GENDER, NARRATIVES AND INTERSECTIONALITY: CAN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH CONTRIBUTE TO 'UNDOING GENDER'?

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of narrative methodologies as one approach to exploring issues of gender, education and social justice and particularly insights into 'undoing gender'. Drawing on feminist beliefs in the significance of experiential evidence, the paper examines the possibilities of exploring gender and its multiple intersections in a range of global and policy contexts through the use of personal experience approaches.

The 'storying' of lived experience is examined as a means of challenging dominant discourses which can construct and *other* individuals and groups in relation to many aspects of gender and education. Drawing on intersectionality, as an ambiguous, complex and developing feminist theory, the paper considers ways in which narrative can illuminate often hidden complexities while seeking to avoid simplistic generalisations and essentialisms. The difficulties of using narrative in relation to these aims are explored being mindful of the warnings of feminist writers such as Michele Fine and bel hooks. The paper briefly considers narrative as both methodology and phenomenon, and finally, drawing on critical discourse analysis, discusses the potential of intersectionality and narrative in relation to undoing gender.

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"'Let the circle be unbroken' in the words of the spiritual, so that no one is lost or excluded" (Bateson, 2000: 46)

1 Gender and Research

Introduction

This paper examines the use of narrative methodologies as one approach to exploring issues of gender, education and social justice and particularly insights into "undoing gender". Drawing on feminist beliefs in the significance of experiential evidence, the paper examines the possibilities of exploring gender and its multiple intersections in a range of global and policy contexts through the use of personal experience approaches.

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Abu-Lughod poses a difficult question when she asks whether there could be a (single) feminist methodology and, if so, which of the many possibilities it might be (1990:26). I doubt there would be agreement except for the argument that there is more than one approach to feminist research. This notion of methodological plurality and the complexities involved in methodological choice are echoed in the words of Norman Denzin:

> In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's eye view which guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge. The days of naïve realism and naïve positivism are over (Denzin, 2003: 245-6).

Through the somewhat arrogant notion of *giving voice*, this paper suggests that narrative has something to offer feminist researchers, for as Greene argues, "without articulation, without expression, the perceived world is in some way nullified" (1978: 223). The use of narrative research is growing (Clandinin, 2007), and it is claimed that narrative has the power to influence and change policy (Lyons 2007: 600). However, Pinnegar and Daynes note that, most academic work today is non narrative, and based on "quantitative data and positivist assumptions about cause, effect and proof" (2007:3). In the light of these statements, this article considers whether narrative approaches have anything to offer in relation to the *undoing of gender* as a boundary or limiting factor, a construct of and for power inequity.

Gender continues to be connected with some of the most exclusionary and discriminatory practices in the world, whether this relates to society, home, school or further and higher education. In almost every culture, "being" "male" or "female", however that might be interpreted, is used to "define" people. These definitions inevitably involve inequalities (Deutsch 2007:106). Such inequalities may stem from disparate meanings, processes and power relations, and result in very different outcomes ranging from the continued exclusion of women from predominantly male board rooms of top companies to the murder of girl babies. Discriminatory outcomes reflect the underlying lack of value for what it means to *be female*.

I recently edited a special edition of the journal *Support for Learning* (Cole, 2007a) in which five women academics discussed a range of hidden gender issues within educational contexts. The articles cover diverse subjects such as how the term, parent, masks the very gendered reality of parenting in home-school relations, (Cole, 2007b); the academic invisibility of Black girls against the perceived visible challenge of their male counterparts (Rollock, 2007); the hidden gendered language used by peers, often condoned by staff, which marginalises some girls even within what is regarded as a "successful" institution (Gunter and Thompson, 2007). The contributions by Lavia (2007) and Alur (2007), which examine gender inequity in the

Caribbean and India respectively, illustrate a very different perspective on gender inequality and discrimination and what these can mean for millions of women. Legislation alone cannot ensure gender equality. It should offer considerable support where and when it can be enforced, but, for example, in the UK, despite 34 years of "equality" in pay, women are still paid less than men and are continually discriminated against in the work place (The Guardian Leader, 05 January 2007). In a worrying article in a recent edition of The Guardian (g2 pp.6-11, 01 July 2008), entitled "Now the backlash", Kira Cochrane asks if the 247% rise in rapes (while convictions rest at an all time low); the opening of a new lapdancing club every week in the UK; the threat to abortion legislation; business leaders not wanting to employ women; and the questioning of maternity rights by the founder of Spare Rib amongst other things, are indicative of a "war against women".

What is clear is that gender inequality is still an ongoing issue, on many levels and in many ways, for women in almost every country of the world. That such inequality is different in scale, effect and meaning does not undermine the impact on the collective and individual lives of many millions of girls and women everywhere. Yet many feminists (e.g. Sheldon, 2004; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Thomas, 1999), maintain that gender alone does not marginalise, but that the relevant issues for exploration are the multiple interactions between gender and race, class, religion, faith, disability, poverty, sexuality, age and so on. Peterson, writing about the intersections of gender, race and disability, argues that:

> there is a serious need to examine the experiences of individuals within intersecting oppressions. … doing so will allow a critical examination of how our thoughts and actions may uphold another's subordination. From this perspective the potential for social change lies in understanding the multidimensional nature of oppression (2006: 721).

This interaction is increasingly referred to by feminist writers as 'intersectionality'.

2. Intersectionality

*"Diversity of experience also speaks to the politics of hope" (*French and Swain 2001:394*).*

The term intersectionality was originally used by Crenshaw (1989) to recognise the ways in which the experiences of Black women fell between the different discourses of gender and race. More recently intersectionality has been described as,

> the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis, 2008: 68).

However, there appears to be, as yet, little agreement about what intersectionality is (theory, heuristic device or reading strategy); how it should be conceptualised (as "'axes' of difference" or "dynamic process"); whether it concerns individual experience, theorising or identity; or is a "property of social structures and cultural discourses" (Davis, 2008: 68). It is its "vagueness and open-endedness" which has been perceived as the important factor of its success (Davis, 2008: 69). Indeed today, the concept of intersectionality is recognised as one of the most important feminist contributions to understanding the different experiences of women (McCall, 2005: 1771).

Within this article, there is not the space to consider what intersectionality might be, important though this is. Because it is perceived to be important to feminist research and because of its very openness and ambiguity, I am seeking to open up discussion around the possible use of intersectionality as a theoretical base in conjunction with narrative as a methodological approach, to explore "undoing gender".

According to Davis (2008: 70), " 'Intersectionality' addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely the acknowledgement of differences among women". In so doing, intersectionality brings together two significant aspects of feminist thinking; firstly, the impact of race, class and gender (and other intersections) on women's lives, and how relations of power are produced and transformed through this interaction within women's lives and experiences. Secondly it offers support for the deconstruction of binaries, normalisation theories and homogenizing categories while simultaneously offering a platform which can address the concerns of all women (Davis, 2008:71-72). Davis writes:

It promises an almost universal applicability, useful for understanding and analysing any social practice, any individual or group experience, any structural arrangement, and any cultural configuration. Moreover, it can – by definition – be employed by any (feminist) scholar willing to use her own social location, whatever it may be, as an analytic resource rather than just an identity marker' (ibid).

The last thirty years have seen a growing number of challenges to categorisation by gender, race, class and sexuality from critical feminists (e.g Butler, 1990; hooks, 2000; Reay, 2005). But intersectionality brings together, in a unique way critical feminist theory about the impact of race, class and sexism on gender, and post structural feminist critical methodology seeking to deconstruct categories, providing a collaborative platform for different feminist researchers and theorists (Davis, 2008). It is the ambiguity of intersectionality which Davis maintains is its strength for "with each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light" (2008: 77). As a "good feminist theory" intersectionality alerts us the to the notion that the,

world around us is always more complicated and contradictory than we ever could have anticipated. … It encourages each feminist scholar to engage critically with her own assumptions in the interests of reflexive, critical, and accountable feminist inquiry (Davis, 2008: 79).

I believe, intersectionality as a feminist theory, can offer important support for methodological approaches such as narrative which permit the asking of "new" questions and the exploration of different connections and alternative understandings. Its ambiguity would seem to work well with personal experience approaches within which contradiction and complexity abound, and where the opportunity to ask "one other question" and to explore different and individual connections would seem appropriate.

In my own field of research, the area of inclusion and exclusion in educational contexts with a particular focus on disability, "special educational needs", and gender, I am aware of the dangers of perceiving "disabled" lives through negative, tragedy discourses of "difference". There is a small but growing amount of academic research by disabled women activists (e.g. Morris, 1993a; 1993b; Thomas, 1999; Peterson, 2006), around gender and disability which contradicts these "tragedy" models. Such research is both personal and political, drawing on "lived experience" approaches in

order to illuminate the reality and complexity of experience in contrast with policy rhetoric and professional and dominant medical models of disability and special educational needs (SEN). Often the stories reflect transgression and transformation (both as described by Deutsch, 2007), within a context of immense complexity, equality policy rhetoric and invisible reality. Different stories suggest the multiple ways in which gender, disability and for example race, age, or sexuality might interact. These narratives, drawing on the "personal as political" (David, 2003), also starkly illuminate the ineffectiveness of policy to bring about social and political change to reflect such interactions within issues of gender, education and society (e.g. Pillay, 2007; Rollock, 2007; Peterson, 2006; Reay, 2005, 1998; Sheldon, 2004; David, 2003, Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Kimmel, 2000; Arnot et *al,* 1999; Thomas, 1999; Weiler and Middleton, 1999; David and Woodward, 1998; Maguire, 1996; Morley and Walsh, 1996, 1995; Ross, 1996; Morris, 1993a, 1993b; Ruth and Öberg, 1992; Matthews; 1983).

Thomas asks what kind of knowledge we hope to obtain or give credibility to, when we focus on experience (Thomas, 1999: 150). She notes that in her own area of research, gender has been poorly addressed by medical sociologists as well as by disability studies researchers who:

> note the significance of gender and age factors in relation to the epidemiology of chronic illness (Bury, 1997), but when it comes to exploring the experience of illness and disability its gendered character goes largely unexamined (1999: 151-2).

The issue of "double oppression" (e.g. gender *and* disability) must be avoided, whether this is with regard to disability or any of the intersections and gender. Morris writes:

> We have to find a way of making our experiences visible, sharing them with each other and with non-disabled people, in a way that – while drawing attention to the difficulties in our lives – does not undermine our wish to assert our self-worth (1996: 2).

Other feminist researchers have explored multiple identities within gender and education, for example Bradbury (2007) explores the notion of "dialogic identities" in which historical and social constructions of identity are examined through the voices of women, in relation to their experiences as women, mothers, and primary school

headteachers in the North Midland area of England. Others have considered gender and educational leadership and management (e.g. Coleman, 2002; Blackmore, 1999; Hall, 1996). Pillay, (2007), Bassett, (2005), and Cole, (2004) explore the intersections of women's lives as teachers, professors and mothers, and there is a growing recognition of the experiences of women in further and higher education (e.g., Pillay, 2007; Sagaria, 2007; Leonard 2001; Morely and Walsh, 1995; 1996).

Collins (2000) identifies a need for a methodology which examines the experiences of individuals within these many intersectionalities and argues that, from a developing understanding of the complexity and multidimensional nature of oppression, there could emerge the potential for societal change. If, as Deutsch argues, "gender is an ongoing emergent aspect of social interaction" then in order to bring about societal change:

> it is time to put the spotlight squarely on the social processes that underlie resistance against conventional gender relations and on how successful change in the power dynamics and inequities between men and women can be accomplished. Namely we need to shift from talk about doing gender to illuminating how we can undo gender (Deutsch 2007: 107).

One way of "undoing gender" and turning the spotlight on the social processes could be by exploring the multiple intersections through individual and collective narratives.

3: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative – "a mode of knowledge emerging from action" (Mitchell, 1981, pp.ix-x).

> Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new to us for a variety of reasons. Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research. With this emergence has come intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives and their place in composing our collective affairs (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007: 35-36).

The history of narrative is well charted (see Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and a study of how "the 'academy' has made space for narrative" has also been offered recently (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007: 3). Narrative is now regarded as almost "fashionable" (David, 2003), and "documents of life" (Plummer, 1993) are increasingly being recognised as an important method of analysis in the social sciences (e.g. Lyons, 2007; Clough, 2002; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Erben, 1998; Atkinson, 1997; Booth and Booth, 1996; Goodson, 1992; Witherell and Noddings, 1991; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). There is recognised a growing interest in what Denzin (2003: 243) refers to as "experimental ethnographic texts"; "subversive, resistance narratives, dramatic, epiphanic performances that challenge the status quo" (2003:243-4). Such resistance can come in many forms, e.g. the "sharing of additional stories and continued enquiry into the lives of individuals within intersecting oppressions", or moving beyond "simple binary analysis to portray, as in this case African-American women as multiple other" (Peterson, 2006: 722); or "the offering of stories which can complicate our understandings of intersecting oppressions" (ibid). Indeed, Madison maintains that these subversive narratives can "create … a space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated" (1998: 280).

French and Swain (2006: 383) argue that, in their own research field, disability is experienced through the "structural, environmental and attitudinal barriers that marginalise, limit and shape people's lives". While it can be argued that offering individual experiences may individualise the problem, French and Swain maintain that to deny individual experience marginalises "legitimate concerns and understandings" (ibid.). The use of narrative can help to break down the "culture of silence" which still allows the oppression of groups such as disabled people to continue. French and Swain maintain that it was through using narrative in their own research with disabled people that "the chinks of collective light were born" (2006: 383).

A number of reasons have been suggested for the "remarkable, meteoric rise of narrative inquiry research" over the last thirty years (Lyons, 2007: 600), including, the disappearing individual in sociological theory; a reaction against, the over-determined view of reality brought about by methods that impose order on a messy world; a growing dislike of research which relegates personal experiences below the quest for generalisations; and the excluded voice thesis that has developed primarily

from feminist research and critical race theory (Booth and Booth, 1996: 55; see also, Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Clandinin and Murphy, 2007; Lyons 2007; Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007).

The genre of research approaches covered by the term narrative is broad, covering a range of personal experience methods or "evocative narratives" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739-744). Narrative can be both process and/or phenomenon. As process or method it is the pattern of inquiry for the study; as phenomenon it represents the structured quality of the experience – the story (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994: 416). Narrative researchers assume that the story is "one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience" (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007: 4), and argue that we construct our identities "narratively" (Griffiths, 1995:2), often maintaining that:

> social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life. … and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives (Somers, 1994: 613-614).

The differences and borderlands between narrative and other research approaches such as Deweyan theory or experience, post positivism, Marxism and post-Marxism, critical theory and critical ethnography, and post structuralism are explored elsewhere (see Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007) and will not be considered here. Perhaps the real difference between narrative and other qualitative research is its dialogical, discursive nature where "narrator and researcher achieve mutual understanding or intersubjectivity" (Chin quoted in Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995: 117). Narrative reflects the three way relationship between teller, listener and narrative (see Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Its success lies in the agreement between the teller and listener that "you seem to have captured what I see in it" which implies that the text is "reasonably accurate" and meaningful (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995:27). Researcher and researched are in a relationship from which (it is hoped) both parties will learn and change in the dynamic encounter. This relationship between the researcher and researched is claimed to be one of the strengths of narrative in that it re-presents, in part, the "voice" of the "other" person.

Crisis of re-presentation and "othering"

However, it must not be thought that narrative offers a panacea for feminist researchers. Indeed, from within some of the seeming strengths of the genre emerge serious ethical and representational issues. Telling stories is a political act, one through which writers may seek to emancipate (Clough 2002), but narratives, as well as having the potential to bring about change, can reaffirm existing conceptions and marginalisations and keep in place "existing structures of domination" (hooks, 1991). Goodson warns that stories can "confine" the teller within their own story (1992: 240), thus confirming their apparent marginalisation. It is argued by some critical feminist academics that much qualitative research has "reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the 'other' " and can be a " 'tool of domination' which 'others' " (Fine, 1994: 70). bel hooks issues a chilling warning to researchers about the dangers of "othering":

> I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'Other', to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. Often this speech about 'Other' is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there. This 'we' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. (hooks, 1990:151-152).

Fine, (1994), Denzin, (1989) and Clough (2002) argue that such research *should* be "messy", "designed to rupture the textual laminations within which Others have been sealed by social scientists, to review the complicity of researchers in the construction and distancing of Others, and to identify transgressive possibilities inside qualitative texts" (Fine, 1994: 71).

Questions are also asked relating to "incompleteness, personal bias and selective recall" (Butt et al., 1992: 91), and there are dangers in relation to misinterpreting or misunderstanding the stories, and also the "crisis of representation" (Denzin, 1989), the representation of lives as text (in what Clough refers to as "the confusion of writer, text and subject matter" [2002: 12]). This raises serious questions about representation and how lives can be represented in all their complexity through what must emerge as coherent text. There is also a fundamental

question around "whose" story is being told, the researchers or the researched (or someone else's?), and for what purpose. Hatch and Wisniewski (1995: 123) argue that narrative may be both a problem and a solution in the sense that a poststructuralist approach complicates life history research for it renders interpretations less "authoritative" and such lives are therefore open to multiple interpretations. I will return to this point later. Nor is it enough for researchers to acknowledge their own subjectivity. They still need to be aware of the intersections of emotions, fictions (in the Foucauldian sense) and fantasy and "to work with the multiple constitution of those discourses through which the subject is produced", and be aware of how, "out of the intersection of these, certain research stories get to be told" (Walkerdine et al., 2002: 179).

Critics and proponents alike ask questions about criteria for evaluation of narratives echoing Phillips (1994) question, "will any story do?" How do we know *good* narrative? How do we know this is *good* research? Attention is now being given by narrative writers to criteria for analysis of narrative data and it is being acknowledged just how complex this is (see Clandinin, 2007; Clough, 2002; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995). Indeed, Clough maintains that it is not possible to offer prescription (2002: 8). The importance of theorising narrative in the light of critical questions such as these is evident and is stressed by Hatch and Wisniewski who argue that "applying theoretical frameworks from a variety of perspectives provides ways to represent commonality and uniqueness; operating without them leaves them open to solipsism and the elevation of the idiosyncratic" (1995: 128).

Developing feminist theories such as intersectionality would seem to offer a theoretical perspective relevant to narrative research approaches. Both in spite of and because of the critical questions they raise, I would argue that they are worth examining as a means of accessing and re-presenting lived experience as a counter to dominant and discriminatory discourses and also as a way of disseminating both transgression and transformation. While intersectionality can provide theoretical support for multiple and individual interactions and experiences, narrative approaches are recognised as being characterised by a deep respect for the perceptions of the participants and understandings and meaning-making of lived experience (Van Maanen, 1990). In the final section, I consider how intersectionality and narrative might offer ways into "undoing gender", into breaking into the "culture of silence" and how they might contribute to a "politics of hope".

4. Intersectionality, narrative and "undoing gender"

"Weaving lives in context". Weaving the "wholeness of lives". (Bateson 2000: 11)

Deutsch (2007: 107) maintains that gender is "dynamic and that what is considered appropriate gendered behaviour changes over time". She also argues that "doing gender" maintains gender relations, that it has "become a theory of conformity and gender conventionality" (p.108). How can intersectionality and narrative challenge this gender conformity and conventionality? How can they illuminate and explore experiences of oppression and marginalisation? And how, through developing the link between domination and narration can increased emancipation be achieved? These are immensely difficult and complex questions and I cannot answer them all here. But perhaps I can raise a few for further discussion. I believe research is a political act, and if researchers seek in some way to inform or bring about change in relation to issues of equity and social justice, then the theories they draw on for support, and the research approaches they choose matter.

Fairclough, one of the main proponents of critical discourse analysis, maintains that texts are "dynamic" and argues that we can have "no real understanding of the social effects of discourse unless we look closely at what happens when people talk or write"(2003: 12). Whilst any knowledge we have of what is *there* in any given text is "inevitably limited and partial" it can, arguably, provide a "scientific basis for a critical questioning of social life in moral and political terms, e.g. in terms of social justice and power" (Fairclough, 2003: 15).

Fairclough, argues that these texts "as elements of social events have causal effects- i.e. they bring about changes … in our knowledge …our beliefs and our attitudes, values and so forth" and can even have long term causal effects; "one might for instance argue that prolonged experience of advertising and other commercial texts contributes to shaping people's identities as 'consumers' or their gender 'identities' " (2003: 8). As I noted earlier, experiences are open to multiple interpretations and, therefore, can have different effects on different interpreters. This multiplicity and ambiguity of interpretation opens up the opportunity for possible transgression and transformation. What is said in a text relies on what is unsaid and

part of the analysis is trying to identify "what is assumed" (Fairclough, 2003: 11), for there is "no such thing as an 'objective' analysis of a text" (p.14-15). The researcher is not only concerned with the text as such but also with the "interactive process of meaning-making" (ibid). Narrative can offer texts which are open to different readings, interpretations, while still being faithful to the teller. Critical discourse analysis may offer one way of enabling narratives to illuminate different inequities. Through critical exploration of the many different interconnected elements, it may offer insights into the "cracks" of everyday lived experience, retaining complexity, blurring boundaries and challenging dichotomies, and powerful discourses.

Given that we live in rapidly changing times, it is important that complexity is perceived as relational and that people can *read it* and relate to it in different ways at different times and in different contexts. Bateson's work, around weaving the "wholeness of lives" within their own contexts (2000: 11), is perceived as a major contribution to narrative research and relational aspects of inquiry. In *Composing a Life* (1989), Bateson focuses on the lives of five women researchers and refers to "unfolding stories", "improvisations", and "rethinking achievement". She shows how reflection on the stories of their personal and professional lives makes visible the ways in which the women *composed* their lives in the context in which they happen. However, revisiting the stories (2000: 11), she also notes that such stories allow for different "readings" at different times depending on the changing experiences of the reader as well. It is this notion of "wholeness" which narrative may touch upon.

Highlighting this elusiveness and the complexity of *knowing* the world and ourselves within it, Denzin (1989) draws on the work of Derrida to warn us that there can be no clear "window" into the inner life of any person for such a view is always filtered through many lenses such as context, language, symbols and is always unstable and changing. Yet perhaps narrative offers us some hope. Clandinin and Rosiek cite the work of Anzaldúa, who focused on the intersections of colonisation, patriarchal oppression and racist exclusion, and argue that injustices can emerge and "find their way into narrative inquiries because they are part of people's lives and lived stories" (2007: 59). Even the "institutional terrain" chosen by many narrative researchers "is fraught with power struggles, often gendered, over whose voices are worth listening to" (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007: 59). Such research may be in apparently democratised and "free" contexts; for example, Pillay's work focuses on middle class women academics who have access to childcare and live in a democracy

with strong legal rights and protections. Yet Pillay maintains that it is about the freedoms that have not yet been achieved. "It is about liberating thinking" (2007: 1).

There is, however, a more fundamental issue at stake, which I touched on at the beginning. Lyons (2007: 600), believes that there is "a paradox and a seeming contradiction which has international implications" in relation to narrative. On the one hand is the growth of narrative over the last thirty years and its continuation today; on the other is the "narrowing" of what is perceived as "valid educational research". Certainly in the US, scientifically based research (SBR) is increasingly becoming known as the "gold standard" involving research based on experimental designs and randomized trials (Lyons, 2007). Such research is attracting the funding and, given the international nature of much educational and social research, is having an impact on research in other countries too (ibid.). Lyons asks the question as to what might "be at risk or lost if narrative inquiry were stifled?" (2007: 602). It may be that part of the answer lies in the questions Bruner asks in relation to *why* a narrative turn has emerged in the late twentieth Century: "Was it disenchantment with cut-and-dried, impersonal history, sociology and anthropology, that produced it? Or was it response to the enormous personal suffering and dislocation of the most destructive century in human history?" (2002: 111). While we may be at the beginning of a new millennium, there would seem to be little sign, as yet, that destruction, social injustice and inequity based on gender, race, disability, age, poverty, sexuality etc, on a global scale are coming to an end. The struggle for gender equality seems set to continue and education must be seen as one of the foremost arenas for the struggle. Bringing together the concerns of Lyons in relation to the nature of "privileged" research (SBR), and the reasons Bruner offers for the "narrative turn", it would seem that there is a clear, pressing and continuing need for the use of personal experience methodologies. If such approaches were to be lost, the effect on struggles for gender equality and social justice could be disastrous.

I have found writing this article extremely difficult for it has involved the bringing together of complex, developing and often ambiguous theories, approaches to research and analysis in an attempt to consider what research into issues such as "undoing gender" might be. It is a genuine attempt to raise these issues for further consideration. Returning to Cochrane's article in The Guardian recently (g2 pp.6-11. 01 July 2008), I feel most strongly that we cannot ignore gender inequity anywhere in the world. If we do, we do so at our peril. So if narrative has something to offer such

research into "undoing gender" and all the different intersections, and I believe it has, then it is important that neither narrative nor the voices of women are stifled.

So let the voices and the stories which are heard be those of women, individually and collectively from all over the world, telling it *as it is for them, in their context, and in their time*, in all the complexity, diversity, incompleteness and inequality, for as Pillay claims, "we cannot choose silence" (2007: ix). So let our stories be heard by our own, our daughters' and our granddaughters' generations.

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