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of Southampton**

**Methodological Review:
mapping the literature in relation to the challenges for the
non-participation project**

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Working Paper 4

2007

Non-Participation in HE
Project Series



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SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW

Contextualisation and challenges faced

This review explores the methodological challenges involved in investigating decision-making about educational career pathways. It arises out of the ESRC-TLRP funded project, *Non-participation in higher education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice*. The research project is examining the extent to which higher education is conceived as 'within the bounds of the possible' for non-participants with Level 3 qualifications and is exploring how attitudes to higher education and decisions about non-participation are embedded within 'networks of intimacy', consisting of family members and close friends. The study hypothesises that such networks provide a critical context within which individuals' thinking about participation is embedded and co-constructed.

The research involves two overlapping parts. Stage One has drawn on existing large-scale survey data to develop a macro-level account of (non-) participation in the general population and a critique of the literature on educational decision-making. The implications of this initial phase are being explored in the qualitative study, Stage Two, which involves case studies of sixteen networks of intimacy. In this stage, we identify non-participating adults at different stages in the life-course and who may, or may not, be economically active in order to provide 'entry points' to each network. Each case study will involve two interviews with each 'entry point' individual, and semi-structured interviews with approximately five 'network members' who are identified as sources of influence in the decision-making process.

The review will explore the issues involved in investigation questions such as:

- How do individuals within networks of intimacy make decisions?
- How do age, familial generation, cohort generation and particular historical period affect attitudes, aspirations and influence?
- How is cultural and material capital transmitted from generation to generation?

The research described above involves various methodological challenges. These include:

- investigation of decision-making as a collective process in networks of intimacy;
- investigation of intergenerational aspects;

- investigation of a hidden population; and
- integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Ontological and epistemological (and ethical) issues underpin these challenges and imbue all levels of the investigation: broad investigative approach and conceptualisation, data collection; and data analysis. Issues of ontology and epistemology are especially prominent in this investigation because of:

- the need to interpret and represent multiple accounts within any one network of intimacy, accounts which may be potentially conflicting or at least told from different perspectives;
- the need for the interviewers to interview and interact with many individuals in one network who will themselves be responding to what they perceive the story to have been presented by other members of the network;
- the difficulty of investigating a complex decision making process, ongoing probably over many years.

Aims

Over the period of the project, we aim to:

- map the existing methodological literature in the field in relationship to these challenges,
- critique existing approaches and
- offer a useful methodological as well as substantive contribution to related literature.

This review addresses the first of these aims and is an initial mapping exercise of some of the relevant literature available. The relevant literatures are huge, covering a range of theoretical fields, substantives fields of study and research approaches, so the review is necessarily partial and limited. Future papers, when the research project is further advanced, will address the second and third aim.

By carrying out the review we hope to discover:

- what we can learn from various existing approaches to investigating small groups
- pointers to pitfalls and ways forward for addressing issues related to
 - fieldwork
 - subsequent analysis
 - ethics

- what other approaches are neglecting
- what we can contribute to the existing methodological literature, what value we can add (in our focus on the collective)?

In the review, we highlight issues of particular relevance and interest to those:

- wrestling with similar methodological problems,
- interested in investigative methodology, and
- with a substantive interest in the field of (higher) educational decision-making.

The review as currently constituted is wide-ranging and inclusive. It is designed as a resource that the research team can draw on in the research project for many aspects from methodological conceptual matters to practical issues such as setting up access to our participants.

Structure

Section One contextualises the methodological review. It briefly describes the nature of the methodological challenges faced, sets out the aims of the review, explains how it was carried out, and explains its status. Section Two elaborates on the nature of the challenges faced. Section Three discusses the theoretical and methodological approaches that we can draw on in our research project. Section Four draws together some comments on the study of small groups, a central issue in the research project. The comments arise out of the literature survey in Section Three. Section Five looks at various aspects of the research process, illustrating what we can draw on from existing work. It provides examples of contexts people have worked in and problems they have faced, describing approaches they have taken and solutions they have found. The appendices include various practical documents and guidance related to the methodological challenges we face.

Conclusions about the existing literature

Contributions

The existing literature:

1. provides a framework of understanding at different levels (i.e. those of theory, substantive fields, research approaches and data collection and analysis techniques);

2. enables us to draw on a wide variety of knowledge ranging from the conceptual level to practical documents for use in fieldwork in the areas of ontological and epistemological consideration, quantitative and qualitative integration, sampling, interviewing, data collection and data analysis;
3. highlights many ethical issues which we should be aware of and consider as we go through our study.

Limitations

Limitations of the existing literature, for our purposes, are that:

1. The higher education choice literature does not contain much that is methodologically close to our *networks of intimacy* focus so we are pioneers of such an approach in this substantive field of study. This gives us opportunities but also presents difficulties in that we cannot tread well trodden paths.
2. Much of the rest of the literature available in other fields is also limited in its focus on investigation of small groups. Studies tend to rely on one (maximum 2) participant(s) to speak for the workings of a group. Some studies use questionnaire surveys to investigate groups. In some cases, where more than one person has been involved there is little methodological discussion in the reporting of the studies. The substantive areas of *Family studies*, *Studies of Social Mobility* and *Intergenerational Research* seem to offer the best opportunities for us to learn from existing work in this respect.
3. The literature on interviewing appears to be rather restricted to one or two approaches (e.g. BNIM and variants) or other approaches which are difficult to access (e.g. those employing approaches which draw on psychoanalysis).

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

Contextualisation

This review explores the methodological challenges involved in investigating decision-making about educational career pathways. The review arises out of the ESRC-TLRP funded project, *Non-participation in higher education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice*.

This research project is examining the extent to which higher education is conceived as 'within the bounds of the possible' for non-participants with Level 3 qualifications and is exploring how attitudes to higher education and decisions about non-participation are embedded within 'networks of intimacy', consisting of family members and close friends. The study hypothesises that such networks provide a critical context within which individuals' thinking about participation is embedded and co-constructed.

The research involves two overlapping parts. Stage One has drawn on existing large-scale survey data to develop a macro-level account of (non-) participation in the general population and a critique of the literature on educational decision-making. The implications of this initial phase are being explored in the qualitative study, Stage Two, which involves case studies of sixteen networks of intimacy. In this stage, we identify non-participating adults at different stages in the life-course and who may, or may not, be economically active in order to provide 'entry points' to each network. Each case study involves two interviews with each 'entry point' individual, followed by semi-structured interviews with approximately five 'network members' who are identified as sources of influence in the decision-making process.

This review will explore issues involved in investigating questions such as: How do individuals within networks of intimacy make decisions? How do age, familial generation, cohort generation and particular historical period affect attitudes, aspirations and influence? How is cultural and material capital transmitted from generation to generation?

Challenges faced

The methodological challenges faced in the project *Non-participation in higher education* include:

- investigation of decision-making as a collective process in networks of intimacy;
- investigation of intergenerational aspects;
- investigation of a hidden population; and
- integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Ontological and epistemological (and ethical) issues underpin these challenges and imbue all levels of the investigation: broad investigative approach and conceptualisation, data collection; and data analysis. Issues of ontology and epistemology are especially prominent in this investigation because of (1) the need to interpret and represent multiple accounts within any one network of intimacy, accounts which may be potentially conflicting or at least told from different perspectives; (2) the need for the interviewers to interview and interact with many individuals in one network who will themselves be responding to what they perceive the story to have been presented by other members of the network; (3) the difficulty of investigating a complex decision making process, ongoing probably over many years.

Aims

In the project, we aim to:

1. map the existing methodological literature in the field in relationship to these challenges,
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3. offer a useful methodological as well as substantive contribution to related literature.

The review addresses the first of these aims. Future papers, when the research project is further advanced, will address the second and third aim. By carrying out the review we hope to discover:

- what we can learn from various existing approaches to investigating small groups
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- fieldwork
- subsequent analysis
- ethics
- what other approaches are neglecting
- what we can contribute to the existing methodological literature, what value we can add (in our focus on the collective)?

In the review, we will highlight issues of particular relevance and interest to those:

- wrestling with similar methodological problems,
- interested in investigative methodology and
- with a substantive interest in the field of (higher) educational decision-making.

Methods

Members of the team brainstormed about relevant substantive and methodological fields and the purposes of the review and drew up a long list of relevant literature. It was agreed that Brenda Johnston would read as broad a selection of the relevant literature as possible as well as speaking to those experienced in this type of research in order to glean as much useful information as possible. She has spoken to a range of experts in the fields of biographical research, family studies and community studies. The relevant literature was located by the initial brainstorming and through following up literature which emerged in the subsequent reading as well as from discussions with those experienced in this type of research. The literature read is referenced at the end of this review.

Current status

The review as currently constituted is wide-ranging and inclusive. It is designed as a resource that the research team can draw on in the research project for many aspects from methodological conceptual matters to practical issues such as setting up access to our participants.

SECTION TWO: PARTICULAR METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES THAT WE MUST ADDRESS

In this research project, we face a range of challenges. This section of the review draws out the nature of some of the complexities involved in what we plan to do.

Investigation of decision making as a collective process in networks of intimacy

We plan to collect data from “networks of intimacy”, that is small groups of connected people, related to the decision making processes and to analyse the decision making process as regards educational and employment pathway of the main case entry person in the group. This is problematic, in that obtaining accounts from related individuals can raise:

postmodern ontological and epistemological themes of multiple perspectives and multiple realities, but there has been little explicit discussion of how to tackle the analysis of such related interviews (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003, p.1).

Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003) attempt to address such problems in their excellent methodological article. They point out that few studies in family sociology:

describe in any detail how they subsequently approached the task of analysing the resulting rich but highly complex sets of interview materials (p.2).

They emphasise that the data generated in such multiple people approaches is complex and time consuming to analyse (p.1). They describe some of the problems as follows:

... analytic choices yield different forms of knowledge and lead us to ‘see’ varying patterns and themes according to the focus we take, whether we reveal the possibility of ‘family cultures’, the relevance of standpoint differences around gender and generation, or wider structural issues of class and ethnicity. Within individual accounts we can see how these different aspects are interwoven in particular histories. How we represent such complexities and tensions between related accounts is a further choice, which may depend upon the audience and purposes involved. Even where we choose to weave the threads into one apparently coherent overall story, we argue for openness and reflexivity concerning the difficult analytic choices that underlie such a production (p.1).

Specific issues from this article will be raised later in this review.

Complex and relevant as the issues are that Ribbens McCarthy et al. raise, we should note that they are not describing a *decision-making process* in their article. Investigation of a decision making process, ongoing over many years is a further layer of complexity.

Issues raised by this challenge will be addressed throughout the review, but especially in *Section Four Comments on the small group issue* pp.36-44.

Investigation of intergenerational aspects

Investigation of multiple generations within one family and others in the network of intimacy leads us to various challenges related to inter-generational and generational matters. Some of the challenges are as follows:

Networks of relationships and dependencies

In a theoretical article on intergenerational issues, Ahier and Moore (1999) emphasise the importance of understanding *networks of relationships* within intergenerational research within the field of youth transitions and post-16 education:

We would argue that precisely because the move is towards 'management through negotiation', youth transition must be located and understood in terms of *networks* of relationships (mainly intergenerational) which provide the resources through which young people might actualise whatever options they may aspire to. Hence the key question both theoretically and methodologically is: *where, with whom and how* do these 'negotiations' take place and how might they become the subject of sociological theory and investigation? (p.517).

Ahier and Moore mention various conceptual and practical issues related to *networks* of relationships, interdependencies and transmission of resources which we should be alert to in carrying out our empirical research and doing the data analysis. Ahier and Moore are writing within the context of young people, but we might consider how these issues affect people at all different life stages in our study. The specific issues they focus on are as follows:

Inter-age transfers:

Inter-generational transfers are those between kin, where assets are transferred chiefly between parents and children, but also between grandparents and grandchildren and others (Ahier and Moore, p.517).

In our research, we should look out for such inter-generational transfers, noting their nature and extent.

Public inter-cohort transfers:

These are, for example, where “those in work pay the pensions of the old through their taxes” (Ahier and Moore, p.517). In our case, we should perhaps examine how higher education has traditionally been funded, who has borne the costs, and how is this changing in terms of public inter-cohort transfers.

Private dependency:

In fact, most young people, whilst they are attending courses in FE or HE colleges or, indeed, taking part in the variety of post-school training programmes, find themselves at least partially dependent upon a variety of resources provided by their families (Walters and Baldwin, 1998) (Ahier and Moore p.518).

With the expansion of HE:

increasing numbers of young people are not only living economically dependent yet socially independent lives, but they are living through this stage at home (Ahier and Moore p.518).

In our research, we should take notes of how dependency plays out with people at different life stages?

Guidance and resources:

Hence, the relationship with ‘significant adult others’ is not just one of guidance, but more materially of the management of transition-facilitating resources. In this respect, the idea of ‘dependence’ in youth has to be seen not just as a state, but as a process continually managed and negotiated within and with reference to a network of others, the most significant of whom are most likely to be meeting a range of demands on their resources, as well as having to assume additional responsibilities on their own behalf (Ahier and Moore, p.519).

In our data, we should take note of how guidance and resources are interacting?

Some further questions arising from these issues are:

- How does this private dependency affect the construction of identity?
- When does a young person become an adult?
- How are different social groups affected differentially by this greater privatisation of dependency?

These are questions partly raised by Ahier and Moore and partly drawn out for the purposes of this review.

Ahier and Moore believe that:

Culturalist approaches have focused too narrowly on parents at the neglect of these broader kin networks and too bluntly on values rather than 'the management of negotiation' through which assets are transferred. It is necessary to find:

- a) ways of conceptualising and mapping the matrix of intergenerational relationships within which the dynamics of dependency/reliance and transition are embedded;
- b) of identifying what it is that is being transferred or mobilised within and by these dynamics;
- c) the principles and processes through which transfers are mobilised (p.526).

Other generational aspects

Other authors draw our attention to different issues we should be aware of and aspects we should separate out in the generational aspect of our research. Useful discussions of such aspects can be found, for example, in Miller (2000) a methodological text on life and family histories; Antikainen et al. (1996) in their study of the meaning of education over three generations in Finland; and in Aquilino (1999) a study of parental and young adult child perceptions of intergenerational relations.

Age

Age is "a structural variable of central importance and of significance equal to that of other structural variables such as gender, social class and racial or ethnic group" (Miller 2000, p.ix)

Generation has more than one meaning.

Family generations

Miller (2000) points out that generation can mean "generations in the sense of parent/children family generations" (p.ix).

Cohort generations

Generation can also signify "periods of significant social experience – cohort generations" (Miller, p.ix). The experience may be associated with a particular age, but may really be cohort effects. For example, poor nutrition when young may affect

ageing, but it is the nutrition when young not the age per se that may cause illnesses later. Not all members of the cohort will have processed events in the same way. There may be groups of people who have processed them differently. Cohorts may cover very different time-spans and not just the traditional 30 years of family generations. Antikainen et al. (1996) make a strong case for the importance of looking at *cohort generations*. A researcher can look at a particular time period and events and see how they have shaped the life chances and understandings of individuals living at that time. The cohort generation also affects motivations.

A generation consists of a group of people born during the same time period and who are united by similar life experiences and a temporarily coherent cultural background. People belonging to the same generation have the same location in the historical dimension of the social process. They share a group of events that have influenced, first, the ways in which they experience and thing and, second, historically relevant ways of action (Mannheim, 1959, pp.191 and 292; Puoronen, 1988, p.4) (cited in Antikainen pp.34-35).

Historical trends and influential events

These are “central to understanding social change” (Miller, p.ix). e.g. the changing position of women in society in the past 150 years. The direction will be constant and not just a generational blip.

Period effects

These “raise important issues of the interplay of historical events and social change” (Miller, p.ix). Period effects are caused by the particular conditions pertaining at the time of the study. For example, a study of the honesty of politicians might have results affected if there had just been a big political scandal. For example, crime figures might be going down, not because of law and order actions but because of declining numbers of young men who are the main criminal group.

Generational viewpoints

Aquilino (1999) alerts us to the possibility of systematic generational viewpoints, largely related to concerns to do with identity and interest in relationships, within the framework of generational stake theory. See the section on *Generational stake theory* p.21 for a discussion of this theory. These viewpoints may well relate to the issues of dependency and networks that Ahier and Moore (1999) raised.

We should bear these various aspects in mind when collecting and analysing our data.

Issues raised by the challenge of investigating intergenerational aspects will be addressed throughout the review, but especially in *Section Four Comments on the small group issue* pp.36-44.

Investigation of a hidden population

Our population of non-participants in higher education is not a clearly defined group. Indeed, the people we are interested in encompass a wide range of individuals and groups of different educational backgrounds, ages, life stages, geographical location and employment history. They do not belong to any one organisation. They are not marked out in any lists or databases we can have access to. It is difficult even to estimate how many individuals with Level 3 qualifications exist in the general population and to work out what their socio-economic and educational profile is, although we are fortunate in having access to some large scale quantitative surveys (such as the Labour Force Survey, the Youth Cohort Studies) which may assist us. The hidden nature of the population would be a serious problem if we were seeking a representative sample in the traditional quantitative sense. However, we are pursuing an approach of theoretical sampling so the problem is far less, but we do still have to be aware of the fuzzy nature of our population. See the section *Theoretical sampling* p.55 -57 for a discussion of theoretical sampling.

In our case, it may be difficult even to define our population. For example, is someone who has Level 3 vocational qualifications gained many years ago and who does not consider the possibility of formal education any longer a candidate for inclusion? Is someone who has done one unit of an Open University course, with no intention of continuing to a full degree, a candidate for our study or not?

Research into controversial and private areas such as sexual orientation and activity often have to deal with such hidden populations. For example, in a study of lesbians, gays and kinship:

Random sampling is clearly an impossibility for a population that is not only partially hidden or “closeted”, but also lacks the consensus as to criteria for membership (Morin 1977; NOGLSTP 1986 cited in Weston 1991, p.9-10).

We can draw on research practice in such areas (e.g. Weeks et al. 2001; Weston 1991). See the section *Family (and other) network studies* p.22-24 for a discussion of such approaches as well as many mentions throughout Section Four of this review.

Research into populations which are dispersed internationally are also useful to us (e.g. Rosenthal 1998 in her study of German Jews dispersed following the Second World War). Such research can inform our sampling practice and also our broader research approach. In such research, it is difficult to use a quantitative approach because identities and relationships shift around and develop a lot. The issues are complex and sensitive.

A methodology based on semi-structured interviews ... could provide a way of exploring shifting nuances of identity by providing brief life-histories of the subjects, and allow for the development of narratives of 'intimate' and 'family' life (Weeks et al. p.201).

Issues raised by this challenge will be addressed especially in the section *Sampling* pp.55-64.

Integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches

Integration of qualitative and quantitative research is a potentially fruitful way forward, offering the opportunity for the joining together of the large-scale spread of information that is offered by survey data, for example, with the often small-scale, in-depth information provided in qualitative research approaches. Each source of knowledge can challenge the other, suggest avenues of investigation to pursue and the sum of the two sources of knowledge added together could be greater than each can offer individually.

However, the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches is not straightforward. Each set of approaches tends to operate within a different set of epistemological, evidential and analytical assumptions and traditions. Those working within the quantitative paradigm tend to assume that research knowledge relates to data which are observable and measurable in a transparent fashion (if the research investigation is conducted with appropriate skill and sensitivity) while those working within a qualitative paradigm tend to assume that knowledge is largely socially constructed and contingent, data interpreted by the research participants (direct or indirect as in the case of written texts) as they give them, by the researchers as they

receive the data and in the research findings texts composed by the researchers, and by the readers or the listeners as they receive the data.

Following from this basic epistemological division, the research process assumes a different shape and meaning in each approach. For example, each approach tends to be better adapted to asking different types of question. Quantitative approaches are well-placed to ask *what* questions about large swathes of data (including longitudinal data), but find it harder to cope with complex *why* and *how* questions since they depend on separating out and measuring factors which is hard in complex questions of causality. Qualitative approaches are well-placed to ask *why* and *how* questions (including longitudinal data), but less able to address questions about large scale *what* questions.

In sampling, quantitative approaches tend to use representative samples, of one kind or another, while qualitative approaches tend to use theoretical samples or at least use the sample to build a theory.

Quantitative approaches tend to use numerical data whereas qualitative approaches tend to use textual or visual data of one kind or another, although these boundaries are by no means clear cut.

At the analysis stage, quantitative approaches tend to utilise statistical generalisation, that is they generalise on the basis of numbers while qualitative approaches tend to utilise theoretical generalisation, that is they generalise on the basis of an underlying explanatory framework or employ other types of meaning making approaches.

These differences in epistemological assumptions can present problems of coherence. Jennifer Mason (2006) summarises the problems which an ill-thought out collaboration between quantitative and qualitative approaches can lead to:

... mixing methods for no good reason other than the sake of it can produce disjointed and unfocussed research, and can severely test the capabilities of researchers. Researchers engaging in mixed methods research need to have a clear sense of the logic and purpose of their approach and of what they are trying to achieve, because this ultimately must underpin their practical strategy not only for choosing and deploying a particular mix of methods, but crucially also for linking their data analytically.

Mason proposes six strategies for quantitative and qualitative collaboration, each with advantages and disadvantages. See *Quantitative/qualitative integration aspects* p.52-55 for a description of these strategies.

The challenge in our project is to use each research approach to its maximum potential, while integrating what each can contribute into coherent findings which can be presented to audiences located either mainly in quantitative or qualitative traditions or both.

Issues raised by this challenge will be addressed especially in the section *Quantitative/qualitative integration aspects* pp.52-55.

SECTION THREE: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES WE CAN DRAW ON

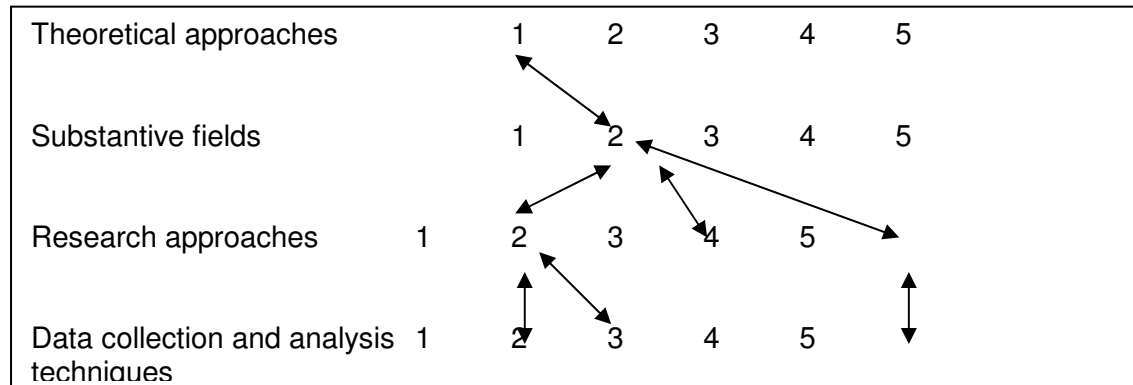
This section of the review seeks to provide a flavour of the theoretical approaches, substantive fields and particular associated research approaches and methods which we can draw on in our research project, *Non-participation in higher education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice*. The section is perhaps best understood as describing a complex network of linkages operating at different layers.

The first layer is that of theory. Each piece of research will have an underlying theoretical approach, expressed explicitly or implicitly. These theories may be macro level grand narrative theories or narrower, more field-specific theories. Theories relevant to our study include social capital, Sen's capability approach, combination models, class conflict theory, and generational stake theory. The second layer is that of substantive field of study. Substantive fields of study which include work relevant to our study include family studies, community studies, higher education choice, and generational research. These fields of study may draw on one or more theories. For example, the higher educational choice literature draws on social capital approaches, Sen's capability theory and combination models. A third layer is that of research approach. Research approaches relevant to our study include biographical research and surveys. These research approaches may be drawn on by one or more field of study. For example, life history, a branch of biographical research, is drawn on in family studies, higher education choice research and community studies as well as other fields. Each research approach will typically have associated data collection methods and techniques such as questionnaire surveys, interviews, and observation. They will also have associated analytical techniques such as grounded theory, analytical induction, and statistical analysis.

Particular theoretical approaches may have particular affinities for specific research approaches. For example, social capital approaches are often investigated either by life history interview approaches or by surveys. Certain fields may employ different research approaches, sometimes related, for example, to their stage of evolution or the prevailing fashion. See Figure 1 for a diagrammatic representation of the different layers and their interaction.

Underlying theoretical and methodological issues are ontological and epistemological choices, explicitly or implicitly discussed in research accounts.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the different layers and their interaction



In the following section, the links between theoretical approach, substantive area of study and research approaches and techniques are highlighted where possible. It should be understood that the levels are somewhat fluid. At times, for example, what is a field of study is hard to distinguish from a research approach. However, within these limitations these somewhat fluid divisions are helpful for understanding the levels at which different literatures operation and how they interlink.

In addition to the framework outlined above, there is work from particular standpoints such as *intergenerational research* and *gender* which provide a broad umbrella for work in various of the above categories. These will be discussed separately.

Theoretical fields

Theoretical aspects are dealt with mainly in the choice review written by Karen Paton so I will only address theory in an outline fashion in this review. The purpose of the discussion of theoretical aspects in this review is to give a flavour of the over-arching theoretical frameworks within which the methodological aspects are operating. The theories are overlapping and complex.

As well as macro level theories such as those relating to social capital, there are theories which operate at a more local level such as generational stake theory.

Social and cultural capital approaches

Social and cultural capital approaches have been advocated by authors such as Bourdieu (1984, 1989), Putnam (1993, 2001), Coleman (1988, 1990). As Putnam (2001) defines:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (p.19)

In his major study, *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu examines:

the distinctive forms of power - political, intellectual, bureaucratic and economic - by means of which contemporary societies are governed. What kinds of competence are claimed by the bureaucrats and technocrats who administer our societies? And how do those who govern come to gain the recognition of those who are governed by them? Bourdieu examines in detail the work of consecration which is carried out by the educational system - and especially in France by the grandes ecoles. The work of consecration can be seen in operation in different historical periods, whenever a nobility is produced. Today the socially recognized groups function according to a logic similar to that which characterized the divisions between high and low in the ancient regime. Today this state nobility is the heir - structural and sometimes even genealogical - of the noblesse de robe which, in order to consolidate its position in relation to other forms of power, had to construct the modern state and the republican myths, meritocracy and civil service which went along with it. Bourdieu examines the mechanisms which produce the kind of nobility displayed by those who govern, and the recognition granted to them by those who are governed by them. (c) Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited, UK (Library catalogue description of book)

In the book, *Bowling Alone*:

Robert Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbours and our democratic structures- and how we may reconnect. *Bowling Alone* warns Americans that their stock of "social capital", the very fabric of their connections with each other, has been accelerating down. Putnam describes the resulting impoverishment of their lives and communities. Drawing on evidence that includes nearly half a million interviews conducted over a quarter of a century in America, Putnam shows how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors are isolating Americans from each other in a trend whose reflection can clearly be seen in British society. We sign 30 percent fewer petitions than we did ten years ago. Membership in organisations- from the Boy Scouts to political parties and the Church is falling. Ties with friends and relatives are fraying: we're 35 percent less likely to visit our neighbours or have dinner with our families than we were thirty years ago. We watch sport alone instead of with our friends. A century ago, American citizens' means of

connecting were at a low point after decades of urbanisation, industrialisation and immigration uprooted them from families and friends. That generation demonstrated a capacity for renewal by creating the organisations that pulled Americans together. Putnam shows how we can learn from them and reinvent common enterprises that will make us secure, productive, happy and hopeful. (c) Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited, UK (Library catalogue description of book)

Structuralist models

As Foskett, Dyke and Maringe describe:

Firstly, structuralist models (for example, Gambetta 1996, Roberts 1984, and Ryrie 1981) view choice as a result of institutional, economic or cultural constraints over which pupils have no control. Based on this model, it can be assumed that pupils do not make conscious decisions about their progression beyond compulsory education, but that their ultimate destinations can be predicted from the environmental constraints surrounding them. Long standing assumptions based on socio-economic status, cultural and ethnic origin and the inherent capabilities of the pupils have been found to be positively associated with progression to various post pathways. Thus, according to structuralist models, post 16 decisions cannot be rational and consciously driven, because there are forces operating within schools over which pupils have no control, but which all the same have a significant influence on the choices pupils make. Such forces include the SES (socio-economic status) of the school, parental levels of education and occupational status, curriculum organisation issues in the schools, and the influence of teaching groups (p.8).

Foskett, Dyke and Maringe explain some of the weaknesses of structuralist approaches:

Structuralist models fail to explain the prevalence in some schools of pupils' decisions that are driven largely by economic imperatives. Some choices may be strongly related to the need to become successful and earn 'loads of money' through following a post 16 curriculum that lead to what some pupils call 'the rich occupations' (p.8).

Economic and human capital theories

Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004) suggest that some of post-16 educational choice can be explained through economic or human capital models.

Such models are based on the assumption that pupils will make decisions based on estimations of the relative returns associated with various post 16 options. The returns do not necessarily have to be measured in monetary terms, and indeed may be difficult to ascertain, particularly over short periods of time. Cultural reproduction and the reality of pupils lives and experiences the 'street wisdom' of young people form part of a complex web of information and experience that shapes the pupils decision making (p.8-9).

As Becker (2002) explains, human capital theory suggests that:

... tangible forms of capital are not the only ones. Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures of medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty also are capital. That is because they raise earnings, improve health, or add to a person's good habits over much of his lifetime. Therefore, economists regard expenditures on education, training, medical care, and so on as investments in human capital. They are called human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets.

Education and training are the most important investments in human capital. Many studies have shown that high school and college education in the United States greatly raise a person's income, even after netting out direct and indirect costs of schooling, and even after adjusting for the fact that people with more education tend to have higher IQs and better-educated and richer parents. Similar evidence is now available for many years from over a hundred countries with different cultures and economic systems. The earnings of more educated people are almost always well above average, although the gains are generally larger in less developed countries.

Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004) suggest some weaknesses of human capital models:

A key weakness of explaining choice on the basis of perceived economic benefits is that the returns from education take a long time to accrue, and rationalizing choice on this basis is like crystal ball gazing, something pupils at this stage are often not easily amenable to. Furthermore, it is clear that the benefits that accrue from education are not entirely financial. They can be related to how 'cool' the choice is perceived to be, the prestige associated with the choice and the 'fashionability' (Foskett, Lumby and Maringe, 2003) of the chosen pathway in the post-16 market. Such benefits are often seen by pupils as short term and act as a powerful force to steer their decisions towards specific options in the post-16 market (p.9).

Others have suggested that human capital theories do not take sufficient account of: (1) issues such as the social construction of educational ability and achievement; (2) the complex operation of supply and demand in the economy; (3) the complexity of human motivation; (4) the operation of gender in graduate employment processes (Bourdieu 1987/79; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Smetherham 2006).

Personality and subjective judgement models

Another set of models is based on the role of personality and subjective judgement.

As Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004) describe:

Originally proposed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) the theory of pragmatic rationality argues that choice is a 'rational process that is constrained

by a realistic perception of opportunities and shaped by individual personality' (Payne 2002:13). ... This type of 'rationality' is seen in terms of promoting self interest and utilizing a base of information and life experience to arrive at decisions (p.9).

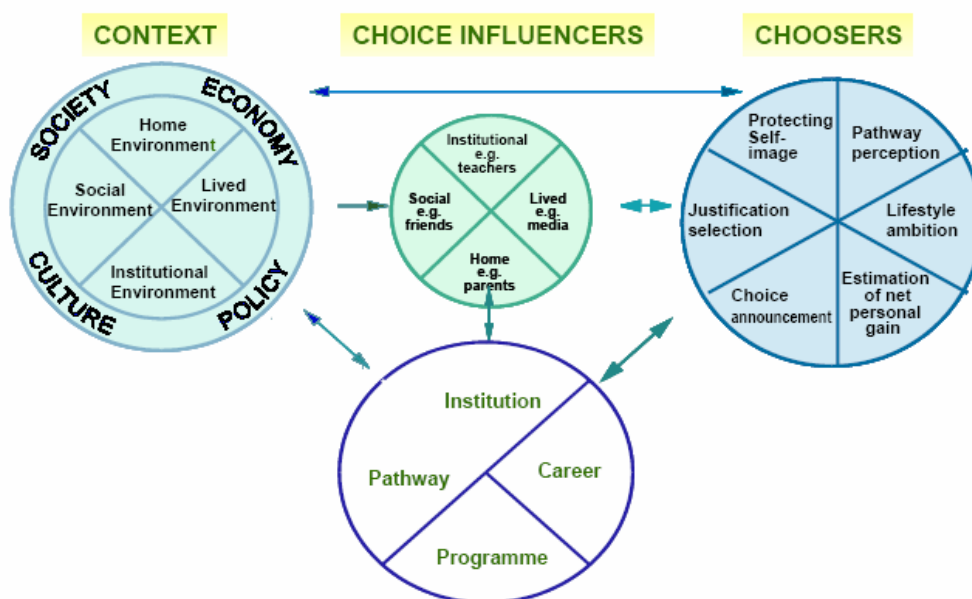
Combination models

Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004) used a model combining elements of the above.

Choice is clearly both complex as a process and multi-factorial in terms of the range of influences that bear upon that choice, therefore. The model of choice developed by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) (Figure 1.1) seeks to bring together the relevant elements of the three groups of models described above into a single integrated mode to show this complexity, drawing on existing research evidence about choice at all key transition points within the education and training system. The model seeks to conceptualise and represent choice, but does so with the clear provisos that:

a) Choice is not a 'rational action' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p40) in the sense of a systematic weighing up of all facts that enables the individual to make one clear unambiguous decision. The model represents a dynamic system in which all of the elements exist and all of the processes are occurring on a continuous basis. Hence the individual chooser is continuously subject to each of the influencing elements and processes, and the psychological processes supporting choice are also continuously in operation. 'Choice' is therefore simply an expression of the preference that exists at a particular moment, and is subject to change and modification on any timescale. In a world of rapid and wide ranging change young people are forced to respond to changing and contradictory information; their decision making process is therefore likely to be more volatile and consist of reflexive responses to experience.

Figure 1.1 An integrated model of educational choice



b) While choice is not 'rational action' in a strict sense, it is also not irrational or random. Choices that are made or exercised will reflect some active process by the chooser, but that process will have been based on partial evidence, perception and circumstance rather than any rational, comprehensive and objective search for, and weighing of, evidence.

c) The role of perception and individuality must be stressed in understanding the process of choice. There is no deterministic connection at the level of individuals between a particular set of circumstances and a specific outcome or 'choice' – one individual may respond to a set of circumstances in a very different way to another individual, in part because of their different personalities and personal histories. However at the level of larger groups or populations such individuality may aggregate up to patterns that reflect the probability of particular 'choices' under prescribed circumstances, however (p.9-10).

Sen's capability approach

Sen's capability approach focuses on the resources necessary to make choices that make supposed freedoms and choices real. Robeyns (2004) outlines Sen's arguments:

In a sequence of papers and books following his 1979 Tanner lecture, Amartya Sen ... proposed the capability approach as an alternative approach for interpersonal comparisons to those approaches that exclusively focus on people's mental states, such as utilitarianism, or those approaches that focus on resources, such as Gross National Product (GNP) per capita, disposable income, or Rawlsian social primary goods (Sen 1980; 1984b; 1984a; 1985b; 1985a; 1987; 1990; 1992; 1993; 1995; 1999). Interpersonal comparisons are a necessary component in the assessment and evaluation of a wide range of issues, including inequality, poverty, justice, development, and the capability approach is meant to be applicable to any of these normative tasks (p.3-4).

... Economics generally focuses on the means to achieve a good life, which are consumer goods and services, and the sources needed to generate them. The goods and services that an individual is entitled to, have a variety of sources: nonmarket production, market production and the income that this generates, net income from other sources (e.g. gifts, pensions, savings or welfare benefits) and transfers-in-kinds. These are the basic inputs into the generation of goods and services. Different people will rely on these different sources to generate consumer goods and services to very different degrees, for example a young child is almost completely dependent from the transfers-in-kind from her parents or other guardians, whereas a high earning healthy single professional might get virtually all her commodities through market transactions (p.4).

Conversion factors, those that allow a person to generate "capability" from goods and services, are key:

Sen's core argument is that goods are not important in themselves, but in what their characteristics enable people to do and to be, that is, in the capabilities that a person can generate from these goods and services. The extent to which

a person can generate capabilities from goods and services depends on the factors that determine how smoothly this conversion can be made. Three different types of conversion factors can be distinguished: social, environmental and personal conversion factors. The social conversion factors are determined by a number of societal aspects, such as social institutions (e.g. the educational system, the political system, the family, etc), social norms (including gender norms, religious norms, cultural norms, moral norms), traditions, and behaviour of others in society (e.g. stereotyping, prejudiced behaviour, racism, sexism, homophobic behaviour, and so forth). The environmental conversion factors are determined by the environment in which a person lives, e.g. whether deforestation has caused erosion and flooding which threatens the stability of one's shelter. The personal conversion factors are determined by one's mental and physical aspects; these personal characteristics, such as disabilities or bodily vulnerabilities affect the types and degrees of capabilities one can generate with resources. A healthy person who has a pair of running shoes can use these to train for a marathon, but this is not an option for people with bad knees and certainly not for paralysed people (p.4).

Goods and services are not the only relevant resources:

Not all capabilities require some good or service as an input; for example, being respected by your peers only requires respectful behaviour from other people, and not necessarily any goods or services. Still, the same category of social and individual factors and parameters which influence the conversion factors also impinge on those capabilities that do not necessitate commodities. For example, being subjected to a pattern of insults is a negative capability, and many cases of insult in contemporary society do not rely on any material basis, but often occur via discourses and attitudes. Another example is an incurable and aggressive cancer. If such cancer drastically restricts the capabilities that a person can enjoy, this restriction is to a large extent a direct effect of the cancer, and not only via its hampering effect on what this ill person can do with certain commodities. Thus, several of the factors that determine the individual's conversion factor also impinge on the capability set directly (p.6).

Sen distinguishes between a *general capability set* (all the opportunities and potential achievements of a person) and *achieved functionings* which are the capabilities the person has actually realised.

A person's capability set, which comprises all the capabilities of a person, represents her freedom to achieve well-being and agency – and this is the dimension which Sen proposes as the informational basis for assessments of inequality, poverty, justice, and development. However, as a person's capabilities are her real and genuine opportunities to do what she wants to do and be the person she wants to be, these capabilities obviously are difficult to observe. Instead, what we can observe are those capabilities that she has chosen to act upon, the capabilities that she has chosen to realize. These realized capabilities are called her achieved functionings, the doings and beings that a person has chosen to realize. The choice of achieved functionings from her capability set need not be seen as an idealized choice of a purely rational agent who is detached from society; instead, the capability approach explicitly acknowledges the impact of preference formation mechanisms on the preferences that people activate when they make choices, and also the potentially wide range of other social influences on decision making, such as

peer pressure, social conformity, expectations from or commitments to family and friends, and so forth. In addition, certain mental aspects of the person impinge on her ability to choose, for example low self-confidence, or post-traumatic anxieties (p.6).

Individual agency has an important role in Sen's framework.

An important aspect of Sen's capability approach, which can only to a limited extent be reflected by the stylised figure above, is the role of agency. The key role of agency shows up at different places in the capability approach. At the meta-theoretical level, it is reflected in the fact that the capability approach is not a well-defined egalitarian theory, nor does it provide a blueprint for ethical development or just redistributive policies. Instead, it is an open framework, perhaps even an evaluative paradigm, that must be tailored to the aspirations and needs of the people affected, and to the local circumstances in which they live. This contrasts quite strikingly with most other egalitarian theories in Anglo-American political philosophy, which are generally very well-defined and result in precise prescriptions or assessments. The importance of agency in Sen's capability approach is also visible in the role that deliberation, public reasoning and democracy play in selecting the capabilities that will count in the assessment, and thus also in the design of social arrangements and policies. The capability approach refuses to see people primarily as patients, who can be helped by giving them a handout or a cure which they can take or leave, but rather as agents who can and should be given the power and the necessary conditions so that they can take their lives in their own hands. Finally, agency is also taken into account in the different categories of evaluation that Sen proposes, when he distinguishes well-being from agency, and freedom from achievements. A person's capability reflects her potential well-being, or her well-being freedom, in contrast to the actual well-being which she has realised, her achieved well-being, which is reflected in the achieved functionings (Sen 1985b). If well-being is supplemented with the outcomes resulting from commitments (i.e. an action which is not beneficial to the agent herself), then we are focusing on agency. Again, agency can be further specified as being either an achieved outcome, or the freedom people have to achieve their agency goals, independent of whether they opt to achieve them or not (p.6-7).

It is important to stress that Sen's capability approach is deliberately an open-ended framework or an evaluative paradigm, and not a fully fleshed out theory. Strictly speaking, the capability approach only advocates that for normative evaluations we should focus on capability sets. Many scholars who have either criticised the capability approach, or furthered it, have done so against the background of their own discipline or field. In most cases, the capability approach is not sufficiently specified by Sen to provide complete answers to questions central to a specific sub-discipline, and such an analysis requires the integration of additional theories (p.7).

Generational stake theory

According to the developmental or generational stake theory (Acock & Bengtson, 1971; Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971), each generation is invested in maintaining solidarity and the relational bond, but younger people seek to maximize their

separateness, whereas older adults seek to maximize continuity. For this reason, older adults may report higher levels of relational closeness and similarities in values than their adult children report (Marshall, 1995) (cited in Roer-Strier and Sands 2001). This theoretical approach relates to generational issues raised in the previous section *Investigation of intergenerational aspects* p.5-9.

These overarching theoretical approaches are associated with various fields of study, research approaches and standpoints.

Substantive fields of study

This section describes a second layer; that of specific fields of study, which lies under the overarching theoretical frameworks described above. These fields of study frequently have fluid boundaries.

Family (and other) network studies

Family studies is an area within sociology which examines family (and sometimes other) networks. Thompson (1997) describes the importance of the family in our society:

Family is still the principal channel for the transmission of languages, names, land and housing, local social standing, and religion; and beyond that ... also of social values and aspirations, domestic skills, and ... taken-for-granted ways of behaving (p. 43 qtd in Miller 2000, p.42).

Families continue to provide emotional support and are the main source of primary relationships. It may be fashionable to deride the functionalist assertion that families play an essential 'emotional/affective' role in providing close primary contacts, but that role remains no less essential (p.42).

Miller (2000) suggests that certain issues are likely to be important in a family history approach. These issues are:

- Family strategies
- The unequal allocations of resources within a family
- The control and passing on of wealth and status
- Questions of patriarchy and matriarchy and authority
- The familial "micro" as a reflection of the societal "macro"
- Skeletons in family closets
- Contradictory descriptions of the same family events (p.x).

In terms of theoretical links, Bertaux and Thompson (1997), from the social mobility and family studies literature, emphasise the rich conceptual tools necessary for the

complex analysis of family case studies. They argue that Bourdieu is helpful in his ideas about “reproduction” suggesting three main types of family assets or “capital”:

- economic capital
- cultural capital
- social capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1989)

Bertaux and Thompson point out that families are differentiated by the extent and nature of economic, cultural, relational and other resources available and *also* by how they exploit these. There is also a need to understand the emotional and moral bonds in a family and not just to focus on instrumental aspects.

Miller (2000) describes the role of capital transfer in families.

Material capital

Transmission of resources can be considerable. E.g. older generation transferring money to young adults in the shape of college tuition. (p.43)

Cultural capital

Educated parents can assist children through school education, books, help with homework etc. (p.43-44)

Social capital

e.g. business connections can be used to find the child a job, get favourable treatment during a job interview (p.44).

Negative social capital

Being a member of an ethnic group that is subject to prejudice can lead “to social and economic handicaps” (p.44)

There are overlaps between the different kinds of capital. For example, wealth allows more books to be bought, space to work in etc. Social capital will lead to the ability to negotiate with teachers more easily.

One well known and exemplary family study is that by Finch and Mason (1993).

Negotiating Family Responsibilities examines patterns of support (both practical and financial) between adult members of family and kin groups, and focuses upon ideas about responsibility, duty and obligation within families and how far these underpin the support actually given. *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* provides a fascinating insight into contemporary family life, particularly kin relationships outside the nuclear family. While many people believe that the real meaning of 'family' has shrunk to the nuclear family household, there is considerable evidence to suggest that

relationships with the wider kin group remain an important part of most people's lives. Based on the findings of a major study of kinship, and including lively verbatim accounts of conversations with family members, concepts of responsibility and obligation within family life are examined. The authors expand theories on the nature of assistance within families. They maintain that the family does remain an important source of support for many people and that such assistance is treated as a characteristic part of family life. (Publisher's synopsis)

In terms of research approaches, Finch and Mason use a combination of biographical and survey methods as do other family and network studies (e.g. Brannen 2003; Thompson 1997; Weeks 2001; Weston 1991).

There are a number of studies of networks other than families such as those of gay and lesbian groups (e.g. Weeks et al. 2001, Weston 1991). Weston explores the contemporary manner in which gay men and lesbians are constructing their own notions of kinship by drawing on the symbolism of love, friendship and biology in the San Francisco Bay area. Weeks et al. investigates *Families of Choice: The Structure and Meanings of Non-heterosexual Relationships*. As the authors describe:

In studying emerging narratives of non-heterosexual relationships, the aim was to provide empirical insights into the changing nature of forms of domestic organisation, the shifting meanings of identity and belonging, and the developing culture of non-heterosexual ways of life (p.201).

In terms of research methods, Weston employed participant observation and eighty in-depth interviews with gay men and lesbians. Weeks et al. used life history interviews, usually with individuals and some as couple units.

Social mobility research

Social mobility research investigates patterns of social mobility in society. In terms of theoretical approach, social mobility research seems to draw on social capital approaches such as Bourdieu (1984, 1989) and Giddens (1991).

In terms of research approach, frequently, quantitative survey data is used, but life history methods may also be used. Bertaux and Thompson (1997), for example, investigated the micro-processes involved in social mobility. They explored the issues as follows:

Calling for a broader, new approach to social mobility research, Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson moved in this book beyond pure statistics to use qualitative techniques - such as life stories and family case studies - to examine more closely the dynamics of mobility and address more fundamental sociological questions. Up to this point, the extensive sociological literature on mobility had been based around the survey method. As a result, researchers had access to abundant statistical data, but there is little information available to explain how and why people follow particular life paths. To overcome these limitations, the authors have developed an alternative, complementary approach using life stories, case histories of whole families over several generations, or case studies of local communities. Employing the case-study approach does not prevent the identification of structural trends; on the contrary, it allows us to analyse those collective processes through their local effects, restoring the links with the classics of sociological thought. (c) Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited, UK (Library catalogue description of book) (*Description in library catalogue*)

These are questions of interest to us.

Community studies

I spoke to Professor Graham Crow in the Sociology Division in the university and he recommended various studies to read and issues to think about. Community studies is a rich and long-standing tradition within sociology (e.g. Bell 1977; Jackson and Marsden 1962; Wallman 1984; Young and Willmott 1957). Clearly these researchers must have faced many of the same problems as we will in our study, but I have not yet found a study with a serious methodological discussion along the lines that would be useful to us. For example, Young and Willmott (1957) carried out a community study of family and kinship in Bethnal Green in East London. There is methodological discussion in the book, but it focuses on issues of sampling (quantitative study etc) and interview questions rather than issues of investigating related people and synthesising accounts etc.

In terms of research approaches, the researchers sometimes use social network approaches.

Higher educational choice literature

The higher education choice literature investigates how, why and which choices people make about entering higher education (e.g. Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball et al. 2002; Brooks 2003; Brooks 2004; David et al. 2003; Pugsley 1998; Reay 2003; Reay et al. 2001; Watts and Bridges 2006). The literature also investigates how understandings and viewpoints about higher education are formed and operate.

Authors tend to focus on issues such as the influence of social class, ethnicity, institutions, family, peers and gender.

In terms of theoretical approach, many authors use social capital approaches. This field tends to focus more on the habitus rather than other social capital aspects of theoreticians such as Bourdieu. Brooks (2003) uses a Bourdieuan analysis of habitus, but also points out the limitations of Bourdieu in explaining those who change habitus radically. For example, some social processes such as competitiveness cannot be explained by socio-economic processes alone. It also does not explain why some people try to change their habitus. How far can Bourdieu's account explain radical change?

From the point of view of our project, probably looking at radical changes of habitus is a very useful thing to do in order to work out how and why people do it. This might be useful for future social policy recommendations.

Watts and Bridges (2006) use Sen's capability approach which focuses on the resources, to make choices that make supposed freedoms and choices real, adapting it to higher educational consideration. As described in the study:

The drive to expand access to higher education (HE) in the UK assumes that it is a desirable option that will benefit both the individual and his or her wider community. There is also an assumption that low aspirations and low achievements present a barrier to increasing participation rates. Based upon a recent qualitative study of young people in the east of England who left school with little or no desire to enter HE, and drawing on the capability approach of Amartya Sen, our paper questions this assumption and posits that there is an alternative reading of low aspirations as different aspirations that lead young people away from HE and towards other valued lives and lifestyles. The life histories of 10 young people are used here to illustrate their aspirations and achievements, as well as their perspectives of HE, and to argue for the need to reconsider the practical and moral challenges confronting the current widening participation agenda (Watts and Bridges, Abstract).

Watts and Bridges present a useful discussion of how we must not assume that everyone should want to enter higher education. Sen argues that policy should not simply aim to increase resources (such as income or educational qualifications) *per se* but to increase access to the resources that enable these freedoms.

HE can have both intrinsic value (such as the satisfaction generated by learning opportunities) and instrumental value (inasmuch as it can lead to further valued ways of 'doing or being') but is not necessarily of value to someone who does

not recognise any intrinsic value in either its academic or social manifestations and who does not want a career requiring a degree” (Watts and Bridges p.272).

Watts and Bridges used Sen’s classifications

to identify and examine the aspirations of our participants and these were analysed within the context of their educational, social and vocational opportunities (p.273).

This presents moral and practical challenges:

For Sen, human development should be concerned with providing the resources people need to choose and achieve ways of living that they value and have reason to value; and practical resolutions, therefore, must focus on appropriate resourcing issues. Yes if these young people are to be engaged with the widening participation agenda rather than further alienated from it, we must also pay heed to the moral challenge and recognise that HE is not and will not be valued equally by everyone. Our aspirations, surely, should be directed towards ensuring that young people are sufficiently well informed that they have the opportunity to reject HE because it does not enhance their freedom to lead lives that they value and have reason to value (Watts and Bridges 2006, p.287).

In terms of research approach, the researchers tend to use a mixture of data collection methods (typically questionnaire survey and/or interviews and/or focus groups). Except, perhaps in the case of Watts and Bridges who might be using something close to a life history approach with their repeated interviews, the data collection methods do not seem to be allied closely with a particular research approach. These are “generic” semi-structured interviews, focus groups and questionnaires.

Broad research approaches

Biographical research:

There are various branches within biographical research: life history, autobiography and biography, auto/biography, narrative analysis of life and oral history.

Biographical research is:

Research undertaken on individual lives employing autobiographical documents, interviews or other sources and presenting accounts in various forms (e.g. in terms of editing, written, visual or oral presentation, and degree of researcher’s narration and reflexivity) (Roberts 2002, p.176).

In terms of relationships to fields of study, life history methods are used by researchers working within various fields such as family studies, social mobility

studies and generational research. In these fields, examination of individual lives can illuminate wider social, psychological, cultural, economic and educational aspects.

Literature in the biographic research tradition, reviewed in this report, includes: Antikainen (1996), Brannen (2003), Finnegan (1994), Miller (2000), Roberts (2002), Weeks (2001), Wengraf (2001) and Weston (1991).

The various branches of biographical research are as follows:

Life history

Life history approaches focus mainly on individuals and their relationship to the wider historical and social context. It is not about how individuals interrelate in small networks. In terms of data collection, life history often uses face-to-face interviews where the *individual* is able to speak.

The life history is based on a collection of a written or transcribed oral account requested by a researcher. The life story is subsequently edited, interpreted and presented in one of a number of ways – often in conjunction with other sources (Roberts 2002, p.176).

Life story is a term associated with this area. Terminology in this field is slippery. Terms change in their meaning. *Life story* seems to be now the story as told by the respondent and ordered into themes as highlighted by the respondent. *Life history* refers to a series of substantive events arranged in chronological order.

According to Bertaux and Thompson (1997), social mobility researchers, there are two broad approaches to life stories. The first approach, strong in Germany “focuses primarily on the subjective meanings that a particular person gives to her/his past and present life; it is almost a form of social psychology” (*Introduction*, p.13).

The second approach,

takes interviewees as informants about the various contexts which shaped their life: thus they are used as sources to reveal what happened to the interviewee, how and why it happened, what he/she felt about it, and how he/she reacted to it or ‘proacted’ to realise his/her projects. This orientation thus aims at gathering both factual and interpretive information, in the same way that ethnographers learn about a micro-culture by asking their informants not only to explain but also to describe it as factually as possible (Introduction p.13)

Shaw (1980, p.229) cited in Antikainen et al. (1996, p.17) suggests three elements revealed in life stories:

1. biographies portray the narrator's socio-cultural environment;
2. biographies portray an individual's perspective;
3. biographies include a time dimension concerning both the individual and the society.

Antikainen et al. suggest that:

A person always speaks of himself either consciously, or unconsciously, with respect to the social structures of his life. The individual and the social are on within the other, the different sides of the same coin: the world is the self and the self is the world (Bruner 1990). A human is both deeply social and in many ways individual at the same time. Socialisation does not happen merely through role-taking but also through role-making (Mead, 1962; see also Antikainen, 1991; Antikainen et al., 1992; Hurrelmann, 1988). The self reflects a social structure but at the same time it is more than this. A person both receives something from culture and also provides culture, that is, the individual is both a product and a producer (Antikainen et al, p.21).

Antikainen et al. (1996) provide an example of a life history. They discuss the meaning of education in Finland

...through an examination of life paths, identities and significant learning experiences. Looking at education over three generations (of war and scant education; of structural change and increasing educational opportunities; and of social well-being and wide educational choice) the book examines a variety of questions. The book demonstrates how the synthesis of social and cultural interpretations of education forms four groups: resource, status, conformity and individualism. The implications to education policy in late-modern or postmodern society are also discussed. © Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited, UK (from library website)

Antikainen et al. is useful for us in that it looks at life histories, generational issues and related methodological issues which are relevant to us. However, it is looking at individuals, not their networks of intimacy or families.

Finch and Mason (1993), family study researchers, used life history approaches in their major study *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*.

Autobiography and biography

Autobiography and biography may involve interviews not with the original individual of the study, but with significant others plus perhaps diaries, letters, memoirs and other artefacts etc. The interviews are often with individuals and not about group interactions. Autobiography and biography can be a literary pursuit.

Auto/biography

In auto/biography, theorising is a goal (Roberts 2002, p.76). Epistemological and theoretical concerns are forefronted. Auto/biography uses a wide variety of sources – diaries and oral accounts etc. It operates away from the realist approach. It is concerned with representation and meanings of the representation.

Narrative analysis of life

In a narrative analysis of life, there is an emphasis on the plot and story, but also on individuals and the interplay between the individual and the social. Narratives are concerned with the socio-cultural context. Life story is a type of narrative. Narrative analysis of life has spread across a range of disciplines. “Whilst different approaches to narrative interviewing and analysis are possible the central feature is the careful listening and reading of the words and stories of the teller” (Roberts p.133).

A usual distinction is made between story and narrative – the former is the ‘story’ told by the individuals (‘storied lives’), the latter denotes the means of enquiry (Roberts p.177).

Oral history

Oral history involves direct personal contact with the respondent who might be interviewed about events or their personal lives. It can also include letters, photos etc. Typically those who would usually be unheard can give their point of view. Interview is now seen as part of the historical interpretation, along with the narrator. Oral history includes “the practice of interviewing individuals on their past experiences of events with the intention of constructing a historical account” (Roberts p.177).

Thompson (1996) describes the growth of oral history as a field in the United Kingdom. Post-1945 with the Labour government, there was an awakening of interest in ordinary lives. This was in the wider world. In the academic world, in sociology people began to be interested in working class culture not just patterns of poverty (e.g. Young and Willmott 1957). Historians were still interested only in documents. Then in the 1960s, new universities were founded, especially Essex and Lancaster, where disciplinary boundaries were weaker and oral history could be accepted (Thompson p.353-354).

One branch of oral history is family history. As Shopes (1996) describes of family history:

Traditionally, family history has been equated with genealogy, the reconstruction of a person's lineage through the use of written records. However, the stories family members tell about their past are also a rich source of information on a family's history. In particular, they can yield information about motives and attitudes and 'feeling tone' of life that even the most extensive genealogical reconstruction lacks. Enlarging the notion of family history to include information gathered from oral sources also encourages people to investigate their pasts even through extensive genealogical records are not available

...

By tying together the strands of family history and trying to understand the meaning of individual lives in relation to the social and historical context within which they were lived, family historians can gain perspective on the context of their own lives.

...

Since the 1960s, historians increasingly have sought to understand the daily life experiences of ordinary people. They have paid particular attention to the history of the family since it is so fundamental a social institution and shapes so much of people's daily lives.

...

Oral history too has emerged in recent years as a method of historical research. Though by no means limited to the study of ordinary people, oral history interviews are especially valuable as source of information about those individuals and groups for whom the written record is both scant and misleading (Shopes, p.232).

Although the exact focus of the family history is unlikely to tally with our own interests, elements are likely to be useful in the sense of relationship to wider context, the central role of the family for understanding individual and collective lives.

Finnegan and Drake (1994) provide a basic, but fascinating, description of how to undertake a family history study.

Analytical approaches

Biographic research has used various methodological approaches for analysis: ethnomethodology, phenomenology, narrative analysis, symbolic interactionism, discourse theory, conversational analysis and others (Roberts 2002, p.14).

Miller (2000), who integrates American and European traditions and provides methods-related exercises, provides a guide to the methods and issues involved in carrying out biographical, life history or family history research. Miller demonstrates that biographical research is a distinctive way of conceptualising social activity. He

suggests three main approaches to biographical and family history: *realist* - focused around grounded-theory techniques of interviewing; *neo-positivist* - more structured interview techniques; and *narrative* - with emphasis on the active construction of life stories through the interplay between interviewer and interviewee.

Anthropological approaches

Mintz (1996) draws a useful comparison between oral history and anthropology:

The anthropologist, unlike the oral historian, records interviews to learn the structure and patterns of a society as exhibited by a representative individual's world view, cultural traits, and traditions. The culture's internal perceptions of a specific activity's meaning may thus be more useful than an external appraisal. This discussion of the ethnographic interview provides useful insights in interviewing individuals not as historical witnesses but as culture bearers (Introduction to Mintz, p.298)

Mintz, writing from an anthropological viewpoint, notes the importance of a wide knowledge of community and culture. As well as just speaking to one person, a researcher also needs "knowledge of the community and culture within which the informant lives, and which he or she expresses, in one way or another, in nearly everything he or she says or does" (Mintz, p.299).

Quantitative methods

Researchers in many fields (social capital, social network analysis generational research, higher educational choice) use quantitative approaches. Frequently, questionnaire surveys (either especially designed for the particular study or analysis of large scale publicly available data sets) are used. However, other kinds of quantitative data may be used involving observation of particular aspects of behaviour or ways of living.

Traditionally, sociologists using social and cultural capital approaches have used quantitative data. For example, in his major study, *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu (1996) uses a variety of data, mostly quantitative, such as:

- Survey or prize-winners data (p.9)
- Documentary evidence of comments etc written by a teacher over a period of time about students (p.30)
- Obituary data (p.42)
- Themes in prize-winning essays (p.60)

- Survey questionnaire (p.74)
- Exemplary written accounts of educational experiences (p.124)
- Statistical data held by government bodies (p.196, p.206)
- *Who's who, Year books*, alumni publications
- Accounts of ordinary days by researchers (?) of VIPs (p.356).

To take another example, *Bowling Alone* Putnam (2001) is another major example of the use of a social capital approach and associated methodology. In the study, Putnam used:

1. Social surveys
2. Organisational records

The research is scholarly. Putnam uses many different sources of quantitative data for triangulation.

In both cases, these data provide rich resources for looking at social capital. Both are designed to capture large scale trends which suggest the existence of micro-network processes with macro-level implications. However, they do not explore the nature or operationalisation of the micro processes. As such, they are not suitable for our Stage Two qualitative enquiry.

Traditional social capital approaches offer us useful ways of conceptualising the macro effects of micro processes in terms of social capital and its transfer, but do not suggest how we might explore the nature and working of micro processes involved in social capital transfer and operation.

Social network approaches

This field looks usually at quantitative aspects of social networks for insights into social, economic and educational relationships. Wallman (1984) used network analysis; analysis of time budgets for individual members of the household; job histories; and open ended interviews (Wallman, back cover). See *Appendix Three Research tools we could draw on in data collection*, and *Job histories* pp.124 for examples of tools used.

We will now discuss work written from a particular standpoint relevant to our study, intergenerational research. This discussion will span theory, fields of study and research approaches.

Intergenerational research

Intergenerational research draw on various theories (e.g. social capital – Ball et al. 2002, Bertaux and Thompson 1997, Pugsley 1998, Reay et al. 2001; generational stake theory – Aquilino 1999); crosses various fields of study (e.g. higher education choice – Ball et al. 2001, David et al. 2003, Pugsley 1998; social mobility – Bertaux and Thompson 1997), uses various research approaches (e.g. life history – Bertaux and Thompson 1997, Brannen 2003; quantitative surveys – Aquilino 1999). In this review, I am considering it as a standpoint, deserving of special recognition because of the nature of our study, looking at *networks of intimacy*.

The following description of intergenerational research is taken from Sue Heath's research note of 2005 on intergenerational research.

Existing social research on intergenerational relations and the transfer of resources between generations tends to focus on two generations only and more specifically on the parent-child relationship. Such studies are not unusual within the traditions of educational research and youth studies. A number of recent studies of educational choice have, for example, generated data from young adults and their parents. Ball et al's ESRC-funded research into HE choice ('An exploration of the processes involved in students' choice of higher education'), for example, involved interviews with 120 students and 40 parents, whilst Maguire et al's earlier ESRC-funded study (Choice, pathways and transitions: 16-19 education, training and (un)employment in one urban locale) involved a series of interviews with 40 young people and ten parents.

Alongside studies of parent-child relationships and the transfer of resources between them, Wilk (1999) argues that studies of grandparents and grandchildren are also becoming increasingly common, partly because the nature of grandparenting has changed in recent decades: 'grandparents have fewer grandchildren, grandchildren have more grandparents, and the relationship often lasts for decades' (p26). With the rise of childhood studies as a distinct area of research in recent years, there has also been a growing interest in the broader intimate networks of children beyond the immediate family. There are a number of such studies listed in the ESRC's ESRC Society Today database.

Studies which involve more than two generations within the same research design are, however, relatively unusual. Two recent ESRC-funded studies within the broad

area of family studies have successfully adopted this approach. These are: Moss, Brannen and Mooney, 'An intergenerational study of employment and care', and Hockey and Robinson, 'A cross-generational investigation of the making of heterosexual relationships'. Moss et al's study was based on interviews with members of twelve different four generation families. Only first, second and third generation family members were interviewed; the fourth generation in each case including an under-five year old. Theoretical sampling was conducted at the level of the 'pivot' second generation, ie the grandparent generation in their fifties and sixties. Hockey and Robinson's study involved interviews with members from each of three generations in 22 different families, the members of the youngest generation for the most part being in their teens and early twenties. In both of these studies, biographical interviewing techniques were used.

Both of these studies owe a great deal to the earlier work by Finch and Mason (1993) on the negotiation of family responsibilities within contemporary family life. Alongside a face-to-face survey of just under one thousand adults, they interviewed between three and eight members of 31 different kinship groups, with a particular focus on practical and financial exchanges between family members. This is a very widely cited study in sociological research on intergenerational relations.

Gender

Some researchers have argued that gender is an aspect that must be taken into consideration at various stages of the research process.

David et al. argue that:

Gender is woven into the fabric of the whole research process: from the selection of the 98 students, to the ways students were interviewed, to student processes of choosing to involve their parents, to parent perspectives in relation to individual, familial and institutional features (p.24).

Gender aspects are considered in more detail later in the reports in the section *Gender perspectives* pp.81-82.

The following section of this report will move on to more detailed consideration of various aspects of the research process.

SECTION FOUR COMMENTS ON THE SMALL GROUP ISSUE

This section will draw together some comments on the study of small groups, a central issue in our study as discussed previously in the sections *Investigation of decision making as a collective process in networks of intimacy* pp.4-5 and *Investigation of intergenerational aspects* pp.5-9. The comments arise out of the literature survey in the last section and are useful before the detailed methodological discussions of the next section.

Limitations of existing work on small groups

Much existing work on small groups is limited in various ways from the point of view of our current needs and, therefore, of limited help to us in suggesting how we cope with issues related to decision-making in small groups and intergenerational research in our study. (The studies have much to contribute from other points of view). The limitations are as follows:

Reliance on one individual to explore workings of a network

As Bertaux and Thompson (1997) report, several studies rely on only one interviewee to build up understandings about a network/kin-group etc. Weston (1991) in her study of gay and lesbian conceptions of kinship just spoke to one person within a network to discover how they conceived of kinship in the group. Reay (2003) in her study of mature working-class women students interviewed twelve mature, working-class women students attending an inner London further education college. These are individual interviews so there is little to be learnt about analysis of networking from this study. Some family histories have undertaken investigations through the use of single interviews in combination with extensive documentation (e.g. Finnegan and Drake 1994).

Individual voices within focus groups

Sometimes, researchers investigate the views of particular groups using focus groups which represent a collection of individual points of view (from the point of view of family and peer and other networks that those people might be involved in). For example, Archer and Hutchings (2000) in their investigation of the viewpoints and understandings of working-class non-participants in higher education about the value

of higher education used 14 focus groups with 109 people who were not participating in higher education.

Limited network exploration

Some studies have interviewed parents and young people (e.g. Brooks 2004; Pugsley 1998). However, this is a far less extensive endeavour to investigate networks than ours and beyond alerting us to gender differences in parental and child perspective cannot add much to our knowledge on the issues related to investigating small groups.

Survey approaches

Some of those investigating networks like Aquilino (1999) use a survey approach, comparing questionnaire answers given by parents and adult children.

Limited reporting

In some cases, there are studies where more than one member of a family or other small group has been interviewed, but there is little methodological detail given in the writing up of the study. For example, there is little discussion of how the researchers coped with analysing this type of data? What principles and methods did they use to do the analysis? (e.g. Hodkinson 1996).

This work analyzes the context of post-compulsory education and training through the stories of ten young people entering the world of youth training in Britain. In their re-examination of the ways in which young people make career decisions, the stories are grounded in policies emphasizing individual responsibility for education and training in a market built around neutral careers guidance. The book aims to show that current debates about education and training are often based on false assumptions about how people behave and interact with each other, and to help the reader understand the actions and perceptions of the young people in their care, as well as to reflect on his/her own professional practice. © Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited UK
(Description from library website)

This book does not have a methodological discussion, but clearly the researchers must have faced many similar issues to the ones we are facing. The researchers have spoken to members of networks surrounding ten young people – parents, careers advisors, employers, the young people themselves, and trainers. The authors report conflicting accounts of events such as that of Helen's sacking from her job at a garage.

As previously discussed, Young and Willmott (1957) carried out a community study of family and kinship in Bethnal Green in East London, but there is little discussion of the issues involved in investigating related people and synthesising accounts.

Rosenthal (1998), in her research on holocaust survivors, gives frustratingly little detail about how the analysis was carried out although there is more discussion of interviewing and so on.

One study of small groups (Watts and Bridges 2006) reported interviewing peers and family, but there was no systematic analysis of these interviews in the article.

Reay et al. (2001) investigated the effects of institutional habitus on higher education choice. The researchers tried to separate out the effects of family, peer group and educational institution attended. Their view was that:

Perceptions and expectations of choice are constructed over time and in relation to school friends and teachers' views and advice and learning experiences, no less than in relationship to the views and expectations of families (Reay et al. 2001, para. 1.3).

These influences overlap and shift over time (Reay et al. 2001, Para. 1.6). It is a messy process. However, there is not an extensive methodological discussion on network analysis in this article so we cannot draw directly on that.

Limited methodological guidance

Methodological texts, while helpful in many respects to us, are not very forthcoming on how to deal with multiple interviews. For example, Miller (2000) advises looking out for the effects of aunts and uncles as well as parents in life history interviews. He suggests probing sibling trajectories and interactions and potential supports/allocation of resources within families, but does not provide more extensive guidance.

Studies we could learn from

Studies which have actually investigated small groups and from which we could seek to learn about that aspect include Finch and Mason (1993), Brannen (2003), Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003).

A family study

Finch and Mason (1993) investigated the negotiation of family responsibilities, as previously described in the section *Family (and other) network studies* pp.22-24. They carried out 120 interviews. 88 people were interviewed, the case entry persons more than once. The relatives interviewed were those identified as close family by the original entry person. They investigated 11 'kin groups' in total, including three to eight members of the same family. Finch and Mason explained why they interviewed more than one person in each kin group:

We believed that there would be great benefit in interviewing several members of the same family, since we were focusing upon processes of negotiation and therefore we need to know how these were experienced by different parties to them. Much previous work on family relationships has been criticised because researchers have interviewed just one person each family – usually a woman – and just let that person's account stand for the whole family group (p.13).

The 'kin group' exists only as the group recognised as such by the main respondent. It did not have an independent existence. It was "one person's kin group" (p.13). This is similar to our conception and needs.

Finch and Mason (1993) have a useful micro and empirically based discussion of individual agency and social structure (p.172-177). In their study, Finch and Mason focus on issues such as obligations, commitments, reciprocity and reputations. Commitments are created by people within the structures in which they work. They are not unmovable obligations etc. Structure offers constraints and enabling factors.

An intergenerational study

Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003) carried out a study on the 'family' lives of young people where they interviewed the mothers, fathers and a young person in three different families. They suggested that in analysis of multiple interviews, researchers could:

- prioritise standpoints (e.g. fathers, mothers, teenagers) or
- could look at individual differences and try to identify themes or
- could focus on joint and divergent accounts within particular groups and see what meaning can be made of that.

According to Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003), usually researchers have not discussed their methodology and its implications. Often they do not discuss how different

accounts relate to one another. Researchers often try to aggregate the data or to reveal contradictions to “round out” the family account (p.4).

Reasons for accounts within a group differing

- Each person may have different knowledge on an issue
- May have similar knowledge, but perceive it differently
- May be a careless answer
- May deliberately want to deceive
- Interviewer may misunderstand (taken from Pahl 1989 in Ribbens McCarthy et al. p.5).

Opportunities for multiple perspectives

Ribbens McCarthy et al. suggest that opportunities for exploring multiple perspective arise:

- Between and within ‘individuals’ as such;
- Between standpoints of gender and generation;
- Between individuals in ‘families’;
- Between ‘families’, maybe characterised by standpoints of class and ethnicity;
- Between us, as researchers, and between us and our interviewees; and
- Between different epistemologies (p.6).

In examining the multiple perspectives, are we searching for a “truth” or a set of subjective realities or some kind of intermediate position?

If we take a more objectivist approach, we would look at how far multiple interview confirm or contradict one another at a factual level. If we take a more interpretationist approach, we may be more interested in how far and in what ways individuals have constructed divergent realities and expressed in which themes and through which language (Ribbens McCarthy et al. p.7).

The researcher has a powerful role in constructing the interpretation. The interpretation is not neutral.

Ribbens McCarthy et al. suggest that Finch and Mason have an ambiguous position between these two extremes. They explore one direct contradiction between a mother and a son about financial arrangements. Finch and Mason discuss this in

terms of different ways of framing the relationship – mother emphasising continuing support and son emphasising independence. This is a standpoint analysis where symbolic meaning is emphasised.

In analysis, researchers can actively pursue an:

- *Objectivist approach* – round out and confirm the picture, look for contradictions and gaps and try to resolve them
- *Intermediate position* - different versions of the same stories
- *Interpretationist position* – each account is a way of making sense of situations, framed around particular concepts. Exploration of similar and different themes in the family groups.

These approaches will highlight different issues.

Responsibilities of the researchers

Ribbens McCarthy et al. suggest that researchers have a responsibility to:

- explore multiple interpretations
- listen to silences
- understand constructed accounts and relationship to factual reality.

There is a need to take into account:

- Family themes
- Individual voices
- Generational point of view
- Class point of view
- Gender point of view.

These issues about the decisions we make about what kinds of accounts we choose to give of our research relate to discussions about *Issues of ontology and epistemology* pp.46-52.

Different types of analysis lead to different types of knowledge (Ribbens McCarthy et al. p.19). Various factors are interwoven as described in above bullets in any one case study account with multiple voices.

Researchers may make decisions about the account they present according to the audience (e.g. policy, academic).

Ribbens McCarthy et al. suggest that researchers should probably make explicit the analytical choices that have been made and associated implications.

Another intergenerational study

It will not be straightforward to interpret our data. Brannen (2003) in her study of care and paid work across four generations wrote of the complications of understanding the data in her study:

We were ... interested from an epistemological point of view in issues of interpretation from the actor's perspective. Indeed, we were interested in the ways in which people's accounts of the past were mediated by time, meaning and audience (research context). But we were also interested in the 'facts' of their lives as we deduced them from their accounts and those of other members of their families. (Paragraph 1.5).

We will face similar kinds of complications.

Brannen (2003) listed various perspectives that she took into account in doing her intergenerational analysis. We might want to consider adopting at least some of these, depending partly on the issues that emerge in our data and partly on what theoretical/methodological approach we use.

Ambivalences and tensions

Brannen (2003) highlights the importance of "ambivalence" "to describe the forces which push family members to carry on family patterns and those which pull them apart and lead them to strike out on their own. It shows how, whatever the type of intergenerational pattern, each generational unit seeks to make its own mark" (p.1). Her paper "provides a typology of intergenerational relations with respect to the transmission of material assets, childcare and elder care, sociability, emotional support and values" (p.1). It proposes two conditions which shape intergenerational relations: (a) occupational status continuity/mobility and (b) geographical proximity/mobility.

As she describes, we should look out for “a creative tension between change and continuity, between processes of reproduction and innovation. Parenting is passed on while new practices are adopted in different generations” (3.1)

3.2 The tension between change and continuity generates *ambivalence*. [Luscher \(2000\)](#) identifies ambivalences in which different generations are caught up in a tension: between on the one hand, the reproduction of some aspects of their ‘family systems’, and innovation of other aspects, on the other hand. Ambivalence has to be managed; it is *not* resolvable. As [Luscher \(2000\)](#) and [Luscher and Pillemer \(1998\)](#) suggest, ambivalences may be expressed structurally e.g. via a change in occupational status across family generations. They may be reflected in strategies as for example when a family *seeks* to put geographical distance between different family generations or chooses to remain geographically close at hand. Ambivalence is expressed through feelings and in the social interaction and interpersonal relations; it may be expressed in values.

3.3 These different aspects may not however work in tandem. Structural aspects of people’s lives may pull in one direction, for example towards the reproduction of aspects of family systems while, at a strategic level or, in Bourdieu’s terms, their habitus ([Bourdieu 1986](#)) creates a divergent lifestyle. Thus, over the generations, some families may reproduce the life chances of the older generation, as when wealth and educational capital are transmitted. However, younger generations may, at the same time, also seek divergence from older generations despite the transmission of assets and wealth which cushion their life chances. They may differentiate themselves, for example with respect to values and life styles.

3.4 It is important in this discussion of ambivalence not to counterpose structural factors against the agency of actors. The transmission of resources of different kinds is likely to involve processes in which much of what passes on, or is passed on, is taken for granted; cultural transmission of class and family cultures can be implicit as well as explicit ([Bernstein 1996](#)). As [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#) suggests in his elaboration of the concept of habitus, the dispositions of individuals and groups are cumulative and not necessarily intentional or strategic.

It will be important to look out for the kinds of divergences and ambivalences in our data and interesting to see if they exist and how they operate. It will be important to look out for the “what goes without saying” aspects in our probing for such ambivalences.

Generational perspectives

Brannen discusses the generational perspective first. This relates to our earlier discussion of intergenerational aspects (see Section *Investigation of intergenerational aspects* p.5-9):

The broad theoretical approaches adopted in the study were as follows. First, the study took a generational perspective – with a focus on family generations and historical [cohort] generations. According to [Mannheim \(1952\)](#) generation units are created, especially in the so-called ‘formative part’ of our lives. The process of becoming a generation unit is two fold: (a) through sharing a similar social location notably relating to social class and (b) through the process of collective exposure to the same historical set of cultural and political events and experiences. Adults in the three generations interviewed were born in three historical periods: the great grandparents born 1911-1921; grandparents born 1940-1948; parents born 1965-1975. These generations grew up in very particular times: the great grandparents experienced the 1930s Depression. (Paragraph 1.2)

The grandparents were children of post-war reconstruction and the welfare state while the parent generation experienced the neo-liberal economic policies of the ‘Thatcher’ period (Paragraph 1.3).

Brannen also drew attention to aspects of gender in intergenerational analysis. This is discussed elsewhere in the section *Gender perspectives* pp.81-82.

Hermeneutical case reconstruction

Hermeneutical case reconstruction is the method used for analysis by Rosenthal (1998) and developed by her over many years (p.4-5).

What we are contributing that is new

Case studies of small networks of intimacy such as we are going to do in our research are not usual in the higher education choice literatures, although they have been carried out in other substantive fields such as social mobility and family studies as well as standpoint research on intergenerational research. As such we will be drawing on methodological achievements in other substantive areas and applying them to our substantive area of the higher education choice literature. These other studies suggest factors we should be alert to, but working in a different substantive field there may be other factors we should take into account.

Bertaux and Thompson (1997) make the case for what case studies of families can offer:

Case studies of families allow us to open up those black boxes [families as seen by survey research] and to see what takes place inside. We can at last look at their strategic efforts, the roles played by women and men, and by different generations, in the transmission of skills and resources, ambitions and dreams, and compare such efforts at transmission in various social milieux. We can explore the relationship between early socialisation and adult occupational

success or failure. We can track down why there might be sharp differences between the fate of different siblings; or whether it is mother, fathers, or their interaction, whose influence is strongest in creating the family's microclimate. By relating families to their social and local contexts, which are bound to be highly differentiated by class and other macrostructural variables, we can begin to discern what kinds of games families are forced to play, and what are the unwritten rules of such games (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997, Introduction, p.19).

SECTION FIVE METHODOLOGICAL LEVELS AND ASPECTS TO CONSIDER

This section will look in some detail at various aspects of the research process, illustrating what we can draw on from existing work. It will provide examples of contexts people have worked in and problems they have faced, describing approaches they have taken and solutions they have found.

Issues of ontology and epistemology

We have to make clear how far we consider research accounts (of both participants and researchers) to be transparent revelations of an uncontested truth and how far they are constructed. The position that we take on this will affect our research from our theoretical and methodological positions through all levels of the research process, including broad investigative approach and conceptualisation, data collection and data analysis. Different researchers have taken different positions on ontological and epistemological issues.

Constructionist approaches

It seems likely that constructionist approaches will be useful to us. What is described below are lines of reasoning we can draw on, mainly taken from those working within a life history or oral history research approach.

One possible approach is “a context-sensitive social constructionist approach” such as Antikainen and researchers (1996), who are engaged in writing life histories, adopt (p.6).

From a constructionist point of view, the individual is observed both as one created by the situation and the cultural context, and as their creator. A human is considered as an active, individual, holistic and intentional creature who, in addition to adjusting to existence, continually recreates the social world.
(Antikainen, p.19)

Guba (1990, p.27 qtd in Antikainen p.19) illustrates a constructionist approach in the following diagram.

ONTOLOGY

There are many truths and they exist as mental constructions in the human consciousness. By nature these truths are social, specific and dependent on the personal in question. There are always many conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of research and there is no criteria with which the ultimate truth or falseness could be stated.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Because the reality being studied is in the individual's consciousness the only way to approach it seems to be subjective interaction. Epistemology is, therefore, subjective.

METHODOLOGY

The aim is to recognise the existence of the prevailing constructions and to create consensus between them as much as possible. The processes are hermeneutic and dialectic, that is, the individual constructions are defined hermeneutically as strictly as possible after which these individual constructions are dialectically completed with other constructions. The possibility of constant communication is also essential in the constructionist approach, which may influence the constructions by changing them.

Denzin (1989) states:

The point to make is not whether biographical coherence is an illusion or a reality. Rather, what must be established is how individuals give coherence to their lives when they write or talk self-autobiographies. The sources of this coherence, the narratives that lie behind them, and the larger ideologies that structure them must be uncovered (p.62 qtd in Antikainen p.5).

Bertaux and Thompson (1997), writing in the context of social mobility research and life histories, argue for the usefulness of case study in social analyses:

As Weber had well understood, the subjective dimension of the socio-historical world, which underlies not only perceptions and representations but also agency, needs to be seized and utilized. While we cannot expect ordinary men and women to offer us full-blown sociological explanations of their behaviour, they are also certainly not cultural dopes - and indeed the poorer they are the shrewder they need to become to survive at all. We see their interpretations as vital first steps to our own: first- and second-order hermeneutics respectively. They are the best short cut towards grasping the local rules of the game of generalised competition (Bertaux and Thompson, Introduction, p.12)

Writing from the point of view of oral history, Dunaway (1996) writes:

Prior to the 1980s, the process of generating oral history was considered uncomplicated, with interviewers presumed to have recorded, from a neutral stance, whatever material of historical use they could glean for the good of the future. History would emerge at some later time, when writers and scholars used these oral sources. This notion was challenged by more theoretically oriented research[ers] ... who speculated that interviews- and their construction – *themselves* represent history: compiled within a historical frame negotiated by the interviewer and the narrator, within contemporary trends, with certain definable conventions of language and cultural interaction (p.8).

Shopes (1996) also writing in the oral history tradition argues that:

It is ... important for the interviewer to do background research and interview several family members about the family history in order to judge the veracity of any single account. But what is most important is to accept all interviewees' interpretations of their lives as their interpretation. Oral testimony, like any other historical source, needs to be evaluated both for its factual accuracy and for what it reveals about the attitudes and values of the interviewee (Shopes, p.238)

This does not problematise the status of accounts sufficiently for our purposes, although it is very practical.

Weeks et al. (2001), writing in the field of network studies and using a life history approach, in their discussion of the structure and meaning of non-heterosexual relationships discuss the meaning of *stories* and *narratives*.

Throughout we have highlighted the value of seeing [narratives and stories] as part of emerging narratives of the intimate that have a key role to play in the organisation of everyday life. We have been informed in this by Plummer's (1995) work, and by his defence of the validity of analysing narratives less for their 'truth' telling or 'aesthetic' qualities than for what can be said at a particular time. This involves taking narratives seriously in their own right, not as historical truth (though historical truths do become apparent through them), but as narrative truth. This is what Plummer (1995) calls the 'pragmatic connection', by which stories can now be examined for the roles they play in lives, in contexts, in social order. Hence the concern is with the role a certain kind of story plays in the life of a person for society (Plummer 1995, 172). It is precisely this pragmatic connection – between the relational stories and the lived lives of non-heterosexuals – that was the foundation for our research (and this book) (p.206).

The nature of memory

Given that we will be speaking to people about events which necessarily must often be in the recent or distant past, an understanding of the nature of memory is important.

There are different theoretical understandings of memory. "In *copy theories* of memory, memories are regarded as copies of past events." (Antikainen 1996, p.22). In *reconstruction theories* of memory "memory interprets, organises, adapts, and selects past events. Remembering is reconstructive by nature: the events that can be found in the memory have not occurred in real life as remembered. This,

however, does not mean that memories do not contain elements of previous experiences” (p.23). In *partial-reconstruction theory*:

personal memories are viewed as referring to experienced meaning of external events (Barclay, 1988; Brewer, 1986). According to this view memories contain information about the original experience, but in the course of time other elements not present in the original experience have also merged. Memories, then, would not correspond with past experiences as such, but they would rather be phenomenally in harmony with the self-concept they represent. From this perspective, life-stories could be characterised as inaccurate with respect to details, but honest and truthful in the sense that they refer to the personal meanings attached to experiences (Barclay, 1988). (cited in Antikainen, p.23).

Collective or social memory is when a person remembers something that s/he individually experienced, but which was impossible to have remembered. These “memories have been created interactively with other people” (Antikainen et al. p.23).

Memory is an important issue in (auto) biographical research. Roberts (2002) describes some of the complexities involved in working with memory. Memory is affected by emotion. Psychotherapy has a place in this type of research. There are hidden and constructed memories etc.

The investigation of memory can bring dangers for interpretation unless a sophisticated (and more advantageous) approach is taken which recognises that individuals, groups and organisations interpret their surroundings by a complex interweaving of ‘fact’ and ‘fictionalisation’ (Thompson 1988: 135). In addition, there are different memories or even competing memories (Popular Memory Group 1982); conflicting memories and accounts (Stern 1992; Schrager 1998); and distinctions between public/private and informal group/individual memories and so on. Different memories are not isolated but interact and have mutual influences – if only by opposition – in a complex set of processes. Memories are also delivered according to language use – employing genres and devices (description, dialogue, humour, polemic, justifications, drama, allegory, metaphor, pauses and emphasis) and so are ‘performative’, whether oral or written, for an audience and its intended reaction. Memories are also refined, remade, reviewed and rehearsed (Roberts p.148-149).

The work of Rosenthal (1998) is a biographic study looking at holocaust memories and effects and an empirical illustration of the complexity of memory. The following is a description of the study:

What form does the dialogue about the family during the Nazi period take in the families of those persecuted by the Nazi regime and of Nazi perpetrators and accomplices? What impact does the past of the first generation, and their own way of dealing with it, have on the lives of their descendants? What are the structural differences between the dialogue about the Holocaust in families of perpetrators and those of the victims? This text examines these questions on

the basis of selected case studies. It presents five families of survivors from Germany and Israel whose experiences of persecution and family histories after the liberation differ greatly. Two case studies of non-Jewish German families whose grandparents' generation are suspected of having perpetrated Nazi crimes illustrate the mechanisms operating in these families – those of passing the guilt on to the victims and creating the myth of being victims themselves – and give a sense of the psychological consequences these mechanisms have for the generations of their children and grandchildren. © Copyright 2002, Book Data Limited,UK (Library catalogue description of the book)

In this study, there is a very good analysis of the empirical data which looks at interview data mainly of the case study families. There are lots of conflicts in the accounts, discrepancies, painful memories, memory avoidance issues etc. The analysis seems to be based on biographic methods in the tradition of psychoanalysis. It would be difficult to replicate as we do not have the training. Cathy Gelbin (2000) discusses the role of memory in this kind of research:

Biographical survivor narratives combine the three levels of the events themselves, which objectively occur in the past, with survivors' subjective experience of these events at the time of their occurrence and their interpretation by survivors in the present narration in extremely complex ways. According to sociologist and biographical researcher Gabriele Rosenthal, biographical narrations are divided into those actual experiences in the past and their subjective perception by the individual; the narration itself represents a construction and reinterpretation of these subjective experience from the present perspective (Rosenthal 1995).

Due to the complex relationship between the actual events, their individual perception and their narration, survivor testimonies cannot simply function as one-to-one mirrors of the unfolding of historical events as it is commonly understood (see also Laub 1992, and Young 1988). Biographical narratives rather point to individual modes of understanding those historical events, while at the same time transcending individual life stories. As Gabriele Rosenthal contends, biographical interviews occur at the juncture of biography and society, since they reflect the socially available patterns of understanding historical and personal experiences both while these events occur and while they are retrospectively narrated. Individual patterns of understanding biographical experience, as well as the belated construction and reinterpretation of this experience in the testimony is thus socially based and therefore allows for wider conclusions.

We will have to consider how we treat the memories – both personal and collective - of those we speak to.

The role of language

In our research, we must also be conscious of the role and nature of language. Antikainen et al. (1996) argue that:

... apart from describing reality verbal expressions also produce circumstances: language is a product of social reality at the same time that it creates this reality (p.26).

Antikainen et al. go on to constructionist views of language:

Constructionism questions the traditional, realistic view of language as a neutral tool that adjusts to reflect and convey the constructions of the social reality without gaps (Potter and Wetherall, 1989; Saarenheimo, 1991). The constructionist approach has questioned the relationship between language and reality as well as the fundamental rules of traditional information production. The descriptions presented by people both about their experiences and feelings, and about the social and material world are not unambiguous reflections. It is typical of this kind of discussion to understand linguistic representations as factors which produce subjects and objects (p.20).

In life stories, language provides an entrance into the life-worlds of individuals and verbal expressions form the raw material on the basis of which interpretations are made. Human reality is, to a great extent, linguistic by nature and past life can be realised through verbal stories. Language is the most central phenomenon in human existence and interaction (p.26).

We will have to be careful to examine closely our participants' use of language – its particular meanings, relationship to their identities and world views etc.

A critical stance

When looking at life stories and methodology, it is important to ask which sorts of stories are encouraged and which discouraged by particular methodologies (McLure and Stronach 1993, p.378 cited in Antikainen p.6). We should be aware of which lenses we are using to interpret our data – policy-makers, our own participants' perspectives, theoretical perspectives and how these mesh together, which are dominant/subordinate in which circumstances and so on.

Antikainen et al. (1996), for example, took a critical stance. They cite David Livingstone who outlines some specific features of critical pedagogy as follows. We should endeavour to be aware of these factors:

First, critical scholars must thoroughly appreciate that the prime task of educational scholarship is not merely to convey naturalistic understanding of educational practices but as Walter Feinberg (1983, p.153) puts it: '... to reflectively understand these relationships as social constructions with historical antecedents and thereby to initiate an awareness that these patterns are objects of choice and possible candidates for change. Thus educational scholarship adds a consciously critical dimension to the social activity of education.' Secondly such research can only be adequately accomplished

through identifying discrepancies between dominant versions of reality promulgated in formal institutions and the lived experience of subordinate groups in relation to such institutions. Thirdly, such identification requires scholars to attempt to take the vantage point of the subordinated, and this vantage point can only be sustained in contemporary critical inquiry if scholars remain engaged in collective dialogue with people more fully immersed in oppressive social relationships. Fourthly, the dialogue of critical pedagogy should not be restricted to narrow educational concerns focused only on the schools alone or including mass media and family spheres, but should facilitate popular efforts to make sense of the entirety of everyday life in relation to practice. Fifthly, it is through subordinated peoples' own discussion, growing self-consciousness and informed action in relation to their social reality – their appropriation of cultural power – that more no-elitist democratic forms of education and other societal institutions are most likely to be generated and sustained. (1987, p.10 qtd in Antikainen p.4).

Quantitative/qualitative integration aspects

Laura Staetsky has carried out a separate review of the quantitative literature relevant to the *Non-participation in higher education* project. The present discussion includes aspects relevant to the collaboration of quantitative and qualitative researchers and to particular aspects of theory relevant to quantitative research.

Potential strategies for quantitative/qualitative collaborations

In her working paper, *Six strategies for mixing methods and linking data in social science research*, Jennifer Mason suggests how quantitative and qualitative researchers might work together. We have to decide which approach to take (if we have not already done so) and think how to ensure that that approach achieves its goals.

The six strategies she suggests are as follows:

1. *Mixing methods for a close-up illustration of a bigger picture (in quantitative approaches), or for background (in qualitative approaches)*
In this approach, either quantitative or qualitative approaches dominate and the researchers use qualitative examples to provide illustrative examples for quantitative points or the researchers use quantitative data as background information to contextualise their qualitative points. The additional data is supplementary rather than essential. The explanatory logic for the research is either quantitative or qualitative.

2. *Mixing methods to ask and answer differently conceived or separate questions*

In this approach, both quantitative and qualitative approaches work separately, probably on different aspects of the project, in a parallel fashion. There is no attempt to make an integrated argument. Each parallel part to the study has its own explanatory logic. Data and explanations can possibly be integrated at a later stage.

3. *Mixing methods to ask question about connecting parts, segments of layers of a social whole*

In this approach, there are multiple layers or components, each dealing with a different aspect of the topic under study. Layers or component parts may be predominantly qualitative or predominantly quantitative. However, unlike in 2., the parts are considered to be part of a jigsaw which will knit together. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the parts do knit together and are not discordant, disconnected parts.

4. *Mixing methods to achieve accurate measurement through triangulation*

In this approach, “triangulation” (here meaning specifically where a phenomenon is “*measured* from two or more vantage points, in order to improve, test or validate the accuracy of the observation” (Mason 2006, p.8). It is a narrower venture than in 3. above. It is likely to be problematic as many types of social science explanation cannot be easily triangulated and measurement agreement upon.

5. *Mixing methods to ask distinctive but intersecting questions*

In this approach, Mason invites us to consider the example of emotional and personal life.

Instead of leaving questions about ‘inner psyche’ to psychologists, and those about ‘social construction of emotions’ to sociologists, and those about ‘rules and rituals of emotional display’ to anthropologists, and those about the ‘commodification and marketisation of emotion’ to economists, and those about ‘emotional health’ to health scientists, and so on - how much more exciting to pursue the differently conceived questions and methods for exploring them in a collective (in contrast to integrated) manner? This involves recognising that the social world and the issues and problems we seek to research are multidimensional, and that different dimensions might exist in an uneasy or messy tension, rather than being neatly integrated

within one plane or dimension (like the wedding cake or the jigsaw puzzle) (Mason 2006, p.9)

Mason argues that such an approach would help us understand multi-dimensionality and social complexity. The logic is different from the corroborative approach of 4. or the parallel logic of 2. or the integration required in 3.

... there is some sense of 'intersection' in the approaches. Ideally, this involves a creative tension between the different methods and approaches, which depends upon a dialogue between them. It means that instead of ultimately producing one integrated account or explanation of whatever is being researched (integrative logic), or a series of parallel accounts (parallel logic), one imagines instead 'multi-nodal' and 'dialogic' explanations which are based on the dynamic relation of more than one way of seeing and researching. This requires that researchers factor into their accounts the different ways of asking questions and of answering them. ... instead of a theory of integration and of a social world that contains interlocking parts, this is a theory of multi-dimensionality

6. *Mixing methods opportunistically*

This involves opportunistically seizing chances that may arise to mix quantitative and qualitative methods.

Studies which integrate a qualitative approach and a quantitative survey carried out as part of the study

Finch and Mason (1993) integrate a quantitative survey (carried out for their own project) and qualitative life history data. This does not exactly replicate what we want to do as we will be integrating large scale public data sets and quantitative review, but it might be worthwhile remembering as an example to go back to when we are doing analysis/writing up. Ball et al. (2002) have a similar approach, although there is very little methodological information in this article.

Quantitative studies based on national survey data

Analyses of large scale national survey data can provide useful support for the notion of differences in perspective between different generations within families. For example, Aquilino (1999) took data from the longitudinal *National Survey of Families and Households* in order to probe patterns of agreement and disagreement on quality of intergenerational relationships. He matched up data on parents and young adult

children. Data on parent-child closeness, contact, control and conflict were examined.

Aquilino suggests that:

There are systematic differences in the perspectives of parents and adult children on the nature and quality of their relationships. At the aggregate level, a sample of parents is likely to provide an overall rosier picture of intergenerational relationships than is a sample of adult children. This is consistent with the findings of generational stake theory (Acock and Bengston, 1980) and with the findings of Ross and Rossi (1990). High agreement between parent and adult child from the same family characterised only about half of the dyads in the NSFH sample. One of the most important findings of this research, however, is what when disagreement occurs, it is not always in the direction of parents giving the more positive report. There are many cases in which the adult child expresses a more positive view than the parent. This pattern appears to be especially likely when parents have high educational attainment and when children were raised in more conservative, religious, authoritarian families
Aquilino (1999), p.869.

Aquilino suggests that in line with generational stake theory:

young people tend to emphasise conflict with parents and exaggerate differences in order to achieve a clearer sense of emancipation and to facilitate separation from the family of origin... (in contrast, parents) may be more motivated than adult children to present a picture of strong intergenerational ties and to avoid revealing problematic aspects of the relationship' (Aquilino, 1999, p.859) (Sue's notes)

Aquilino concluded that theoretical and empirical scholarship on intergenerational relations would benefit from more attention to the issue of divergent perspectives in families" (p.869). He suggests that that researchers should avoid relying on second hand accounts and should consider gathering accounts from all family members. This provides support for the approach we are taking, interviewing various family members, albeit that our approach is qualitative.

Sampling

Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling (e.g. Finch and Mason 1993, Weston 1991, Watts and Bridges 2006) aims to illustrate diversity and is about making sure you select the sample according to certain principles, for example, selecting representatives of different age groups and ethnic groups. In theoretical sampling, the main interest is in the identities that people have rather than these characteristics as objective indicators.

Theoretical sampling is distinct from pure snowballing sampling which can lead to samples biased in terms of race, class and organisation if the participants know one another.

It is also distinct from probability sampling [the type of sampling usually used in quantitative studies],

a number of cases are chosen by a random chance procedure from a general population that ideally includes all the possible elements of interest. The number randomly chosen is large enough so there is a high probability that the characteristics of the sample mirror those of the whole population within a small margin of error. This reliable mirroring means that the sample is deemed to be representative – one can generalise from the sample to the whole population in that any relationships observed in the sample should also exist in the whole population (Miller 2000, p.77-78).

This type of sampling which is statistically representative is impossible anyway with a hidden/inexact population such as ours will be.

Miller notes a difference between *selective* and *theoretical* sampling. *Selective sampling* is similar to the “*theoretical sampling*” of grounded theory. But theoretical sampling is a more general term and technique. The units could be individual people or could be contexts or locales or types of behaviour. The point of theoretical sampling is to provide additional information that is needed to broaden or refine a developing theoretical schema.

Miller (2000) discusses theoretical sampling from the point of view of the different methodological conceptual approaches he discusses: *realist*, *neo-positivist* and *narrative*.

Realist approaches may use theoretical sampling.

The realist approach implies collecting information from a cross-section of individuals with the criteria for selection corresponding to those of theoretical sampling. (Miller 2000, p.11-12).

Neo-positivist approaches will use selective sampling as in realist approaches, but with even more concern for conceptual criteria in choosing the sample.

Sample size

The issue of how large the sample should be arises. One method of deciding how large a sample should be is to keep interviewing until the theoretical concepts arising from the data are exhausted, until saturation point is reached in terms of building understandings.

A sufficient number of cases is important, but as a means of obtaining a broad and varied basis upon which to generalise rather than for the purpose of generating a statistically representative probability sample (Miller 2000, p.11-12).

This implies the use of a grounded theory approach. It also implies overlapping sampling and analysis stages. See *Analytical induction, grounded theory* pp.77-79 for a description of grounded theory.

For example, the French family bakery study by Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) used this approach as reported by Miller (2000). When saturation point was reached, sampling stopped.

The numbers chosen in a selective sample will be much smaller [than in a probability sample] – once an adequate number of cases (as judged by the researcher) have been chosen to represent all of the main variety of phenomena in the groups of interest, there is no need to take any more. Selective sampling is based upon deliberately choosing individuals who typify certain conceptually based types, the proportions chosen need not match their overall prevalence in the general population ... (Miller 2000, p.78).

Antikainen et al. (1996) also used this approach and carried out 44 interviews. They interviewed men and women; representatives of different social classes and ethnic groups; persons of various ages/age cohorts. We are constrained by our research design in how many people we interview. We may be able to use a “saturation point” justification in our theoretical sample or we may have to think of a different justification.

Examples of studies using theoretical sampling

Below are some examples of studies using theoretical sampling. As Finch and Mason (1993) described:

We did not aim to produce a sample representative of the general population in statistical terms. Instead we wanted to end up with a study group which would help us to understand the processes of negotiation about responsibilities between relatives. This meant incorporating into the study group people who might have been involved at some stage in processes of negotiation and

renegotiation of family relationships. We wanted to capture a range of experiences, or instances of negotiation or support, and we sampled accordingly (p.186).

In terms of sampling the close kin, the researchers selected from those relatives offered by the main entry contact point person according to theoretical principles, that is people who would be able to talk about a particular aspect the researchers were investigating.

In her study of gay and lesbian conceptions of kinship, Weston (1991) used theoretical sampling, selecting people deliberately as below.

In any sample this diverse, with so many different combinations of identities, theoretic sampling cannot hope to be 'representative'. To treat each individual as a representative of his or her race, for instance, would be a form of tokenism that glosses over the differences of gender, class, age, national origin, language, religion, and ability which crosscut race and ethnicity. ... The tables in the appendix present demographic information on the interview sample, but – since this is not a statistically oriented study – merely to illustrate its diversity and provide descriptive information about participants (p.11-12).

Weston points out that the sample is weak in places as in the case of age where there is a shortage of older people. This is possibly as the researcher had fewer contacts in that age-group.

Weeks et al. (2001) adopted *theoretic* sampling in order to avoid “bias” problems, that is they based their selection from the volunteers on “various social and cultural positionings” “This was not an attempt to claim ‘representativeness’ as such but to include identities considered important by the respondents themselves” (p.202). “... self-identification was the key to our sampling approach” (p.202).

Self-definition is not unproblematic, but it can demonstrate the complexity of identities and the problems of sampling that attempts to rely on neat categories and definitions. In the end, we believe that allowing respondents the time to develop complex accounts of their class, ethnic, and sexual identities provided us with information which is highly relevant to ‘realities’ of sexuality, identity and relationships in today’s world (p.203).

Accessing the sample

This section describes the various ways previous research studies have found research participants. These suggest some useful avenues and rationales for us. Many of the studies are working with hard to reach and hidden populations.

Weston (1991) emphasised that it is important to *access a sample through a variety of methods*, and not just use volunteers, for example, as that can bias the sample towards “joiners”.

Below are some examples of how research studies have accessed samples.

Hidden populations

In studies, some populations have been hidden, in the sense of not being easily measurable, although not necessarily especially hard to reach. For example, Archer and Hutchings (2000), one of the few other studies on non-participation, recruited participants through a variety of means. They:

- surveyed recent employees of public sector organisations
- advertised in several cities, including in local newspapers
- used their own social networks.

The researchers reported that:

Ten of the group were recruited through, and conducted in, further education (FE) colleges with students who were attending a variety of courses (largely Basic Skills and vocational courses) from which they were considered to be unlikely to progress into HE. The other four groups were recruited from the general public through an independent company [how?], and included both people who were not participating in any form of education and some who were studying in FE (p.558)

The four groups recruited through the independent company were deliberately composed by race and gender (African Caribbean women, African Caribbean men, white British women, white British men). The composition of the 10 FE groups was determined on a more ad hoc basis, through negotiations with FE college staff and being dependent upon student agreeing to participate (p.558).

Miller (2000), in his methodology text, recommended locating hidden samples through advertising and going to places where potential sample individuals are likely to be found and snowballing.

Hard to reach groups

Some groups were particularly hard to reach. Finch and Mason (1993) researchers found it hard to locate people from Asian or Caribbean descent to interview. There were not many in the survey they used to get people from initially or if they were, they did not fit the theoretical sampling requirements or did not agree to participate so the researchers adopted a different strategy based on personal contacts for that. The

researchers found it difficult to get access to an extended kin group. So for the Asian and Afro-Caribbean sample, they do not have many such extended kin interviews. In discussion with Jennifer Mason, she mentioned that there were a number of reasons why they had found it hard to recruit participants from these ethnic minorities. Firstly, the researchers were white. Secondly, the geographical area concerned had been over-consulted and researched on a number of issues with few concrete results so people were weary and wary of speaking to strangers.

Weeks et al. (2001) in their ESRC-funded study on the meanings of non-heterosexual relationships used individual interviews or sometimes interviews with couples. (96 individuals, 32 as 'couple units' + four group interviews). As with our research, this study involved study of a hidden population of non-heterosexual couples. The researchers used a contact system of some snowballing to reach "hard to reach" groups, but recruiting samples based mainly on advertising in the press, plus contacting local information, social and cultural groups.

By using a mixture of recruitment methods, it was hoped at least to touch a diversity of experience in terms of different social and cultural positioning and geographical location ... (Weeks et al. 2001, p201).

The methods used to locate people included:

- Designing leaflets with cut off section for those interested in participating
- Advertising for participants in relevant press
- Placing posters in relevant groups and organisations

The researchers continued to recruit throughout the interviewing process to supplement areas where respondents seemed to be in short supply.

In her study of gay and lesbian conceptions of kinship, Weston (1991) did initial interviewing of some participants and then followed further cases up through informal contacts. Weston reported that she:

let self-identification be my guide for inclusion. Determined to avoid the race, class, and organisational bias that has characterised so many studies of gay men and lesbians, I made my initial connections through personal contacts developed over the six years I had lived in San Francisco previous to the time the project got under way. The alternative – gaining entrée through agencies, college classes, and advertisements – tends to weight a sample for "joiners", professional interviewees, the highly educated, persons with an overtly political analysis, and individuals who see themselves as central (rather than marginal) to the population in question" (p.9-10).

By asking each person interviewed for names of potential participants, I utilised techniques of friendship pyramiding and snowball sampling to arrive at a sample varied in race, ethnicity, class, and class background (p.10).

Approx 36% were “people of colour”, 64% white, just over 50% had working class backgrounds, 58% in working class occupations at the time of the study.

Gender aspects of access

In their study, David et al. (2003) found that:

- Girls were more willing than boys to participate in the study
- Girls were more willing to volunteer their parents, especially their mothers, for interview.
- More mothers than fathers were willing to be interviewed. “The gender balance of parents was three mothers to every one father” (p.25).

Both boys and girls:

- If they did not want to involve parents, they invoked worries about their parents’ work and not having enough time and/or parental lack of knowledge about higher education. The ignorance reason especially was given by those attending the ethnic minority school. Fathers especially were seen as too busy to be interviewed.
- Most students did not want the researchers to speak to their parents. (BJ This is probably because they are teenagers. Less likely to be so at other ages).

The researchers think this female preponderance is because of factors such as:

- The researchers own gender (two women and one man)
- Changes in the gender balance in higher education
- “The two women tended to be relatively more successful with gaining access to girls’ rather than boys’ parents, whereas the male interviewer obtained positive replies from several boys to interview their fathers” (p.26).
- Some mothers were lone parents so this was one reason why there were more mothers. Easier for the children to ask the parent they were living with to participate in an interview.
- Other studies (e.g. David et al. 1997) have found a preponderance of fathers interested in HE choice because of the financial investment involved so this study is somewhat unusual in its findings.

In discussion with Miriam David (July 2006) she said she thought that more female friendly response to the study is just the way the world is. Men and women behave differently as parents. In their study, they asked the child for a parental contact, not specifying both parents. Children, especially girls, tended to involve their mothers. We could specifically *ask for both parents* if this were relevant.

Access to extended networks and families

In terms of *accessing the kin group*, the researchers in the Finch and Mason (1993) study did a second interview with respondent and a simultaneous one with their partner in a different room. At the end of the second interview in some cases, they asked if they could approach other relatives. In discussion with Jennifer Mason, she described how they had waited until the end of the first interview and then asked if the participant would mind if their relatives participated. The research team had not always wanted to follow up everyone so they did not invite anyone on the spot. They put it more as follows: "If we were to follow, would you be prepared for us to contact members of your family. This is not a commitment on either side." "Would you be happy for us to approach them in principle?"

Later you can go back to the people and say "We mentioned to you that .. Is it OK if we follow up with contacting your friends/family?" Then the researchers need to get contact details from the participants. Often when it comes to the crunch, the participants are happier for the researchers to contact some people than others.

People usually prefer to check with relatives first before they hand out their contact information. Researchers usually say that they are willing to do the contacting, but participants (8/10) usually want to check with relatives. Then researchers can do the formal contacting.

Another approach is to say upfront that the researchers want to interview networks. This can be hard if you then do not want to follow people up. It may set up expectations which may be awkward if we don't want to follow up. It may appear as an affront. The situation has to be handled carefully.

Brannen (2003) in her study of "intergenerational relations with respect to the transmission of material assets, childcare and elder care, sociability, emotional

support and values” (p.1) interviewed between five and eight members in twelve families.

Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003) in their study of the ‘family’ lives of young people carried out nine in-depth interviews, including members of three case study families. They interviewed mothers, fathers and young people (not more extended family). In terms of recruiting other family members, the researchers found that:

Issues of access and refusals seemed to be more problematic when we were trying to snowball from one family member to another, rather than when we approached, teenagers, mother or fathers directly as individuals in their own right (Ribbens McCarthy et al. p.2).

Rosenthal (1998) located her sample of twenty families in Germany and eighteen families in Germany (each with multiple members interviewed) through personal contacts and advertisements in newspapers.

Other studies

Page (1999) in her research on educational programmes for teenage mothers recruited women from a local LIFE hostel and local women’s refuge. She also mentioned working through OPEN (Opportunities for parents with educational needs) which is an advisory service provided by a group of post-compulsory education providers in Dorset.

Reay (2003) found the twelve women she interviewed in her study of mature working class women and access to higher education found her interviewees from Access courses. Many of these women were facing difficult decisions about whether to go into higher education or not and many had considerable practical difficulties facing them.

Reay (2006) mentions interviewing those from institutions such as schools. We should perhaps consider people likely to have been influential on our entry point individuals in our sample.

In Watts and Bridges (2006) investigation of the aspirations of young people and their perspectives on higher education, the study was carried out at three sites in the east of England, in higher education ‘cold spots’, that is postal districts with a lower than average participation rate in HE. There was a concern more with variety of

experiences rather than typicality in the young people. The study involved 75 young people ages 16-19 (unlike our current project they are just looking at young people) across three sites and peers and family members.

Participants were recruited through government and voluntary organisations working with young people such as *Connexions* and youth clubs, and also by word of mouth. By progressive focusing, the researchers narrowed numbers down to 15 “key witnesses” (five at each of the research sites).

These cases were offered in the tradition of ethnographic and biographical research to provide not samples but examples, not abstraction but concrete cases, not measures but ‘thick description’ and which, in the study, were used to fill in the gaps between the statistical numbers by providing insight into the real experiences of real people for whom access and learning opportunities are real issues (Watts and Bridges p.273).

Interviewing

Underlying methodological approaches to interviewing

Miller (2000) discusses three basic methodological-conceptual approaches to interviewing: realist, neo-positivist, and narrative. Each approach will have different implications for how the interview is set up and what the interviewer asks and says.

The approaches discussed by Miller are as follows:

Realist approach

Here the interviewer says very little in order not to contaminate data. S/he nods, makes encouraging noises and reflects back what respondent has just said in a very neutral way to stimulate continuation. The interviewer in asking any questions has to try to be non-directive, not directing respondent to a topic the interviewer may think is important. For example, s/he should ask factual questions, ask something like “what was the most significant thing that happened to you in your 20s?” The interview should be close to a monologue on the part of the respondent.

There may be a second interview to clarify issues from the first interview and to probe concepts developed from the first interview.

There may be new interviews with new respondents where the basis of questions are the concepts developed in the first lots of interviews. Then interviews can be telescoped together so two interviews are not necessary.

This approach links to that of grounded theory. See section *Analytical induction, grounded theory* p.77 for a discussion of grounded theory.

Neo-positivist approach

In this approach, there is a more developed schedule of topics to test out concepts. But there should still be lots of flexibility so new concepts can emerge. This approach “emphasises the empirical testing of pre-existing conceptual frameworks” (Miller 2000, p.ix)

Interviewing in a neo-positivist approaches is on “focused modes of data collection or interviewing with semi-structured interview schedules”. Interview probes and questions are crafted in the light of particular theoretical understandings. But flexibility is allowed. Also as with realists this approach suggests

an objective reality and holds that the perspectives of the actors do represent aspects of that reality. Here the hermeneutic interplay between the subjective perceptions of the actor and an objective social structure would be emphasised. The actor’s view will be a subjective view, a mediation between perception and structure. These subjective perceptions will be malleable further due to changes in structure and to the passage of time as the effects of past structural influences recede and alter in the individual’s own recollections (Miller 2000, p.12).

Narrative interviewing

This may start off similar to the interview above, but should develop into more of an exchange between interviewer and respondent. The interplay between the two in constructing the account is what is important. In some narrative approaches, the interviewer may still stay relatively neutral and the importance of the interviewer is only acknowledged at the analysis stage.

The argument is that you cannot get rid of the social dynamics between the interviewer and respondent. There is a power dynamic so this might as well be out in the open. Informed consent is very important. Congruences between the interviewer’s position and that of the respondent could be pointed out in the interview.

A second interview could be a reflexive account of the first interview given by the interviewee.

A narrative approach “centres upon the process of constructing a view of reality that is carried out jointly by the researcher and the interviewee” (Miller 2000, p.ix).

The narrative approach can be labelled ‘postmodern’, in that reality is seen to be situational and fluid – jointly constructed by the interview partnership during the conduct of the interview (p.13).

Construction of the narrative at the moment in time according to the position of the respondent and that of the interview etc is central. The interviewer should not necessarily try to remain neutral as neutrality is impossible. “while the narrative approach is tightly located in the present moment, remembrances of the past and anticipations of the future are reconstructed continuously through the lens of the present (Kohli 1981 cited in Miller 200, p.14). For more on the practical aspects of interview interactions see the section *Interaction between interviewer and interviewee* pp.72-74.

Miller does acknowledge that researchers are likely to be eclectic in approach, but each approach has its own unique core of insight. Each will have a different approach to interviewing and to analysis. Others may also wish to cut the methodological categories somewhat differently from Miller.

We have to decide which broad type of interviewing approach we wish to take.

Different interview types and associated content

General life history approaches

Many of the researchers in the literature reviewed had used a *life history* approach to interviewing. This approach is not entirely appropriate for our interviews in that we are looking for more selective information, rather than a life history. However, can we adopt elements of this approach. For example, we might begin with a free account of some kind from the interviewees and then progress to more focused discussion.

One study which used this type of life history approach, Antikainen et al. 1996, held two sets of interviews. (See section *Life history* pp.28-29 for a discussion of such approaches). Input from the interviewer was limited to some comments in interview, where needed. At the end of this first set of interviews, the interviewer asked some thematic questions. The second set of interviews were thematic interviews about significant learning experiences.

In Thompson's (1997) study of social mobility, each interview "combines an account of family background and occupations with a full life story, covering childhood, working life, marriage, and childbearing" (p.58).

In their family study, Finch and Mason (1993) reported that they used semi-structured interviews which were fully transcribed. The interviews lasted on average one and a half hours and the researchers used a life history framework. There were similar themes in each interview. Each interview had its own focus and particular questions according to the specific experiences of the respondents.

Biographic-Narrative-Interpretive Method (BNIM)

A more formal approach is that of the Biographic-Narrative-Interpretive Method (BNIM). In this approach as Wengraf (2001) describes, the interviewer asks one single question aimed at inducing narrative and all other interventions are minimal. In other conversational type interviews, the danger is that the interview gets taken over by the more powerful interviewer (Wengraf p.113).

In BNIM there are probably three sessions: (1) single question and narrative, (2) ideally after about 15 minutes, interviewer elicits more story in same order and language as discussed in the first session, (3) a separate interview asking questions arising from preliminary analysis of first two interviews and further questions arising from theoretical and practical concerns of the research project. This is a whole worked out system of interviewing (Wengraf).

Wengraf (2001) points out that although he is talking about biographical narrative, there are other types of narrative interviews:

An interview design that focuses on the elicitation and provocation of story-telling, of narration, can be called a narrative interview design. After noting that there are a variety of ways of designing interviews to elicit narratives, I focus on

a particular design: that which starts from a single initial narrative question, and a particular focus of such a question – part or all of the individual's life study, their biography. ... Not all narrative questioning need ask for biographical narrative. Roe (1994) is concerned with policy narratives, and others are concerned with particular life-events, critical incidents, the histories of organisations and so forth (pp.111-112).

Brannen (2003) used a Biographic-Interpretive Narrative Interviewing approach.

We adopted the Biographic-Interpretive Narrative Interviewing approach ([Wengraf 2001](#)) with some adaptations. Following the method in the first part, respondents were invited to give an account of their lives from childhood onwards, with a minimum of guidance and intervention from the interviewer. This provided an opportunity for the respondent to present his or her own gestalt. In the second part, the interviewer invited the respondent to elaborate on salient events or experiences that had figured in the initial narrative. Third, using a more traditional semi-structured style of interview, the interviewer asked questions relating to the specific foci of the study if they had not already been covered in sufficient detail in the first two parts of the interview. This final phase also included the use of a vignette to explore normative views about parental employment and childcare relating to a contemporary situation of parenthood (Endnote 5).

Wengraf (2001) suggests presenting a vignette of, for example, moral dilemmas and asking for comments as a way of getting at values. Another example is that of asking whether someone should steal money to help his wife get drugs to live (p.178-180). This might be useful for us.

A narrative-biographical approach with a psychoanalytical slant

Rosenthal (1998) used a *narrative-biographical approach with a psychoanalytical slant*. In this approach:

... initial opening question aimed at eliciting and maintaining a lengthy narrative by the interviewee. The method is based on the assumption that narration of an experience comes closest to the experience itself. The narration of biographical events gives social scientists a chance to get a sense of some of the motives and interpretations guiding their subject's actions (Rosenthal, p.6).

There were no questions, just non-verbal expressions of interest etc from interviewer. In second part of the interview, questions were allowed about issues of interest etc that the interviewee has addressed. In the third part, there were invitations to talk about issues the interviewee has not addressed. "Perhaps you could tell us something more about ..." (p.3). Interviewers also used "*scenic memory*". If interviewees can't remember particular incidents well, then the interviewers work with the fragments that are remembered to coax our full reconstruction from interviewee.

Rosenthal also targeted *dreams and fantasies* (p.3). Another technique used is that of *family sculptures* which resembles a technique used in family therapy. The interviewer gives interviewees four adhesive circles in different colours and ask the interviewees to group them according to closeness in family relationships. The researchers then ask the interviewees to write a sentences to each member of the family and have that member say a sentence back to them (p.4)

The researchers see the interviews as “social therapeutic intervention that facilitates communication” (p.4).

Family or group interviews

Still in the tradition of narrative-biographical research with a psychoanalytical slant, Rosenthal (1998) also used family interviews which functioned as follows:

After a general analysis of the individual interviews, we decide which family members we wish to invite to take part in a family interview. The consideration of how we can best help the family to open up the family dialog is a key criterion here. Like Ivan Boszormeny-Nagy and Geraldine Spark (1973) or advocates of the Stierlin school (Stierlin et al. 1987), we are thinking here in terms of helping to uncover family secrets and make family members aware of strong invisible bonds of loyalty as well as encouraging them to deal with family myths in a more reality-oriented way. In this process, it is important to ensure that the combination of family members chosen for the family interview does not lead to a discussion of too many or too different conflicts in one interview (Rosenthal 1998, p.4).

There were interviews:

with at least one member of each generation in every family studied. After conducting individual interviews with the various family members, we carried out family interviews in order to examine the dynamics within the family dialog. Our work of this study involved conducting interviews with members of twenty families in Israel and eighteen families in Germany (Rosenthal p.3).

In the higher education choice literature, Pugsley (1998) interviewed three family members together (parents and young adult child). She was interested in probing dynamics between them. The inclusion of all three family members was deliberate in order to:

consider the dynamics of family interactions at this level of choice and focus on the role of the family in the choice process (p.73).

Pugsley acknowledged that the inclusion of all family members will probably have shaped the response she achieved:

I recognise that having conducted these interviews with both parent simultaneously may well have resulted in an overt display of patrician authority and family unit. This might well have accounted for an acknowledgement of paternal involvement in the choice process which is not made explicitly in research which is conducted with only one parent, usually the mother. If this is the case, then in the future researchers might wish to reconsider their interview strategy. It may be necessary to interview both parents individually, and then jointly, in order to determine the levels of involvement each has in the choosing process (p.90).

Shopes (1996) discuss the advantages that group interviews can offer:

Though oral historians generally agree that maximum rapport is gained by interviewing only one person at a time, sometimes talking with a small group of family members about old times is an especially enjoyable and valuable experience that provides considerable information as individuals trigger each other's memories and spur one another on. A group interview may also provide insight into patterns of interaction among family members and may highlight differences and similarities among family members' individual experiences (Shopes, p.237-8)

Weeks et al. (2001) in their study of the structure and meaning of non-heterosexual relationships reflected on what was the most appropriate unit of study (couples or individuals). Methodologically, a collective account might be different from an individual account. Also practical issues about who was available when and what the couples wanted. So the researchers adopted a dual approach. Individual accounts allowed access to information that may be withheld in joint interviews. Couple and individual narratives were not the only ones that were important. The narratives are part of collective experiences involving wider networks. So it is necessary to interview people outside the immediate couple.

We might want to consider talking to whole families in particular cases.

In contrast Shopes (1996) focuses on the possible areas of enquiry in a family history interview:

... the impact of major historical events and trends such as racial segregation, technological development, or the post-World War II housing boom on the family; the relationship of various aspects of social life such as work, religion, community life, or class status and mobility to individuals within the family; and the structure and dynamics of family life itself, including household membership, relationships among family members, and family values. A fourth area of inquiry is suggested by family folklorists who are concerned not so much with the content of a family's history as with the forms a family uses to preserve its experiences. Thus, the family researcher also might collect family stories, traditions, customs, and beliefs (Shopes, p.124).

Shopes suggests that it is advisable to focus on a few themes and sub-themes.

Finnegan and Drake (1994) report on a basic pattern that they suggest investigators use. Their advice is basic, but useful to bear in mind. It suggests that in semi-structured interviews with family members the interviewers should start by:

explaining to the person you are interviewing that you want to learn about their earlier life as part of your research into the family's background; allow them mostly to talk informally and more or less in the order they wish; but also ensure that, by the end, the conversation has covered basic personal information plus as much information as you can obtain about whichever topic you have chosen to pursue (p.123)

Make a second set of notes afterwards about general impressions from the conversation: for example, what did the person want to talk about (not necessarily what you wanted)? Did some topics strike an uncomfortable chord (silence can be interesting too)? What comments didn't fit your expectations, and why (this sometimes proves very valuable for further work, so don't ignore it)? Making notes on such points is not easy: doing it effectively means listening, not just 'interviewing'. (p.123)

Think carefully and critically about what you are being told. Bearing in mind that fallibility of human memory .. the influence of hindsight, and the possible effects of the interview itself, e.g. of the expectations of both interviewer and interviewee (p.123).

However, are these interviews they are describing about individuals or families?

Unclassified, general semi-structured interviews

Some studies cannot be classified under particular interviewing approaches and come into a category of general, semi-structured interviews. For example, Reay (2003) in her study of mature working class women in higher education asked about the following issues:

- Ask about earlier experience of schooling and education. May have had a profound effect on the research participants' views, identity.
- Ditto location of nearest university or other HEI.
- Motivations for entering HE or not very important.
- Attitudes to HEIs if the participant has had any contact. How have they been made to feel?

Research participants doing research for researchers

Watts and Bridges (2006) mentioned that "interviewees became interviewers".

In some cases, the interviewees became the interviewers, taking questionnaires and/or tape recorders into their own communities to explore the issues the research had already begun to explore with them (p.272).

Interview length and repeated or follow up interviews

Interview length

Interviews using a life history approach tended to be long. In one study, interviews lasted 3-7 hours (Weeks et al. 2001). The researchers reported that sometimes interviews had to take place over two sessions as they were so long. The interviewers piloted their interviews and in this time it became clear how long the interviews were to be which raised questions about transcription time and the quantity of data to be handled. Thompson (1997) reports that interviews in his social mobility study were supposed to be 3 hours long, but typically were more than four for older and middle generation participants (p.58). Miller (2000) also talks about long interviews, last several hours. The first set of interviews in the study by Antikainen et al. typically lasted typically 3-4 hours where the interviewee told their life history. However, as we are not asking our respondents to report their entire life history to us, ours may be shorter.

Repeated interviews

Repeated interviews were common (Watts and Bridges 2006); Finch and Mason (1993) (one and a half hours)

Follow up telephone calls

Wengraf (2001) suggested that it probably be a good idea to ask for permission from interviewee to follow up any particular issues that might occur to you, perhaps by telephone after the interview (Wengraf p.190).

Interaction between interviewer and interviewee

Issues related to such interactions relate to the earlier discussion of the constructed nature of life histories and issues of epistemology and ontology. As Vilko (1991) pointed out:

The interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is an important factor which affects the formation and the content of the narration in the life-

stories obtained by interview. The content is also affected by, for instance, other imaginary receivers, culturally conditioned rules of expression, by what can be realised through memory, one's own unique life experiences, and by what is considered as significant and worth telling within the discursive framework of life history. The stories, therefore, are sensitive of context and they are always told to someone else for some purpose. Life-stories portray a selected image of life's events, presented according to the conditions of life-story discourse and adopted for it. In a way the participants in an interview negotiate the conditions of understanding, how interesting the narration's contents are, and the possibility of reaching interaction. As a consequence the informant chooses to narrate certain matters presented in a certain way in his life-history (cited in Antikainen, pp.26-27).

It will be useful to look at specific examples of what researchers have said about the interactions between themselves and their research participants. Archer and Hutchings (2000) reported that "Obviously, the researcher is influential in guiding and biasing discussions, and the race/gender of research and participants interact within the research context, although this may not occur in predictable or homogenised patterns (see Phoenix, 1994)" (p.559). Respondents may associate the researcher with the university and so be more positive about it. "Interviewer race and gender may also have worked to suppress the expression of some discourses" (p.559). For example, people may not feel very able to say that the university is racist to a white researcher.

Corden and Sainsbury (2005) reported that their participants said that they might have said different things to an interviewer of a different gender (p.18-19). David et al. reported that the male interviewer in their study was given more names of fathers to pursue for interview than the female interviewer (Discussion with Miriam David July 2006).

Different degrees of openness on the part of the interviewer are possible. Howard Newby was engaged in a study interviewing farmers and farm workers. He talks about having to hide his opinions from the people in his study.

"... there was ... the danger of revealing my personal opinions [about the reputation of sociology and Essex students] – which would have antagonised nearly all farmers and most farm workers – from behind my deliberately anodyne and occasionally evasive replies. Constantly being on guard, weighing my words, controlling my gestures-these were the stuff of interviewing, on the whole a carefully contrived and executed performance, not daring to let the mask slip

The ethics of this continue to concern me. No one was under any obligation to answer my questions, but I still found the whole business faintly distasteful. I was not telling outright lies, but I was engaging in systematic concealment. Perhaps I was over-reacting; all this careful affectation may have been totally

unnecessary (though I doubted it). Perhaps my conscience is oversensitive: why should farmers need to know my political views? Whatever the answer, these questions must surely cross every researcher's mind although they are so rarely discussed" (Newby 1977, p.118).

This approach to interviewing would be anathema to those advocating a narrative approach to interviewing as discussed in the section *Narrative interviewing* pp.65-66 and the issues raised by Newby are much more commonly discussed nowadays than in 1977.

Trust and rapport may be easier to build if the researchers belong to the same population as those being interviewed (which we won't in the sense we are all university educated etc). Weeks et al. (2001) reported that in their study of the structures and meanings of non-heterosexual relationships the interviewees were very willing to talk, partly because researchers revealed their own non-heterosexual identities.

On the other hand, we will be more likely to note things that are so familiar to research participants that they are taken for granted (Weston 1991).

Reay (2003) cautions against getting friendly with research participants. Being friendly may make it easier to have empathy with and identify with the participants. But it may make it more difficult for the researcher to disentangle his/her own feelings from those of the participants.

Wengraf (2001) urges us to remember that people may put very different constructions on what an 'interview' means. Not all of these are likely to be positive. (job interviews, police interviews, job centre interviews). We have to be careful how we present what we are doing.

Settings for interviews

Thought needs to be given about where to hold the interviews. As Shopes (1996) points out:

The setting of interviews can help nurture recall, and the interviewer should pay attention to this detail of the interview process also. Interviews should take place where those being questioned are most comfortable and used to talking informally; usually this means their own home-perhaps in the living room, but more often in the den, kitchen or back yard. Wherever the interviews take

place, they should be free of interruptions and distractions that might break the interviewees' concentration. (p.237)

Physical and temporal arrangements are always of considerable importance. Is the interview in a private space of one of the participants, or in a public one? Most 'private spaces' are liable to overhearing interruption by flat-mates, family members, assorted others, the telephone or just distracting sights or sounds. It is important to try to avoid these. Public spaces also have their distractions. A 'neutral space' may be the best to aim for, unless you want to get clues from the surroundings that your informant wishes to present himself or herself in (Wengraf 2001, p.43).

Young and Willmott (1957) in their community study of family and kinship in Bethnal Green wanted to interview people separately, but sometimes had to interview husbands and wives together as both were there in the evenings. In the 1950s, they managed to get wives alone during the day, but to get the husband had to go in the evening (p.173).

If we are interviewing people who have answered advertisements (as did Brannen 2003) and about whom we have little information, we should take care over security issues.

Coping with difficult issues in interviews

Hostility between family or group members

Some researchers have discussed the issue of coping with hostility between family or group members. If there is in-fighting of some kind in the group we are investigating, we should think about sending different researchers to speak to different people. In this study of Banbury, different researchers were detailed to speak to the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties. (Bell 1977).

Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003) found that:

Some people might deliberately prevent the inclusion of other family members if they thought their own accounts might be contradicted, while others might embrace the notion of pluralism (p.2).

In Appendix Three, a network map suggests a tool for coping with asking people about those to whom they may be hostile (p.121).

Difficult issues for families

Some people may be unwilling to talk about what they see as personal and private information.

Other difficulties can arise. Pain over a deceased relative, embarrassment at a youthful indiscretion, efforts by estranged relatives to get the interviewer 'on their side,' and attempts by an interviewee to present only 'the good side' of the family history have been encountered by family historians. There is no single solution to handling any of these problems, but tact, persistence, and a sensitivity to this human dimension of family history research are the best guides (Shopes, p,238)

Other aspects of data collection

Multiple sources of data

Some studies use multiple sources of data. For example, in the study by Reay et al. (2001), multiple methods of data collection were used:

- Questionnaire to 500 students
- Individual interviews with 120 students
- Selective sampling from questionnaire respondents and then wider to access groups which had not volunteered for the questionnaire.
- Interviews with sixth form tutors and other key personnel in institutions
- Sub-sample of 40 parents
- Field notes from participant observation (attended range of events including parents' evenings, HE careers lessons, Oxbridge interview practice and tutor group sessions on the UCAS process.

This suggests that perhaps we should keep an eye out for supplementary forms of data collection that we could use. Indeed, we are collecting multiple sources of data: data from large-scale quantitative sets, interviews with case study participants, interviews with key informants, and literature related to the key informant interviewees institutions/units and roles.

Integrating this data into a research account has ontological and epistemological implications as discussed in section *Issues of ontology and epistemology* pp.46-52.

Data analysis

This section on data analysis presents firstly some general concepts and practices common in qualitative research to draw on in our planning and writing about our

methodology. It will then move to consideration of issues more specific to our particular research. Please also see the section *Studies we could learn from* pp.38-44 for discussion of how studies of small groups have approached data analysis.

General issues in qualitative analysis

Basic approaches to analysis

Miller (2000) suggests that the three basic approaches he describes (realist, neo-positivist and narrative) have different approaches to analysis as well as sampling and interviewing as discussed previously in sections *Theoretical sampling* p.55-57. and *Underlying methodological approaches to interviewing* pp.64-66.

A realist approach is “concerned with issues of factual reliability and views ‘saturation’ (multiple cases revealing the same patterns) as a solution and may depict the life or family history as a ‘microcosm’ that reflects (some aspects of) ‘the macrocosm’.” (p.xii) Analysis involves moving from data to theory and then back again in ever more sophisticated conceptual understanding and eventually new cases do not add to the conceptual understandings (114-124).

In a neo-positivist approach “there is an interplay between the ‘actor’ and ‘structure’”. The goal of analysis is the validation of pre-existing theory through the deductive evaluation of concepts against empirical information” (p.xii). After deduction, induction probably happens, i.e. ideas can be reformulated. There is the same kind of process for analysis as with realism probably, except that there is more focus initially on testing out concepts (p.124-128)

A narrative approach “is based fundamentally in the ongoing development of the respondent’s viewpoint. Here, questions of fact take second place to understanding an individual’s unique and changing perspective as it is mediated by social context, including the context of the life history interview itself” (p.xii). Unlike the two above approaches, narrative approaches do not recognise that there is a reality to be reached.

Analytical induction, grounded theory

Analytical induction and grounded theory are two common strategies in data analysis in qualitative research.

Analytical induction has a number of stages. To start with there is an initial hypothesis and a conceptual position. Cases studies are investigated to see if they fit this. If they don't match, then the hypothesis is altered, redefined etc. The main issue may need to be reformulated. Eventually a relationship established where the hypothesis fits data. This is time consuming so there are few examples of it. (Roberts 2003 p.8-9)

Wengraf (2001) calls this the *Hypothetico-deductivist model* This “declares that there is no such thing as ‘all the relevant facts’, there are only ‘hypothesis-related facts’, and that research must always start with a body of prior theory, if only to decide which set of ‘collectable facts’ should be collected or generated. It is this prior body of theory from which the researcher generates a particular hypothesis whose truth or falsity could be ‘tested’ by a particular selection of ‘hypothesis-relevant’ facts’. The hypothesis relevant facts are then collected, and the hypothesis is either supported by the evidence of those facts or it is refuted by them” (Wengraf p.2).

In *grounded theory* examination of the data produces the theory. Initial examination produces the beginnings of conceptualisation. The researcher continues constructing conceptualisations through examination of the data until eventually s/he reaches *theoretical saturation*, when all cases fit.

Wengraf (2001) calls this the *Hypothetico-Inductivist Model* where “the researcher collects ‘all the relevant facts’ and then examines them to see what theory is suggested by this set of ‘all the relevant facts’. The theory thus ‘emerges’ from the data. This is the original ‘grounded theory’ tradition (Glaser and Strauss, 1968) in which theory emerges by a process of ‘induction’. The facts are believed to suggest – or even ‘require’ or ‘dictate’ – the theorisation” (Wengraf p.2).

According to Wengraf (2001) both are appropriate at different stages of the research cycle. He argues that even during interviewing:

the ‘semi-structured depth interview’ normally involves the interviewer in a process of both model-building and model-testing, both theory-construction and theory-verification, within the same session or series of sessions (Wengraf p.4).

Given that one approach is related to what Miller (2000) calls the realist approach and the other to what he calls neo-positivism, one wonders how they can sit together so easily if we accept Miller's divisions.

The issue of causality

Establishment of causality is a problematic issue in all types of research. The following comments from Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate the complexity involved in looking at causality:

The causes of any particular event are always multiple (Abbott, 1992a). That statement masks even more complexity (Ragin, 1987): The causes are not only multiple but also "conjectural"- they combine and affect each other as well as the "effects". Furthermore effects of multiple causes are not the same in all contexts, and different combinations of causes can turn out to have similar effects. That statement means we have to think of causes and effects as arranged in a network (Salamon, 1991) that we approach as a system changing over time, rather than as a study of a billiard-ball impact of A (as vs. C) on B (146).

Qualitative approaches are often concerned, as Campbell (1986) suggested, with the validity of their findings in a *particular* setting by achieving "thorough local acquaintance" (qtd in Miles and Huberman 146). They may follow a *process* and/or a *conceptual* mode as defined and described by Miles and Huberman:

In the "process" mode, we'll be likely to assemble chronologies, pay attention to time, and look for connections within the big picture. In the "variable" [conceptual] mode, we'll be likely to code small chunks of data, retrieve them, and look for similarities and conceptual patterns, with less regard to setting, sequence, and the passage of time (147).

Qualitative researchers tend to move through their data, in what may be painfully slow detail, backwards and forwards between these modes, noticing, conceptualising and reconceptualising. While this may sound quite haphazard and inexact, such a process yields rich understandings of the data. Miles and Huberman, argue quite rightly, that:

Qualitative analysis [is] a very powerful method for assessing causality. ... Qualitative analysis with its close-up look, can identify mechanisms, going beyond sheer association. It is unrelentingly local, and deals very well with the complex network of events and processes in a situation. It can sort out the temporal dimension, showing clearly what preceded what, either through direct observation or retrospection. It is well equipped to cycle back and forth between variables and processes - showing that "stories" are not capricious,

but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time (147).

What goes without saying

One aspect to bear strongly in mind in qualitative analysis is what is so commonplace that it does not need to be said. Pugsley recommends looking out for

what goes without saying (Barthes 1973, p.11). Implicit assumptions in some families which served to make choices invisible (p.74). Unsaid pressure (p.74).

Wengraf (2001) talks about something similar.

One mode of analysis, that associated with the work of Foucault and Chomsky, is where you attempt to identify a 'deep structure' which underlies or (as some would argue) generates the 'surface performance' of the things actually said. This is like a system of rules that creates 'patterned productions' of things likely to be said ('sayables') and things unlikely or impossible to be said ('unsayables') within that particular 'regime of discourse' (Wengraf p.7)

For example, there is a neo-liberal discourse (unregulated free trade) which is distinct from 'social and ecological discourses' (ravages of search for profit) p.7.

Making connections between different accounts

The issue of how we deal with multiple accounts from members of our networks is dealt with differently in different parts of the literature.

Triangulation

Triangulation is one approach. Wengraf says that social science is happier when cross-referencing can occur, i.e. triangulation. This kind of triangulation can occur, he says, in studies of three generations (e.g. work of Bertaux 1997, Rosenthal 1998). "One principle is that of taking several generations of one family. Each has their own view on past, present and future, and their views and experience relate to each other in complex and enlightening ways" (p.104-5).

Good research would certainly attempt to give voice (partially in the form of direct quotation) to members of each group, but it would also go beyond the partial viewpoints to evaluate and synthesise and place in historical and theoretical contexts (Wengraf p.105).

This is a somewhat different way of looking at things from other writers who are more concerned with the idea that cross-referring between accounts presents a lot of problems.

Gender perspectives

Brannen also drew attention to aspects of gender in intergenerational analysis. This emphasis is echoed in other studies. For example, Brooks (2004) in her empirical study looking at differential levels of involvement by mothers and fathers in the choice of higher education for young college leavers, emphasises the importance of differences between the influences of parents according to whether they are male or female and differences between children according to whether male or female.

This emphasis on gender was echoed in an article by David et al. (2003). The authors wrote about aspects of gender involvement in the higher education choice process. As the abstract of the article explains:

This article explores gender, social class and ethnic issues in parental involvement in students' choices of higher education. It draws upon interviews with students and their parents, who were a small group of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded study of students' higher education choice processes in the UK. Gender was highly significant in several respects, illustrating changes in higher education over the last 20 years, whereby more women than men now enter higher education. Most of the interviewees were female. They were mothers and daughters who were thinking about higher education. The article explores first how gender is inflected in choice processes—from whether students choose to involve their parents in the study, to their parents' characteristics, to the forms of involvement revealed. Different facets of involvement are considered—interest, influence and support, investment and intrusion. Secondly, the article provides illustrations of girls' collaborative approaches to the choice processes, in which some of their mothers also engage. This is contrasted with boys' perspectives and those of fathers who were interviewed. This illustrates how gender is woven through social networks across the generations. Parental involvement varied in terms of gender, educational and social backgrounds, or notions of 'institutional' and 'familial habitus'. Finally, the authors reflect upon why gender is salient in how young people and their parents think about their involvement in choosing universities and relate this to changes in higher education policies and practices. (Abstract from front of article, p.21).

The article is concerned with traditional students of school age from a variety of schools who are thinking about going on to higher education and their parents and it appears to be quite traditional universities that are being talked about.

David et al. argue that "Gender, linked to social class, ethnicity and education, was highly salient in all the processes of choice of higher education" (p.35).

- Girls tended to pursue more collaborative strategies than boys in finding out about higher education etc.

- Boys “tended not to want parents to intrude on their lives at school, some because they were not progressing well in their studies and others because of their desire for independence and autonomy from parents” (p.35)
- Fathers were concerned about levels of investment involved in sending child to HE

The article suggests various aspects we might look for in our analysis of our data.

Social class perspectives

Researchers have suggested that social class is a significant aspect from which to analyse the data. For example, David et al. (2003) suggest differences in the nature of involvement of parents according to social class and that there are different fractions of the middle class. They report that “lower middle class mothers were intensively involved with encouraging their daughters’ educational progress” (p.35). They also report that “the parental sample was skewed towards highly educated middle classes” (p.29).

Brooks (2003) is a qualitative, longitudinal study which argues that assumptions about social class homogeneity overlook the very different ways in which students from a similar (middle class) location come to understand the higher education sector. It suggests families have a strong influence on choices made, but also that friends and peers play an important role in informing decisions about what constitutes a ‘feasible choice’. This study is based on individual interviews with young people about their experiences at college, plans for the future and thoughts and decisions about applying for higher education courses.

Pugsley (1998) attempts to assign social class, but using occupational classifications is somewhat problematic (see Goldthorpe 1987; Goldthorpe and Hope 1974). So in her study, class has been defined taking a multi-dimensional approach.

This has included, consideration of the occupational categories of the parents, according to the Goldthorpe scale, the extent of any formal engagement in post-compulsory education by the parents, their residential postcode and the use of cultural markers (Bourdieu, 1979) from observations in the family home (p.73).

Social network perspectives

Researchers have looked at social networks when looking at small groups. For example, Wallman (1984) carried out a study of eight South London households

looking at patterns of life. “It focuses on individuals’ options and expectations within the household, through detailed descriptions and analysis of their resource systems” (Wallman, back cover). She investigated the resources that the families had at their disposal. Resources in this study means:

- Money
- Property
- Time
- Experience
- Information
- Networks of contact with kin and neighbours (Wallman, back cover)

Analytical tools used:

- Network analysis
- Analysis of time budgets for individual members of the household
- Taking of job histories
- Open ended interviews (Wallman, back cover)

See Appendix Three for possible network analysis tools (p.123) and job history tools (to be adapted to educational history tools) (p.124) for our study.

Perspective relating to particular family dynamics

The dynamics working within a particular family may be a significant aspect to investigate (David et al. 2003).

Ethical issues

In this section, I have selected a range of ethical points which various researchers have made and which seem relevant to our study.

Primary ethical responsibilities

Norman Denzin wrote of the general principles underlying the ethical code of the life history researcher that:

... we must remember that our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared with us. And, in return, this sharing will allow us to write life documents that speak to the human dignity, the suffering, the hopes, the dreams, the lives gained, and the lives lost by the people we study. These

documents will become testimonies to the ability of the human being to endure, to prevail, and to triumph over the structural forces that threaten at any moment to annihilate all of us. (1989, p.83 qtd in Antikainen, p.3).

In line with such ethical principles, Finch and Mason (1993) mention that they did not interview people who were in a crisis situation.

Initial access matters

Antikainen et al. (1996) did not emphasise “education”, the main object of the study, in the initial letter to potential interviewees as did not want to over alert the interviewees to what they were interested in, but could not ignore it totally for ethical issues.

David et al. suggest that in order to facilitate access to parents, it may be better to approach parents directly rather than going through the children. However, one has to get the children’s consent for this.

Miriam David suggested that access to parents was not an essential part of their (2003) study and she thinks that different researchers pressed differentially for access to parents. There would probably have been a better success rate if everyone had pressed for access to parents.

In their study of structures and meanings of non-heterosexual relationships, Weeks et al. (2001) reported that interviewing began when the volunteers rang up. At this stage, they were provided with “information about the nature of the research, and informed the contact about issues of confidentiality and time” (p.205). They were asked if person wanted to be interviewed alone or with a friend. They were also asked for permission to record. If people were still interested, the researchers asked for basic personal details. They contacted the person later to check if they were still willing to participate and to arrange a time and location for the interview.

On the issues of encouraging people to want to join a study, Bertaux (1997) points out that:

One of the norms of our society is that one should not refuse to communicate without good reason. This will help you, particularly if you present yourself as somebody who is attempting to understand a situation which your interlocutor, by virtue of their experience, knows much better than you do (qtd in Wengraf p.189).

Wengraf raises a number of issues that we should consider about the information we give interviewees before the interview. He points out that information you give to an interviewee before the interview will encourage them to come with a framework in their mind. This could be limiting (Wengraf p.189). Asking someone else to find an interviewee for you could mean that the interview is “framed” in a way you didn’t want or in a particular way (Wengraf p.189-190). These are problems which we should be aware of and then can take into account or forestall some of them (Wengraf p.190).

Weston (1991) reported that it required great persistence and flexibility to get people to agree to interviews in her study of gay and lesbian notions of kinship.

Power issues

Until the interview happens, the interviewer is at the mercy of the interviewee. After that the opposite is likely to be true (Mintz pp.301-2). Wengraf (2001) points out that power dynamics have been raised especially by feminist writers and that interviewees may feel in a weak position in the interview.

Informed consent

Gaining informed consent from people being researched is central to ethical research practice. There are, however, a number of factors that make the issue of informed consent problematic, particularly in research conducted with specific groups commonly characterised as ‘vulnerable’, such as children and people with mental health problems. Wiles et al. (2004) review the background to informed consent in social research and outline some of the challenges faced by researchers in a rapidly changing research environment.

Wiles et al. argue that there are three elements to informed consent:

Informed consent in social research is defined in similar ways as in medical research. In medical research ethics, informed consent is viewed as comprising three elements: **adequate information** (so people know what they are consenting to); **voluntariness** (so people are aware they are under no obligation to participate and have a right to withdraw at any stage); and, **competence** (that potential participants are capable of understanding what consent will entail and of deciding whether or not they wish to participate) (see Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). While the ethical issues that social researchers engage with are often very different to those of medical researchers, social research guidelines point researchers to similar broad

elements in terms of managing informed consent – (Wiles et al. p.2) (emphases mine)

Wiles et al. argue that there are a number of factors to balance in thinking about informed consent:

Social researchers have to balance a number of factors in managing issues of informed consent. They obviously have to comply with any legal frameworks and regulation but additionally they have to balance a range of sometimes competing interests, such as the aims of the research, what they consider to be the 'best' interests of research participants and the interests of formal or informal gatekeepers. They also have to operationalise and be reflexive about issues of, 'consent' 'voluntariness' and 'competence' (Wiles et al. p.3).

They argue that informed consent should be an ongoing process

Julia Lawton (2001) has outlined these [consent when to get it etc] problems and the impact that they had in her PhD research in a hospice and she, among others (e.g., Ramcharan and Cutcliffe 2001) have argued for consent to be seen as a process rather than a one-off event. These authors have argued that researchers should seek consent each time they collect data from a study participant and some researchers also feel this should extend to consent for the ways that the data collected are used, by for example, asking study participants' agreement for the way their data are presented in reports, publications or presentations. Consent regarding the use of data raises the issue of data ownership and with whom this should reside and our study participants had varying views on the appropriateness of this. (Wiles et al. p.5).

This is especially likely to be important if you do not know at the beginning how often you will be going back to people.

Wiles et al. raise the issue of giving potential participants time to think:

There are several issues that researchers have to address in ensuring people have had the opportunity to consider whether or not they want to participate in a study. Giving people sufficient time to consider whether or not they want to participate is viewed as important. This issue has been raised particularly by researchers working in NHS and social care settings where such procedures are part of everyday clinical and research practice. (Wiles et al. p.6).

In terms of written informed consent, there are different views:

Views about the importance of gaining a signature as evidence of consent are varied. Some researchers felt that it was important for people to actively 'opt-in' to research by signing a consent form. However, while a signature may be viewed as important to safeguard researchers, on the other hand asking for a signature might be problematic in research in some contexts, particularly in relation to research that relates to socially unacceptable or deviant behaviour where study participants may have reason to fear the consequences of being identified (Coomber, 2002). Additionally the need to obtain a signature is seen as problematic in that it makes the process a formal one and again it is feared that this might be seen as off-putting for some people. (Wiles et al. p.6)

Corden and Sainsbury (2005) ask how far do people understand what they are consenting to when asked to sign consent forms? See related work by Crow et al. For example, most people don't have much conception of what a research report looks like so how can they know what they are consenting to in relationship to research reports.

Issues to discuss before the interview begins

Miller (2000) considers the following issues should be considered:

- Let the respondent know how long the interview is likely to take.
- Agree on how information from the interview will be used before the interview
- Can assurances of full confidentiality be given, given the amount of personal detail that will be in the interviews
- How much control will the respondent have over the information given in the interview:
 - *No control* – respondent doesn't see interview transcript. Doesn't see research results unless goes and searches them out
 - *Sight and comment on transcript accuracy* Respondent can check on transcription accuracy – advantage is that they may be able to fill in gaps transcriber could not hear. But the respondent may wish to remove material they see as too revealing
 - *Sight and comment on interpretation* This is more demanding of the respondent than just giving an interview. More invasive.
 - *Sight and comment on publication* Can see what is going to be published. How much control at that point do respondents have? Which parts do they have the right of veto over – what they have said or broader conclusions.

For a sample of informed consent forms see pp.100-105 and *Appendix Two Sample documents for a family research project, Sample informed consent documents* pp.108-112.

Weeks et al. (2001) reported that research participants were told about confidentiality and recording when they initially volunteered. They were told again at the start of the

interview and also reminded about the time the interview could take. They were told they could finish whenever they wanted. They were asked to choose a research name.

Wengraf (2001) urges that the researcher:

Be sure to get on tape permission to record when you begin an interview. Tell the narrator what the project is about, how the taped information will be used, where the tape will be placed, and who will have access to it. Inform the narrator of rights – such as withdrawal from participation and refusal to answer every question or discuss a topic. Be sensitive to the possible harm that can come from encouraging a narrator to ‘tell all’ (Yow 1994 qtd in Wengraf p.185).

Research participants are not helpless victims

The research bargain is a social construction, the result of assessments by each side of what the other has to give and what they are prepared to offer in return for these things (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1979, p.120) ... Respondents are not fearful victims who open their lives and souls because they are told or asked to. People have boundaries and strategies to protect themselves in research situations (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p.230 qtd in Antikainen p.3).

Information sheet for interviewee

Wengraf suggests giving the informants an information sheet before the interview:

To help your informant, you ... should considering providing him or her with something like one side of A4 which outlines the material arrangements, explains the point of the exercise and the time and place, and reassures them about confidentiality and the anonymity of the material. It could advise them how to contact you both before and after the interview with any questions or comments or requests they may have. McCracken (1988: 69-70) has a short ‘ethics protocol’ which you could use as part of an ‘interview memo’ which acts also as an informal contract/release form (Wengraf p.192).

Risks to the interviewee in the interview process

McCracken (1988) presents a somewhat dated discussion of long interviews: the issues involved in running them, analysing them etc. However, he does have some useful comments about risks and advantages for the interviewee in the interview process:

The respondent in a qualitative interview is subject to several risks. Participation in qualitative interviews can be time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding in ways that

quantitative interviews rarely are. To make matters worse, it is difficult for many respondents to anticipate these dangers at the outset of the interview. Investigators must take pains to see that the respondent is not overtly or subtly victimised by the interview process (McCracken p.27).

Advantages to the interviewee in giving an interview

We might want to present something of this in our initial approach to the interviewees. McCracken (1988) argues that the interviewee potentially gains advantages from the interview process:

... the qualitative interview gives the respondent the opportunity to engage in an unusual form of sociality. Suddenly, they find themselves in the presence of the perfect conversational partner, someone who is prepared to forsake his or her own "turns" in the conversation and listen eagerly to anything the respondent has to say (Stebbins 1972). This characteristic of the qualitative interview leads to other benefits, including the opportunity to make oneself the centre of another's attention (Ablon, 1977; Von Hoffman and Cassidy 1956), to state a case that is otherwise unheard (Leznoff 1956; Wax 1952), to engage in an intellectually challenging process of self-scrutiny (Merton and Kendall 1946), and even to experience a kind of catharsis (Gordon 1956: 159). Together, these advantages suggest that there are for most respondents benefits to compensate for the risks of the qualitative interview (McCracken p.28).

Wiles et al. (2004) explore the issue of inducements to participate in research:

Inducements to participate in research can be seen as a form of coercion that impacts on the voluntary nature of research participation. There was little consensus among our study participants about the appropriateness of payments being offered to research participants. Some researchers viewed it as important that all people should be paid for their time and one researcher commented that young people expect to be paid because this is now common practice. Other researchers were concerned that this might encourage potentially vulnerable people to participate for the wrong reasons and would never pay their research participants either in money or gifts. One way researchers who do offer inducements have managed this is by not informing people that they will be paid and to give payment as a thank you after the individual has participated in the research. Of course, the difficulty with this is that it is not possible to keep this a surprise for long as word soon gets round, especially in specific communities.

Incentives aren't necessarily confined to money or vouchers and some research projects may provide gifts for participants. One might argue that focus group research that typically provides lunch or refreshments on attendance is using a form of inducement (Truman, 2003). The opportunity to make use of the space provided by researchers or other benefits that researchers might be able to give may also be seen as inducements. One of our study participants who was conducting research in clubs on drug-taking behaviour noted the space they provided within the clubs was viewed positively and that this could be seen as an inducement to participate. (Wiles et al. p.7)

Anonymity

Do not promise anonymity unless you are certain you can enforce the provision. Beware of publishing confidential material in a way specific enough for the information source to be identified. Discuss with the narrator the ways identity will be disguised and the information presented (Yow 1994 qtd in Wengraf p.185).

Anonymity is a question of degree. It can be satisfied in a weak form, at least sometimes, by changing certain identifying details (name, place, age, occupation etc) sufficiently so that, were people who are not friends and relatives of the individual to read the account, they would not recognise their friend or relative as the one who had given the interview. A stronger version is one in which friends and family would not recognise the person. The strongest is one in which the informant would not recognise himself or herself in the published account (p.187).

Too much loss of detail will degrade the value of the report ... From the point of view of the research purpose, certain changes of detail will be trivial while others will be disastrous (p.187).

Confidentiality

If you promise confidentiality this would mean that certain material cannot be used at all. If a whole interview were to be confidential, nothing could be published from it.

Wengraf particularly mentions the difficulties of coping with interviewing people who are close to one another, for example, husbands and wives. It is difficult to guarantee confidentiality and the publication of details is very hard. See Hertz 1995 for more discussion.

Pseudonyms

Pseudonyms can be chosen by the research participants. Other disguising measures taken by Finch and Mason (1993) included, changing characteristics or events which do not alter the analysis, by using examples abstracted from context without a pseudonym.

In an ESRC-funded research project to investigate the use of verbatim quotations in research reports, the researchers looked at research participants' views of the use of verbatim quotations. They undertook the research as it has been hard until recently, apparently "to find a well developed conceptual and theoretical basis for inclusion of verbatim quotations within social researchers' written texts" (pp.1-2). This project

aimed to address some of the relevant issues. The researchers found that research participants did not like the use of pseudonyms for a variety of reasons:

- Using such names is “false” or “telling lies”
- Names used could be wrongly attributed to people who really had those names who had used the volunteering project around which the verbatim quotes project was structured
- Would be confusing to the people themselves reading the report (p.18).

Wiles et al. (2004) report that in one palliative care research projects about 75% of people wanted their real names to be used.

Confidentiality within the network: difficult situations we may be placed in

Newby (1977) reported on how other members of the rural networks he was investigating attempted to extract information from him about how members of the network had responded to his enquiries. However, he was very conscious of the need for confidentiality, especially in close rural communities.

One assurance I readily made and was determined to keep – especially in a particularistic rural society – was a guarantee of total confidentiality. This seems to me the right of every respondent, and it had to be firmly adhered to despite occasional nudges and winks over cups of tea to pass on the replies of others to certain questions. ... acting otherwise would probably have cut me off from any further sources of data, so my stance was largely governed by instrumental considerations. The confidentiality issue coincided with my moral stance (Newby p.118).

We must be similarly cautious.

Reporting

Corden and Sainsbury (2005), in their study of the use of verbatim quotations in research, reported that research participants may have feelings about the categorisations that researchers use to describe them. For example, they might have a strong dislike of categorisations which might not reflect well on those taking part such as “disabled”, “woman in 60s”, “an income support recipient”, “people with mental health problems”. “What was important was not standing out as different in a way that invited judgement or criticism” (p.18). Moreover, although people might themselves use certain terminology to describe themselves, they might not

necessarily like to be identified in this way in a report e.g. “single parent” (p.29). Corden and Sainsbury found that people did not object to the reporting of negative experiences as long as this to “led to their feeling part of a wider group of people who also had such experiences” (p.19).

Giving reports to research participants to read

Corden and Sainsbury (2005) reported that research participants may find it hard to understand/read long reports. In this case, the researchers made taped copies of the report for people who preferred (p.8). They found a range of reading skills among their participants (p.26).

Participants often had no idea what length of report they would be sent. Do researchers have a responsibility to tell respondents in advance in more detail what they will be getting? How their interviews will be used?

Thoughts on editing transcriptions

In the research by Corden and Sainsbury (2005) some people thought that it would be desirable to “tidy up” language in transcriptions. Examples of language to tidy up are “you know”, “I mean”, “wanna”. Some people thought grammatical correctness and ease of reading was important. Some thought that leaving these types of things in would reflect badly on the literacy skills of the researchers (p.20-21). Others wanted things left as they were. If not the report would be “untrue” (p.21). There was a big variation in views.

Reaction to participants comments

The amendments that Corden and Sainsbury (2005) made to their reports were quite minor in the end. (It is not clear how they dealt with all the contradictions mentioned above. Perhaps they talked the respondents out of them by presenting alternative arguments?)

Questions to consider

Wiles et al. (2004) We suggest a number of questions that researchers can usefully reflect upon:

- How can you know that someone has understood the information that you have given them and that they appreciate fully what participation will involve?

- How can you judge when someone wants to withdraw from a study? How long do they have the right to withdraw (e.g., during data collection, during the write up, later?)
- How concerned should researchers be that participants will agree with how data about them are used? Should participants have the right to veto this? Who owns the data: the participant, the researcher, the grant holder, the research funder, or the gatekeeper? (Wiles et al. p.10)

SECTION SIX: WHERE NEXT WITH THE REVIEW

Where are we now?

If we return to discussions of the review in the *Introduction, Challenges faced* p.2, we can see that many of the challenges involved in our project are discussed extensively in the literature. These challenges include:

- investigation of decision-making as a collective process in networks of intimacy;
- investigation of intergenerational aspects;
- investigation of a hidden population; and
- integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Our aims in the review are to:

- map the existing methodological literature in the field in relationship to these challenges;
- critique existing approaches and
- offer a useful methodological as well as substantive contribution to related literature.

The current review is an initial mapping exercise of some of the relevant literature available. However, the relevant literatures are huge, covering a range of theoretical fields, substantives fields of study and methodological approaches, so the review is necessarily limited. *Section Three* of the review pp.13-21 attempts to make sense of these literatures.

At the moment, it is possible to offer only one or two aspects of critique of the literature. These are that:

1. The higher education choice literature does not contain much that is methodologically close to our *networks of intimacy* focus so we are pioneers of such an approach in this substantive field of study. This gives us opportunities but also presents difficulties in that we cannot tread well trodden paths.
2. Much of the rest of the literature available in other fields is also limited in its focus on investigation of small groups. The substantive areas of *Family*

studies, Studies of Social Mobility and Intergenerational Research seem to offer the best opportunities for us to learn from existing work in this respect.

3. The literature on interviewing appears to be rather restricted to one or two approaches (e.g. BNIM and variants) or other approaches which are difficult to access (e.g. those employing approaches which draw on psychoanalysis).

We cannot make a substantive contribution to the methodological field as we are too early on in the study. We will be better placed to do so when we have some empirical data to analyse. However, we must be aware at all stages of the investigation of the implications of our investigative decisions for the research process and our final methodological, as well as substantive, products.

Where next with the review

It will be useful to do more reading, specifically to:

- address issues that others may raise to with us about existing work
- focus on existing studies of small groups which can be helpful to us (at the moment, there are only a handful of studies reviewed in Section Four which focus on investigation of small groups)
- focus on interviewing (the available literature seems to be rather restricted in its focus – what about some more imaginative interviewing?).

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APPENDIX ONE: INFORMED CONSENT

ESDS advice on informed consent and sample forms

The Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) is a national data service providing access and support for an extensive range of key economic and social data, both quantitative and qualitative, spanning many disciplines and themes. ESDS provides an integrated service offering enhanced support for the secondary use of data across the research, learning and teaching communities. (Website)

General guidance

<http://www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/consent.asp#Gain>

Sample consent form: research projects in general

Economic and Social Data Service



Example consent form for research projects in general

CONSENT FORM

Project title: *(Add name here)*

Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored. Please answer each statement concerning the collection and use of the research data.

I have read and understood the information sheet.  Yes No

If options such as this are offered, the opportunity to respond i.e. request more information, must also be offered. It is a requirement of the Data Protection Act that an information sheet be provided.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Yes No

I have had my questions answered satisfactorily. Yes No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation. Yes No

I agree to the interview being audiotaped and to its contents being used for research purposes. 📄 Yes No

To ensure clarity and rigour each type of consent is dealt with individually: consent to participate; consent for immediate use of findings; and consent for future use. Individual requests to use material in an open or confidential way are made later for the same reason.

I agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Yes No

I do not agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Where used my name must be removed and my comments made unattributable. 📄 Yes No

This will mean simply replacing the name - in full or part - and immediate address details. If discussion leads to an agreement to remove any other kind of information then ideally it should be spelt out here. A common error by researchers is to remove too much information.

I agree to the transcripts (in line with conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers. 📄 Yes No

Archiving should be seen as simply extending the research to a wider (bona fide) research community. All will honour any undertakings made as a condition of use. Whether archived within a researcher's department, or with a formal archive such as the UK Data Archive, participants should see it as safeguarding and preserving their contribution after the research project has finished. This is supported by the rights management framework (including depositor and end user licence agreements) operated by the Archive.

I agree to my audiotapes (in line with conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers. Yes No

I would like to see a copy of my transcript. 📄 Yes No

The reason for doing this is not specified. Like an offer of acknowledgement, its main use may be to reward or encourage participation. It is not a legal or ethical condition. It


may serve to acknowledge involvement, or allow fact checking or further content approval. If such editing is involved, the extent should be clear and agreed so that it does not impede progress of the project at some later stage e.g. a time-frame/period for receipt of participant's comments should also be included. The fact that transcripts may then begin departing from the original recording may be a further concern.

I would like my name acknowledged in the report and on the project web site (without linking it to content or quotation) Yes No

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

The name(s) of the main investigators, along with telephone and email contact details are: *(Add names here)* 

Sample consent form for telephone interviews

Economic and Social Data Service



Example consent form for use with a research project using telephone interviews
This form is for use with a research project using telephone interviews

Participant consent for research project

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and 'Name of University' attaches high priority to the ethical conduct of research. We therefore ask you to consider the following points before signing this form. Your signature confirms that you are happy to participate in the study.

Your contribution to the research will take the form of a telephone interview. This will be tape-recorded and transcribed (it will be typed up and anonymised). 📄

Introducing an offer to anonymise - without defining it properly - is premature and unnecessary. An alternative wording which is more specific, such as 'it will be transcribed and your name removed', is just as effective.

The tape-recordings will be kept securely and destroyed in due course. 📄

Whilst 'in due course' is vague there is a definite promise to destroy the recordings - the primary source of data. Unless there is a particular reason to do this any key material generated by a research project should be preserved.

The transcriptions (*excluding* names and other identifying details) will be retained by the project team and analysed as part of the study. 📄

The level of anonymisation should be discussed with the respondents and the identifying terms clarified.

We will send your own interview transcript back to you after it has been anonymised. That way, you can keep a copy of our conversation. We will also give you time to check it over. You can make changes if you want, and advise us of

anything else we should do to protect your privacy. 🖨️

The reason for doing this is not specified here. Like an offer of acknowledgement its main use may be to reward or encourage participation. It is not a common practice or a legal or ethical condition. It may be a courtesy to acknowledge involvement, or it may have a practical purpose - allowing fact checking or further content approval. Whatever the reason, it should be clear and agreed in such a way that it does not impede progress of the project at some later stage. The fact that transcripts may begin departing from the original recording may be a further concern.

The findings of the research will be written up as feedback for you, for policy makers and for other organisations interested in our work. The findings will be published, and they may also be used for teaching and research training. The written work may include quotations from the interviews, but individuals will never be named.

About 'number' people from all walks of life are taking part in this phase of the work. Your contribution is immensely valuable. However, if, at any point during the course of the project, you wish to withdraw from the study, we will respect your decision immediately. 🖨️

A good concise summation of intent. However there should also be an outline of the purpose of the research here or somewhere else on the form. Alternatively a separate information sheet could be provided.

Confirmation and consent

I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in the 'Name here' research project. I have been briefed on what this involves and I agree to the use of the findings as described above. I understand that the material is protected by a code of professional ethics. I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to the 'Name of University'. 🖨️

The participant will retain a copyright interest in their spoken words which may have bearing on the researcher's future use. Participants should be encouraged to assign copyright to the researcher/research team.

Participant

signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____


I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to keep the undertakings in this contract.

Researcher

signature: _____


Name: _____

Date: _____

As the ESRC is a publicly funded body, it has developed ways to share data among academic researchers (subject to strict conditions). To this end, we hope you will allow your anonymised transcript to be stored as part of the UK Data Archive (a service provider for the Economic and Social Data Service). 

Please tick one of the following boxes to let us know whether we can include your transcript when we deposit the findings of this study in the Archive.

- I agree to my 'Project Name' interview transcript being lodged in the UK Data Archive.
- I do not agree to my 'Project Name' interview transcript being lodged in the UK Data Archive.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the study, or the details of this form, please contact one of our Research Fellows in the Department of 'Name here'. 

Informed consent form (McCracken 1988)

This form is from a somewhat dated discussion of long interviews and the issues involved in running them and analysing them. Elements of the form may be useful to us.

APPENDIX B STANDARD ETHICS PROTOCOL

(to be read by interviewer before the beginning of the interview. One copy of this form should be left with the respondent, and one copy should be signed by the respondent and kept by the interviewer)

Hi, my name is _____. I am a researcher/ research assistant on a project entitled:

This project is being sponsored by the Department of _____ at the University of _____

I am (Professor x is) the principal investigator of this project and I (he/she) may be contacted at this phone number _____ should you have any questions.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights.

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team.

Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

(signed)

(printed)

(dated)

Please send me a report on the results of this research project, (circle one)

YES

NO

/ address for those requesting research report

(Interviewer: keep signed copy; leave unsigned copy with respondent)

APPENDIX TWO SAMPLE DOCUMENTS FOR A FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

Hockey, J., Robinson, V. and Meah, A., *Cross-Generational Investigation of the Making of Heterosexual Relationships, 1912-2003* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], October 2005. SN: 5190.

<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/doc/5190/mrdoc/pdf/q5190uguide.pdf>

Description of research process (including recruitment)

A Cross-generational Investigation of the Making of Heterosexual Relationships

Methodology

The data is drawn from focus group discussions and oral life history interviews carried out between March 2002 and July 2003. The focus group discussions were originally planned to facilitate recruitment, and to sensitise the investigators to generational and gender issues in discussing sensitive information about relationships.

Each of the 6 groups was presented with a series of comments made about relationships by individuals at different points over the last 65 years. Participants were invited to respond to these comments, indicating how they perceived them to be indicative of age and gender etc. Discussion was generated around these perceptions and how they compared with the reality once this was revealed. Two of the groups were men only, two were women only and two were mixed. Four of the groups were exclusively comprised of older people, while one was made up of young men under the age of 35, while the ages of the women in another group ranged between mid-30s to late-70s.

None of the participants volunteered to take part in the family study.

Via local publicity and through a process of snowballing, 22 extended families – each with three generations of volunteers - were recruited to the family study. Having established a principal contact in each family, information about the project and the informed consent document was circulated to each potential participant before interviews were undertaken with the family. In many cases, follow up calls were made to confirm that each person understood what the study involved. Each person received the informed consent statement prior to their interview and the researcher then went through

this with them again prior to commencing the interview. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full. Names and locations have been changed, but occupations have not been changed as this would alter the meaning of the data.

The interview schedule represented a loose topic guide which facilitated a reflection on each participants' life course. Topics ranged from learning about puberty; the acquisition of sexual knowledge through talk and practice; courtship, weddings and home-making; parenthood, work and family life; separation and divorce; redundancy and retirement; death, dying and bereavement. Some of the issues raised were extremely sensitive and many participants became upset. In such cases, breaks were taken and the researcher offered to suspend the interview. No one took up this offer. In one case, the researcher made enquiries about counselling services on behalf of one participant. Most people said that they had valued the experience of talking about things which they had not talked about before or did not usually discuss.

Subsequent coding of the data was carried out around descriptive themes; for example the acquisition of sexual knowledge, emotionality, a range of heterosexual 'practices', space/time and reflections. Thematic coding has subsequently taken place which explores issues such as masculinity, femininity and identity; structure and agency and cross-generational cultural transmission.

Sample informed consent documents

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project on 'A Cross Generational Investigation of the Making of Couple Relationships' that is being conducted by Dr Angela Meah and Dr Jenny Hockey of the University of Hull.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to hold a series of interviews with different members of the same family to find out about patterns of continuity and change in relationships between couples of different generations. During these, I will have the opportunity to discuss my experiences of family life. This might include:

sharing opinions about marriage and the alternatives to it, what I see as the significant influences on my relationships, how my experiences may differ from my expectations, what I regard as the significant events in my life and what I see as the recipe for a good relationship.

I understand that the interview that will last for as long as I deem necessary and will be audio-taped. The tape will then be transcribed and destroyed. All names will be changed so that participants cannot be identified.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that if I wish to withdraw from the study or to stop the interview, I may do so at any time, and that I do not need to give any reasons or explanations for doing so.

I also understand that all the information I give will be anonymised in any publications and that what I say will not be shared with other members of my family.

I understand that I may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, but that my participation may help others in the future.

The members of the research team have offered to answer any questions I might have about the study and what I am expected to do.

I have read and understand this information and I agree to take part in the study.

Date Signature

If you have any concerns about this study, please contact either: Dr Angela Meah, Tel: 01482 466621 or Dr Jenny Hockey, Tel: 01482 465928 or write to us at C.A.S.S., University of Hull, HU6 7RX.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU
Tel: 0114 222 6479
Fax: 0114 276 8125
Email: a.meah@shef.ac.uk
Dr Angela Meah
23 October 2003

Dear Emma

We refer you to your involvement in our study looking at relationships and family life in Hull and East Yorkshire. You will note from the letter head that our team has moved to the University of Sheffield, but the work nonetheless continues.

We hope that you are well and would again like to thank you for your unique and very important contribution to our research project which could not have taken place without the support of so many enthusiastic volunteers. We have presented some of our findings at various academic conferences and people have always commented on the richness of the data which we have presented from our interviews.

As we come to the end of our study, we have been asked if we will submit the transcripts of the interviews to a national data archive. This will not be accessible to members of the general public, but only to genuine academic researchers on a restricted basis. Given the time and effort that each of you contributed in making our study successful, this presents an opportunity for you to make a more lasting contribution to this area of research. As was promised at the time of your interview, all names have been changed within the interview transcripts, as have locations and street names etc, although people's occupations have not.

We would be extremely grateful if you could indicate on the reply slip enclosed whether or not you give permission for your interview transcript to be held in the UK Data Archive and return it in the prepaid envelope. If you have any concerns, questions or queries, do not hesitate to contact us.

Once again, we thank you for your invaluable contribution to our study.

Yours sincerely

Dr Angela Meah
Professor Jenny Hockey

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU

Dear Angela and Jenny,

I have read and understood the information that you have provided about confidentiality and anonymity and

- give permission
- do not give permission

for my interview transcript to be held in the UK Data Archive which I realise will be accessible to only to academics involved in related areas of research and not to members of the general public.

Name (print):

Signature:

Date:

Sample interview schedule

- How did you find out about 'sex'/periods etc? Do you think that boys/girls were treated differently?
PROBE AROUND SOURCES OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE
- When did you first notice/become 'interested' in boys/girls?
- What was/is courtship like for people of your generation? What do/did you get up to?
ACTIVITIES: CINEMA, MEALS, OUTINGS, CLUBS, DANCING, HOLIDAYS, SEX?
- How did you know when you'd found what you thought was the 'right one'? What was 'right' about them?
- The first time you slept together/were intimate together, was it a) what you expected? b) what your partner expected? (Was this on your wedding night or some other time or place?)
PROBE AROUND LOCATIONS
- • IF EXPERIENCED WITH MORE THAN ONE PARTNER:
- Do/did you find yourself comparing other partners to your 'true love'? How have earlier or subsequent partners compared with this person sexually, emotionally etc?
- Tell me about your wedding day. How did he/you propose? What was planning for it like – was it a big event or low key? How did you feel? What are your enduring memories of your wedding day(s)
- How did your courtship compare with day to day life after you decided to set up home together? Think about having to share each other's physical, psychological

and emotional space and also sharing them with other people (in-laws, children etc)?

- What impact did the arrival of children have on your relationship? Do you feel that you became less of a partner/husband/wife and more of a parent? Was there an 'identity' shift? What was the impact on your sexual relationship?
- How did you make your choices about how to socialise your children? Did you replicate or reject existing family models? Do you feel that you treat your sons and daughters the same, or do/did you have different rules for the girls/boys? (E.g. re. sex and social lives – going out etc.)
- How do/did you feel about the possibility of your children being sexually active in your home? OR Do/did your parents let your partners stay over?
- How do you feel about the possibility that your parents are still sexually active, or that they are while you're in the house?
- As you've got older, do you think that your relationship has become less physical and more emotional/companionship etc? If so, do you think that the latter has been a compensation for a waning sex life? How has your sex life changed from when you were younger, if at all? OR Do you think imagine that sex will hold the same place for you as you get older? When do you think that it might change?
- Are there other moments that had a significant impact on your relationships - either by testing it/them or bringing you closer together? For example, starting or leaving work, changing body image/confidence, taking up an 'interest', children leaving home, moving house, becoming a grandparent, separation, divorce, loss, retirement?

INVITE EXAMPLES IN EACH CASE. ASK HOW GRAND/PARENTS/CHILDREN VIEWED THEIR DECISIONS /ACTIONS IN PARTICULAR INSTANCES.

Interview Schedule

- What were the best and worst moments in your relationships? How did you and your partner(s) respond when difficulties arise?
- How important is talking through things with your partner?
- Who do you talk to when you're having problems or, share the good times with? Partner, parent, sibling, friend, grandparents etc?
- What is okay to take outside the relationship? 'Bedroom moments', emotional or sexual difficulties etc?
- How did/do your experiences of relationships compare with the expectations you had when you first started discovering men/women?
- How have your relationships with your partners differed to those with your friends? What do you get from one and not the other?
- What do you see as the key ingredients for a successful relationship?

INVITE EXAMPLES IN EACH CASE. ASK HOW GRAND/PARENTS/CHILDREN VIEWED THEIR DECISIONS /ACTIONS IN PARTICULAR INSTANCES.

APPENDIX THREE RESEARCH TOOLS WE COULD DRAW ON IN DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaire we could draw on for our questionnaire for our main case study entrant people

Page 1

Annex C: Questionnaire

Men returning to study

Dr. Penny Jane Burke
School of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies
59, Gordon Square
London WC1H 0HT
Telephone 020 7612 6753
Email p.burke@ioe.ac.uk

Office use only

Case code _____

Date _____

Participant

Name _____

College _____

Course _____

Date _____

Age (years) _____ D.O.B. _____

The cultural background of your family

	<u>Yourself</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Mother</u>
Place of birth			
Nationality at birth			
Nationality now			
First language			
Other languages			

Grandparent's country of origin

Paternal _____ grandparents

Maternal _____ grandparents

How would you describe your ethnicity?

How would you describe your parents' ethnicity?

How would you describe your social class?

How would you describe your parents' social class?

Case code

Your health and access to education

Do you have any long-term illness or medical condition?

Would you need any facilities or equipment to help you access the college building or study materials?

Would you describe yourself as having a disability?

Your educational background

State
Fee- paying.....

Primary school (age ____ to age ____)

Name of the school

Town and country

Secondary school (age ____ to age ____)

Name of the school

Town and country

Qualifications at age 16

Did you take any exams at age 16? **YES /NO**

If YES, which ones?

Subjects you passed

Subjects you tried

After compulsory education

Have you taken any courses after leaving compulsory school? **YES/NO**

If you have, please tell us what kind of courses have you taken

Did you gain a qualification (for example NVQ or A-levels)?

Ever went to school abroad?

Some of you might have attended school or college outside the UK.

If you did, what kind of school did you attended?

What was the language used at school?

Your life now

Are you working alongside your studies at the moment?

Did you give up employment to become a student again?

What kind of living arrangement have you found for the academic year? _____

Are you married? **YES/NO**

Are you cohabiting with an unmarried partner? **YES/NO**

Have you got children? **YES/ NO**

If yes, please tell us a bit about them

Case code
Your parents' education and jobs**Which of these types of schools your parents attended?** (Tick all boxes that apply)

Father			Mother		
	State	Fee-paying		State	Fee-paying
Primary			Primary		
Secondary			Secondary		
College			College		
University			University		

Do your parents have qualifications? (Please list all qualifications you know they have)Father _____
Mother __________
_____**What are you parents doing for living at the moment?**Father _____
Mother _____If one or both of your parents is **retired, unemployed or a homemaker**, please describe what was their last job.Father _____
Mother _____Many thanks for filling in this questionnaire.
See you in the interview.

Sample interview schedule

This is a sample interview schedule from a study. Are there questions on here that it may be useful for us to adopt? ¹

Schooling

What were your early experiences of schooling?

Did you enjoy school?

What did you like most about school? What did you like least about school?

What was/were your favourite subject(s)? Why?

Were there any subjects that you did not like? Why?

Do you have any memories of school life that stand out in particular?

What do you remember about your school friendships?

What were your parents' attitudes towards your education?

How would you describe yourself as a pupil at school?

How do you think your teachers would have described you?

How did this affect your feelings about school?

What kinds of relationships do you remember having with your teachers?

What were your hopes and aspirations?

Did you plan to stay on in education after you finished school?

Life after school

What did you do after you left compulsory schooling?

- Did you find the transition from school (to work, further education, etc) smooth or difficult? Explain.
- What kinds of memories do you have of this stage in your life?
- Would you describe it as a positive time in your life? Why/why not?
- Did you stay in touch with your school friends?
- Did you make new friendships? Tell me a bit about this.

¹ Original reference for this study mislaid.

- If you continued on in education, what led you to choose the course you did? What are your memories of that educational experience? What did you hope to gain from that learning?
- What were your attitudes to learning and education during this period in your life?
- What significant events stand out in your memory during this stage in your life?

Turning Points: Decisions to Participate in Education

What led you to decide to enrol on this course?

- Did you make the decision on your own or did others advise you (e.g. friends, parents, college staff, etc)?
- Why did you choose to study at this particular college/university?
- Did you consider any other courses? Did you consider any other colleges/universities? Why did you decide against these in the end?
- Did you have any doubts about taking this course? If so, what were they?
- How did significant others feel about your decision to enrol on this course?
- Do you think that your self-expectations have changed in any ways?
- What do you hope to gain from taking this course?
- Do you have any specific goals for future study and/or employment?
- What concerns do you have about the course?
- Do you have any worries in relation to yourself as a learner (e.g. study skills, time management, comprehension, academic writing, etc)

Transitions and Adjustments: Induction to student life

What was it like when you first approached the college?

- What kinds of adjustments have you had to make in your everyday life in order to participate in this course?
- How do you feel about being in a classroom again?
- What is it like to be a part of a group of students?
- Do you feel part of the college/university community?

- If so, what has helped you to feel a part? If not, what has made you feel outside of that community?
- Have you had a chance to meet/socialise with the other students on the course/in the college?
- What is the college/university environment like? What aspects of it do you like? Dislike? Why?
- Are there any support services in the college that you use (e.g. study skills, workshops, tutorials, mentoring, student welfare office, etc)?
- Do you find these services useful?
- In what ways, do you think these services could be improved?
- Are there any main hurdles you feel you need to overcome in order to complete your course?

Experiences and Relationships

What are you enjoying most about your course? What are you enjoying least?

- Do you feel treated as a respected and active member of the classroom? Of the College?
- Describe your relationship with tutors and other staff. Describe your relationship with other students.
- Does this course feel different to your experience of schooling? Explain.
- How do you feel about the teaching methods? Assessment? Coursework?
- Have your relationships (with friends, family, etc) outside of college been affected in any ways? Explain.
- How do you manage learning and other responsibilities and commitments?
- So far, has learning interfered with other aspects of your life? Has it enhanced other aspects of your life in any ways?
- Have your attitudes/perspectives/values changed in any ways since you came to college? Have your self-expectations changed?
- Has participating in the course changed your life in any ways?
- Has it caused any difficulties for you (e.g. financially, personal relationships, work, etc)?
- Summarise the significance of learning for your life.

Figure 4 Map to record geographic distance of people in the household network

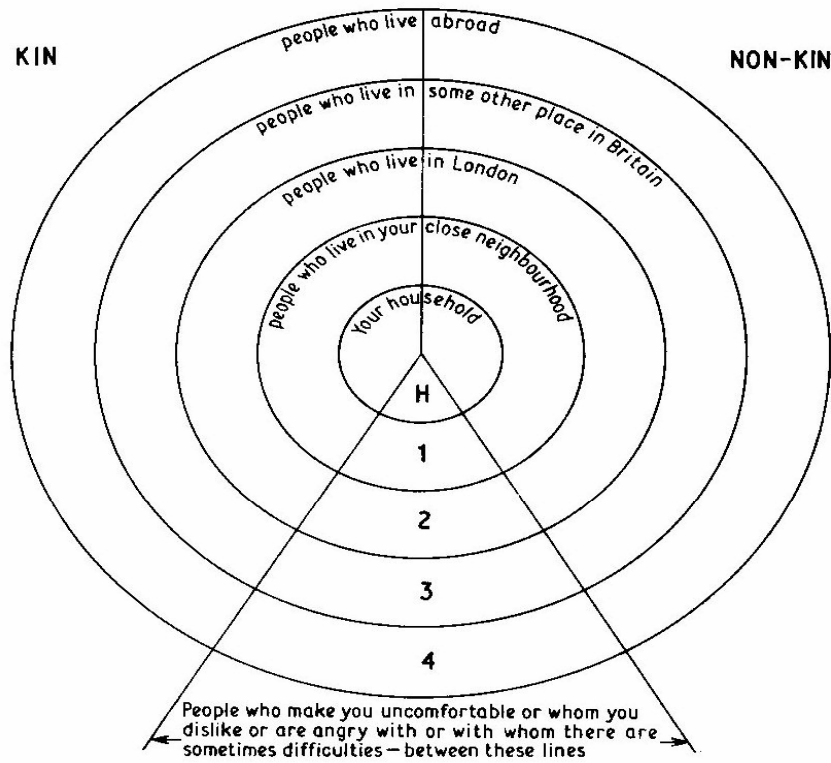
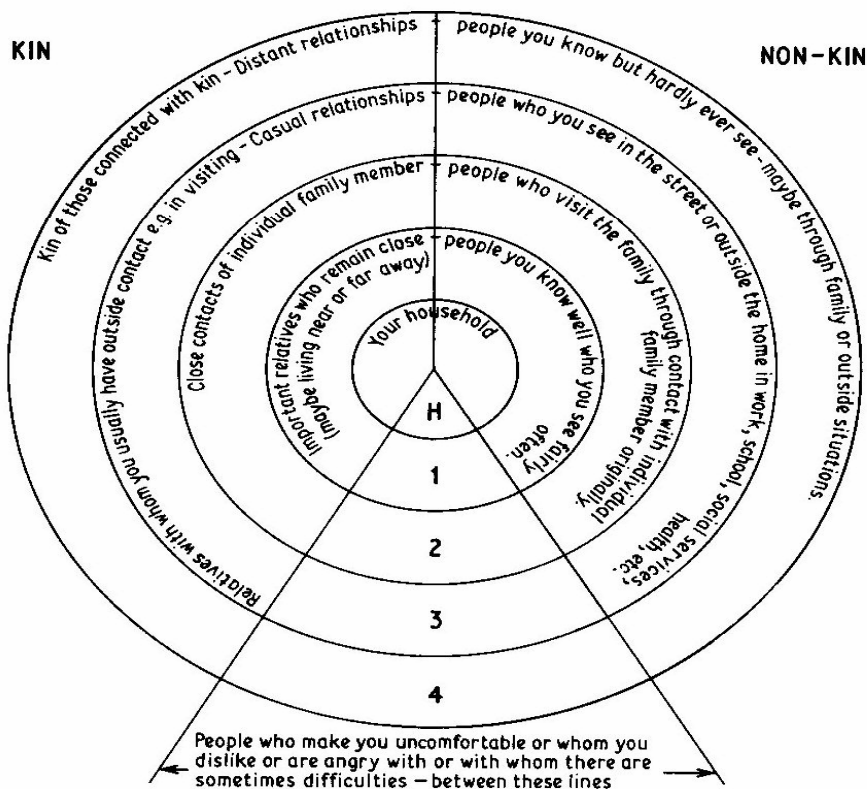


Figure 5 Map to record affective distance of people in the household network



These network diagrams are taken from Wallman (1984).

The first diagram gets at significant others and geographic distance while the second gets at affective meaning etc.

We could use this pie slice idea to get people to talk about relationships which are influential which are with people who are difficult. This could be an elicitation tool in the first interview with case study entry points. We would need to devise our own network diagram according to our needs.

Job histories

Could something like this be useful for an educational history for us?

Job history of Given by: self partner other

Name of job	Short description: what was it like?	How did you get the job? Who helped?	Where was it? How far away?	How long and what dates were you there?	Why did you leave it?	What else was happening around the time you left?