

# Identity in time: the short and the long of it

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## Two contrasting time dimensions

- PACE
- GENERATIONAL TIME
- (omitting comment on the longitudinal design, namely interviews and observations over one year)

## The project: short description

- Part of 'Identities and social action'
- 20 first-time mothers in Tower Hamlets
- Ethnic, class and psychosocial diversity
- 20x3 Free Association Narrative I'views
- Reflexive fieldnotes
- 6 x 'infant' (psychoanalytically-informed) observations, weekly over one year

## Purposes of Methods

- Identity change (longitudinal)
- Beyond intentional identity
- Beyond discursive/positioning theory
- Towards taken for granted, embodied, practical, unsayable (unconscious)
- Refs (methods/observation/epistemology)  
*Infant Observation 10(3)* December 2007, ed C.Urwin  
Hollway (f'coming 2008) Clarke, S., Hoggett, P. & Hahn, H (eds) London: Karnac

### Observation 7 (10wks) Jane

She watched him as he woke, and talked gently to him. She asked him if he was waking now... his eyes had now returned to shut although he continued to wriggle and moan. He opened his eyes and Jane put her hand on his tummy and said to him: 'You're not quite sure are you?' She stroked him and spoke to him again, he stilled and opened his eyes, she moved the sheet from his face, and asked: 'Are you ready now... Are you ready now?' She released his arms from the sheet and touched his chin and lip, speaking to him brightly and smiling at him. 'Are you ready to wake up O? Are you O? Are you?' She stroked his chin and he smiled at her: 'Ah that's better, perhaps you are ready?' She stroked his chin again and he smiled again. 'What a lovely smile: you are nearly ready?' She smiled and kissed him lightly on the nose. Jane then moved away telling him she was just going to open the blind. He lay in his cot gazing towards Jane and then following her voice with his eyes as she moved to the window. When she returned she stroked his face and tummy again and again he smiled, she said: 'You are ready...'. She picked him up and held him against her shoulder and I said 'hello..' He held his head up and away from her body looking at her and then suddenly losing control of his neck crashed heavily into her chest. 'Oh dear, oh dear,' said Jane. And then holding him up asked if he needed a new nappy: 'yes you do,' she decided. She took him to the changing table.

### Comments on observation

What were your responses?

Learning to notice pace

Adjusting to slow pace of babies

What method affords

Notice contrasts in other mothers,  
eg employment/childcare  
adjustments

Embodied identity/practices

Identification as identity dynamic

## Generation time

- From daughters to mothers
- Identification (and dis-id'n) with mother
- Is identification observable
- FANI extract with Liyanna
- 30 year-old Bangladeshi origin
- Showing old family photo

### Generation time: Liyanna extract

It's this picture, it's so strange. (baby cries). I was showing it to my sister the other day, and I said to her that when I used to look at this before it was like "oh there's Mum and Amina" ... and you just sort of flick through it, you know, and I never really stopped to analyse it. But I said to her, since I've had Maryam, I look at that picture and I know exactly what my Mum was feeling when she was looking down at my sister. (Int: Really?) 'Cos I know how I feel when I look down at her, and when I play with her, and it's just taken on a whole new meaning, you know, it's like there's my Mum and that's her first-born child, it's a little girl, same as me, you know, and I can just see the love and the emotion that she's feeling when she – when she – when that picture was taken.

### Generation time: Liyanna, comment

- Wherein lies the strangeness
- Identifying with mother and daughter at the same time
- Mothers as generational pivots
- Effect: emotional understanding of being loved by her mother
- Accessing internalised mother and daughter, impact on identity

### Intergenerational identity transmission 1

- Justine, 24, African Caribbean origin
- Dual identification (mother-daughter)
- 'I'm bringing her up the way Mum brought us up introducing her to a lot of things early because apparently I was a smart and quick child, just quick to catch on and Aisha's exactly the same.'

## Intergenerational identity transmission 2 Justine

- talking of her future hopes for Aisha, she hopes that she will
  - ‘just focus on a career base, you know, afford to, you know, be able to afford your house and that kind of thing. I don’t want her to ever live like how I am now because I feel like I had the opportunity to go out there and just not be like under the Tower Hamlets section and have to go homeless and that palaver, but if I had stayed at work when, when I should have, then I wouldn’t be like this. I would probably be on a mortgage thing and so I’d like her to just go that way, just different from what I did’.

## Intergenerational identity transmission Justine

- J. identifies in Aisha aspects of herself she failed to accomplish
- Her mother hoped for J’s career success
- She internalised those hopes and projects them on to her own daughter

## Conclusions

- Methods determine what aspects of identity can be noticed (and thus theorised)
- Psychoanalytically-informed methods can go beyond the unitary, rational, intentional aspects of identity/subjectivity to embodied, taken-for-granted, repressed and practical aspects
- [Researcher subjectivity can be used as a resource but requires careful theorisation and application.]