

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Sage Journals in Irish Journal of Sociology on 5th December 2016, available online: <https://journals.sagepub.com/> [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0791603516680374>].

Title:

Family rhythms: Re-visioning family change in Ireland using qualitative archived data from Growing Up in Ireland and Life Histories and Social Change.

Authors:

Ruth Geraghty

Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland, Centre for Effective Services, 9 Harcourt St, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Email: rgeraghty@effectiveservices.org

Jane Gray

Department of Sociology, Auxilia Building, North Campus, Maynooth University, Maynooth. Co. Kildare, Ireland.

Email: jane.gray@mu.ie

Published as: Geraghty, R. and Gray, J. (2017) 'Family Rhythms: Re-visioning family change in Ireland using qualitative archived data from Growing Up in Ireland and Life Histories and Social Change', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 25(2), pp. 207–213. doi: [10.1177/0791603516680374](https://doi.org/10.1177/0791603516680374).

Abstract

The Family Rhythms project examined the Irish experience of family life over an extended period of time, in which we traced evolving relationships and practices and against a backdrop of immense social, cultural and economic change, from the early years of the Irish state to the present day. We combined qualitative data from Growing Up in Ireland (Doyle et al., 2008), with Life Histories and Social Change (Gray et al., 2008) to construct a longitudinal, qualitative database with the distinct focus on family relationships. Family Rhythms demonstrated the potential for bringing data from two major, qualitative studies into dialogue to develop new insights into the motives, feelings and rationalities behind Irish people's family practices and experiences in changing social contexts. Combining the data from two unrelated studies presented methodological challenges; namely how to consolidate these data, and how to compare the retrospective life story data with the prospective data. To overcome this, we worked 'forwards' and 'backwards' across the two collections to specify patterns of continuity and change in key dimensions of family relationships. The strengths of this dynamic approach was that we could examine family relationships across an extended timeframe, and from different generational standpoints.

Keywords: qualitative data, family change, archival data, secondary analysis

Background to the Family Rhythms project

Ireland has a distinctive demographic history, and provides an interesting case study given the rapid convergence of the Irish family form to the European and North American norm from the late twentieth century. The Family Rhythms project (2011 – 2012) was a qualitative examination of the Irish experience of family life over an extended period of time, in which we traced evolving relationships and practices and against a backdrop of immense social, cultural and economic change, from the early years of the Irish state to the present day. Our method of investigation was to combine archived qualitative interview data generated by two research studies, namely Life Histories and Social Change (Gray et al., 2008)¹ and the Growing Up in Ireland, wave 1 at 9 years (Doyle et al., 2008)² to construct a longitudinal, qualitative database with the distinct focus on family relationships. The total sample for the Family Rhythms project was 216 qualitative interview cases³ that span an extended period of reference, which stretches from the early years of the newly established Irish Free State, to first decade of the twenty-first century and impending global economic recession.

¹ Gray, J., O Riain, S. and O’Carroll, A. Life Histories and Social Change project [collection], Maynooth. Co. Kildare: Irish Qualitative Data Archive [producer], ID10028. Irish Qualitative Data Archive [distributor]. Full details of this dataset are available at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/iqda/collections/life-histories-and-social-change-collection>

² Doyle, E., Greene, S., McDaid, R., Merriman B., and Williams J. Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland – Wave 1 at 9 Years [collection], Maynooth. Co. Kildare: Irish Qualitative Data Archive [producer], ID10027. Irish Qualitative Data Archive [distributor]. Full details of this dataset are available at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/iqda/collections/growing-ireland-wave-1-9-years>

³ In the GUI collection a single case consists of an interview with a 9-year-old child plus a follow-up interview with the parent(s) of the child, both of which were conducted on the same day, plus the ‘time capsule’ materials including drawings and letters collected in the course of the interview. For more information on the creative interview methods used with the child participants see Harris, Doyle and Greene (2011).

The central aim of Family Rhythms project was to ‘re-vision’ family change in terms of changing rhythms and textures of family life⁴. In this way Family Rhythms is aligned with contemporary theoretical perspectives which seek to re-orientate research away from questions about shared values and attitudes that govern family life, towards questions about the construction of meaning in the everyday practices of ‘doing family’ over time. This change in focus is related, in part, to the emergence of major new sources of longitudinal data that enable researchers to capture family life as a process (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Holland, 2011; Neale et al., 2012; Holland and Edwards, 2014). This approach has allowed researchers to understand how people construct morally inflected understandings of ‘good’ family roles and practices (Shirani et al., 2012) and how variations in moral identities and rationalities emerge amongst different social groups and in different social and historical contexts (Duncan et al., 2003).

The facilities for data sharing and re-use offered by the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA, www.ucd.ie/issda) and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) have strengthened capacity for theorizing the drivers behind demographic and social change in Ireland, in particular where different datasets can be brought into conversation with one another. The

⁴ The Family Rhythms project was funded by the Irish Research Council between 2011 to 2012 and was located at the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis at Maynooth University. The project was a demonstrator and knowledge exchange project for the analysis of archival qualitative research data.

archiving of the qualitative data from the Growing Up in Ireland study in the IQDA in 2010 was an interesting step in linking these two archives, as it was the first collection in the IQDA to be linked to a nationally representative panel study which is held at ISSDA. The Life Histories and Social Change study, which has been archived at the IQDA in batches since 2012, drew its sample of qualitative interview participants from the nationally representative Living in Ireland Survey and is therefore also linked to a nationally representative panel study available through the ISSDA. The following section describes the two data collections that were combined to generate the Family Rhythms database.

Description of the data

Life Histories and Social Change (Gray, O Riain and O'Carroll, 2007)

Life Histories and Social Change (LHSC) is a large collection of qualitative life story interviews with three cohorts of Irish citizens, each of which reached adulthood in the crucial decades of the 1950s (an era of socio-economic decline), the 1970s (an era of initial 'modernisation') and in the 1990s (the 'Celtic Tiger' boom). The collection originated in 2005 from a three-year project, funded from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, to develop an infrastructural database of qualitative life history narratives. From 2006 to 2008 detailed life story interviews were conducted nationwide with a sample of 113 participants who had also participated in all eight waves of the Living in Ireland Survey, which is the Irish component of the European Community Household Panel conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) from 1994 to 2001.

Participants in the LHSC study were purposefully drawn from three birth-cohort years: those born between 1916 to 1934⁵; between 1945 to 1954, and between 1965 to 1974 in order to capture individual life stories of Irish citizens whose lives traversed many social, cultural and economic changes since the foundation of the Irish state. The resulting database is of social-historical value as many interviewees contextualised their own life story in terms of significant political and historical events that were occurring at the same time, and sometimes they recounted first-hand experiences of these events. To date interview transcripts and audio data have been archived at the IQDA ⁶.

Growing Up in Ireland, wave 1 at years collection (Doyle, Greene, McDaid, Merriman and Williams, 2008).

Growing Up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children is a government-funded, panel study of Irish children that was launched in 2006 and is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. The primary aim of the study is to examine the factors that are contributing to, or undermining, well-being for all

⁵ One interviewee was born in 1914 but the transcript was not included in the archived collection as consent to archive was not granted by the study participant.

⁶ Once fully archived, the Life Histories and Social Change database will comprise 100 in-depth life history interviews with three cohorts of respondents drawn from the original sample of 113 life story interviews. Thirteen interviews were excluded from the final archival collection because the interview participant declined having their transcript included in the final archival database, and because in two cases the research team had some doubts about the interview participant's capacity to give fully-informed consent to having their transcript included in the final archival database.

children in Ireland. Growing Up in Ireland provides a rich source of social, economic and developmental research data on a national sample of Irish children, and the project actively encourages the re-use of GUI data in a range of disciplinary contexts. Since 2008 the study has been following the progress of two groups of children, namely a 'Child Cohort' of 8,500 children that were first surveyed at nine years of age, and an 'Infant Cohort' of 11,000 that have been followed from nine-months of age⁷.

During the first wave of surveys, qualitative interviews were also conducted with a sub-sample of 116 child participants and their parents from Child Cohort (interviewed in 2008), and a sub-sample of 122 parents from the Infant Cohort (interviewed in 2009). The conceptual framework underpinning the Growing Up in Ireland study emphasises the child's agency in their own lives, and the intention of the one-to-one interviews with the nine-year-olds was to capture, in their own words, the child's experience of relationships with family and friends, their neighbourhood, school experience, and their well-being. The interviews with the Child Cohort participants "were designed to be both interesting and enjoyable for nine-year-old participants" (Harris, Doyle and Greene, 2011) and children also engaged in drawing and visual activities in the course of the interview. These include the 'My Family and Me' map (Hill,

⁷ Quantitative data from the longitudinal survey are available through the ISSDA as Anonymised Microdata Files (AMF). More detailed Researcher Microdata File (RMF) are available and are subject to stricter access controls. Researchers wishing to access the RMF should apply to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. See <http://www.growingup.ie/> for more information on accessing the data from the Growing Up in Ireland study.

Laybourn and Borland, 1996) which was of particular value to our interpretation of how children experience relationships with various family members (for more on our methodology see Geraghty et al., 2015).

Methodological challenges

These two data collections were used in combination by the Family Rhythms project to trace and compare the experience of family life across four birth cohorts – three cohorts from the LHSC collection and a fourth contemporary cohort of young families from the GUI collection. However, the combination of these two collections presented both methodological challenges and opportunities. The key challenge was consolidating the data from two different methodologies; whereas the LHSC interviews followed a guided, in-depth life story method, the GUI interviews were semi-structured and followed the key domains covered by the survey. An additional challenge was how to appropriately compare the retrospective life story data of adults in the LHSC cohorts with the prospective interview data of children and their parents in the GUI cohort.

To overcome this methodological break, we worked ‘forwards’ and ‘backwards’ across the cohorts to specify patterns of continuity and change in key dimensions of family relationships (Gray, Geraghty and Ralph, 2013). The current-day focus of the GUI data acted as a contemporary reference point to which we could anchor the analysis. From here, the analysis worked backwards through retrospective LHSC narratives, and, from accounts of the past,

worked forwards towards the contemporary anchor point. This dynamic approach to the analysis allowed us to trace changes and continuities in family relationships and practices over time. In addition, the four cohorts in the Family Rhythms database allowed us to examine relationships from different generational standpoints; the GUI data provided both a contemporary 'child's eye' perspective on the child's relationship with their parents, siblings and grandparents, plus a parent-generation perspective on these relationships. Cohort 3 of LHSC data (born 1965 to 1974) similarly provided a contemporary parent's view on intergenerational relationships, while the older LHSC cohorts 1 and 2 (born 1916 to 1934 and 1945 to 1954 respectively) provided a contemporary grandparent-generation perspective.

An example of how we put this method in to practice is our examination of the relationship between children and their grandparents. We found substantial evidence of co-residence between children, their parents and their grandparents during the childhoods of the oldest cohorts (Cohorts 1 and 2). Working forwards from these remembered childhoods of the past, we examined the declining practice of intergenerational co-residence during the lifetimes of Cohort 1 and 2, and found little evidence of prolonged co-residence amongst the contemporary young families in Cohorts 3 and 4 (the GUI cohort). Despite the decline in co-residence, there is strong evidence that grandparents continue to provide regular care to their grandchildren in contemporary families. We therefore worked backwards from the contemporary accounts to explore different generational experiences of being cared for by a grandparent. Consistent with international research we found that the balance of power

shifted to parents during the second half of the 20th Century, as young parents were better positioned to establish an independent residence and could therefore mediate the degree of contact between grandparents and grandchildren. However, the increased need for unpaid childcare support amongst the contemporary generation of dual-earner families has given rise to renewed opportunities for close relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren, and new patterns of strain in the relationships between parents and grandparents. For a more detailed discussion of our examination of the relationship between grandchildren and their grandparents, see Gray et al. 2013, and Geraghty et al. 2015.

Conclusion

The Family Rhythms project demonstrated the potential for bringing archived qualitative data collections into analytic conversation with one another, in order to develop a higher-level analysis of family change over time. The use of qualitative data to examine a century of family life was a unique approach that enabled us to look at individual motivations, feelings and rationalities in the context of macro-societal changes in demography, economy and values, and this may not have been possible if working with a single dataset. While there are methodological challenges when comparing the data from two disparate studies, one should not be put off working analytically across two or more archived qualitative collections because of the context of their production. GUI and LHSC shared many points of comparison and connection, for example, both studies involved national samples of Irish people that were interviewed around the same time, and in both were orientated towards family life and

intimate relationships. The Timescapes ERC project (<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/>) has done much work in the area of translating evidence and enabling analytic conversation between disparate qualitative datasets (see for example Irwin and Winterton, 2012).

The principal output from the Family Rhythms project is the 2016 book publication⁸, which is the first textbook of its kind to draw upon more than two hundred qualitative interviews with Irish people to illustrate the contemporary theoretical ideas and empirical scholarship that have informed sociology of the family. The book explores the changing Irish family at four different family life stages; childhood, early adulthood, parenting in the middle years, and grandparenthood, and situates change in a global socio-historical context.

References

Duncan, S., Edwards, R., Reynolds, T. and Alldred, P. 2003 'Motherhood, Paid Work and Partnering: Values and Theories'. *Work, Employment & Society*, 17 (2): 309 – 330.

Geraghty, R., Gray, J. and Ralph, D. 2015. "One of the best members of the family' Continuity and change in young children's relationships with their grandparents' in the 'Irish' Family.

Edited by Linda Connolly. London and New York: Routledge.

⁸ Gray, J., Geraghty, R. and Ralph, D. 2016 *Family rhythms: The changing textures of family life in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gray, J., Geraghty, R. and Ralph, D. 2013. 'Young grandchildren and their grandparents: a secondary analysis of continuity and change across four birth cohorts'. *Families, Relationships and Societies*. 2 (2): 289-298.

Harris, E., Doyle, E., Greene, S. 2011. *Growing Up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children Child Cohort - Qualitative Study. The Findings of the Qualitative Study with the 9-Year-Olds and their Parents. Qualitative Research Report Number 1*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Hill, M., Laybourn, A., and Borland, M. 1996. 'Engaging with primary-aged children about their emotions and well-being: Methodological considerations'. *Children and Society* 10: 129-144 in Harris, E., Doyle, E., Greene, S. 2011. *Growing Up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children Child Cohort - Qualitative Study. The Findings of the Qualitative Study with the 9-Year-Olds and their Parents. Qualitative Research Report Number 1*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Holland, J. 2011. 'Timescapes: Living a Qualitative Longitudinal Study'. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (3).

Holland, J. and Edwards, R. 2014. *Understanding Families Over Time: Research and Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Irwin, S. and Winterton, M. (2012) 'Qualitative secondary analysis and social explanation',
Sociological Research Online, 17 (2), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/2/4.html>

Neale, B. and Flowerdew, J. 2003. 'Time, Texture and Childhood. The Contours of Longitudinal
Qualitative Research'. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6 (3): 189 – 199.

Neale, B., Henwood, K. and Holland, J. 2012. 'Researching Lives Through Time: An Introduction
to the Timescapes Approach'. *Qualitative Research*, 12 (1): 4 – 15.

Shirani, F. Henwood, K. and Coltart, C. (2012). *Meeting the Challenges of Intensive Parenting
Culture: Gender, Risk Management and the Moral Parent*. *Sociology*, 46 (1): 25 – 40.