

INTRODUCTION

The Timescapes consortium has, as one of its main goals, cultivating social researchers' capacity for engaging qualitatively with time. Its core work programme is substantially focused on developing Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) methodology and showcasing the value of QL research; hence all Timescapes projects have generated and analysed multiple waves of data in and through time.

Timescapes is a broad church harbouring a diversity of analytical perspectives and methods in its pursuit of textural and temporal knowledge. In fact, Timescapes shares a many of its defining priorities and interests with other inquiry traditions within qualitative, interpretive social science - such as narrative (Squire, 2008). Therefore it should be no surprise at all to find some striking areas where synergies exist between them. In the case of narrative, there is considerable knowledge to be mined, for example, about the roles played by text and time in the ordering of lives; how to construct knowledge that is capable of illuminating the vital processes and meanings in everyday life; and principles and practices of qualitative analysis for exploring people's accounts of their personal experiences of time and change.

This guide charts some of the analytical strategies and techniques that have been developed by one of the Timescapes' project teams - the men as fathers (MaF) project - so that it is capable of exploring the meaning of qualitative, temporal data on men's transitions to fatherhood. It foregrounds some of the ways in which the project has innovatively and synergistically adopted narrative and psychosocial sensibilities for studying the personal and cultural significance of men's accounts and how they live out their lives and relationships with others in changing times. Complementing other guides in the series (see methods guides no 4, 6 and 13) the guide explores the generation and analysis of temporal case history narratives to generate psychosocial insight, and the use of historical and contemporary images as visual narratives as a supplementary technique for extending temporal horizons (see guide no. 4).

KEY POINTS

- Useful synergies exist between Timescapes and other research approaches such as narrative, and awareness of this can help promote strategies for creating textural and temporal knowledge.
- A range of analytics is needed, capable of mining the significance of patterns discerned in the data and their relevance for inquiring into social and policy issues.
- Generating QL case histories and conducting a narrative psychosocial analysis is a useful means for researching intergenerational transmission.
- The analysis of visual narratives provides important psychosocial insights, in this case into paternal subjectivity.

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Researching Lives
Through Time:
Analytics, Narratives &
the Psychosocial
*Karen Henwood &
Carrie Coltart*



SERIES EDITORS
*Bren Neale &
Karen Henwood*

BACKGROUND

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The Timescapes network is committed to building a dynamic, processual approach to enquiry capable of grasping the qualitative, temporal dimensions of personal and social experience and elucidating “change in the making”. A central premise is that there is unique potential within such an approach for illuminating the intricate temporal processes by which people’s lives unfold and the ways in which they make their life journeys. What is required is a strong empirical focus using QL designs so that it is possible to track both continuities and changes in people’s lived experiences and life circumstances. Alongside this a range of analytics is needed, capable of mining the significance of patterns discerned in the data and their relevance for inquiring into social and policy issues.

A set of published Timescapes papers (Edwards and Irwin, 2010) has showcased the value of Timescapes research strategies for investigating how people’s lives have been affected by living through the economic downturn. One paper (Edwards and Weller, 2010) approached the life journey theme as inviting questions about the structural conditions underpinning the choices made by young people. By attending to both continuities and changes in lived experiences and life circumstances, the research was able to elucidate how young people’s pathways into adulthood are not simply changed or fractured by living through economic recession but reflect particular sets of conditions embedded in pre-existing trajectories.

Timescapes’ disciplinary impact could be held to lie primarily in the ways its temporal and textural strategies can bring the sociological study of the lifecourse, identities and family relationships to life. This is where close synergies can be perceived with narrative inquiry. With its routes back to philosophical traditions such as hermeneutics (e.g. of Paul Ricoeur), narrative inquiry explicates the importance of grasping the “storying” of lives (see methods guide no. 6) or point of temporal meanings for deepening understanding of the telling and living of lives. Hermeneutics explains the significance of the way words unfold in sentences, and sentences in discourses, as reaching beyond the narrative itself (Simms, 2003). Hence the point in listening to/reading someone’s written or spoken narrative is its referentiality to human life. As a field of inquiry, narrative also seeks to meet difficult epistemological challenges and interpretive complexities such as those to do with linking real temporal orderings and their textual representation, and considering whether researchers’ or participants’ tellings are the ‘real’ story.

Within Timescapes, the value of adopting a narrative sensibility to the analysis of personal accounts in and through time is recognised as a way of creating a more nuanced picture, a ‘textured’ understanding, of the dynamic

ways in which people experience continuities and changes in their lives. For example, in our own project, by studying fathers’ narrative accounts, we have been able to study how participants interpret changes in their relationships, identities and lives as they enter parenthood, and how they understand and negotiate masculinities, fatherhood and risk across biographical, generational and historical time.

Another value of studying the kinds of stories told by family members and how they change over time lies in insights gained into the way present experiences are recounted, highlighting unresolved legacies of past events (Thomson *et al*, 2010). The MaF and Dynamics of Motherhood projects carry narrative sensibilities within their analytic work as a means of studying cultural transformations in, and the psychosocial configuration of, parenting subjectivities.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PRACTICE

..... **Psychosocial Research within the MaF Study**

The MaF project has been studying continuities and changes in the lived experiences of men who become fathers, and their sense-making about this major life transition, drawing upon QL interviews on life story/ biographical themes that have been conducted over the short and long term. Deploying and developing well-honed techniques of qualitative thematic analysis (Charmaz and Henwood, 2008), we have utilised the potentials of QL study to allow for a consideration of changes over time and explored time as a vehicle and topic of analysis (see methods guide no. 4).



Additionally, we have adopted a psychosocial approach to study the formation of paternal subjectivities in changing socio-cultural contexts (Finn and Henwood, 2009; Henwood and Finn, 2010). Psychosocial research eschews

sociological determinism and psychological essentialism by considering the importance of the culturally available (discursive) resources people draw upon, and the emotional investments they make in identificatory/imaginary positions, as they narrate their life stories and account for their lived experiences. These psychosocial sensibilities lie behind our analytic focus on men's identificatory positions/imaginings, helping us to plumb the depths of everyday meaning making in ways that reach beyond the surface of accounts to what cannot easily be said (Frosh, 2001, also see methods guide no. 3). Our particular trajectory of psychosocially and narratively informed work is showcased here as we explain our evolving investigations into the relationships between men's responses to the positions made available by the 'new' or modern father discourse and discontinuities across generations.

Analysing Identificatory Dynamics: Putting Psychosocial Principles into Practice

Our psychosocial research has involved reading men's narratives for the imagined identifications they adopt in making sense of their lived experiences within their social and cultural milieu (situated encounters and cultural inscriptions), and as they accounted for themselves and their conduct in relationships with others. We have been concerned with investigating the ways in which their identificatory imaginings, along with their aspirations for and reflections on the doings of fatherhood, are assembled through a dynamic nexus of personal and social energised forces. This follows our assumption that "identificatory imaginings [are] made, driven and transfigured through the energised personal and social forces that assemble a set of relations and hence subjectivity in a particular way" (Finn and Henwood, 2009: 38). In our study such assemblages include: inter-subjective intergenerational transmissions, current relational dynamics (between men and the significant others with whom their lives are linked) and hegemonic (viz culturally dominant or most popular) constructions of masculinity.

Our analytical work has enabled us to elucidate a number of important facets of identity, affect, relational (dis)connections and temporal dynamics operating within the (aforementioned) cultural and personal nexus to bring about the psychosocial configuration of men and fathers. In particular, we have identified how men are incited to disconnect their own fathering from the previous generation by contemporary discourses of the 'new' or modern father which depict the traditional father as overly authoritative, unyielding and emotionally distant. We have also considered how our participants' identifications with more caring, emotionally expressive, involved models of fathering are affectively charged (or freighted) because they are carried through childhood memories, as reconstructed in the present, and convey a sense of 'lack' in the men's relations with their fathers.

These insights do not simply develop specialist knowledge within the psychosocial domain but speak to a number of wider academic and social policy literatures, especially those on changing masculinities and involved fatherhood. They open to scrutiny a complex mix of hegemonic (distant, detached) and non-hegemonic (expressive, caring) masculinities, and put into question arguments about the new father construct that simply celebrate new fatherhood for instantiating a progressive form of masculinity or dismiss it as a cultural fallacy. Moreover, in showing the need for a more nuanced (temporal, contextual and depth) approach capable of illuminating the dynamics of paternal subjectivity, our psychosocial work underscores Timescapes' commitments to understanding the dynamic ways in which people live out their personal lives and unpacking processes of change in the making.

Researching Inter-Generational Transmissions: A Psychosocial and Narrative Analysis of QL Case Histories

In taking this work forward, we wanted to continue to stress the constitutive role played by discourse and affective relations in mediating our first time fathers' shifting identifications with modern and traditional models of fathering. But we also knew that we needed to do more to understand the significance of men's intergenerational experiences and (dis)connections in the making of today's men and fathers. Accordingly, we decided to pose further questions about the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions looking, in particular, at the ways in which intergenerational transmissions of classed masculinities can be integral to men's experiences of becoming a father (Coltart and Henwood, 2012).

One reason for focussing upon transmission is the way it enables us to draw attention once more to transformations in fathering between generations, showing how these could follow a non-linear temporal pattern. In our study such transformations included the vexed rejection and replication of inherited (classed) forms of masculinity and ways of practicing fathering. Studying the potential importance of classed paternal transmissions allowed us to investigate how continuities and changes in fathering between generations are experienced and negotiated by fathers in particular biographical, cultural and social locations. Adopting a narrative, psychosocial approach meant that we, as researchers, were able to listen beyond the men's coherent narratives of positively embracing changing gendered and generational relationships and create an investigative focus that attended far more to the tensions, inconsistencies and shifts in the men's accounts. In our analysis, this enabled us to study motherly and affectionate father identifications in the men's narratives and better understand the men's affective investments by situating them within broader flows and trajectories.

The success of our chosen analytic method depended upon the careful selection and construction of QL case

studies and case comparisons; accordingly we used data from two men with analytically interesting differences in their self reported class backgrounds, life experiences and circumstances. Guide 6 provides the background to, and practices for, writing QL case histories, depicting these practices in narrative terms as “storying”. We too have deployed narrative sensibilities (in the ways already described above) and so that we would be able to illuminate the interplay between past, present and future in our interviewees’ narrative accounts. Drawing upon a range of conceptual lenses from the fatherhood and masculinities literature sharpened our thinking about psychosocial dynamics, including ones from the research literature about men’s desires to take flight from forms of masculinity that are troubling in their biographical accounts.

Having conducted our comparative case study analyses, and as a result of this mix of methodological and analytic strategies, we were able to report findings on the influence of the past on the present (classed masculine transmissions and inherited paternal identities) along with the ways in which the present mediates the past (e.g. the ways in which novel experiences, such as caring for a new baby, and ‘new’ socio-cultural and relational contexts can recast inherited paternal identities as a means of seizing new opportunities or to accommodate change). For reasons already discussed, we were able generate a particularly in-depth analytical account of men’s intergenerational experiences by tracing the affective flows within their life story narratives. The longitudinal lens afforded by the study design allowed us to also feature within our analysis fathers’ attempts to reconcile ‘old’ and ‘new’ discourses and identities as they responded to the opportunities, demands and concerns arising out of particular circumstances. Taking this longer term perspective shed further light on the dynamics of continuity and change in fathers’ experiences and subjectivities, especially the ways fathers arrive at particular ‘settlements’ between past, present and future over time.

Time, Change and Multimodality: Visual Study of Historical Narratives

Within Maf a historical narrative of publically available images was presented to our participants before they had become fathers. This enabled discussion of past ways of fathering and aspects of this they would like to continue, while personal images were often preferred later on given their greater significance at this time. In this guide we want to show how this visual technique also reflected our interests in understanding psychosocial aspects of the ways in which our participants came to configure themselves culturally and subjectively as men and as fathers.

Typically discourse analytic methods are used to answer questions about the sense making of cultural subjects, with a more narrative focus bringing into view the dynamic ways in which identities and relationships are experienced and represented in and through biographical time. However, we wanted to engage with arguments about the possible

over-use of methods for inquiring into socially constructed meanings and linguistic practices and getting at the doings and makings of cultural subjects. Should other methods be used to assist people in communicating unsayable experiences via other sensory modalities such as the visual?

Our technique presented interviewees with a sequence of images depicting socio-cultural change in ideals of fatherhood and masculinity over time. Interviewees were invited to comment on each individual image before being presented with the next; as each image appeared in succession the sequence simulated a moving image. Accordingly, the technique can be described as involving a narratively organised set of images, presented in visual mode, of time and change in fatherhood ideals. Our analytical focus has been on the different ways in which the men spoke of identifying with, reconfiguring or resisting the temporal and socio-cultural flow of changing representations of paternal identity. In this way we were able to address the processes by which they constituted themselves in ways that were complexly temporal.



For some men, the technique proved valuable for enabling them to make temporal comparisons more easily than they were otherwise able to do. It also allowed them to reconfigure their thoughts about fatherhood and re-represent themselves in relation to the flow of the images. By speaking in this way, our participants could articulate their shifting and coexisting identifications with traditional and modern ideas of masculinity and fatherhood, which was important to our psychosocial inquiries into paternal subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

QL study is important for putting the significance of time and temporality in people's lives at the heart of empirical, interpretive social science. It is a means of tracking continuities and changes in lived experiences in and through time, a basis for discerning shifting patterns of relationships in what matters to study participants, and facilitates the creation of analytical insights on themes of substantive importance that unfold and change over time. In writing this guide we have brought into view some different, complementary, analytical strategies (temporal, narrative, psychosocial), and documented how they have enabled us to develop our contributions to studying fathers' accounts of their lived experiences, especially their formation as subjects in and through time. In so doing we have noted the development of innovative techniques such as the use of visual narratives for studying the dynamic (continuous and changing) multimodal constitution of masculine identity and paternal subjectivity. By reporting on our substantive, methodological and analytical insights in a non-reductionist way, we hope to have distinguished our own narratively informed QL approach from ones that use waves of data simply to fill in gaps in people's narration of past events. Our intention has been to show how it is possible to study questions pertaining to the way experiences, life circumstances and meaning making unfold and the transformation of subjectivities over time, and to stress the importance of researching how cultural subjects are embedded in the (multiple) flows of time.

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RESEARCH TEAM

Professor Karen Henwood | henwoodk@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Carrie Coltart, Research Associate | coltartc@cf.ac.uk

Cardiff University School of Social Sciences
Glamorgan Building
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff, CF10 3WT