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- To the people who participated in my studies – my infinite gratitude.
- PhD studentship funded by the Centre for Social Gerontology, Keele University.
- 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.

What's my privilege? I am...

- Privileged to be here and to be talking to you
- I am a involuntarily childless man: I was very 'broody' in my 30's
- 58, White-British, born working class, Lancastrian-Mancunian
- I am Hard-of-Hearing since birth with a 30% loss
- I left secondary education with 3 'O' levels
- 1997 - 2008 I worked as a scientific & technical photographer
- 2005 – 2008 Trained and studied (MA) in Counselling
- 2008 – 2009 Self-funded MSc looking at the levels of 'broodiness' in men and women
- 2010 – 2015 PhD in Social Gerontology at Keele University

Why childless men?

- Off the cuff suggestion for the topic for my MA dissertation in Counselling (2008): Interviewed 10 men aged 30 – 65:
- Underlying question, *'Was it only me'?*
- Found there was very little on men's desire for fatherhood.
- MSc in Research Methods (2009): Online survey of 232 men and women. Age range: 19 – 75:
- Question: *'Is it true women are broody and men aren't'?*
- PhD in Social Gerontology (2015): 14 men: 2 non-heterosexual, 12 heterosexual aged 49 – 82
- Question: *'What is the impact of involuntary childlessness on older men?' My PhD was funded by Keele University.*

The Package Deal*: Ideal Masculinity?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNOIqfEFew4>

Dove 'Manthem':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNOIqfEFew4>

Google: *NEW DOVE MEN+CARE AD THE MANSONG* – YouTube

* (Townsend, 2002)

Qualitative interviewing

- Interviewing is one of the most popular forms of gathering rich qualitative data.
- One of the most powerful methods for generating data.
- Oakley's (1981) ground breaking work challenged the positivist/masculine assumptions of quantitative methods of the time.
- Led to an appreciation of dynamics in interviewing: Power, Class, Age, Disability, Race, Interviewer, as well as Gender in the research process
- Gender dynamics of interviews has tended to centre on female-to-female women interviewing women. (*Broom et al., 2009: 53*).
- In this presentation the material drawn on is mostly based on one-to-one interviews between me and men.

Female interviewer with male interviewee.

- Issues in cross gender interviews via displays of masculinity
- Manipulation in arranging the interview. (*Grenz, 2005; 2010*).
- Forced into 'heterosexual female' role. (*Presser, 2005*).
- Re-enforcement of position of power. (*Pini, 2005: 201*)
- Men more disposed to talk with women than men. (*Lohan, 2000, Gatrell, 2006*).
- Maria Lohan (2000: 177): 'it was I as interviewer, who was doing the 'chatting-up' (with male participants).'
- Tina Miller (2011) study of first time fathers:
- Only opportunity the men had to open up.
- Gender and the research subject influences the interview dynamic.

Male interviewing female participants.

- Ortiz's (2005) ethnographic study of the sports marriages of professional male athletes in the USA: interviews with 48 women.
- Adapted an outsider strategy of 'muted masculinity' in his interactions with the female participants:
- By presenting the 'right' masculinity he became a 'male insider'.
- Padfield (female) and Procter (male) research interviews with young British women for gender bias: (Gender related disclosure differences *Padfield and Procter, 1996*).
- Williams (female) and Heighe's (male) analysis of interviews with male nurses in the USA (1993).
- Responses to questions were adapted to the gender of the interviewer.

Mixed doubles

- Broom et al (2009) re-examined female-to-female, female-to-male, male-to-female, and male-to-male, interviews in different settings.
- Both female and male interviewers used gender commonalities to build rapport with same sex participants:
- Creation of idealised positions lead to a 'gender script' that affected the interaction.
- Other factors that influence the interview: age, class, location, and the timing and duration of the interview.

Male with male interviews.

- Robb (2004) re-examined one of his interviews in a study on British fathers and identity:
- Shared difficulty in the asking and answering of questions. Resolved by indirect reframing of the question, 'Others have said...'
- Walby (2010) in his study of male-for-male sex workers found many participants sexualised the interview:
- Challenged stereotypical view that gay men are always pursuing hegemonic masculinity.
- Awareness of intersubjective interactions

Lessons from interviewing men

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

Background to studies

- Demographic change: increased longevity, decreased fertility, smaller families, increase in divorce, diversity if family.
- Future impact on pensions, health & social care funding and provision (*Wittenberg et al 2008*).
- Family (adult children) provide most informal care for older people (*Phillips, 2007*).
- Potential or actual infertility has major implications for health, wellbeing and identity.
- Paucity of data on male experience of infertility and ageing (*Letherby, 2010; Hadley, 2017*).
- Ageing research has focussed on older women as they lived longer, accessed more state benefits and health & care services (*Arber 2004, Arber et al, 2003*).

Childlessness

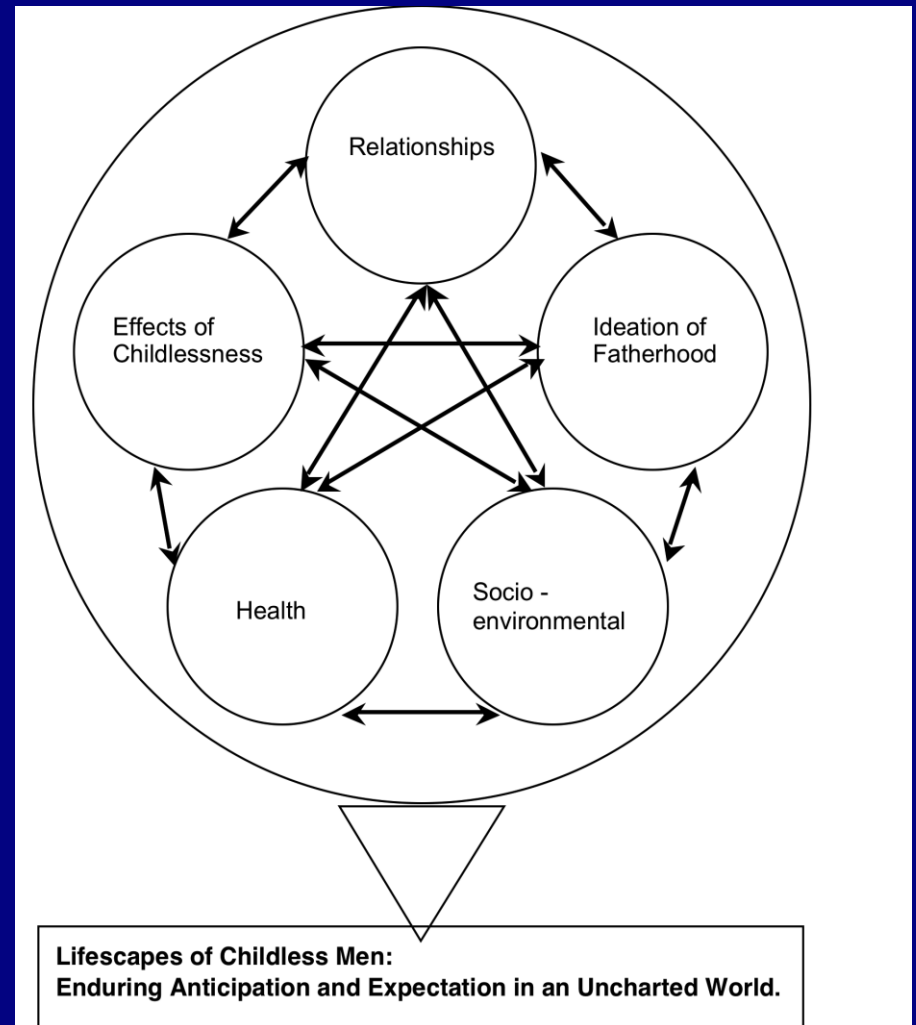
- Most societies are pronatalist: childless labeled as 'other'.
- Majority of research focuses on the 'involuntary' as it is based on those accessing infertility treatment.
- Potential or actual infertility has major implications for physical & mental health, socio-economically, identity & well being.
- Men 'condemned' as 'not interested' by infertility researchers.
(Lloyd, 1996).
- Difficult to assess the level of involuntary childlessness because people who do not access treatment are not recorded.
- Men's fertility history is not collected: it is not possible to assess the level of childless men in the UK. *(ONS, 2014; Cohort Fertility background notes).*

Ageing and childlessness

- Older childless adults: *'rendered invisible in social science literature.'* (Dykstra and Hagestad 2007: p. 1275)
- Older childless adults have an increased risk of loneliness, social isolation, depression, and ill health. (Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007)
- Formerly married childless men showed poorer physical and mental health, sleeplessness, excessive drinking and smoking than men with partners. (Kendig et al, 2007)
- Long-term non-contact fathers & childless men have higher death rate through suicide and risky health and social behaviours. Linked to *'emotional instability and willingness to take risks.'* (Weitoft et al, 2004: p.1457).

MA emerging themes:

- Consequences of childlessness
- Ideation of Fatherhood
- Relationships (childhood and adult)
- Socio-economic
- Health



Impact of Childlessness:

- *"I felt out of phase with...normality or the expectations of how, to how life is..." (Jeremy, 61)*
- *"There was a slight awkwardness...like people were implying there was something wrong with you" (Ben, 60).*
- *"Envy, envious - plum envious...I've got friends with children, all my sisters have got children." (Ernest, 34)*
- *"If I didn't want one so much, I wouldn't be in the crap I'm in" (Shane, 33).*
- *"You know I'd look at my son growing up and remember me relating to my Dad." (Phil, 51)*
- *"I felt the pain of it, emotionally there was a real gut feeling that you know, arghh...that I'm not a father of my own children." (Ben, 60)*

My MA reflections

*There's something missing,
A conversation ended before it began
Scatterlings of cuda, shuda, wuda, dada
The latent maelstrom of the none man*

*There's something missing,
holding a life-wide gap,
breathing wallpaper,
I am whole and incomplete*

*There's something missing,
first to be left behind,
first to be sent in,
this line is not complete*

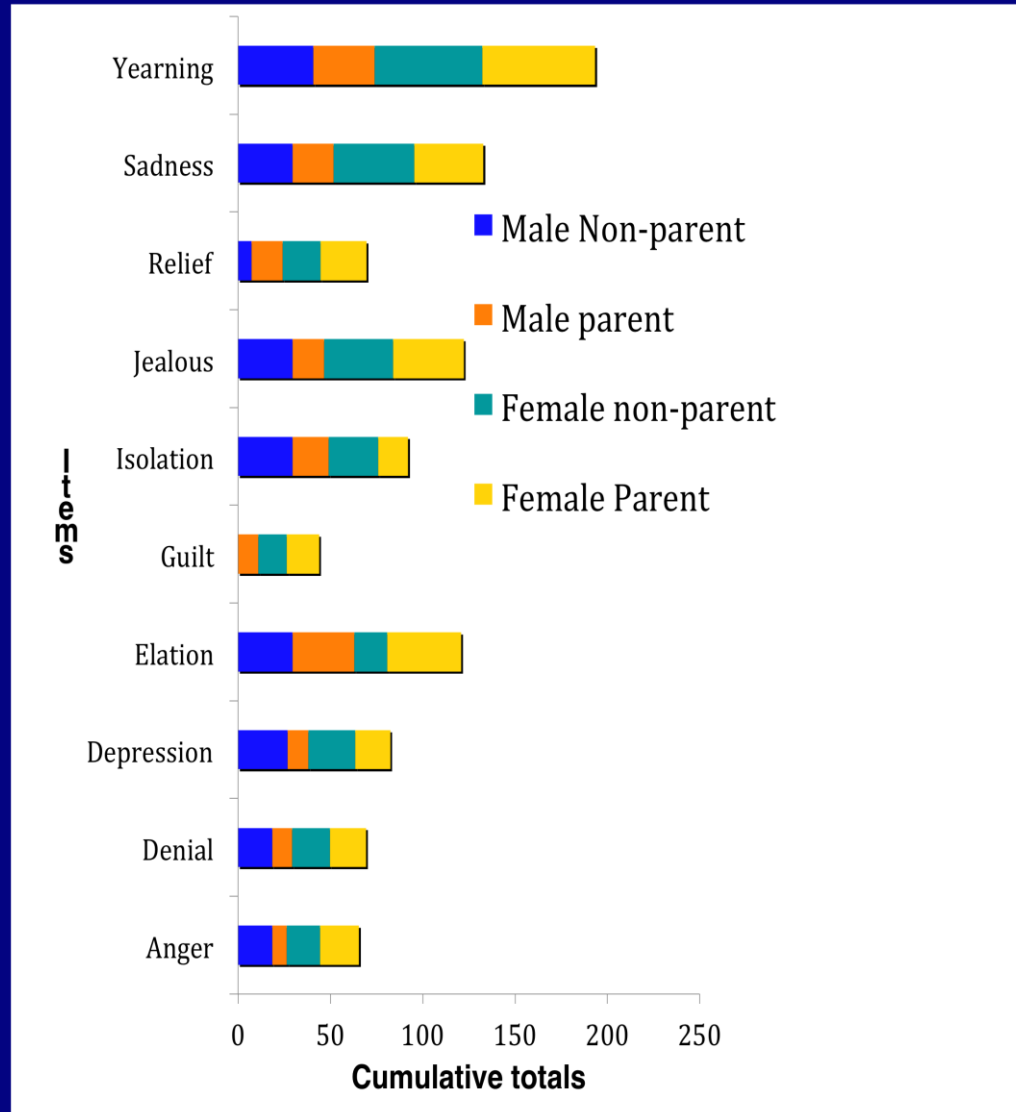
MSc 'Broodiness' online survey ($n: 232$)

- 51.9% of the **childless men** in the survey indicated a desire for parenthood compared to 25.9% who did not.
- **Female and male non-parents** showed **a similar level of desire for parenthood**: ($Mdn = 1.00$ [Yes]), $U = 995.000$, $z = -.688$, $p = .492$ and $r = -0.06$.
- The decision to **parent** for **non-parents** indicated **economic** and **social** factors as the main influences, with greater differences between **females** and **males**. **Females** noted **personal desire** as a major influence. **Males** indicated **cultural/societal** and **family expectations**, with an underlying trend of **personal desire** and **biological urge**.

Yearning item:

- 'Yearning' was the item most associated with broodiness. Compared to parents, *non-parents* were more affected by Yearning, Sadness, and Depression.
- *Females* from both groups had similar response levels, with *non-parent females* indicating higher responses in Isolation and Sadness.
- *Male non-parents* demonstrated higher responses than both female non-parents and male parents for Depression and Isolation.
- *Male non-parents* recorded higher levels in all items, compared to male parents, except for Elation, Guilt, and Relief.

Reactions to broodiness question



PhD Methodology

- Chambers (2002) highlighted that no single perspective can capture the experience of later life. She developed a 'feminist life course perspective' that drew on gerontology, feminism, and Life course to capture the totality of older widow's experience. Underpinning of social constructionism.
- Feminism: giving voice to the voiceless, demystification, acknowledges power of researcher, legitimises experience, reflexivity of researcher, gendered nature of ageing, hegemonics of patriarchy, political dynamics.
- Social gerontology: multi disciplinary examination of ageing including structural, economic, political, demographic, age/stage. An increasing focus on individual experience and the contingent and existential aspects of aging.
- Life course: acknowledges that an individual's ageing will be influenced by personal, social and historical factors. As per social gerontology increase in focus on life experience.

Interview: Biographical-narrative interpretative method (Wengraf, 2011)

- Three interview subsession structure: aim is for 'depth'. Analysis via interpretation procedure.
 1. One open ended narrative question – no further interviewer involvement apart from note taking.
 2. Interviewer asks questions only on emerging narratives in order that they were raised. End of sub-sessions 1 & 2.
 3. Semi-structured interview: based on the transcript and wider issues. New stories/perspectives may be revealed.

PhD: Methodology and sample

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

The method used

- Two interview method semi-structured method adapted from the BNIM (Wengraf, 2006).
- First interview: Three sections:
 1. **Biography:** *'Can you just tell me a little about yourself please'?*
 2. **Childlessness:** *'When did you first become aware of Fatherhood?'*
 3. **Health and QoL data:** *'Generally speaking, what would you say defines a good quality of life?'*
- Second interview: Focus on issues arising from analysis of first interview. Participant representation verified.

Life course: The British Package Deal....

<https://youtu.be/WEbV97xAPsY>

Google: Rustlers Advert 2016 80 Years of Torment Commercial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEbV97xAPsY>

PhD : Attitudes to fatherhood

Attitude	Participant	Age	Relationship status
Aspirational	Stephen	49	Single
	Frank	56	Single
	David	60	Married
Uncertain	Russell	55	Single
	Michael	63	Single
Mediated	Colin	59	Long term relationship
	John	59	Long term relationship
	Edward	60	Long term relationship
	George	60	Married
	Harry	64	Single/widower
	James	65	Long term relationship
	Martin	70	Married
	Raymond	70	Single/widower
	Alan	82	Single

Social context: 'The package deal'

"I just naturally, in growing up, rather assumed I would leave school, do university, get a job, get married, and have a family." David (60)

"I always imagined I would have children." Harry (70)

"I think from about like 15 years old I knew I was gay, so in my mind even then I knew I would never get married. So I suppose I didn't even think too much about children because you don't get married them days you didn't have children." Raymond (70)

Pathways to childlessness

- **Economics:** *“The bloody interest rates hit 13% - so that made me delay, you know, overtures in those directions.” John (59)*
- **Social clock:** *“Nobody wants a 70 year old father when you’re 20.” Martin (70)*
- **Biological clock:** *“We just don't want to let time go by and let nature take the decision for us.” John*
- **Timing:** *“My parents had me in their 40’s. So I thought it would be like falling off a log basically.” Edward (60).*
- **Relationship dynamics:** *“She said, “I never thought you are responsible enough to have children” Which, I guess, is the time I started drinking seriously.” John*

Affect of childlessness

Regret: *"I've never discussed it (IVF). If people ask if we have children I say "regrettably no." I quite like people to know we did want a family."* Edward (60)

Peer network: *"It is noticeable that friends who have children drift away."* Edward

Existentialism: *"I think having kids is a way of producing a sense of continuity. Otherwise, death feels very final. If you're leaving kids, you've left something of yourself."* David (60)

Advantages: *"The advantages then, of course, are not having to plan and worry about others."* Edward

Continuity of disruption

“It would suddenly hit me - I would see the relationship between a father and son, or a daughter, and I was thinking “Ah” I’m never really going to get that, you know ... I miss that.” George (60)

“It’s something I will never stop regretting. You know, it won’t go away.” Martin (70)

“How is a man supposed to be a man?” Frank (56)

“I’m never going to be able to say, “This is my grandson” am I?” Harry (64)

“People have no conception of just how isolated someone who hasn't got kids in middle age is. That's point number one to get through in your bloody PhD.” Russell (55)

Mediated

- **Age:** *"Since I was about 47 I accepted that it won't happen."* Colin (59)
- **Health:** *"That was when I found out I was infertile and probably had been from being a teenager."* Martin (60)
- **Relationship:** *"Liz [ex-wife] stated that she didn't want children, I just quickly put those inklins' to one side..."* James (65)
- **Sexuality:** *"I could never have been a [biological] father, I don't think so."* Alan (82)
- **Loss:** *'If you have a child there would be a part of Helen still walking the streets.'* Harry (64)

Future

Health: *“Who's gonna take us to the hospital? Who's gonna push us? When we fall on the floor, who's gonna pick us up?” Michael (63)*

“You're suddenly aware you're no longer invincible.” John (59)

Threat: *“I don't want people saying, “Oh, he's a bit of a paedophile, this one, looking at the kids”.” Raymond (70)*

Legacy: *“There is a richness of family history, which it's nice to pass on, again no one to pass it on to.” David (60)*

“To be brutal death is the future... I'd like to see my surrogate granddaughter grow up... 15 years will take her to 18. You can see them to be an adult then, can't you?” Martin (70)

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson: “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk”

Chapter One:

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

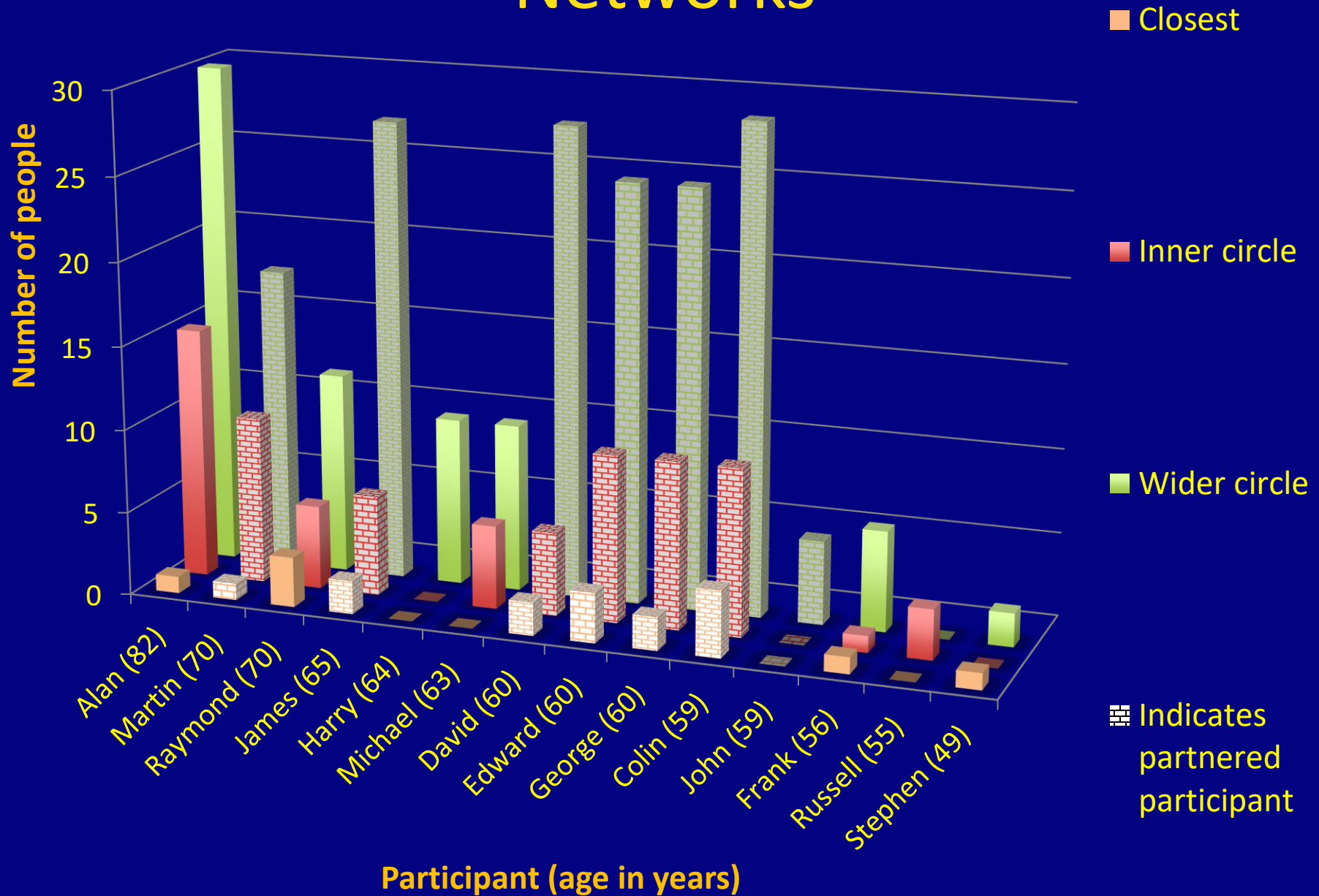
I fall in. I am lost . . .

I am helpless.

It isn’t my fault . . .

It takes forever to find a way out.

Networks



Example 1 from my research

- Interviewer: Can I just check that you wanted to have children but have not had any?
- John: *That's true.*
- Interviewer: Can you tell a little bit about yourself please?
- John: *What exactly would you want to know?*
- Interviewer: Okay...
- John: *Cos that's like 60 years of history so you don't want all of it.*
- Interviewer: *Well, er, where were you born?*

Example 2 from my research

- **Tim:** *Do you find what you're doing... Robin, do you find what you're doing a very lonely pursuit?*
- **Interviewer:** **It is lonely, yeah, yeah.**
- **Tim:** *Ah yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*
- **Interviewer:** **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.*
- **Interviewer:** **And the data wins.**
- **Tim:** *You're having a relationship with data, yeah.*
- **Interviewer:** **Er, yeah. Yeah...**
- **Tim:** *Yes. In the hope of procreation between you and the data.*
- **Interviewer:** **Yeah. Yeah...**
- **Tim:** *Not be fatherless...*

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson: “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk”

Chapter Two:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I pretend I don’t see it.

I fall in again.

I can’t believe I am in this same place.

But it isn’t my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

Example 3 from my research

- Interviewer: 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...*
- Interviewer: 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.*
- Interviewer: *Erm, I'm digging myself a big hole here...*

Example 4 from my research (journal)

Appendix Twelve: 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? I remember from the 1st interview thinking I had annoyed him with one of my 'on-the-fly' questions – although wasn't able to find it on the tape. I'm sure there was a tone. Something about not being on his script? Maybe it was the same thing – perhaps he doesn't want to reveal or face something. 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. Perhaps I should have asked about his PhD and field of study more?

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: I noted that I feel I had disappointed him and that he had been annoyed by some of my 'on-the-fly' enquiries. Moreover, he does become emotional but quickly regains control and my intervention suggesting we could stop recording sounds scratchy and tentative.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson: “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk”

Chapter Three:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it there.

I still fall . . . it’s a habit . . . but, my eyes are open.

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

Example 4 from my research

- **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."*
(laughter)
- **Russell:** *(claps hands) Well done! You say all the right things, go on.*

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson: “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk”

Chapter Four:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

Chapter Five:

I walk down another street.

Post PhD: processing

"It's crowded he said" and I agreed with the man on the tube who looked like Richard Dreyfuss from Jaws.

His Irish accent surfed roar of the human wave that swirled around and washed out and in and out again.

His voice dips and swells as he skims the lifescapes of the Irish greats of the English

'I am one of those' when he heard about my research.

The few times he had the chance and if he could go back and he would do it different.

We are swimming in the sea of the unspoken and the latent currents of regrets unites and separates us.

The shark exits at Finchley Central.

Insider outsider research: risk

- Maria Lohan (2015, p. 215) argues that men are absent from the literature 'on family planning, fertility, reproductive health and midwifery.'
- Marcia Inhorn (2012, 2009), and William Marsiglio et al. (2013) have argued that feminist scholarship has retained the theoretical and experiential spotlight on women's reproductive issues.
- There are risks 'associated with leaving the field, analysing sensitive data, and fulfilling commitments to research participants in the delivery of research findings' (*Sampson et al., 2008, p. 930*)
- Researchers can face 'professional danger' if they challenge or deviate from existing academic, theoretical, methodological, occupational, and/or institutional precepts.

Insider outsider research: researcher as outcast

- I have attended many academic events where I have been the only male. I try *not* to behave in the manner often associated with male academics: dominate the space and/or conversation. I place myself in the front row of the seating furthest away from the speaker and/or the chair or power holder.
- I have had a range of reactions to my research findings - from being asked if I can be hugged to covert and overt hostility including: exaggerated eye-rolling, imitation of crying with wiping away pretend tears and saying “Boo hoo” and “Why should I care? Oh, that’s right I don’t.”
- During her talk Dr X referred to the ‘paedophile in the corner’ looked at me and made a hand gesture in my direction. I have never met Dr X before and I was unaware of any of her academic work. The incident left me shaken and confused.

Influence of counselling in practice.

- Counselling Research: support 'naturally' built in to research.
- Monitoring and managing of self.
- Use of self-reflexive diary and other therapeutic methods: drawing, poetry...
- Aware of own limits: emotionally, physically, mentally, relationally.
- 'Internal supervisor' (Casement, 1985): during interview, analysis, writing.
- Supervision: Bryne (2007) suggested that ethical practice be discussed at every supervision meeting.
- Researchers' to have own therapy common working practice.
- Peer support groups formal/informal common
- Post interview notes to include own performance/reaction as per practice.

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.

Thank you for listening!
Any questions?



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Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson: “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk”

- Chapter One: I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost . . . I am helpless. It isn’t my fault . . . It takes forever to find a way out.
- Chapter Two: I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don’t see it. I fall in again. I can’t believe I am in this same place. But it isn’t my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.
- Chapter Three: I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it there. I still fall . . . it’s a habit . . . but, my eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.
- Chapter Four: I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.
- Chapter Five: I walk down another street.

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