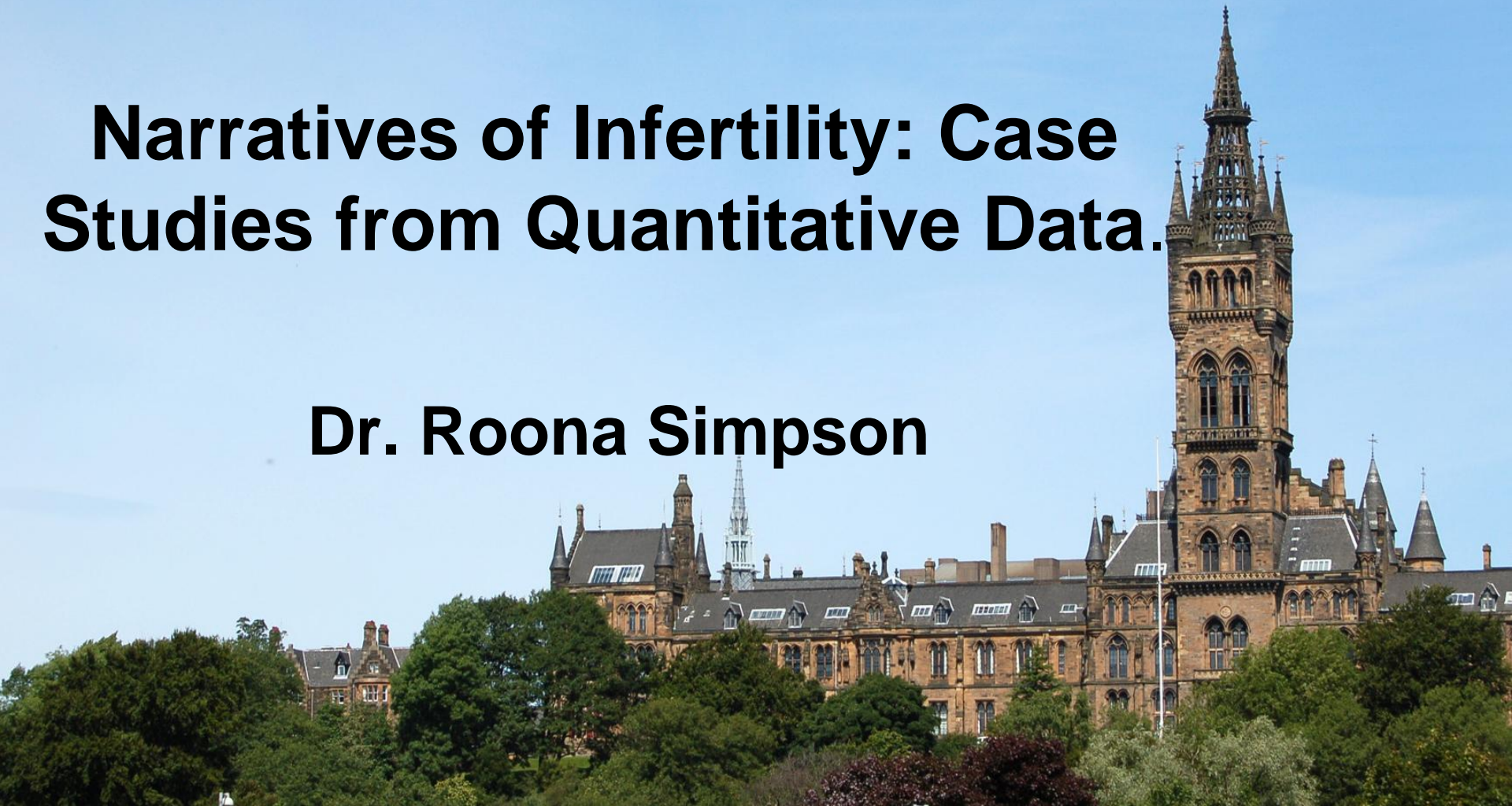# Narratives of Infertility: Case Studies from Quantitative Data.

Dr. Roona Simpson

- Background: Delayed childbearing and childlessness; disjuncture between public and personal narratives; voluntary/involuntary childlessness and questioning 'choice'.

- Contemporary Fertility Decline: Facts and Figures

- 'Narratives from numbers' – pilot study on using quantitative longitudinal data to explore partnership and parenthood trajectories: case study of Pamela.

Delayed childbirth, in particular the postponement of first births, related to smaller family sizes and increased childlessness, all of which contribute to overall fertility decline.

- Average age of first birth in 2011 - 28 (27.9), compared to 21 in 1960.

ONS (2013) Live Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Mother, Statistical Bulletin

- Nearly one in five women born in 1966 remained childless at age 45. This compares to one in ten women born in the mid-1940s who were childless at the same age.
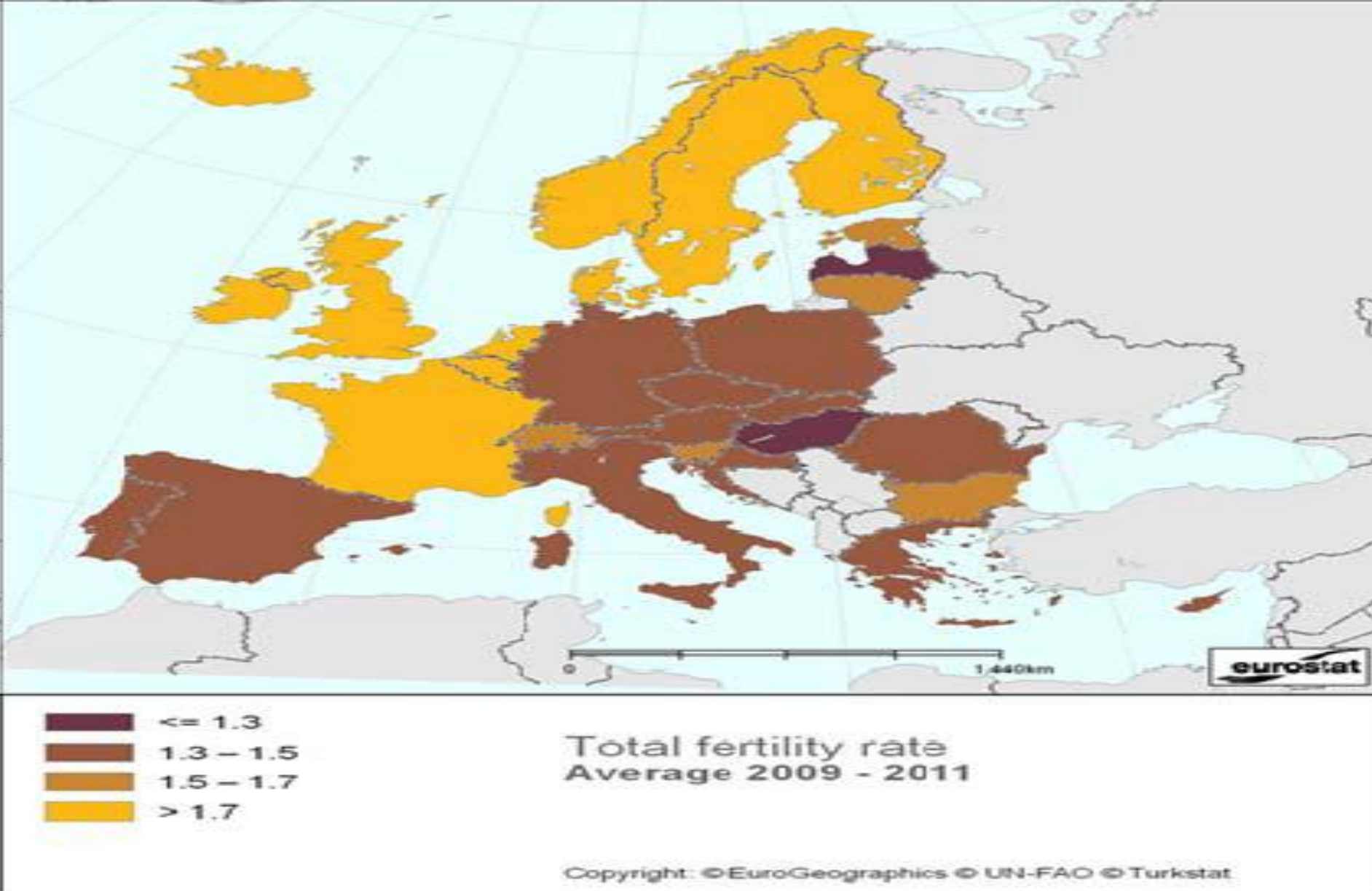
ONS (2013) Cohort Fertility, England and Wales, Statistical Bulletin

- Concerns re individual/societal implications – involuntary childlessness, ageing populations/dependency ratios.

	1994	2011
Low fertility, below replacement but at least 1.5 children per woman		
Ireland	1.85	2.05
Iceland	2.14	2.02
France	1.66	2.01
United Kingdom	*1.74*	*1.96*
Sweden	1.88	1.90
Norway	1.86	1.88
Finland	1.85	1.83
Belgium	1.56	1.81
Lithuania	1.57	1.76
Netherlands	1.57	1.76
Denmark	1.81	1.75
Slovenia	1.32	1.56
Luxembourg	1.72	1.52
Estonia	1.37	1.52
Bulgaria	1.37	1.51
Very low fertility, less than 1.5 but at least 1.31		
Malta	1.89	1.49
Slovakia	1.66	1.45
Czech Republic	1.44	1.43
Austria	1.47	1.42
Greece	1.35	1.42
Croatia	1.52	1.40
Italy	1.21	1.40
Germany	1.24	1.36
Spain	1.21	1.36
Cyprus	2.23	1.35
Portugal	1.44	1.35
Latvia	1.39	1.34
Lowest low fertility, < less than 1.31 children per woman		
Poland	1.80	1.30
Romania	1.42	1.25
Hungary	1.65	1.23

Total fertility rate
Average 2009 - 2011

(dark red)	<= 1.3
(brown)	1.3 – 1.5
(orange)	1.5 – 1.7
(yellow)	> 1.7

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'Towards a 'baby recession' in Europe? Differential fertility trends during the economic crisis', *Eurostat Statistics in Focus*
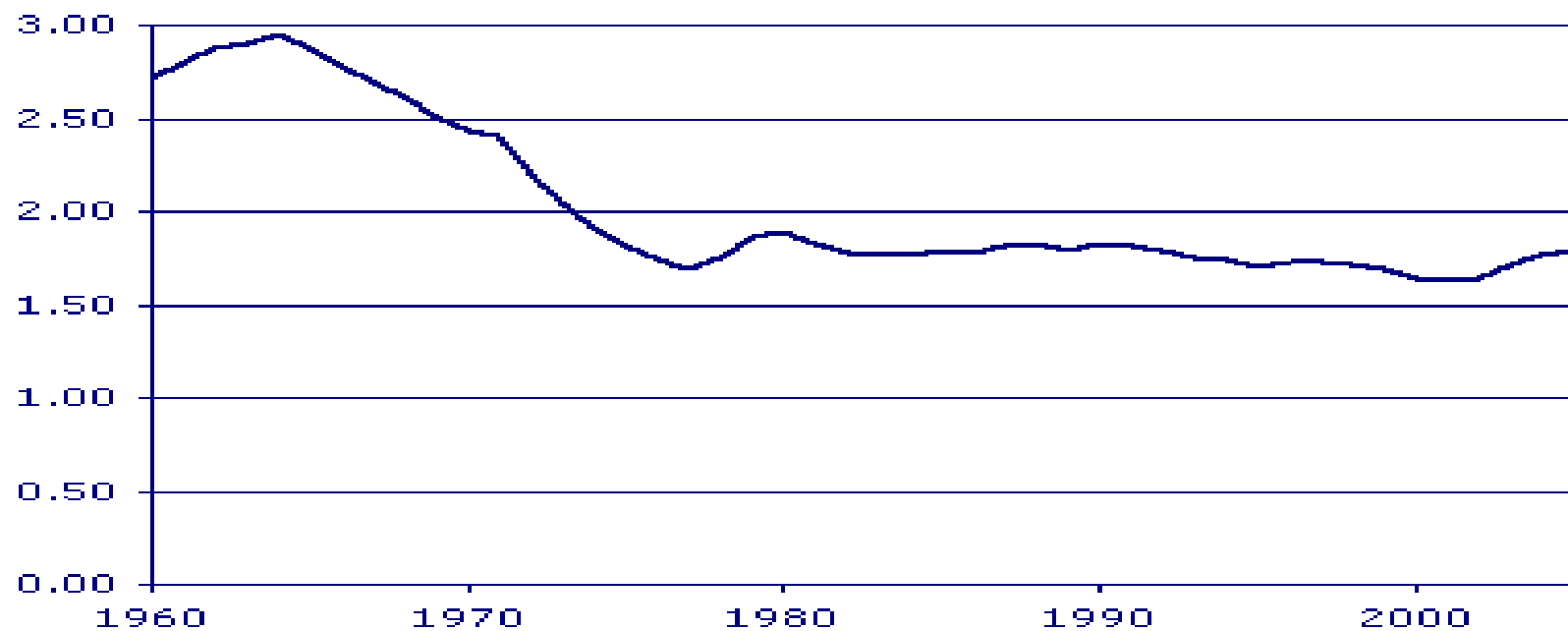
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-13-013/EN/KS-SF-13-013-EN.PDF

Total Fertility Rate, UK
Source: ONS 2006

Children per woman

Get Britain Fertile, a nationwide fertility campaign

- **Kate Garraway, TV Broadcaster and Mum**

- Kate is encouraging women to think about their fertility earlier in life following her struggle to conceive at 45.

- "I know careers and finances seem important but you only have a small fertility window. Get prepared first and make informed choices early".

"

- The connection of events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings the narrator wants the audience to take away (Reismann 2008)

- discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997).

- Narrative encompass three essential elements – they are chronological, meaningful, and inherently social in that they are produced for a particular audience (Elliott, 2005).

- The level of detail about individual lives often more than would be available through qualitative interviews, allows for individual life histories that take account of multitude factors across various domains.

- Information on changes over time both at the individual and the societal level: individual life histories can be situated in the framework of wider economic, political and social transformations, thereby allowing a focus on the specific contexts shaping individual experiences.

- In a prospective study will provide information that isn't dependent on recall.

- Four British Birth Cohort Studies
  - 1946 (National Survey of Health and Development)
  - 1958 (National Child Development Study)
  - 1970 (British Cohort Study)
  - 2000 (Millennium Cohort Study)
- Children (over 17,000) born between March 3-9 1958.
- Sample followed at ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42, 46, 50
- Multipurpose study: family life; education; employment; skills; housing; health; finances.
- Data also collected from parents, teachers and medical professionals.

NCDS4 Questionnaire, 'Family Plans':

- Would you like to have any (more) children of your own?
    [Yes, No, Don't Know]

- How many children would you like altogether? *[Number, Don't know/uncertain]*

- (if No) Why don't you want any (more) children? *[Probe fully. Record Verbatim]*

NCDS8 Questionnaire, 'Views':

- People with no kids are missing out.

- Unless you have kids, you will be lonely in old age.

- Can have fulfilling life with no kids.

- Age 11 Essays:

"Imagine you are now 25 years old. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work at the age of 25".

- Age 50 Interviews:

"Tell us about your life"

'Social Participation and Identity' Study.

Interviewees selected in relation to geographic region and social mobility. As well as information on social engagement, interviewees were invited to say what they considered had been important in their life, and the main points of their life story from their own perspective.

Time	Home	Education	Employment
1958 (birth) *NCDS*	Oldest child		
1965 (7) *NCDS1*	Has moved twice, younger sibling	BSAG overall score is 27 (top quintile behavioural maladjustment)	
1969 (11) *NCDS2*	Has moved again. Another sibling. 68 – 75: Terraced house with parents. Another sibling.	BSAG – top quintile. Medium ability.	
1974(16) *NCDS3*	1975 – (move) semi-detached house, with parents. Rooms (private rental) 1979: Jan to June Parental home 1979: July to Dec Rooms (private rental) 1980: Jan to June	Left school at 16, 8 '0's Jan 1979 – block release (no quals)	JOB1 '74 – '80 Apprenticeship Unempl1 Aug '80- Sept '82 Govt. scheme Sept 82 to Nov 82. Unempl2 Nov 82 to Dec 85 JOB2: 1986 – Jan to July (dismissed). Unempl3 Aug 1986 to Dec 1987
1981 (23) *NCDS4*			

Box 1: Summary Description of Childless Married Woman, age 50.

Pamela is living in the North-West of England, where she moved to with her husband in 1988 when she was 30, to be nearer his ageing parents (now deceased). Pamela, the eldest of two siblings, moved several times in her childhood around the South West of England, due to her parents' employment in catering (pubs/restaurants), and had attended four schools by age 16. She was judged as academically able, and had ambitions to be a doctor, however did not do well in her A levels. She left school at 17 to live with a boyfriend in lodgings, and did a secretarial course. In her late teens/early twenties she had various boyfriends and jobs. Pamela married at 21, her husband (divorced) was 34. At 23 she isn't working and her well-being scores indicate depression. Pamela subsequently trained as a nurse and has worked in nursing since her mid 20s, and is now in a managerial position. Her husband, previously a manual worker, subsequently also retrained as a nurse. H is now retired, due to ill-health. Her job requires shift work. Her (divorced) brother-in-law is a neighbour, and Pamela is close to his son, age 7, who stays with them frequently. She has very little contact with her family of origin. Pam is now very involved with the local church. She is also very interested in pottery. They have two dogs she refers to as 'child substitutes'

Pam always answered positively on the fertility intentions questions at 16 and 23. By 33 she had been diagnosed as infertile. She tried several attempts at IVF, prior to going through the menopause at 42. At 50 her well-being scores and self-assessment are positive.

Box 2: Reflections on Childlessness

"[IVF] didn't work, and it, it really is soul- destroying to go through that, it was very hard [...] it was a nightmare, we nearly got divorced then 'cause it was just abysmal, it was really awful [...] it was four goes I had in all and during all that time it's like you're in limbo, you don't want to live anything, you want to do all your proper living 'cause you might be, I hate, it's a really weird thing and I don't, it's just so weird, you think, well if we had kids this is the way life's going to go but if we don't we'll do this. But then of course you don't do anything 'cause you're just waiting to see what happens to you. So the fourth time fell through and that, that was devastating 'cause kind of thought that's my last chance 'cause we weren't going to be paying for it and I wasn't going to - you know, mortgage the house a second time or anything like that like some people do, so – but then the menopause hit when I was 42 which was a big shock, so that kind of helped in a way 'cause psychologically I thought, well this is it now [...] So after that it was like, okay, now I know I'm going to be this person with no kids, so fine"

- Importance of historicising the individual life history.

Creating a researcher narrative through mapping and comparing life course trajectories within wider historically situated macro-sociological processes.

"it is important to stress that lives told or untold require contextualisation through filling in the wider context... In the reporting of much micro-sociological research the wider context is often allowed to speak for itself…. I would endorse the view that life story research should incorporate in equal measure a focus on both talk and context; only then will it guard against naïve exponents of narrative approaches, in particular the prioritising of 'voice' ".

Brannen, J. (2013) Life Story Talk: Some Reflections on Narrative in Qualitative Interviews, Sociological Research Online, Vol 18(2).
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