# Report of meeting between Timescapes' 'Men as Fathers' and 'The Oldest Generation' projects: University of Cardiff, 21st July 2008.

One of the aims of the Timescapes programme is to explore and promote ways in which a linked collection and assembly of archived qualitative longitudinal data can enable secondary and collaborative analysis. To this end, two of the Timescapes projects met with a view to sharing data and drawing out some common themes. This was to be a pilot, a model, from which other Timescapes projects might develop their own approaches. We hoped to draw out implications with significance in relation to content as well as process. In what follows we document aspects of both. Our topic for the day was to be 'Fathering'.

## The two projects

Secondary analysis of someone else's data presents opportunities for new interpretations and new theorising. This may be planned, or serendipitous. In the case of 'Men as Fathers' (MAF) and 'The Oldest Generation' (TOG) the process was to have aspects of both. The two projects, being part of Timescapes share certain characteristics, they are for example, both qualitative and longitudinal. Data has been derived from interviewing on topics relating to family life. Fatherhood and fathering both appear in the data. However, whereas in the case of MAF these are defining areas of interest, in the case of TOG, they are only one amongst many aspects of the life histories recounted. And, whereas for MAF all the interviewees were men, in TOG they were only five of the twelve seniors interviewed.  Differences in the size of the two data sets was also a factor to be accommodated in any planning. The MAF data comprised three waves of interviewing, whereas the TOG participants had only been interviewed once at this stage. There were further differences in the nature of the data. While MAF data are exclusively drawn from interviews, TOG's data comprises both interview data and diary entries, the latter written in the case of four out of five of the men by a daughter.  The two projects' participants were also different. MAF' interviewees were men who were first time fathers, mainly in the age group 20 to 45. In contrast, the TOG participants were all grandfathers and could look back to at least two generations of fathering experiences. Finally, differences in the disciplines generating the data, meant that the conceptual framing of the two projects differed. Whereas MAF drew on theorising within social psychology as a discipline and psychosocial studies more broadly (including synergies between sociology and psychological perspectives),  TOG drew on sociology and on oral history as a method and had generated life history interviews including questions about the grandparents of the 'seniors'. The significance of this last difference was to emerge during the joint meeting.

Despite these many differences, and maybe because of them, the meeting proved fruitful, generating new common themes and issues relevant for secondary analysis in Timescapes and beyond.

All academic member of the two projects were present at the meeting which was held at Cardiff University: Mark Finn, Karen Henwood and Fiona Shirani for MAF; Joanna Bornat and Bill Bytheway for TOG.

In what follows we cover three aspects of the joint meeting: preparation; presenting the datasets; identifying emergent common themes; and broader issues for secondary analysis.

## Preparing for the visit

Before the visit and joint meeting we agreed to draw up aims and objectives that give us a shared focus for the day and some identify substantive and practical  outcomes which could be passed on to other Timescapes projects, and possibly further. These were:

*Aims:*

* to engage in a collaborative process that involves seeking ways of pooling and sharing data across the two projects

* to think about ways of collaborating on data analysis e.g. by identifying ways of selecting and linking the data, possible data analysis strategies, and how to capture contextual information to assist in analysis and interpretation across the projects

* to derive new interpretations from data from the two projects, and consider any implications they may have for the work programmes and development of each project over time

* to develop ideas and strategies – to be built up over time - that will be mutually beneficial for the two projects and for the collaborative work of the Timescapes as a whole

* to identify aims, questions and strategies for possible secondary analysis work using data from the projects

* to contribute to the process of developing an approach to secondary analysis within Timescapes

*To do this we planned to:*

* outline our research questions, methods (of data collection, data organisation/selection and analysis), and data sets

* present extracts from our data together with progress on data analysis made prior to the meeting; open up our (ongoing) analytical work to questioning and discussion

* reflect on the collaborative process in order to i) identify features of the processes of data pooling and sharing and ii) make more transparent the analytical and interpretive work of the two projects and how this can be developed

* work up a short 'think aloud' piece on the collaborative process for posting on the methods and ethics page of the Timescapes website

* explore the possibility of producing a joint publication (methodological or substantive) from the collaborative process

* agree on points which can be generalised for others to use

\* note ways in the exercise can contribute to the process of secondary analysis of data from the two projects and the development of the secondary analysis strategy of Timescapes as a whole.

These items comprised the data, or checklist for the day's business.

## Presenting the datasets

In both cases, work had been done before the day in order that each project would be able to present their data in a form that was accessible to the other. This meant that the meeting was unlike an open-ended secondary analysis visit to an archive. Given that TOG interview transcripts are on average 25K words long and that diary entries are mostly not brief, with only this one opportunity to share the data TOG needed to find a way in for the MAF team, who took similar steps with their own data.

The two projects necessarily approached this task in different ways. TOG needed to find data on the topic identified for the meeting from their larger data corpus of material on other topics. Their solution was to present interview and diary data on four of the men from their sample. Joanna  presented the interview data in a temporal, thematic way in order to facilitate access under the headings: fathering now; being fathered; becoming a father; being a father; being a grandfather. Under each of these headings she assembled extracts which linked to these themes. Bill spoke of searching the diary data for sons' names and then deleting all information which was not about the topic.

As all the 'men as fathers' project's data is about the topic of fatherhood, selection was made on analytical grounds as articulated explicitly in the circulated paperwork. Two lines of analytical work on the timing of fatherhood (Fiona) and intergenerational continuities and continuities and men's imagining positions as fathers (Mark) provided the focus for data selection.

As the first item on the agenda was to outline data sets and questions, Karen had prepared a short document outlining the MAF study: ""Men as fathers" study – context, questions and data sets"".  Although she spoke only briefly to this; it did provide an important reminder of the broader intellectual location and design of the project and hence of the selectivity of the data sets that had been prepared for use on the day.

Preparation and presentation of the data was an issue for both projects but was discussed in more detail in relation to the MAF data. Mark had put together an extensive data set including multiple data extracts from four cases. These were chosen in order to make possible comparative analysis of continuities and discontinuities in relationships between interviewees and their own fathers and intergenerational transmission of fatherhood aspirations, ideals and ways of practicing fatherhood into the current generation. There was discussion of whether communication of the presented analysis might have been hindered by reporting details of the interviews waves (1-3) along with the data extracts. Did it imply that the comparisons in question was between the three different interview waves, when it was not possible to make claims about change between the interviews? The intended analytical point about the dynamism and change in men's ways of identifying with their father's ways of fathering did not fit with this simpler comparative strategy. Fiona's presentation of single quotes to exemplify analytical themes prompted comment that it might suggest over-selectivity – were the extracts just chosen to foreground a preferred theme? The analytical work that had gone into

identifying the themes and choosing particular quotes to stand for many other possible ones was not made transparent by the presentational strategy itself.

The 'men as fathers' project primary data was presented along with case study details (Mark), analytical framing (Mark) and interpretive commentary (Fiona). The aim of this presentational strategy was to provide analytical and interpretive reference points deriving from work conducted prior to the day in order to stimulate new interpretations of the data. In turn, implications for the projects' work programme might follow. In the event, comments on the presented data packages were prompted both by features of the analytical reference points and presented data. Fiona's right time analysis on socially expected life course sequences prompted reflection by the TOG team on their interview strategy which tracked the expected, biographical sequencing of lives. Did this strategy generate the stories of life course progression told by interviewees? Participants' use of the word 'people' in the 'men as fathers' data was discussed; it could signal reflective appraisals by family members or people beyond the family depending on context.

## Identifying emergent common themes

During the course of a fairly open and unstructured discussion a number of themes emerged which linked the two projects. Some of these had emerged on reading the data circulated before the meeting and were then tested out in discussion. Others emerged during the meeting, proposed by members of the two teams. These themes were:

- **lifelong dependency and attachment**: looking at the TOG diary entries the continuing emotional involvement of fathers with their children and grandchildren could be read into references to tasks and roles which had wider symbolic significance for these older men and men in both projects. The two projects differed in the ways that they focused on feelings about fatherhood. The MAF data illustrate how the team was concerned to focus on aspirations, fears for the future and exploring men's feelings about their potential as fathers. In contrast, with a life history focus, the TOG men tend to look back at a happy past and success as fathers.
- **discourses of planning and choice**: the MAF interviewees talked about choice in decisions about initiating parenting, in particular in relation to the impact of timing on their own lives. This was not mentioned by the TOG interviewees but the difference opened up questions relating to the focus of the TOG interviews, gender issues in interviewing, the history of birth control and socio-historical differences in evaluations of risk. For the TOG project, there might be taboo areas about issues such as pre-marital conception, miscarriages and disability that are not being considered and which would confound the simple making of intergenerational contrasts. The TOG data on grandparents wanting grandchildren and feeling an impending sense of disappointment as they did not arrive was relevant to the timing of fatherhood/parenthood analysis. Features noticed by TOG project members looking at men as fathers data were the idea of fully growing up, and the distinction between having a life and having children which was absent from the TOG data.
- **practices of care**: considering the two datasets together raised issues about who was presenting what particular version of the family. For example, it could be that with a life history focus, the TOG data showed more evidence of the activities and role of the extended family whereas MAF version of family was more nuclear in its presentation. This led to a comparison of different ways of being responsible. The TOG men

appeared to be presenting themselves as not being needy, as reluctant to ask for help, nevertheless there was evidence of cyclical practices of care as engagements fade away and then return, often with grandchildren.

- **masculinities in fathering:** coupling fathering with time lead both projects to consider intersubjective intergenerational transitions around masculinities. The MAF interviewees were asked how they saw their own fathers and then how they see themselves. The TOG interviewees, though they talked of their fathers' fathering practices also referred to other older men who played fathering roles in their lives, providing information and knowledge. This was providing insights into experiences of masculinity over time with references in both sets of data to understandings of fathering and to the presentation of issues around discipline and acceptable masculinities in interviews.
- **constituting an idea of the future:** talk about the future in interviews and diaries which focus on the past and the present was identified as immanent in the TOG interviews and as focused more specifically around planning child development and childcare issues for the MAF interviewees. For both projects it was a difficult topic to raise in interviews, though for different reasons. Here the discussion became as much methodological as substantively oriented. For the TOG group the future is expressed, drawing on diary entries, more in terms of seasonal change, anticipating and planning for winter for example, longer term has more problematic associations, potentially. This may be a question of interviewer inhibition, finding out ways in which to frame or define what is meant by 'what next' for people facing a future which is time-limited and wanting to 'minimise distress'. For the MAF group the 'horizons of next' may be equally difficult to talk about. 'I don't know where I'll be in a year's time?' suggested that an interviewee in the 'men as fathers' project did not want to talk about the future in that way. 'What do you want for your grandchildren?' sounds idealistic, and such questions may create responses about unreal and moral futures. For this group the future feels near because of new decisions to be made about, for example, moving house or finding a nursery for a child.

## Broader issues for secondary analysis

This collaborative approach to secondary analysis threw up some issues which we consider have broader implications for Timescapes and for secondary analysis in general. The points we make in this final section respond to the last two aims we set up for the day:

* to identify aims, questions and strategies for possible secondary analysis work using data from the projects

* to contribute to the process of developing an approach to secondary analysis within Timescapes.

Issues with broader implications for secondary analysis, within Timescapes and beyond include:

**Future use of archived data**

In approaching another dataset it may be that within Timescapes, projects want to signal certain topics for collaborative or secondary analysis. On the other hand, serendipity has a certain value, as the discussion between the two projects had revealed. If topics are to be signalled then projects may want to collaborate over coding to capture issues identified as of common concern at an appropriate level of specificity and to facilitate searching across data sets.

Thinking ahead to future users, MAF is attempting to systematically record contemporary online media representations of fatherhood, building on its strategy of collecting key popular father images when the project first began in 1999. This strategy reflects a theoretically informed interest in considering the contemporary context in which men become fathers, but there are questions to be raised about whether it should be deposited as metadata. There are resource implications as well as questions about issues of subjectivity and selectivity in what it is decided to preserve.

Being too aware of the future may mean that the original researchers (ourselves) tend to self censor or launder what is deposited. On the other hand there are problems attached to being too relaxed about what counts as metadata. The MAF project had discussed as a possibility on ethical grounds 'scrubbing out data' when questions of researcher performance as well as data quality were involved. As explained, this option is no longer the preferred one for the men as fathers project – better to highlight in metadata the reasons why an interview was difficult and how valuable are the data. Sometimes difficulties in interviews have little to do with interview practice, and this specific point could be addressed in the metadata. The TOG project commented on their general preference for relaxing data preparation requirements in Timescapes and having more stringent restrictions of use e.g. open viewing but no quoting of data directly by secondary users.

### Issues from collaboration

As projects develop, they may incorporate new ideas, in particular at the stage of data analysis and these are likely to be incorporated into the next wave of data collection. It is important for secondary analysis that changes introduced through emergent design are made explicit, perhaps identifiable through the metadata that is deposited with the primary data. New observers of data add value and noticed data features take on fresh significance. For example, one of the TOG data extracts was from a man who visited his new baby accompanied by his fishing rod as he was on his way fishing This was of interest to the men as fathers project for what it suggested about the man's implied awareness of generational change in expectations of men's behaviour at the time of their baby's birth. Similarly, the TOG data on grandparents wanting grandchildren and feeling an impending sense of disappointment as they did not arrive was relevant to the timing of fatherhood/parenthood analysis. These new insights are important but as yet it's not clear how the results from such collaboration can be built into data which is to be re-used.

### Identifying well told stories

The TOG team is aware, partly through being able to co-ordinate their two data sources that some of their participants are telling well told stories. Some interviews may in fact be a series of well told stories. For both projects the influence of the interview setting and the part played by performance may be significant. Fieldwork notes may alert future users of the data to some of the characteristics of each interviewee, however, the selection and role of the well told story may be harder to identify for a later researcher.

### Spacing of waves may affect how change is identified and marked

The two projects have very different spacing in their waves of data. Including TOGs use of diaries this can affect how change is identified and marked by participants as well as researchers. The MAF group wants to build reflexivity in relation to time into their interviewing, a feeling of 'then – now – what next?'

and noting how the narrative strategy changes at different points in time. This process is less important for TOG. It may mean that longitudinality has to be understood on a project by project basis as a variable concept with time and change having a range of substantive and methodological meanings.

**Discipline base of deposited data**
There was a point in the discussions where it became apparent that, in comparison with the TOG data, there may be lack of historical data in the MAF project regarding how men see generations past (beyond own parents) within their families which could usefully be addressed in interviews yet to come. The TOG project had a much clearer idea of how many of the older generations were still living etc. By contrast, the TOG project had given less attention to feelings and meaning in their interview design and had used a rather different approach to interviewing to the MAF project. Clearly the discipline base of the researchers has significance for what is collected and deposited.

## Key organisational points from the experience

In organising and carrying out a joint approach to secondary analysis we have identified some key points which emerged from the process and which we'd like to pass on to others who might be interested in taking part in a similar activity. These are:

**Preparation:** identifying a substantive focus for the discussion; selecting and sending out data in a manageable format; agreeing a plan of what is to be covered on the day; circulating all papers to be discussed in good time beforehand.

**Dialogic exchange:** ensuring a helpful dialogic flow for the day with opportunities to present, question and develop ideas in as open manner as possible; avoiding tabling of papers with new information or analysis.

**Noting points on the way:** ensuring that everyone involved has a note of points of agreement or for discussion by encouraging all present to take notes and by reviewing understandings at intervals.

**Follow up:** writing up an account of the meeting which meets with the understanding of all who took part

**Dissemination:** circulating an account to others in Timescapes and beyond who are interested in the development of secondary analysis and collaborative working.

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