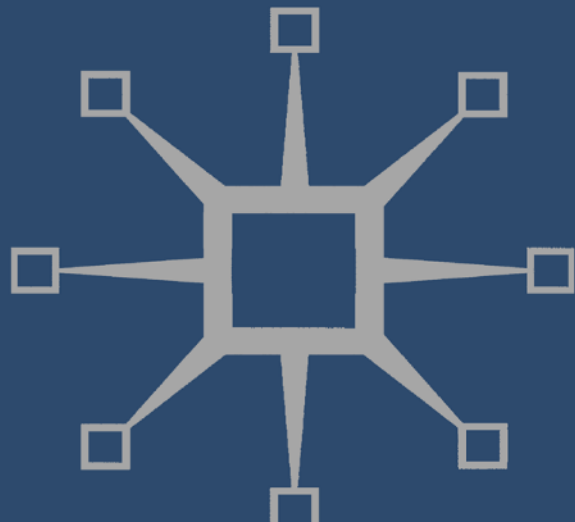


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Reflections on Process

Edited By
Lynn Jamieson
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Reflections on Process

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20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11

Contents

<i>List of Figure and Table</i>	ix
<i>Foreword</i>	x
<i>Series Editors Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Contributors' Biographies</i>	xvi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
<i>Lynn Jamieson, Roona Simpson and Ruth Lewis</i>	
Why a book on researching families and relationships?	3
Issues and debates	5
How to navigate this book	15
Chapter 2 Framing Relationships and Families	19
<i>David H. J. Morgan</i>	
Researching men's same-sex relationships in a socially-excluding context: The case of Nigeria	31
<i>Dan Allman</i>	
Researching social attitudes towards families and relationships	34
<i>Fran Wasoff</i>	
When a family is not a 'family': The value of confusion in cross-cultural research	36
<i>Ingela Naumann</i>	
Losing (my) autonomy under the ethical committee's gaze	40
<i>Sarah Wilson</i>	
Where is the care? Conceptualising and researching families' responsibilities and work in a survey	43
<i>Linda McKie and Andrew Smith</i>	
Chapter 3 Engaging with Families and Relationships	46
<i>Kay Tisdall</i>	
Unfamiliar places and other people's spaces: Reflections on the practical challenges of researching families in their homes	56
<i>Alice MacLean</i>	

Researching children and families in schools <i>Jenny Spratt</i>	58
Hanging about and hanging in there: Dilemmas in managing research relationships with young people <i>Kate Philip</i>	61
Dad said 'she won't talk' ... but he does: Messy realities of negotiating access to children through parental gatekeepers <i>Louise Hill</i>	65
See no evil, hear no evil: Do children in distress take second place? <i>Sarah Nelson</i>	67
Chapter 4 In the Field: Research Relationships <i>Angus Bancroft</i>	71
Only nodding and smiling: Reflections on feelings of complicity in interviewing <i>Andrew Bell</i>	83
'I don't know where to put myself': The boundaries of researcher roles and responsibilities <i>Gill Highet</i>	85
Performing secrecy: Maintaining the hidden identity of research informants in public <i>Jennifer Speirs</i>	87
Keeping it in the family: Conducting research interviews with your own family members <i>Julie Seymour</i>	90
Is there a place for physical engagement in the adult researcher-child participant research relationship? <i>Sue Milne</i>	92
Chapter 5 Time and Place: In and Beyond 'the Field' <i>Stuart C. Aitken</i>	96
Second best? Raising the status of telephone interviewing in research <i>Emma Davidson</i>	109
'I can't share that with you yet': The line between protecting premature research findings and being a cooperative colleague <i>Gina Nowak</i>	111
Making it through the night – the experience and impact of doing research on night-time care <i>Heather Wilkinson</i>	114

The uncomfortable context: Reflections on time and space when researching young people's experiences of parental substance misuse <i>Kathrin Houmøller and Sarah Bernays</i>	117
Feeling at home: Researching children's experiences of residential care <i>Susan Elsley</i>	119
Chapter 6 Interpreting and Representing Families and Relationships <i>Lynn Jamieson</i>	122
'The things children say': Understanding children as narrators of their lives <i>Allison James</i>	135
The emotional impacts of working with sensitive secondary data <i>Sharon Jackson, Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Elinor Newall</i>	138
Hearing men changed my mind but it is still a feminist issue! <i>Sue Kelly</i>	141
Using mixed methods to research families and relationships <i>Vanessa May</i>	143
Making sense of family resemblance: The politics of visual perception <i>Katherine Davies</i>	146
Chapter 7 What Happens Next? Getting Research into Policy and Practice <i>Sarah Morton and Sandra Nutley</i>	150
Sharing slippery knowledge – handling the unintended impact of knowledge exchange <i>Heather Wilkinson</i>	163
The process of editing from academic to 'real world' language <i>Jennifer Flueckiger</i>	167
Dissemination – 'sounds painful!': Experiences in a dedicated Knowledge Exchange role on a Government survey <i>Lesley Kelly</i>	170
Construing or misconstruing families in research and media <i>Valeria Skafida</i>	172
Communicating Edinburgh City Council's Annual Neighbourhood Survey <i>David Porteous</i>	175

Chapter 8 Conclusion	178
Pains and pleasures	178
Reflections on process	179
The future of families and relationships research	185
<i>References</i>	189
<i>Index</i>	202

List of Figure and Table

Figure 7.1	The many active players in policy networks	153
Table 7.1	Additional knowledge exchange activities and formats	164

Foreword

The research process is fundamentally about relationships, whether negotiated directly, for example, through face-to-face interaction or indirectly, for example, through mailed questionnaires. All of us engaged in empirical work know and experience this and, over the past few decades, writings have been produced that reveal and unpick the sometimes uncomfortable realities of doing research. And certainly, each new generation of researchers must feel free to do this too, adding to the 'how to' methods texts with thoughtful exposes of what it is really like to be out there, studying other people's lives and reporting on it. Honesty and integrity demand such reflection, for how otherwise can we judge our knowledge claims and move our understandings and theory-making forward? However, it is certainly a challenging task to produce a book of reflections on the research process without simply replicating what has gone before, albeit with different authors and different research studies. This collection rises to this challenge in a number of ways.

Firstly, the book brings together personal, reflexive pieces from over 40 scholars doing research on intimate, personal and family relationships. This is indicative of an inclusive approach to scholarship and debate. Many contributors are early career researchers and all are helping to move social scientific research on families and relationships forward methodologically and conceptually. Key areas that stand out are the attentions to space, place and time, emotions and the senses, multiple perspectives and the manner of framings. The latter may be influenced by the macro and micro contexts within which research takes place, such as the role of gatekeepers or other stakeholders, but also a researcher's own theoretical or personal standpoints and experiences. Such an array of contributions provides extensive reach; many issues can be addressed, reflecting the experiences of individual researchers and also how these link to wider concerns about how we can understand families and relationships. This might lead to lack of coherence but the contributions are not put together in a haphazard way.

Secondly, the book takes seriously all aspects of the research process and this gives it a structure that helps to bring out key themes from the contributions. These are elegantly brought together in insightful introductory pieces to each chapter. These do more than introduce the sub-

sequent researcher narratives; they draw from them to advance our thinking in the field of families and relationships research. So, as a reader, one is able to draw insight both from the raw immediacy of the researcher accounts – accounts that at times bring you right there into the field with the researcher, making you too stop and think and reflect – and from the carefully crafted ‘think pieces’ which precede them. The necessity of taking a linear approach to the research trajectory is done with a light touch, and the book moves from initial framings, relationships with research participants and other relevant actors, research spaces and places, analysis and interpretation and, unusually, dissemination and communication. As the editors themselves note in their introduction, the contributions could have been presented in different ways, but cross referencing and a neatly constructed introduction and conclusion, brings out important cross-cutting themes.

Thirdly, the book is about relationships, but not just research relationships. The substantive focus is entirely on families and relationships and the contributions reflect this in all its complexity and diversity – from understanding children’s experiences of family and friendships through to older people’s care settings and so much more. Relationships are then both a topic and resource; the intimate and personal relationships that are the subject matter of the studies reflected upon here are only revealed and understood through the relationships that are embedded in the research process itself. Of course, this means that other families and relationships scholars will have particular interest in the contributions as there is something distinct about doing research on families and relationships. However, the particular insights that can be generated by the intertwining of subject matter, research subjects, researcher subjectivity and research relationships and the reflexivity this demands, means that the book will have wider resonance in the social science research community.

Fourthly, the book brings together accounts from researchers engaged in very different projects, using different methods. This juxtaposition of diverse methods, from, for example, the use of survey questions through to analysis of narrative summaries of telephone helpline calls, and much face-to-face research too, serves to underline the importance of research relationships no matter how seemingly distant these are. The contributors, in different ways, had unique access to the worlds of others, described by some as a privilege and a position taken lightly by none. This sense of responsibility is, at times, palpable, as researchers strive to do the right thing when faced with particularly difficult situations. It is also ubiquitous as they contend with the wider contexts within which

their research is conducted and received and the challenges of making sense of the messy world of families and relationships.

There are many reflexive moments in the contributions that reveal starkly our research and intellectual dilemmas. Be ready to be challenged about the research process, the social worlds you inhabit, including personal and academic life, and about how we can come to know the social worlds of others, especially their families and relationships. This book demonstrates clearly that, as researchers, we are not isolated in ivory towers, but politically engaged social actors with the keenly felt responsibilities that engaging with the lives of others demands.

The editors said they wanted the book to bring together ‘the things that researchers regularly talk to each other about but which are often conspicuously absent from the usual methods texts’. This book is testament to the high quality of those conversations and the willingness of those researchers, some in precarious employment situations, to develop these into text for others to learn from. As one of the founding co-directors of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), I am delighted to introduce the reader to this insightful volume and proud of my colleagues, new and established, who collectively came together to formalise the informal and make sense of their experiences reflexively. I hope we can look forward to a second volume, perhaps one that focuses even more on the hidden world of analysis, the increasingly important world of research impact as well as the new intellectual and methodological challenges that the terrain of families and relationships and social change bring.

Sarah Cunningham-Burley
Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
The University of Edinburgh

Series Editors Preface

The remit of the *Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life* series is to publish major texts, monographs and edited collections focusing broadly on the sociological exploration of intimate relationships and family organisation. As editors we think such a series is timely. Expectations, commitments and practices have changed significantly in intimate relationship and family life in recent decades. This is very apparent in patterns of family formation and dissolution, demonstrated by trends in cohabitation, marriage and divorce. Changes in household living patterns over the last 20 years have also been marked, with more people living alone, adult children living longer in the parental home, and more 'non-family' households being formed. Furthermore, there have been important shifts in the ways people construct intimate relationships. There are few comfortable certainties about the best ways of being a family man or woman, with once conventional gender roles no longer being widely accepted. The normative connection between sexual relationships and marriage or marriage-like relationships is also less powerful than it once was. Not only is greater sexual experimentation accepted, but it is now accepted at an earlier age. Moreover heterosexuality is no longer the only mode of sexual relationship given legitimacy. In Britain as elsewhere, gay male and lesbian partnerships are now socially and legally endorsed to a degree hardly imaginable in the mid-twentieth century. Increases in lone-parent families, the rapid growth of different types of stepfamily, the de-stigmatization of births outside marriage, and the rise in couples 'living-apart-together' (LATs) all provide further examples of the ways that 'being a couple', 'being a parent' and 'being a family' have diversified in recent years.

The fact that change in family life and intimate relationships has been so pervasive has resulted in renewed research interest from sociologists and other scholars. Increasing amounts of public funding have been directed to family research in recent years, in terms of both individual projects and the creation of family research centres of different hues. This research activity has been accompanied by the publication of some very important and influential books exploring different aspects of shifting family experience, in Britain and elsewhere. The *Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life* series hopes to add to this list of influential research-based texts, thereby contributing to existing

knowledge and informing current debates. Our main audience consists of academics and advanced students, though we intend that the books in the series will be accessible to a more general readership who wish to understand better the changing nature of contemporary family life and personal relationships.

We see the remit of the series as wide. The concept of 'family and intimate life' will be interpreted in a broad fashion. While the focus of the series will clearly be sociological, we take family and intimacy as being inclusive rather than exclusive. The series will cover a range of topics concerned with family practices and experiences, including, for example, partnership; marriage; parenting; domestic arrangements; kinship; demographic change; intergenerational ties; life course transitions; step-families; gay and lesbian relationships; lone-parent households; and also non-familial intimate relationships such as friendships. We also wish to foster comparative research, as well as research on understudied populations. The series will include different forms of book. Most will be theoretical or empirical monographs on particular substantive topics, though some may also have a strong methodological focus. In addition, we see edited collections as also falling within the series' remit, as well as translations of significant publications in other languages. Finally we intend that the series has an international appeal, in terms of both topics covered and authorship. Our goal is for the series to provide a forum for family sociologists conducting research in various societies, and not solely in Britain.

Graham Allan, Lynn Jamieson and David Morgan

Acknowledgements

The idea for this book took shape over the course of several conversations, and we would like to thank Caroline King and Eric Chen for their crucial contributions in the early stages. We are also grateful to Nina Hallowell for her advice on the practicalities of coordinating a book with so many contributors.

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Susan Elsley runs her own independent consultancy in children's rights, policy and research and is also a part-time Senior Research Fellow at CRFR at the University of Edinburgh. Susan's interests centre on children's rights and participation, looked after children and young people and advocacy and well-being. Much of her work focuses on the interface between policy, research and practice and builds on her experience across these areas. She has worked extensively in the voluntary sector and has undertaken a wide range of cross-sectoral projects.

Jennifer Flueckiger is Communications and Knowledge Exchange Coordinator at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh. Jennifer graduated from Mount Holyoke College in the United States and has an MSc in Public Policy from the University of Edinburgh. Before joining CRFR, she held policy and communication posts at a number of national voluntary organisations in the UK and Australia. She has done research on the impact of the implementation of the minimum wage in Scotland and been involved in campaigns on issues ranging from welfare reform to bank branch closures.

Gill Hight has worked on many qualitative studies spanning several substantive areas, in particular, family and relationships research, tobacco control research and most recently, healthcare services research. Her current post has explored the role of primary care in providing follow-up care for lung cancer patients. In her forthcoming post with Lothian NHS and Edinburgh University she is joining a palliative care research team which will identify patients before discharge from hospital and assess and plan their supportive and palliative care needs. Gill has experience in a wide range of qualitative methods and is particularly interested in methodological innovation in qualitative research.

Louise Hill is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Learning in Child Protection, University of Edinburgh and NSPCC. Louise's doctoral research explored children and young people's experiences and support needs when affected by parental alcohol problems. This study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as a CASE award with Barnardo's childcare organisation. Louise has a keen interest in developing participatory research approaches with children and young people and a strong commitment to connecting research, policy and practice.

Kathrin Houmøller is a PhD Fellow at the Section for Anthropology and Ethnography at Aarhus University. She has previously carried out research in East Africa on reproductive health and from 2008–2010 she worked at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on a research project exploring children and young people's experiences of parental substance misuse. She is currently carrying out ethnographic research on family life and HIV and AIDS in a South African township.

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Sue Kelly is a freelance training and research consultant. Sue's overall research interests lie in the relationship between private lives and public policy and the significance of context to the negotiation of and truth about personal relationships. During and since receiving her PhD in 2007, Sue has been involved in various teaching and research activities within academic and non-academic settings. Her PhD involved a critical study of the cohabitation rule in UK social security law. Her findings had important family as well as social security implications. Sue is currently conducting a qualitative study of the use of Wellness Recovery Action Planning with carers.

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Linda McKie is Professor of Sociology, Glasgow Caledonian University and Associate Director, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh. In 2004 she was elected to the Academy of Social Sciences. In addition to teaching courses on families, social theory, work, and research methods she co-ordinates a research programme on organisations, work and care. Linda has strong links with a range of charities and is a trustee for Evaluation Support Scotland and the Institute of Rural Health. In 2009 she qualified as a Certified Member of the Institute of Fundraising.

Sue Milne has 30 years' experience of working with children, young people and their families in a range of educational, health and community settings. Her PhD explored children's experiences and conceptualisations of child-adult relations within, and beyond, their families. Other research projects with children and young people include consultation on local authority services, an examination of pupil councils in schools across Scotland and currently children's views of their adult volunteer befrienders and young people's experiences of attending a personal development programme. Sue has also held a Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship. Her primary interests are child-adult relations, child/adult worlds and children's rights, participation and play.

David Morgan taught Sociology at Manchester University for over 35 years and has also been a Visiting Professor at the Norwegian Technological University, Trondheim and Keele University. Publications include *Family Connections* (1996) and *Acquaintances: The Space between Intimates and Strangers* (2009). He has just completed *Family Practices Revisited* to be published by Palgrave. He is also a former President of the British Sociological Association.

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