



Real Life Methods

Part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

Presentation for the NCRM Advisory Group: The Living Resemblances Project

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The Living Resemblances Project – 2005-2008

- Significance of kinship and connection in contemporary social life
- Cultural 'evidence' that resemblances matter and express something about how people are connected
- Family resemblances in existing studies of family and kinship – sometimes observed but not systematically addressed
- 'Tangible affinities', as well as sensory and ethereal
- Methodological challenge and disciplinary stretching

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Living Resemblances – Research Questions

- How do family resemblances operate? How are they perceived, imagined, practiced and enacted:
 - in everyday lives and relationships?
 - in expert knowledge, in scientific and social scientific theorising?
 - in public assumptions and understandings?
 - in cultural expressions
- What role do family resemblances play in everyday family life, in the ‘politics’ of kinship, in power relations, in individual and family identity and sense of self?
- How do people theorise about family resemblances in their own lives and outside?
- How can studying resemblances advance contemporary understandings of kinship, genetic inheritance, and identity?
- Why do resemblances matter so much? Is there/why is there a societal fascination with them?

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Methods

- Creative interview study, everyday family life – ‘ethnographic’ interviewing, biographical narratives, visual methods including photo elicitation, video, photography (N = 40, plus additional video interactions)
- Psychoanalytically informed father-son interviews (N = 6)
- Qualitative questionnaire and experiment - standardised visual and textual stimuli, group discussion and video (N = 4 including pilots)
- Expert study – interviews, questionnaire and focus group/experiment sessions (N = up to 10 interviews, plus 2 experiments)
- Analysis of resemblances in popular culture, including TV and radio – Who do you think you are? Desert Island Discs.

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Creative Interview Study - methods

- Interactive talk, narratives and stories. The value of interview methods.
- Asking grounded questions about appearances, ways of being, the sensory and ethereal elements of people's kinship and relationality.
- Interactions – the doing of resemblances.
- Photo elicitation, material objects, drawing 'family trees'.

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Qualitative 'Experiment' - aims

- How resemblances are 'publicly' referenced, transacted, measured.
- Measuring what 'everyone knows' about resemblances
- Resemblance spotting and theorising as a cultural practice – how willing are people to do it, how do they do it?
- How do they negotiate being 'good' or 'bad' at it?

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Qualitative 'Experiment' - methods

Use of video, audio, creative work, written questionnaires

- Individual questionnaires with:
 - vignettes (including normative)
 - visual task Prince Harry and Major Hewitt
 - opinion/attitude questions (including using BSAS data, eg most people say violence is upbringing, being gay/lesbian is genetic or chance)
 - some personal experience questions.
- Links with interviews in formulation of scenarios and theories explored.

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Qualitative 'Experiment' – example of a normative vignette

Question 3.

Sofia is a 33 year old mother. She separated from her former husband and cut off contact with him 2 years ago because he had been violent towards her and unloving of their young son. Her former husband is now in prison serving a long sentence for armed robbery. Their son is now 4 years old, and Sofia has noticed that he has started to look like his father and to have some of his mannerisms.

- a) How do you think Sofia is likely to feel about this resemblance?
- b) Should she be worried about this resemblance? Why/why not?
- c) Should she tell her son that he resembles his Dad, or just keep quiet about it?
- d) How do you think her son is likely to feel about this resemblance?
- e) Should her son be worried about his resemblance to his Dad? Why/why not?

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Qualitative 'Experiment' - methods

- Individual questionnaires with vignettes (including normative), opinion/attitude questions (including using BSAS), some personal experience questions. Links with interviews in formulation of scenarios and theories explored, specific examples.
- Value of third party scenarios for cultural understandings – for 'what everyone knows'
- Resemblance spotting, photo sorting/sticking/annotating exercise – individually and in groups.

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- Group discussion of how they did it, theories and key themes. Receiving the 'correct answers'.

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Pulling it all together – analysis of the different data sets

- NVivo and Transana thematic and content analysis of textual and visual materials
- Case study, narrative and biographical analysis
- Metaphor analysis with own software
- Psychoanalytic analysis
- SPSS analysis of BSAS data
- DRS software from DReSS Node of National Centre for e-Social Science, Nottingham, for analysing experiment digital data

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Putting it all together – dialogic explanations

- Linking of different material across the methods and analysis eg BSAS and creative interview study data into the experiment, experiment and interview data into the expert study. To understand how resemblances are 'publicly' and 'expertly' transacted
- Trying out different forms of explanation on different themes emerging across the data – eg magic/ethereal/spiritual, what 'genetic means', nature/nurture, fixed/inevitable in other ways, [measurement and resemblances](#), construction of 'self', constructions of family
- Dialogic explanations, creative tensions between approaches and explanations. Not straightforward integration. Factoring the questions in – ie explanations have relevancies (Hammersley). Different ways of asking questions as well as answering them need to be part of the explanatory process.
- Link to our TCB programme (Analysing Real Life Mixed Methods Data Training Workshop)

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Themes – an example: [measurement and resemblances](#)

- Measuring and judging resemblances
- Resemblances as evidential, innate, essential
- What do resemblances measure?

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Measurement and resemblances

- What is being measured?
- How is it being measured (including 'objective' measures)
- What do resemblances provide evidence of?
- What kind of evidence? Or on what basis is it said to be evidence?
- Measurement theme helps build our critical use of 'visual methods'. Appearances can be deceiving and can be manipulated and cultivated! Importance of the visual and other sensory elements. But we need a sophisticated approach to researching them. Even the visual is not always visible (theories, moving images, memories etc in people's heads), and resemblances are not always visual

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The expert study – the science (?) of measuring resemblances

- Geneticists
- Facial recognition scientists/diagnostic imaging specialist
- Developmental/evolutionary psychologists
- Media scientists
- (Media or professional) genealogists
- Social anthropologists
- Portrait artists/photographers
- Adoption and fostering experts
- Educationalists
- Criminologists

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The end

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