

3rd European Congress on
Family Science, Vienna 2008
**Multiple lenses in studying
gendered families**
Julia Brannen

Thomas Coram Research Unit,
Institute of Education, University
of London

Four perspectives on gendered families

- a generational/ historical perspective
- a global perspective
- a life course perspective
- a relational perspective

A generational lens

A study of four generation families

- Great grandparents born 1910-31
- Grandparents born 1943-1946
- Parents born 1968-1970

Brannen, J, Moss, P and Mooney, A (2004)
Working and Caring over the Twentieth Century Palgrave Macmillan

Working and Caring over the Twentieth Century

Change and Continuity
in Four Generation Families

Julia Brannen, Peter Moss
and Ann Mooney

The Future of Work Series
General Editor: Peter Nolan

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL



Great grandmother talking about her own mother

My father – it was in the Twenties. Life was very hard, no jobs and all that. So he didn't really have a – any profession. He used to do odd jobs. Until he got a newspaper pitch, and for the rest of time he sold newspapers for a living. ... (My mother) would go down Covent Garden (central London), and ... shell peas down there, peel potatoes for the hotels. You know, like, they do by machine now. And they used to be paid sixpence! Sixpence for - five days, six days a week and get three bob, in shillings. And she used to take in washing. That's how we sort of lived. My mum used to take in washing. We used to go to the public baths, which was just across from where we lived. She used to go in at eight o'clock in the morning, and about eight o'clock at night. ... – a very hard life. But I don't remember her buying anything for herself, new. Ever. Ever. Not until she got old. When you compare that generation to ours, it's like a different world.

Her daughter (who is the grandmother generation) **talking of her own employment**

I always had to work, because (husband) never earned – you know, big money or anything. He was never a big wage-earner. He was always going to work. I always needed to work, but I would only ever do part-time work, and bits and pieces. Freelance work I did, book-keeping, you know, four hours at this firm here, do a bit of – do their wages.

A global lens

Two studies

- A study of organizational change in a bank call centre (Brannen, J 2005 *Time and Society*)
- A seven country comparative (EU funded) study of working parents in private (finance) and public sector (social services)

<http://organizations.www.workliferesearch.org/transitions>

Father in the UK insurance company: (comparative study)

“Most people expect the mother, to take the time off, in general, so it’s probably harder for the men in some ways. Because they probably think, well what’s your wife doing, or what’s your girlfriend doing, why can’t they do it?”

Line manager:

“We are in a team with six people; one is on a four months leave, the other has maternity leave, so you lose a great part of your manpower. And to replace them takes a lot of hassle, or you end up with trainees who finally start to get it after 3 months. When I oversee this situation as a manager, this is very badly solved by the organization”

A life course perspective

A study of childcare workers caring for vulnerable children

Brannen, J, Statham, J, Mooney, A and M
Brockmann, M et al (2007) *Coming to
Care*

Policy Press

COMING TO CARE

The work and family lives of workers
caring for vulnerable children

Julia Brannen, June Statham, Ann Mooney
and Michaela Brockmann

A relational perspective: how children construct and negotiate family life

- Brannen, J, Heptinstall, E and Bhopal, K
Connecting Children Open University
Press

Julia Brannen
Ellen Hepinstall
Kahwan Bhopal

Connecting Children

Care and Family Life
in Later Childhood



Sometimes my mum speaks about her problems to me, her deep inside secrets to me and I understand them ... The problem is that parents should understand children and children should understand parents.
(Zarina, a South Asian girl living with a lone mother)

Conclusions

- A generational lens suggests different pathways of change and continuity across generations among men and women in families
- A global lens shows that responses to organizational change and flexibility are gendered
- A life course lens reveals the ways in which the choice of a work career is shaped, for example the influence of gendered childhoods upon the orientation to care of childcare workers
- A relational lens reveals children's normative views of parental responsibilities as gender free, albeit practices were reported to be different.