBT-identified youth as the dominant frame through which young LGBT people’s lives in Ireland are understood. Their paper seeks to trouble the assumption of an automatic relationship between LGBT identification and suicidality. They argue for a more nuanced analysis and interpretation of LGBT suicidality, as part of the need to recognise the diversity of LGBT lived experience.

All of these papers point out the strength of qualitative (especially ethnographic) approaches to the study of suicide, not just as a sort of supplement to the experience-distant sociological/public health analyses of suicide, but as a means of reimagining the field of study as such. Suicide is, ultimately, a decision made by a specific person in concrete social-historical circumstances. However impaired one might construct the decision-maker, the question of agency remains central in both the social determination of the category (separating it, for example, from death by misadventure), and the ways that society imagines intervening in future decisions of this type. Ultimately it is incomprehensible without a principled contextual understanding of communities and individuals, alongside the shifting meanings of key cultural concepts, such as gender, agency, and risk.

References


Speaking Back to Dominant Constructions of LGBT Lives: Complexifying ‘at riskness’ for Self-harm and Suicidality among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

Audrey Bryan* and Paula Mayock

Abstract: This paper challenges dominant constructions of LGBT youth against a backdrop of increased attention to LGBT people’s vulnerability to a host of mental health risks, including self-harm and suicidality. A universalising narrative of ‘at risk’ LGBT-identified youth has become the dominant frame through which young LGBT people’s lives in Ireland are understood, particularly since the publication of ‘Supporting LGBT Lives,’ the first study of the mental health and well-being of LGBT people to have been conducted in the Irish context. Drawing on key findings from this mixed methods study, this paper problematises the assumption of an automatic relationship between LGBT identification and suicidality. The merits of mixed methods research in the generation of a nuanced analysis and interpretation of LGBT suicidality are highlighted, as is the need to recognise the diversity, complexity and multifacetedness of LGBT lived experience.

Key words: LGBT youth; mental health; suicidality; mixed methods research; Ireland.

Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed the emergence of a consensus that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people—and youth in particular—are at greater risk of mental health problems and suicidal distress than their non-LGBT-identified peers (e.g., Gibson 1989; Kitts 2005; Remafedi 1999). These elevated levels of risk are generally attributed to a range of challenging or negative experiences associated with living as a sexual or gender minority in a homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist society. This paper discusses some of the key findings from Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People (hereafter LGBT Lives), the largest and most significant study of LGBT mental health to have been conducted in an Irish context to date (Mayock, Bryan, Carr & Kitching 2009). Focusing in particular on the prevalence of, as well as motivations for, self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours, we argue that the findings challenge universalising representations of LGBT youth in which vulnerability and ‘at riskness’ for self-harm and suicide have become the dominant frames of reference. We also consider the study’s contribution to the emergence of counter-discourses which, albeit less visible, challenge prevailing assumptions about the ‘riskiness’ of LGBT lives, whilst simultaneously recognising the alienation and discrimination experienced by many LGBT-identified youth.

Dominant Discursive Constructions of LGBT Youth

LGBT youths’ ‘at riskness’ for self-harm and suicidality has become one of the key frames through which LGBT young people’s experiences have become ‘knowable’ in the academic and activist literatures (Rasmussen 2006; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt 2004). As Rasmussen (2006:135) explains, these ‘tropes of risk’ have become part of the lexicon of LGBT activism and scholarship and serve an important strategic authorising and legitimising function for LGBT organisations whose existence is contingent on mobilising financial and political support for a range of LGBT services. The LGBT Lives study is no exception; co-commissioned by two of the most prominent LGBT non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Ireland, findings from the study have been used to directly inform several newspaper articles, parliamentary debates, policy documents, educational guidelines and pedagogical resources. In the main, these discussions and documents have highlighted the vulnerability of LGBT-identified youth to such negative life experiences as bullying, depression, alcohol and drug misuse, self-harm and suicidality (see for example, Department of Education and Skills [DES]/Gay and Lesbian Equality Network [GLEN] 2010; National Youth Council of Ireland and Youthnet 2012). While a detailed analysis of the content of these documents is beyond the scope of this article, this particular framing of the LGBT Lives study has arguably resulted in a situation whereby young LGBT people’s lives in Ireland have come to be defined primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of their vulnerability to bullying, their experiences of homophobic or transphobic violence, and their ‘at-riskness’ for depression, self-harm and suicidality. On some occasions, the study was referenced within the context of claims that people who identify as LGBT are at increased or elevated risk for self-harm and suicidality relative to their heterosexual or non-transgender identified counterparts, a claim which the research itself never sought to, nor was in a position to address, given the scope of its objectives and the nature of the research design (see methodology section).

The relationship between LGBT identification and suicidality has, of course, long been a source of intense debate within the medical, psychological and social work literatures (Remafedi 1999; Russell 2003; Savin-Williams 2001a, 2001b). While some of the literature presents the relationship between LGBT
identification and the risk for suicidality as a settled question (Kitts 2005; Remafedi 1999), others have disputed these claims, highlighting instead a range of methodological challenges associated with researching suicidality, particularly in relation to issues of sampling, the measurement of sexual minority status, and the measurement of suicide risk (Savin-Williams 2001a, 2001b; Russell 2003). An important emergent trend in research is the recognition that LGBT youth are not a homogeneous ‘at risk’ group, and that diversity of experience, resilience and the effects of risk-based discourses themselves, merit investigation (Cover 2012; Eisenberg & Resnick 2006; Fenaughty & Harré 2003; Marshall 2010; Rasmussen, Rofes & Talburt 2004; Rasmussen 2006; Savin-Williams 2001a, 2001b; Talburt & Rasmussen 2010).

This paper presents a more nuanced interrogation of the relationship between suicidality and LGBT identification than the dominant discourses through which young Irish LGBT lives have become intelligible and knowable allow. It seeks to demonstrate the complexity and inherent ‘messiness’ of explorations of the relationship between LGBT identification and suicidality, as revealed through a mixed methods approach to LGBT mental health and well-being. It ‘speaks back’ to dominant narratives which constrain the available ways of thinking about LGBT lives by discursively constructing LGBT-identified youth as automatically vulnerable, by virtue of their non-normative sexuality or gender identification. Furthermore, by focusing on the effects of these dominant discursive framings, it seeks to contribute to an emergent counter-discourse which asks: what do such universalising discursive constructions of LGBT unhappiness and ‘at riskness’ do for LGBT youth? (Cover 2012). Before discussing some of the study’s key findings, we provide an overview of the study’s methodological approach.

**LGBT Lives Methodology**

The research aimed to examine mental health and well-being among LGBT people in Ireland with specific attention to the identification of factors and experiences that heighten vulnerability to psychological and suicidal distress. A strong emphasis was placed on contextualising LGBT mental health and on the identification of experiences that strengthen resilience in the lives of LGBT people. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques was used, including the administration of a primarily quantitative, anonymous on-line survey and the conduct of in-depth interviews with LGBT people. Mixed methods research designs of the kind adopted in this study are increasingly recognised as the third major research paradigm and have become popular across a range of disciplines (Johnson et al. 2007; Leech & Onwegbuzie 2009). Whilst the field is still evolving (Creswell 2009; Small 2011), researchers are increasingly embracing mixed methodology because of the recognised need for a variety of methods in order to capture the nuances of particular research questions (Patton 2002).

The study’s quantitative and qualitative data were collected roughly within the same time period (between November 2007 and March 2008). The survey instrument took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete on-line and was designed to capture the experiences of LGBT people living in Ireland in a variety of settings and contexts. It included demographic and biographical variables (e.g., information about gender identity, sexual orientation, behaviour, and attraction), school experiences, including perceptions of belonging, victimisation and harassment, workplace experiences, as well as general levels of verbal and physical abuse experienced etc. Items and measures capturing various correlates, dimensions and indicators of psychological well-being, including alcohol use, self-esteem, family and social support, history of self-injurious behaviour and attempted suicide were also included. While the survey was constructed primarily for the purpose of gathering quantitative data, a text box was placed at the end of the survey to provide participants with the opportunity to make general comments or to discuss issues that were personally relevant. Over 400 individuals (out of a total of 1,110) answered this question, in many cases offering detailed explanations of their responses, or in-depth accounts of their experiences. Thus qualitative comments from the online survey complemented data garnered from the in-depth interview dimension of the research and were used to inform the analysis as a whole.

The qualitative component of the study involved the conduct of in-depth interviews with 40 LGBT adults and young people. Mixed sampling strategies, including purposive, snowball, and targeted sampling techniques, were used to recruit participants for in-depth interview. This combination of sampling strategies allowed for emergent design flexibility and permitted the addition of new and appropriate approaches to sampling as the study progressed (McManus 2003). The interview schedule was designed to examine the experiences (social, educational, familial, and peer-related) of LGBT people and their influence on their mental health status, including suicide risk. It also sought to identify sources of resiliency as well as positive aspects of LGBT identification. During interview, participants were encouraged to talk about daily life, their experiences of school, family life and peer relationships, as well as their social life and leisure activities. Specific questions targeted experiences that may have been challenging, difficult or stressful (e.g., experiences of discrimination, homophobic bullying, stress associated with ‘coming out’ to family and peers) while others focused directly on participants’ experiences of depression, anxiety and loneliness, self-harm, as well as suicidal ideation and behaviour. Consistent with a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006; Strauss & Corbin 2008), qualitative
data analysis began during the data collection process. This essentially meant that ideas for making sense of the data started when the study was still in the field. To facilitate the systematic analysis of the qualitative data, all interviews were coded using NVivo, an integrated software package for qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994). This process facilitated multi-level narrative and thematic analyses. The rationale underpinning the integrated analysis of the study's qualitative and quantitative data was inherently complementary and also sought, through triangulation, to elaborate and extend current understanding of LGBT mental health (Brannen 2005). The quantitative and qualitative components of the study were explicitly related to each other throughout the analytic process, producing nuanced findings that are ‘greater than the sum of the parts’ (Woolley 2009:7). A primary goal was ‘to use the analytic leverage generated by different analytical perspectives’ to yield a more comprehensive picture than would have been possible from one perspective alone (Small 2011:76).

Analysis
Assessing the prevalence of depression, self-harm and suicidality was a key dimension of the online survey. Suicidality was assessed using multiple self-report indicators, including suicidal thoughts, intent, plans and attempts. The number and severity of suicide attempts was also examined. Almost 18% (n = 197) of the on-line survey sample reported ever having attempted suicide, just under two thirds of whom had tried to take their lives on more than one occasion. However, a majority of survey respondents had never (42%) or rarely (32%) seriously contemplated suicide, a finding that significantly undermines the claim that LGBT people are uniformly at risk of suicide.

Universalling narratives of LGBT people's lived experience as primarily negative and traumatic because of their LGBT identification are further complicated by the complex pattern revealed by those participants who had ever attempted suicide when asked to what extent their first and/or most recent suicide attempts were related to their LGBT identification. Less than half (46.7%) of those who had attempted suicide at least once described their first suicide attempt as having been directly or primarily ('very related' or 'very much related') to their LGBT identification (n = 92), suggesting that a complex constellation of factors—including, but not limited to one's LGBT identification—are involved. Moreover, the vast majority (83%) of those aged 25 and under had never or rarely given serious consideration to ending their lives in the past 12 months, suggesting that while significant sub-group of LGBT young people are indeed at risk of suicide, that it would be inappropriate to characterise all LGBT youth as being vulnerable.

Participants’ narrative self-understandings of their self-injurious behaviour or suicidal feelings or actions further illuminated the extent to which these experiences are attributable to a range of overlapping factors that cannot be reduced to monocausal explanation. Some participants were very clear that their sexual minority or gender-non-conforming status—or the range of negative experiences associated with this identification—had a direct role to play in their psychological distress. The following participant attributed his suicidal thoughts directly to ‘being gay’.

Obviously [my sexual orientation] would surely have to be part, wouldn't it? I would think, I mean obviously the abuse, sexual abuse that kind of … being gay … But no, it was my sexual orientation would have been the suicidal reasons. If I had committed suicide it would have been because of being gay. So that’s definitely true, you know (Gay, Male, age 46).

For others, heteronormative expectations were a central feature of participants’ self-understandings of their attempts to end their lives.

But it was actually my sexuality, certainly a lot closer in [the second attempt] than the last time. And again, you know, I think it was really the pressure of stepping out and not conforming to the marriage scenario… I really didn't know how to, I really, [pause], I suppose I felt [pause]… that this [marriage] is what I was supposed to do … what I was meant to be doing, this was one's purpose in life (Lesbian, Female, age 29).

The emotional states described by young people in particular were strongly connected to an absence of legitimate means of self-expression and ‘being’ within contexts where heterosexuality was presumed. Non-acceptance, loneliness, and isolation were common themes that emerged in some participants’ narrative accounts of their self-harming or suicidal behaviours.

At the time I started cutting myself, around when I was 17 ... The whole seclusion thing, I didn't feel accepted, I felt isolated … my mum had a lot of problems to deal with so I didn't really express myself to her like, my emotions (Female, Bisexual, age 20).

In other instances, perceived or actual lack of acceptance of one's identification as LGBT among family and friends was cited as a specific trigger for self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts. One on-line survey participant identified her parent’s failure to acknowledge or embrace her lesbian identity and same-sex relationships as the primary reasons for her self-injurious behavior and thoughts of suicide.

Most of my self-harming is related to the fact that my family are so disgusted with me for being gay and have shut me out constantly ever since I came out, asked me not to come home for
Some felt attacked and silenced in contexts where they feared they would be ignored or reprimanded because they did not conform to the ‘standards’ of the heterosexual majority. School emerged as the most significant site of perceived threat and was a setting where homophobic or transphobic bullying was pervasive, with 58% percent of the overall survey sample, and half of all current school goers, reporting homophobic bullying among peers in school.

There’s all this pressure [at school] and then the word gay being used as an insult for someone that’s in school. You hear it and it’s almost attacking you … and you just feel that you can’t be yourself because if people know that you’re gay they’ll just attack you and throw stones at you, metaphorical stones at you, and you’ll be kind of at the centre … (Gay, Male, age 20).

While some of those who had experienced suicidal distress attributed these feelings primarily to the challenges associated with their LGBT identification, others alluded to a range of additional circumstances or events in their lives that had caused them to contemplate or attempt suicide. This highlights the importance of the need for a highly nuanced understanding of suicidal distress, which views it as a result of a broad range of motivations and factors which interact in complex ways (Cover 2012). Furthermore, some did not perceive their suicidality to have been related in any way to their LGBT identity. The following are examples of these kinds of narrative accounts.

**Interviewer:** And have you ever had any thoughts about suicide, or wanting to take your own life?

**Participant:** Definitely, definitely. But again, not in relation, not because I’m gay or any issues surrounding the gay, always because of other issues, you know finding out about my Dad and my sister dying, definitely. When I’m in severe depression I’m like ‘what the fuck am I doing here, what’s the point,’ d’you know? But you know, nothing because of being gay, it’s always other issues (Lesbian, Female, age 31).

I attempted suicide once when I was 16. It was totally unrelated to being gay. No one knew I did it as it was unsuccessful and I never wanted to try it again after that (Lesbian, Female, age 29, Survey Participant).

A considerable number of those who had self-harmed or who had felt suicidal articulated these thoughts or actions as a response to a combination of challenging or negative life experiences, such as home-based difficulties, school and exam-based pressures, or sexual abuse during childhood. These accounts illuminated the pressures that young people in general experience in a world which necessitates balancing a complex set of demands and experiences in multiple contexts and settings, such as school, family and the peer-group (Cover 2012). For example, this young bisexual woman understood her self-harming primarily as a response to parental conflict and other home-based challenges which she had been experiencing at the time.

My mum and dad constantly fighting. My sister didn’t have [pause], the mental thing [mental health problem] wasn’t recognised at the time but she was very wild, she was very unstable. So my mum had a lot of problems with her at that age. So I think it was all that and I was a young 17, I wasn’t able to handle all that (Female, bisexual, age 20).

Others were unable to identify or articulate a specific reason for having attempted to take their own life, but nonetheless believed that it was not related to their LGBT identification.

And the second time [I attempted suicide] it was to do, not with my sexuality but it was to do with [pause] … the second time I never figured out what it was about. I’ve no idea why I’ve been depressed for so long and now suddenly I’m out of it (Gay, Male, age 17).

Collectively, these findings suggest that suicidality and self-harm among those who identify as LGBT was often motivated by a complex constellation of experiences. The diversity of experiences in relation to suicidal distress reported here speaks to the importance of recognising sexuality as but one facet of identity—albeit a significant one—which must be considered in relation to a range of other contexts and experiences which shape and influence individuals’ lives (Cover 2012). In other words, while some of these experiences were related to the stress of identifying as LGBT in a range of homophobic and transphobic settings and environments, others were wholly unrelated to LGBT identification. As stated earlier, almost a fifth of the overall survey sample had attempted suicide on at least one occasion but only 8% of all survey participants had made a first suicide attempt which they deemed to
be 'very much related' or 'very related' to their LGBT identification. The narrative data similarly suggest that suicidal distress is not always, or necessarily directly or primarily related to one's LGBT identification. That a majority of survey participants had never given serious consideration to the idea of ending their lives lends further support to the view that it would be inappropriate to characterise all LGBT people as being at elevated risk for suicidality (Savin-Williams & Ream 2003). These findings raise questions about the legitimacy of universalising discourses which portray LGBT youth in particular, as always, or necessarily 'at risk'. None of this, of course, negates the reality that suicidality and self-harm are very real features of a significant minority of LGBT people's lives. Nonetheless, the weight of the combined quantitative and qualitative data does call into question the appropriateness of assuming that there is an automatic relationship between LGBT identification and suicidal or psychological distress.

As previously noted, the study aimed to balance an assessment of the prevalence and nature of depression, self-harm, and suicidality with an exploration of LGBT people's perspectives on their lives and of the experiences that mobilise and strengthen resilience in LGBT people of all ages. Measures of subjective well-being were assessed as part of the on-line survey and the findings suggest that LGBT people living in Ireland are, on the whole, more happy than they are unhappy with their lives. When asked how happy they considered themselves to be, the average score was 7 out of 10 (mean = 6.87, s.d. = 2.20, n = 1097), where 0 was 'extremely unhappy' and 10 was 'extremely happy'.

Satisfaction with life as a whole was also generally high amongst the survey sample. Again, the average score was 7 out of 10 (mean = 6.96, s.d. = 2.29, n = 1092). Findings of this nature raise further questions about the accuracy of popular constructions of LGBT lives as uniformly wounded and vulnerable and as somehow markedly different from their heterosexual or gender-conforming peers. The study's exploration of resilience drew primarily on the study's qualitative data and provided critical insight into experiences, people, places and relationships that act as enablers, thereby protecting LGBT people against stressors. These data offer important insights into the contextual factors which make some LGBT youth more vulnerable—and indeed others more resilient—to psychological and suicidal distress (Cover 2012; Savin-Williams 2001a).

Four key sources of social support—friends, family, LGBT support services, and specific environments such as school and the workplace—were found to foster resilience and enable LGBT people to cope positively with stress. While not seeking to reproduce an overly-simplistic, stereotypical representation of vulnerable LGBT youth versus resilient LGBT adults, or to feed into some of the more problematic elements of the 'it gets better' discourse (see Cover 2012), participants accounts did suggest that strengths can be fostered or developed over time, taking us beyond the common view of resilience as a trait that is static or innate. Study participants frequently described a process of becoming resilient, a path that can be broadly characterised as an emerging capacity to move on in a positive way from negative, traumatic or stressful experiences. The following are examples of participants who described the development of new meanings and interpretations of their lives and experiences over time.

I think that I've become more comfortable with my sexuality as I've got older, and my mental health is definitely a lot better around it too (Lesbian, Female, age 38, Survey Participant).

I was sick of being bullied. I decided, 'I don't care, people can think what they want'. When I seemed to be going that way I made more friends and became more social. From that point everything was good like (Gay, Male, age 21).

For some, negative experiences appeared to act as a catalyst for change, propelling people to resist and transform negative perceptions of self. Taking strength from and resisting prejudice or discrimination was therefore an important dimension of a process of 're-framing' experience that may otherwise have been constructed negatively.

I was just anti-gay myself and, even coming out, I found a struggle. But again it was just over time; you let go of that. You get to the stage in your life and you say, 'so what, you're the person who has the problem with it. This is my life and I'm living it for me' (Lesbian, Female, age 47).

There was also evidence that LGBT people actively engaged in the development and strengthening of their own resilience to reduce their vulnerability to adversity and stress. Several reported ways in which they gained deepened insight into their lives over time, emphasising ways in which this enabled them to positively appraise their situations and experiences, making them more comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

Discussion

The findings presented in this paper challenge dominant constructions of LGBT people, and youth in particular, against a backdrop of decontextualised narratives about LGBT people's vulnerability to a whole host of risks and negative outcomes, including suicide. This narrative appears to have intensified in an Irish context following the publication of LGBT Lives, the first mixed methods study of its kind to have been conducted on the island of Ireland.

As highlighted earlier in this paper, the dominant image invoked by many researchers, as well as organisations advocating for LGBT youth, has been that of an isolated, victimised, and largely powerless...
young person who is ‘at risk’ of self-harm and suicide. In recent years, a small yet significant number of scholars have begun ‘speaking back’ to these dominant discursive constructions of risk, arguing that they present a pathologising and universalising picture which fails to illuminate the diversity and multi-facetedness of the experiences of LGBT-identified youth, or their capacity for agency, pleasure and creativity (Marshall 2010; Rasmussen, Rofes & Talburt 2004; Rasmussen 2006; Savin-Williams 2001a, 2001b; Talburt & Rasmussen 2010). These counter-discursive efforts have been led by ‘after-queer’ scholars (Cover 2012; Marshall 2010; Talburt 2010; Talburt & Rasmussen 2010) whose goal is not to discount the existence of self-harm or suicidality among individuals who identify as LGBT, but rather to convey the socially constructed nature of tropes of risk. These counter-discourses also powerfully illuminate some of the problematic effects of those representations which define LGBT-identified youth predominantly or exclusively in terms of their relationship to victimisation and suffering (Marshall 2010; Rasmussen 2006). For example, Rasmussen (2006) suggests that the constant repetition of ‘horror stories’ of ‘wounded’ LGBT youth has a range of consequences, including a focus on individual pathology which forecloses consideration of LGBT agency or the heteronormative processes that generate and sustain LGBT marginalisation. The repetition of risk-based tropes may also have a distorting or numbing effect, in the longer term, which prevents people from acknowledging or recognising their implicatedness in the suffering of others (Rasmussen 2006). The case for destabilizing the notion of LGBT-identified youth as ‘always already victim’ has been argued by Marshall (2010) on the grounds that this discursive representation has the effect of policing queer youth. By focusing on their ‘at riskness’, LGBT-identified youth are defined by their victimhood and become objects of our empathy (Patton 1996; cited in Talburt 2006; Rasmussen 2010). To counteract these problematic effects, Rasmussen (2006) maintains that we need to guard against constructing LGBT youth as uniformly abject and in need of salvation and protection and hence fundamentally different from their heterosexual or gender-conforming peers. The findings presented in this paper reveal that suicidality and self-harm among LGBT people are related to complex constellation of factors and experiences, some of which may be significantly or in part related to LGBT identification; others however, were wholly unrelated to LGBT identification. That a majority of on-line survey respondents had rarely or never seriously contemplated suicide further problematises dominant constructions of LGBT youth as uniformly at risk of suicidal distress and mental health problems. The study’s findings in no way conceal the extent to which many LGBT people are negatively impacted by both external and internal stressors including direct and indirect forms of LGBT discrimination and victimisation. There were numerous stresses associated with concealing and/ or disclosing one’s LGBT identity and, for LGBT youth in particular, school was a site where LGBT identities were silenced or ridiculed (Mayock et al. 2009). Nonetheless, the evidence arising from the study’s quantitative and qualitative data significantly challenges the assumption of an automatic relationship between LGBT identification and suicidality. Moreover, this study’s mixed methods approach helped to produced a more nuanced understanding of self-harm and suicidality among LGBT people than would have been possible through the use of either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. While the narrative data uncovered motives as well as meanings that helped to locate, contextualise, and understand self-harm and suicidality, the quantitative data produced a broader statistical picture of the extent to which participants who had experienced suicidal distress attributed their thoughts or attempts to end their lives to their LGBT identification. These integrated findings pose important questions about the now pervasive narrative which portrays all LGBT people as at elevated risk for suicidality which, by implication, suggests that mental health problems are simply associated with being LGBT.

While some of the findings of LGBT Lives have been influential in shaping policy responses, public debate and service provision in recent years, a highly nuanced and multi-dimensional interpretation and understanding of the perceived link between LGBT identification and mental health indicators such as self-harm and suicidality is warranted. This understanding should neither lend itself to universalising discourses about the prevalence of risk within communities of LGBT-identified youth nor discount the realities of homophobic and transphobic violence in society; rather, it should enable a deeper appreciation of the diversity, complexity and multi-facetedness of LGBT lived experience.

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References

Notes:

1 Davis 1999; cited in Rasmussen 2006 noted an overemphasis on what he termed ‘at riskness’ and an absence of understanding of how black males construct personal meanings in their lives in an out of school. The term ‘at riskness’ captures the dominant framing of LGBT experience in which LGBT youth in particular are positioned as inherently ‘at risk’, disempowered victims.  
2 The study was commissioned by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and BeLonG To Youth Service and was funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention.  
3 Initial efforts to recruit LGBT people for in-depth interview centred on making contact with LGBT organisations, services and interventions as well as LGBT
venues and clubs. The personal contacts of the research team also facilitated access to participants in some cases. As the recruitment process progressed, snowball sampling techniques were also utilised. Finally, a smaller number of participants made direct contact with the research team (usually by telephone) having completed the on-line survey to indicate that they were willing to be interviewed. All interviews took place at a time and venue selected by individual interviewees.

This research project was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committees at the Children’s Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, and University College Dublin, respectively. Appropriate ethical procedures relating to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to throughout the conduct of the study. Due to the sensitive nature of many of the issues under investigation, a range of protective mechanisms were put in place from the outset of the research (see Mayock et al. (2009) for a detailed account of the procedures for protecting research participants).
The Gender Paradox and Stories from the Edge of Living

Cormac Sheehan*

Abstract: In most countries where there has been a developed epidemiological interest in suicidal behaviour, there exists a gender paradox, where male rates of suicide exceed those of their female counterparts. Paradoxically, females deliberate self-harm and contemplate suicide more than men. This gender paradox is well discussed and documented in Ireland and elsewhere, but serves as a springboard into the discussion of ethnographically collected data about the difference between men's and women's stories from the edge of living, where suicide and deliberate self-harm are seen as real options. This paper concludes that ethnography has a part to play in our understanding of suicide as being part of larger tension between feeling part of 'normal' society, and that there are very real differences between men and women in narrating their stories from the edge of the living.

Key Words: suicide; gender paradox of suicidal behaviour; ethnography; narratives; cultural scripts; lethality; socialisation; 'numbness' and 'rassell'

Introduction

There have been historical incidences where populations have been politically blinded to the rates of suicide and associated behaviour; for example, in China, records were not made available to the public until 1989 (Pearson & Liu 2002). There have been examples of serious under-reporting of suicide rates which makes it difficult to understand their rise and fall historically (Walsh 2008). In Ireland, suicide and mental health promotion have become the cornerstones of models of prevention and debate, (NOSP 2009) and are a sharp contrast to the politically-hidden, under-reported and legally-sanctioned suicides of the past (Sheehan 2003). However, there are still areas of the world where little is known about suicide rates. For example, suicide on the continent of Africa is almost undocumented, and parts of Euro-Asia, Oceania, and South America present little or no data on suicide rates.

With that in mind, every year, almost one million people die from suicide, accounting for a global mortality rate of 16 per 100,000. Over the last 50 years, there has been a sharp increase in suicide rates of 60% globally, and it is also estimated that the rate for suicide attempts is twenty times higher than completed suicides. In Ireland, there has been a keen political interest with the establishment of various task forces (such as the National Task Force on Suicide Prevention established in 1996) to deal with mental health promotion and suicide prevention. In addition, there have been commendable research and health promotion offices established, for example, the National Office of Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF). Pearson and Lui (2002), note that international attention focused on suicide rates in China when records were made publically available in 1989, and there was considerable reaction to the higher rate of female suicide.

Comparisons can be drawn between Ireland and China, where a collision of forces focused international attention on suicide rates in Ireland. Underreporting was commonplace, for both structural and cultural reasons. Suicide was not decriminalised until 1993 - perhaps an outdated hangover from British rule, but a deterrent none the less - and a consideration for coroners, medical clinicians and the police who all have a role in determining causes of deaths in Ireland. Following changes in reporting structures and decriminalisation, it became clear that young male suicide rates were a cause for concern in Ireland, as are female suicide rates in China.

Rates

In Ireland, there is a comparatively moderate rate of suicide accounting for, on average, 400-500+ deaths per year, or 9.2 per 100,000. Out of 26 EU countries, Ireland is ranked 20th with Lithuania having the highest rate of 30.5 per 100,000, and Greece the lowest rate at 3.5 per 100,000. However, when examining the 15 to 24-year-old male suicide rate, Ireland is ranked 4th, with 14.4 per 100,000; again, Lithuania is highest with 20.1 per 100,000 and Malta is the lowest with less than 1 per 100,000. Greece is the second lowest with 3.5 per 100,000. These figures do not convey the impact that high rates of youth male suicide have on the collective consciousness of local and national populations. When conducting research during 1999-2003, it was clear that people I spoke with believed that rates were nowhere near the true level of suicides, and these documented suicide rates – as opposed to what people believed to be the true level - were being described as an epidemic (Sheehan 2003). I observed that people often associated death caused by external causes (for example, overdoses, road traffic accidents, murder) with suicides, as being a risk to young men. There was a strong local sense that young men were dying needlessly. Among the people I did my research with, there was a collective grouping of all deaths, regardless of cause and year of the event. The following exchange exemplifies this collective grouping of deaths. A young man died of an overdose, and, after the funeral, the following conversation took place among a group of men:

‘Name all the people that have killed themselves?’

Ben answered, ‘Turkey, Marksy [overdose].’

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Then Lee said, ‘Redo’, and then another, ‘Shaker [accident] and Matty [overdose] and Phillo and that fella [sic], you know, Will’s brother’ [disputed suicide]. ‘Then there was John, he died of an overdose, but he was well used to it, and then there was Mark, and the fella [sic] that went to prison, and he died then after that.’

As Will - one of my sources - explained about the estate that he lived in all his life (as did all those mentioned above) ‘This place is the place of the dead, so many young people have died, it is like death row’. These exchanges and conversations were a striking example of how ethnographic research can illuminate collective memory about suicide and death and, perhaps, provide an explanation regarding the sense of suicide epidemic that people experience and convey.

The Gender Paradox
In part, the collision of social events which has made suicide in Ireland a predominantly male problem, has overshadowed the levels of deliberate self-harm and suicidal behaviour among the female population. In Ireland and Western Countries, deliberate self-harm rates are often higher among women than men. The rate of suicide, for example, for men and women in 2010 in Ireland, was 486 (10.9 per 100,000) and 100 (4.4 per 100,000) respectively. In 2010, there were almost 12,000 presentations for deliberate self-harm in Irish hospitals, equating to a female rate of 231 per 100,000, and a male rate of 205 per 100,000. It would be unimaginable for socio-moral, cultural, and economic consequences, if all those engaging in self-harm resulted in deaths. It must also be noted, that the gap between female and male rates of deliberate self-harm, has narrowed from 37% in 2004-2005 to just 13% in 2009-2010.

The high rate of deliberate self-harm amongst women, when compared to the rates of suicides, is called the gender paradox (Canetto & Sarkinofsky 1998). As with suicide rates, caution must be taken when considering the universality of the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour. This is similar to the argument about global figures of suicide rates as Canetto argues.

Some consider the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour to be a manifestation of basic differences in the nature of women and men. In reality, the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is not constant within or across countries, especially when factors such as age or ethnicity are considered. It is also important to note that national suicide mortality data is available only from about half of the world’s countries. Furthermore, the data on suicidal behaviour, including the World Health Organization (WHO) national suicide data, comes from selected, primarily industrialized, countries. Thus, based on available data, the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour appears to be a dominant, not a universal pattern, suggesting the importance of cultural perspectives on suicidal behaviour. (2008:259)

The gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is the dominant pattern in Ireland. However, there are countries (for example, China), and small-scale societies, where the pattern is inverted, and more women die from suicide than men. In Ireland, the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is becoming less clear and, if the trends continue, it is easy to imagine Irish males dying by suicide and engaging in deliberate self-harm more than their female counterparts. Rates and patterns change, and as Lee and Kleinman point out: ‘Even if two societies have the same suicide rates, the local causes, meanings and impacts of suicide can still be quite different. As a social index, suicide may therefore be indexing different things across different communities’ (2003:296). In the case of Ireland, there is also evidence to suggest that suicide as a social index and associated causal factors may be locally variable.

There was widespread variation in the male and female deliberate self-harm rates when examined by city/county of residence. The male rate varied from 104 per 100,000 for Leitrim to 484 per 100,000 for Cork City. The lowest and highest female rates were recorded for Roscommon and Limerick City residents at 136 and 416 per 100,000 respectively. (NSRF Annual Report 2011:1)

Following Lee and Kleinman’s (2003) assertion of different social indices, the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour in Ireland is variable across different communities. This variation of rate may diminish the validity of the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour. However, the variation is within the parameters of the pattern, and is epidemiologically important. It is the contention of Canetto (2008) and Canetto and Sarkinofsky (1998) among others, that the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is best analysed through cultural scripts. The gender paradox is a culturally scripted pattern of behaviour, and in the case of Ireland, men die more by suicide, and women engage more in suicidal behaviour, variations aside. There has been considerable interest in explaining the gender paradox. For example, Mościcki (1994) argued that the gender paradox could be explained by four possible reasons: lethality, recall bias, differential rate of depression due to alcohol abuse, and socialisation. In this paper, I will discuss lethality and socialisation. For a more detailed review, see Mościcki (1994), and Canetto and Sarkinofsky (1998).

The Gender Paradox, Methods, Lethality and Intent
In Ireland, the most common means of suicide for both men and women is hanging, which is more common in males (64%) than females (43%). It is more prevalent in younger cohorts, with drowning the most common in older cohorts. The use of other methods, such as drug overdose and cutting, are also common among men and women. While hanging is the most common method of suicide among females (43%), poisoning and drowning combined, account for half of all female suicides. In cases of deliberate self-harm, overdose is
the most common method. In 2011, drug overdose accounted for 69% of all acts, with more women (75%) than men (62%) overdosing. The second most common method of deliberate self-harm was cutting, accounting for 25% of registered acts, with men accounting for 27% and women 22%. Attempted hanging accounted for 6% of all deliberate self-harm, with men three times more likely to choose this method than females. Central to the lethality theory as an explanation of the gender paradox, is that it is an artefact of different rates of survival from suicidal acts, as men choose more lethal means, and are less likely to survive or be rescued, whereas women are more likely to be rescued or to survive. The difficulty with the lethality theory is that it does not take into account the intent of the individual. Intent and lethality are not easily equated as Canetto and Sakinofsky explain:

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\text{[..]} \text{suicide method is not a substitute measure of considered intent. The same method may be used with very different intentions. A low-lethality method may be associated with high death intentionality, and a high-lethality method may be used on sudden impulse by someone whose considered desire would be in favor of life.} \) (1998:9)
\]

It is also conceivable that there is no one single intention associated with a suicidal behaviour; in my own research, sources often discussed multiple intentions, as Stephens (1995) explains: ‘Most behaviour rarely arises from a single intention but it is accompanied by a complexity of purposes’ (1995:91). Moreover, from my research, it was clear that all the suicide attempts involved a vision or imagining of the reactions of others to their death. The lethality - at first glance - is a promising explanation of the gender paradox. However, it does not consider intent as a variable, and is not constrained by lethal or non-lethal means, as one source explained to me: ‘...I wish I was dead, I often hold my breath while lying in bed waiting to die, or I stop eating for a few days at a time...I wish I was dead’ (Sheehan 2003).

The Gender Paradox and Socialisation

Several authors have argued that suicide is viewed as a masculine behaviour, whereas deliberate self-harm is more feminine. It has also been argued, that at the core of this gendered bias, is the belief that suicide is unsuited and unnatural for women. This argument is central to Durkheim’s thought on the gender paradox: ‘Being a more instinctive creature than man, woman has only to follow her instincts to find calmness and peace.’ (Durkheim 1951:272) By positioning women as being less civilised, and acting instinctively, Durkheim argues that women are ‘less concerned with civilizing process. . . [She] thus resembles certain characteristics found in primitive culture’ (1984:192). According to Canetto:

A corollary of this theory is that women were assumed to be immune to suicide as long as they acted ‘like women’, that is as long as they stayed subordinate to men within ‘traditional’ institutions. By contrast, women who acted ‘masculine’, that is women who ventured into such masculine activities as education and employment, would do so at the risk of becoming suicide casualties, like men. (2008:261)

Canetto goes on to point out that authors in the past have argued that women were unable to plan their own deaths as they became hysterical, and have borderline personality disorders. Women are more at risk if they move away from more traditional roles and enter employment. They are susceptible to suicide attempts for trivial reasons, and are more open to suicide attempts following the ending of a relationship. Men were not presented in this light.

Jean Baechler presents this view of women, and their disposition towards non-fatal suicidal behaviour:

Women endure misfortune better than men. Their social roles require them to face unbearable problems less frequently. As daughters, wives and mistresses, and conforming to the dependency which nature and culture encourage, women have a greater tendency to reach their ends by the threat of trying to kill themselves. . . Dangerous and aggressive behaviour generally is not characteristic of women. (1979:291)

I do not endorse this view of women. On the contrary, it has been shown in numerous studies that men and women equally attempt suicide after the ending of a relationship (I also observed this in my research) and that employment is a protection factor when considering suicide ideation and risk. Is it possible however, that these prevailing and historical notions associated with fatal-male suicide, and non-fatal suicide (the feminine ‘cry for help’) have come to be the cultural scripts associated with the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour? As Canetto and Sakinofsky explain:

According to the ‘socialization’ theory, the gender paradox in the epidemiology of suicidal behaviour, flows from these gendered narratives of suicidal behaviours. It is suggested that women and men will tend to adopt the self-destructive behaviours that are congruent with the gender scripts of their cultures. (1998:17)

Similarly, Wolf, in her early study of female suicide in China, points to the importance of cultural scripts: ‘In the West, we ask of a suicide, “Why?” In China, the question is more commonly “Who? Who drove her to this? Who is responsible...?”’ For a woman, it is the most damning public accusation she can make of her mother-in-law, her husband, or her son.’ (Wolf...
1975:112). This is not to suggest that cultural scripts on gendered suicidal behaviour simply allow for a woman to die by suicide. Quite the reverse, in fact. This death is a last resort, as Lee and Kleinman (2003) explain: ‘Whatever the individual motives involved, suicide is often seen to be a rejection of everything in society on the level of cultural production, and compels the members of society to doubt its core values’ (2003:297). Is it possible to understand and trace these cultural scripts?

Lee and Kleinman go on to argue that depending on the observer - there is much bias and contextualisation of cultural scripts:

Depending on the observer's disciplinary bias and discursive context, the life of a suicide examined microscopically can support different causal interpretations: depression and/or borderline personality disorder for a modern psychiatrist, negative cognition for a psychologist, anomie for a sociologist, patriarchy for a feminist, or change of local meanings for an anthropologist. (2003:294)

Observational Bias
The local meanings of suicide and self-harm that I set out to explore in Dublin from 1999-2003 were found in the lives of men and women with histories of mental illness, psychiatric disorders, drug addiction and people with 'normal' pathologies and lives. Looking back, it was a mishmash of ethnographic encounters. It wasn't simply contextualised by my own observational bias, but directed by my contacts who considered suicide to be as a result of a psychiatric disorder, diagnosed or undiagnosed. For this reason, I contend that observational bias is not restricted to discipline, but also includes personal belief, access to sources, and the prevailing dominant ethos in Ireland at the time of conducting research, i.e. that suicide and self-harm were caused by psychiatric disorders. Even if I contested, and, at times, rejected the medicalization of suicide, the dominance of medical models impacted on my own observational bias and, perhaps, became a boundary within ethnographic observations. I observed the gender paradox first hand during my research and in the subsequent years after completing my PhD, where all my male sources - whom I spent time with getting to know, interviewing, and later acting as their drug counsellor - are now dead (suicide, homicide, and overdose) or in prison. It is a humbling fact that of the twenty men I spent time with, none achieved what they so dearly wanted - a 'normal' life, a sense of integration and social value. The women I interviewed, and spent time with, have all survived, despite they having had diagnosed psychiatric disorders, addictions problems and brutal pasts.

In the next section of this paper, I will follow two narratives - one male, one female - and discuss the validity of the gender paradox, and the cultural scripts associated with suicidal behaviour.

‘Numbness’ and ‘Rassell’ (Wrestling)
Both Linda and Bon are from the same estate. Their houses are no more than one hundred metres apart. Linda is slightly older, and was once married. Bon, like Linda, had children. He had an on-off relationship with his partner, with whom he has a young son and an older child from a previous relationship. Bon had been in and out of prison and had a history of addiction. Linda had a history of mental ‘breakdowns’ and had regular contact with the psychiatric services.

The following narratives show that there are gendered differences in the choice of language, in notions of normality and abnormality, and in perceptions of suicide and the lasting impact of a suicidal attempt. I interviewed Bon on a number occasions. He was a vocal man who had opinions on nearly every subject. Bon explained that the move towards suicide or suicidal ideation was like the winding of string, the piece winding tighter and tighter. Bon, in his words, got involved needlessly in a ‘tit for tat’ ‘personal war with a local drug dealer. It escalated to the point whereby they were taking pot shots at each other openly, attacking each other's homes and property. As Bon depicts:

I was going around armed. I was sleeping in different gaffs, and I had a knife and gun on me. People must have known. I would be sitting on the bus with a shotgun up my coat or my sweater. I went to this guy's house one day with a hatchet. I break the window in his car; I get on the roof and I 'hatchet' that. He is taking shots at me from the window.

Eventually the strain took its toll on Bon. He was sleeping in different houses every night, and carrying a knife, shot gun and hatchet. He then found himself in his father's home, with his family screaming through the letter box as they witnessed him step close to the edge of living.

How did I end up with a shot gun in my mouth? How did I end up on the edge of living? The day I put that [gun] in my mouth, and I had a shotgun in my gaff at that time and other things as well and I was robbing things with other people and things went missing and the person that took them was the psycho… me [sic] mind was just messed up. I know tha' much and I just gave up and I remember sitting on the stairs saying it was just too much, no matter where you go or what you do, there was no way out. I couldn't see any future and you know the way people say that "it will be better tomorrow", but you can't see fucking tomorrow. You are in that black bleedin' space, tha' black hole and it is there at tha' moment and every minute is an edge of living.

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fucking bleedin’ moment, you can’t see past your eyes, you can’t see past your nose. It is just gone, you are in the moment.

He went on to explain that this was not his only suicidal attempt.

It was like a rassell [fight or wrestle] in your head. I cut meself [sic] a few times, I even planned accidents in the house, and I set a local school on fire hoping to die in the fire, [I] burnt down the school to nothing. The rassell, it is . . . you know . . . it is a winding of string, getting tighter and tighter and then, bamm . . . it snaps . . . then you are in the moment.

All the men I spoke with for my research, explained their suicidal behaviour as being a fight in the mind, and framed their narratives in the context of not being part of ‘normal’ society. All the men rejected the notion that they were suicidal, and when I asked them to explain their suicidal attempts, they would all respond by shouting, ‘I am not fucking suicidal!’ Once over, the suicidal attempt for the men receded into the past; the fight or ‘rassell’ was over, and they were extremely reluctant to narrate their experiences in the context of mental health, or their current identity. It was a past action, and, at times, I was a burden to them, asking questions of moments (albeit important) in their lives, which did not pertain to the sense of self.

I met Linda through the psychiatric services. Linda lived with her youngest son. Her marriage had ended badly and with great animosity, but the defining characteristic of Linda’s narrative, and perhaps the root of her psychiatric problems, was the disappearance of her eldest son, who is still missing. She told me that she of her psychiatric problems, was the disappearance of

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numbness’ in your stomach and then it’s all over

you and then you don’t want to talk to anybody and then you can’t handle anything. When you are like that you just can’t handle big things, but everything is a fucking problem . . . so you are just numb and everything around you is numb to the world.”

Numbness, as described by Linda and all the women I interviewed, was first located in the stomach, and this led gradually to a lack of appetite for bodily care, sexual gratification, and social contact. The numbing of the sensations - as described by the women - was a slow and absorbing process. The women vividly recounted the sensation taking over their bodies and their social lives. They expressed an understanding of their suicidal attempts as being valid to a creation of their personal histories and identities; they did not reduce their numbness to an artefact of the past. The men dismissed their actions as momentary, and did not see any value in their actions. Those actions were in the past and not part of their identity. The winding of the string, the growing tension, the emotional pain, as they all had described, ended with the attempted suicide or, as Bon described it, ‘Being the moment, not being able to see past your own face’. Are numbness and ‘rassell’ part of the gendered cultural scripts associated with suicidal behaviour in Ireland, or at the very least in the estates where my sources lived? Is it possible to draw conclusions that men and women experience suicidal behaviour differently? Are the men and women acting within the cultural scripts associated with suicidal behaviour? Are men predisposed to violence, and have women learned the importance of the suicidal narrative to their own identity? It is perhaps beyond ethnography to answer these questions, but it is in this questioning that ethnography smash head on into humanity’s uneasiness with simple categorisation. Suicide and self-harm are never black and white; they are multi-layered, imbued with all the depths of human imagination and suffering. It is an epidemiological fact that the gender paradox of suicidal behaviour is evident in Ireland, and it is probable that these patterns are important to the (cultural) scripts that dictate the cultural and social norms of suicidal behaviour. Linda, who attempted suicide eight times, unintentionally explains these cultural scripts: ‘A couple of weeks ago, I tied a rope around my neck. I still wish I had died. But I didn’t have the nerve. Maybe men can only do this; they seem to be more violent!’

The majority of men in this research are dead. The women, who accepted their narratives, are no longer living on the edge. As Linda told me in 2006, ‘I am not like that anymore. I know I was normal then, but I don’t wish to die anymore’.

Conclusions

Bound to the macro narrative of suicide in Ireland are the efforts to prevent and stop as many people dying by suicide or deliberately self-harming. It
makes economic and social sense to have preventive campaigns, aimed at de-stigmatising mental health and suicide, by having open discussions and to be socially inclusive of those who have mental health problems, as ably demonstrated by the recent Amnesty International campaigns. For example, the banner line in one of the posters seen throughout Ireland during 2012 reads: 'Caroline survived suicide. The gossip left deeper scars.' However, inclusion and social acceptance of mental health conditions and suicidal behaviour are still dominated by the larger macro narrative that depression and psychiatric disorders (diagnosed and undiagnosed) are the root cause of suicide. As Lee and Kleinman argue:

Current medical research on suicide, such as case-controlled studies of risk factors or psychological autopsy studies, uniformly conclude that suicide is the result of depression or other psychiatric disorders. From an anthropological perspective, such studies fail to attend to the layers of privacy and equivocality that typically envelop suicide, or to evaluate the consequences of suicide on the socio-moral processes that maintain suicidal behaviour in a local world. (2003:313)

For the men and women in my research in the estates of Dublin, the socio-moral processes were bound to tensions between what people perceive as being part of normal society. The men lamented their unease with society, how they had not achieved a standard of occupation and social standing. They ‘rasselled’ within themselves as much as they did with others. The fight, the ‘rassell’, was an internal strain, winding tighter and tighter, until they found themselves sitting on the edge of the stairs with a gun in their mouths. For the men, it was a deep seated feeling of being lost, without a social or, at times, a moral anchor, that caused the deepest internal fight; and most of these men lost their fight. For the women, being normal was a demonstration of self-belief; that despite the psychiatric care, the endless stays in hospital, the repeated overdoses, the cutting and the numbness, they believed uniformly that they were not insane, but normal in the context of their socio-moral worlds. They did not reject the help of their doctors and community mental health nurses; they embraced their mental health as being normal. As Linda pointed out to me more than once: 'What the fuck is normal? I mean you sit and listen to me all the time, and I think that’s nuts!'.

Ethnography is not a perfect discipline; it is nothing without the trust and the belief of one’s sources, and the people that you meet know that your interests are genuine. Often - as ethnographers - we have to forgo our own moral compass, and shed all our ideals, our naïve understandings and prejudices, to be able to hear the narratives about an ever-changing and challenging human world.

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References
Coping and Suicide Amongst ‘the Lads’: Expectations of Masculinity in Post-traditional Ireland

Felicia Garcia*

Abstract: This article summarises findings made during a four-year field study on the over-representation of suicidal behaviours among young, working-class men (‘the lads’) in, and around, Cork City, Ireland. The particular relevance of gender-appropriate behaviours is examined, especially where they are seen to influence coping mechanisms, skills, constraints and general well-being amongst ‘the lads’. The aim is to examine the relationship between how gender is interpreted in the local context, and how this shapes and regulates social bonds and coping mechanisms amongst the lads.

Key words: lad culture, suicide, self-destruction, over-consumption, gender equality, cultural expectations of masculinity

Introduction

There is a stark gender ratio in Irish suicide statistics as well as among figures relating to traffic accidents, alcohol abuse, violence, recklessness and other unhealthy practices. In Ireland the gender ratio in suicides is approximately 4:1; for every female suicide, four men kill themselves (National Office for Suicide Prevention 2009). I focus extensively on the overconsumption of alcohol and other high-risk, self-destructive behaviours which are part of the so called ‘lad culture’. Based on extended field study, this work discusses what might at first appear to be collectively damaging processes of self-destruction, and shows how such behaviours also serve complex functions of relief and comfort against structures and cultural codes which are often ignored in current debates on suicide prevention.

Between 2008 and 2012 I shared a tight-knit community among approximately 40 ‘lads’, aged 18-34. Because of a previous field study on a different topic (Garcia 2008) I already resided in an area that was becoming affected by noticeably gendered suicidal trends as Ireland entered the recession. Hence, I did not select an over-representatively vulnerable community for the purpose of study and I had already established a network of informants. The stories and testimonies from this fieldwork stretched in between various areas around Cork City and its suburbs and the target group was defined by social ties rather than geographical boundaries. Participant-observation and interviews were selected as the main methods to investigate processes of self-destruction, coping and relief and the ways in which – according to my informants - these practices were gendered. All of the young men interviewed preferred to go under the common pseudonym ‘one of the lads’ and the girls are referred to as ‘one of the girls’ in order to assure anonymity.

The ethnographic experience offers a more direct look into official suicide statistics and yields a subjective insight into the atmosphere of a bereaved community. In fact, during my four years in the field, ear-to-the-ground reporting of suicides turned out to be among males exclusively – which exceeded twenty cases - and thus conflicted with the official gender ratio of 4:1.

My thesis did not concern individual suicides or suicidal biographies, but rather concerned the unsustainable lifestyles and gendered realities where young male suicides had become a prominent and devastating feature. All of my informants knew of several friends, and sometimes family members, who had died by suicide. As my informants attempted to answer, and reflect upon, the link between locally-held expectations of gender and suicide, the focal point –the linking keys- were held to be coping; well-being and quality of life. We might refer to this as ‘indigenous theorising’, which adopts more of a communal and less of an individual focus.

This text does not attempt to answer the overarching question: ‘why do people kill themselves?’ but an anthropological approach can help in answering why some groups in a specific society/community are more prone to do so than others.

The overrepresentation of male suicides in Ireland

According to feminist theory, gender is a social construct. This idea suggests that girls and boys, women and men, are socialised into different gender-identities. Ideas about gender vary from one context to another and these variations have important consequences for men’s and women’s behaviours and lifestyles as well as public health outcomes. This research suggests that gender is a critical determinant in issues of mental health. The question posed in this research is: Would an increase in gender equality lead to a convergence in young men and women’s development of life, social skills and coping mechanisms and would it lessen young men’s vulnerability to self-destructive behaviours and suicide in Ireland?

Before investigating the specifics of changing gender roles in Irish society, recent circumstances in Ireland during this time of rising suicide rates require some particular attention. Two things become immediately apparent; the fact that young male suicide was high during the economic boom (rather uncomfortably known as ‘the Celtic Tiger’) as well as during the economic recession. In 2004, at a time of unprecedented prosperity in Ireland, the town of

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Midleton in Cork had recorded the second highest suicide figures in the world. The Irish Independent reported how some 34 young men had killed themselves and had been buried in a line in the local cemetery, then referred to as ‘suicide row’ (05/06/2004). The highest number of suicides ever recorded in the Republic of Ireland (527 people) was in 2009, shortly after Ireland entered into the recession (NOSP 2011:45).

How can such high suicide rates be a ‘sign of the times’ during periods of both ‘Boom’ and ‘Bust’? I argue that the most influential conditions behind the gender ratio and the particularly high numbers in young male suicides in Ireland have remained constant, rather than being prone to change, over this period.

What has changed specifically for young, working class men in Ireland is that the traditionally male types of employment (such as construction and manufacturing) are the sectors that have been most affected by the bursting of the property bubble which had inflated the Irish economy. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) the number of persons on the ‘Live Register’ in December 2010 stood at 437,079. Of this figure, approximately one third are female and two thirds are male. Craft and related (26.3%) were the largest occupational group on the Live Register in December, followed by Plant and machine operatives (16.0%) (SCO January 2011). The jobs that are expected, and which are ‘appropriate’, for young working class males went from accessible and over-rewarding to inaccessible; where there are now thousands of applicants for a single job, significant pay-cuts and often insufficient working hours.

The difficulties in setting up the requirements for adulthood, such as independent living arrangements, have for lower-income youth remained the same during both ‘Boom’ and ‘Bust’; first because of a property bubble causing inflated house prices and rental costs and during the downturn because of considerable job losses and income insecurity. Not being able to afford independent living (i.e. not moving in with peers or not remaining in the family home) was one of the major stressors for the ‘lads’ in this field study. The vast majority of the ‘lads’ had to remain in the family home well beyond their teens and twenties even sometimes well into their thirties. The next affordable option for the many young men who are single is setting up in a house among friends. The lifestyle created and maintained in such a setting is the point of departure of this study.

My main conclusion is however, that cultural expectations of masculinity and the internalisation of discredited forms of masculinity are so deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Irish society that they work independent of economic fluctuations. This, this work contends, is why suicide has remained higher among young males regardless of recent developments in the Irish economy.

Increasingly discredited working-class masculinities, or ‘redundant masculinities’ (McDowell 2003), are misplaced against middle-class, cosmopolitan values as they are defined as backward, racist, sexist, homophobic etc. Dr. Anne Cleary who has conducted important research into how class and gender impact on suicide trends in Irish society writes: ‘It appears that it is the marginalisation of particular, often male groupings resulting from social change which is associated with suicide, rather than social change in general’ (2005b:15).

It is not in the average, absolute rates that we understand how and why stress and distress take over in certain demographics. Instead it is in examining particular social settings and conditions where certain routes for the expression of distress are created that an understanding can be arrived at. To do this it is necessary to collect qualitative data to examine the actual social (and certainly cultural) crises and circumstances that precipitate the act in selected cases.

Policing and Schooling Gender-Appropriate Behaviours

The two earliest and most influential social institutions to shape the individual are the family and the school. The young women interviewed for this study tell stories of how their upbringing and family structure helped shape their gender-appropriate behaviours. They made the point, in relation to their male family members and peers that the ‘lads’ are exempt from the same responsibilities and from carrying the same worries as the girls, even from early childhood. They felt that this was harmful in that the girls had become over-burdened with responsibility and that their male peers had become untrained in stressful situations.

Y. Can I just say something? And this is not just for my mam, I love my mam, this is about every woman I know like. It is for a fact ok: For some reason, they are tougher on the girls than they are on the boys! My mam will fucking lift me and tell me what is what but when it comes to cleaning the house or picking up after themselves or washing their own bed clothes and washing their own clothes, she does that for them because she doesn’t wanna hurt them. And when it comes to the boys she is so sensitive to their feelings ‘cos she doesn’t wanna hurt them. And when it comes to cleaning the house or picking up after themselves or washing their own bed clothes and washing their own clothes, she does that for them because she doesn’t like to see them stressed out because, when they get stressed out they go way worse than we do, for some reason. Girls are able to handle it! Fellas are not. And now I know it shouldn’t come down to washing your own bed clothes and stuff like that and that but in some cases it does.

X. Well that’s where it starts ‘cos you know, if they can’t wash their own bed clothes then how the hell can they go and sign on the dole for themselves?

(Interview with two of the girls Aug. 2010)
The 'lads' interviewed were more keen to talk about their experiences of work and the loss of work. However the 'lads' showed considerable awareness of their own disadvantages in developing the social-esteem, confidence, trust, intimacy and coping mechanisms that they recognised in their female peers. Field notes written in 2008 show how narrowly defined masculinity was among the 'lads' and how deviations from appropriate male behaviour were regulated within the peer group:

On yet another occasion sitting in the pub with the lads, somehow we get to talking about metrosexuals. One of them says: 'I prefer to say gay. It's more insulting'. He takes a round around the table pointing at the lads, one by one and calling each one 'gay'. He skips only me and so I point to myself: 'But that's not an insult. It's ok for women.' He says that it the worst thing you can call a man: 'Messing up his manliness.' Masculinity in this context is ultimately determined by its relation, or rather the restraint from, any type of feminine or homosexual domain. I have rarely been in any social engagement with a larger group of the lads without anyone using the word gay or some equivalent. For instance, waiting in a car park for the bus to come around to take us to a soccer match everyone gradually shows up and greet each other: 'How are ye doing there girls?' 'What are ye on about ye homos?'

The consequences of 'gender-appropriate behaviour', the exaggerated norms and constraints adhered to through this extreme social surveillance, are very serious. This study, as well as others, serves to confirm that one does not in fact have to be lesbian, gay or bisexual in order to experience homophobic bullying but merely refuse to conform to gender norms. McCormack's (2010) study also suggests that: 'young men's poor communication skills develops out of fear of being labelled homosexual as those who are more open and honest about their feelings are easier targets for homophobic bullying. In this context young men tend to keep their feelings, emotions and concerns to themselves.' (McCormack 2010:172)

Both the 'lads' and the young women interviewed perceived that women were 'mentally stronger' than men. In an interview with one of the girls, who was in her mid-twenties, she postulated that they, as women, are 'mentally stronger' than the 'lads': 'They are, yeah. Not in general but around here. Absolutely.' (Interview with one of the girls, Aug. 2010) This young woman emphasised that such was the case 'around here', 'but not in general' which suggests that she saw these 'male' behaviours as being specific, 'local' behaviours that did not apply to all men, however, the 'lads' interviewed always held this as true of men in general. In the local context, the girls and the 'lads' recognised many and important differences between norms and behaviours:

X: And at the same time, we don't have to watch what we say all the time in case we... you know? They have to do that. And it's not just because of themselves like, they'd do it themselves like, if they're in the room and someone else says something weak then, 'oh you're gay!'

Me: They're under surveillance all the time?

X: Yeah. Sure, they're all sitting there, and then one of them won't say something sensitive... because then they fear someone will judge them but if someone else says something they will judge them as well you know. Even if... even if they agree. They won't let on that they do.

(Interview with two of the girls, Nov. 2010)

Being 'a homo' or 'queer' is thus showing emotions, being 'soft', sensible or involvement in anything of a 'feminine nature'. It also includes showing concern for one's physical and mental health. In Ireland, homophobic bullying is prevalent in 94% of all-boys' schools (followed by co-educational (82%) and finally in all girls' schools (55%)) and has in itself become a marker for heterosexuality and 'appropriate' male behaviour (Norman, 2004:9). The boundaries of homosexuality and consequently heterosexuality are being policed on an everyday basis, in family, school and peer-group settings. This helps socialise young 'lads', whether gay or not, into fixed, narrow and restricted gender 'appropriate' spheres and identities which will further shape a wide range of life perspectives, skills and opportunities.

The lads and young women interviewed saw a connection between this locally defined masculinity and the lack of coping mechanisms that exist amongst the lads. This research thus conclude that a masculinity 'less cornered' would be beneficial in terms of health, coping and life skills, life expectancy, quality of life, and ultimately to self-destruction and suicide.

'Manly drinking', coping and suicide

According to Dr. Tony Holohan, chief medical officer at the Department of Health, alcohol is implicated in half of all suicides (The Irish Times 20/02/2012). The overconsumption of alcohol and the use of other drugs bear an important influence on the frequently impulsive character of suicides and 'gambles'.

The following hypothesis was posited to some of the lads at an early phase of the execution of this research project: If you add up all the money you have spent on alcohol from when you had your first drink until today and you were offered that full amount on the promise that you will never drin... Replies of 'No!' came almost immediately in two. 'I meant you can...
never have another drink again...? ’ Again, I received a unanimous: ’No’!

There is no doubt that the lads have attached an irrefutable value to the drink3 and that it fills important, and to the lads beneficial, functions that far outweigh the damaging consequences otherwise covered in studies of alcohol consumption. To drink with someone who is in distress; to offer an opportunity of momentary relief or to talk, with alcohol acting as a facilitator, or rather, to alleviate pain through avoidance, distraction and oblivion, is also offered by the lads’ social support system and the ’good friend’.

Social surveillance and homophbic jargon regulate recklessness and excess within the group and the lads are often shamed into drinking irresponsibly. Responsible drinking, in conflict with the egalitarian ethos that underpins their social framework and drinking standards, has become a sign of disloyalty towards the group or of one’s lacking responsibilities as a ’good friend’. The connectedness created and felt within the group through intoxication; the sense of release and relief from strain, everyday boredom and distress, all require a code of ethics that must be adhered to by the entire group to allow for this experience.

House-sharing with peers was a regular set up amongst the lads who could otherwise not afford to leave the family home. This living arrangement favoured in-house drinking. With a group of eager-to-drink lads coming together like this, ’staying on the drink’ for the entire weekend was actively encouraged to a degree that made it rather difficult to refrain from. For the lads who now found themselves out of work, only financial constraints set the limits for their weekly consumption. ’The drink’ served as a social lubricant in a social framework that did not allow for intimacy and a momentary distraction from the overwhelming problems of job losses and financial insecurity. Many of these self-destructive behaviours were enacted with the intention of feeling better, and not worse.

There is however an undeniable link between suicide and the overconsumption of alcohol. My research shows that it is relatively safe in a social setting, but that it is a hazardous activity to be doing alone. According to the ’lads’, without the distraction and entertainment offered amongst friends, one is easily left to one’s own dark thoughts and overwhelmed by those negative feelings that made you ’go on the lash’ in the first place. This would perhaps also explain the unpredictable nature that seems to feature in most reported suicides in the field: He seemed ’happy out’, was ’grand in the pub’ but was then found dead afterwards having gone off alone.

Maleness, Immaturity and Social Constructionism
Risk-taking and immaturity have become important themes within the inverted gender orders and in the ’feminization of health’ (Robertson 2007:140). Traditional stereotypes of men have ’become associated with irrational, emotional, (projected as childish) responses and women with a dominant, rational, active self’ (Robertson 2007:47).

During the course of the fieldwork undertaken it was suggested, by the young ’lads’ and women interviewed, that women were indeed ’mentally stronger’ than the lads’. To be for example, ’emotionally handicapped’, is a negative evaluation of someone’s character and refers to someone who is not in touch with, and/or cannot express, their emotions. In the days of female pathological hysteria (19th and first half of the 20th century) being emotionally handicapped would have meant someone who was in touch with their feelings (and who consequently let them rule over reason) and could, and did, express them. The stereotypical opposites have become inverted and marked by a new gendered hysteria in present day Ireland. Public concerns now lie with exaggerated masculinities and the defensive, ’backward’ conservative and reactionary ethos of young working-class men who are increasingly depicted as ’underperforming’, ’psychologically vulnerable’, and too immature to ’mind’ others or themselves.

There is nothing to support the view that the negative images of men that are now prominent in popular discourse are inherent characteristics of males. This research suggests that men and women are steered and segregated, structurally and systematically, practically and symbolically into ’gender appropriate’ spheres and life-styles. A debate that highlights this social imperative is urgently needed before more valuable resources are spent on the implementation of intervention programmes and crises-courses targeting negative male behaviours to disrupt the logical outcomes of a society that in its fundamental structures is set up to regenerate these spheres in the first place.

The outlying concern, based upon empirical evidence (during previous and the current research projects) is that these spheres apply to the most intimate levels of the management of feeling and expression of self. Secondly, it is clear that even those strategies and resources which are acknowledged by individuals themselves to be more beneficial choices for their general well-being are still made inaccessible due to restrictive gender norms and fears of sanctions.

Gender Equality and Public Health
The question set out in this article was whether increased gender equality would lead to a convergence in young men and women’s development of life-, social skills and coping mechanisms, and if it would lessen young men’s vulnerability to suicide. In order to provide any answer to the aforementioned question, the very meaning of gender equality has first had to be reassessed and re-read. The dialogues presented here, and supported elsewhere, show that there is strong evidence of an overwhelming imbalance in the social and cultural expectations carried by men and women in Ireland today.
This imbalance encourages important skills and opportunities for women while discouraging the same in men, which essentially favours no one. The stage we have reached (in Ireland and Western societies at large) is one in which women have assumed roles and entered domains previously deemed inappropriate, or even forbidden, to them and which ought to be viewed in just that fashion: women are progressing into spheres previously reserved for men. This is not gender equality. Gender does not mean women. And gender equality is not a women's affair exclusively. To get closer to a situation where boys and young men can uninhibitedly develop skills and resources that benefit their health and quality of life we have to start to re-evaluate gender-appropriateness. Women have broadened their roles and functions in society while men have yet to do the same.

In an interview with one of the 'lads' in his mid-twenties, who had spent the first part of our chat listing the many recent male suicides in the area, I asked him if he knew of any female suicides as well:

X– No. I never heard of a woman doing it, ever.
Me – Why do you think that is?
X– I don't know... Cos they are stronger... mentally I'd say...

Me – Do you think it's because they do talk about, when they are depressed a lot more?
X– Yeah women actually talk about it all the time!

Me – About how depressed they are?
X– No like... you know how women, how they chat and all...? You wouldn't see fellas doing that like.

Me – And why is that?
X–You know masculinity...? Like, you wrote it down! (He refers to my note book in the kitchen that he was looking at before the interview.)

Me – But what does that mean to you like? You know being a man, what you can and cannot do...?
X– Like you wouldn't wanna be crying in front of your buddies but then you see women crying on each other's shoulders and all this.

Me - Do you wish... men were more like that?
X– No. You wouldn't.
Me – You would feel weird?

With time, inexperience and unfamiliarity with certain spheres of our lives, our behaviours, thoughts and feelings become awkward or as one of the lads put it: 'too weird'. They have in effect become inappropriate. The conclusions of this research are that neither social structures nor cultural expectations of masculinity (held by both men and women) facilitate the transition from 'ladhood' to manhood. The 'lads' are governed by exaggeratedly-gendered norms that blatantly influence suicidal behaviours. Paradoxically, much of the most influential research on social change and male suicide in Ireland today argues that the causes behind these rising numbers of suicide in Ireland today is loosened social/normative control (anomie) (Begley et al. 2004, Durkheim [1897] 1957). This research suggests that as these discredited or 'redundant masculinities' become internalised by young 'lads', the violence of regulatory norms have become more rigorous and restrictive, not loosened.

Self-destructive and suicidal behaviours, coping skills and resources, are fundamentally gendered. Increased role-flexibility and role conflict has become a female predicament. Role-inflexibility and role restriction is a burning issue for many men in Ireland today.

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The Irish Times Pubs could help solve Ireland's drink problem (20/02/2012).


Notes:

1 In this text I use the term 'self-destruction' rather than 'self-harm' which I believe, by broader definition, places more emphasis on the specific or primary intent to harm oneself. I have chosen to use 'self-destruction' because certain actions and behaviours physically and emotionally does damage and sometimes destroy individuals. I refrain from using 'self-harm' which I read as an indication of an intent to 'do harm' which I believe is not the case for the 'lads' who are trying to feel better and not worse. I have read 'destruction' as a result of actions which are taken in order to cope, assess, get perspective, release, relief and much more.

2 The ‘Live Register’ is not a precise measurement but an indicator of Irish unemployment. It also includes persons who work part-time (up to three days a week), seasonal and casual workers. It serves to signal the overall state of the labour market.

3 To imply tradition; psychological (release, escape) social (communication, quality of relationships), and cultural elements (terms of conduct and scripts) I will use the term -the drink- rather than 'alcohol' which merely describes the substance and not the use. In my research I have taken on the perspective of my informants (how else could we understand why they drink?) and what ‘the drink’ means to the ‘lads’ as a group.
An explorative study of episodes of suicide between 2000 and 2006 within Traveller culture

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Abstract: A nationwide annual account of incidences of suicide among Travellers in Ireland has been compiled by the author from 2000-2006. This paper seeks to explore and identify whether the incidence and profile of suicide among Travellers can be reliably ascertained and compared with national rates. The paper refers to available demographic factors of Travellers who have died through suicide. It also looks at socio-cultural factors which may be seen as protecting individuals from suicide, and explores other issues associated with increasing risk of suicide. Behavioural patterns of those who have completed suicide are explored and identified. Though not explicitly identified as causative factors, such information may assist service providers and Travellers alike in identifying factors, which in turn may identify those at risk of suicide within the Traveller culture.

Key words: Traveller; suicide

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority group of approximately 30,000, making up almost 1% of the total population of Ireland. They have their own language, customs and traditions, and rarely marry outside the Traveller community (McCarthy 1994). Nomadism, the importance of the extended family, the Traveller language and the organisation of the Traveller economy all provide visible and tangible markers of the distinct Traveller culture (DoE 1995). Popular culture suggests several theories regarding the origins of Irish Travellers, including theories that Travellers are the direct descendants of the Irish nobility, descendants of Irish peasants from the time of the Great Famine of the 1840s, or that they are dropouts of society. While these do not seem to have any foundation, historical sources suggest that Travellers have been part of Irish society for centuries (Ni Shuinnéir 1994). Travellers are widely recognised as one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Irish society; they fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage: poor health, lower life expectancy, sub-standard living conditions, low levels of education, and high levels of unemployment (O’Connell 2002).

The author worked with Travellers as a Social Worker employed by Wicklow Co. Council in the late 1990s. This experience highlighted what may be perceived as a high incidence of suicide among Travellers, especially young Traveller men. At the time the author embarked on this project in 2000, no data had ever been collected on the rate of suicide among Travellers. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) does not categorise rates of suicide according to ethnic group, no literature on Travellers and no study on Traveller health referred to suicide, and the then recently published Report of the National Task Force on Suicide (Department of Health and Children 1998) did not mention Travellers. The aim of my study was to increase knowledge about the incidence and nature of suicide within the Traveller community. The methodology used was to collate the number of Traveller deaths by suicide that year and to compare the result to national figures available for that same period. This was the ‘millennium year’, the Irish economy was booming, jobs were plentiful, Irish people had a lot to look forward to, and that year nine Travellers took their lives. This was a rate of 3.89 per 10,000 compared to the national rate of 1.28 per 10,000 that year.

Having established that the rate of suicide among the Traveller community in 2000 was over three times the national rate, the author gathered further data over a longer period of time to ascertain if the number of suicides in 2000 had been exceptionally high or whether they were more indicative of a disturbing trend. The sources of information were Local Authority social workers. Practically every Local Authority employs at least one social worker specifically for Travellers (there being approximately 55 such positions) and they compile official statistics on Travellers such as the DOE Annual Count. Apart from Local Authority social workers, the author also interviewed Local Authority personnel such as Traveller liaison officers, housing officers, caretakers, and other statutory and community workers such as public health nurses for Travellers, local Traveller support groups, and Primary Health Care Project workers. A nationwide annual account of completed suicide among Travellers in Ireland was compiled by the author between 2000 and 2006 (Walker 2008). This is the first evidence documenting the incidence of suicide among Travellers. This research is groundbreaking and unique in that it spans the whole Traveller population and has been collected over a seven-year period. Additional information has explored around the family circumstances and other possible underlying issues related to the topic.

At the outset of this research, a number of respondents were of the opinion that suicide was an extremely rare occurrence within the Traveller community. It was generally believed that the huge social, emotional and practical support provided by the extended family should serve to protect Travellers from suicide. However, between 2000 and 2006 the rate of suicide among Irish Travellers at 3.70:10,000 was over three times the average rate of suicide of the total population, which was 1.2 per 10,000 during the
same period. For Travellers the annual rate peaked at 5.44 per 10,000 in 2005, which was over five times the national rate. This paper is a summary of the key findings of this research.

**Demographic factors**
Suicide is most common among men, the male to female ratio among Travellers from 2000 to 2006 was 9.6:1, while the male to female ratio for the total population was 4.2:1. In particular young single men are at risk, with men under 30 years accounting for almost 65% of all Traveller suicides. There is a considerable difference between this and the national rates where those under 30 years of age account for 34% of the total number of suicides over the same period. 52% of the Travellers who died by suicide were single, while 66% were either single, separated or widowed.

The most frequently used method is hanging which accounts for 80% of suicides among Travellers. This is significantly higher than the national rate from 2000 to 2006, where hanging accounts for 57% of all suicides. It is a particularly lethal method, leaving little possibility for rescue. Fewer than 15% of Travellers who died by suicide were reported to have made previous suicide attempts, a disturbing statistic for service providers and families alike. Poisoning follows at 9% with 4% of deaths by drowning. For the total population deaths by drowning exceed deaths by poisoning, 17% compared to 14%.

The typical profile of the Traveller who dies by suicide is similar to that of the typical Irish person who dies by suicide; young, single, male and death by hanging. However in the case of Travellers, the figures of those falling into the typical profile are significantly higher.

Few Traveller women have died by suicide, and it appears to be a more recent phenomenon. Generally speaking they have been single women, in their 20s and without children. However, in every instance where the woman was married, domestic violence was reported as being a significant concern.

**Traveller suicides classified according to the patterns that have emerged from the findings.**

**Troubled suicides**
This refers to twelve cases where the informant described a background of major social problems. In each case there had been a childhood of abuse or neglect. Problems in the family home included violence, both domestic and feuding, alcohol abuse, conflict with the law, and a family history of suicide. In over half of these cases, siblings had died by suicide or other violent means. Of those who reached adulthood, most went on to have relationship difficulties, lives characterised by alcohol or substance abuse and violent behaviour, and a history of self-harm or suicide attempts. From the time they were children these people were in a situation where there was little hope of a positive future. The question here is not why they died, but how they had managed to stay alive for so long.

It also refers to people who had been affected by several precipitating life events. Some of those who died had suffered a considerable degree of hardship and tragedy in a short space of time, which may have increased their vulnerability to suicide.

**Motiveless suicides**
Seven Travellers who died by suicide were described by respondents as coming from loving and secure families, and were involved in sport or were working. According to respondents, they appeared to have everything going for them. Speaking at the 24th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention in Killarney, August 2007, Mishara stated that ‘relatively minor precipitating events can have tremendous effects at crucial moments’. These events are not always possible for others to recognise. These individuals were reported as showing no sign of suicidal ideation; they had none of the risk factors typically associated with suicide, such as depression, alcohol or substance abuse. Respondents said that there appeared to be no reason for the decision and spoke of the incredible anguish experienced by those left behind, unable to understand why these people had actually chosen to end their lives.

**Bereavement suicides**
The most common pattern that has emerged throughout this research, and which was reported in over 36% of cases, is that of the Traveller, who, following the death of somebody close, takes his own life, usually by hanging. This appears to be a time of extreme vulnerability for Travellers. In addition to the loss, they may have to shoulder the organisation and the financial burden of an elaborate funeral. Respondents have reported drinking sessions, or binges, with vast quantities of alcohol and possibly drugs being consumed. It is as if the group is drinking to escape from the pain, and one takes it to the next stage by suicide.

Not all bereavement suicides follow this pattern. Some have taken their lives following a death, without any ‘assistance’ from alcohol or drugs. What is of major concern is that of the 27 Travellers who took their lives following the death of somebody close, in 11 cases that ‘somebody close’ had also died by suicide.

Included here are suicides which very closely followed the news that a relative was seriously ill and may be about to die. The view of the respondent was that the anticipation of the death of their loved one so greatly disturbed these individuals that they took their own lives.

**Violence suicide**
Domestic violence, not limited to conflict between couples, but in some cases among other family members, and feuding, were reported as a contributory factor in 27% of Traveller suicides. I was informed of eight suicides which occurred following a violent episode, four of whom were victims, four were perpetrators. In
all but one case, a large quantity of alcohol was reported to have been consumed at the time. All eight died by hanging, a violent means of suicide in itself.

In a study published in 2005 by the National Crime Council (NCC), in association with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), it was found that 49% of admissions to women’s refuges are Travellers (Watson and Parsons, 2005). These statistics are extremely high as Travellers make up less than 1% of the total population, and it is an issue which warrants further research. There are major difficulties facing a Traveller woman who wishes to escape from a violent domestic situation. Where there are children, reasons cited for a mother’s reluctance to leave home include the emotional attachment the children have to their father, or her own fear of financial insecurity. In some situations there were ties of friendship and kinship between her own family and that of her husband’s. Escaping from a violent situation would mean severing links not just with her husband’s family but also with her own, and for a Traveller woman, given the high value placed upon the extended family, this is not a realistic option.

The perpetrator is also at risk of suicide. For those who grew up in families where conflict was resolved using violence, perhaps it is the only way they know of asserting authority as head of the household. Four episodes were reported, where an argument escalated out of control, and following a violent episode, perhaps when the wife had taken shelter elsewhere, the perpetrator took his life. Some respondents have expressed the opinion that this form of suicide is one final act of vengeance, to punish his wife for leaving the situation. Others have said that it may be the consequence of an overwhelming sense of depression, that they are no longer stable. Parents may be so overwhelmed by and totally absorbed with their own problems, that they neglect their children. Although there are strong emotional bonds, they are not able to give their children the discipline and guidance that is essential for their development. In times of difficulty the extended family and community offers complete support to its members. However, there are times when family ties may not be enough to protect the individual from suicide. Outlined below are three situations where the family may not be able to offer its members protection from suicide.

Although rare, it sometimes happens that a member is ostracised from the family, or indeed a family may be ostracised from the extended family or community network. The consequences of exclusion for the individual are extremely serious as it results in a total breakdown of social supports. The author believes that this may be a factor in some suicides, especially those where there has been a legal conflict which may bring shame upon a family. According to Liégeois (1994) the person acts not as an individual, but as a member of the family, and it follows that the misdeed of an individual is felt to be that of the family. It is possible that the perceived shame these criminal acts would bring upon their families was more than the individuals could bear. Respondents have spoken of rifts occurring among families, and apportioning of blame, following such cases of suicide.

Domestic breakdown occurs in families where there are so many issues such as poverty and overcrowding, domestic violence, addiction and depression, that they are no longer stable. Parents may be so overwhelmed by and totally absorbed with their own problems, that they neglect their children. Although there are strong emotional bonds, they are not able to give their children the discipline and guidance that is essential for their development. Having learned not turn to their parents for support, these children are at risk of growing up to be angry and frustrated teenagers, engaging in anti-social behaviour, violence (sometimes directed at their parents) and excessive alcohol or drug use. In the case of Australian Aboriginal peoples, Tatz (1999) refers to young people at risk of suicide, because they have nobody to turn to, should they wish to change their present circumstances. The home is filled with family members in a similar hopeless situation, and there is nobody to act as a guide or mentor in a transition to betterment (Tatz 1999). Questions regarding parents or family background were not asked, and I would suggest that this be an area which would warrant further research within the Traveller culture.

When a death occurs, Travellers will travel great distances to attend a funeral and be with the bereaved. There are a number of grieving rituals such as the ‘9th day’ and ‘month’s mind’ masses, sometimes held every month for the first year, which offer ongoing support for families. However, without the loved one (or ones), the family is no longer the same as it once was. Unlike the situation above where family members are so absorbed in their own problems that they cannot offer support, in this situation the individual may view the family, and indeed life, as no longer complete. So great is the desire to be with the deceased, they may

Shamed suicides

These suicides, seven in total, took place following disclosure of an alleged criminal act or awaiting trial for a criminal act. In general, the older the individual the more serious the act was. In all cases it was perceived by respondents that the act, or its disclosure would bring shame upon the individual and dishonour to the family. A possible consequence of this could be that the individual and the family would be marginalized and ostracised from the whole community. The view of the respondents was that the pressure of this shame motivated these people to kill themselves.

The family

For Travellers, all aspects of life revolve around the family, which offers social and emotional support to its members. Living in multigenerational families, children and adults work side by side; the aged, the unmarried and the sick remain with the family, all members contributing to family life (Liégeois 1994). In times of difficulty the extended family and community offers
not allow the other family members to give the support which is vital as protection against suicide.

**Why now?**

Travellers’ lifestyle has improved greatly since the start of the 21st century, and materially they are better off than before. Much progress has been made in the participation of Travellers in the school system (Department of Education and Science 2006), and also in the provision of Traveller accommodation, where over 58% of Traveller are accommodated as tenants in Local Authority houses or official halting sites, and a further 33% rent privately or are homeowners (Department of Environment and Local Government 2011). There is some consultation with Travellers and Traveller organisations in decisions and policies which affect them directly, Travellers are specifically named in the Equal Status Act (2000), and following from a number of successful and well-publicised court cases, there is a growing awareness that they have rights.

Paradoxically, it appears that improvements in the quality of their lives and increased integration with the settled population, have coincided with an increase in the rate of suicide among Travellers. This in turn indicates that there is a serious problem, which is proving to be too strong for traditional safeguards to protect. In other words, the protective factors associated with Traveller culture, family ties and group cohesion, are not strong enough to counteract the negative forces. Both Travellers and service providers feel that this increase in suicides within the Traveller community is a recent phenomenon (Pavee Point 2005). Assuming that this is so, there is a need to understand why suicide levels are higher in the 21st century rather than at any other time.

In the past Travellers had completely separate lives with the minimum of contact with the settled population. Today, young Travellers have a lot more in common with their settled peers than their parents’ generation did. They live in the same estates, attend the same schools, listen to the same music and watch the same television programmes. To a certain extent, there has been a loss of cultural traditions as the young take on the values of mainstream society. Nonetheless, public opinion of Travellers as inferior and as a threat has not changed, and Travellers face huge rejection from the settled population. Unable to integrate into mainstream society, but no longer firmly rooted in their own cultural and social traditions, many young Travellers exist in a type of ‘nowhere land’. Some attempt to conceal their Traveller identity completely. They are not fully accepted as part of settled society, they may no longer be fully accepted as Travellers, and they have lost pride in their own ethnic identity.

Many Travellers, even those on the roadside, no longer live a nomadic life. This is partly because the economic reasons for doing so are no longer viable for them, but also because finding a place to move to has become increasingly difficult. Similarly, tighter restrictions on the keeping of horses have taken away something which gives men a purpose in life. Looking after horses is time consuming, it involves handing down skills from one generation to the next, and there are fairs to look forward to, which in themselves are major social events. For those without work, who have lost the traditions of travelling and keeping horses, there may be little else to do. They lack purpose in life; they have no reason to get up in the morning and nothing to look forward to. Particularly vulnerable are single young men. To alleviate boredom they may drink, take drugs, joy ride, and engage in other forms of anti-social behaviour. All of these risk-taking behaviours are associated with suicide, and it may take little to persuade somebody for whom life holds no interest to end theirs.

With recent changes in society, Travellers have had to learn to cope with increased hostility, difficulty with identity, loss of culture and traditions and lack of purpose in life, all of which render them vulnerable to suicide. In addition to this are the same socio-economic issues, namely the fact that Travellers continue to be a marginalized group, with (although there have been improvements) poorer levels of health, life expectancy, living conditions, and education than the general population. Given the existing vulnerabilities of Travellers today, factors such as alcohol or substance abuse, economic insecurity, violence, depression assume an additional risk level. It may therefore not be so surprising that an immediate crisis situation, such as death or marital conflict, can act as a trigger factor for suicide.

**References:**


Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between rights and cultural identity through analyzing the practical implementation of policies which aim to promote gender equality. As India increases its reservation for women in local level politics to 50%, the relationship between state level policies and indigenous governance becomes more complex, as is demonstrated through examples of a Santali community in northern Orissa, India. The Santali Majhi system and the decentralized system of governance work in ‘parallel’ to each other, yet the power vested in the locally elected women representatives interlinks and overlaps with the Santali system. This paper uses ethnographic material to analyse state policies at the local level from a gender and rights based perspective.

Key words: power; gender equality; culture; rights.

Introduction
This paper examines the relationship between rights and cultural identity through analyzing the practical implementation of policies which aim to promote gender equality. Through focusing on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), I demonstrate how the Government of India has attempted to implement the articles of the Convention and how this is re-interpreted, resulting in unintended consequences within a Santali community in Northern Orissa, India. Messer (2009:121) maintains that ‘UN doctrine insists that human rights be monitored and addressed from the top down, but in practical terms rights are conceptualized and met at various levels. A challenge for anthropologists is to envision and then design strategies for meeting human rights that might better coordinate international, state and local efforts’. This paper attempts to further the debate on culture and rights by analysing examples where government policies and laws are in place to uphold rights, but local contexts deny citizens their rights. One argument for this denial of rights is the tension between ‘rights’ and ‘culture’, stemming largely from the ‘pathologies of power’ (Farmer and Gastineau 2009:150) which rights frameworks encounter at the local level.

I highlight the importance of taking a holistic approach to development which moves beyond a ‘Rights Based Approach (RBA)’ and incorporates an understanding of the ways in which legal and political institutions, culture and customary practices interact, and the impact of these interactions on gender equality. This builds on both Mamdani’s (2000) and Cowan’s (2009) arguments of moving beyond rights talk. Mamdani maintains that ‘for those interested in the process of cultural dynamism and cultural change, neither the language of rights nor that of culture is likely to prove adequate’ (2000:4). Cowan argues that investigation into rights processes and theorization of them must pay attention to their ambiguous, contradictory and unpredictable dimensions’ (2009:307), and she argues for the ‘special value of empirically grounded studies of rights and culture’ as these are the studies which ‘confront us with – and force us to grapple with – the messiness, contradictions, ambiguity, impasses and the unintended consequences that neither neat and tidy theory nor the best-laid plans for political reform can never fully anticipate’ (2009:325).

This paper is divided into two sections. Section one describes the key principles of RBA, and demonstrates how the Indian government has attempted to implement both CEDAW and the principles underlying RBA through important amendments to the Panchayati Raj Institutions1, but also how this implementation plays out in practice within a Santali community. Section two describes the Santali system of governance – the Majhi system, with a particular focus on women’s rights within this system, demonstrating through the practical example of men’s and women’s wages the tension between local culture and international rights.

Section one – Upholding CEDAW through the PRI

Principles of RBA
RBA is an approach to development, which ensures that people are active participants in development processes. It works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to claim their rights, and of duty bearers to meet their obligations (UNDP 2003). This approach assumes that governments are legally and morally bound to provide assistance to its citizens, and citizens are empowered to demand of their governments the full implementation of their rights (Brocklesby and Crawford 2005). Ultimately, the goal of RBA is to ‘render power accountable...to reconnect power and obligations’ (Greedy and Philips 2009:3). There are six key principles to RBA, three of which will be the focus of this paper: 1) accountability of duty bearers to those whose rights they are supposed to guarantee; 2) equality – the belief that all people have the same inherent political, social, cultural and economic rights and 3) meaningful and informed participation of citizens whose rights are denied or violated2.

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CEDAW and the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI): Upholding CEDAW Article 7?

CEDAW was opened for signature in 1980, came into force in 1981 and has since been ratified by 187 countries (UN 2012). India signed the Treaty in 1980 and ratified it in 1993. CEDAW establishes a universal set of standards and principles that are intended to serve as a template for shaping national policies towards the long-term goal of eliminating gender discrimination. Governments that ratify the Convention are obliged to develop and implement policies and laws to eliminate discrimination against women within their country. This Convention provides specific standards related to gender equality in the spheres of education, employment, healthcare and other areas of economic and social life. Article 7 of the Convention refers to political participation and obliges States to ensure that women, on equal terms with men, have the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government (CEDAW Convention).

CEDAW is particularly critical of local customs that perpetuate inequality. This is evident from Article 2(f), which calls upon states to take ‘appropriate measures to modify or abolish customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women’ (CEDAW Convention). However, what this legislation fails to acknowledge is the extent to which legislation can provide a solution to addressing customs and practices that perpetuate inequality. This is perhaps best explained through the example of changes to the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in India.

India’s 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which came into force in 1993, are a key mechanism for strengthening the PRI and ensuring women’s rights are upheld. The aim of these Acts is to ensure people’s participation through the Panchayats (system of local governance), providing an important opportunity for improving government activities by empowering people to demand better services in education, health, watershed and forestry programmes. Communities can now take responsibility for ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and effectively and development and poverty eradication programmes are now vested in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

To ensure women’s issues are considered, the Indian Constitution now incorporates a number of affirmative action policies, including a 50% reservation system for women in Panchayats, through the 73rd Amendment. This Amendment is thus fundamental to the principles of accountability and equality within RBA. However, as is seen by the example below, while this legislation is an enabling factor in addressing gender inequality, on its own is not sufficient.

The Politics of Water: the interaction of legislation, local politics and customs.

There are a number of problems in relation to the supply of and access to water in rural areas of Northern Orissa. Firstly, as there are no water harvesting systems in the fields, villagers are reliant on the monsoon rains, which have been both insufficient and erratic in recent years. Secondly, while there are a number of tube wells in the village in which I conducted my research, about half of these were broken in 2010, and were not supplying safe drinking water to the community. Despite the fact the women in the village spoke to the female assistant Sarpanch3 about the issue, the female Sarpanch claimed to know nothing about the problem and there were no references to it in any of the minutes of the village level meetings.

Thirdly, at the time of my research, a major water and sanitation programme was underway in the Panchayat. Every household was in the process of constructing a latrine, and water tank construction was also underway. Despite the importance of this scheme for both sanitation purposes and to ease women’s workload in the home, the success of the programme was jeopardised by political competition played out at the local level and the lack of women’s voice on the water tank committees.

The principle underlying this scheme focused on community ownership of the project, where the community contributed their own labour to the construction of both the latrines and the water tank. However, while the community initially agreed to this, in practice only some families contributed their labour, even though everyone from the village would eventually benefit from it. This subsequently created tension amongst some of the villagers.

Tension in the village increased over the cost of the project. As a number of villagers explained to me, the previous Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promised Rs180,000 (approximately €3000 as of May 2010 exchange rates) for the piping from the main water tank pipe to villager’s homes. However, this money was never given, and the new MLA, from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) party, claimed the allocated money had already been spent elsewhere. To further complicate matters, the Sarpanch applied to be an MLA for the Congress party – this proved to be fundamental to the cause of tension in the community.

As the MLA money never materialised, the Sarpanch requested each household to pay Rs250 ($4) in order to connect their individual pipes to the main pipeline. However, BJP and BJD party members gave alcohol and money to some villagers in the area and requested them to protest against the payment and sabotage the water tank in order to halt its progress so that they could prevent the Sarpanch from successfully winning the next local elections.

During my research, the water tank committee, which was established by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the community, tried to ease the tension in the village, and the Sarpanch attempted...
to encourage the women from this committee to influence their husbands to halt the protests. While there were six men and four women on the water tank committee, not all of them were active, and none of the women on the committee were actually present in the meeting when they were selected. Only one of the female committee members attended a two-day workshop organised by the local NGO in relation to the water tank, where she learnt about the benefits of the water supply. Crucially, none of the female committee members had any financial responsibility in relation to the tank, and as a result, lacked control over the resource.

This example highlights the inter-linkage between state and non-state actors; the power balance between them; the manner in which local communities encounter the state and the extent to which rights are upheld. While the central government promoted improved sanitation facilities in local communities, this was implemented by the local state government in partnership with an NGO (which was largely funded by Europeans). However, the process was hampered by local party politics (which stems from both national and international ideologies), and as a result the families and in particular the women who were to ultimately benefit from the scheme became marginalised rather than central to it.

While international and national law and consequent policies are important, what is more important is how these policies are implemented at a local level, and how local cultural identities interact with universal human rights frameworks. The PRI is supposed to be an apolitical institution providing a mechanism for villagers - women and men - to identify their needs and demand their rights. However, the cultural identities associated with local party politics inevitably become embedded within this institution, as do local customs on decision-making. Finding a space for critical engagement, which incorporates but moves beyond a human rights framework and involves dialogue and interaction with all of these various institutions and processes, is the only way forward. As Nyamu (2000) argues while ‘CEDAW’s strong abolitionist language is arguably an important reflection of the Convention’s aspirations, abolition is not conducive to a positive dialogue that achieves a balance between gender equality and cultural identity’ (Nyamu 2000: 415-416). The example above highlights the numerous challenges of implementing a global human rights framework within national and local political structures. The following example highlights the further tension of implementing this framework within the context of a tribal system of governance.

**Santali systems of governance: upholding rights? Women’s rights within the Santali Majhi System**

Many tribal communities in India have their own political and judicial systems, which operate in parallel to the PRI. My research in a Santali community in Northern Orissa shows how, as a result of the strengthening of the PRI system, two interlinking centres of power have emerged. In the past, the Santali village leader, the Majhi, also carried out the roles that elected PRI representatives currently fulfil, but these tasks have now been divided – with the Majhi dealing with societal issues, and elected PRI representatives addressing development issues. However, these power centres carry unequal weight, as most villagers attribute more importance to the Majhi. Villagers explained that the Majhi was more important to them, as he is responsible for finalising marriages and carrying out rituals. ‘The Sarpanch (elected PRI representative) is only responsible for the development of the area. Without a village Majhi, society would not function, as occasions such as births, marriages or deaths could not be celebrated or recognised. The community thus perceived the Sarpanch as responsible for implementing government schemes, whereas the Majhi was part of the Santal identity.

In the community where I conducted my research, women’s role in the Majhi system was severely restricted – a woman cannot be elected as a Majhi or a Naik (Santali priest), nor can she participate in the election procedures. The reasons for this are linked both with etiquette relating to social interaction, and with religion.

In terms of etiquette, restrictions based on ‘avoidance and joking’ relationships impact on the level of interaction women are permitted to have in the public sphere, as these cultural rules determine how they interact with male family relations. If women were to be involved in the Majhi system, their participation would be limited by the presence of some of their male relatives. Rao (2008) further outlines, in her research with Santal communities in Jharkhand, that Santal men believe any women’s involvement in the Majhi system will be a direct threat to men’s masculinity. Many women in the community where I conducted my research confessed that if they tried to speak at meetings attended predominantly by men, they would be mocked, and they therefore did not have the confidence to speak their minds.

While women’s involvement in the Majhi system may threaten men’s masculinity, another issue at the core of women’s lack of involvement stems largely from the fact that this system is inherently associated with Santali religious beliefs and witchcraft. Santal’s belief in witchcraft directly prohibits women from openly worshipping the Santal gods and spirits, as by worshipping, women are at risk of being denounced as witches. As a result, women are not permitted to enter the Jaber Garh (spiritual area), where worshipping takes place and where village meetings are also often held. Fundamentally, the power that has been ascribed to the Santal spirits directly undermines any power that women can formally gain from the Majhi system. In the Santali community where I carried out
my research, it was evident that the societal belief in witchcraft also intertwined with the PRI, as the Sarpanch herself sincerely believes in witchcraft and would not criticise anyone she suspects to be a witch for fear of retaliation. As a result of these entangled power relations between state and society, women's rights within this system are particularly challenging as is outlined by the example below.

CEDAW Article 11 D - Equal Wages?
CEDAW Article 11(d) refers to ‘The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;’ (CEDAW Convention), yet this article is a long way from being fully implemented in the area in which I conducted my research. In 2010, women from this community received Rs35 (£0.58) a day for land cultivation, while men received Rs60 (£1). In terms of construction work, women traditionally carried the bricks on their heads, and earned Rs70 (£1.16) a day, while men earned Rs150 (£2.50) a day for constructing the building. In discussing the issue of wages and ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ work with the Sarpanch, she highlighted the fact that in all government development work, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) women and men earn an equal wage. While she acknowledged that this should also be the case in private and informal sector employment, she did not see it as her responsibility to use her influence in this area. The different wages for men and women in the informal sector was frequently justified by the perception that men do more difficult work. As one male explained, men do digging and ploughing, whereas women’s work ‘is easy – they just plant the seedlings’.

In observing women and men’s work during the peak agricultural months of June and July 2010, I saw far more women than men working in the paddy fields. On average, for every 10 women working in the fields, there was approximately one man. Men were generally responsible for ploughing and digging, while women were responsible for transplanting the paddy. However, transplanting is far slower and more tedious than the work men conducted in the village, as it involves bending over for up to eight hours a day. Men who did transplanting work finished earlier than the women – the men stopped at 4pm while the women continued in the fields until 5-6pm in the evenings. During the month of August 2010, I observed that men's ploughing work in the fields started early morning, and finished by 10 – 10:30 am. The women then carried out their fieldwork in the soaring heat of the mid-day sun.

One fundamental reason for the continuation of unequal wages in this particular area is because Santali women are not involved in the village level meetings where the wages are decided. The Santal village priest explained that the village wages are decided by the men in the village during pujas (religious festivals). As it is very difficult to arrange community meetings at a time suitable for everyone, the men in the community use the opportunity in puja celebrations to discuss other village issues such as wages for both men and women. These ceremonies take place in the Jaher Garh – a spiritual area in the Santal hamlet where women are not permitted to enter. The fact that these discussions take place in a space only accessible to men prevents women from even being mere silent observers on the key decisions that affect their livelihoods. Therefore, while national frameworks such as the NREGS ensure that both women and men receive an equal wage (although control over these wages is a separate issue), policies such as these do not always translate into private employment at the local level, which may further entrench the view that women are of less value than men.

Cultural Politics and Politics of Culture: Rights and Culture in Context
Understanding how rights are applied in practice can lead to clearer strategies to ensure their more effective implementation. While at first glance, this paper has shown the tension between cultural identities and rights, understanding the wider context which has resulted in a rationale for the strengthening cultural identities is crucial.

The fact that the changes to the Panchayat system has led to a clear division between formal governance structures and the Santali Majhi system needs to be contextualised in terms of a marginalised Santali culture which feels threatened by a national Hindu ideology. This perceived threat further strengthens the need for maintaining and use of the sacred Jaher Garh space – one to which women are denied access. As a result of this collective dis-privilege and resulting cultural defensiveness, patriarchy has become further entrenched. We have seen this in other instances, as is highlighted by Mathur (2003) in her analysis of Muslims in the US after September 11th 2001. While there were instances of domestic violence within Muslim communities in the US, few of these were reported, as ‘women were afraid to bring official attention to their husbands’ (2003: 40). As Mathur argues ‘the internal shut down of the Arab American community has led to the burial of some of its most interior oppressions’ (ibid). In the examples highlighted above, women's role in the PRI also needs to be taken into consideration: with the increasing reservation for women in the PRI, men’s role within the Santali system has been further consolidated, as women now feel comfortable contributing to village PRI level meetings but are content to leave the Santali space to men. Understanding these cultural identities, through understanding the intersection of processes of power with processes of tradition is crucial to creating a dialogue on women’s rights.

Conclusion
As Cowan (2009: 315) maintains, we need to understand that an individual ‘can be inside more than
one culture at any one time.’ The locally elected female Sarpanch, who is herself a Santali woman, navigates on a daily basis the political and cultural tensions of being between the Panchayat cultural space and her own Santali cultural identity. Through understanding how she is able to navigate this space and contest cultural barriers and local power relations we may provide avenues for developing locally appropriate strategies in implementing rights based frameworks.

As Preis (2009: 349) maintains, human rights conventions ‘are grounded in the meanings accorded them through the ongoing life experiences and dilemmas of men and women and therefore do not – and cannot – in any straightforward, linear, or mechanical manner, form the basis of human rights action.’ She therefore maintains that we need to examine and understand the ‘cultural constructions’ of human rights in the everyday life of communities. By understanding the life experiences and individual interpretations of human rights through the eyes of the Sarpanch and the Majhi, two of the key power holders in the community, as well as understanding power relations through the wider context of politics of culture and cultural politics, we can begin to understand how rights frameworks are played out in practice, and why the ultimate goals of Conventions such as CEDAW are so difficult to achieve.

Fundamental to negotiating the tension between rights and culture is how we understand ‘culture’ – not as a static and fixed set of values, but as ‘unbounded, contested and connected to relations of power’ (Merry, 2003:67). In addressing gender inequality, a human rights framework can be useful, and is important, but it needs to be placed within a context of local, national and international political economy. Through understanding how human rights are applied through the life experiences and concerns of men and women, we can begin to understand that the underlying reasons for the perpetuation of gender inequality are not merely blamed on ‘tradition’ alone.

References

Notes:
1 PRI are panchayat level governance structures through which local people can influence official governance processes, including decisions on the utilisation of government development funds
2 The other principles are: universality and inalienability; indivisibility; and inter-dependence and inter-relatedness.
3 Elected PRI representative
Conversations with the Future: Creativity, Aesthetics and Industry Application in Anthropological Practice

Fiona Murphy* and Ioannis Tsioukalis*

Abstract: This article presents a series of conversations with anthropologists working in collaborative, interdisciplinary settings and projects. It examines the changing role and place of anthropology on the island of Ireland, particularly for early career anthropologists. With anthropologists now working in settings as diverse as business schools, health, music, documentary making and industry (to name but a few), early career researchers are now dealing with new challenges. In this piece, we map out a number of these debates and show how a multiplicity of anthropologies and practices are emerging on the island.

Key words: Anthropology; creativity; music; aesthetics; ethnography; industry; business.

Anthropology should have changed the world, yet the subject is almost invisible in the public sphere outside the academy. This is puzzling, since a wide range of urgent issues of great social importance are being raised in original and authoritative ways by anthropologists. They should have been at the forefront of public debate about multiculturalism and nationalism, the human aspects of information technology, poverty and economic globalisation, human rights issues and questions of collective and individual identification in the Western world, just to mention a few topical areas.

(Thomas Eriksen 2009: 1)

We live in a time where academic culture is permeated by an audit sensibility and subject to the mores of stringent publication (indeed funding) directives. As such, for PhD graduates from any academic discipline, the challenges of finding and keeping an academic role are much more complex than for our predecessors. While every ‘academic’ age has its contested aspirations, central to economic, political, and even moral debates over how we should organize our research, teaching, and publication objectives, at present, early career researchers are confronted with the need to remake their academic ambition into alternative career choices. Some argue that this challenge is even greater for graduates coming from the Humanities and Social Sciences. Doing a PhD in these disciplines is generally a commitment to an intellectual life that has limited value in industry or practice, for PhDs in business, science, and engineering, the options are much broader and career trajectories can assume many different forms. Our particular focus herein - that of the life of the PhD anthropology graduate - reflects a number of these concerns.

Over coffee, in seminars and at conferences, anthropologists bemoan what they see as the lack of opportunities for them, both on the island of Ireland and further afield (in the US this has crystallized in debates about the nature of the adjunct lecturer – see Savage minds anthro blog on this). Such concerns signal a need to reflect on how anthropology can communicate its value to other academic disciplines and more generally, industry contexts. But something is changing for anthropology graduates in Ireland. A cursory glance across the spaces where recent PhDs now find themselves employed on the island of Ireland points to a shift in the role and presence of anthropologists and anthropology within both academic contexts and industry. Recent graduates now find themselves in schools of nursing, business, medicine, music, religion, global health, sociology, folklore, and working in applied contexts such as INTEL and other large organizations. Assessing these efforts in terms of what they represent, what they may lead to, where they came from, and whether they are, or can be, successful is beyond the scope of this co-authored piece but what we intend to do is to map out how successful anthropology is becoming as a collaborative presence here in Ireland.

Herein, both authors Ioannis Tsioulakis and Fiona Murphy have had a number of conversations with anthropologists and a designer working in quite varied contexts. Indeed, such is the breadth of disciplines and contexts that anthropologists in Ireland find themselves working in we are, in such a limited space, only able to address a few of these areas (one strong example which has a long history in Ireland is the relationship between the area of health and anthropologists, which we have not addressed here). Our own experience as anthropologists working in a music department and school of business are also brought to bear on our conceptualization of future directions for the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland.

Looking Back, Projecting Forward: Reflections from the AAI 25th Anniversary Conference

Anthropology’s potential as a study of the particular and its ability to connect, complement and nourish other academic disciplines indicates a bright future in an academic world where interdisciplinarity is widely sought (particularly by large funding bodies). However, given the diversity of topics and communities with which we work anthropology’s epistemological and methodological underpinnings need, we argue, more
transparency if this cross-disciplinary rapprochement is to be successful.

At the founders panel of the 25th anniversary conference of the Anthropological Association of Ireland, Joe Ruane, Hastings Donnan and Seamas O Siochan reflected eloquently on how the organization was imagined, constructed and utilized as a unifying tool for a community of anthropologists North and South of the border. In spite of putative disciplinary origins (British and American) and theoretical influences, anthropology on the island through the AAI gained a presence and important momentum through which recognition and impact evolved (in the form of numerous important conferences, articles, edited collections, and monographs). Hastings Donnan posited his belief that part of the reason why anthropology departments haven’t grown in Ireland is that anthropologists have been extremely successful within other academic environments and departments. Hence, it is anthropology’s inherent interdisciplinary nature that makes it such a successful discipline. While some anxiety was expressed about the future of the AAI, the overall spirit of the panel articulated the dynamism and confidence with which anthropology on the island has developed.

A smaller more intimate panel the following morning composed mainly of anthropologists working in contexts as differing as schools of business, medicine, public health, sociology, and documentary making saw the expression of an anxiety over the divergent interpretations of ethnography across these variant spheres. While some papers expressed concern at the policing of disciplinary boundaries around the question of ethnography, others promulgated the need to codify and professionalize ethnography. Both panels highlighted how anthropology, in spite of there only being two professional departments on the island, is peripheral no more. Implicit in much of both of these discussions was a questioning of the value of anthropology, both in terms of its core method – ethnography, and in terms of its analysis. As Tim Ingold (1992) argues anthropology is a discipline that practices its ‘philosophy outdoors’; a study with, not of; other human beings; thereby making it collaborative, indeed, ‘co-operative’ in Richard Sennett’s use of the term (Sennett 2011). In the next two sections, we map our different conversations with anthropologists working across a range of different topics. Ioannis Tsioulakis speaks to Lidia Guzy and Maruška Svašek in the first section and following that Fiona Murphy speaks to David Prendergast of INTEL and Flip van den Berg of TRIL research centre UCD.

**Conversation One: Constructing an Anthropology of (and through) expressive forms and aesthetics (Ioannis Tsioulakis)**

Anthropology is philosophy with the people in.

(Tim Ingold 1992)

As I sat across from Dr Lidia Guzy and Dr Maruška Svašek, on two separate occasions, to talk about their research and teaching experiences, I suspected very little of the attributes that we shared and the common ways in which we challenge canonical profiles of anthropologists in Ireland. None of the three of us is Irish or did systematic research on Irish cultural forms. Yet, all three find ourselves teaching at institutions in the North and South of Ireland and participating in the equivalent collegial and research networks. Despite the diverse locales of our field research, we all have attempted to describe expressive forms, visual and performative, secular or sacred, and contextualise them within shifting debates on aesthetics and values. Based on interviews with Lidia Guzy and Maruška Svašek, I offer a brief reflection on the ways in which anthropologists of expressive cultural forms contribute to the diverse landscape of research and training in Ireland, within or outside anthropology departments.

‘Probably all of us who do anthropology are between cultures, in this liminal position’, Lidia remarked while recounting the story of her first contact with anthropology, adding that ‘the fate of migration leads you to being in-between’. Lidia was born in Poland, but it was while taking her first steps as an anthropology student in Berlin that she had the opportunity to embark on a funded three-month field research project in Gujarat, India. This experience initiated her interest in rural Indian religiosity and its connection to values and performance, which she later explored during a Master’s programme in Paris and her doctoral research based in Freie Universität Berlin. For the needs of this research, Lidia lived in two villages in the Indian region of Orissa, documenting endangered musical traditions and expressions. There, she became fascinated by the concepts of life and death that become entangled with local artistic creativity and their impact on society. In our discussion, Lidia emphasised the aesthetic dimensions of all the aspects of her work. Describing the French social theories that influenced her perspective she asserts that ‘theories can have a certain aesthetic [...] and the French were artists in creating aesthetic theories’. Her interest in musical expression stems from the same preoccupation with aesthetics, but also from her personal upbringing within a very musical household in Poland.

Lidia’s relocation to Ireland in 2011 for the purposes of a lectureship in Contemporary South Asian Religions in the School of Asian Studies at University College, Cork is treated with an ethnographic interest similar to the one driving her previous personal stories of migration: ‘I don’t understand a lot yet, I have to learn like a small child and observe like an anthropologist’, she tells me. Yet she remarks that the collaborative culture of the department has ensured a very pleasant intellectual environment, while the opportunity of working together with other Schools (such as Music) has further enhanced her academic experience. Interestingly, she regards the ability of anthropologists
to fit within diverse academic disciplines as a sign of the success of the discipline:

Key concepts of anthropology have been absorbed so well into social sciences generally, that it has become almost general knowledge to pursue anthropological perspectives. […] So, anthropology has become a key discipline in relation to reflective terms […] it is directing social sciences and recognised as a set of techniques of knowledge transmission.

Thus, in Lidia Guzy’s view, anthropology has gained a position within social sciences that extends beyond the common place of ethnography and into the theoretical realms of reflexivity and critical epistemological debates. She recognises, nonetheless, that students’ methodological training in ethnography is not always accompanied by an equivalent understanding of anthropological perspectives, a phenomenon leading to a danger of ‘a certain reduction of the fieldwork exercise’. This is mainly an issue relating to time restrictions within a BA programme.

If teaching about expressive cultural forms (especially outside anthropology departments) entails a danger of watering-down or even misunderstanding anthropological perspectives, are there other gains that would potentially compensate for this issue? My experience as a lecturer in ethnomusicology at the School of Music and Theatre in University College Cork, suggests that creative practice, and especially composition, can offer an extremely fruitful dimension to ethnographic work. Anthropological and ethnomusicological scholarship has always valued practical engagement as a way of learning, both in the research field and in settings of training. Developing compositional forms as an output of anthropological conceptual frameworks, however, serves a different purpose: the exploration of alternative (or at least complementary) methods of expression, beyond the use of text. Assessment methods for the MA in Ethnomusicology at UCC give students the option of combining textual coursework with music and/or dance performance, including original composition and choreography. This process facilitates a dual relationship: writing about music/dance, and musicking/dancing about words and concepts. Thus, the successful product of this combination requires writing and performance that speak to each other, and capture the complementary dimensions of ethnography - discourse and experience. In this logic, performance is not merely an additional way of understanding a culture, but a meta-level of creating culture that speaks about culture (parallel to writing about culture).

Understandably, this process is not without its challenges. A department of music can often be a locus of competing academic perspectives from historical musicology to cultural studies, some of which are not necessarily compatible with anthropological frameworks. But more often than not, creative work provides ways out of theoretical discordance, and the fluid process of improvisation intrinsic to music performance can itself offer an interdisciplinary paradigm of research and teaching.

Maruška Svašek’s research and teaching has consistently focused on processes of creativity, transition, and transformation within art and cultural aesthetics more generally. Born in the Netherlands with a Czech ethnic background, Maruška completed her first degree in fine arts at the Minerva Academy. Coincidentally, it was also a trip to India that jumpstarted her interest in ‘world cultural diversity’ which eventually lead her to a career in anthropology. She completed her first research in Ghana, examining the development of the art market in a post-colonial setting. Her transformation into an anthropologist was combined with the creative process: ‘working with students and artists […] sharing space and painting together.’ This was further explored in her doctoral research in Czechoslovakia, where she had the chance to examine the political and artistic transition marked by the ‘Velvet Revolution’ into what became the Czech Republic. Her more recent research on migrant experiences in Northern Ireland and the aesthetics of religiosity in Chennai, India has also enlightened the themes of transition, transformation and aestheticisation that dominate Maruška’s work. In parallel ways to Lidia Guzy’s views, Maruška Svašek’s approach to aesthetics allows for an engagement with diverse human activities that exceed the narrow realm of ‘art’:

Aesthetics is not something that I see as connected to the art; it has much more to do with multisensorial perception […] and then if you have a processual approach to aestheticisation, something can be aestheticized as art or religion […] and that’s how the ‘social life of things’ perspective comes in.

Maruška’s later focus on migration and emotions expands her theorisations of transition from objects to subjects: ‘Transformation is looking at how people’s engagement with material reality influences how they engage with themselves and make identity claims’.

In the courses that Maruška convenes in the School of History and Anthropology at Queen’s University Belfast, artwork is often used as an application of (and an output for) anthropological concepts. In 2010, I had the opportunity to co-design and teach the module ‘Anthropology of Art’ with Maruška Svašek and Barbara Graham at Queen’s University. For the needs of this module, a group of anthropology students were expected to create their own original artwork exploring in innovative ways anthropological conceptualisations of movement, emotions, beauty, transition, and materiality. Using material as diverse as plastic Barbie dolls, Tesco containers from imported exotic fruit, and discarded public transport tickets (which they
collected from passengers along with short personal stories of travelling), students constructed exhibits which they then presented along with reflections on the anthropology of creativity and art. These artworks were eventually exhibited in the School's end-of-year showcase where students had the opportunity to discuss the creative process with various spectators, from within and outside the academy. For the needs of a module entitled 'Love, hate and beyond: emotions, culture, practice', Marieka required the participants to collaborate with drama students and together take part in Kathakali performances directed by an invited Kathakali actor and make-up artist. This process urged students to produce non-textual work, experimenting with visual representation, physical movement, and music. Their textual outputs also strengthened their creativity, with self-explorations relating to concepts of 'grief' and 'care'.

The discussion of aesthetics and creativity in anthropological research and teaching can point to two conclusions regarding the positioning of anthropology within the island's professional scene. Firstly, it alerts us to the diverse applications that anthropological debates can lead to when combined with expressive forms. These applications can be useful in a range of academic departments, from music and fine arts to religion and area studies, widening the spectrum of employment opportunities for anthropology academics. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it leads to a realization that anthropological teaching can expand beyond critical analysis, towards a set of skills including non-textual creative outputs. These are skills that university students have been anxious to gain from their academic studies, and which could lead to diverse and exciting professional opportunities for anthropology graduates.

**Conversation Two: Constructing an Anthropology of Corporate Contexts (Fiona Murphy)**

Fieldwork projects in anthropology are not what they used to be—at least as they have been imagined in an aesthetics of practice and evaluation that define anthropology's highly distinctive disciplinary culture of both method and career making.

*(Faubion and Marcus, 2009)*

Anthropology's primary research methodology 'ethnography' has become increasingly central to the way in which research is conducted in a number of industry contexts. The practice of corporate ethnography (and corporate ethnographers as consultants) has yielded great insights into how business can and should be conducted across a diverse array of contexts. Large Corporations such as Unilever, Motorola, HP, and INTEL (to name but a few) employ anthropologists to work on a wide variety of projects. Here in Ireland, INTEL currently employs anthropologists (some of whom have been trained in Ireland) who work collaboratively on a number of research projects. While for some the idea of anthropologists working in and for large corporations has been controversial, with much debate around the ethical, academic and social consequences of this development, on the island of Ireland it is largely seen in a positive frame. Anthropologists working in INTEL in Ireland have carved out a space for the progression of a corporate ethnographic space, which could in the future encourage other large corporations to see the benefits of hiring anthropological graduates. An anthropology career that exists outside of traditional routes in the form of corporate work becomes then an interesting site for re-imagining methodological anxieties and anthropology's positioning within broader society.

Ethnographic practice in corporate contexts has been subject to much criticism by academic anthropologists, often described as a watered down version of anthropological research. Regardless of the debates, corporate ethnographers are forging ahead, working in innovative and challenging ways. The proliferation of corporate type positions for anthropologists both on the island of Ireland and globally has implications for how anthropologists are trained and taught in the academy. In a discussion with Dr. David Prendergast, senior researcher and anthropologist working in INTEL Ireland, on the topic of corporate ethnography and the role of anthropology in INTEL's new sustainable cities project, we discussed how ethnography is being redefined and hence, the subject of much debate in both academic and applied contexts:

I think it is something that we are all trying to safeguard against and trying to put boundaries around to some degree. I don't think that is an academic-industry divide. I don't think it is a case of industry polluting ethnography. I think it is something that we all have to work together on and it's got to be a real collaboration. Bearing in mind that a far greater degree of anthropology PhDs, certainly in the States and over here, go into jobs outside of academia and certainly outside of anthropology departments. We all have the same training, the same backgrounds, but we have somewhat different pressures on us. I would argue that we need to reflect hard on how we train our upcoming generations of anthropologists, particularly considering that academia has not been the primary career path for many PhDs. That is what needs interrogating, what we need to be constructively critical about.

Thus, whether or not, one grants any validity to the forms of ethnographic research and anthropological work being conducted in corporate settings, it is nonetheless providing legitimate employment.
opportunities for anthropology graduates (see especially Melissa Cefkin 2009). Here, we concur with David’s provocation to reflect on how anthropologists are trained in the academy. Corporate employers call for a range of skills and expertise, amongst which ethnography is merely one. Hence, anthropology departments need to consider new career trajectories in applied contexts when re-evaluating anthropological training. Beyond the issue of how ethnography is being redefined and therefore the principles of training, is the question of how anthropological engagement is fashioned in corporate contexts. Here, we return to the issue of collaboration. Anthropologists in corporate contexts tend to work in teams with a variety of other professionals. How we communicate anthropological analyses in these contexts is also of concern. INTEL provides a very good example of how successful collaborations between anthropologists, designers, engineers, and business professionals can achieve much in terms of product design and impact. Flip van den Berg, an interaction designer working at the TRIL (Technology Research for Independent Living) centre told us how successful his collaborations with anthropologists working for TRIL have been, and continue to be. He says:

I come from the tradition of participatory design, it actively involves people in the design process and for me I see ethnographers as good collaborators to work with when you talk about getting the real views of people even without any interventions – you see the context of what we will develop. What I really like about working with ethnographers (or anthropologists) is they question concepts as well, it is not just thinking that someone knows, it’s about asking all the questions necessary.

Flip gave the very particular example of a project engaged in alertness training and outlined how the design of a biofeedback device evolved through collaborative ethnographic research, resulting in a number of unexpected outcomes around further training for elderly people on alertness and a refined device. The story Flip tells about the TRIL centre is an excellent example of the kind of work anthropologists can achieve. Having recently started working in a business school in DCU, I am engaging with the collaborative essence of anthropology anew. Working amongst a range of academics, both quantitative and qualitative in their research agendas, I find that anthropology as a boundary crosser par excellence brings great value to general business degrees and the research agendas of business schools. This understanding of the value of anthropological analyses is being replicated as we have previously outlined in a wide variety of spaces. As other academic disciplines and industry begin to understand that anthropologists have, and can bring to bear, both theoretical and methodological innovation we will see a flourishing of our discipline on the island of Ireland. This at the very least is the way forward for early career anthropologists whose focus should now be the carving out of interdisciplinary and collaborative paths.

Conclusion: Towards an Ethos of Multiple Anthropologies in Ireland

Rather than suggesting a patterned profile of anthropologists in Ireland, this text has attempted to shed light on the multiplicity of aspirations, practices, and professional paths within the discipline. There is no denying that anthropology has been defined from the very start by the multiplicities of both its research starting points and its applications. The ‘liminality’ and in-between-ness of multiplicities of anthropologists as cultural beings seem to also shape their professional fates: learning through observing, constructing new ways of belonging in different groups, and occasionally comparing ‘fieldnotes’ with colleagues in seminars and conferences about the diverse cultural conventions that permeate their working contexts.

Admittedly, the multiple applications of anthropological training introduce two dangers: the fragmentation of the discipline and its reduction to a free-for-all depository of ethnographic methodologies. These two dangers offer the basis for persistent ethical and deontological debates that we do not aspire to solve in this short text. However, it seems that an effort towards the sustainability and growth of the community of anthropologists in Ireland, and the participation in the common debates might provide the most successful safeguarding of both our epistemological uniqueness and the ethics of our practices. As the recent AAI conference proved, sharing experiences, anxieties, propositions, and strategies can provide the enthusiasm and confidence necessary for our dispersed professional fields.

Yet the tensions between anthropology as a critical, often deconstructive discipline and its applied dimension within the industry remain a subject of controversy. During her interview, Lidia Guzy stressed that the fear of anthropology being corrupted by colonizing attitudes is as current as ever. The discipline, Lidia reminds us, was shaped by a history of deconstructing power and ‘a legacy of being an advocate of diversity in the world’. Consequently, she is wary of any collaboration with those in power that is not accompanied by critical reflection. This is crucial ‘for a science of resistance, in order not to be muted by hegemonic world views’.

The space of the corporate encounter with ethnography and anthropology engenders a new cause of both anxiety and excitement that dovetails with Lidia Guzy’s viewpoints. However, as we have shown in this text, corporate anthropologists and their collaborators also pay close attention to these debates, striving to ensure transparency and ethics in their practice. David Prendergast repeatedly stressed...
in his interview how anthropologists working within corporate contexts are continually faced with different kinds of challenges to academic anthropologists, but are often in a better position to control and manage the sphere of ethnography within these domains.

The contradicting views of the industry as a hegemonic power or a field of opportunity lead to one certain observation: the naiveté of an anthropologist who produces knowledge on the world’s cultural diversity devoid of professional, industrial and bureaucratic implications needs to be addressed at the earliest stages of academic education. Anthropological training needs to be accompanied early on by the dilemmas (and the excitement) of careers within and outside the academia. Because, as all the earlier conversations suggested, the production of anthropological work can be innovative yet inclusive, experimental but simultaneously applicable, systematic as well as aesthetic. The proliferation of multiple anthropologies on the island of Ireland offers anthropologists working here the chance to reflect the insightful and diverse body of work on the island. We opened this article with a quote from Thomas Eriksen bemoaning the inability of anthropology to make inroads into public debate. We hope to have shown throughout this piece that what is in fact happening on the island of Ireland in terms of an early but burgeoning engagement with other disciplines is the carving out of a space of creativity, connection and collaboration (in Ireland at least), one which for the past number of years many of us have been hoping for.

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Notes:
1 Unless otherwise indicated, quotes in this section are from private interviews with Lidia Guzy (October, 2012) and Maruska Svasek (December, 2011).
2 See Guzy (2012; 2013)
3 For some discussions of performance as anthropological practice see Turner (1979) and Lindsay (1996).
4 See Nettl (1995) for a seminal book on the antagonisms between ethnomusicology and historical musicology in academic departments in North America.
6 Her theoretical monograph Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production (2007) explores these themes in depth.
Living Gift: A Strange Exchange among Organ Recipients in Ireland

Karinda Tolland*

Abstract: This article is taken from the undergraduate thesis titled ‘Living Gift: Transformations and the Secret Realities of Post-Transplant Life among Organ Recipients in Ireland’. With almost 3,000 people in Ireland now living longer lives because of organ transplantation, it has touched almost every community in the country. But behind the celebration of the medical miracle, how much do we know about those who receive this ‘gift of life’ and how they relate to the society that has provided it to them? This article is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork carried out during a five-month period initiated in July 2011. By interrogating gift-exchange theory, I aim to understand the organ recipient experience in Ireland. More specifically, I address the following: What kind of ‘gift’ is an organ? What kind of relationship does this unique form of gift object create?

Key words: ‘archaic’ gift exchange; gift; organ transplantation; reciprocity; Ireland

One could be forgiven for thinking that once someone is lucky enough to receive their organ transplant that they will move on and leave that chapter behind but I have to say that I am always humbled by the motivation of transplant recipients to ‘give something back.’ There is an eagerness to show their appreciation of the gift they have been given and to do what they can to improve the chances of others receiving the gift of life

(Member of the Irish Donor Network, October 2011)

Introduction

Organ transplant medicine represents the pinnacle of biomedical science. Over the last six decades, transplant technology has developed to include virtually every vital organ in the human body other than the brain. More and more medical conditions are categorised as treatable by organ transplantation; hence, more and more people have the experience of receiving an organ as part of their medical treatment. But behind the celebration of the medical miracle, how much do we know about those who receive this ‘gift of life’ and how they relate to the society that has provided it to them? Does the compelling narrative of celebration and renewal hold true or is it a more complex, nuanced and difficult position to be in? It has been well documented that people react in different ways to the integration of a new organ into their body (Sharp 1995, Fox and Swazey 1974). While there has been important work done internationally in this area the specific Irish context has received little attention. The material recorded in this article is drawn from data collected during a five-month period of a part-time field project initiated in July 2011. It explores the relatively unfamiliar field of the organ recipient experience in Ireland and provides a small sample of the Irish transplant population; from those as recent as two months transplanted and still very much on the ‘road to recovery’, to others celebrating 20 and 25 years successful transplantation. I initially introduced myself to Colin White, National Projects Manager of the Irish Kidney Association, and Manager of Transplant Team Ireland, who subsequently became my point of entrée. Additionally, I interacted with various institutions within the Irish Donor Network, which incorporates a group of individuals and patient associations directly concerned with organ transplantation, such as the Irish Kidney Association, the Irish Heart and Lung Transplant Association and the Cystic Fibrosis Association. Primary methods of data collection consisted of participant-observation as well as open-ended interviewing techniques. Ranging from one to two hours, interviews were conducted with 16 transplant recipients, most of whom had received organs from what is called a ‘living cadaver’ – a term that refers to a fully non-sentient, brain-stem dead yet still organically functioning body (Shildrik 2008). For many it was their first time to be able to talk about very real concerns, issues and feelings they had. While obviously extremely grateful for the life saving organ, many struggle to come to terms with the fate of their donor, the pressures to be ‘healthy’ and reject the conventional medical paradigm of organ-as-machine and organ-as-thing that is supposed to protect them. Engaging issues of anthropological concern, this ethnographic guided inquiry aims to understand the nature of social actions that stem from receiving the gift of a human organ from an anonymous deceased donor. More specifically, I address the following: What kind of ‘gift’ is an organ? What kind of relationship does this unique form of gift object create?

We are all encouraged to be organ donors – indeed it is rooted in our hegemony, with its benefits and success stories reinforced by the media and successful PR campaigns. The principles of human generosity and the moral concept of voluntary altruism associated with the ‘gift of life’ rhetoric pervade these campaigns. In discussions regarding the ‘gift of life’, many transplant scholars have drawn

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on gift exchange theory based on the work of Marcel Mauss as it seems to have resonance with the process of organ transplantation and provides a framework for understanding the recipient experience (see for example Fox and Swazey 1974 Lock 2001, Sharp 1995, Siminoff & Chillag 1999). Gift exchange as practised in societies which Mauss termed ‘archaic’ – Melanesia, Polynesia and the Pacific Northwest – is characterised by certain moral obligations connected to the gift: the obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. Mauss insists that the obligation to reciprocate is the most important obligation, as it generates a circuit of gift-giving, creating a social relationship between the giver and the receiver of a gift (Mauss 1990). Anthropologists entertain certain assumptions about altruism and gift exchange. We know that pure altruism does not exist and that gifts are never free; sooner or later all gifts demand counter-gifts (see for example Mauss 1990 [1950], Levi-Strauss 1987 [1950]). The ‘tyrannical’ ties of transplants suggest that to receive an organ from an anonymous deceased donor sets up an impossible expectation of reciprocity. The ‘gift’ of an organ is too animate, too lively, too intimate, and too personal – it is too heavy a burden – it cannot possibly be reciprocated in this strange exchange. Or can it? The concept of organ donation as an uncomplicated, ‘free’ and non-reciprocal ‘gift’ does not always hold up under closer examination. I ask whether the celebration of the process of transplantation, and the mix of very personal tributes on one hand, and shared, constructed acknowledgements and memorials on the other might actually mean reciprocation is realised in a highly socialised way that gives comfort to the recipient, to donor families and satisfies society’s need to further promote the practice of organ donation.

The ‘Tyranny of the Gift’

The most detailed, long-term, qualitative studies regarding organ transplantation have been conducted by a handful of medical sociologists, including Renée Fox and Judith Swazey (1974, 1992), who have published significantly connecting the notion of The Gift to the transplant world and highlighting the dilemma of how to reciprocate the giving of so precious a thing – a part of oneself. On the basis of their research in the United States, Fox and Swazey state:

As Marcel Mauss could have foretold, what recipients believe they owe to donors and the sense of obligation they feel about repaying “their” donor for what has been given, weigh heavily on them (1992:40).

The psychological and moral burden is especially onerous in transplantation because the gift is so extraordinary that it is inherently unreciprocal: ‘It has no physical or symbolic equivalent’ (1992:40). For this reason, the giver and the receiver are ‘locked in a creditor-debtor vise that binds them one to another in a mutually fettering way’ (1992:40). These aspects of the gift exchange dimensions of transplantation are what they refer to as the ‘tyranny of the gift’ (1992:40). Indeed, my fieldwork uncovers a similar observation where recipients grapple with a curious emotion to reciprocate; however, only one female heart recipient acknowledged this as a ‘burden’:

It’s been three years [transplanted] now and yes, sometimes I think this gift is too big. It’s a huge responsibility and I am always anxious about it. I have so much medication to take and I find that difficult. The transplant coordinator actually told me to ‘cop on’ at one stage and to realise how lucky I have been. I know I am lucky. And I am grateful, but I still think of it.

While receiving an organ is almost certainly considered the ultimate and most noble of gifts, defining it as such can be hurtful to the recipient because it is a reminder that somebody had to die in order for them to live which is, at times, very difficult to accept (Siminoff and Chillag 1999). The death and evisceration of an anonymous donor encumbers many who were on the brink of death themselves. Anna, a kidney and pancreas recipient who is 11 years post-transplant reflects: ‘It took some time and quite a lot of [private] counselling to make sense of it all really. To make some peace with the fact that someone had to die so I could have my second chance.’ We see the transfer of body parts certainly bears a heavy price – recipients struggle with grief and the compelling demands of reciprocity. As Anna suggested, ‘it takes time’ to accept these rare gifts. Laura, who received her kidney four years ago, conveys a similar sentiment:

I was very upset for the girl who had died and felt guilty for benefiting from her death. I felt a huge weight of gratitude and a sense of obligation and guilt toward her family. Immediately after the transplant I was an emotional mess, I cried and cried.

The vast majority of research participants experienced sorrow and anguish, especially in the initial post-transplant phase. At the source of each transplant narrative is a loss of life. Donor organs are usually procured from young people who have died in tragic circumstances, and given to recipients who are suffering end-stage illness. The recipient’s life is saved through the loss of another’s - a situation that is likely to heighten the recipient’s sense of gratitude, obligation and guilt. A female participant who received a double lung transplant five years ago shares her experience:

My donor took her own life... It took me a very long time to accept that. I wrote a [thank you] letter to her family and her family wrote back telling me that she had attempted suicide a few
times and that she had suffered depression for a long time. They were happy that some good had come out of her life. This helped me with my grief I think. I feel I am carrying a bit of her with me and now I just hope that I can bring some happiness to her life that she could never find before.

During my fieldwork, the data reveals that the desire to give back stems from a sense that recipients are bound, not only by the ‘tyrannical’ ties of transplant, but, as one participant suggests by their ‘physical’, ‘emotional’ and ‘spiritual’ journey. While many recipients consider the organ itself to represent their ‘new life’ and their ‘second chance’, there are those who do not necessarily equate the ‘gift’ with the actual life-saving body part. The life transformation for some is the experience of humanity and sacrifice. Thus, the gift cannot only be understood to mean organ; it must also be seen as a life embracing, all-inclusive human bond. Laura echoes this reality:

The experience of unknown people at the darkest moments of their lives making such an enormous sacrifice for someone they don’t know, and that person being me, is incredible. It gives me great faith in humanity and in particular the inherent altruism of human beings. I think that this is incredibly life affirming.

**Investigating Reciprocity**

When describing the Potlatch – a gift giving festival among Native American peoples in the Pacific Northwest - Marcel Mauss writes that ‘the obligation to reciprocate worthily is imperative’, and he refers to ‘equivalent value’ (Mauss 1990:54). But what is equivalent value? What is a worthy reciprocation? I have shown how the distinctive features of the gift relationship structure the meaning of exchange; however, deeper analytical investigation asks whether there can really be such a thing as a universal concept of ‘The Gift’. Can we really compare archaic Melanesian exchange practices with the Euro-American logics of organ transplantation? Does the gift of Kula wealth – shell necklaces and shell armbands – mandate reciprocity in the same way the gift of human organs do? Marilyn Strathern (1992) cautions that the surface similarities may obscure more profound differences; differences that derive from the contrasting conceptions of ‘person’ that vivify each culture. Accordingly, the appearance of similarities between Western culture and the pervasive sociality of Melanesian life is misleading as Euro-American gift giving is apparently signalled by two constructs peculiar to it, ‘altruism and voluntarism’ (Strathern 1992:127). Gifts in Euro-America are considered ‘extensions of the self’ as they carry the expression of sentiments’ (1992:130) which may be directed toward persons or society (1992:130). Strathern’s critique illuminates reciprocity in the Euro-American context through the notion of ‘benign feeling’ and ‘spontaneous emission of emotions’ which is rooted in the dialectic of intimacy and community (1992:131-132). This ‘intimate altruism’ evokes connotations of self-less ‘charitable gesture’ or a ‘personal sacrifice for the public good’ – transactions that typify mutually independent personal relations outside of the market. The alienability and the anonymous aspect of this ‘gift to society’ are precisely what make it altruistic; ‘Organ donors can give anonymously because human organs are regarded as anonymous’ (1992:129). This differs from Maussian notions of exchange where persons are understood relationally and the gift is understood in the context not of an initial establishment but of the re-establishment of these relations. Rather than presupposing two kinds of relationships (interpersonal relations and individual relations with society), Melanesian gifts presuppose two kinds of persons, partners divided by their transaction (1992:136; see also Strathern 1988).

Jonathan Parry elaborates on the ideology of the ‘pure gift’ suggesting: ‘Those who make free and unconstrained contracts in the market also make free and unconstrained gifts outside it. But these gifts are defined as what market relations are not – altruistic, moral and loaded with emotion’ (1986:466). Set against this background, the uniqueness of the anonymous altruistic gift of a human organ becomes clear – ‘interested exchange and the disinterested gift emerge as two sides of the same coin’ (Parry 1986:458). Through the critique of Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1992) and Jonathan Parry (1986) we see gifts in Euro-American culture framed within the cultural logics shaped by different assumptions than those of Melanesian cultures. Therefore, the ‘gifts’ of Euro-American ‘charity’ cannot be equated with the ‘gifts’ of Melanesian (or American Indian) exchange systems. However, though their analyses disallow an equation between systems, the comparison of different gifts helps us to see what does make Euro-American gift-giving distinctive – what circulates in organ transplant is not only body, but also ‘feeling’. This has led me to dispute the dominant theory within anthropology that what is given in organ transplantation cannot be reciprocated worthily. Through participation and observation it is my assessment that reciprocity does materialize within the transplant population of Ireland. It is a life-long reciprocity represented in many different forms and with many actors. We see the return gift, in a broad sense, resembles a symbolic and emotional reciprocity built on inspiration, faith and remembrance, gratitude and acknowledgment, awareness and advocacy and most of all on sociality. The relations characterised by this ‘intimate strangerhood’ (Strong 2009) are reciprocated even though the reward to the donor (or more precisely, donor kin) may not always be obvious.
The Spirit of Giving

The annual service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving held in Dublin, organised by the Irish Kidney Association, is attended by the families of organ donors, transplant recipients, patients, carers and the medical profession involved in organ transplantation. I was also present at the 26th Service of Remembrance held in the Corpus Christ Church in Dublin in October 2011. The memorial event is a mixture of sadness and joy and talk of the ‘gift of life’ flows freely. This Catholic Mass is a formal and explicit component of religion with the leitmotif of providing an opportunity for the organ recipient to publicly and symbolically give thanks for their incredible gift by honouring the families of deceased donors. The donor card and the Forget-me-not flower, which represents the symbol of transplantation, are placed in front of the altar along with lighted candles from those present. The vast majority of research participants conveyed a similar story: ‘The service is a part of my life and I would never miss it.’ The ubiquity of memorial events should be noted as there are additional annual ceremonies for the respective Associations within the Irish Donor Network in most counties throughout Ireland. Although the breakdown of who attends the Service of Remembrance is not known, the physical and immediate effects of reciprocation are visibly noticeable among the numerous donor kin present. It was obvious to me they found solace in the shared remembrance and acknowledgement that someone had benefited from the death of their loved one. During the service it was announced that the first national commemorative garden, aptly named the ‘Circle of Life’, is to be established and will play an important role in ‘the spirit of giving’ and the ‘enduring legacy which defines the lives of organ donors.’ The garden is to be a place of sanctuary and reflection open to all of the transplant population. Here we are reminded of Lesley Sharp’s claim that the one way to give thanks for so extraordinary a gift from the dead is to memorialize them (Sharp 2007). Reciprocation is realised in a highly socialised way between those who have survived organ failure and those whose decisions made transplantation possible. Furthermore, these constructed acknowledgements and memorials, while providing a space for the instantiation of social ties, also encapsulate and solidify the broader social domains of community through the principles of human generosity – through emotion and ‘benign feeling’ (Strathern 1992).

We see the commemoration of lives in many forms. An impressive celebratory mode of reciprocity that promotes a public image of medical success is the ‘Transplant Games’. Against a backdrop of news media coverage, ceremonial and celebratory affairs, transplant athletes promote the message that you can live a full and active life following the procedure of transplantation while facilitating awareness of the ‘gift of life’. Although I did not attend the 18th World Transplant Games held in Goteborg, Sweden in June 2011, many of my research participants did, or certainly, had been part of Transplant Team Ireland in the past. It was for this reason I closely followed the media coverage in Ireland pertaining to the event.

The official programme states: ‘To take part in the Games is firstly an expression of THANKS for the gift of life, to the donors and the donor families’ (WTG 2011). Donor recognition ceremonies at the Games are attended by transplant athletes compelled to acknowledge their donor and their ‘second chance’. Throughout my fieldwork it was not uncommon to hear stories of training regimes, personal bests and medal tallies, along with gratitude and remembrance. Anna, a successful transplant athlete had this to say:

Through all my memories of illness and health, I am always very mindful of my donor. My Games medals belong to my donor. They symbolise all they have done for me and all they continue to do for me.

Nevertheless, it is not only organ donors who are remembered. One participant remarked: ‘The most emotional thing for me was to see my transplant surgeon at the Arrivals Hall of Dublin airport to show his support for the team.’ The ‘gift to society’ has contributed to the common good and these networks of organ recipient, donor kin and transplant surgeon inscribe a social and civic solidarity that ameliorates a connectedness along the sturdy norms of a generalised (and emotional) reciprocity.

Of course not all organ recipients in Ireland attend a religious Service of Remembrance or compete in sports; in fact, some mentioned they would like to see more secular activities enabling them to mix with donor families and the wider transplant community. Despite this, reciprocity in the Irish transplant setting can be found in a multiplicity of ways and obligation differs considerably from one individual to another. There are those who have become public figures promoting awareness around organ donation; some provide assistance in writing the difficult, heartfelt anonymous thank you letter to the donor family; there are those who feel they give back to society by volunteering in various charities like ‘Meals on Wheels’ or the ‘Samaritans’; one research participant had set up their own transplant related charity raising over €50,000 the previous year; others have established support group networks distinct from patient associations; and then there are those who feel the best way to reciprocate is by keeping healthy and happy. According to this notion, remaining healthy by taking care of the organ is more important – an almost greater reciprocal act – than to give something in return. This is articulated by Laura:

I feel a responsibility to the memory of my donor. I actively seek to feel joyful and am
conscious of appreciating my health and good fortune. I suppose living a good life and looking after my kidney is my way of giving back. My husband and I often raise a glass in honour of our absent friend.

As Fox and Swazey (1992) have so poignantly argued, the ‘tyranny of the gift’ weighs heavily on the minds of many recipients, who struggle to make sense of a gift whose magnitude they cannot reciprocate. Arlene Macdonald (2007) argues that by confining organ exchange to a circle of two, the ‘tyranny of the gift’ critique hinders exploration of the larger social and cosmic fabrics into which organ transplantation is woven. Macdonald maintains that scholars are correct that the ‘letters’ can be uncomfortably tight. But the close weave can also be comforting, the ‘ties that bind’ constitutive. My ethnographic data reveals an overwhelming resemblance. Research participants emerge as comforted by the thought of remaining attached to their donor or carrying the memory of their donor’s sacrifice. The fact that the inalienable body part had become alienable qua transplantation (Weiner 1992) is actually reassuring. The majority of participants insisted they were not overly troubled by reciprocal obligations – their desire to give back stemmed from being part of the wider transplant community and from having something inspirational to offer society more generally. Over time this behaviour had become ‘a way of life’.

**Conclusion**

While a successful transplantation brings a new lease of life – a ‘second chance’ – it also brings obligations and social expectations. First and foremost, this article has sought to provide a glimpse of the intricacies of post-transplant life among organ recipients in Ireland. Focusing on what happens after the transplant draws attention to the powerful image of an exotic branch of medical culture that often remains unseen. The realities of not just receiving a transplant, but living with one over time create a highly problematic and fascinating realm of social relationships illuminating how this new opportunity for life defines our ways of living. As organs are nearly always described as ‘gifts of life’ and the language of The Gift permeates discussion pertaining to this biomedical achievement, it is also the theoretical framework guiding this ethnographic inquiry. Applying Marcel Mauss’ gift-exchange paradigm provides an expedient framework for exploring the factors that motivate receiving the gift and reciprocating. The ‘tyrannical’ ties of transplants suggest that to receive an anonymous donor organ sets up an impossible expectation of reciprocity. A robust interrogation of this dominant anthropological theory, that what is given in organ transplantation cannot be reciprocated worthily, provides the basis for the overarching argument in this article. A deeper analytical investigation into reciprocity facilitates a discussion on how Melanesian exchange practice differs from the imputation of the cultural logic of reciprocity within Euro-American organ transplantation. The comparison of different gifts illuminates the Euro-American constructs of ‘altruism’ and ‘voluntarism’, where gifting is a highly personalized form of transaction. The alienability and anonymous aspect of this ‘gift to society’ is precisely what makes it altruistic. Through the critique of Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1992) and Jonathan Parry (1986) I have shown what circulates in organ transplant is not only body, but also ‘emotions’ and ‘feeling’. The ethnographic data reveals that the desire to give back stems from a sense that recipients are bound, not only by the ‘tyrannical’ ties of transplant, but, by their journey of transformation. While the ‘letters’ can be uncomfortably tight, organ recipients simultaneously emerge as comforted by these ‘ties that bind’. The thought of carrying the memory of their donor’s sacrifice propels an assured lifelong reciprocity – ‘a way of life’ – built on inspiration, faith and remembrance, gratitude and acknowledgment, awareness and advocacy and most of all on sociality.

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Notes:
1 The term is now being replaced by the supposedly more
anodyne term ‘deceased donor’ (Shildrick 2008).
2 The Transplant Games are an annual international
sporting event, where transplant athletes demonstrate the
physical success of transplant surgery. Additionally, there
are the annual Winter World Transplant Games and the
European Transplant and Dialysis Games.
HEART OF BOURDIEU*

An interview with Loïc WACQUANT

It is just over ten years since the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu passed away. In that decade, the diffusion and influence of his work around the world has grown exponentially, making him the first and only social scientist of the second twentieth century to join Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber among the classics of social science. This milestone is being marked by the publication of Sur l’État (On the State), Bourdieu’s lecture course at the Collège de France from 1989 to 1992, and by special conferences and dossiers in leading national media in several countries. In this interview, Loïc Wacquant discusses Bourdieu’s intellectual legacy and the increasing significance of his former teacher’s work for contemporary scholarly research and public debate.

Can you tell us how you first encountered Pierre Bourdieu?
Loïc Wacquant: I met Bourdieu at a public lecture he was giving on “Questions of Politics” one grey evening in November 1980 at the École Polytechnique just outside Paris. After the talk, which I found dense and abstruse, the discussion continued informally in the school cafeteria with a group of students until the wee hours of the morning. There, Bourdieu dissected the subterranean connections between politics and society in France on the eve of 1981 elections that led to the victory of Mitterrand with the maestría of a surgeon. It was an illumination, and I immediately thought to myself, ‘If that’s sociology, that’s what I want to do.’ So I took up studies in sociology at the University of Paris in Nanterre and took to skipping class at the École des HEC [France’s top economics school] to attend Bourdieu’s lectures at the Collège de France, where he had just been elected. At the end of those lectures, I would wait him out patiently and then exhaust him with questions. We developed the habit of going back to his home together walking through Paris. It was a fabulous private tutorial for an apprentice sociologist.

What did Bourdieu represent for you then and how did you view him in relation to other luminaries such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida?
Loïc Wacquant: Bourdieu was already famous as the author of Outline of a Theory of Practice (1972), which challenged the mentalist structuralism of Lévi-Strauss with its concern for capturing the ordinary activities of people in concrete situations, but also of Distinction (1979), which refuted the philosophical vision of taste defended by Derrida to reveal that our most intimate preferences are stamped by our position and trajectory in society.

But I did not construe Bourdieu in relation to other major thinkers of the time, first because I did not have any intellectual ambition and also because he was a very approachable, warm, and shy man. I saw him more as the conductor of the journal Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, to which I had subscribed in spite of my great difficulties reading it. Actes is a unique scholarly journal in that it brings its readers into the kitchens of science: it allows one to see the process of production of the sociological object, which is built in rupture with common sense. For a generation of researchers, the best way to learn from Bourdieu was to read the journal he had founded and edited for a quarter of a century. Later, others discovered his thought through the short books of the series “Raisons d’agir” [“Reason to act”] that he launched in 1996.

What adjectives would you use to characterize Bourdieu’s sociology?
Loïc Wacquant: Bourdieu is an encyclopedic sociologist. He published thirty books and nearly four hundred articles that tackle the most diverse topics, from kinship in rural communities to schooling, social class, culture and intellectuals, to science, the law and religion, masculine domination, the economy, the state – and the list goes on. But beneath this bewildering array of empirical objects lies a small number of principles and concepts that give his oeuvre striking unity and coherence.

Bourdieu develops a science of human practice, which feeds a critique of domination in all of its forms: class, ethnic, sexual, national, bureaucratic, etc. This science is anti-dualistic, agonistic and reflexive. Anti-dualistic because it circumvents the antinomies inherited from classical philosophy and sociology, between the
body and the mind, the individual and the collective, the material and the symbolic, and it fuses interpretation (which traces reasons) and explanation (which detects causes) as well as the micro and macro levels of analysis. This sociology is _agnostic_ in that it posits that all social universes, even the most apparently irenic such as the family or art, are the site of multifaceted and interminable struggles. Finally, Bourdieu's sociology departs from others – including those of the founding fathers, Marx, Durkheim and Weber – in that it is _reflexive_; sociologists must imperatively turn the tools of their craft onto themselves and work to control the social determinations that weigh on them as social beings and cultural producers.

**What are the distinctive concepts that form the heart of Bourdieu's sociology?**

_LW:_ For Bourdieu, historical action exists under two forms, incarnate and institutionnalized, sedimented in bodies and concretized in things. On the one side, it _subjectivizes_ itself by being deposited in the depths of individual organisms in the guise of categories of perception and appreciation, bundles of durable dispositions that he calls _habitus_. On the other side, it _objectifies_ itself in the guise of distribution of efficient resources, which Bourdieu captures with the notion of _capital_, and of microcosms endowed with a specific logic of functioning, that Bourdieu calls _fields_ (political, juridical, artistic, etc.).

The agenda of his sociology consists in elucidating the dialectic of history made body and history made thing, the contrapuntal interplay of habitus and field, disposition and position, which takes us to the heart of the mystery of social life. Bourdieu proposes that the mental structures (of habitus) and the social structures (of field) interpellate, respond and correspond to each other because they are linked by a genetic and recursive relationship: society moulds the dispositions, the ways of being, feeling and thinking characteristic of a class of persons; which dispositions in turn guide the actions whereby these same persons mould society.

Add to this the core idea of the plurality and convertibility of species of capital: in contemporary societies, inequalities stem not only from economic capital (wealth, income), but also from cultural capital (school credentials), social capital (effective social ties) and symbolic capital (prestige, recognition). Stir and you have the recipe for a flexible and dynamic agonistic sociology, capable of tracking the material and symbolic struggles through which we produce history.

**What are we to make of Bourdieu's political engagement, especially his interventions after the social unrest of 1995 [when millions of French people took to the streets to protest government plans to roll back the welfare state]?**

_LW:_ In truth, Bourdieu's political “engagement” goes back to his youthful works during the Algerian crisis triggered by the nationalist uprising against continued French rule in 1955-62. The freshly minted graduate of the École normale supérieure converted from philosophy to anthropology; that is, from pure reflection to empirical investigation, to absorb the emotional shock of this horrific war and to deploy a clinical gaze on decolonization, which rocked and eventually toppled the fourth Republic.

Making social science was always for Bourdieu a way to contribute to civic debate. His major books all tackle and reformulate major socio-political issues of the day. This is true of _Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society_ ([1970] 1977), which uncovers the meritocratic myth of the “liberating school”, as it is of _The State Nobility_ ([1989] 1996) which discloses the mechanisms of legitimation of technocratic rule and, of course, of the team field study that led to _The Weight of the World_ ([1993] 1998), published two years before Bourdieu's famous speech to the train strikers protesting public spending cutbacks at the Gare de Lyon in December of 1995.

What changed over time is the manner in which his civic commitment manifested itself. At first, it was entirely sublimated in and through his scientific work. Then it gradually assumed a more discernible form, eventually leading to concrete actions visible to the general public. This is for two reasons. First, Bourdieu changed: he aged, he accumulated scientific authority, and he gained a better grasp of the functioning of political and journalistic universes, and thus a greater capacity to produce effects in them. But the world also changed: in the 1990s, the dictatorship of the market came to directly threaten the collective gains of democratic struggles, and intervening became a matter of social emergency. What remains constant is Bourdieu's consuming passion for research and his devotion to science, which he defended tooth and nail against the encroachment of “magazine philosophy” and the irrationalism of the so-called postmodernists.

**What are the differences between the reception of his work in France and the United States?**

_LW:_ In foreign countries, one reads Bourdieu without political interference and without the distorting prism created by his media image, as a classic author who forged powerful and innovative tools for thinking about contemporary societies and as a major figure of intellectual action extending the lineage of Émile Zola, Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault. In the Paris crab-basket, prejudices die hard and some have continued posthumously to wage the petty academic clan wars that muddled the reception of his work during Bourdieu's lifetime. It's too bad for France…

**In your own research work, what do you take from and do with Bourdieu?**

_LW:_ I extend and revise his teachings on three fronts: the body, the ghetto and the penal state. In _Body and Soul: Ethnographic Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer_ (2004), I
effect a double test of the concept of habitus. First as an empirical object: I disentangle how one assembles the mental schemata, kinetic skills and fleshly desires that, put together, make the competent and appertent prize fighter. Second as a method of investigation: I acquired the pugilistic habitus via a three-year apprenticeship in a boxing gym in the black ghetto of Chicago to pave the way for a carnal sociology that treats the body, not as an obstacle to knowledge, but as a vector of its production.

On the front of ethnic and urban inequalities, my book Urban Outcasts (2008) deploys Bourdieu’s models to show how, by its structure and policies, the state shapes the forms assumed by marginality in the city at century’s turn, leading to the emergence of the ‘hyperghetto’ in the United States and of the ‘anti-ghettos’ of France and Western Europe. Lastly, my research on the global diffusion of the law-and-order themes of ‘zero tolerance’, summed up in Prisons of Poverty (1999, expanded edition 2009), reveals that the return of the prison marks the advent of anew regime for the management of poverty that weds the ‘invisible hand’ of the deregulated labor market with the ‘iron fist’ of an intrusive and hyperactive penal apparatus. Neoliberalism brings about not ‘small government’ but the shift from welfare to workfare on the social policy side and the massive expansion of ‘prisonfare’ on the criminal justice side.

Conversely, what do find to be less useful or relevant in Bourdieu?

LW: The assumption that there exists a close correspondence between one’s objective chances and subjective aspirations is no longer as valid today due to the universalization of secondary schooling and generalized disruption of the strategies of reproduction of working-class households faced with the shrinkage and degradation of labor. The national framework within which Bourdieu built his analyses must be broadened and supplemented by an analysis of transnational phenomena, for which he happens to provide crucial conceptual tools—as attested by the recent development of a strand of international relations theory derived from his work. As with all scientists, we must take the postulates of Bourdieu’s sociology and push them to their breaking point. Bourdieu would be the first to incite us to do so.

His lecture course at the Collège de France from 1989 to 1992 has just been published under the title On the State (Editions du Seuil/Raisons d’agir, 2012). What does this voluminous tome add to Bourdieu’s sociology and to political sociology more generally?

LW: As regards its form, this major posthumous book, the first of a series to come, allows us to see Bourdieu the teacher in action, groping his way toward this ‘cold monster’ decried by Nietzsche that seems so familiar to us that we no longer realize that it has in fact made itself well-nigh invisible. By clarifying why he poses problems the way he does (approaching the state by starting from mundane acts, such as filling out a bureaucratic questionnaire or signing a medical certificate), by pointing to the traps he sidesteps, by revealing his fumbling and errors, his doubts, even his anxiety, Bourdieu invites us into his sociological laboratory and offers us a sociological propedeutics in action.

As regards its contents, Bourdieu reinvigorates the theory of the state by characterizing it as the ‘central bank of symbolic capital’; the agency that monopolizes the legitimate use, not just of physical violence with the police and the army (as proposed a century ago by Max Weber), but also of symbolic violence, that is, capacity to inculate categories and assign identities, in particular through the school system and the law, and thus the power of veridiction of the world. The book retraces the astonishing series of historical inventions through which the ‘house of the king’, founded on the private appropriation and dynastic transmission of powers gradually morphed into the ‘reason of state’, founded on academic credentials and reproduced through bureaucratic means. The state thus emerges as a Janus-faced institution: on one hand, it is the vehicle through which those who construct and control its levers divert the universal for their benefit; and, on the other, it is the possible means to advance the universal and thus to push justice forward.

What would Bourdieu think of the current economic crisis roiling Europe and the threat it poses to its conception of the state as regulator and protector?

LW: With its perspective of the longue durée, Sur l’État provides precious tools to better capture the stakes and import of the political struggles induced by the financial and monetary crash that is shaking the world today. It reminds us that it is states that build markets and, therefore that states can rein them, provided that those who direct them muster the collective political will to do so. Bourdieu’s analysis suggests that the seemingly scientific utterances (such as the assessments of debt rating agencies) in which the established economic order enwraps itself are so many symbolic coup d’états that rest on nothing more than the collective belief in them accorded by those who submit to them (starting with the mainstream media).

Here one can profitably reread the chapter of Bourdieu’s short book Firing Back ([1998] 2000), originally subtitled Statements to fuel the resistance against the neoliberal invasion, in which he slams what he christened ‘Tietmeyer-thought’ (Tietmeyer was then the president of the Bundesbank and the leading apostle of the euro), which has since become ‘Trichet-thought’ and then ‘Draghi-thought’, which presents the dictatorship of finance as ineluctable when it is fundamentally arbitrary and endures only by dint of the voluntary servitude of political leaders.
What do you miss the most since Bourdieu's passing and what are we to retain from him?

LW: Personally, his phone calls at two in the morning in Berkeley, which often started on a note of anxiety and invariably ended with laughter, and which infused me with electric energy. The breakfasts we used to have together in his tiny kitchen, during which everything became intermingled, research work, political discussion, and life advice, all of it lathered in sociology. Although he denies it in Sociology is a Martial Art, the movie that Pierre Carles made about him, Bourdieu never took his sociological lenses off.

But the author of the Logic of Practice ([1980] 1990) is still present and alive among us through the myriad works that his thought stimulates around the planet. Bourdieu is now the name of a collective enterprise of research that cuts across the boundaries between disciplines and between countries to fuel a rigorous social science, critical of the established order and bent on broadening the spectrum of historical possibilities.

Paris, January 2012

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*This interview, conducted with Mark Maguire, Mary Gilmartin and Gavan Titley on the occasion of the publication of Pierre Bourdieu’s new book, On the State (Seuil/Raisons d’agir Editions, 2012), is appearing in multiple languages and countries in 2012.
In December 2010 the chartered flight KER 767-31 departed from Dublin Airport bound for Lagos, Nigeria. Onboard were thirty five ‘failed’ asylum seekers and their dependants, members of the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and a medical team. The aircraft experienced technical difficulties during a stopover in Athens and was forced to return to Ireland. Controversy erupted soon after the flight landed. Several asylum seekers alleged that they received inadequate food and were not permitted to use the toilet facilities while waiting in Athens. Local and national newspapers ran the story, offering the public a brief glimpse into a partially occluded world. Commentators on internet blog-sites formed up along the usual battlelines: those advocating for a more humane and rights-based asylum system faced a barrage of criticism from those who demanded that a hard line be maintained.

The return of KER 767-31 is, however, also illustrative of a more complex set of processes. In addition to the thirty five Irish deportees, the chartered flight contained another sixty ‘failed’ asylum seekers from across Europe. They were issued with deportation orders by nation-states and placed on a private aircraft facilitated by Frontex, the European border control agency. Migration management is no longer about states and their (non-)citizens, as these deportation flights show so clearly. NGO and activist groups across Europe are now tracking the inexorable rise of Frontex, especially in Member States within the Schengen Area (Ireland is not yet a Schengen member). Frontex now has a budget of well over €80 million per annum and has played a leading role in the ‘management’ of the Turkey-Greek border, deploying military Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs), electronic identity verification systems, land and sea surveillance measures, and even accidentally violating Turkish airspace in 2009. In 2011, Frontex launched Joint Operation Hermes in Lampedusa, Italy. Lampedusa is the site of five-star resorts and because of its proximity to North Africa it is also a place where the bodies of ‘failed’ migrants occasionally wash onto the shore.

During the last decade, an important literature has emerged in the critical social sciences on the semi-private and multi-layered world of migration management. Few scholars, however, have made serious efforts to enter into the world of migrants, policymakers and technocrats with the aim of disclosing the highly mediated connections between them. Many have noted the rise of the European migration management apparatus, but the apparatus qua apparatus has thus far received insufficient attention. Gregory Feldman’s The Migration Apparatus: Security, Labour, and Policymaking in the European Union speaks directly to these important issues.

Following Hannah Arendt’s provocation that modern mass society is held together by indirect and non-local human relations, Feldman seeks to understand how the common language of migration management and various forms of expertise have emerged out of the vast and decentralized world of EU policymaking. The book is ethnographically rich, but its true value, like Arendt’s work, is to be found in its provocations. The book is about the migration management apparatus, and it is a serious effort to ethnographically evaluate an apparatus with conceptual tools derived from Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow. Feldman understands the apparatus as a grouping of heterogenous elements deployed to specific targets in a given socio-historical moment. Thus, he brings together a book composed of essays on heterogenous elements of the apparatus that work to control and manage at the level of life itself. But each chapter shows a consistent approach. He is concerned to describe the often-temporary, project-based technocratic workers, the constant drive towards ‘standards’ and EU-wide harmonization, and the linguistic ‘shifters’ that allow policy to cross diverse social domains. Feldman is especially perceptive when he documents the use of high-minded phrases that lend the apparatus its socio-cultural values and virtues – ‘humanitarian approaches to border control’ (p. 16) are announced while investment in unmanned aerial vehicles (surveillance drones) gathers pace.

Chapter 2, ‘Right versus Right’, for example, offers one of the most refreshing discussions of the politics of migration that I have read during the past decade. Feldman dispenses with tired discussions of liberal versus right-wing politics and instead focuses on the shared territory of right-wing and neoliberal policy agendas. And rather than framing right-wing racialization as the hidden logic behind the mask of neo-liberal policy makers, he shows the deep surface of neoliberal management, technocratic administration and humanitarian governing via the apparatus. To illustrate, take the following statement made to Feldman by a high-level policy maker at an international conference:

You don’t get radical, Marxist academics here. You don’t get cultural studies. You don’t get post-modernists here. … We tend to talk a policy and academic language. Migrant stories need to be inserted into the conference. We don’t get the

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Feldman is quick to point to the absence of actual migrants at such events. However, he notes the presence of their disembodied ‘stories’ and data doubles in a stream of events that bring people together to partake in the apparatus, all while enjoying a hand-made chocolates and Kir Royale-soaked version of the good life unavailable to those facing ‘humanitarian approaches to border control’. Neoliberal policy makers are not, of course, opposed to neo-nationalists or the far-right per se, rather they occupy a high ground of practical aims intoned in a suitably humanitarian language.

Chapter 3, ‘Making things Simple’, continues to show the redundancy of traditional left/right political distinctions beginning with a discussion of the normalization of the ‘good migrant’. Feldman shows how the EU’s area of ‘Justice, Freedom and Security’ assembles policy and politics to provide the conditions for the possibility of a certain type of migrant subjectivity. He is also concerned to describe the harmonization of migration terms and the power-knowledge that subsists in information systems such as the Frontex co-sponsored i-MAP, a real-time representation of mostly ‘illegal’ migration routes from Africa to Europe. I have been arguing that the greatest value of Gregory Feldman’s The Migration Apparatus is in its provocations and conceptual tools. His discussion of i-MAP illustrates this perfectly. He calls attention to the high-minded aspirations, the technocratic work involved, and commonsense ways in which the apparatus expands and takes on a solid form. Feldman shows the way to an important project on migration mapping at EU level.

Chapters 4 and 5, which are on ‘Border Control’ and ‘Biometrics’ respectively, are insightful, but a gap opens in the analysis that deserves attention. Feldman notes the quasi-military style of border control operations in ‘Fortress Europe’, but says little about some of the key players, major international arms/technology companies who sell directly into the global border control ‘market’. So too with the chapter on biometrics—the roles of corporations such as SAGEM and Gemalto in the revolution in biometric security are noted (p. 124) but unexplored. This is a weakness. Gemalto, for example, provide ‘solutions’ in markets such as the Middle East, and there is what Foucault would describe as a boomerang effect in the recent secularization of civilian life in Europe. This, among other things, is what Jean and John Comaroff argue in Theory from the South (2011). One might take a local example: one Irish supermarket chain now uses palm scanners for staff time control, a technology developed for sweatshops in South Asia.

If we are to work as ethnographers on the most pressing of social issues, we must attend to apparatuses; we must, following Foucault, attend to tools, tactics and devices that appear mundane but actually carry great weight. Gregory Feldman’s The Migration Apparatus: Security, Labour, and Policymaking in the European Union challenges anthropologists to think in terms of non-local ethnographic encounters with the specific intellectuals of EU policy and security. This is an extraordinary book on tools, tactics and devices filled with conceptual tools and devices, and tactics for ethnography in the present moment.

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Much of the [jailtacht] language is of standard form, but the distinctive Irish of the north is self-confident to the extent that it now writes its own history, with the peculiar acquisition of Irish in prison as a defining moment. (pp. 145-46)

It has been said that language is always political, and that this truism is demonstrated nowhere better than in the case of the Irish language. Those who have followed the slow ‘progress’ of the nearly two-decade long Northern Ireland peace process will be aware that the ‘Irish language issue’ remains one of the main sources of on-going conflict; the Unionist parties continue to resist or ‘just say no’ to pretty much anything that supports the Irish language, and have asserted their own support for so-called ‘Ulster Scottish dialect’ as an explicitly reactionary tactic in what is now referred to as the current ‘culture war’ that has replaced the ‘real’ war that preceded it. This peace-process period has seen other important developments with regard to the Irish language, including the emergence of at least one local ‘dialect’ termed jailtacht. The on-line Urban Dictionary includes a definition with an example:

A form of Irish used in Northern Ireland that has developed from the H-block hunger strikers, who didn’t know or couldn’t remember a lot of the Irish language and reinvented it to the best of their knowledge. It is now widely spoken in Northern Ireland and has been accepted as colloquial. It is a play on the word ‘Gaeltacht’, which is used to describe predominantly Irish-speaking regions in Ireland. “Madadh rua” is the Jailtacht Irish term for fox, as opposed to “madra
Jailic has not faded away but rather remarkably survived and the introduction of improving formal facilities for H-Blocks. So I am pleased to learn that despite the end mainly by word of mouth among the prisoners in the colloquial expression of the language being taught was ‘regular’ or ‘proper’ Irish and not the more colloquial expression of the language being taught mainly by word of mouth among the prisoners in the H-Blocks. So I am pleased to learn that despite the end of the armed national liberation struggle that created it and the introduction of improving formal facilities for ‘proper’ Irish language acquisition in Northern Ireland, Jailic has not faded away but rather remarkably survived as a distinct and increasingly recognised modern dialect of Irish, mainly associated with the Catholic-nationalist working class communities in North and West Belfast.

This book combines excellent historical and ethnographic description with strong semiotic analysis, and includes outstanding black and white and colour illustrations. Between the introduction and conclusion, five chapters are presented on Chronology, Style, Performance, Visual Grammar, and Ideology. Chronology recounts the fascinating history, origins, and evolution of the relationship between the Irish republican prisoners of the ‘long war’ in Northern Ireland and the Irish language, divided into three historic phases, 1972–76 (Internment), 1976–81 (Protest), and 1981–98 (Engagement). Style presents detailed linguistic, grammatical, stylistic, semiotic, and critical discourse analyses of key texts, which show precisely how jailic differs and is used differently from ‘regular’ Irish. Performance shows how people actively choose to use jailic in various contexts as a form of symbolic power and political resistance. Visual Grammar presents linguistic and semiotic analysis of multimedia jailic texts presented in pictorial (e.g. murals) and contextual material (e.g. architecture). Again, the author brings us up to date, for example with reference to the emergence of ‘struggle tourism’. Finally, Ideology employs critical discourse analyses to look at the ‘politicisation’ of the language by both Republicans and, more recently, by Unionists.

This is a fantastic book, which does a great job of introducing readers to the historical background and bringing them up to date with the on-going significant developments with regard to the Irish language in Northern Ireland today. The author is himself a somewhat rare ‘breed’, a mixed-ethnicity son of Derry with a personal and intimate experience of political violence who recounts that he was ‘the subject of at least twenty sectarian attacks by groups or gangs of youths from both sides of the political divide’ and that ‘from an early age the Irish language was a feature of this personalised landscape of political violence’ (pp.11-12).

Finally, my one small qualm is with regard to the author’s choice to employ ‘terrorism discourse’ because the book is not about terrorism but rather violence in an armed national liberation struggle. However, the author does take a critical terrorism studies approach (Jackson, 2009) which simultaneously engages and critiques traditional pro-state ‘terrorism studies’, and states that he intends this study as a ‘uniquely linguistic contribution to an emerging critique of the symbolic terrain in the ‘new’ terror and as a provocative contribution to the study of language as symbolic violence’ (p.7). It is interesting, and disturbing, to note that where the previous generation of politically aware and engaged academics employed the concept of ‘resistance’ in their analysis of political violence, the new generation appears to have bought into the dominant post-9/11/2001 ‘terrorism’ paradigm.

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References:

The 1992-95 Balkan war was a grim reminder of the scope of cruelty and hate, that we are capable of towards each other. Once again, when watching the news or reading a newspaper, we saw images not unlike the ones witnessed by the victims of WW2. Once again, people were tortured, raped and killed because one group saw itself above the other. Once again, the survivors were left among the ruins to somehow continue their life, brutally ruptured by an event beyond their control. There have been numerous publications analysing and describing this conflict, and Sarah E. Wagner’s To Know Where He Lies is one of them; however it manages to rise above the mere historical or factual accounts. It is a comprehensive anthropological work, dealing with ideas about memory, identity and the aftermath of a war, where the broken pieces of one’s existence are put back together with the help of a technology employed in an innovative way.

The author herself points to what is at the core of her book, namely the questions on ‘why people seek out the remains of their loved ones - what it means to them - and how the advent of a DNA-based system of post-mortem identification has helped transform this process of recovery, remembering, and reckoning’ (p. 266). The 1995 massacre in Srebrenica serves as a point of reference in exploring those issues, however Wagner also stresses, that this technology is not the only tool in the search for the missing and that people’s memories, personal accounts, clothes or artefacts, found with the remains, are just as vital.

The first chapter contains a detailed description of the horrific events of 1995. It is very factual but at the same time not devoid of emotions. It seems to set the general tone of the book and the images it evokes stay with the reader throughout, making it perhaps harder to read but at the same time more memorable. This personal tone also seems to bring the reader closer to the people mentioned in book; it makes their stories and experiences come to life, rather then keeping them merely as a backdrop to the theories or ideas presented by the author. It is thus easier to understand why, for example, seeing young people walking on the streets of Tuzla in the spring, can become a painful reminder of a loss of a son. The author also supplies the reader with a note on the pronunciation of Bosnian words and a map of the country with its current borders, almost as if she did not want the English-speaking reader, unaccustomed to the Slavic language, to have an excuse for mispronouncing the names of people and places, and thus perhaps somehow disrespecting them.

Most of the victims of the Srebrenica massacre are men, which means that the survivors are mothers, wives or sisters who now have to somehow continue living without their loved ones. Wagner points to a certain shift in the traditions and customs caused by this tragic event. In the case of a funeral, it was not common for Muslim women to follow the coffin to the cemetery; they would remain at home and let the men do it. However, when most of the men are missing, women have to take on some of their social roles and are now present at the burial. This sense of a broken reality and emptiness is present throughout the book, and we soon realise, that there is no escape from it. A poignant example of it is a description of a woman, Hajra, preparing baklava, ‘a sweet offered to family members and guests visiting homes in the days following namazan’ (p. 5). She makes a large tray of it, as if for the whole family, but there is no one in the house to share it with. She is the only survivor of her immediate family and seems to be living a life suspended between the harsh reality, the tradition and the belief, that her husband and son will return home, and they will once again altogether sit around the table. It is a powerful image and one of the many present in Wagner’s book.

This, as well as a thorough analysis of the connections between loss, memory, personal and social identity, and the possibilities created by the advanced technology, makes the book both an important anthropological work and a highly engaging read.

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Submission of Material
Authors are encouraged to submit items for the IJA. Articles, which may be in English or Irish, should be original and should not be under consideration elsewhere. IJA is a peer-reviewed journal and articles submitted will be assessed for their suitability.

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Articles should be in the region of 4000 words and should include a title, a short abstract of no more than 100 words, and a list of key words. Included also should be the author’s name, contact details for publication, academic affiliation, and a short biographical note. Contributions should be submitted in electronic form, in PC format readable in Word. Receipt of a submission will be acknowledged.

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Notes should be endnotes and should be kept to a minimum.

Bibliographical references in the body of the text should be given in parentheses in standard author-date form: (Lee and Devore 1968: 236). A complete list of references cited, arranged alphabetically by author’s surname, should be typed at the end of the article and adhere to the following style:


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