

# ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL END OF AWARD REPORT



## For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. ESRC reserves the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

Grant Reference	RES-051-27-0181-A		
Grant Title	Transforming experiences: Re-conceptualising identities and ‘non-normative’ childhoods		
Grant Start Date	1 <sup>st</sup> January 2007	Total Amount	££412,757.56
Grant End Date	28 February 2010	Expended:	
Grant holding Institution	Institute of Education University of London		
Grant Holder	Ann Phoenix		
Grant Holder’s Contact Details	Address		Email
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Co-Investigators (as per project application):		Institution	
N/A			

## 1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by ESRC to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project.

*[Max 250 words]*

This project addresses an important, but neglected, social issue; how adults from different family backgrounds negotiate their identities as they re-evaluate earlier experiences. It consists of empirical studies with adults who had three sets of ‘non-normative’ childhood experiences: (i) as serial migrants who came from the Caribbean to rejoin their parents in the UK (N=53); (ii) those who grew up in families of visible mixed ethnicity (N=41) and (iii) those who were sometimes language brokers, interpreting and/or translating for their parents (N=40). The data are predominantly qualitative and psychosocial, in treating psychological and social issues as inextricably linked.

Across the three studies, the participants considered themselves resilient and good citizens. Adults who experienced serial migration tended to view both the separation from their parents and the process of reuniting with them as disjunctive and painful. As adults, however, most did not consider that they themselves are damaged in consequence. For the ‘visibly different’ sample, racism was a key feature. Many reported simultaneously feeling belonging within their families and displacement when other people challenged their positioning.

Experiences of language brokering differed. Some parents were reported to be appreciative of their children’s efforts, while others took these for granted or were dismissive of, or displeased with, the children’s interpreting work. Many of the adults interviewed said that they knew that people their parents talked to had condescending and racist views of their families. Most, however, considered that their language brokering was family business and wanted to help their parents.

## 2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

### a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to the ESRC.  
[Max 200 words]

The research programme aimed to further understanding of intergenerational relationships and of how lives are crafted from past and present practices and experiences, and future hopes and anticipations. It examined the social, psychological and cultural processes involved when adults brought up in diverse families which included 'non-normative' features negotiate their identities and re-evaluate earlier experiences. It considered how theoretically-driven, research-based knowledge can be applied to policy and practice concerns. It had five objectives:

- i. To lead the development of a new psychosocial theoretical and methodological approach to analysing accounts of experience.
- ii. To contribute to theoretical understandings of the impact of non-normative childhood experiences on adult identities and on the negotiation of everyday practices.
- iii. To investigate how adults who have experienced non-normative elements in their childhood construct adult accounts.
- iv. To move forward debates on how these experiences relate to identification with various communities (i.e. on the basis of ethnicity) and how those identifications relate to whether or not they consider themselves to be active citizens.
- v. To contribute to social policy and practice by making accessible to social workers, clinicians and policy and practice professionals, understandings of how adults deal with childhood non-normative experiences.

### b) Project Changes

Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with the ESRC. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. [Max 200 words]

The main change to the original award was that the Professorial Fellow moved from the Open University to take up the post of Co-Director at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. This was arranged in discussion with the ESRC. In recognition of the time that starting the job would entail, the Institute of Education contributed the funding for a second Research Assistant (RA), who became pregnant soon after appointment. It was, therefore, decided to bring forward the period of fieldwork. This RA had a period of sick leave after returning from maternity leave and a two-month, no-cost extension was agreed with the ESRC.

It proved difficult to bring together focus groups at the start of the data collection process. The focus groups were, therefore, held directly after the project feedback sessions and provided triangulation and an ethical check in the form of participant commentary on the team's interpretations. As originally intended, they also allowed the breadth of issues relevant to the studies to be debated. This change was detailed in the 2009 Annual Report. Two extra focus groups were held; with Bristol serial migrant participants and with language brokers in Los Angeles.

### c) Methodology

Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. *[Max: 500 words]*

The study aimed to provide an innovative psychosocial approach to analysing accounts of experience. It encouraged participants to construct full, narrative accounts of their experiences. Individual interviews focused on experience and on psychological and social processes, personal biography and positioning. They explored how people are affected by their awareness of what 'society' thinks of them (the canonical) and justify their individual positioning. They also elicited discussions of how narratives of social and emotional contexts and experiences change over time and the place of anticipated futures in these changes and in identity projects.

None of the three populations are readily identifiable and so it was not possible to recruit a random sample. The interview participants were, therefore, theoretically sampled, recruited through a combination of advertising, community organizations, electronic and physical notice boards and snowballing. The final samples comprised 53 serial migrants; 41 who grew up in visibly ethnically different households and 40 language brokers. Most interviews were held in a range of locations in southern England, with a few in Australia, Italy, Sweden and the USA. The final sample was recruited from varied backgrounds, including in terms of educational backgrounds, employment, ethnicised and language groups. Interviews lasted from just under an hour to over six hours, with most lasting about two hours. Participants were asked to look back on their childhoods and tell their stories. These were then followed up with questions eliciting further narratives. Researchers wrote fieldnotes to contextualize the interview data and facilitate psychosocial analyses. Fieldnotes included the circumstances in which interviews were done, how researchers felt about interviews and interviewees and how the interviewees seemed to find the interviews. Interviews were fully transcribed, including transcription of non-linguistic features to allow analysis of the interactional dynamics of the interview. Summaries were prepared as a first stage of analysis, followed by thematic analysis and narrative analysis (which is both labour intensive and extremely time consuming) for some interviews and some questions. This was facilitated by the PI's successful Leverhulme Visiting Professorship award to Professor Cathy Riessman, who conducted workshops and helped to analyse some project interviews.

Seven focus groups were conducted each with 5-12 participants, after feedback sessions. A further focus group was held in Los Angeles. Group discussions helped the identification of 'well-worn' stories and canonical narratives and to highlight areas of consensus, conflict and negotiation. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed as standard prose in order to save time and transcription costs.

In order to provide a demographic background to the samples, secondary analyses of census data and of other existing data sets were conducted by a consultant.

An unexpected ethical issue arose when a participant requested the transcript and audio-recording of their interview for sharing with their children. This contained graphic discussion of the reasons for their divorce, deemed by the team unsuitable for this purpose. On ethics committee advice, the project team sent the material with a letter detailing its concerns, followed up with a telephone call to discuss these.

#### **d) Project Findings**

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on *ESRC Society Today*. Any future research plans should also be identified. [Max 500 words]

Most participants felt that their stories are invisible and wanted them known. The findings contribute to answering theoretical questions such as, how memory is constructed and psychosocially motivated and how experiences are understood over time and in context. Many participants said that they could not remember events they found traumatic in their childhoods (see Outputs). They often reflected on how their understandings of their experiences and identities had transformed over time. Transformations were also evident in the emotion in the accounts and in relation to issues, identities and people in participants' histories. Children seemed meta-analytic about their experiences and continued to re-evaluate them in adulthood (Outputs).

Experiences that were emotionally marked often produced tense shifting, lack of fluency and systematically vivid and vague accounts (in press). The research also contributes to understanding that siblings grow up in non-shared environments. In each study, some participants identified their siblings as having different childhoods, for reasons including: cultural difference (e.g. Caribbean v. British born); differential racialisation and different responsibility for language brokering. These differences related to, and impacted on, the children's relationships with their parents. Many reported early social understanding of diversity, difference and their own identities as a result of their experiences.

The adults considered themselves resilient. Across the three studies, they crafted 'livable lives' for themselves as worthwhile citizens. School was an important site for negotiating identities because children had to account for themselves as racialised and/or 'different' in socially significant ways (Output). Relationships with parents were shown to be affected by parents' and children's positioning and were psychosocial (Outputs).

Findings specific to particular studies include the following. Adults who experienced serial family migration tended to view the separation from their parents and parent substitutes and the process of reuniting with parents as disjunctive and painful. Most, however, did not consider that they themselves are damaged in consequence and had developed 'good enough' relationships with their parents (Outputs). For the 'visibly different' sample, racism was a key feature. Many reported that their identities developed from simultaneous feelings of belonging within their families and displacement when other people challenged their positioning (Output).

Experiences of language brokering differed according to how others reacted. Some parents, for example, were appreciative of children's efforts, while others took these for granted, were dismissive of, or displeased with, the children's interpreting work. Children often observed during interpreting that their parents were subjected to racism. They considered that language brokering was family business and wanted to help (Outputs).

The quantitative analyses provided demographic context for the three groups by exploring and, where appropriate, conducting secondary analysis of the Labour Force Survey and school statistics. They indicate that existing large scale data sets fit imperfectly with socially meaningful categories relevant to transnational families.

Plans for future research include projects on Information and Communication Technologies and transnational families; the experiences of those in the three categories studied who are currently children and their parents, and ways to

maximise the impact of the findings.

**e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)**

If your project was part of a wider ESRC initiative, please describe your contributions to the initiative's objectives and activities and note any effect on your project resulting from participation. [Max. 200 words]

N/A

### **3. EARLY AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS**

**a) Summary of Impacts to date**

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on *ESRC Society Today*. This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. [Max. 400 words]

This programme of work has been particularly important to the participants in the research, many of whom have kept in touch with the research team because they are keen to have their stories told. Many have publicised the project, evidenced by the contacts they facilitated with potential participants and interested laypeople.

Engagement with potential research users continues to be one of the major tasks of the research programme. The project advisory group included policy makers, practitioners and academics and has provided helpful advice on how the programme can be of use to policy makers and practitioners. In turn, they have drawn on methodological ideas and findings from the project in their own fields.

Practitioners have been addressed at conferences and seminars including at the Separation and Reunion Forum, a seminar of London deputy headteachers, a black workers group in Bristol, at the Division of Educational and Child Psychology Annual Conference as well as at two EU conferences, one on gender and one on families (Outputs). Informal discussions of the issues raised by the three projects have been discussed with several social work, community, family and childcare practitioners, who consider this an under-researched area.

Short articles have been written for practitioners in *Children in Scotland* and in the Thomas Coram Research Unit *Annual Review* and an attachment journal for therapists (Output). The project has been discussed with policy and practice professionals from the Family and Parenting Institute; Research in Practice and the Race Equality Foundation. Findings were also presented to DCSF policy customers at a seminar to inform the preparation of a Green Paper on families and relationships. The project also has a website and the programme of work is represented on the websites of various interest groups. Impact has been augmented by successful awards of an ESRC/SSRC award that brought an internationally renowned researcher on childhood language brokers, Dr Marjorie Orellana, to work with the project.

The academic impact includes invitations to talk at more than 30 international conferences in Australia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, USA as well as the UK. Some of these have been ESRC investments. Academics from these countries and France came to the project conference. The publications are being

read and commented on. There are four papers in press and a further four and a book in preparation, as well as a potential themed journal issue from the conference papers.

**b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts**

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. *[Max. 200 words]*

The activities detailed above will continue in terms of contacts with policymakers and practitioners and further publications. It is proposed to write further short pieces for practitioner journals, and the PI has been invited to speak to a variety of policy and practitioner and teacher organisations in the coming year.

The project submitted an unsuccessful bid for follow-on-funding that was innovative in aiming to collaborate with Research in Practice and the Race Equality Foundation (organisations expert at bringing academic work to policy and practitioner audiences) in order to generate and measure impacts. Both organisations would be keen to pursue further work and other researchers would like to use the methods generated in that proposal. It is, therefore, likely that further impact-generation work will be conducted.

The PI has been invited to spend a term at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Oslo, Norway (by Hanne Haavind and Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen) and one of the aims will be to use some of the data from the study collaboratively to generate innovative thinking on psychosocial analyses. Continuing contacts in the USA and Scandinavia will contribute to future impacts.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

## 4. DECLARATIONS

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed.

Please note hard copies are NOT required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

### A: To be completed by Grant Holder

*Please read the following statements. Tick ONE statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section.*

#### i) The Project


This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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#### ii) Submissions to *ESRC Society Today*

Output and impact information has been submitted to <i>ESRC Society Today</i> . Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>OR</b>	
This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to <i>ESRC Society Today</i> as soon as they become available.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>OR</b>	
This grant is not listed on <i>ESRC Society Today</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### iii) Submission of Datasets

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>OR</b>	
Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>OR</b>	
No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>

SIGNATURE: 	
NAME: Ann Phoenix	DATE: 28 May 2010

### B: To be completed by Head of Department, School or Faculty

*Please read the statement below then sign with an electronic signature to confirm your agreement.*



This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts.

**SIGNATURE:** 

**NAME:** Professor Marjorie Smith

**POSITION:** Co-Director, Thomas Coram Research Unit **DATE:** 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010

**C: To be completed by Finance Officer of Grant-Holding Institution**

*Please read the statement below then sign with an electronic signature to confirm your agreement.*

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.

**SIGNATURE:** 

**NAME:** Steff Hazlehurst

**POSITION:** Head of Research and Consultancy Services **DATE:** 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010