REFLECTIONS ON USING FAMILY INTERVIEWS IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND PARENTS
Aim: to investigate the ways parents and children negotiate the issues raised by working parenthood, how such issues impact on everyday family practices, and how these may change over time.

- Qualitative longitudinal research with 14 families over approx. 18 months.
- 3 waves of interviews including a family group interview.
- Thematic analysis: cross sectional and longitudinal.

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A way to explore the ‘doing’ (Morgan 2011) and ‘displaying’ (Finch 2007) of family.

Family interviews may offer an opportunity to access the ‘tone and personality of a family [...] in a way that interviewing individual family members cannot’ (Eggenberger & Nelms 2007: 209).

An opportunity to try something different.

Things to consider:
- Timing
- Ethics
  - Anticipating potentially sensitive topics
  - Network confidentiality
  - Tensions and relationships
- Interview design
THE CHART ACTIVITY
Hugh: Yeah, yeah, we went to [Canada].
Robert: Oh, aye. That wasn’t very nice.
Hugh: It was lovely.
Robert: You forgot the bed!
Hugh: Oh well minor…
I: What happened?
Robert: They forgot my bed!
Hugh: But when we got there it was late at night [...] there was only a double bed, no bed for him, you know [...] Aye, it wasn’t the best place in the world I’ve ever stayed in [...] But we had a good time, it was a great time.
Gail: I suppose the other thing that’s a real change for you [Heather] is you’ve been spending a lot of time with your dad that you’ve never really done. She’s been practically living at her dad’s house.

Heather (12): I do live at dad’s house.

Gail: Because we thought by the time you got back [from school camp] it [the renovations] would be all alright. How foolish we were.

Heather: How foolish you were…

Later when talking about weekends and future changes:

Heather: Well I go swimming a lot and I go round and see my friends and things like that and they…well, they don’t come round here because it’s disgusting. Well it is. It’s horrible. […]

Gail: Yeah, if we can get the house finished that’ll be…

Heather: My room. I don’t care about the house, I want my room back.

Gail: Yeah, well that’ll happen…

Heather: You can’t be bothered.
ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

- Relationships with participants:
  - When I started conducting the family interviews, one of my first feelings was that it was like walking a tightrope between all the relationships that I’d started to develop with the individual participants in the first wave. It felt like it was impossible to please everyone and I came away from some groups concerned that the children were disappointed with how I’d interacted with them in the groups, so I questioned whether I was able to build on existing relationships through the group context.

- The messiness of family life
- Relationships between participants
Lisa (12): Like sort of maybe like go out shopping with my friends, like early in the morning [...] Like somewhere different that I’ve never been on my own before...

Jane: I was wondering when this one was coming.

Lisa: Somewhere like [shopping centre in city centre]. But I would go with like one of my friend’s parent dropped me off there and then say like we all meet back at like say [shopping centre] at like... pick you up there. Just like free time sort of thing.

Jane: [Sighs]
‘And there are just times when I could just cry about the whole thing’ (Jan Ritchie, wave 1 individual interview)

Jan: When did I go back [to work]?
Calum (10): Back to work [reads off calendar and laughs]. Sad face.
Jan: Well, no actually, it’s been fine.
Calum: Has it?

Later:
Anna(8): And back to work after mat’ leave. That’s very sad [puts sad face sticker on chart].
Jan: It was sad going back, but now I quite like it.
(Wave 2 Ritchie family interview)

‘Everything’s going as well as it could be... And Daniel has settled much better than I thought he would at nursery and Anna’s just having to lump it...she would like it if I didn’t work [...] but that’s life, so she’ll just have to make the best of it’ (Jan Ritchie Wave 3 individual interview)
When adding post-its to the chart, Jack asked if it was only good things they were supposed to put on. When I said he could put any changes on, he added that his mum’s boyfriend had left and Evie also put this on the chart. When using the smileys, Jack and Evie both went for sad faces first and put them on this change. This was an awkward moment. Rachel made eye contact with me, she looked concerned and seemed to be saying ‘this is difficult, please don’t ask any questions’ - which I didn’t. (Alice’s field notes following the Erskine family interview)

Observing family dynamics
What are the opportunities and challenges of using Family Group Interviews?

**OPPORTUNITIES**
- Accessing and making sense of multiple perspectives
- Insight into family practices

**CHALLENGES**
- Making sense of multiple perspectives
- Combining with other methods
- Navigating the researcher role
Opportunities:
- Family interviews assisted us in making sense of multiple perspectives of family members often presented in fragmented form via individual interviews alone.
- Family interviews may have facilitated children’s voices by providing them with a supportive, comfortable context within which to take part in research; and the opportunity to voice grievances, ask questions and to negotiate relationships and change.
- Insight into family practices: doing and displaying family 

Challenges:
- Making sense of multiple perspectives mediated through interaction with other family members.
- Understanding how group accounts relate to individual accounts.
- Including observational data in the analysis.
- Acknowledging them as public accounts.

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REFERENCES