

Sex, lies and storytelling: The sociology of talk shows

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New research on the manner in which people reveal their most intimate secrets on national TV talk shows will be presented at the University of Leicester on Wednesday October 22.

Professor Ian Hutchby, Professor of Sociology at the University of Leicester, will present his paper: Revealing revelations: 'Performed retellings' of significant announcements on a TV talk show.

In his talk, Professor Hutchby will discuss his findings on the way the revelation of personal information is managed by the protagonist.

He said: "There is now an established tradition of television talk shows in which secrets, affairs and other private things are 'revealed' for the watching audience. Sometimes, such things are also revealed for co-guests in the studio.

"In either case, revelations of this type can be linked to significant life effects. Two recurring themes in such shows are:

- revelations of extramarital affairs which potentially have consequences regarding paternity of a couple's child or children;
- revelations of homosexuality or transsexuality between couples living in an established heterosexual relationship.

"My paper focuses on one example of the latter, in which now-divorced women recount, in interaction with the show's host, how the revelation

of their homosexuality to their erstwhile heterosexual partner - their husband - was managed.

"In the sequential organisation of such accounts, we sometimes see the phenomenon of performed retelling, in which a speaker uses para-verbal phenomena - prosody, gesture, facial expression - to inflect the same story in different ways.

"The analysis will consider the interactional work these performed retellings may be doing; in particular, the management of emotional labour in talk that is produced for an audience."

Professor Hutchby's research focuses on the relationship between language and social interaction.

He said: "I examine how the social processes involved in language use relate to the structures of human relations and social institutions. I have been analyzing radio and television talk since the early 1990s, and in my recent book *Media Talk* (Open University Press, 2006) I showed how this research is important for a range of issues in contemporary democracy, such as the relationship between journalists, broadcasters and their audiences, and the public role of media output."

Source: University of Leicester

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