


Please cite the Published Version

Hadley, Robin  (2014) Biographical Interviews: 'Not being a father: the experiences of involuntarily childless men as they age'. In: PAUUD Research Unit research seminar series 2014, 19 March 2014, The University of Manchester, UK. (Unpublished)

Version: Presentation

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Additional Information: Slides from a presentation given at: PAUUD Research Unit research seminar series 2014

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Biographical Interviews

‘Not being a father: the experiences of involuntarily childless men as they age.’



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Ageing and Childlessness

- Older childless adults: ‘...rendered invisible in social science literature.’ (Dykstra and Hagestad 2007: p. 1275).
- Survey data indicates 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 health, excessive drinking and smoking, depression, and sleeping difficulties than men with partners (Kendig et al, 2007).
- Later-life: policy of ‘active ageing’ v media discourse of ‘health & socio-economic’ poverty/burden.
- Difficult to assess the level of involuntary childlessness.

Methodological tensions in Social Science

- ⦿ Lazarus suggests the debate in social science is one between 'Those of us who are in the trenches (practitioners) against theoreticians' (Dryden, 1991, p. 108).
- ⦿ The 'dynamic tension' between theory and practice reflects the complexity in balancing 'science versus artistry, and planned structure vs. creativity and flexibility' (Lazarus, 2005, p. 1).

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 and feminism to capture the totality of older widow's experience. Underpinning of social constructionism. Similarly this study
- ❉ 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.

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) seminal 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).

Biographical method

- ❉ **Central to the Chicago School of Sociology of the 1930's: developed to gather life stories of 'ordinary' people.**
- ❉ **Now used in many Feminist, Gerontological, and Disability studies as a counter to the**
- ❉ **Used to reveal and understand the pattern of a life to the present: provides in-depth sight of individual lives.**
- ❉ **Acknowledges subjectivity in the context of life-course and timing of events (Chambers, 2002)**
- ❉ **Narrative life stories add a unique subjective dimension through an individuals account of their life.**

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.**

Affect of gender in interviews.

- ⦿ 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.*
- ⦿ Padfield (female) and Procter (male) research interviews with young British women for gender bias (Padfield and Procter, 1996):
 - ⦿ *Gender directly related differences in disclosure.*
- ⦿ 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..."*
- ⦿ *Awareness of intersubjective interactions*

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.

Interchange 1. (Good?)

- ⦿ 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?*

Interchange 2 (Bad)

- ❉ Interviewer: *And what has changed or stayed the same since the age of fifty 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 Fifty, 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...*

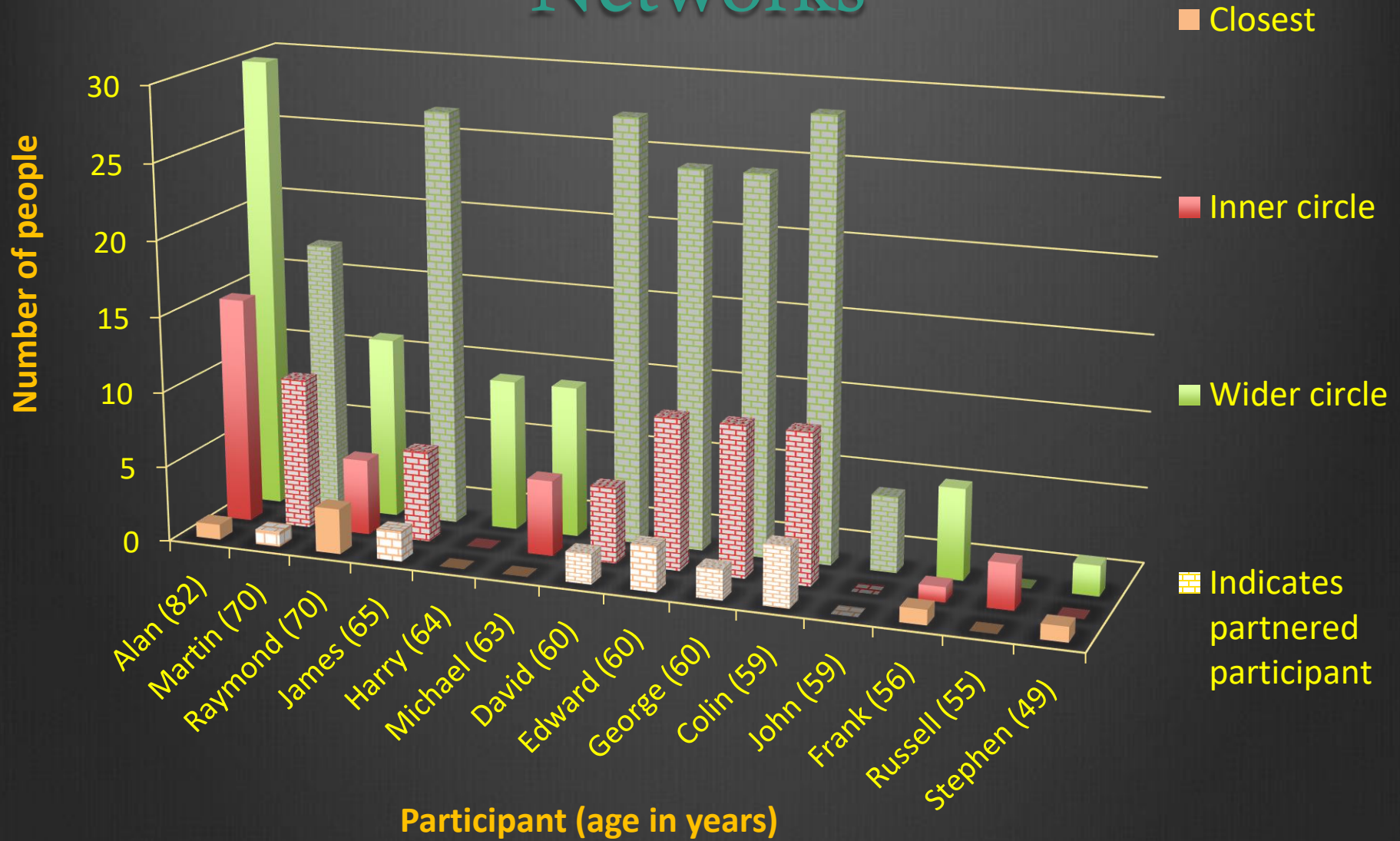
Interchange 3 (Humour).

- ⦿ 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.*

Tips from interviewing men

- ❉ False generalisation that men don't want to talk
- ❉ Men find interviewing a cathartic experience.
- ❉ Managed experience: supply details in advance. (Oliffe & Mróz, 2005)
- ❉ Traditionally men are said to view interviews as challenges to masculinity (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001: 91)
- ❉ *Provide a non- competitive environment.*
- ❉ Acknowledgement of masculinities (Broom et al, 2010)
- ❉ *Self disclosure: Use of 'Authentic chameleon' (Dryden, 1991).*

Networks



Thank you for listening.
Any questions?



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