Life History Approach

Biographies and psycho-societal Interpretation

Olesen, Henning Salling

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Life history approach: Biographies and psycho-societal interpretation

Henning Salling Olesen[1]

(Roskilde University, Denmark)

ABSTRACT

The article presents a development of biographical research in education and learning research, in which psycho-societal interpretations play a key role. The horizon of the approach is the lifelong subjective engagement in intended as well as unintended learning, in formal education as well as in everyday life. Life histories represent lived lives past, present and anticipated future. As such they are interpretations of individuals' experiences of the way in which societal dynamics take place in the individual body and mind, either by the individual him/herself or by another biographer. The Life History approach was developing from interpreting autobiographical and later certain other forms of language interactive material as moments of life history, i.e. it is basically a hermeneutic approach. Talking about a psycho-societal approach indicates the ambition of attacking the dichotomy of the social and the psychic, both in the interpretation procedure and in some main theoretical understandings of language, body and mind. My article will present the reflections on the use of life history based methodology in learning and education research as a kind of learning story of research work.

Keywords: Life History, Biography, Experience, Psycho-Societal Interpretation, Hermeneutics

1. A PROBLEM-ORIENTED METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

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This article summarizes experiences of a research strategy within adult education and lifelong learning. It focuses on adults' life histories and their subjective experience of them as an empirical and theoretical framework for an understanding of their educational career and the dynamics in their learning processes. It is rooted in the theoretical and empirical research as well as social and political engagement of an interdisciplinary research group at Roskilde University DK. We have since 1970es in many concrete forms been preoccupied with the dependence and impact on learners' social and cultural background of learning processes. Although emerging from quite specific education research questions it soon also involved the wider theoretical issue of the subjective dimensions in societal dynamic. I shall give just a couple of examples.

Firstly, there was a critical reflection on the socio-educational fact that education systems with egalitarian objectives have continued to reproduce class and gender differences - which is a central political issue in social welfare societies – in other more heterogenous societies ethnicity and religion might have been added. Historically it related to a phase of modernisation in which formal education played an increasing role in all aspects of social life: In the access to the labour market and professional careers, in the distribution of wealth and social priviliges – and as a necessary tool to navigate in everyday life. Yet it appeared that in societies which made great effort to expand formal education, to open access to all children and youngsters, and even to some extent provide compensating pathways for adults the result was a general increase in formal education level at the same time as patterns of social class and gender remained (ref Hansen….). In a more or less positivist educational sociology this issue was initially conceptualized as an effect of external barriers that limit certain subjects' optimization of their social situation In the first place this explanation precluded any recognition of a differentiated subjective factor. The following introduction of a concept such as cultural barriers made it quite clear that a dichotomous explanatory model was unproductive. In order to explain individual careers and to understand the complex role of education in simultaneous social change and social reproduction we need not only to understand the differences in individual subjective orientations in a given objective societal environment but also to understand the ambiguities an inner dynamics of the subjects themselves We found the key to overcoming the dichotomy in a socialization theoretical understanding of the formation of subjectivity.

Secondly, we were increasingly involved in adult educational research and development. Some activities related to adult education with strong political engagement in trade unions and social movements. And some adult education and training was narrowly connected with labour market and work activities. Both types of adult learning could be seen as successful on the backdrop that substantial part of adults do not participate in any type of educational activities, and have strong resistance against doing so.

For adults living a "normal" life and participating voluntarily in education, teaching practices must obviously respond to their experiential background and everyday social life. But there were equally obviously striking differences in adult education in how to understand this experiential background. Learning in cultural or political organisations are defined by the activity itself, and may not at all be distinguished as learning – the learning is driven by the learners' interest in the cause of the activity, contributing to the formation of collective experience - the learners are considered as political or cultural subjects. Opposite, most vocational education involves a more school like organisation with a prescribed curriculum defined by the needs in relation to a specific work process, and the learning taking place contributes to their competence and employability in relation to this work process - learners are seen as a labour force with only instrumental

learning interests. But also this type of adult learning seems to engage adult learners, and paradoxically often some of those who seem most sceptic to education.

The challenge of adult education as a scientific reflection was therefore to understand how adult learning interests (and frequently also the lack of them) in an everyday life context could be conceptualized as genuine and relevant subjective articulations, informed by their (different) social situations. It became obvious that the technical question about how teaching could engage the life experiences of adult learners could only be handled by examining whether and how (adult) education could contribute to learners' experiential processes (Salling Olesen, 1989).

These (and other) issues came together in an theoretical effort to develop a specific concept of experience which understands connections between objective life courses (marked as they are by biology and society), the culture- and everyday life-oriented subjective interpretations of these, and the importance of these experiences for both educational choice and career and learning processes as individual life history-based interactions with societal culture in the broadest sense. Against this background, we viewed empirical research on individual life histories as a way to develop a new, interdisciplinary theory of education.

However, little funding was available for critical empirical social science in the waste land between conservative academia and theory-sceptical practitioners in community education, business, and also trade unions. Not until the 1980s did some opportunities arise in connection with the development and evaluation of curricula and teaching related to work and the labour market, and also in the trade union representative training. IN a number of projects, we succeeded in convincing external partners (government agencies, trade unions, major companies) that a qualitative study focused on participants' life histories and lifeworlds was an important element of the project design, often combined with more traditional methods such as observations, questionnaires, etc. Our argument was simple: adults' learning processes are primarily linked to their life experiences and general life situation. Therefore, a valid understanding of the driving forces in educational activity and the effects of education would necessitate a study of learning processes and the subjective meaning of teaching in the context of learners' life histories. Then followed many and varied studies of people who on their own initiative, encouraged by their institution or downwright forced by their social situation participated in learning and education in the light of crises and upheavals, especially in their work and career (Salling Olesen, 1994; Salling Olesen, 1996; Weber, 1995; Weber, 2010a; Weber, 2007; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2002; Dybbroe, 2002; Dybbroe, 2012; Larsen et al., 1998)

The specific methodology chosen for the various projects arose as a result of a political-practical dialogue on the pertinence of allowing learners to narrate, giving their own rationale for a study of their educational participation and how their learning processes were embedded in their life historical process in relation to other factors. The common starting point was solidarity with the learners, and the perception that the researchers should help to articulate their perspective. In practice, the choice of method in each project was obviously determined by the experience and interests of the particular researchers. Like many others in critical social research, we had used semi-structured qualitative interviews. But there was a real need (around 1990) to professionalize the research methodology and clarify the epistemological status of interviews. Our starting point, especially in the dialogue with external stakeholders, was to use the plausibility of life histories in a quasi-explanatory model in which individuals' experience of their past and present objective life situations was an explanatory factor of their later life courses, including actual education, access to education (motivation,

interests, perspectives) and actual learning processes, using life stories as a source of knowledge of objective life circumstances, sometimes together with other data (responses to questionnaires, observations of teaching and statistical and other background information). All the information and also narrative accounts could in this way be understood as knowledge about a subjective factor that could help to explain future subjective actions, including participation in education and the learning from it. Antikainen (Antikainen, 1998) has formulated the theoretical concept of learning identity to represent this subjective experience that has a (causal) impact on the educational participation and learning interest of adults. Different multi-factor models have combined psychological and social factors in understanding participation and this type of theorizing is still in development. Antikainen's concept of learning identity has re-emerged in our research when we have returned to prioritize issues of participation in education. A PhD project on the learning motivation of unskilled workers was based on the concept using life history interviews, and discussing the relationship between the different types of interpretation (Kondrup, 2011; Kondrup, 2013). In the life history project we focused on interpreting the individual experience of a lived life under certain societal conditions, assuming that it remained an active driver in and horizon for the individual's present agency and learning processes, and itself still in ongoing formation. Especially in studies of professional learning it has appeared productive in understanding the subjective identity processes involved in professional careers. So we saw the interpretation of the individual story as a way of understanding not only actual behaviour but also the content and dynamics of learning processes, and it determined our priority of qualitative hermeneutic methods. The specific point in this priority has become clearer in retrospect, in relation to different multi-factor models (Rubenson & Salling Olesen, 2007). In some ongoing projects about untraditional pathways to professional education I hope we shall be able to work out the relation between experience as a state and experience as a process.

The concept of experience which originally structured our research questions (Salling Olesen, 1985; Salling Olesen, 1989) was taken from the Frankfurt School and its Marxist and psychodynamic theoretical tradition. In (Danish) adult educational practice it was linked to a notion of collective political learning processes, inspired by Negt, (Negt, 1964; Negt, 2001; Negt & Kluge, 1972) , which transcended the immediate individual experience. In Negt's version , cllective learning processes (exemplarisches Lernen) were by definition only possible through communication of individual subjective experience of common societal conditions in a historical dialectic between everyday life experience and a mediated historical/theoretical knowledge. Our understanding of the participants' experiences combined everyday practical plausibility with a conceptual coordination of the relationship between learning processes, everyday life, culture and the formation of societal institutions – informed by phenomenological sociology and Berger & Luckmann's understanding of how specific individual actions contribute to the overall cultural productivity of society (scientifically, politically and practically,(Salling Olesen, 1985; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It connects the subjective entirety of learning processes, including individual and collective meaning ascription of their content, with prior socialization processes and the objective life circumstances which provide their social and cultural framework and ascribes dynamics and a social transformational meaning to them.

In order to substantiate this concept of experience, we viewed empirical analyses of specific individual experiences as mediations of non-concurrent but interrelated dynamics: on the one hand, individual inner psychic dynamics and their importance in identity processes, and on the other, contradictions and historical conflicts in various levels of societal formation that both structure the content of learning processes and provide framework

conditions for them. This meant a dialectical understanding of relationships between individual and societal factors through the study of concrete subjective processes. With support from the Danish Research Council we organized the life history project (Salling Olesen, 1996), designed as a theoretical and methodological umbrella for various empirical projects with a wide range of contexts and outputs, often on a broader basis than the purely pedagogical or educational. Apart from qualifying these projects, including PhDs, we aimed to use this diversity of research as a lever for the theoretical and methodological development of research into education and learning as empirical critical social science (Salling Olesen, 2006)

The orientation on learners rather than teaching allowed for a wide variety of inspirational influences from neighbouring disciplines dealing with the individual as a subject in a social context: cultural research, biographical research and (psychodynamic) socialization research - besides gender studies and Marxist social research. We sought theoretical models and concepts that went far beyond education and learning research and methodological experiences to be used in data production and processing.

In the given situation, we needed a manageable and obviously practical methodology, but which also placed educational participation and its learning processes in a scientifically relevant context. We found these resources in extensive empirical biographical research. A lengthy visiting professorship of Peter Alheit who played a key role in educational biographical research in Europe (Alheit, 1994b; Alheit, 1994a; Alheit & Dausien, 2002) had decisive influence. We also drew inspiration from sociological biographical research, including active involvement in the research committee "Biography and Society" of the International Sociological Association (Rosenthal, 1995).

Such inspirations have enhanced the quality of our empirical research, especially at the methodological level (sampling, interviewing techniques, transcription, coding). They have also stimulated our work on more general methodological issues. This was an exciting challenge for a research environment previously mainly based on inspiration from critical theory, and thereby Marxism and psychoanalysis. The organization of the life history project enabled a more principled and critical discussion of the methodologies and the development of theoretical problems in an understanding of subjective dimensions of societal processes through empirical data analysis, at the same time as the research horizon was gradually redefined by the concept of lifelong learning, comprising learning processes in many specific situations, which could be both educational situations and everyday life situations such as work processes

2. Key Concepts and Theoretical Traditions

Biographical and Life History research is a very diverse stock of research and a number of different and divergent research inspirations. I shall point out some of the research perspectives that seem important for education and lifelong learning research, in terms of conceptual framework, the methodology underpinning the research and the strategic and technical development of research.

The concept of biography and the concept of life history have been chosen here to signify an approach to our research field, adult education and learning, which is in itself multiple and only vaguely delimited. Although these concepts are often used in a broad and general manner, the terminology does give some signal of the research tradition. They have both placed the individual learner or participant in education centre stage, and they

underpin the general turn from a focus on educational intention and teaching to a focus on understanding learning and education from his or her perspective. But in a quite different way, which actually covers quite different epistemological and practical perspectives.

Neither of the two concepts biography or life history would form a unifying principle, and more complicated: In several versions each of the two key concepts tends to subordinate the other one. I prefer to talk about approach instead of a method or a theory because we talk about a broad stream of research traditions to which some belong mainly by their application of specific date collection methods, whereas others share a theoretical object but are quite different in their concrete method.

"Biography" has been the most continuously shared concept, very often connected with a direct use of autobiographies or biographies as the empirical material of this research. The continuity is, however, deceptive, as it refers to quite different current practice. In some traditions the research is focussing on the individual's story as a source of knowledge. In this context biography and life history research has generally assumed the function of alternative knowledge or perspective, giving voice to specific experiences vis a vis dominant cultural, political or institutional ideas. This goes from oral history traditions, where the focus is on the local or individual version of history, and also the many forms of heroic biographies where particular individuals or groups of individuals are interesting in themselves, to biographical sociology, which also treats biographies as sources of knowledge in the sense of realism, from "the polish peasant" (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927) to Daniel Bertaux's sociological studies into class and occupations (Bertaux, 1981; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). Some of this research has developed as a very local and specific attention to a particular group of people in a specific context - most often asking them to tell their own story, but sometimes reconstructing their stories on the basis of interviews and/or other sources of information about their life as it appears to the learners themselves. In this "realist" tradition biographies tell us about the social reality of (potential) learners.

However, the epistemology of biographical research in education have been more interested in the narration or the active construction of the subject itself. They are generally developed on the basis of symbolic interactionism first developed by G.H. Mead and others), and draw a basic line of on to current social constructionism. "Biography" in the cognitive analysis of narratives as developed by Fritz Schütze (Schütze, 1984), and furthermore by Alheit, can be seen as a narrative (re)construction of the action schemes in the individual lived life. This approach combining structural analysis of narratives with interactionism is also recognizable as a strong sub-stream in sociological research (Rosenthal, 1995). Other developments see biography as a specific representation of individual experiences, or of cultural orientations, based on the assumption that the very narrative act is the most direct or the most interesting representation of the learner subject. However, one may also emphasize other aspects than the narrative's structural similarity to the agency of everyday life. In our first life history studies, we conducted thematic, semi-structured interviews on concrete life histories, in relation to e.g. experiences of education, gender socialization, work experience, work identity and future prospects. The themes were theoretically justified expectations of how structural conditions could have a differentiated impact on the interviewees' life histories, but the analyses were also marked by a very open attitude to the empirical material. If the biography is seen neither as a source of lived life, nor as a proxy, it will be clear that, although the same linguistic interface is involved, the narrator is subjectively formulating experience of this lived life - and possibly also trying to "talk around" certain aspects of it. The gestalt character of narration draws the telling close to subjective impressions of the narrative present, including aspects of

emotions, mood and sensory perception, which provide experience of the life history that would not be reflected in a more logical argumentative discourse. In our early projects inspired by biographical research we sought to understand whether and how education gives them opportunities for self-definition and autonomous expression (Larsen, 1992; Salling Olesen, 1994). Precisely at a time of disruption, where women only with difficulty and against obvious odds define their lives as their own, a biographical approach may be particularly relevant because it shows "solidarity" with their effort to gain relative autonomy as wage earners. But we have also seen that unemployed people, subject to obvious structural constraints, produce narratives about their struggle to secure a position in certain segments of the labour market which also include ideas of real self-determination in (working) life and can fuel alternative life plans that are quite beyond the intended qualificational perspective. The narratives as a whole were interpreted as an expression of the individual perception of a "destiny" in society, where specific work experience, class and gender played key roles. Autobiographical interviews represent interviewees' interpretations of their life histories as they wish to portray them at the moment of narrating.

Life History is a notion not less ambiguous than biography. When research defines itself as "biographical" it may, depending on different epistemologies, refer to the actual "reality" of lived life or to the subjective biographical account of it. "Life history" may similarly be used interchangeable with "life course" or with "life story" to signify this real, objective series of events, or the relatively unproblematic account of them. However, when I speak of "life history approach" this key concept refers to the complex of a subjective life experience and the individual life(-ves) it is based in, seeing the individual life course as the relevant context for understanding the individual subjective experience, and understanding individual lives as intrinsically societal. It is basically a hermeneutic notion. Within this conceptual framework "biography" is used in its more literal meaning as a notion of the specific form of text in which somebody describes a life, and autobiography describing one's own life, subordinated under the concept of life history (Salling Olesen, 1996; Salling Olesen, 2010; Salling Olesen, 2004; Weber 1998). This way of using the concept biography shares with the former version of biographical research - the "realist" one - the interest in the particular historical events and social realities, and with the second - the "constructivist" one - the idea that biography is an interpretation in which the subjective significance can be expressed by the protagonist himself or by others. Neither the relevant sources of empirical evidence nor the final interpretation are delimited with the specific individual. Biography is seen as a specific format of describing one's own life experience (autobiography) or the lives of others, but this format ("construction") is just one possible way of telling it, and must be read as a subjective expression and representation of a life experience seen from a specific time and place. On a practical methodological level this means that biographical accounts are just seen as "texts" which have specific qualities. In my own research group a multitude of data formats have been used. Beside individual biographical interviews different forms of thematic group discussions and focus group interviews have been useful in situations where the research was related to shared significant experiences of a group of people (Weber, 2010b; Weber, 2010a; Dybbroe, 2012), and also variations of ethnographic field study, texts in the form of video-recorded practices etc (Liveng, 2010).

In such approaches the concept of life history focuses on the subjective appropriation of living conditions, with particular emphasis on significant conflicts and transformations. They have an explicit epistemological interest in understanding the inseparable nature of subjective and societal experience, thus exposing not only the societal preconditioning of subjectivity but also the complex dynamics of human being, individually and

collectively influencing societal development. They mostly draw on psycho-societal research traditions, which comprise the understanding of sub- and preconscious levels of consciousness, individually and collectively, in life histories and in everyday lives. The life history notion points to the understanding of the societal formation of subjectivity in the individual life, and the interplay between this historical subject and social contexts in everyday life (Salling Olesen, 2007b; Salling Olesen, 2007a; Salling Olesen, 2010).

Other uses of Life History have developed in a more or less critical dialogue with sociological research on life courses in terms of longitudinal studies of populations situated in and moving across social spaces of families, educational settings, work life, etc., more or less correlated with background variables like social class, ethnicity, gender and cohort/generation. This use of life history, which is more "realistic", combine and triangulate with qualitative studies with a view to expose the interplay between structural preconditions and subjective experience in the formation of traditional as well as late- or post-modern biographies. The different meanings of the key concepts and the different emphasis on them may appear crude but they both trace the epistemological interests in different approaches and also yield a clue to how the different research perspectives are handled in research practice.

On the backdrop of the different research perspectives and the different paradigmatic inspirations we think that the challenge is to define in which ways biography and life history research can contribute to the development of (adult) education and learning as a research domain - in terms of topics, theorizing and methodology. The shared idea of focussing the attention of education research on the learners is decisive. People are always interesting in themselves in their concrete multitude. For our research it is the understanding of them as learning subjects in their respective societal and cultural context which is interesting. Biography and life history has potential to enrich this understanding. By understanding specific cultures and practices from inside, from the subjective outlook of their inhabitants and agents it will provide an empirical base for theorising subjectivity and learning in a comprehensive way, also enabling a better understanding of the interplay of learning inside and outside of formal education and training. We also hope to move learning theory beyond the traditional dichotomies of social versus individual or societal versus subjective The general attention to language, which has influenced social sciences including psychology in the last couple of decades, has wiped out previous clear differences between social sciences dealing with institutions and the social activity of human beings, and cultural sciences dealing with their symbolic articulations in language use and artefacts (Habermas, 1988). It also opens new ways of theorizing subjectivity.

Concepts of subjectivity and identity may be defined primarily in terms of conscious meaning making. Focussing on the very telling, emphasizing the narrative structure of remembering, implies a theoretical idea that narrativity provides a more comprehensive account of the subjective logic in human agency and most often that the narration is in itself an identity production (narrative identity). But also the analysis of cognitive structures, which seems to assume a homological relation between narration and real life agency can be seen as a way of identifying the subject with it's imagined (in cognitive structures) possible agency and social positions. Both positions assign the conscious self regulatory meaning making the status of subjectivity. They have some epistemological overlap with concepts of discourse, and might include also positions where the script of this meaning making is seen as entirely societally determined - hence they may be called constructivist in the contemporary Anglophone terminology - but this is in a way not important here, because they see the very capacity to narrate as a constitutive quality of subjectivity. In practical terms there is a different emphasis in the

orientation on the concrete agency of telling and "gestalting" (making meaning by imagining a concrete whole), or on the identification of basic patterns in agency.

The linguistic turn, while helping us out of naïve realism and in this way allowing an understanding of the subjective moment in societal reality – as well as in the epistemic subject also raises some difficulties in terms of a reductive understanding of the relation between language and embodied experience, and the relation between language and societal reality (as can be seen in the increasing discussion of the linguistic turn). This is a quite important aspect in relation to learning and the possibility to theorize learning in the context of the biography/Life History. Marxist social theory and psychoanalysis, as conveyed by the tradition of critical theory, were the general frames of reference for our work. Both involved a theoretical premise of non-transparency, meaning that reality is not entirely transparent for either the actor or the observer. In positions inspired by Frankfurt-school Critical theory it is an important presumption to understand society as a contradictory and non-transparent totality of relations, which are included in the life experience of any individual. But this is in a way also an empirical question provided we see subjects as constituted by interaction in a specific societal context: Societal relations and conflicts will appear in interpretation of subjective material. Identities can be conceptualized as a mediating level of the social meaning making in relation to available life conditions and cultural scripts, and subject to ongoing re-configurations, i.e. learning is also always reconfiguration of identity(Salling Olesen, 2001; Salling Olesen, 2007a) . In this cultural analysis the classical concept of unconscious is redefined as societally produced rather than drive related, and hence a semantic realm. Subjectivity may then be conceptualized as embracing conscious (linguistic) as well as pre- and unconscious (non-linguistic) dimensions of the life experience of the individual socialisation. The societal production (or construction) of subjects can be seen as a comprehensive process of experiencing the world and building conscious as well as unconscious, defensive dynamics to deal with it, and the relations between the sensual experience and the possible meaning making can be seen as an interactive relation, regulated by societal as well as by embodied but un- or preconscious dynamics.

Against this background, we reached an understanding of a looser coupling between data production and analysis/interpretation. But as long as the requirements of a hermeneutic procedure are met, the objectified data may be transcriptions of various kinds of interviews or interactions and also field notes, audio and video recordings, etc. This does not imply irrelevance of the data production method or the characteristics of the data. On the contrary, reflections on aspects of data production form part of the interpretation process, and this then becomes a crucial link between the concrete analysis and the research question. In the next section I shall go deeper into the development of this approach, which we first named in-depth hermeneutics, and then a psycho-societal approach after the interpretation procedure applied.

3. THE SOCIALITY OF SUBJECTIVITY

The aim of the life history project was to establish an understanding of learning processes and education from a subjective perspective. Empirical research of concrete subjective expressions - including biographical narratives - was intended to elucidate the experiences of specific people of lived life and its sociality. Oskar Negt's reformulation of the basis of political learning processes (1964) was the first major attempt at a

connection between the subjective endeavours of everyday life and non-structuralist Marxism. Until then, subjective factors appeared to be reduced to either false consciousness or class consciousness, which in a global context were colonized by the Leninist political understanding of Soviet communism or by various elitist avant-garde theories. In the neo-Marxist debate in Western Europe, which included the Frankfurt School, the revival of Marx's analysis of capital opened up a new recognition of subjectivity, so that at least criticism of the dominance of exchange value and the commodity form could actively change society. In the education economy there arose a rudimentary understanding of the significance of the human factor in system change, but mostly only as an analysis of contradictions in the capitalist system. Parts of the new left (e.g. via Marcuse) were also inspired by Freudo-Marxist thinking, which had otherwise been somewhat marginalized in a form of drive-based essentialism in the 1930s (Reich). But most of these theoretical developments were in fact still very abstract "openings" of particular importance for the general critique of capitalism - Frankfurt School critical theory was for example generally seen as "pessimistic" because it correctly identified the pervasive effects of the capitalist political economy on all levels of cultural and social life.

Since the life history project distinguished between biographical life history and the narrator as a situated subject, it became clear that the object of analysis was the subjective act where the subject in a given situation (usually specified by research) interprets lived life and its circumstances, and more or less consciously envisions his future life. We must try to understand the individual subject's relationship with himself and the world as a path to understanding subjectivity as an aspect of sociality in a broader sense. We were not primarily interested in the individual, but saw him/her as exemplary, as a specific person who could variously enhance our understanding of how subjective processes can emerge.

We were therefore especially interested in the contradictions, the "breaks" and "gaps", which appeared in some of the biographical narratives, as pointed out by both analysts (see Schütze, 1984) and critics (Nielsen, 2005) of narrative structural analysis. They are particularly interesting in potentially enabling an entry point to an analysis of how both recognized and unrecognized circumstances and experiences are involved in the processing of conflicts and constraints and are attributed new meaning. One can first look for signs of the defence mechanisms that are inevitably embedded in a narrative self-representation. The story can in itself be a form of rationalization to provide a coherent and reasoned view of one's life. But the task of narration, including requirements for concretisation and completion, will naturally also involve topics and memories already surrounded by defensive reactions such as repression or rationalization, or a need may arise to "repair" elements of the story during narration. They may appear as flaws in logic or narrative, contradictions, obvious omissions, breaks in the story line, changing evaluations of people and relationships, etc. But they can also be expressed by directly opposing inner emotions. Apart from helping to reconstruct objective elements and enhancing our understanding of how the narrator interprets them, they may also sometimes be perceived as expressions of ambivalence, i.e. emotional ambiguity regarding some aspects of the narrative or the basic self-representation itself. Ambivalences are particularly interesting subjective expressions for two reasons (Becker-Schmidt, 1982; Weber 1995). Firstly, they could represent cultural and societal contradictions of interest in understanding the relationship of the individual narrative to a broader context. Secondly, our fundamental research interest lay in learning, especially the learning processes of everyday life, as mentioned in the introductory comments on educational research issues. Learning processes involve shifts of consciousness and discontinuities on many

levels, and both logical ruptures and emotional ambivalences in the autobiographical narrative can therefore indicate learning processes or provide the potential for them.

Our methodological approach in the life history project was (deep) hermeneutic interpretation, inspired by a method based on social psychology which Leithäuser et al. used in research into working life and everyday life (Leithäuser & Volmerg, 1988). Here too we adopted a proven empirical method that could plausibly be justified in social intervention projects (Salling Olesen & Weber, 2002), albeit with a quite different theoretical basis from biographical research. It is primarily a procedure for textual interpretation, mostly generated through transcription of themed group discussions (a cross between a focus group interview and a social psychology experiment). The group discussion is stimulated by a chosen theme the researchers expect to be of vital importance to the participants. Group discussions establish group dynamics that may be assumed to include elements of unconscious interaction involving participants in relationships to each other and perhaps to a particular theme. The interpretation is not aimed at individual life historical experiences but at understanding the indications of subjective experience activated by the theme in the social interaction. This is also fundamentally an example of hermeneutic interpretational practice, and the aim is to understand interaction and meaning in a broader societal context through analysis of the psychodynamic levels of communication. This psychoanalytically inspired interpretational practice was originally developed as cultural analysis, with e.g. works of art as its primary empirical object. Leithäuser and colleagues applied it thus first to working life, and its use was later expanded to a variety of material that objectifies social interaction in everyday life situations and organizations in the form of texts in the broadest sense (Leithäuser, 2012) . This was further developed by the International Research Group for PsychoSocietal Analysis (Salling Olesen, 2012) which included German, Danish and British researchers.

The methodology is based on the psychoanalytic recognition that subjective meaning is rooted in life historical memories that are scenic wholes. Cognition and emotion in a present situation activate memories of similar past situations, and initiate a process of cognitive and emotional differentiation. In a social interpretation, one can thus achieve a more comprehensive understanding of subjective aspects of this situation by trying to understand the scenic recollections it might activate for the people involved. The first point in this scenic understanding is to interpret subjective meaning and especially conflicts, by attending to emotional and relational aspects of communication which require a situated attention and imagination. But it is also important to understand how the whole of a societal context has influenced subjective experience and forms the context for conscious as well as unconscious imagination of a future. Within the theoretical framework it would be more appropriate to talk about a wider (in a societal context) rather than a deeper understanding of the meaning under study than what is normally understood in hermeneutic interpretation. It counts on levels of meaning which may not be represented, or not adequately represented, in the socialized language, but nevertheless are embodied and subjectively significant. In brief: All the marginal(ized) meanings.

The main theoretical originator of the methodology, Alfred Lorenzer, called his method in-depth or deep hermeneutics (Lorenzer, 1986) to indicate that the method is hermeneutic but also goes beyond an understanding of the immediate social surface. The depth metaphor is problematic since it connotes certain stereotypical understandings of psychoanalysis as an objectification that allows the analysis to "uncover" deep-lying "causes" in the psyche. This stereotype is fed by the original Freudian theory of drives but is far removed from the interactional understandings of psychodynamics of all the researchers involved. Conversely "psycho-

societal analysis" points out that its mandate is to broaden its perspective in both psychodynamic and societal directions.

It is primarily Lorenzer's theory of socialization and language acquisition that provides a theoretical basis for this type of interpretation. Lorenzer's socialization theory is based on the material, social and bodily interaction experiences of early childhood, and its particular feature is the symbolization of these life experiences through language acquisition. In connection with Wittgenstein's language-game theory, he sees socialization as an entry into the linguistic communities that establish an attachment between the individual, situated and sensory experiences and a socially defined semantics (symbolization). This originally interested him because he saw disturbance and discontinuity in this process as a key to the understanding of various mental disorders. But it gradually became a complete socialization theory, providing an understanding of how the total interactional experience is translated into pre-verbal interaction forms and then becomes part of symbolization, enabling the individual psyche to include both conscious and unconscious dimensions and be in lifelong development and transformation. It is not possible here to present further details, which may be found in a special issue of Forum: Qualitative Social Research (2012/3).

In order to reach this form of scenic understanding the psycho-societal approach takes advantage of the researcher's subjective relationship to the field being researched. The point here is that imagination is scenic in its format: it inter-relates all informative, sensory and situated impressions in holistic images. The strength of this theoretical background is that it offers a material explanation of how unconscious subjective dynamics in everyday situations are based on life experiences (social interaction). It thus becomes more readily comprehensible that the interpretation of linguistic material can provide access to meanings that are not explicitly formulated in language but must be interpreted by the researcher's imagination. In order to achieve this kind of scenic understanding, the approach uses the researcher's (interpreter's) subjective relationship to the field under study. Psycho-societal interpretation uses the experience of psychoanalysis of communication between interpreter and interpreted text that is socially produced but unconscious. With reference to the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference, one obtains a theoretical understanding of the fundamental methodological question of the interpreter's involvement in the interpretation, which is reflected in any hermeneutical method. In practical terms, the researcher's imagination is supported in the analysis of social interaction through interpretation groups and similar social interactions, which both encourage a variety of conceptions and also represent a kind of first step in a communicative validation.

The assumption that the researcher's conscious and unconscious prior experiences are resources in interpretation, and not "disruptive elements", touches on a principled discussion we have often met in the discussion of biographical research. It concerns the relationship between the researcher's pre-understanding/prior knowledge and his/her interpretation of the interview subject's knowledge of and meaning ascription to some of the same elements of the narrative. The researcher's prior theoretical or empirical knowledge of objective social contexts and psychodynamics, such as defensive reactions and hence the potential distortion of life history by the biographical perspective, is used in this strategy as a store of insight or an analyst's prerequisite for interpretation. This may be a particularly crucial point, since biographical research is based on respect for the interviewee, but this in reality applies to all qualitative research which aims to respect the autonomy of the research field. The delicate point, where the interpretation becomes "deep hermeneutical", is where the researcher has an critical attitude to the interviewee's stated interpretation of his/her life, and

attempts to understand possible unconscious dynamics or to analyse it as pragmatic consciousness in connection with a specific societal practice and position (Leithäuser & Volmerg, 1988; see Habermas' argument in Habermas & Apel, 1977). The critical aspect of the interpretation will then be to open up for the suppressed or latent features of this articulation - but still with the intention of understanding the subjective meanings (better).

The theoretical basis for this is on the one hand the analysis of how fundamental social structures appear systematically distorted in the immediate social practice and to the immediate experience. This is most fundamentally attributed to Marx's concepts of socially necessary ideological consciousness, and in the critical theory tradition to the permeation of exchange value and reification into social relations and forms of everyday practices. On the other hand, most relevant is the psychodynamic theory of the unconscious and the understanding of the psychodynamic defence mechanisms' distortion of communication and individual consciousness. Here too there is a "socially necessary distortion" insofar as defence mechanisms are necessary mediations of emotional aspects of practical lived life. In both of these bases lies a theoretical justification for a materially produced intransparency. The intention is thus by no means that the researcher must "see through" the distortions or reveal other causalities or explanations of the life course in the biography. They are rather to be used to enrich the understanding of the subjective expressions with an understanding of how they handle conditions of reality and their latent possibilities if this handling was altered. No more than this; the rest is up to the interpreted subjects. But this fundamental consideration should suggest why the critical interpretation is supplemented with an interpretation with space for learning processes and life historical opportunities.

4. LIFE HISTORY, LEARNING PROCESSES AND WORK IDENTITY

The above methodological discussion was related to the general question of how to empirically study subjectivity in everyday life interaction. It was based on the argument that some key issues in pedagogy and educational research could best be theorized in this way, but also that this required a concept of subjectivity that is historically and societally specified. This relationship between subjectivity as the focal point and a societal macro perspective was the source of our interest in empirical methods. The life history approach was conceived as a unit of an empirical method based on life history or histories and a theoretical understanding of the social constitution of the subject.

Some of the issues in focus of critical education research during the 1980s - the need to refine the subjective dynamics related to educational participation and the need to theorize learning processes in a way that covers both life learning and more formal education - have meanwhile almost become mainstream policy issues under the heading of lifelong learning, with a dominant interest in how to mobilize all citizens' subjective engagement in learning and educational participation. In this sense, developments have justified the research strategy but thereby also intensified the theoretical and methodological challenges for a critical research. I have described how we over time have redefined the methodology, primarily by taking a consistent hermeneutic position and supplementing the methodological repertoire, but also by developing a psycho-societal, analytical subject concept and including this in the interpretation of subjective aspects of the empirical data and also as a prerequisite for the interpretation in the understanding of the interpreting subject (researcher subjectivity).

Two brief examples of further outcomes will illuminate how this can help in a critical handling of some of the educational policy issues emerging from the present-day landscape.

The experience concept defines learning processes as an aspect of a life historical progression where previous experiences must constantly be imbedded or rendered invalid by new ones. This process is rooted in forms of everyday practice, or in other words is lifeworld-based. Individual perceptions of the outside world and identity formation are based on this practice-related experience. A relatively self-evident perspective on oneself and one's immediate courses of action is established. However, life is neither static nor devoid of contradictions. Therefore, long before school and education, learning processes are taking place, which partly involve the processing of concrete conflicts and impulses and partly accumulate as an experience of one's life and its development. Practical consciousness integrates some experiences and blocks others. Apart from practical consciousness and the relatively self-evident perception of oneself and the world, a store of non-integrated impressions and unrealized impulses is established. Simultaneously, additional knowledge and alternative perspectives on one's lifeworld are offered by education and other social and cultural institutions. The individual subject constitutes itself through this lifeworld context.

The socialization and consciousness research which underlies the methodological development of the life history project aims to understand the subjective aspects of this process on the basis of a life experience with both conscious and unconscious levels. Contemporary cutting-edge theories of learning processes are orientated in somewhat different directions - mostly either as social learning, linked to practice contexts, and/or a constructivist tendency that emphasizes that learning is cognitive model building and a problem-solving activity. The two trends are not mutually exclusive but one viewpoint tends to dominate in most studies. A life historical experience concept clarifies that they are interwoven. When for example in the name of lifelong learning one takes a critical view of the possible practical applications of scholastic knowledge and attempts to credit skills acquired outside formal education, the connection between the cognitive, relatively abstract process and its dependence on situatedness gains central importance. The understanding of the life history project of how unconscious dynamics remain active forces in consciousness and social interaction throughout life can now be linked to the concrete life historical experiential contexts in which a particular competency is acquired, and thus provide a less abstract understanding of learning processes (or the absence of learning processes in the form of resistance or routine lack of sensitivity). One could say that a psycho-societal analysis can incorporate both of these two developments of learning theory - social learning and constructivism. But it brings them together through a theoretical understanding of the material connection between specific individual learning processes and local interactions on the one hand and a historical or societal macro-context on the other - and this also represents a criticism. In the context of courses of study with a practical professional aim, this connection between abstract knowledge and thinking and concrete experiences and contexts is crucial.

Another illustration of how a life history approach has proved productive is related to identity processes. The most simple example concerns people for whom this experience is negative and predominantly translated into opposition to education or a strongly instrumentalized attitude to it. In a sense, they seem unable to learn much because their sensitivity to the relevance of knowledge and skills is blocked. Our immediate reaction must be just to take note of their choice. However, awareness of the contextual experiential nature of this blocking and especially ambivalences and marginalized learning experiences will provide a more nuanced, solidarity perspective on educational abstinence.

But even more illustrative are the identity processes related to vocations and professions. Professions have generally been considered either from within - through their identity-forming professionalism and practice repertoire, legitimized by a "mission" that was commonly altruistic - or from the outside, as societal categories defined by their special knowledge or competence, which therefore received (functionalism) or fought for (sociology of action) certain economic and social privileges. Neither of these perspectives - which both have a certain justification - include a sense of the professional as an individual human being who has incorporated professional knowledge and function in his/her subjectivity. This is an extremely interesting example of sociality and subjectivity being concretely expressed in all the individually specific learning histories of people becoming doctors, engineers, etc. If one studies professional identity and professional learning processes with a life historical empirical methodology, one gains insight into the reproduction of societal and labour divisions and the reproduction of expertise as learning processes that are far from linear and regularly successful. On the contrary, one realizes how professional expertise is shaped through and subordinated to subjective dynamics that may be "irrelevant" individual dynamics or perhaps provide insight into a collective professional defence system - or societal repression (e.g. the denial of death).

Supported by Lorenzer's further development of the language-game concept, we can gain a generic understanding of vocational or professional learning as subjective acquisition of culturally prescribed bodies of knowledge. Not unlike a discourse concept, we can view such expertise as a language game embedded in social practices. But where discourse analysis is most concerned with how the historically established discourse acts as a compelling medium for thought and communication in a specific domain at a given historical moment, or rather thus establishes a domain, determination is unimportant in the language-game concept. With Lorenzer's expansion, we can consider reproduction in the language game as a relationship of exchange between the societal form of interaction (professional practice) and the individual process of sensory experience and we can view the unfolding of the individual learning process and the collective formation of experience in professional practice as an ongoing development of professional knowledge taking place in exchanges with the corporeal perception of work challenges and the practitioner's life experience. An empirical analysis of the subjective aspects of these processes can contribute to a new theoretical framework for the analysis of vocational and professional development and education.

These are just two briefly sketched examples of many possible approaches revealed by our research group. Using the concept of experience as the theoretical perspective on learning and education can help life historical, empirical analyses of everyday life, work and education to lead to a critical social scientific development in education and educational research. It also seems clear that the understanding of learning processes as a subjective dimension in all social interactions will enable these methodological experiences to be applied to other areas of research.

Henning Salling Olesen

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Biographical Learning: Reflections on transitional learning processes in late modern societies

Peter Alheit[1]

(Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany)

ABSTRACT

The article begins with two both real and provocative German post-reunification scenarios: one that blocks learning processes (an arrogant and boring setting of vocational education), another one which discovers – unconsciously – what *"biographical learning"* actually is (the hidden career of Herbert Schmidt, a mechanic freak of the former GDR). The following consideration is affiliated to the second case and tries to develop what the reasons beyond this astonishing learning process possibly are. The last idea is interested in a more abstract view and creates the label *"transitional learning"*. Those learning dynamics never apply simply to the individual, rather to a political challenge of post-modern societies.

Keywords: Biographical Learning, Transitional Learning, Biographicity, Unlived Life

1. Two German scenarios

A group of administrative employees of the municipality of a Thuringian town attend a training event. The topic is the legal and organisational framework of German municipalities. The participants are shy and nervous. They have very few questions. As a rule, a series of speakers deliver monologues about their areas of specialisation. An analysis finally reveals that the success rate of the learning process was extremely low.The

people do not feel comfortable. The course contents are strange and unfamiliar. Worst of all, they get the impression of not being taken seriously. Even the relatively friendlier instructors do not treat them like adults, who are able to contribute to the process with their professional competence and experience in everyday life, but as immature students. They will go back to their everyday professional situations and reinforce some of the annoyances that accompany the reunification of Germany: the administrative mess of East Germany.

An intensive evaluation of teaching experience with the instructors shows the other side of the coin: No one had ever had such narrow-minded and non-receptive participants. It is said that their flexibility was extremely low, while their recalcitrance to learn doubtlessly was a provocation. The instructors emphasise having gone East with a great deal of idealism, but what they experienced here truly defies description. If this were not to change immediately, the outlook for the German administration certainly would not look bright. Circumstances like those in Italy would probably be the result.

Not a word is lost about the learning history of the people concerned, and there is no introspection by the instructors about their own behaviour. The situation is characterised by a distinct cultural dominance of the type that precludes further consideration. Nothing appears more plausible than that the administrative regulations of the old Federal Republic of Germany that continue to apply to the "New Germany": The Winner takes it all.[2]

Change of scene: Herbert Schmidt[3] has been operating a small repair shop in the outskirts of Berlin since 1990. Before he established himself as a small entrepreneur, he had to overcome various hurdles. Bargaining processes with the authorities, credit negotiations at different banks were only the most visible difficulties. Far more important was his own insecurity. Herbert too is an East German. He grew up in the German Democratic Republic. And, although he unofficially operated a small garage on the side while employed as a worker in a medium-sized engineering company even during the era of the German Democratic Republic (a loophole in the market that simply could not be plugged by state efforts), he finds it very difficult to adapt to capitalism after the fall of the iron curtain. He still feels under-privileged. If he negotiates with a banker, he feels as being taken advantage of. When he has to approach the authorities, he still has the feeling of being a bothersome supplicant. He has remained an "Easty", an East German at heart. In spite of everything however, his business numbers have been in the black since 1993. The professional future seems to be secure, not only for himself, but also for his two employees.

Herbert is – unfortunately – not an average case. Out of the nearly 100,000 "self-employed" that have registered a business in East Germany since the fall of the wall, only a small percentage has been successful. Nevertheless, Herbert's "career" covers a phenomenon which sociologists call "actor genesis" (see Koch, Thomas & Woderich, 1993). People, who certainly do not seem to be predestined to become self-employed due to their professional and cultural socialisation, decide for a future as "new self-employed" in the German transformation process. Many of these projects fail. At first glance, professional failure appears to be almost pre-programmed. They usually do not own any investment capital worth mentioning. They have little

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[2] This scenario is a casual "transcript" of an unpublished evaluation study conducted by Werner Mauch immediately after the re-unification (1991) as part of the research focused on employment and education at the University of Bremen.

[3] The name is, of course, a pseudonym. The case study material originates from a research project (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation) on the new entrepreneurship in East Germany, which was carried out by the Berlin Institute for Sociological Studies (BISS) (see below).

experience with the rules and exigencies of the capitalist market; and all the capabilities they do have, seem to have been devalued with the collapse of society in the German Democratic Republic (cf. Alheit, 1993b). And yet there are some like Herbert Schmidt, who contrary to all expectations, are successful. It is an interesting observation that a high percentage of the "new self-employed" had unusual career paths even in the times of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Straight-line career paths, which corresponded to the normal expectations of a career in the GDR, are the exception rather than the rule in the group of the "new self-employed" (cf. once again Koch, Thomas & Woderich, 1993, p. 284)

Therefore, what we discover in the new entrepreneurs are the concealed self-employed of the dilapidated "real socialism". Since the inflexible planning and decision-making structures of GDR society were not able to keep pace with the growing need for change and distinction among the people, there emerged even within the framework of the (old) system, quasi-independent structures, either as privileged islands in the sea of the economic bureaucracy or as more or less tolerated refuges, in which "side businesses" were embedded. If, in an economy of shortages, subcutaneous wheeling-and-dealing in goods, services and rare qualifications thrive (there was nothing, but everybody had everything), then one can assume with a certain degree of plausibility, that there were practices and procedures which proved to be a bridge into the new social order (Koch, Thomas & Woderich, 1993; 285).

Herbert Schmidt's success is therefore definitely not accidental. He manages to integrate individual skills which had only informal significance in the GDR, measure for measure, into the consciously available repertoire of his social experiences, and to restructure the edifice of his biographical knowledge. A "modernisation process" is therefore required only to a limited extent. Basically, it is a matter of becoming aware of "half lived" social experience resources and moving them into the centre of the new social orientation.

Both scenarios bear reference to research contexts. The first refers to an expertise immediately after the reunification (Mauch, 1991, cf. footnote 1), that has not been published because its results seemed to reproduce the structures of prejudice much too blatantly. The second scenario depicted in the compelling research project by the Berlin Institute for Sociological Studies bears reference to the new entrepreneurship in East Germany. Its researchers, without exception, are sociologists and cultural scientists from the former GDR.

In their studies, the GDR sociologists have, without specifically mentioning it, convincingly worked out what "biographical learning" could be. In the study on continuing education, on the contrary, it becomes clear that the pedagogues do not know that every learning process has got a "life" story behind it, so to speak; that it refers to real life experiences. Moreover, when teachers ignore this and the learners cannot even develop subversive techniques in order to accommodate such experiences, the learning process is invariably deemed to fail.

Frankly, what is it that the Berlin sociologists have actually discovered – without even being aware of it? What sort of learning are we talking about here? Is the subject of our discussions really so clear and unambiguous? This question will be systematically studied in the subsequent parts of this essay. It is an attempt to sketch out a theory of biographical learning.

2. Basic structures of individual survival capability

In spite of all crises of the modern times, most of us certainly do not struggle frantically through everyday life. The cause for this – at least in Western societies – is obviously not that statistical life expectancy is increasing steadily, in spite of all nuclear, genetic and ecological disasters, but due to much more intimate dispositions. Most of us certainly feel that we are the "organisers" of our career path. Even if things don't go the way we had wished or imagined, we usually make course corrections in our life's planning under the impression of personal autonomy. In other words, the deliberate stance towards our own biography can be understood as an intentional idea of action. [4]

The attitude that we have towards our own biography is predominantly that of planning. Of course it is not exclusively the "major plans" we carefully cultivate for our lives that are meant here: professional aspirations, a career in politics, the building of a house, the "good match" etc. It is also the planning of a weekend, the next morning or the evening television programme that are also covered. For example, we may decide to take ten pounds off our weight or to give up smoking, and succeed in doing so. All this gives us the impression that we have "control over our lives" and are subjects of our own biography. Possibly, this impression may however be extraordinarily misleading – not only because fate can strike at any time, and we could for example become incurably ill or unemployed, lose a loved one or all of our belongings. Indeed, this is even more so misleading because our ostensible autonomy of planning and action is based on biographical "process structures" (Schütze, 1981) over which we have only limited control.

All *"institutionalised procedures"* which have a long-term influence on our personal biography are to be mentioned here, such as the realm of the family cycle or other dynamics of which we certainly do not govern: our schooling or other highly influential professional protocols, which significantly limit our leeway. These include, for example, professional training, treatment for a serious illness or a long-term re-socialisation process. Basically, all of those social protocols belong to the context that conventional socialisation theories attribute to having a measurable influence on our development. Of course, this is not about the comparatively trivial insight that socio-structural influences will accompany us for life. It is rather about the complicated interrelationship of influences that actually make up *our* lives.

This also includes, for example the time that "influences" us and – as Karl Mannheim (1964) impressively described – leaves us with the unmistakable feeling of belonging to a certain "generation". We feel that we are members of the "war generation" because the war experience became a central component of our identity. We group ourselves with the "68ers" because the period when we were studying at university happened to coincide with the period of student rebellion where the experiences of the times lastingly shaped our professional careers. Or, we received the decisive part of our social imprinting during the difficult process of the German reunification – the "89ers" as the new label is tagged. This experience will remain with us and with some of

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[4] The following versions benefit most of all from Fritz Schütze's concept of the "cognitive figures of the autobiographic extempore narration" (cf. Schütze, 1981, 1984). These are however designed somewhat differently and will be completed in the following contribution by my own theory of "biographical experience stratification" (cf. Alheit, 1990, especially pp. 191 ff.).

those of our age group for the rest of their lives, and will clearly distinguish us from preceding and following generations.

The social dimension of gender bears a similar status. "Gender making" is obviously also a highly complex and extremely subtle process and is in no way exclusive to the socialisation of certain role models. The development, which "turns us into" women or men, the so-called gender-doing effects of the protagonists and institutions that cross us on this path should be understood not so much as the gradual acquisition of a certain "code of behaviour" in a shared social world. Rather, it is more plausible that we are dealing with a sort of grammar, a characteristic principle of producing statements about life which do not lose their uniqueness, but nevertheless have a certain "logic" to them (cf. Goffman, 1994; Dausien[5], 1996). "Gender" is therefore not dissimilar to social classes. Like the generation, it influences our "stratification" in the social sphere.

Obviously, this also applies to the conditioning through the milieu of our origin – and here too, which also works in more subtle ways than superficial socialisation patterns would have us believe. Bourdieu's differentiated observations about the distinction of social "types of habitus" (cf. especially Bourdieu, 1984) give us an impression 6of how deep the tracks of social cultural reproduction wear: the body language that we develop, our preferences in terms of taste, our sense of humour, our hygiene habits, language-specific gestures, the types of affiliations and many singularities for coping with everyday life, are all the result of basic and proven norms of behaviour in very different and strictly segregated fields in the overall social status.[5]

The framework, in which each of our individual biographies can unfold is therefore not infinitely broad. Its "generative structures" are always perceptible. The fact that we do not normally lose the dominant feeling over our own planning autonomy in spite of such restrictions is based on the singularity of how we process that knowledge biographically. On the one hand, we should regard it as a relief that we cannot be made responsible for every step in our biography, but rather that certain decisions regarding alternative plans and actions are simply made for us by external processors, by conventions or based on well-entrenched traditions. Precisely this, after all, puts us in a position to make deliberate and autonomous decisions in situations personally perceived as particularly relevant. On the other hand, biographical knowledge inventories, which, in principle, are continuously necessary, tend to simultaneously "decline", as it were, to become latent or even "prescriptive" forms of knowledge, and thereby merge with the background structures of our experience.[6] That specifically applies to the knowledge about dependencies that cannot be cancelled arbitrarily. Herein lies the origin of certain behavioural dispositions which we develop, possibly even of mentalities which we unwittingly acquire. The background knowledge about the dependencies of institutionalised flow patterns and border demarcations applicable throughout society therefore need not necessarily endanger the dominant presence of biographical autonomy of action.

Of course, process structures of a "trajectory nature" are indeed threatening (Schütze, 1981, pp. 67 ff., 1995). They refer namely to biographical courses in which we painfully experience the loss of intentional capacity to

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[5] The three main behavioural dispositions (types of habitus) that Bourdieu reconstructs – i.e. the behaviour of *necessity* for the lower social classes and strata, the behaviour of pretension, of ambitious climbing for the middle classes and that of *distinction* for the elite – are only basic examples in this process, which continuously create new variants by virtue of displacements.

[6] See also the "classic" versions in case of Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1979, pp. 154 ff.; also Alheit & Hoerning 1989, pp. 8 ff.).

act, and can finally even lose control of our lives. We are aware of comparable developments in people who become unemployed for no fault of their own. The planning perspective changes, after unsuccessful strategies aimed at re-stabilising the biographical path when "unemployed". It narrows down and concentrates on problems of everyday life, and might even collapse completely. A biography goes into a "tailspin" (Schütze, 1981). Unemployment might sometimes be accompanied by an excessive consumption of alcohol. The style of living shifts. The circle of friends changes or disappears altogether. Then perhaps an insignificant criminal offence triggers a total collapse. But, perhaps this breakdown itself can have a cathartic effect. Not infrequently, it marks the point of the "new beginning", the gradual recovery of autonomy. Therefore, trajectories with comparably dramatic outcome are often of merely temporary incursions into that selfsame dominant feeling of being the more or less autonomous subject of one's own biography.

Under certain circumstances, the experience of "processes of conversion", which we cannot address distinctly, can be just as irritating as the process structure of the trajectory. We yield to a desire for a career on the stage, which we have secretly cherished for a long time, and change the course of our life completely. We dare coming out as a homosexual beyond the age of forty and step into a completely new social world. For a short time, we lose the feeling of natural biographical autonomy in this process. We feel that we are "driven". We seem to be "unavoidably" subject to the mercy of a new perspective in our biography that however meets our secret strivings. But here as well, the process structure of the course of life often changes very quickly. The process of conversion changes into a trajectory or it is superseded by intentional plans of action.

What is important, is the finding that our basic feeling of being able to control our biography relatively independently need not necessarily contradict the fact that the major portion of our biographical activity is either extensively predetermined or is activated by different processors. It therefore seems plausible that this "basic feeling" is, in reality, certainly not an intentional plan of action nor a deliberate and intentional biographical plan, but rather is based on a type of hidden "logic" behind the changing process structures of the course of our lives. In other words, it involves the undoubtedly virulent but strategically not necessarily available intuition that we are dealing with "our own" life in spite of all its contradictions (see Bude, 1984, pp. 7 ff.).

How does intuition of this type come into existence and what is the "logic" hidden behind it? Apparently, the non-intentional is more decisive than the actively desired. It is not the success or failure of the plans which we cultivate that guarantees this basic feeling, but rather a specific "background knowledge" that bolsters even the impending impression of loss of consistency and coherence of our experience. The difficulty lies in the connectivity of biographical problems to already accumulated experiences. Such experiences are apparently more structured than we usually assume. They have long since lost the nature of accidentally accumulated experiences we have made over the course of our lives; rather each one has a concrete form (cf. Rosenthal, 1995). We can call it a "biographical construction" (Alheit, 1995; Dausien, 1996), a sort of "process script" for our actual lives (Fischer-Rosenthal, 1995) – a generative structure of our biography, that is in no way strategic, yet certainly intuitively available.

This "Gestalt" (shape) is certainly not to be perceived as some kind of prison. Its contours are soft and flexible. Nevertheless, we notice especially in biographical crises that such boundaries do constrain us. For we know situations in which the connection of new experiences fails us. We can no longer categorise a request that is put to us, or a situation with which we are unexpectedly confronted. It irritates us. We just do not have the tools to deal with it. We feel unable to cope. To put it colloquially, the whole thing goes "over our heads". We

may not be able to get rid of the feeling that we are living "against our times". We fail in our efforts towards social ascent because we do not have the cultural resources to fill the new position in the social space. Or, we simply sense that the conditions, under which we must lead our life, do not allow us any leeway any longer. Perhaps, we are even assailed by an entirely contrary feeling: namely that totally new "worlds" have opened up to us; that we had a qualitatively new experience which will change our future life. All this indicates that there are structures hidden behind daily experiences that concern even our entirely personal life. Between the two poles of structure and subjectivity, "life constructs" come into existence, which can indeed develop a kind of dynamic (Bude, 1984). It is here however that the theoretical explosiveness of biographical research results lies.

It is not the external erosion potential that is so very astonishing and fascinating, but rather the complex survival techniques of subjectivity. It seems particularly surprising that one can describe these strategies - which are very intimate, and usually only intuitively available - in sociological terms, i.e. in the continuous presence of a concept of social structures, and not by splitting off a part of the psychical from the social - similar to what is done in neo-psychoanalytical approaches.

3. The concept of "transitional learning"

What in the world does all this have to do with education and learning? If people predominantly overcome their problems themselves, then what sense does education make? Perhaps the question is not whether we need education in the first place. In societies such as ours, we are incessantly confronted with education and training processes (representatively, cf. Tenorth, 1992). Possibly the decisive problem is what type of education we need and how it is connected to those biographical constructs that actually make up our lives. These constructs namely go beyond what we can narrate about our own lives. They are first of all hidden references to the structural conditions that are imposed on us. Bourdieu has convincingly covered this fact with the concept of habitus. And whoever is familiar with his unmasking analysis, particularly of the life style practices which are produced by the social habitus of the (French) petty bourgeoisie (cf. Bourdieu, 1978, pp. 169 ff.) is startled by the "power" of the structural framework.

Biographical constructs however have yet another aspect: During the course of our lives, we create "more" meaning with regard to ourselves and our social framework than we overlook "from the perspective of our biographical self-thematization" (Bude, 1985; 85). We have biographical background knowledge, which in principle puts us in a position to fill out and to use the social space in which we move.

In this process, none of us has all conceivable possibilities. However, within the framework of limited potential for change, we have better chances than we will ever realise. Our biography therefore contains a considerable potential for "unlived life" – an extraordinarily stimulating concept that comes from the unorthodox physician Victor von Weizsäcker (1956). The intuitive knowledge about this is part of our "practical consciousness" (Giddens, 1984). It is reflexively not easily accessible, but nevertheless represents an entirely central resource for learning processes in a double sense:

Our hidden knowledge of the life constructs that accompany us but have not been or not yet been realised, keeps the deliberately available self-reference open in principle, and thereby creates the prerequisite for us to be able to take a look at ourselves from a different perspective without simultaneously revising that hidden "logic".

The process structures of our life course suggest expansion or restriction of biographical autonomy of action to us. Its deliberate "ratification" however remains with us as carriers of our biographies. We are, to a certain extent, thoroughly "autopoietic systems" – according to an irritating, albeit relevant concept of Luhmann's system theory (cf. for instance Nassehi & Weber, 1990). We have the chance to recognise the surplus meaning of our life experiences and to make them usable for deliberate modifications of our self- and world-reference.[7]

Biographical background knowledge is however at the same time a living potential for the modification of structures. The modification of individual self-references and world-references - and be it in the context of specific life constructs – offers chances for transformation of even the institutional framework of social existence. "Structures", after all, are to a considerable extent the functioning unquestioned background certainties to which the social individuals make reference as they act on a daily basis, but also when they act biographically. As soon as such prescriptions – or even only parts of them – enter into and become available in one's consciousness, the structures change. "Unlived life" indeed harbours social explosiveness.

The dynamics of this "double learning resource" evokes associations to that educational option of classic psychoanalysis, "where it was, I shall become". Closer scrutiny certainly reveals that it concerns not only the sovereign, I-based handling of an otherwise unchanged basic dynamic, but rather the transition into a new quality of self- and world-reference – a process which leaves neither the learning nor the ambient structural context unchanged. In other words, it concerns transitional learning processes.

The systematic quality of such transitions can be demonstrated by means of confrontation with the architecture of conventional educational processes. As is well known, these are designed in such a manner that new information is best "subsumed under a context which has remained stable" (Kokemohr, 1989; 340). Learning contributes to both the expansion and therewith simultaneously to the stabilisation of this established framework. Transitional learning processes deal with new information in a different manner. They do not refer them to existing structural contexts, but rather they are already interpreted as elements of new contextual conditions (cf. once again Kokemohr, 1989, pp. 340 ff.; Marotzki, 1991, pp. 171 ff.). The processed "new knowledge" thereby acquires another quality. It is not merely incorporated into the existing structure of biographically accumulated knowledge. It changes the structure of the knowledge. Transitional learning processes are to a certain extent "abductive". They realise, what would be described in early American pragmatism - particularly by Charles Sanders Peirce - as the ability to network something, to "put something together which we would never have dreamed of before" (Peirce [1903] 1991, p. 181).[8]

Of course, this capability requires a social actor. Knowledge can only be truly transitory as biographical knowledge. That modern key qualification of "biographicity" – a concept which thus far has hardly entered into the consciousness of modern learning and education theories – does not become involved (cf. Alheit, 1993a, 2009) until real-life people make reference to the world around them in a manner such that their self-reflexive activities have a formative reaction on social contexts. Biographicity implies that we can keep on redesigning

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[7] A similar position seems to stand behind the concept of "modalisations", differentially developed by Winfried Marotzki in his "structural education theory", pp. 144 ff.

[8] It appears to be symptomatic that *abductive* research strategies play an exceptional role in recent empirical social research – and even in the research traditions preferred by biography researchers (summarizing in addition the excellent dissertation of Kelle, 1992; but also once again the compelling work of Dausien, 1996).

our lives again and again in the contexts in which we (have to) live them, and that we experience these contexts on their part as "potentially shapeable" and designable. Although we do not have all conceivable opportunities in our biography, there are within the framework of the boundaries structurally set for us considerable opportunities open to us. These depend on how we decode the "surplus" of our biographical knowledge, i.e. how we perceive the potentiality of our "unlived lives".

This view is not at all euphemistic. It does not deny that transitional learning processes can be difficult or painful. It does not treat people in their biographical learning processes as "cultural dopes" (Garfinkel), who are helplessly exposed to the vagaries of contemporary history and are eagerly awaiting the assistance of therapy-willing continuing educators. Rather, it interprets learning as a discovery of concealed resources – concealed in the biographical experiences of real-life people. And, it indeed takes the social modification potential of these resources seriously.

Let us once again remember the second entry scenario: the secret "career" of Herbert Schmidt in his new independence. If we ask what transitional learning processes would mean to him and people like him, then the reference to the significance of the skills for adult education described here is not abstract in absolute terms. It concerns that "actor genesis", as the sociologists say (Koch, Thomas & Woderich, 1993), the creation of autonomy of action in situations which were previously determined externally on the basis of concealed experience resources.

There are a large number of such situations: A woman decides to return to work after a long phase of familial domesticity. She is extremely nervous and lacks confidence in her own decision. The beginning is difficult, but she soon discovers that she is certainly up to par with the requirements. A transitional learning process has thus taken place. A young man, spastically paralysed after a serious accident is confronted with the question of whether it is all over for him, or whether a new normalcy of his own can be recovered. Deep depression interrupts the learning process over and over again. After two years, he decides by his own initiative to look for people who are challenged by similar problems. He organises a self-help group and, in the end, even becomes active in politics. This constitutes, without doubt, a transitional learning process. The series of examples could be extended without any problem: Flight, migration, social ascents and descents are connected with transitions and force transitional learning processes upon us. Teachers in higher education can function as gatekeepers or as pseudo-therapists in this process; but they can also assume the "midwife's" function and act as biographical "maieutic", to use a classic Socratic metaphor.

In conclusion, we ask: Can the actual achievements gained by more recent biographical research be summarised briefly in terms of adult education? The preliminary answer is: Wherever the life experience of the learners is taken seriously and theoretical attention to an individual's biography does not degenerate into one of those "fashionable turns" that are rather characteristic in adult education, these achievements might indeed have the nature of "theoretical encouragement". Is anything more stimulating for people involved in education than the idea of being able to assist in the breakthrough of an "unlived life"? And, for anyone who understands this process not just from a subjective point of view, but also politically, a curative provocation can result. The new German civil society could certainly stand a dose of this kind of provocation. And even the "postmodern" world society may profit from this idea of biographical learning.

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Biographization, narrative and biographical society

Christine Delory-Momberger[1]

(Université Paris 13 Sorbonne Paris Cité, France)

ABSTRACT

In this text the authors develop the hypothesis that in the last forty years the evolutions in society and the transformations they have encouraged in the way we live and in the models of how we live are being reconfigured for the individual and their relationship to society. Within this context the process of individual existence through biography are becoming the elementary building blocks of the social sphere. This process of biographization (and the preferred medium of self-narrative) is embedded with newfound purposes and uses that in turn are giving it a central quality within our self-narrative society.

Keywords: Individualization, Self-Narrative, Biographization, Self-Narrative Society

1. Introduction

Today the self-narrative (within its subjective and thought-provoking space) is undergoing a revolutionary change concurrent with the evolutions related to the individual and society. In late modern societies the social practice of biographical narrative has become a public, institutionalized, outward act with its objective reality. These transformations for the self-narrative need to be recontextualized within the larger scope of social evolution that has taken place within the last forty years. It is with this enlarged vantage point that two aspects will become evident; first the contradictory quality of the associated social obligation, and second, what's at stake for the self-narrative in our contemporary society.

2. Evolution in the link between the individual and society in a self-narrative society

In the late modern society of today the overwhelming presence of self-narrative - and within this act the biographic act - is linked to the larger movement of individualization and subjectivism that has been underway since the 1970s. To take an expression from Rosanvallon (1995), this decade is welcoming never seen before forms of individualisation du social (where all things social are undergoing individualization) for which the fundamental characteristic is mass dissemination – known in French as *démocratisation*. Entire populations, not just a privileged few, are gaining access to forms of socially structured individualization, even if access is not systematic or unequal due to social status. There is now a social individualism which indicates reciprocity between individuals and society and involves all members of a society. This social individualism stems from life situations where significant regulating social institutions are less present, social and professional status are less rigidly defined, or individual experiences are les strictly and directly determined by exterior forces and in turn take on a quality of uniqueness. The individualization of paths and diversification of biographies can now be seen and understood as significant characteristics of late modernity. So much so they are being recognized on an institutional level; for example the French law of 1971 making professional training a national objective and the French law of 1978 that legally obliges employers to give time off for personalized professional training. These are just two examples of how society instituted biographization will spread into future decades.

Of course the aforementioned social phenomena have multiple consequences that affect the self-created models individuals have of themselves, how people perceive their life path, how much initiative and autonomy people have with their social lives and the level of control people feel to make a difference in their lives and for themselves. So individualism now takes on a second dimension of a feedback loop that turns individuals into subjects able to – thanks to their reflexive and interpretive efforts – give shape to the actions that impact them directly and construct their lifelong social existence. When a desire to self-actualize is coupled with an additional point of view about life path and the meaning of life, Giddens (1991) says "reflexive" individualism is being articulated. Fewer and fewer individuals think that their life course is the linear structure of a predetermined identity; indeed they can contemplate the many possibilities of identity that their specific life choices and social surroundings offer for self-studied experimentation.

Although there is no systematic correlation between social individualism and reflexive individualism we can however assert that there is a link between the increase in specifically designed social activities and how these activities have become more and more individualized. In general we can assert that an individual's social awareness - meaning the awareness that individuals have of their own role in the exercise of their social activities and public and private lives - has collectively grown. Since the 1970s there has been a rise in and propagation of diverse forms of the culture of self; for example there are religious or spiritual initiations or paths (in order to deepen personal awareness of religious and/or philosophical traditions and beliefs), and a plethora of programs, techniques, training sessions and therapies available for personal development. What must be highlighted again is the *démocratisation* of all these forms of self-exploration and self-training. They have taken on public and collective aspects that strongly contrast with the aristocratic and cultivated versions of the traditional culture of self which was previously reserved for only the narrowest upper echelons of society. The

1970s marks the beginning of what Vrancken and Macquet (2006) amongst others have called a "self-actualizing society".

A life-narrative is an exercise in recognition, knowledge, possession and repossession of one's self and narrative as well as an essential component of self-exploration for which personal and professional development and all their associated varieties are necessary for creation. Personal development provides the psychological and emotional content that leads to freeing one's potential; professional development creates a learning profile, an inventory of skills and know-how and projects for development. Although not always verbalized or stated explicitly, a person is aware of the themes of identity, personal growth or self-actualization, all of which encourage and provide a path for action towards attaining a unique story of self. An individual must be simultaneously the subject of and the actor upon their own story.

And in the decades following the 1970s, what's at stake becomes a major social issue found at the sensitive center spot of what certain sociologists, and more specifically Astier and Duvoux (2006) have called a "biographical society". One glance at contemporary surroundings leads us to discover the amplitude of the changes that have taken place. Individualist tendencies have now infiltrated all layers of society, including the lower classes and those affected by social exclusion or a precarious existence. However the real paradox is how public institutions (structures contributing to social and economic organization) have taken on principles of reflexive individualism stemming from self-actualization. Furthermore these principles have become social imperatives for self-actualization and are reinforced by all the opportunities for collective narrative, whether it be at school, in the workplace or through the media. Individuals are now overwhelmingly obliged to substantiate a quality of subjectivity and uniqueness, to simultaneously be the author and actor in their lives, to develop a life-project by determining their own justifications for action and assessments. Honneth (2006) states that self-culture has taken the direction of a normative individualism and become an ideology of self-actualization; what were once an individual's aspirations have become patterns and schemas for institutional structures that individuals now see as obligations coming from exterior sources.

This newfound direction affecting modern societies has been the object of well-known analyses; the Polish-born British sociologist Bauman contributes "Individuality is a task confided to its members by an individualized society" (Bauman, 2006; 29). The individual has become an institution placed at the center of society. Ulrich Beck (2003; 280) states that individuals are *l'unité de reproduction de la sphère sociale* (the building blocks for the public sphere). Socialization (as the integration of social norms and the articulation of social roles) is being followed by new forms of societization[1] which play a more and more important part in the individual experience and compel individuals to put themselves at the center of their life trajectories. I used the term *condition biographique* to explain the idea of a historical association between the individual and the social (Delory-Momberger, 2009). Within this association the consequences of social and economic constraints of individual life paths – and dependence upon institutions - are perceived to be an individual's responsibility and a personal destiny. Life experiences stemming from malfunctioning social and economic structures (from unemployment to exclusion from the workforce) are seen by the victims of these circumstances as personal situations for which they can only blame themselves. A system is now in place where individuals are obliged to

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[2] Term used by Max Webber and translated from the German *Vergesellschaftung*.

assume responsibility for their actions and behavior; everyone is sent back to the proverbial reflexive drawing board of their own existence, to their biography – meaning not the real course of action but the structural representation put together by the actors – and their ability to involve the social agents in biographization.

The paradox of the postmodern condition is that it turned over responsibility of providing our social links – which are extremely differentiated and socially complex - to the individual. The "socialized individuals" of the industrial era have become "individually socialized" (Geulen, 1997) in the era of late modernity. The German sociologist Kohli writes "that which is institutionalized is no longer a pattern of behavior but a pattern of thought about oneself" (1989; 43). An individual's life course is therefore selected and organized so they can make their mark socially as well as construct and be a part of their own social existence. The conversation about self and more specifically in the form of narrative, has now found its use in the concurrent processes of society's biographization and socially-constituted biographies characteristic of late modernity. In this same vein according to Rustin "society is made up of biographies, not simply made out of them" (2006; 47).

3. Self-narrative as a public object and an instrument for social recognition

This leads us to the biographical form – where individuals contribute to their place, impact and interconnectedness in society – which has now taken on new social meaning. Biographical constructions are no longer only seen as an implication for self-actualization, their importance is extended to the realms of professional and political.

In the professional world this obligation is extended to every individual; they must be in control of their life. Ehrenberg's expression "the entrepreneur of oneself" (1991) or the German expression '*Ich-AG*', illustrate that individuals are now the C.E.O.s of "Company Me". Individuals are responsible for finding within themselves the resources for setting up their social existence, employability and professional success; every individual bears the burden to be the best or most efficient they can. Beck (2003; 291) simply says we must be the design office for our own existence. This idea of self-management is particularly pertinent to the notion of employability – the skill, know-how and abilities of an individual to present their assets to potential employers. The image of the manager from the 1990s brought forth by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) characterized by the aptitude to provide personalized answers to change and to find within themselves the resources for employability, has now become the norm.

The skill for self-management is equally important for the growing populations looking for employment (young adults looking for their first career-related job, short or long-term unemployed, seniors victim to economic restructuring, and so on) or the individuals suffering from socially and economically precarious situations that have become the targets for politically constructed social policies. Add to that those who have no professional experience or skills, or individuals who have a past of scholastic failure that becomes a liability for their social existence; for all of these diverse populations we expect them to put forth the personal proof of their motivation to put together a strategy to belong, their ability to undertake the work of (re)building themselves, their readiness to act on and for themselves to adapt and adjust to the limits of the economic system and workforce.

Individualizing social phenomena - accounting for individual specificities instead of regarding anonymous individuals - corresponds to a significant transformation in social actions and the principles guiding them (Astier, 1997; 2007). Instead of the more traditional system of social protection that functions by entitlement through large pre-determined socially defined categories, current politically defined social actions are putting into place structures for groups that are more and more specifically defined or who are defined by their individual characteristics. Current social actions also incorporate the principle of active participation: meaning those who benefit from politically defined social actions –now labeled users- are now intentionally pushed to put fourth their individuality, their needs and difficulties, and obliged to formally participate in their social insertion.

Within this context of individualizing social phenomena, institutions and organizations rely heavily on their knowledge of an individual's experiences in order to provide the most appropriate aid in the form of assistance, training, internships, and so on. In 2009 in France the RSA (*Revenu de Solidarité Active*)[2] was introduced and is aimed at people working with low wages to provide them with a financial complement and encourage professional activity. In the application process for RSA benefits there is a detailed review of an individual's or family's specific biography. So we are now at a point where the biography is a determinant factor for politically orchestrated social action. This goes against the traditional French *modèle républicain* that dictates equality of rights for all citizens under the *not-wanting-to-know-anything* principle regarding individual particularities; now there is the *want-to-know-everything* principle regarding the uniqueness of life experiences and paths for individuals. We have moved from a simple recognition of individual particularities to a more intricate biographical demand by transforming a life-narrative into a formal tool for institutions and public policy. The time of grand narratives – where individuals offered their existence to the collective social narrative that would in turn furnish their political and social situations and belonging (whether it be for example through the *républicain* ideals of equality and merit or Marxist / communist ideals of working class mobility) - has now culminated in an indefinite myriad of individual narratives where individual existences are feedback loops for themselves. So the biographical society is therefore made up of the accumulated individual biographies; Astier and Duvoux (2006; 15) state "society is more and more simultaneously a producer of, and composed of, individual biographies."

The self-narrative as an act of formal and public participation has now acquired the status of an object able to be bartered (Astier, 1997; 239): give me your narrative and I will give you training, job-experience, money, aid in finding a job, recognition of your studies or diplomas, and so on. More significantly, give me your narrative and I will give you a place in society and social recognition. This formalized participation is combined with explicit constraints and even more implicit constraints which are rigidly dictated expectations for form and content. A self-narrative containing educational and professional background information must adapt to and be coherent with outside economic, administrative or financial arrangements and fulfill systematized expectations and pre-determined perceptions of potential employers. Beyond the simple acknowledgement of technical and professional skills, the success of an interview relies largely on the skills for self-presentation and self-

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[3] The RMI (*Revenu Minimum d'Insertion*) was the preceding social welfare program.

marketing; in other words a candidate's know-how for selling themselves or setting the scene for their eventual employment in the working world and for that company.

4. Biographical capital and new inequalities

Biographizing the social realm generates new types of social inequalities. Beyond the social mechanisms that encourage unequal distribution of economic and material wealth, or even those that are responsible for differing social status, there are the inequalities linked with a person's skill for communicating about themselves in an understandable manner. More specifically, being able to use the expressions and language that will let them be formally and socially recognized. Indeed Bourdieu's analysis of "legitimate language" (1982) is easily transposable to the social skill of narration. The ability to expound about oneself, to create a representation of oneself and our existence all the while conforming to social and institutional requirements, result in very unequally distributed biographical capital. Not everyone shares the same mastery of public narrative codes, the necessary distancing to handle borrowed narratives, or the skill to adjust the intrigue of one's life to exterior criterion. These skills assume an implicit knowledge and a relative mastery of, as Martuccelli (2002; 359) calls them, "ready-made tapes" for social narrative. None of which has any resemblance to the values of sincerity, authenticity, or the genuine quality of a spontaneous self-narrative. And unfortunately those who are the most in need – as Robert Castel using a term from Hannah Arendt calls them "workers without work" and "supernumeraries" (1999; 767) – and whose life story is the only object they have left to barter, are then left with no other choice but to pay with their person; meaning they offer up the story of their failures and their inadequacies.

Unequal life conditions (material wealth or social status) can now come from unequal language skills and "me" models; to these inequalities we can add unequal distribution of the means for building a "me". The possibilities for self-building and self-expression don't come solely from social position but also arise from the intricate links of economic, social and cultural resources and their associated potential for building and expressing self. Biographical capital and its inventory of possible selves increase in quantity and variety with the multiplication and diversification of experiences; inversely it is significantly reduced when the cultural environment and socio-economic conditions don't allow for multiple or diversified experiences. According to Kaufmann we are now in a "new place of inequality: one that is for self-representation and the images and emotions it conveys" (2004; 201). It also stems from the personal aftermath reaped from how the public receives the biographical narrative. The self-narrative (regardless of the (re)formatting or reifications it undergoes in the social environment) is not something that its narrator – and simultaneously its principal personae – can easily hold at a distance. Even more so if the narrator / actor is using it rudimentarily or naively; pulling only from their life and from themselves. Beyond material resources or social position which can, up to a certain point, be disassociated from a person, the life narrative fuses together with the feeling of self; when I am in control it is equal to what I am to myself and how I make myself appear to others. The stakes are to socially offer up a biographical narrative and its aspects of the liaison to oneself and to others for public judgment and observations (and potentially their feelings of mistrust and suspicion). Honneth (2000) comments on the diverse manners in which, and how, the narrative is received (on both a personal and public level): self-confidence may arise thanks

to the expectations of love from the people close to them, or self-respect arising from their membership in a community of their peers, or providing self-esteem coming from their ability to construct and engage actions that contribute to communal life. The self-narrative is always three-fold; the story-teller/actor demands to be recognized emotionally, socially, and legally. It is simultaneously the set-up for the intrigue of a unique identity, the background where social belonging is identified and a *mise en scene* used for a place in society. Due to all that it condenses and what's at stake, the self-narrative is susceptible to all the wounds that touch upon a person's recognition and dignity.

5. The social focal point of self-narrative and the necessity of meaning

– an individual's grand narrative

Within this context, the self-narrative has never been so centrally located in our social existence. It is no longer simply a means of personal expression nor a place to explore the intimate or inside, nor a means for self-discovery or self-knowledge; it has without a doubt moved into the public sphere. It is an essential instrument for mediation, recognition and social remuneration. Beck states that it is also the space where the "reproduction of the social sphere" (2000; 280) is elaborated – where individuals have become the building blocks.

The self-narrative therefore bears the embedded burden of its ambivalent uses or purposes that it serves. It may be a medium for self-construction or a formatted and concrete public object; it may be a space where we conform, resist or pledge devotion or a space where we are the subject, or conversely the object. So the ebb and flow from subject to object in a self-narrative creates tension as we move between these aforementioned extremities; for example, moving between the loss of power when we are the subject and when we hold the power by deciding the content as the author**.** Biographies also ebb and flow between states of governance – and as Foucault (2001; 1056) so famously says *conduire les conduites* (to govern, act on or lead our actions), there is a dual effort by the subject to govern, act on or lead themselves while simultaneously being shaped by experiences.

Above and beyond these extremes, what should be remembered is the central place in society occupied by the biographical narrative. To reduce it to a formula, we can say the *homo-narrans* is the building material for the *homo-socius*. Franssen (2006; 75) mentions a society of "social relations from self-induced productions" where people are required to create a social world using their unique experiences. These narrative constructions (the experiences that individuals fashion and contribute to producing a social space) take on a new significance and in turn a newly developed social aspect. This obligation for everyone to make a story out of their life and evolve towards a self-narrative having moral and social aspects, are leading us to a turning point for which we have yet to size up the impact. What now follows the obligation of a self-narrative is finding and giving meaning to one's existence, story and experiences. We are now dealing with a significant event in the history of societies: never before has a society asked so many of its individuals to produce –to make and simultaneously make visible – the meaning of their existence. This embedded layer of meaning weighs heavily on individuals. Students young and old, laborers, employees, and countless other social categories are asked to give meaning to their situation, work, life course, and future; this holds true for men, women, fathers, mothers, grandparents, voters, consumers, citizens and the list could go on.

Now extend this to not only individuals but to the collective whole. Reflexive societies not only produce regulating bodies of knowledge about themselves but also questions about their own meaning and significance about how they function. It doesn't quite seem possible for societies in their previous forms to have had such an intense quality of reflexivity, regardless of whether we are talking about the first ever formed societies, antiquity, or even those in the first stages of modernity. These questions about meaning and the search to produce meaning that late modern societies address to themselves are symptomatic of the situation for individuals – the evolution towards an individual's obligation to have a biography ripe with meaning.

Whereas an individual in modern society found within the *grands récits* (Lyotard, 1979) or grand narratives, the references for meaning and models for living thanks to a specific place in society or peer groups, an individual in our late modern society is left to their own devices and with their own narrative to make sense and meaning out of their experiences. Indeed they must find their path and place on their own by relying on and drawing meaning out of the social spaces and groups they are a part of. And this can only be done within the reflexive space within one's own existence. It would seem, constructing a biography using the building blocks of experience(s) with the continuity of a story – by bringing together plot lines of events and life-situations – is a necessary role to have in a world where reference points and widely-accepted stories are addle or discredited, in a world where only individuals can bring it all together through reflexivity and the creation of a history.

6. Conclusion

Today the grand narrative is no longer a world narrative or a society narrative; it is the individual narrative that makes society and the world as its force reproduces the social sphere and shapes the world. It is without a doubt the redefinition of the societal subject that makes the self-created narrative an ongoing element extending into our contemporary representations and constructions. Before going further we must briefly return to the past; the French Enlightenment and the German notion of *Bildung* have already hinted at the scenario of an individual shaping themselves and in the process shaping the world. Today the self-created narrative is being reinvigorated, rediscovered and exemplified. However the decisive difference is that the narrative is valuable – intrinsic and extrinsic value – and is no longer upheld by legitimizing forces or discourses (reason, progress or emancipation that served to justify and entrust values). The new grand narrative comes from the individual who is ever obliged to be solely shoulder responsibility for their actions, chosen guiding principles for behaving, the construction of the schemas and values that create meaning for their actions, and the creation of social networks that create a tie into the collective social fabric. This grand narrative of individual existence takes on a mythical tint despite the palpable reality of its effects past and present. It is a social-historical construction; it is one of the ways societies articulate themselves and assign to each member their task as well as how to accomplish it. There is a successor to the grand historical narratives from the modern period. Today there is the intrigue of an individual reaching within to find the resources and values that underpin their representational models and existence, and paint the portrait of an individual capable of making a world, which in turn make up our biographical society.

Translated from the French by Leila Buchmann (liaisonleila@yahoo.com)

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The Well-being of the Family

Ethnography within Biographical Research

Christoph Wulf[1]

(Free University of Berlin, Germany)

ABSTRACT

The article shows how important well-being and a satisfying life are for people, as well as how important the family is in this context. It demonstrates the importance of ethnography in biographical research. In an ethnographic study we examined the Christmas rituals of three families in Germany and the New Year rituals of three families in Japan. We wanted to find out how family members create their well-being and happiness in rituals. In the mise-en-scène and staging of well-being and happiness language and imagination, corporeality and performativity, mimetic processes, rituals, and gestures play an important role. We discovered and analysed the following transcultural elements of family well-being: the sacred foundation of the family, the importance of the communal meal, the role of the exchange of gifts, the function of narratives and memories, and the importance of time for each other to create togetherness.

Keywords: Family Well-Being, Transcultural Elements of Family Happiness,
              Ethnography of Happiness, Mimesis, Ritual

1. Introduction

Among the problems for education and upbringing that today are woefully neglected but still central is the question of how children, adolescents, and adults can be provided with support in leading a good and fulfilling life. In this article I would like to accord this question the significance that it has had since the beginnings ofWestern culture. It is not sufficient to equate upbringing with the achievement of curricular learning

objectives, as important as this may be in individual cases. Such objectives only represent the visible and measurable portion of upbringing. If you take an iceberg as an analogy, the objectives of upbringing, the achievement of which is measured in a general sense, represent just the part of the iceberg that extends above the surface of the water, that is, the effects of the upbringing processes. The educational effects of upbringing extend deeper, all the way down to layers of the individual that remain hidden to other people, the environment, and often even to the subjects themselves. The highest objective of all educational efforts is to give people the ability to lead a fulfilling life. At all levels of education, it is necessary to ask the question regarding the contribution that pedagogical measures can make to children, adolescents, and adults learning to lead a fulfilling life. When I speak of a fulfilling life, this does not mean that temporary suffering can be excluded from it. Education of the individual is not possible without suffering. This is something that the Greek poet Menander saw when he formulated: *Ho me dareis anthropos ou paideuetai*: The unoppressed individual is not educated. In spite of this, it is of course important to provide support to young people in leading a fulfilling life through work, successful communication and interaction with other people, and with social and political tasks still to be done.

Biographical research is especially important for educational science because it informs us about how people experience and process the events of their lives, including educational measures. We discover how and why people assign what significance and what meaning to the events of their lives. We need biographical research in order to be able to find out something about the penetration of pedagogical measures. It is not just what is told that is important here. The images and the performativity of pedagogical practices are just as important. In other words: in addition to biographical stories, the reconstruction and study of the images living in the imagination of the individual and the reconstruction of important performative practices are also required. Pedagogical ethnography has developed important procedures for obtaining this information. These include open interviews, group discussions, and procedures of participatory and video-supported participatory observation. For the first two procedures, the task consists of using focusing metaphors to reconstruct and interpret the constructions of meaning of subjects, groups, and institutions. Observational procedures involve advancing into biographically important areas that are initially not accessible to the consciousness of subjects. Here the task consists of reconstructing, interpreting, and perceiving the performative character of socializing and pedagogical practices, that is, the staging and performance of the body. The transformation of performative actions in images and iconic symbols plays an important role for memory here. The area of performative action and knowledge is especially important for biographical research, since what is involved here is often practical, that is, implicit knowledge, which admittedly delivers results, but of which the person taking action is not aware. Even more than in the area of memories that are linguistically comprehensible, a view from the outside is needed for understanding the significance of performative practices.

Let me now express in concrete terms my thoughts about the well-being of the family with reference to our German-Japanese ethnographic study that we carried some years ago. With this study, we would like to show how important the question of well-being and a fulfilling life is for people, as well as how important the family is in this context, where it is often the case that initial experiences with success in life – but also failure – are had. Let us first begin with the prerequisites of this ethnographic study.

2. Staging of family well-being: a German-Japanese study

Leading a fulfilling life is the object of all people. How is well-being to be understood? How are family and well-being interrelated? How do people lead a fulfilling life and what contribution does the family make to this? The number of self-help books, newspaper articles, television programs, and Internet platforms in which answers to these questions are sought has become enormous. What role the family plays for well-being is at the focus of the following considerations.

We do not investigate what well-being is, but instead ask more cautiously how families stage their well-being, how they perform it, how they create it. What a fulfilled life looks like and how it is brought about are among the central questions of religion and philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and anthropology. The answers differ from each other, contradict each other in part, and are often so complex that they cannot be comprehended without the historical and cultural context in which they were given. The objective of our study is to describe and analyze in six case studies how families create their well-being. In accordance with a long cultural-anthropological tradition, we are also studying a family ritual that serves as a window into our own culture and the foreign culture (Morgenthaler & Hauri, 2010; Baumann & Hauri, 2008).

With three German-Japanese research teams, we are studying the celebration of Christmas in three German families and the New Year's celebration in three Japanese families. In the process, we want to find out the forms in which these families celebrate their important family celebration in order that their members are satisfied and feel well. We are interested in the question regarding which similarities and which differences can be identified in such culturally diverse families using mixed research teams. With participatory and video-supported observation, with interviews and group discussions, with photos and videos, and with historical and cultural analyses, we work out the various stagings and performances of family rituals and show how their performative character contributes to the creation of family well-being on these holidays. It wasn't easy to find six families who were willing to grant an international research team access to their intimate family celebration while taking into account the criteria of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1998) during the selection. These families belong to the milieu of the upper middle class, within which the selected families comprise a broad spectrum. In our culturally mixed teams, a methodologically interesting overlap between a variety of cultural perspectives occurred in regard to the perception and interpretation of family rituals. This led to a new form of communicative validation, which presented us with a great number of methodological problems due to the complexity of the study and its associated open questions.

With the study of well-being in heterogeneous families, our ethnographic study also makes a contribution to the biographical study of emotions. Through our research into two very different cultures, we investigate a broad spectrum of cultural differences, within which the diversity of the ritual creation of family well-being becomes very clear. With a consciousness of these differences that extend down to the deep structures of the family and their members, several transcultural elements which contribute to the creation of family well-being can be identified and are later described.

3. Structural elements of well-being

In Japan and Germany, there are different notions of well-being. These are also associated with differences in the social and cultural practices for bringing forth well-being. These practices are an important part of the intangible cultural heritage. They and the emotions and conceptions associated with them play a considerable role in the development, preservation, and change of cultural identity. These practices with which families create their family well-being also contribute to bringing forth a cultural identity that differs in Japan and Germany. Here, cultural identity designates a conjunction of characteristics that can be used to differentiate individuals and groups from others. Within these characteristics, the broad spectrum of symbolizations and practices plays an important role.

In view of the tendency toward homogenization and uniformization of the world due to globalization, the significance of diversity received ever greater emphasis over the last decade, with the objective of preservation and promotion of cultural identity. This development finds clear expression in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from 2003 and in the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression from 2005 (UNESCO, 2003; 2005). In the face of the tendency toward standardization, both conventions underscore the necessity of cultural difference and identity (Wulf, 2005b; 2006). Rituals are among the most important forms of intangible cultural heritage. Among them, day-to-day and celebratory rituals play a central role. They contribute to creating a feeling of community and coherence, thus generating familial well-being. In this way they have an important influence on the cultural identity of family members. This becomes clear in our study of familial celebratory rituals on Christmas in Germany and for the New Year's celebration in Japan. It can be shown here how familial rituals contribute to the development of a social and cultural identity of family members. In the staging of German and Japanese family rituals, it becomes clear how similar and at the same time different the practices are for bringing forth well-being of the family. With the intention of providing examples, five structural elements are described here that play a central role in the design of the rituals belonging to the intangible cultural heritage, the generation of emotions of well-being, and the development of cultural identity.

Language and imagination

Recent research on emotions has made it clear how important it is from a cultural studies perspective not to ontologize emotions of well-being. Emotions are not isolatable substances, but rather always linked with other characteristics of the individual. In many cases, it is language that contributes to the ability of emotions of well-being to arise and be felt. An example of this is the rhetoric of romantic love. Without it, these notions of love and the expectations of well-being associated with them would not have been able to develop. If a culture has a term with which a certain aspect of well-being is denoted, it is probable that forms of expression for this emotion can also be found in this culture. If this word is missing in another culture, it is probably also difficult to identify the aspect of well-being referred to with this word. The Japanese word amae is an example of this. If you were to try to describe the aspect of love and well-being referred to with this word, you might say: "to depend on the love of another" or "to put oneself at the mercy of the sweetness of another." In the Indo-Germanic languages and in the European imagination, there is no designation for this aspect of love and well-

being. This word that cannot be translated into German is nevertheless of central importance for understanding the Japanese mentality (Suzuki & Wulf, 2013). The question is now the extent to which the emotion of happiness and love referred to with this word can be understood by people from other cultures. Several answers are possible here. One position proceeds on the assumption that this emotion can also be understood by people from other cultures with the aid of linguistic descriptions. Another position points out that this only possible to a very unsatisfactory extent, and that what is needed is not just linguistic knowledge, but also the incorporated ideas, emotional relationships, and performative actions referred to with this word. While the first position places more emphasis on the similarity in the emotional endowment of people, the second position refers to cultural differences that can hardly be overcome.

The flowing of emotions

Many emotions of happiness arise in interactions with other people, in ritual communication between them, and in mimetic self-reference. They can be described as fluid. Such a characterization implies that emotions of well-being change in the practices of everyday life. They overlap with previous emotional experiences and form ensembles of emotions. In this process, emotional dispositions are selected and updated. A special characteristic of human emotionality consists of the fact that they are influenced by moods that persist over a long period of time. These moods have an influence on how emotions are "toned." "The world of the happy is quite different from that of the unhappy" (Wittgenstein). Emotions determine our relationships to other people and to the world that surrounds us. They are evaluative, that is, they evaluate the events that happen to us and allow us to act in accordance with this evaluation. This emotional evaluation of actions of other people often takes place unconsciously or semiconsciously and is only accessible to the conscious mind in a limited manner. This evaluative side of emotions supports us in orienting ourselves in the world and with respect to other people. It helps us make distinctions and grasp the meaning of social situations, actions, and contexts. Their energetic side enables individuals and communities to shape sense, meaning, and identity (Le Breton, 1998; Wulf & Kamper, 2002; Wulff, 2007; Greco & Stenner, 2008; Harding & Pribram, 2009; Paragrana, 2010a; 2010b; Wulf, 2010; 2011b; 2013; 2014; Hahn, 2010a; 2010b; Michaels & Wulf, 2014).

Physicality and performativity

If you accentuate the performative character of the creation of well-being, there is a shift in the focus of attention. Interest is directed to a lesser extent toward understanding how notions of well-being are to be understood and interpreted and more toward grasping how people express, represent, modify, and control the various feelings of well-being. In this case it is essential to study the process in which being well is staged and performed. The forms of physical expression of emotions are thus placed at the center of attention (Ekman et al., 1982). Physicality, habitualization, and dramaturgy of emotions become important. In this context, rituals and gestures are of major importance (Wulf & Zirfas, 2004a; 2004b; 2007; Wulf & Fischer-Lichte, 2010). This change of perspective is associated with developments that have led to the designation of modern societies as staging societies in which people's living space becomes a "small theater" where they continuously put on display and market themselves and their role in the community.

Mimetic processes

People that feel well often make other people feel well as well. One reason for this is in the mimetic processes in which people become more similar to each other. As in the case with laughter, emotions of well-being also involve a sensuous transfer in which our body is infected with the joy and well-being of other people. Without us becoming aware of it, we assimilate bodily movements and mimetic forms of expression. We become a sounding box of the emotions of well-being of other people. Their well-being affects us, and our affects strengthen their emotions. An assimilation to the emotions of well-being of other people causes us to be able become well ourselves, namely in a way that we are not well like the others, but instead well in our own way. We reflect the well-being of other people back at them and intensify their emotions. We discern the performative concretization of well-being and learn the practices with which we stage, perform, and pass it on to subsequent generations (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995; 1998; 2003; Suzuki & Wulf, 2007; Paragrana, 2010a; Wulf , 2005a).

Rituals

In all human societies, rituals contribute to the intensification, steering, and control of emotions (Michaels, 1999; 2007; Wulf & Zirfas, 2004a; 2004b; Wulf et al., 2010; Michaels & Wulf, 2012). They lead the involved persons to relate to each other. They are of central importance for the creation of familial well-being. Their performativity creates social forms of well-being. In this process, the movements of the body play an important role. In common action, they create social emotions of proximity, affection, and trust. The dynamics of familial rituals ensure that a ritual action is not a mere copy of a previous action. Rituals are similar to each other, to be sure, but they also create new practices with reference to that which has preceded them. If this is not the case, they lose their vitality and degenerate into stereotypes. Rituals are social practices in which people learn how to create familial stagings and performances that make other people and themselves feel well. In ritual action, all involved acquire the practical knowledge that is required for it (Wulf et al., 2001; 2004; 2007; 2010; 2011a).

Gestures

In the context of rituals, gestures play an important role. Gestures are actions such as the offering of a sacrifice in a sacred ritual in front of a Buddhist family altar. The ringing of a small bell at the beginning of the handing out of presents on Christmas Eve can also be understood as a meaningful gesture in the Christmas ritual. In family rituals, gestures are performative to a great extent; they are mimetically learned. Gestures are movements of the body. They create, represent, and structure the flow of emotions. The significance of a ritual often intensifies in its staging and performance. Gestures make a contribution to creating the social and controlling familial communication and interaction. They make something visible that would not emerge without them. Gestures are spontaneous, ludic and shape transitions. They are intractably linked with language, thought, and imagination. Great importance is attributed to them for the emergence of shared attention and human communication and cooperation (Tomasello, 2009). Gestures can contribute to the production and representation of emotions of well-being (Wulf & Fischer-Lichte, 2010; Wulf et al., 2011).

4. Ethnography of happiness

The focus of our German-Japanese ethnographic studies lies in the question of the form, that is, the performative and ritual shaping of well-being. Familial happiness is generated, stabilized, and renewed in large part through rituals. That is why we also focus on the associated modus operandi of familial happiness. During the respective family celebrations, the questions of what happiness they expect at their celebrations, how the members of the family stage familial well-being, how they create situations of familial well-being through social action, and how they ultimately experience and understand well-being are investigated at the homes of the families. At the same time, which interactions the various family members perform and what well-being effects these have on the social and personal level are worked out.

In contrast to the quantitative or qualitative interview methods, an expansion and shifting of the focus of the methodological spectrum is carried out in order to realize these research perspectives. With the qualitative interviews, which have both an episodic and narrative character, the focus is on content, forms, conditions, and objectives of familial well-being; for this reason, they are primarily carried out as group interviews. Ethnographic data is also supplemented through participatory observation (and observational participation), photography, and videography, as well as through informal conversation with the family members (Bohnsack, 2009). We assume that the complexity of familial well-being, with its traditions, developments, current staging forms, generative perspectives, and symbolic references can only be recorded through a combination of visual, verbal, and textual data.

In order to be able to study the complexity of familial well-being, we have restricted this ethnographic research to the most important family ritual in each case. The importance of rituals for the well-being of children and the family is emphasized not just in self-help parenting books. Certain family rituals, such as eating together in the community of the family, vacations, birthdays, (leisure) activities, and Christmas, are central for familial well-being. In our interpretation, that is why family rituals are used not just to confirm the shared identity and community of the family members, to display and impart values and traditions, to create a common framework of action, or also to develop identities, roles, and abilities – they are used for the performative creation of familial well-being as well (Audehm, Wulf & Zirfas, 2007; Wulf, 2011).

5. Christmas in a Berlin family, New Year in a Japanese family

In a project established in the "Languages of Emotion" Cluster of Excellence of the Free University of Berlin and in the "Happiness" Cluster of Excellence of Kyoto University, three German-Japanese teams studied the Christmas ritual in three German families and the New Year's ritual in three Japanese families. Without being able to go into the methodological questions interesting for a global cultural studies network research project at this point, some common features could be identified in the shaping of the central family ritual. In my further remarks, I will focus on two families in Berlin-Tegel and Higashimonobeie near Kyoto. The Berlin family consists of the parents and four children, the Japanese family of the grandparents and the two families of their children. The German and the Japanese families belong to the upper middle class; they observe the celebratory

ritual in their own houses; both families have a religious orientation. Both families were selected according to criteria of theoretical sampling and the questions and hypotheses upon which this sampling is based.

Christmas in a Berlin family

Arrival: As we (Shoko Suzuki & Christoph Wulf) approach the home of the Schultz family in Konrads Höhe in a residential district of Tegel on the afternoon of the 24th of December, it had begun to rain. Our small group consists of three Japanese and one German. We drive through the Tegel Forest, passing by numerous single-family homes, until we arrive at the street on which the family's semi-detached house is located. The family consists of both parents, Mother Frauke (Protestant), Father Ingo (Catholic), and four children (Protestant). We are expected and are cordially greeted by the mother and then by the father. Curious about what is happening, the four children now come out of their rooms on the two floors above. They are introduced to us. When the family asks what we are expecting, we answer that they should pay as little attention to us as possible and that they should celebrate Christmas as always.

In these hours of the year, the familiar Christmas songs change the living room into a sacred space, which is reinforced by the songs that all family members sing together from time to time. The seating area with the Christmas tree and presents underneath is located in a niche across from the table. The Christmas tree is decorated with red baubles, wooden decorations, red ribbons, and an electric string of lights. It is the sacred center of the living room and the family's staging of happiness on Christmas Eve…

Attending a church service: In the early evening, we walk with Mother Frauke and Kevin to the Protestant church that is located just a few minutes away. The other family members have reserved seats for us there. As the bells rings, the pastor approaches the altar. After some brief organ music, he greets the congregation, says a few words about those who are sick and not able to attend, and asks for the Lord's blessing for the holiday congregation, which then sings "*Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*" ("Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"). Then, as is the case every year, the Christmas story according to the apostle Luke is read. The congregation then sings "*Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her*" ("From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"). The sermon follows, which centers on the star that can only be seen with one's heart, a star that shines like God and warms one like his love. This is followed by an interpretation of the gifts brought to Jesus by the Three Kings, in which gold is equated with dignity, honor, and recognition; incense with the soul ascending to God; and myrrh with encouragement and healing. Organ music and other Christmas songs sung by the entire congregation resound…

Back at home again, the handing out of the presents begins. It is introduced by Mother Frauke again reading the Christmas story "*Wie Jesus auf die Welt kam*" ("How Jesus Came into the World") in the Berlin dialect to the children and husband sitting closely together in front of the Christmas tree. As the story is announced, everyone applauds approvingly. It was apparently part of the family tradition to listen to this "modernization" of the Christmas story. It is the same story told by the apostle Luke, but it comes across so differently through the Berlin dialect that everyone needs to listen carefully to recognize and understand it.

The handing out of presents takes more than two hours. Since each of the six members of the family receives a present from the other family members and the children receive several presents from the parents, many presents are exchanged. The handing out of presents is experienced by everyone as highly intensive and exciting. This time Elias, as the oldest child of the family, is the first to receive a present. It is a DVD of the film "*Der Club der toten Dichter*" ("Dead Poets Society"). Everyone watches as he unwraps it. Everyone curiously

waits to see what sort of present he has received. Comments on the present come from several sides: "You wanted to have that," "Cool," "I'd like to see that film too." The other three children also take the DVD in hand and look at it. The presentation of this present and the comments that accompany this activity make it clear: this DVD is being given not just to Elias, but to the entire family. The attention paid to it makes the present into a part of the family community. It belongs to the oldest son, to be sure, but all the others participate in the process of giving and receiving the present. All family members identify with the receiver of the present. Everyone puts his- or herself into his place for a moment and joins him in his happiness. The present is not so much about the material value, but rather the attention and recognition given to the person receiving the present.

Special attention is paid to a present for the mother that the children need to fetch from another room and whose shape suggests a picture. There is great astonishment as the present turns out to be a doormat for the entrance with the inscription "Hotel Mama". The mother is especially happy about this present in particular. She feels that she and her dedication to the family has been validated and recognized. The commentary of all family members is correspondingly extensive, with everyone emphasizing the constant presence of the mother and her care in front of the entire family. Father Ingo encapsulates what they are all feeling: "Mom is happy now."

During the handing out of presents, the family members sit close together in the seating area near the Christmas tree. Their bodies touch each other: tucked-in legs are next to extended arms, hips next to drawn-up knees, heads on the shoulders of the siblings. The family members crowd in close to each other in front of the Christmas tree. Some sit on the couch, others on the floor, pressed onto the legs of their siblings, and still others balance themselves on the backrest of the couch. The intertwined bodies of the family members fill the niche in front of the Christmas tree. A collective body is created whose dynamics emerge from the movements during the handing out of presents. The handing out of presents is largely a physical occurrence. The giving and receiving of presents is accompanied by many gestures and comments. Physical proximity plays an important role. Parents and children touch each other and express their happiness and thanks to each other in this way. Gestures of emotional expression oscillate in particular between Mother Frauke and her children. In gift-giving, a movement to the body to the Other occurs, which leads to sensuous proximity, festive joy, intimacy, and feelings of belonging. During the fumbling and touching, the presents and the other family members are immediately felt. Mother Frauke feels and strokes her presents multiple times, as if she could better sense and incorporate her gifts using her sense of touch. In these gestures of mutual physical gift-giving, the family Schultze creates a special form of a collective family body.

Family happiness: On the first day of Christmas, we meet again with the family in the morning. Today we want to have a conversation about what the family believes makes up its family happiness. This is to supplement the impressions we gained from Christmas Eve. We want to not just observe how the family stages and performs its happiness on this day, but would like to also find out what the family believes its happiness consists of. We want to understand what aspects are important to them, how they assess them, and how they talk about their happiness.

Not just at Christmas, but also in the day-to-day life of the family, the Schultz parents try to make everything possible for their children that is important for their lives, and they try to make them feel well. For this, material conditions that make the fulfillment of their and their children's wishes possible are also important. It is first and foremost the daily care for the children provided by the mother that both parents believe to be important. In order to dedicate herself to taking care of the children, Mother Frauke gave up her work as a physiotherapist –

against her convictions at the beginning. This decision, without which the comprehensive care for the children would not have been possible, is strongly supported by Father Ingo, whose job allows him to often work from home. Father Ingo spontaneously mentions that the children receive all-inclusive care in daily life. "There's all-inclusive and XXL all-inclusive care" (20:58-21:05 CD 25.12.).

It is especially important to both parents that their children are served a warm lunch every day and that one of them looks after them. For example, the mother brings each child to the door and says goodbye to him or her individually. She also opens the door for each child when he or she returns from school even if he or she already has a key to the front door. Recently Mother Frauke got up each morning at 4:30 am for several weeks in order to make one of her sons breakfast during his internship, sending him into the day on a full stomach. Children's needs are different at each point in time, something that cannot always be predicted and that also differs from one child to the next. Her children could count themselves lucky that she participates in pretty much everything, according to Mother Frauke. In the last twenty years, the Schultz parents have seen their life-task as dedicating themselves entirely to their children…

I interrupt my ethnographic description here and go to the New Year's celebration of the Japanese family and their staging of family happiness that I participated in with Shoko Suzuki, my colleague from Kyoto University.

The New Year's celebration in a Japanese family in a village

The village of Higashimonobe is located north of Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake. It is a typical region for the cultivation of rice (flat with a great amount of water). The village has a long history and ancient traditions that are closely linked with rice cultivation. For example, the irrigation ditches play a major role. They ensure the order and maintenance of the fields. The village orients itself about the irrigation system. It was originally the case that nearly all families of the village were occupied with rice cultivation, something that is reflected in the closely spaced houses, but today only a few families work in rice cultivation. All families have the special family name of the family patriarch who once settled here in the village with his family.

December 31st is called *Omisoka*. In former times it was the case that all businesses received new cloths for their house entrances on *Omisoka*. Each house has a small house shrine; on *Omisoka*, candles are lit there and the people give thanks that the family was able to prosper over the past year; the family also asks that the next year be prosperous. On December 31st, *Soba* (long, spaghetti-like noodles made from buckwheat) is eaten in the evening. *Soba* is a symbol for long life. In the night from December 31st to January 1st, the bells are rung in all temples 108 times at midnight (*Joya*). This Buddhist ritual is intended to get rid of negative desires. It is normally the case that one is not allowed to sleep during this night. According to the tradition, anyone who does sleep will get more white hairs and facial wrinkles. In former times, the people would also spend the night in the shrine (without sleeping). For this reason a large fire is lit at the shrine.

Joya is a very sacred celebration: it receives the annual god of the year to come. All residents of the village wait for the arrival of the god (which is why they are not permitted to sleep). There are twelve annual gods: mouse, cow, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, bird (chicken), dog, and wild boar. When the annual god comes, the people – or the Japanese, in any case – are born again.

On January 1st, two representatives of the village council go to the *Nogita shrine* and prepare the reception of the other village residents. Shortly after sunrise, the other village residents come to the shrine for the New Year's greeting. In former times, everyone wore kimonos on this occasion. Today the people no longer wear

kimonos, but instead formal wear. For the New Year's greeting, each person brings three rice units wrapped in white paper (for the two shrines and the one temple of the village). The people first go to the shrines, then to the temple. Then the people make a brief visit to their relatives (first and foremost the father of the family and the oldest son) to wish them a happy new year. Then a small snack is eaten for breakfast. Around 7:00 am, a drum is beaten in the temple. It symbolizes the beginning of the temple service (a Buddhist mass in the main hall of the temple) which the village residents attend. The father of the family brings a coin wrapped in white paper, the woman an *Isho*, a sack with rice. Later the New Year's greeting cards to friends, colleagues, etc., are written – and usually in great numbers.

The house in which we (Shoko Suzuki and Christoph Wulf) spent the turn of the year consists of two rooms that form a large room, next to which there are another two rooms separated from each other. A large kitchen branches off from one of these rooms. There are six more rooms on the second floor. On the front side of the large living room across from the entrance, there is a stately Buddhist family altar on the right, and on the left is the *Tokonoma*, a pictorial scroll with sacred characters; in front of it is a bouquet of flowers arranged in the Ikebana style. To the left of this, the front side of a Shinto shrine is hanging on the side wall above head height. Sacred vessels are arranged underneath it. Across from the Shinto shrine, photographs of the great- and great-great-grandparents hang on the other side wall next to the Buddhist temple. The Buddhist temple and the Shinto shrine are next to each other and form the sacred center of the house in their mutual entanglement. The separation of the Buddhist and Shinto sanctuaries that was aspired to during the Meji period has not occurred here, or it has been reversed. For the Oda family, the Buddhist temple is of special significance. The family belongs to the *Jodo-Shinshu* school of Japanese Buddhism, in which the great-grandfather was a lay priest and to which the family still feels closely linked. The sacred works handed down from the great-grandfather lie in this temple. In the course of the New Year's ceremony, a text is read from one of them in Old Japanese. The temple is decorated today. A special triangular cloth just for the New Year's celebration, fresh flowers, new candles, and later two rice cakes stacked one on top of the other with a mandarin orange refer to the turn of the year and the hopes for a healthy and happy life associated with it. An *Ootsue*, an image of the devil that is common in the Shiga district around Lake Biwa, hangs over the exit of the large living room in the direction of the entry area of the house. It shows a devil in hiking gear with a rolled-up sleeping mat on his back and a rice bowl on his stomach. One of his horns is mutilated and he looks more comical then threatening. This devil has only limited forces of evil at his disposal. At the transition to the room next door used primarily as a play area for the children, an image of Fuji refers to one of the most important sacred places in Japan, where love of nature, religious feelings, and aesthetic feelings overlap.

Visit to the cemetery: An integral component of the New Year's celebration is a visit to the cemetery, to which we set out for in the late afternoon. The graves of the deceased are at the edge of the village next to a modern highway. For the Japanese, the graves are the gateway to the world of the ancestors. All families in the village have a stone monument in which the remains of the deceased are kept after the body is cremated. As we approached the monument of the Oda family, light snow began to fall.

Grandfather Makato performs the ritual. The flowers on the monument are replaced by new ones. Two candles are lit and placed in wind-protected containers. Incense sticks are lit and placed in the cups provided for this purpose. Water is poured into one of the bowls in front of the candles; the rest of the water is poured over the tip of the monument. Lastly, two small books are produced, from which the grandfather, son, and

granddaughter read prayers. For this they kneel in front of the marble monument with their hands folded between a prayer chain. It gradually gets dark, the snowfall becomes heavier, and we drive back to the house.

New Year's meal: The preparation of the New Year's meal is women's work. It is generally the case that the daughter-in-law must learn the customs and ways of the family into which she has married – the way of cutting the vegetables, the cooking, the seasoning of the meal, and the table and plate decoration, for example. The young woman is to be guided by the mother-in-law. As a young daughter-in-law, Grandmother Oda learned this in the exact same way. After the death of her mother-in-law, she slowly began to prepare the food according to her own tastes. Over the course of time, she also took into account the wishes of the younger generation and the grandchildren, as well as elements from Western cuisine, in the preparation of the New Year's meal. Today her daughter-in-law helps her in the preparation of the New Year's meal. Like she herself did before, her daughter-in-law learns today to prepare the family meal for the New Year's celebration according to the traditions and customs of the Oda family. In an interview, Grandmother Kayoko explains the significance of the preparation of the traditional family meal.

Family well-being: A little later, we ask the oldest son Yasuo and his wife to provide us with an interview about family well-being. We ask them about their notions and perceptions of well-being. Yasuo begins to talk to us as if it were a matter of course; later Nanako joins in. Both tell of their notions of well-being and of the threat to their family well-being through the heart defect of their son Kijoichi. For Yasuo and Nanako, the community of the family played a major role. Yasuo tries to be together with the children and to play with them as much as possible. He would like to enable memories for them that are just as nice as the ones from his own childhood. The love of his father Makato is reflected in these memories, and he tries to create similar memories for his children. Passing on parental love to the next generation occurs in a mimetic process in which the foundations are laid for feeling happiness in later life.

New Year's morning: We will see each other again on the morning of New Year's day. As we arrive before 6:00 am at the home of the Oda family, everyone is already awake and dressed for the celebration so that they can festively mark the first day of the New Year. We head off with the grandfather and his son in the darkness of the morning to ask for happiness for the New Year in a shrine in a temple. It has again begun to snow. While underway, we meet many village residents, almost exclusively men, who like us are walking to the sacred places to ask for blessings for the New Year. The women stay at home to prepare the first and especially important meal in the New Year. As we arrive at the shrine, two priests are sitting there in their blue garments. The gifts of money prepared yesterday are presented; the bell is rung; it resounds; hands are clapped twice; a small bowl of rice wine is drunk. Then we go to the Buddhist temple. As we meet people underway, we wish them and they wish us a happy New Year: *Akemaskite omedeto gozaimasu…*

Conditions of family well-being

Without being able to specify what the conditions are for family happiness, three central characteristics can be specified on the basis of our ethnographic material:

- The well-being experienced during the New Year's celebration is a communal well-being that is created by stagings and performances within the family.

- Family well-being is created during the New Year's celebration in and with the aid of performative practices.
- The community of the family differs from other communities through the intensity of the practices that create family well-being.

In the context of our study of the staging and performance of well-being in the Oda family during the New Year's celebration, two family practices are especially important: 1) the sacred practices rooted in Shintoism and Buddhism that are constitutive for the well-being of the family studied; 2) the associated practices and symbolic forms of eating and drinking. The sacred practices represent the connection with the cosmic order and the subsumption of the individual life into the succession of ancestors and generations. The practices of eating and drinking are experienced as sensual ones that bring the community together. They contribute to the self-assurance of the family, intensify the communication between the generations and genders, and thus ensure the continued existence of the family.

6. Transcultural elements of family well being

In the family rituals studied in Germany and Japan, it is the five elements of eating, praying, gift-giving, remembering, and being together that are accorded special significance for the creation of family well-being. Depending on the focus of the description and interpretation, common and different aspects can be differentiated with each of these elements. Each element can be understood as a *unitas multiplex* whose description and interpretation involves relating the common and the different to each other. It is imperative here to avoid studying just one of the two perspectives without the other. Only with an approach that oscillates between the two perspectives can impermissible conceptual and methodological abridgements be avoided. In his thoughts on the "family resemblance" of games, Wittgenstein thoroughly described the problem of working out the *unitas multiplex* of these elements in family rituals. In the spectrum of family well-being studied, there are many different characteristics, similarities, and differences, so that diversity is created that in principle cannot be comprehended, but within which similarities result that make it possible to perceive and structure this diversity. The basic question of the comparability of cultural phenomena and the possibilities and limits of the comparison arises here, and ensuing from that the question of what people have in common in regard to family well-being (Antweiler, 2011).

For both ritual family celebrations, several elements are characteristic, the configuration of which was very different for the two families. Finally, these common features and differences in the shaping of these central family rituals are to be briefly outlined in six points (Wulf et al., 2011):

- In both families, the *sacred foundation of the family ritual* plays an important role. The German family, at the home of which the living room was transformed into a sacred space by the Christmas tree, the many candles, and the familiar Christmas songs, goes on Christmas Eve to the nearby Protestant church to participate in the Christmas service. There they meet other members of the congregation.

After the handing out of presents, the Christmas story is read again by the father in two new versions. The fact that one of the two stories is presented in the Berlin dialect causes it to be defamiliarized and transformed into a new story without changing its substance in the process. In the second version, the story is "translated" in a modern newspaper item, showing what great resistance the Christmas happenings would encounter even in our world today.

In the Japanese family, a visit to the family grave occurs on the last day of the year; the family visits two temples very early on the morning of New Year's Day. On the way there, the residents of the village wish each other a healthy and happy new year. The New Year's ritual is performed in both temples. Then the families go home to attend another ritual that the grandfather performs in front of the Buddhist altar in the living room in the presence of the entire family and to eat the New Year's meal prepared by the women in the night.

- In the celebration, the *communal meal* occupies center stage. In the Japanese family, it is eaten while sitting around a table on the floor in front of the Buddhist house temple. On New Year's Day, special dishes are cooked whose symbolic meaning for the New Year is spoken about during the meal. The family members sit closely together; they say very little. For the German family, less significance is attributed to the food consumed at the dining table. The mother emphasizes that she not a great "chef" and refuses to make a special effort on this day. The family community is created first and foremost through the conversations at the table, the intensity of which is characteristic of the style of this family.

- The *exchange of gifts* plays a role in both family rituals. While this is rather marginal in the Japanese family, it plays a central role in the German family. It is not so much its material value as its social significance that puts it at the center of the family ritual. The two-hour-long exchange of gifts takes place in the seating area in front of the Christmas tree. All family members sit there closely pressed together. Each gift is commented upon by all members of the family regarding its benefit for the person receiving it and its social and aesthetic quality.

- Families constitute their feelings of community through *narratives* in which the members of the family remember events experienced together, bring the respective present into line with the reference frame of the family, and articulate future projections together. Family narrations generate, confirm, and safeguard feelings of belonging.

- During the celebratory ritual, the family members take *time for each other, for their togetherness.* They enjoy being together and with each other. That is expressed in the German family in the extensive conversations borne by affection. In the Japanese family, it is expressed in the games of the adults with the children, during which the children receive special attention. In the conversations in the German family that we recorded, the children repeatedly express that they would like to later have a family and children, and that they want to pattern their future family life after the model of their family. In the Japanese family, the value of this family ritual that brings together three generations is expressed in the common preparation of the meals by the grandmother, her daughter, and her daughter-in-law, and the high level of appreciation for the meal.

A clear difference between the German and Japanese families arises from the meaning of the parents and previous generations for the family members. In the German family, the father's parents who live nearby and

whom the family thus sees from time to time are visited on the afternoon of the first day of the holiday. Packages with presents are exchanged with the mother's parents, who live quite far away. Telephone calls are placed during the Christmas holiday. In the Japanese family, the family ritual takes place in the house of the grandparents, where three generations participated (four until a few years ago). The family also visits the family grave on the last day of the old year in order to commemorate the ancestors, to thank them, and to ask their blessing for the New Year. The grandfather performs a ritual with water, fire, flowers, and the recitation of sacred sayings, in which he also involves the little grandson.

7. Outlook

In the conversation with the family members of both families, it became clear what central significance the Christmas and New Year's rituals have for the coherence of the family and the well-being of its members. In both families, narrative recourse to previous Christmas and New Year's celebrations and narrative projections to future celebrations embed the present of the family celebration in the history and expected future of the family. This creates an emotional intensity and a feeling of shared identity that the family members experience as family well-being. Durkheim (1994) correctly pointed out how important the sacred character constituted in such rituals is for the family for it to be able to realize its societal and social function. Values, standards, and rules that are binding for the family are demonstrated in the staging of such rituals with their performative practices and their accompanying narrations that generate their meaning. They are created in these processes, incorporated in the behavior of the family members, and confirmed again and again through repetition. These values, standards, and rules, as well as the feelings intertwined with them, do not enter the consciousness of the family members as abstract values. Rather, they are integrated into staged actions, conversations, and behaviors of which one only becomes conscious in case of conflicts or upon targeted questioning of the reasons behind them. They are part of an action knowledge that gives the family members the ability to take the correct action in accordance with the situation.

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Adult Learning Theory: A Review and an Update

Sharan B. Merriam[1]

(University of Georgia, U.S.A.)

ABSTRACT

There is no one definition, model, or theory that explains how or why adults learn. Yet what we know about adult learning is what unites an otherwise disparate field of practice ranging from continuing professional education to basic literacy classes to on-the-job training. What we do have is a mosaic of principles and explanations that form an ever-expanding knowledge base of adult learning. The first section of this article reviews three "foundational" theories of adult learning— andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning followed by a discussion of the shift from these foundational theories to approaches that attend to the social and political context of adult learning. The third section of this review of adult learning theory addresses the most recent research in holistic approaches to adult learning which includes the role of emotions, body and spirit in learning. Also discussed in this section is the growing attention to non-Western perspectives on adult learning.

Keywords: Adult Learning Theory, Holistic Learning, Non-Western

1. Introduction

While everyone knows at some level that adults learn throughout their lives, learning has become so associated with formal classes and "school," that adults often don't recognize or acknowledge that they are

continually learning. Learning is, as Jarvis writes, "the essence of everyday living and of conscious experience; it is the process of transforming that experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs" (1992; 11).

It wasn't until the early 20th century that learning in adulthood was systematically studied and then it was by behavioral and cognitive scientists who were most interested in memory, intelligence, and information processing, and in particular, how age impacted these processes. These early studies spawned different theoretical approaches to learning and adult learning, approaches which still frame research about adult learning today.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, adult educators themselves began studying adult learners which generated several models, theories and frameworks explaining how adult learners could be distinguished from children. These contributions gave rise to adult education achieving its own identity as a field of practice separate from childhood education. We now know quite a bit about adult learners, how context shapes adult learning, and how noncognitive factors play a role in adult learning. This article begins with a review of three foundational adult learning theories—andragogy, self-directed learning and transformative learning. Each of these theories focuses on the individual adult learner. A second section discusses the shift to attending to the context of adult learning that took place in the later decades of the twentieth century and remains central to understanding adult learning today. The third section reviews the most recent work in theory building in adult learning—that of considering the important place of emotions, the body, and the spirit in learning. Also discussed in this final section is the growing influence of non-Western perspectives in learning.

2. Foundational Theories of Adult Learning

While there's always been at least an implicit understanding that adults can and do learn, it wasn't until the twentieth century that research attention was paid to learning in adulthood. The earliest research on adult learning was conducted by behavioral psychologists in the early decades of the century. These early studies were most often conducted in laboratory settings and of interest was how age affected the learning process. Based in behavioral psychology, learning was seen as a change in observable behavior, principles of which are still present in training programs in business and industry, the military, instructional technology, self-help programs and "evidence-based practice" in health and medical arenas.

However, by the mid-twentieth century interest in adult learners from a humanistic psychology perspective focused more on how adulthood could be distinguished from childhood learning. A humanistic perspective on learning emphasizes personal growth and development rather than the more mechanistic change in behavior. And it was this research and writing on adult learning that resulted in adult education becoming a recognized field of practice with its own professional associations, journals, and conferences. The three major "foundational" theories of adult learning that emerged during this time—andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning—are firmly lodged in humanistic learning theory. Each theory or framework is associated with an adult educator who wanted to define what is characteristic of the learning of *adults* versus that of children. Each theory has a robust research base and has, for the most part, withstood the test of time.

2.1 Andragogy

Andragogy is a European concept (indeed, even today there are academic departments of andragogy in several Central and Eastern European countries) imported to the U.S. by Malcolm Knowles in the late 1960s. He introduced it as "a new label and a new technology" distinguishing adult learning from children's learning or pedagogy (1968; 351). Knowles proposed the following set of *assumptions* about adult learners:

1. As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning (Knowles, 1980; 44-45).
5. Adults are mostly driven by internal motivation, rather than external motivators.
6. Adults need to know the reason for learning something (Knowles, 1984).

These principles or assumptions actually tell us more about the characteristics of adult learners than about the nature of learning itself. Eventually shying away from calling andragogy a "theory" of adult learning, Knowles came to believe there was a continuum ranging from teacher-directed pedagogy on the one end, to student-directed learning (andragogy) on the other end, and both approaches are appropriate with adults and children depending on the situation. Using these assumptions about adult learners, Knowles's (1980) program planning model attends to, for example, making the adult classroom a place suitable for adults both physically and psychologically. Further, since adults direct their lives in family, work and civic arenas, they can also (and often want to) direct their own learning.

2.2 Self-Directed Learning

Appearing about the same time that Knowles introduced andragogy, self-directed learning (SDL), a second major adult learning theory, further helped to distinguish adult learners from children. The first assumption of andragogy above, that as a person matures they become more independent and self-directing, in fact speaks to the self-directed nature of adult learners. The impetus for SDL becoming a major theory of its own came from Tough's (1971) research into the self-planned learning projects of Canadian adult learners. He found that 90% of his participants had engaged in an average of 100 hours of self-planned learning projects the previous year, and that this learning was deeply embedded in their everyday lives. Over 40 years of research in North America and Europe has substantiated that most adults are engaged in self-directed learning projects, that this learning occurs as part of everyday life, is undertaken in a systematic way, yet is not dependent upon an instructor or a classroom.

The key to understanding SDL is to recognize that SDL does not mean sitting in a room alone, learning something; rather SDL is all about the learner *taking control* of her or his own learning. A self-directed learner could decide, for example, that she wants to take a class, find a mentor, or join an online discussion group. SDL

can be found throughout the contexts of adult life, including the workplace, continuing professional education, health and medical fields, higher education, and in online contexts where research suggests that the more successful online learners are also more self-directed (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). SDL is often incorporated into formal instructional situations such as in higher education or continuing professional education; that is, a component of instruction might be to undertake a SDL project. The voluminous literature on SDL contains numerous models of the process, sample learner contracts, and assessment tools that measure the extent of a learner's self-directedness.

2.3 Transformative Learning

Of the three foundational theories of adult learning, transformative learning is the most recent and most written about. Instead of focusing on the adult learner's characteristics as andragogy and to a large extent self-directed learning do, transformative learning focuses on the cognitive process of meaning making. This type of learning is considered an adult learning theory because transformative learning is dependent on adult life experiences and a more mature level of cognitive functioning than found in childhood. Mezirow, who studied the experiences of women returning to college, is considered the main architect of this theory (1978) though since his early contribution many frameworks, definitions and theories have been proposed. Learning in adulthood is often more than just adding information. It is also making sense of our experience and can result in a change in a belief, attitude, or perspective. A perspective transformation is central to this type of learnin

Mezirow's (2000) ten-step transformational learning process still frames some of today's research. The process is usually initiated through a sudden or dramatic experience (a "disorienting dilemma" in Mezirow's term) wherein adults are challenged to examine their assumptions and beliefs that have guided meaning making in the past, but now are no longer adequate. From an examination of current beliefs, the learner moves to exploring new ways of dealing with the dilemma which may lead to a change in a belief, attitude, or an entire perspective. The new perspective is more inclusive and accommodating of a wider range of experiences than the previously-held perspective. While Mezirow focused on personal, individual transformation, he readily acknowledged the influence of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) wrote of the need for transformational learning to address oppression and bring about social change.

Currently, transformative learning is probably the most researched and studied area in adult learning theory: "There are hundreds of articles and chapters and dozens of books, the most recent being the 600-page *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* (2012), a journal devoted to this type of learning (*Journal of Transformative Education*), and biannual international conferences on transformative learning" (Merriam and Bierema, 2014; 83).

3. Context-Based Models of Adult Learning

Andragogy, self-directed learning and transformative learning all focus on how individual adults learn. While each of these theories has contributed to our understanding of adult learning, each has also been critiqued for its

lack of attention to the social and political context in which learning takes place. How self-directing can one be in their learning in an oppressive social context? Can transformative learning take place if one is not exposed to alternative ways of thinking about an issue or problem? In the latter decades of the twentieth century attention to the role of context in shaping adult learning became prominent and remains an important component in understanding adult learning today. There are at least two strands of research and writing that attend to the context of adult learning—critical perspectives and situated cognition or "contextual learning."

3.1 Critical Social Science Perspectives

At the heart of a critical social science perspective is shifting attention from the individual learner to the social context where learning takes place. Drawing from Marxism, critical theory, critical race theory, queer theory, feminist theory and multiculturalism, this perspective asks questions about how race, class and gender impact the structures in society, who holds power and how the powerful shape society to reinforce their status.

Brookfield and Holst (2014) point out that from a critical perspective, there are three problems with the individual orientation of andragogy, self-directed learning and much of transformative learning. First, "the self cannot stand outside the social, cultural and political streams within which it swims." Second, "self-direction as a form of learning emphasizing separateness leads us to equate it with selfishness, with the narcissistic pursuit of private ends, regardless of the consequences of this pursuit for others." Third, "a view of learning that regards people as self-contained, volitional beings scurrying around in individual projects is also one that works against collective and cooperative impulses" (2014; 7).

The most prominent adult education writer from a critical theory perspective is Brookfield (2005). He has proposed a theory of adult learning that has "at its core an understanding of how adults learn to recognize the predominance of ideology in their everyday thoughts and actions and in the institutions of civil society (2001, p. 21). There are seven "learning tasks" embedded in a critical learning theory: (1) Challenging ideology. This is "the basic tool for helping adults learn to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequity and oppression that lurk beneath" (Bookfield, 2005; 42); (2) Contesting hegemony. Hegemony is the notion that "people learn to accept as natural and in their best interest an unjust social order" (Bookfield, 2005; 43); (3) Unmasking power. "Part of becoming adult is learning to recognize the play of power in our lives and ways it is used and abused" (Bookfield, 2005; 47); (4) Overcoming alienation. "The removal of alienation allows for the possibility of freedom, for the unmanipulated exercise of one's creative powers" (Bookfield, 2005; 50); Learning liberation. Adults need to learn to liberate themselves, individually and collectively, from the dominant ideology; (6) Reclaiming reason. "A major concern of critical theory is to reclaim reason as something to be applied in all spheres of life" (Bookfield, 2005; 56); (7) Practicing democracy. Adults must learn to live with the contradictions of democracy, "learning to accept that democracy is always a partially functioning ideal" (Bookfield, 2005; 65).

While Brookfield is the major theorist with regard to a critical theory perspective on adult learning, a critical social science perspective is very much embraced by many researchers and writers in adult education and human resource development today. While there are numerous theoretical perspectives couched in complex language and concepts, the theme underlying these perspectives is that the context where learning takes place matters and it is important to relentlessly challenge the inequities of the learning context.

3.2 Situated Cognition/Contextual Learning

A second arena of theory-building related to the context where learning takes place is called situated cognition or contextual learning. Coming from educational psychology rather than social science philosophy, this theory posits that the particular learning that takes place is a function of three factors in the context where it occurs: the people in the context, the tools at hand (tools can be objects like a whiteboard, language or symbols), and the particular activity itself. Probably the most famous example of situated cognition comes from research by Lave who is considered the major architect of this theory. She asked adults to determine which of two products in a grocery store was a "best buy." Those who actually went to a grocery store, talked with people in their group, and physically handled various items to compare sizes and shapes, got 98% of the math problems correct. Those who were given the same math problems in a paper and pencil test got 59% correct (Lave, 1988). Many of us who visit other countries or even unfamiliar places in our own country, learn within the context how to negotiate the transportation system, shop for groceries and other items, and so on. We ask people who know, make use of signs and symbols and engage in the activity itself. In another example, Kim and Merriam (2010) investigated how older Koreans learned to use computers. The physical setting of the classroom, the "tools" of computer terminals, whiteboards, and the teacher's notes, and the culturally defined interactions between teacher and students and among students themselves shaped the learning that took place.

Because a major component of understanding learning as a function of the context in which it occurs nearly always involves other people, the notion of learning communities or communities of practice is a direct outgrowth of this perspective on learning. Communities of practice are groups of people who share a common interest and who learn within that sphere of common interest. We all belong to several communities of practice whether it is our family, our co-workers, a professional association, a neighborhood group, or a social website such as Facebook. In some communities we might have quite a bit of knowledge and thus be more "core" members; in others we may be more on the periphery. Wenger (1998) who is most often associated with communities of practice makes the point that learning is central to these communities, whether it happens serendipitously, or whether it is designed into the "social infrastructures" (Wenger, 1998; 225). In his theory, a community of practice becomes a learning community when learning is "not only a matter of course in the history of its practice, but at the very core of its enterprise" (Wenger, 1998; 214-215).

There is an ever-growing body of literature on communities of practice and learning communities, including a journal, *Learning Communities Journal*. While communities of practice are most often implemented in organizational settings, and learning communities in educational settings, online environments and community organizations, the terms are being used somewhat interchangeably. Precise terminology is less important than understanding that the emphasis of both situated or contextual learning and critical social science perspectives is that the *context* of adult learning is as important as identifying characteristics of adult learners and the cognitive process involved in learning.

4. Recent Theory Building in Adult Learning

Learning is more than a cognitive process, but because for centuries the West has viewed the mind as separate from the body, and because learning has been so connected with formal schooling, the activity is almost always framed from a rational, cognitive perspective. However, recent work in the West and growing knowledge of how other cultures think of learning have revealed that learning can be through pathways other than those dominated by our brain. Our body, our emotions, and our spirit (what is often referred to as holistic learning), are also important avenues for learning or knowledge construction. Work in holistic learning is coming from educators, psychologists, and neuroscientists.

4.1 Embodied or Somatic Knowing

Embodied or somatic learning is learning through the body. Whether or not we acknowledge the body as a site of learning matters little because we have all experienced embodied knowing. The brain itself is a physical organ, a part of our body, thus separating the brain from the body makes little sense. Indeed, it is the brain that processes signals coming through our body. These signals include our emotions which we "feel" as well as intuitive or tacit knowing. In writing about the link between the rational mind and the emotional body, Mulvihill (2003) says "there is no such thing as a behavior or thought, which is not impacted in some way by emotions. There are no neurotransmitters for 'objectivity;'…during both the initial processing and the linking with information from the different senses, it becomes clear that there is no thought, memory, or knowledge which is 'objective,' or 'detached' from the personal experience of knowing" (2003; 322). Embodied learning is highly intuitive. Intuitive or tacit knowledge is knowledge we have all felt but rarely articulate: "It is knowing that we experience rather than think about" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; 130).

Embodied or somatic knowing involves our senses (think of times when our body reacts in a "knowing" way to something in our environment—like feeling threatened or nervous or excited before we know the cause of these feelings). It is also intuitive. This is the emotional component to embodied learning that Dirkx (2008) writes about with reference to adult learning. "Learning itself is an imaginative, emotional act and that really significant learning, learning that involves "big words or concepts, such as Truth, Power, Justice, and Love" (Dirkx 2001; 69) is inconceivable without emotion and feelings.

The body is an instrument for learning, whether beneath our conscious awareness as in tacit or intuitive knowing, or manifested in our emotional connections to the learning. Embodied learning has been explored in a variety of adult education settings including literacy programs, the workplace, community settings, higher education and even online environments (Dirkx, 2008; Lawrence, 2012). Embodied learning has received quite a bit of attention in social work, psychotherapy and nursing. The body is central to healthcare of course, and as Wright and Brajtman (2011) write, "recognition of every person as an embodied being-in-the-world is fundamental to ethical nursing practice" (2011; 25).

Fortunately, the false dichotomy between the mind and the body which can be traced back to the seventeenth century philosopher Descartes' famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am" is being challenged by researchers in the social sciences as well as neuroscientists who study brain functioning (Johnson & Taylor 2006).

Understanding how the brain, body, and emotions are interconnected is contributing significantly to our knowledge of how learning occurs.

4.2 Spirituality and Learning

A holistic approach to learning also includes acknowledging the spiritual dimension of human beings. While spirituality is not the same as religion, it is often associated with religious beliefs and practices, which is probably why there has been some reluctance to accept the role spirituality can have in learning. However, for many, spirituality is "an awareness of something greater than ourselves" (English, 2005; 1171) and is about *connection* to something outside of ourselves, whether it be to others, to the earth, or to a life force. Spirituality relates to adult learning through meaning-making: "Spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and avenue of learning and meaning-making" (Tisdell, 2001; 3).

Thus the key to understanding the role of spirituality in learning is through the notion of meaning-making. Tisdell (1999) explains how spirituality, meaning-making and adult learning are interrelated. First, it is important as adult educators to recognize and acknowledge that our learners have a spiritual dimension to their lives which "is connected to how we create meaning in our relationships with others. It is in our living and loving" (1999; 93). Second, adults come into a learning context with a meaning-making agenda even if it is not articulated in quite this way. Third, meaning making is the process of knowledge construction, a process that uses images and symbols (language is made up of symbols for example), "which often emanate from the deepest core of our being and can be accessed and manifested through art, music, or other creative work" (1999; 93).

In the growing literature on spirituality can be found studies from primary school through higher and adult education. With regard to adult learners, studies on spirituality have been conducted in reference to adult developmental processes especially identity development (Tisdell, 2008), social justice and social action initiatives (English, 2005), and the workplace. Somewhat surprisingly, the majority of research on spirituality and learning seems to be based in the workplace. Adults spend a great portion of their lives at work and we bring our whole self to work--body, brain, and spirit. "There have been literally dozens of popular books and articles and upwards of two hundred studies on this topic in the last twenty years. There is an online resource center, The Association for Spirit at Work (www.spiritatwork.com), and a journal published by Routledge, *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*. Karakas (2010) speculates that this burgeoning interest may be due to a paradigm shift from seeing the workplace as a controlled environment with a solely economic focus "to a balance of profits, quality of life, spirituality, and social responsibility" (2010; 89) (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; 140).

4.3 Non-Western Perspectives on Learning

Never before has the world been so interconnected. Globalization, the movement of goods, services, people and information across local and national boundaries, combined with communications technology and the Internet have resulted in a growing awareness of other cultures, other ways of thinking and other ways of learning. And there is no longer any doubt that learning is indeed a lifelong necessity. Another byproduct of

this interconnectedness is the growing awareness that how and what people learn is shaped by one's history and culture. Acknowledging and understanding other systems of knowing and learning expands our repertoire and hopefully effectiveness as adult educators.

In this section on recent contributions to adult learning theory, the influence of non-Western perspectives is briefly reviewed. The use of the terms "Western" and "non-Western" is of course problematic (setting up dichotomies is itself a very Western activity). However, these terms are commonly used due to lack of better categories as well as the fact that the adult learning theories and models reviewed above have evolved in the West and dominate the thinking, research and writing on adult learning theory. Historically, the formalization and institutionalization of Western knowledge systems has ignored even indigenous knowledge systems in the West. However, this is changing due to the forces mentioned above. And as part of our increasing interconnectedness through travel, study and living outside our home cultures we are much more aware of other ways of thinking and learning.

Non-western perspectives on knowledge and learning can be presented through several lens including looking at indigenous knowledge systems (local or community knowledge embracing spiritual values, traditions and practices passed down through generations), and religious, philosophical, and spiritual systems different from ones predominantly found in the West. However, most of these systems have the following themes in common: learning is a communal activity, it is lifelong and predominantly informal, and learning is holistic in nature (Merriam & Kim, 2011).

The first theme—that learning is communal—positions the benefit to the community over individual development and gain. Focusing on learning for individual development is considered immature, and as Nah (2000) found in a study of self-directed learning in Korea, "a person becoming independent of his or her parents, teachers or other people, tends to be considered threatening to the stability of a community he or she belongs to" (2010; 18). One's identity is seen as communal one as illustrated by the African proverb, *There is no Me Without You* or the Native American saying, "*We are, therefore I am*" (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2007). Learning is the responsibility of all members of the community for the benefit of the community.

Non-Western systems value learning that is lifelong and informal, that is learning is embedded in everyday life, throughout life. As Fasokun, Katahoire, and Oduaran (2005) point out, lifelong learning in African cultures focuses on informal learning through life experiences rather than learning in formal educational settings. While formal learning is valued in non-Western societies, and we know that the vast majority of adult learning in the West takes place informally, the perception of how learning takes place and what is acknowledged and rewarded favors informal learning in non-Western societies and formal, institutionally-based learning in the West.

Finally, a third theme that characterizes non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing is that learning is holistic. While the West continues to see learning as primarily a cognitive process residing in the brain, "if there's anything that non-Western systems of learning and knowing have in common, it's the notion that learning involves not only the mind but the body, the spirit, and the emotions. There is no separation of the mind from the rest of our being" (Merriam & Kim, 2011; 384). While the holistic nature of learning is receiving more attention in the West (see above), such a perspective is firmly embedded in non-Western traditions where equally important to developing the mind "is developing a moral person, a good person, a spiritual person, who by being part of the community uplifts the whole" (Merriam & Kim, 2011; 384).

In summary, globalization and communications technology have exposed and influenced all cultures to different worldviews about the nature of learning and knowledge construction. With regard to adult learning theory, exposure to non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing has contributed to expanding our understanding of learning in adulthood as well as how to maximize the effectiveness of instruction with adults.

5. Implications for Theory-Building and Practice in Adult Learning

It is clear from this review of theory building in adult learning that there is no one theory or set of principles that can capture the full range of what we know about adult learning. Rather what we have is an expanding mosaic of theories, models, principles and insights that together make up what we know about adult learning at any one point in time. Systematic investigations into adult learning began in the West in the early decades of the twentieth century and were dominated by a behavioral and cognitive framing of learning. Much interest in this period centered on how increasing age impacted performance on learning tasks and intelligence scores.

However, by the mid decades of the twentieth century, attention shifted to studying adult learning as a way of differentiating the field of adult education from childhood education. Three major streams of adult learning theory emerged in this period—andragogy, self-directed learning and transformative learning. These three "foundational" theories reflect a more humanistic psychological perspective that focuses on individual growth and development. Such a perspective is congruent with the field of adult education itself, particularly in the West where individualism, competency, and self-development are highly valued. This focus on the individual began to be questioned and critiqued as attention turned to the context where adult learning takes place. In particular, critical theory and all of its variations (Marxist theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, etc.) questioned how much autonomy an individual really had to learn and develop. Writers from this perspective pointed out that society's structures and who held the power to make decisions about what learning consisted of and who had access to this learning greatly impacted an individual's ability and access to learning. This perspective on adult learning is still an important framework for research and theory-building in adult learning.

Also with regard to the shift in attention to the context of adult learning, but coming from a much different perspective is the work of cognitive and educational psychologists on what is called situated cognition or context-based learning. The idea behind this strain of research is that learning is a function of the context in which it takes place. The richness of the context, the "tools" and the people in the context and the particular learning activity itself all come together to structure the learning itself. Communities of practice and learning communities are an outgrowth of this perspective.

The most recent work in adult learning theory has been centered in more holistic conceptions of learning; that is learning is viewed as more than just the cognitive processing of information. Learning also involves our emotions, body and spirit. These holistic conceptions merge well with our increasing understanding of non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing. Non-western views of learning emphasize the communal nature of learning, its lifelong and informal nature and the fact that learning is also more than just a cognitive process—it involves the body, spirit and emotions.

The more we know about how adults learn, the better we can design learning activities that facilitate learning and the better we can prepare adults to live full and engaging lives in today's world. For example, given our fast-changing world in which information overload is a fact of everyday life, we need to be promoting self-directed lifelong learners. From work in situated learning we also know that learning is maximized in contexts that are as "authentic" as possible such as through internships, simulations, and so on. We also need to be developing critical thinking skills to foster examinations of inequities and how interlocking systems of power structure what learning opportunities are available and for whom they are available. Finally, what we are learning about holistic and non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing broadens our repertoire for structuring and facilitating adult learning in a myriad of ways.

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