

PERFORMANCE AND THE MATERNAL



ENGAGE.... conversations conceived
across performance studies and the
maternal

Abstracts

Storytelling and Mothers, 13.10.20, 7.30 – 9pm



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



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Provocation: What maternal narratives might we want or need to tell and hear in these times? How might we represent the diversity of maternal experiences?

Laura Godfrey Isaacs

Laura Godfrey Isaacs will discuss *Maternal Journal*, a growing community movement, which she founded in 2017. *Maternal Journal* uses creative journaling to explore thoughts, feelings, and experiences through pregnancy, birth, and beyond. Journaling is known for its positive effect on mental health and helps to process and better understand the emotions and expectations around birth and parenting. *Maternal Journal* works in collaborations with visual artists, poets, writers, and performers and is inspired by the feminist tradition of journaling and its powerful potential to address the changes, challenges, and joys of birth, mothering, and being a parent.

Tracy Breathnach Evans

Tracy Breathnach Evans will discuss her Birth Stories work, exploring trauma and rupture, non-linear narratives, and stories with no resolution. She will share her Embodied Storytelling practice - a

somatic approach to finding language and discovering new perspectives. Finally, she will share a brief overview and some of the findings of her 'Birth Café' project.

Roiyah Saltus

Why am I here? I create research opportunities that are in part rooted a people's particular cultural identities, migrations and ageing realities. My work in terms of performance is once-removed. 'Once removed' is my very careful way of saying that although my research is rooted in the everyday rituals and practices of the people, and although the research outputs are increasingly creative, they remain crafted, captured, or performed by others. I work with dancers, actors, singers, visual artists and storytellers who - in varying ways – and at times in no way – take my text-riddled findings and make something anew. But that is not why I have been invited to take a seat on this platform today. No, I am here because of the fact that central to my journey towards the creative and of outputs that are 'beyond text' is my mother.

Christine Watkins

Christine Watkins will present an exploration of the traditional siôl fagu (nursing shawl) as a vehicle for powerful maternal narratives. Before the flint knap and the fire stick was the baby sling, in plant fibre or pelt, rewoven again and again, decaying and leaving little

trace. But the child carried within is the holder of memories and imprints that connect past and future. Like matryoshka dolls, a pregnant woman also carries her embryonic grandchildren; memory stretches backwards on a cellular level and forwards into the journeys we will need to take in the world. The siôl fagu, passed on through the generations, is like an outer weave of this process, a first sheath in and beyond our biological mothering. In the close-held bundle we negotiate the border of safety and jeopardy; our journeying begins on the hip, in the sweat smell, pulse, soothe-song and suck-song. Cyn bratiaith daw sioliaith.

Alison Perry

Alison Gabrielle Perry is Lead Research Midwife and Manager of the Women's Health Research Centre at Imperial College London. She is currently funded by an NIHR fellowship to develop her PhD around the wellbeing of women as they become mothers. Her research interest is around the role of story and narrative in maternal health and in the potential that story holds to add impact to maternal health systems and outcomes. Her fellowship continues to provide her a rich period of engagement with women, storytellers, midwives and those involved in maternal health.

Zoe Brigley and Jude Brigley

Mother and daughter, Jude and Zoe Brigley discuss the making of a poetry film, *Blue Milk*, considering what knowledge can be gleaned across generations of mothers. Showing extracts of the film for the first time, Jude and Zoe discuss the stories that women are not told about motherhood, stories that might offer greater sustenance and nourishment. How can women and childbearing people come to terms with the messiness of motherhood?

Chair: Emily Underwood-Lee