

Intergenerational relationships and inequality: methodological and theoretical issues

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Life course perspective

Alerts us to

- Scheduling of social transitions and construction of trajectories
- Historical contexts in which life course unfolds
- Linked lives
- Dynamism of ‘outcomes’

Paradox

- More attention to stratification and destandardisation of the life course
- Less attention to how temporal changes influence pathways and identities

Transmission of resources across family generations

- Within families, not only between families
- What is transmitted
- What is received
- What is acted upon

Transmission as relationships

- Repeating difficulties
- Emotional ambivalence
- Love
- Forms of communication

Transmission not articulated

Ambivalences across the generations

- Structural,
- Interactional,
- Emotional

Social mobility has variable implications for relationships across family generations

Transmission: disruption

- Events – predictable or unpredictable, some wished for and some not
- Critical moments or turning points lead to new meanings and actions
- Turning points as a conceptual bridge between subjectivity and social conditions

Methodological approach

- A biographic-narrative approach
- Linkage between unique and collective
- Approach more than a method-challenges meta narratives

A biographic-narrative approach

- Narrator at centre
 - Narration governed by need to
 - condense story to important events
 - demonstrate their significance
 - provide detail
- Stories as intergenerational transmission

Interpretation

Paying attention to temporality

- Biographical historical context of interviewees' lives
- Narrative context: how stories about the past are told, meanings made in present time, with an eye to the future

An intergenerational study

- ESRC study of changes in fatherhood over 3 generations
- The influence of migration on fatherhood
- 30 chains of grandfathers, fathers and sons
- Life story/ biographic-narrative interview

The ‘middle years’ – parent and adult child relationships

- How migration interrupts or changes patterns of transmission
- The negotiation of intergenerational inequalities in context of increased longevity

Connor (GF) & Murray (F): Life course

- 1933 born Dublin; 7th child; orphaned at 2; institutional care; no qualifications
- 1958-61 1st migration
- 1960 2nd migration
- Construction worker; promoted to foreman and then site manager
- 1970 born London; 3rd of 3; attended RC schools; GCSEs
- 1987 1st job in insurance firm
- 1991 aged 21, trader on London Stock Exchange

Connor: Life story

- Distancing and downplaying of series of disasters
- Dramatic build up of story suggestive of a reversal of fortunes
- Performative quality and narrative skill

Connor: Life story

- Graphic detail of ‘lucky break’ narratively magnified by contrast with past misfortunes
- Metonym to convey success – company car

Murray: Life story

- Antithesis of father's story
- Use of metonym – to convey his childhood and his life in the financial world
- Similarity in narrative – drama and performativity

Connor's story of transmission to Murray

- Sought to pass on strong work ethic rejected by Murray
- Connor reports inability to pass on fathering practices to son; left childrearing to wife
- Passed on 'luck' and 'what I had of myself'

Murray's story of transmission from his father

- Identification with father *as 'sociable Irishman' 'I am nothing without him'*

In conclusion

- Multiple dimensions that create continuity and change across families
- Invisible processes that make for equality and inequality
- How differences are managed

Fathers and Sons: Generations, Families and Migration
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