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Me'(N)'eM: recruiting and interviewing men for sensitive research

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- Supervisors: Prof., Mo Ray & Dr Emma Head.
- My wife and everyone else who has supported me and that I have whinged at, moaned to, bored, & used.
- I acknowledge that terms like ‘childfree’ ‘childless’ ‘voluntary’ ‘involuntary’ ‘infertile’ ‘old’ ‘older’ ‘elderly’ ‘gay’ ‘straight’ and others I may use are contentious.

My background – ‘dripping*’ privilege



- 59, Lancastrian-Mancunian, White-British, born working class;
 - I am Hard-of-Hearing since birth with a 30% loss in both ears;
 - I am a ‘mediated’ childless man: I was very ‘broody’ in my 30’s;
 - I often have imposter syndrome.
-
- * Dripping (juices collected when roasting a beef joint) was commonly given as a ‘treat’ (on coal-fire toast – yum!).

Ageing and childlessness

- Demographic change: increased longevity, decreased fertility, smaller families, increase in divorce, diversity in family formation.
- Potential or actual infertility has major implications for health, identity & well being.
- Older childless adults *'rendered invisible in social science literature.'* (Dykstra and Hagestad 2007: p. 1275)
- Older childless adults: increased risk of loneliness, social isolation, depression & ill health. (Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007)
- Formerly married childless men: poorer physical & mental health, sleeplessness, more drinking and smoking than men with partners. (Kendig et al, 2007)
- Non-contact fathers & childless men increased deaths through suicide & risky health/social behaviours. (Weitof et al, 2004).
- Paucity of data on male experience of infertility and ageing: men often condemned as difficult to access. (Lloyd, 1996; Letherby, 2010; Hadley, 2017)

PhD: methodology and sample

- Draws on Chambers (2002) '*feminist life course perspective*': social/critical gerontology, life course, feminist approaches & *Auto/Biography*.
- Semi-structured Biographical Narrative Interview Method. (Wengraf, 2001)
- Latent Thematic Analysis. (Braun & Clark, 2006)
- 14 self-defined IvC men were interviewed 2012: 27 interviews in total. Age range: 49 – 82 years.
- 14 participants: 13 White-British; 1 Anglo-Celtic Australian.
- 12 heterosexual, 2 non-heterosexual.
- 7 single (5 solo living), 7 in relationships (1 LAT).

Auto/biography (A/B)

- A/B widely associated with the feminist approach.
- Central to feminist scholarship is researcher reflexivity: 'to be explicit about the significance of their personal, as well as intellectual autobiography.' (Stanley, 1993, Letherby, 2014, p. 52)
- Mykhalovskiy (1996) argued that masculinity in the social sciences excoriated the 'texture and variety of men's experience.' No acknowledgement of infertility in masculinities literature:
- Men marginalized as the 'second sex' in social sciences: assumption they are not interested in reproductive intentions & outcomes. (Inhorn et al, 2009)
- A/B 'value explicit': self; involvement, privilege, and power are acknowledged in the research process. (Letherby, 2002b, Hugill, 2012)
- Views the biographies of 'the researcher and the participants are an inextricable part of the research process.' (Carroll, 2013, p. 457)

What makes this group hard to reach ?

- Sensitive topic.
- Men's fertility intentions and history tends not to be recorded.
- Not becoming a father may be seen as a loss and not revealed.
- Men castigated as 'not interested' by infertility researchers (Lloyd, 1996).
- I am not an 'insider' to any organisations such as the social services, charity, or health service.

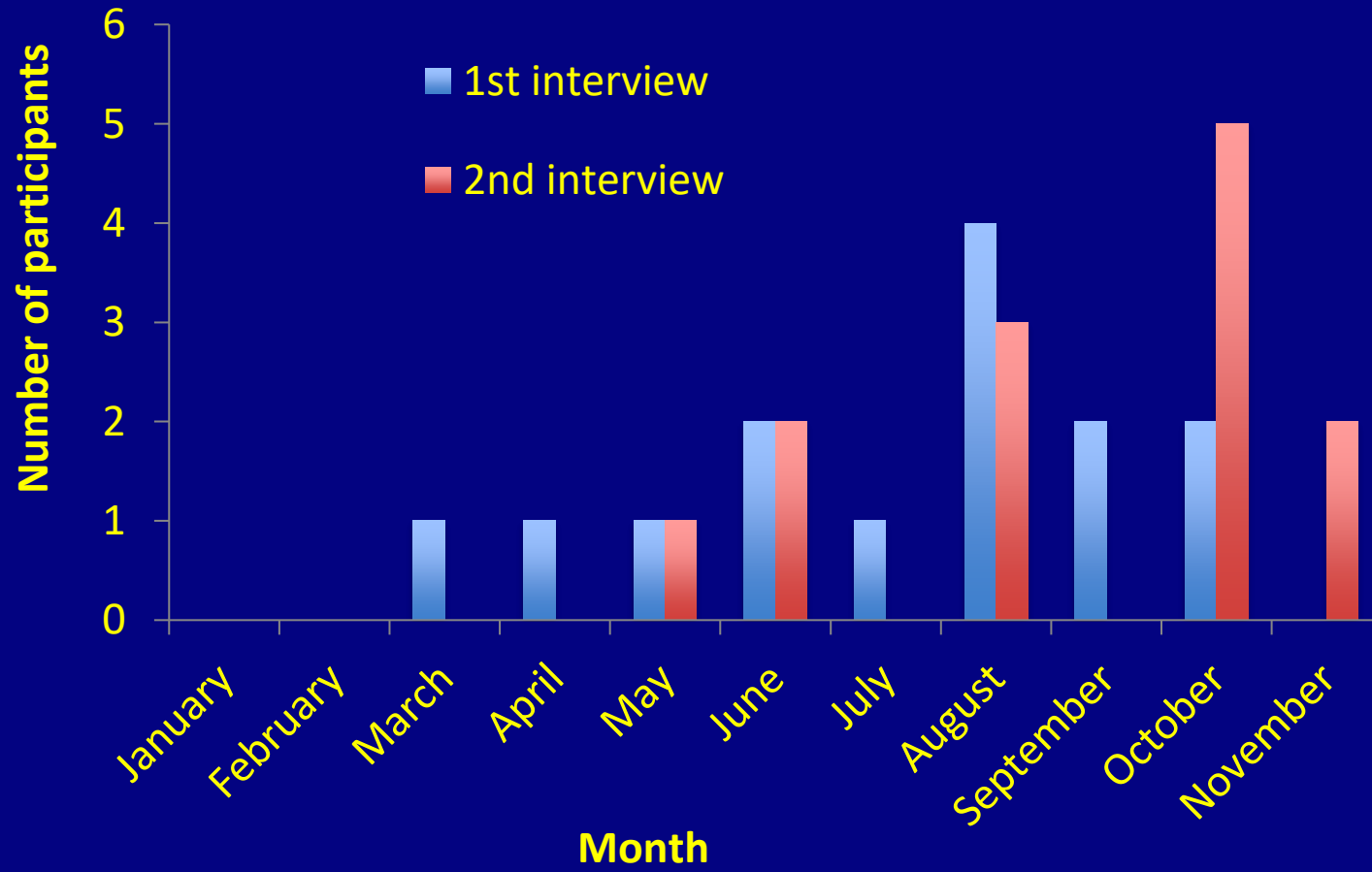
Recruitment methods

- Snowball sampling: Invite personal & professional networks to participate, recruit, or recommend others. Seen as one of the best ways of accessing hidden populations.
- Third party contacts of personal networks (colleagues, friends, especially partners of men) reported as an effective method of recruiting male participants (*Butera, 2006; Oliffe and Mróz, 2005*).
- Direct methods: Email, leaflets, posters, joining activities, dropping in on events, cold calling agencies.
- Approached local radio and was interviewed.
- Set up website 'wantedtobeadad.com' as 'shop window' & linked to Twitter: average 50 hits per month after joining Twitter.
- Adverts placed in 'The Oldie' and in the Manchester Evening News, The Sentinel, the West Midlands Metro.
- Wrote a piece for MTL newsletter.

Missing the Fish



Recruitment timeline



Issues with snowball sampling:

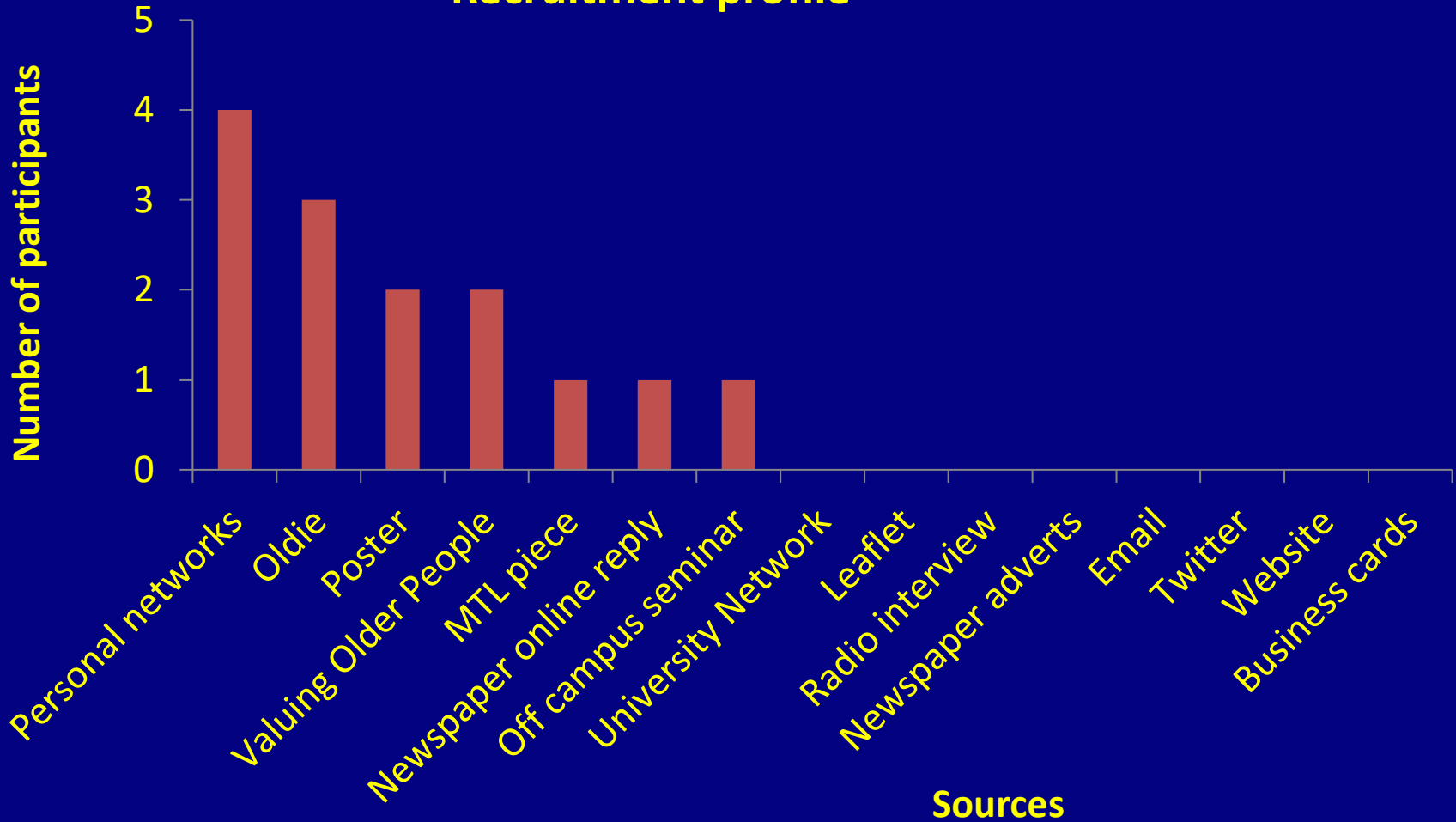
- Participant's found it hard to broach the subject with others.
- Third party recruitment – unknown dynamic between the recruiter & participant.

Catching the fish...



What worked

Recruitment profile



Gender dynamics in research interviews

- Displays of masculinity; manipulation to 'heterosexual female role'; power reinforced. (*Grenz, 2005, 2010; Pini, 2005, 2010; Presser, 2005*).
- Men **more** disposed to talk with women **than men**. (*Lohan, 2000; Gatrell, 2006*).
- **Maria Lohan (2000: 177)**: 'I as interviewer, **who was 'chatting-up' (men)**.
- **Study of first time fathers**: Only time men had to open up. (*Miller, 2011*)
- **Ortiz 'Muted masculinity' strategy in his interactions with the female participants**: 'male insider'. (*Ortiz, 2005*)
- Gender **related to** differences in disclosure. (*Padfield & Procter, 1996*).
- Responses **to questions** adapted **to** interviewer gender. (*Williams & Heighe, 1993*)
- **Researchers used** gender commonalties **to establish rapport**: 'gender script' **enabled** (*Broom et al, 2009*)

Interview dynamics between men



Men interviewing men.

- **Robb** (2004) interviews with British fathers & identity:
- Shared difficulty in the asking and answering of questions: Resolved by indirect reframing of the question: 'Others have said...'
- **Walby** (2010) male-for-male sex workers study : many participants sexualised the interview:
- **Researcher as** 'sexuality insider': builds rapport and/or hides significance of events? (Roberts, 2014)
- Walby & Roberts challenged stereotypical view that gay men are always pursuing hegemonic masculinity. (Walby, 2010; Roberts, 2014)
- **Other** factors influencing the interview: age, class, location, timing & duration. (Broom et al, 2009)

Outsider-insider-outsider

- While I am an insider regarding the wish for fatherhood, I was an outsider to other aspects of their lives.
- I am a heterosexual man and I did not 'advertise' my sexuality nor the fact I am married nor I did not hide it. *(Bruni, 2006)*.
- I did not disclose my sexuality with any participant.
- Both gay men lived in ground floor social housing flats. Both mentioned they had double beds. I did not interpret this as symbolic of any sexual positioning:
- rather reflecting a sense of loss: from partnered to solo-living through, breakup & bereavement. Symbolic of cumulative loss?

Researcher analysed

- **Tim:** *Do you find what you're doing... Robin, do you find what you're doing a very lonely pursuit?*
- **Me:** *It is lonely, yeah, yeah.*
- **Tim:** *Ah yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*
- **Me:** *But it is quite a lonesome job, particularly with the data and you're analysing it, it's just you and the data.*
- **Tim:** *Yes, I can imagine.*
- **Me:** *And the data wins.*
- **Tim:** *You're having a relationship with data, yeah.*
- **Me:** *Er, yeah. Yeah...*
- **Tim:** *Yes. In the hope of procreation between you and the data.*
- **Me:** *Yeah. Yeah...*
- **Tim:** *Not be fatherless...*

My stuff

- Me: And what has changed or stayed the same since the age of 50 with regards to life quality?
- Russell: *I am much happier. Erm...I mean I thought about suicide, erm, a great deal in my life, erm, and indeed attempted it, erm, on several occasions, but what's changed since 50, now is acceptance. Erm, it doesn't bother me now. Erm, I...I'm happier than I've ever been...*
- Me: Hmm, hmm, hmm. And you're happier because you're not held to death or...?
- Russell: *What do you mean? You'll have to elaborate a bit more.*
- Me: Erm, I'm digging myself a big hole here...

Class (journal extract)

Extract from research journal: 2nd Interview with George

Came away feeling that I had disappointed him, that at times he was frustrated by my questions and said on one or two questions what was their point?

Perhaps I worded things poorly or was unclear. Perhaps its masculinity or class? Perhaps its me being too naïve in the interview. I wonder how much that he is already a PhD and was interested in the methodology and background to the study linked to my general anxieties about being not good enough and not being academic enough.

It was George's fate to be the first interviewee and my nerves and unsureness permeate my notes. I am in awe of his use and ease with language and sense he feels my unease.

Gender script and more?

- **Russell:** *This is another reason you see why I'd be such a terrific catch. And why women are so fucking stupid as to ignore me, you know?*
- Interviewer: **It...it's unbelievable...**
- **Russell:** *It is!*
- Interviewer: **It is unbelievable...**
- **Russell:** *I'm sure you've heard this every interview you've done, everyone you've interviewed has said, "I'm so wonderful, why hasn't someone grabbed me up years ago."*
- Interviewer: **No. No. Er, well once or twice, but you're the only one I've actually thought, "Yes, he's right."**
- **Russell:** *(laughing, claps hands) Well done! You say all the right things, go on.*

Summary of interviewing men



Interviewing men

- Generalisations of men and masculinity:
- *'...self-fulfilling prophecies that serve to inhibit or discourage the interviewer'* . (OliFFE and Mróz, 2005)
- Cathartic experience:
- *'...most men enjoy having someone attentively listen to their point of view...'* (OliFFE and Mróz, 2005)
- Managed experience:
- *provide men with the research questions and a few specific interview questions one week before the interview.*
- (OliFFE and Mróz, 2005)
- Self disclosure: infertile man interviewing infertile men:
- *'... had never before shared this experience so fully with another man'*. (Webb & Daniluk, 1999)

Conclusion

- Creativity and persistence needed in recruitment
- Men are not used to being listen to:
- Fear humiliation and/or shame
- Strength of **A/B approach was the** reflexive process that 'allows for, and indeed demands, the consideration of such issues that may not otherwise be thought about within a research project.' *(Robertson, 2006: 316)*
- **Highlighted how gender is one of many dynamics in operation in the research interview.**
 - *Men are fascinating!*

Thank you for listening!



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#BSG2018 #BSG18 #BeeTogether

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My stuff

2019. "It's most of my life – going to the pub or the group': the social networks of involuntarily childless older men." *Ageing and Society*: 1-26
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Ageing Without Children (awoc.org)

- Grass roots organisation campaigning for the recognition of 'AWOC' people. Includes those childless by circumstance, choice, bereavement, disruption, & self defined.
- More people now in their 40s will age without children than ever before; estimates are between 20-25%.
- The population of older people in the UK is increasing.
- Assumption in health and social care policy and practice that older people will have family members to fill the gap left by the state.
- The ageing childless are not recognised in policy and practice documents.
- Seeking funding to conduct more research.

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