



**Illinois Wesleyan University**  
**Digital Commons @ IWU**

---

John Wesley Powell Student Research  
Conference

2010, 21st Annual JWP Conference

---

Apr 10th, 2:35 PM - 3:35 PM

## How Stories Shape Lives and Build Friendships: A Study of Parents With Children on the Autism Spectrum

Bobby Tazioli  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Rebecca Gearhart, Faculty Advisor  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

Tazioli, Bobby and Gearhart, Faculty Advisor, Rebecca, "How Stories Shape Lives and Build Friendships: A Study of Parents With Children on the Autism Spectrum" (2010). *John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference*. 28.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2010/posters2/28>

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Poster Presentation P54

**HOW STORIES SHAPE LIVES AND BUILD FRIENDSHIPS: A STUDY OF PARENTS  
WITH CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM**

Bobby Tazioli and Rebecca Gearhart\*

Sociology and Anthropology Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

Over the course of the last month, I have interviewed, taken pictures of, and built relationships with parents of children on the Autism spectrum. My work here is, in one sense, a collection of stories and experiences about their lives. As an anthropologist, I am partially indebted to Clifford Geertz who stressed the importance of "thick," local understandings of culture. But in another sense, I believe that the particulars of culture are best understood and transmitted to others with reference to the general. In this way, my work has evolved into a multi-layered approach that builds on a theoretical framework for the understanding of "stories" and their significance across cultures. As recent studies in psychology suggest, the stories and narratives that come to shape an individual's memories are malleable and can be remade to meet one's needs for group identification. I will argue, with reference to my own collected observations, that there is an added dimension to the group I studied that differentiates them from this line of research. While the related stories involved in raising a child on the Autism spectrum are what bring these parents together, it is through honesty, not adaptation, that they express their values and maintain their friendships.