Inter/generational dynamics:
A mixed-methods study involving data and participants from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

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Outline

The Inter/generational dynamics project

•Mixed methods research design

•Sampling for the qualitative project

•Linking qualitative and quantitative data

•Challenges and opportunities

•Re-use of data

Research design

Inter/generational dynamics

- Research team: Jennifer Mason, Vanessa May, Stewart Muir and James Nazroo

- Exploring people's experiences of ageing and intergenerational dynamics

- Research questions

  - What are the key forms of inter/generational interaction, communication and transfer (familial and non-familial) in which older people are involved?

  - Do people associate themselves with 'reference groups' generationally, or inter/generationally? How do they relate this to the experience of ageing?

  - How do older people experience, contribute to, or challenge socio-cultural change through inter/generational interactions in their everyday lives?

- Themes we have explored in our analyses:

  - Generation

  - Belonging

  - Technology

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) (www.ifs/org.uk/elsa)

- An interdisciplinary panel study of people aged 50 and older, 6 waves of data collected so far, with an additional wave 0.

  – Face to face interview every two years since 2002, with a biomedical assessment carried out by a nurse every four years

- Some key research areas

  – Health, economic position and resources, the nature of social networks, social support and social participation, and household and family structure

Qualitative methods

- A sub-sample of 24 ELSA respondents

  - Interview 1: experiences of ageing, cultural engagements, relationship to technology, meanings attached to 'generation'

  - Interaction diary

  - Interview 2: people and places

  - Interviews with 'other' generations

- Observations of ELSA respondent local areas

- Observations of Manchester city council intergenerational events

- Focus groups with older people focusing on engagements with culture and technology

Time and interactions diary

Day 3: THURS.

Time of day	Who you saw or spoke to	Approx age of person	What happened (where you were and what you were doing when you saw, spoke to, our communicated with the person)
10.30	▓▓▓▓▓▓	79	She called to give me some plant cuttings to give to Val.
11.30	▓▓▓	40ish	assistant in my local post office Went to do some photocopying for the forthcoming play.
2.30	▓▓▓	63	Delivered plant cuttings.
5pm	▓▓▓▓▓	52	Friend rang to ask if I could walk her dog tomorrow as she is going to a funeral.
6pm	▓▓▓		phoned to cancel gym due to dog walking.

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Sampling for the qualitative linked project

Sampling strategy I

- Factor and cluster analyses performed by James Nazroo and Anna Zimdars

- Finding 'types' of people on the basis of the quality of relationship networks (spouse, children, other family, friends)

  – Questions about the quality of relationships and frequency of contact

Example questions: children

How much do your children really understand the way you feel about things?

How much can you rely on your children if you have a serious problem?

How much can you open up to your children if you need to talk about worries?

How much do your children criticise you?

How much do your children let you down when you are counting on them? how much do your children get on your nerves?

On average how often do you meet up with your children?

On average how often do you speak on the phone to your children?

On average how often do you write or email your children?

(Answers: A lot; Some; A little; Not at all)

The six factors

- The factor analysis of the relationship variables from the ELSA data produced the following six underlying dimensions:

1) Good friends

2) Good spouse

3) Absence of negative relationships

4) Good kids

5) Bad family

6) Writers

Cluster analysis

- Cluster analysis was used to identify homogenous subgroups of cases among the ELSA respondents with regards to their factor scores:

1) Unsupportive and negative friends, low friend contact

2) Negative spouse, supportive children, high contact with children, friends and family

3) Absence of negatives

4) Unsupportive and negative children, low children (and family) contact, low number of close friends and family

5) Unsupportive and negative family, low family contact and few (close) friends

6) Doesn't write, meets children and family and phones family

- These six clusters (eventually) used for sampling participants in the linked qualitative study

Sampling strategy II: ELSA wards

- Hypothesis: 'generationing' is partly related to place

  - How an area is designed

  - Who lives there – eg the perceived generational profile of a particular area

  - The available services – eg shops, GP surgeries

- Sampling of ELSA wards in Greater Manchester on the basis of their age, ethnicity and employment profiles

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Sampling strategy III

- Combination of the first two sampling strategies: clusters and wards

- Ward characteristics the main driving force

- Gaps in the first sample of research participants filled (eg age, ethnicity, 'class')

- We were interested in how ELSA respondents fell into clusters in different wards

  - eg an even spread across clusters versus all respondents concentrated in one cluster

Linking quantitative and qualitative data

Trying out different ways of linking qualitative and quantitative data

- Fleshing out meanings behind ELSA data (eg cluster analysis – does this reflect what people say about their relationships in a qualitative interview?)

- Following up 'puzzles' in ELSA data

Fleshing out meanings example: general health

- Age at interview: 74

- ELSA data: Very good self-reported health, no illness, no limiting illness

Elizabeth: I'm very fortunate. I do keep very well. [. . .] I do have varicose veins which have bothered me quite a lot over the years but I wear surgical stockings for those just to support them really… I had those stripped years ago, years and years ago. They don't really bother me, they're just there. But other than that I keep very well.

Interviewer: Yeah. So you've got no… kind of do you have any aches or pains generally?

Elizabeth: No not really. I get the odd back ache. Nothing really to complain about.

Interviewer: What do you attribute your good health to?

Elizabeth: I think I've been very fortunate, very blessed, because I have a husband who is not well you know. some keep good health and some don't. But I do do exercise and am busy, sort of thing.

Fleshing out meanings example: memory

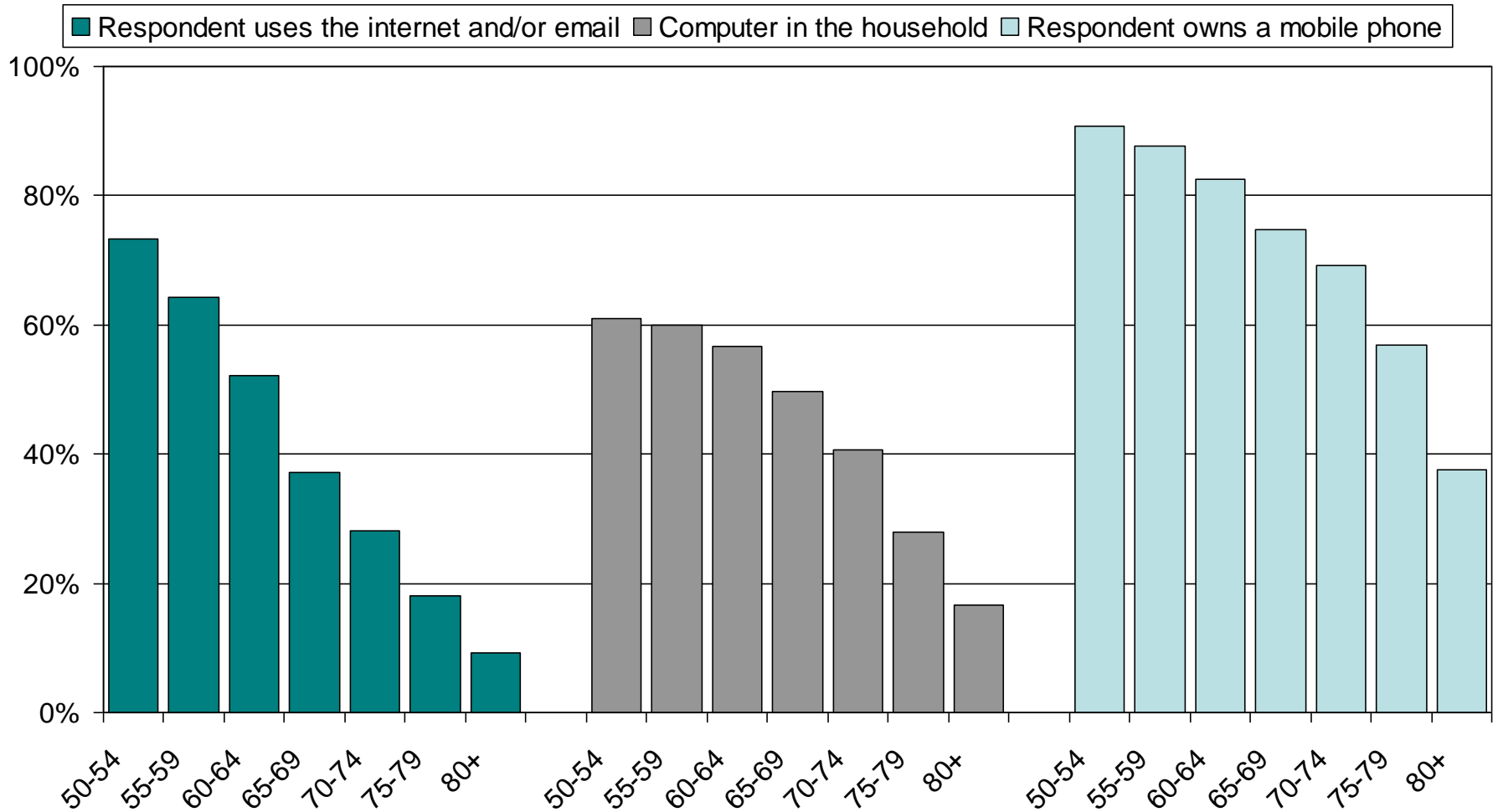- ELSA data: Self-reported memory very good , perceives memory to be worse than 2 years ago

Interviewer: I've got one question about generally about ageing and that's to do with sort of mental abilities, your memory and so on, do you think that's changed over the years or?

Elizabeth: Yes. Sometimes, er, I'm searching for a word that I know quite well I know and it doesn't just come, sometimes. And also, erm, I'll have things in the diary and I know what I'm doing 'cause I couldn't work without a diary but er I'll know the day before and then in the morning I might get up and I forget what I'm doing that today. I mean it'll come back in some way but I'll think 'Oh, I'd forgotten I was going there' or you know I have a look in the diary every day. And things like that and and and and I don't think I'm as sharp, or you know the children might say 'Oh you didn't tell me that' and I'll say 'Oh, I thought I did!' [laughs]. But then I again I might tell it to one and not the others, I've got five to tell things to and you don't remember. There's something that happens and they'll say 'Oh I didn't know about that' and I'll say 'Oh, didn't I tell you?'. In general I'm alright, I'm on the ball but I do think memory is not as sharp as it was. Definitely.

Puzzle 1: Ageing and everyday interactions with technology

- What explanations might we find for decreasing technology use as people age?

Ownership and use of technology drops with age

Legend: ■ Respondent uses the internet and/or email ■ Computer in the household □ Respondent owns a mobile phone

Too old?

'We're behind the times' … 'computers and all that' … 'it's hard cos we're older' … 'when you're older you can't do it cos your mind is here, there and everywhere' (FG1)

'Technology is alright for those in their 50s but if you're in your 70s it's a bit late. You know what you want to know and that's enough. Computers are just a headache'(FG1)

'You've got to have a good memory [to use technology]' (FG1)

Elizabeth: 'He [husband] can't cope with all this new stuff and people think he knows all about it and everything's changed in that way. But he is an engineer, he's got an engineer's brain but even he gets a bit foxed and says, oh, you know I don't know what that's doing. [. . .] now he's lost the, the impetus really to, to do too much. So he used to like gadgets.'

Occupational class, age and use of internet and/or email
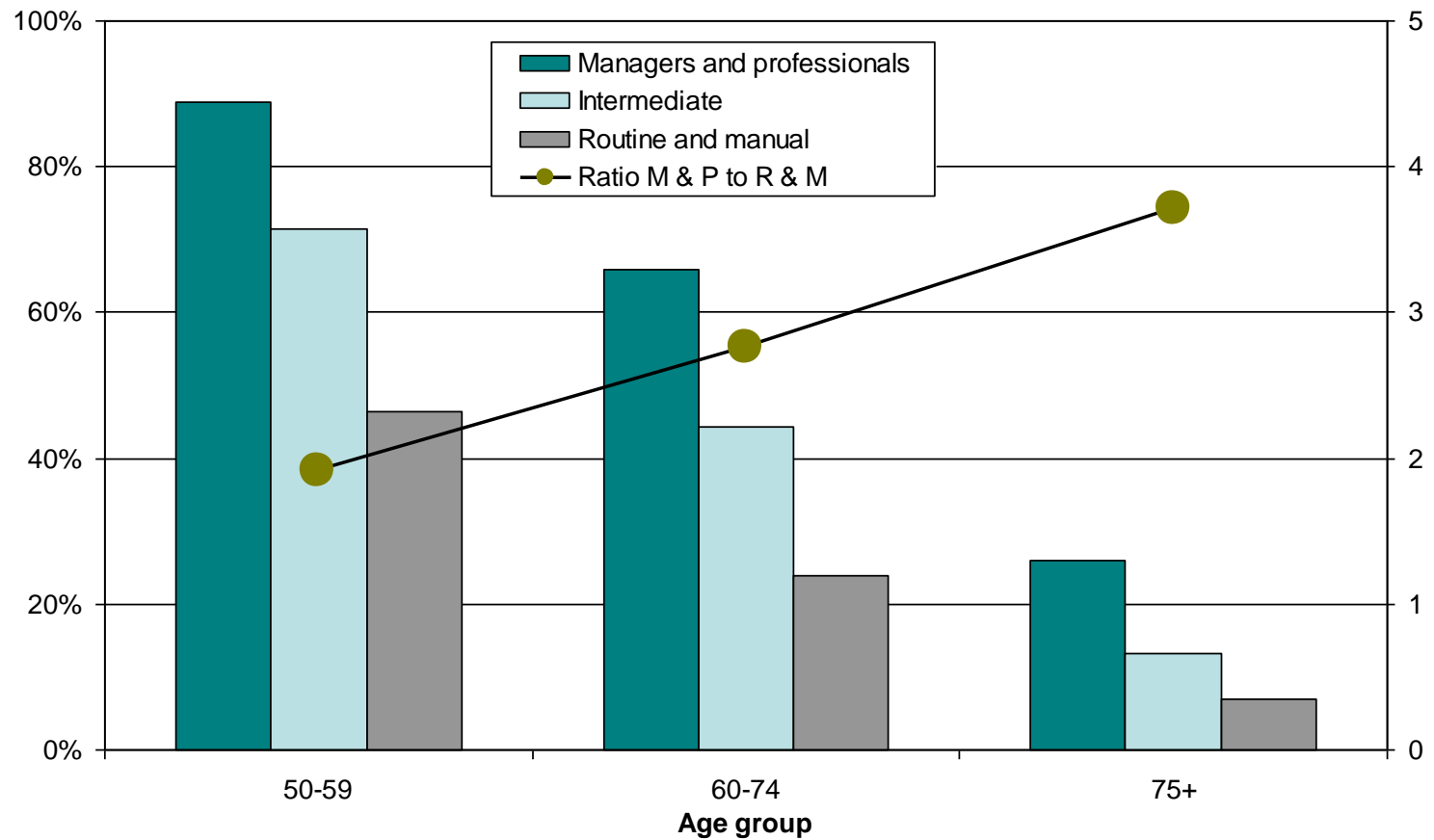
Gender, age and use of internet and/or email
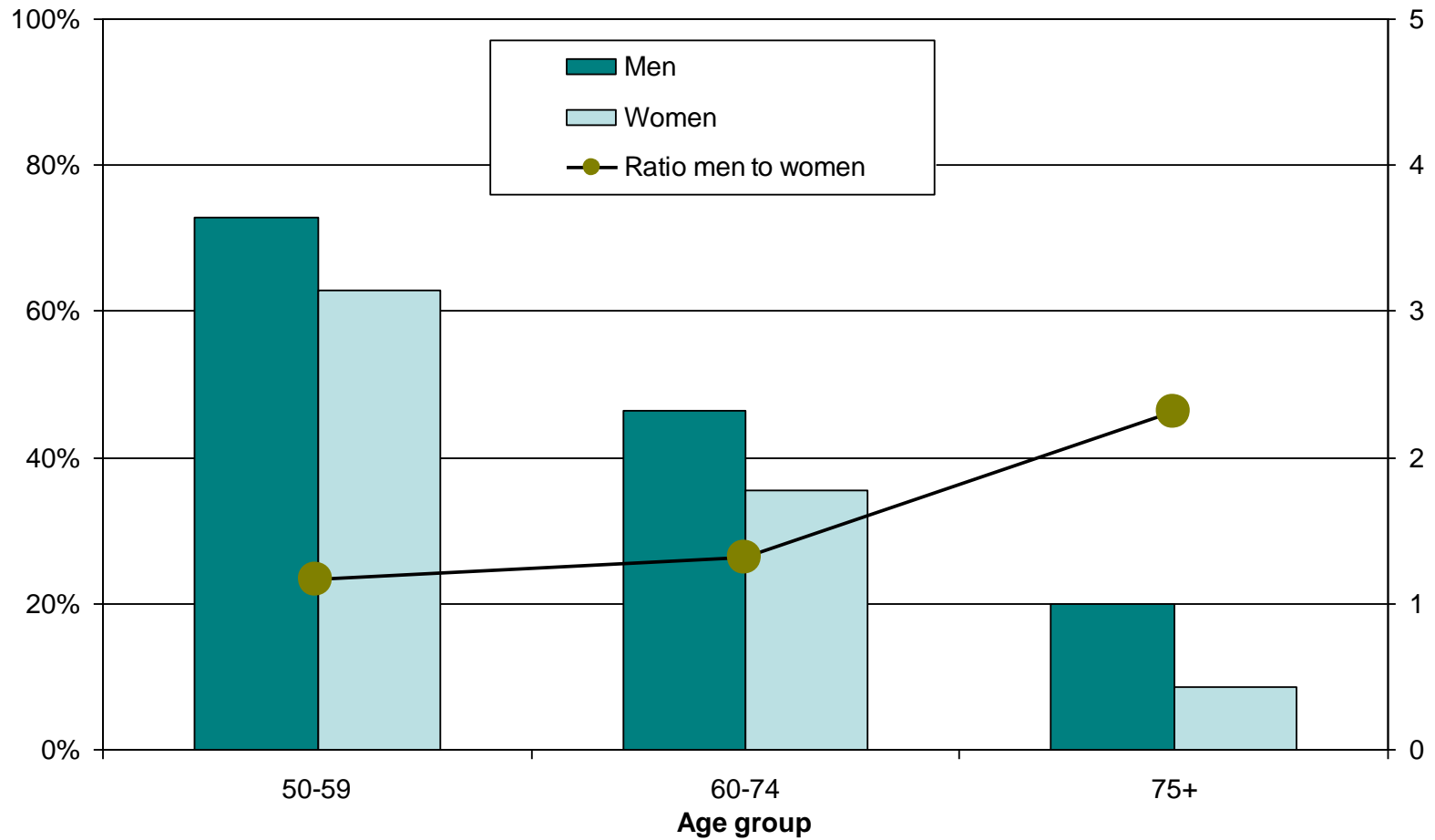
The habituated self

- Interviewer: Would you use it [the computer] for shopping?

- Elizabeth: No. [. . .] I would do it if I needed to because I couldn't get out but not from choice. I like going out shopping on the hoof. Pick up all the bargains. I've been doing that all my life.

- Gareth: MP3s and that lot, we don't use. I don't even know exactly what they are. I-pods, don't use. That's not to say we never will but we've got no need at the moment. Mobile phones, I've been dragged kicking and screaming into having a mobile phone. I very rarely use it**.**

- Interviewer: I'm wondering if you own many gadgets or technological things.

- Louise: Not really. No, I manage without them, so I didn't bother. I think I probably could cope if I wanted.

Changing social practices

- 'Young people talking on mobile phones so that everyone can hear… they don't care … talking to themselves walking round the supermarket' (FG1)

- 'rude youngsters who come to your house and are on the mobile phone' … 'they could turn off their phone on the way in. Why go visit someone if you want to chat on the mobile?' (FG1)

- 'Young people talking loudly rubbish into their mobile phones. No proper conversation, a load of nothing … when I hear them on the bus … You don't start having a conversation in public. I don't want everybody hearing what I'm saying'(FG2)

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

- Time

- Not all of our experiments worked equally well

  – Fleshing out

- Working with puzzles was better – theory driven to an extent

  – A form of facet methodology?

Facet methodology

- Metaphor of a cut gemstone: the way the different facets refract and intensify light

- The gemstone is the overall research question or problematic
  - Multidimensional

- Facets are strategically and artfully designed *investigations* into particular aspects of the object of concern

  - Involve different lines of enquiry, and different ways of seeing

- Aim: define the overall object of concern by creating strategic flashes of insight

Jennifer Mason (2011) 'Facet Methodology: the case for an inventive research orientation', *Methodological Innovations Online*, 6(3): 75-92.

Re-use of data

Secondary analysis

- ELSA data available upon application

- Inter/generational dynamics qualitative interview data has been anonymised and sent to the UK Data Service for archiving, as per funding regulations

  - However, these data are at least not yet available for secondary analysis

- Linking ELSA and Inter/generational dynamics data?