



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud)

# Interviewing fathers and sons together: Exploring the potential of joint interviews for research on family farms



Mark Riley

Department of Geography and Planning, 413, Roxby Building, University of Liverpool, L69 7ZT, UK

## ARTICLE INFO

Article history:  
Available online

Keywords:  
Joint interviews  
Qualitative methods  
Intergenerationality  
Family farming  
Masculinity  
Ageing

## ABSTRACT

The use of joint interviews – interviewing two people *together* focussing on the same topic – has been a relatively underutilised research approach. Whilst the pages of this journal have demonstrated the vitality of research utilising more qualitative research methods, the research therein has reflected the wider social science literature in which the use of joint interviews has been a relatively *ad hoc* application, with little critical reflection on what such an approach might offer the research process. Drawing on interviews with farming fathers and sons in Hampshire and West Sussex (UK) this paper fills this research gap by exploring the interview dynamic(s) and narratives that joint interviewing might bring forward. It is seen that processes of co-narration can add to the research encounter not only through the material that it may reveal, but also in terms of how such narratives are constructed, shared and (re)worked within the interview. In addition to seeing a second interviewee as a co-narrator, the paper also shows that they may provide an audience which challenges their partner to reflect on their own interview contribution as well as providing a second interviewer–interviewee dynamic through which they may reflect on and rework their own contribution. Set within the literature influenced by the ‘reflexive turn’, which recognises that the interview is a site of performance, the paper considers how joint interview narratives might be used to develop particular subject positions and illustrates how this a conjoined process between the narratives of fathers and their sons.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

In sketching out new directions for rural studies Woods (2012) called for a more thoroughgoing reflection on different methodological approaches and their value. Such a call was framed within the recognition that whilst research employing qualitative approaches – and particularly the use of semi-structured interviews – have been commonly presented within the *Journal of Rural Studies*, there have been relatively few critical appraisals of the practice of *doing* qualitative rural research (notable exceptions include Leyshon, 2002; Pini, 2002, 2004). Drawing on interviews with farmers over the age of 65 and their adult sons, the following paper extends this critical discussion of the research process by reflecting on the use, and potential, of joint (combined) interviews.<sup>1</sup> As such, the paper contributes to the methodological

literature in general and more specifically to the recognition from within rural studies of the “need to engage with more innovative research methods” when considering the geographies of agriculture (Morris and Evans, 2004, p.107). In addition to being a structurally significant part of the agricultural industry, family farms have provided a point of interest for rural social scientists (Price and Evans, 2009). In moving beyond the ‘farm survey’ – commonly questionnaire-based - approach which predominated the discussion of family farming in the 1980s and 1990s (see for example Potter and Lobley (1992)), recent agricultural studies have deployed methodological innovations which have sought to get beyond ‘facts’ to “reach the underlying layers of feelings, values and processes embedded in the patriarchal way of life” (Price and Evans, 2009, p.4). Approaches have included repeated life histories (Price and Evans, 2009; Riley and Harvey, 2007), focus groups (Shortall, 2002), and mobile interviews (Riley, 2010). Although such studies have sometimes sought to interview family members together, there has been little overt reflection on the merits of purposefully interviewing fathers and sons together, how this might impact on the research process and what types of interview narratives this process might generate. This situation is

E-mail address: [mark.riley@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:mark.riley@liverpool.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> There have been various terms used for the interviewing of two people together, including dyadic, couple, joint and partner interviews. It should be noted that in many cases these have also been used to refer to interviewing two related/connected people separately on the same topic. In the current paper Sakellariou et al.’s (2013) definition of ‘joint interviews’ is used – which involves the interviewer and two respondents interviewed together.

reflective of the wider social science literature where, despite the fact that the potential benefits of interviewing adult family members concurrently have been pointed to (see [Valentine, 1999](#)), it has most often been an *ad hoc* rather than predetermined part of the research process ([Starkweather, 2012](#)).<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the ‘reflexive turn’ in the social sciences has brought a recognition that interviews are a “joint or collaborative matter” ([Holstein and Gubrium, 2003](#), p23) this has been most clearly articulated in those reflections on interviewer–interviewee dynamics (e.g. [Pini, 2005](#)) rather than a focus on two people being interviewed together. Where conjoint interviews have been employed in the wider literature this has mostly been focussed on married couples – with the two predominant foci being relationships and couplehood ([Allan, 1980](#); [Veroff et al., 1993](#)) – and those focussing on couples’ relationships in the contexts of ill health and caring ([Caldwell, 2013](#); [Morris, 2001](#)). Within this literature there has been some discussion of the relative merits of interviewing separately and together, with both a recognition that interviewing separately may allow the individual to speak unencumbered without the eyes of a partner ([Eisikovits and Koren, 2010](#)) and on the flipside the argument that conjoint interviews may produce interesting narratives co-constructed in the moment ([Morris, 2001](#)). Although the initial focus of the research from which this paper is drawn was on the experiences of [non]retirement amongst farmers over the age of 65, joint interviews with their sons were integrated into the research design for three main reasons. First, it has been recognised, particularly amongst gerontologists, that retirement should be seen as more than an individualistic issue, with retirement decisions impacting on not just the retiree but also their wider family ([Barnes and Parry, 2004](#)). This issue is particularly pertinent within family farms where ‘keeping the name on the land’ is a central goal and retirement is closely choreographed with succession ([Potter and Lobley, 1992](#)). Second, and interrelated, it has been observed that the most common form of [non]retirement on family farms is to maintain involvement in the day-to-day activities of the farm, albeit with some movement away from the more arduous tasks ([Lobley et al., 2010](#)) – a process which sees the work of farming fathers and sons as inextricably linked. Thirdly, it is important that a consideration of farming [non]retirement should not just be limited to older farmers, but should also encompass relationships such as those with their sons who represent the future of their farm in the inherently gendered, and commonly masculine, patriarchal structure which continues to predominate in agriculture ([Brandth, 2002](#)). Previous work from outside the rural studies literature has observed that retirement may pose an unacceptable loss of professional identity ([Price, 2000](#)) and when such an observation is placed alongside the recognition that older age identities may be framed in intersection with other generations ([Tarrant, 2010](#)), we see a need to move beyond the older farmer themselves. Following a consideration of the extant literature on both the research interview and also family farming, which help conceptually frame the discussion, the paper outlines the specific research and methodological contexts. The paper then moves on to explore in detail the findings from the joint interviews with fathers and sons – both in terms of narrative content but also, importantly, style and interview dynamic – before drawing conclusion on the wider relevance of these observations to future research.

### 1.1. Interviewing together

As part of what might be termed the ‘reflexive turn’ within social sciences there has been a recognition that the qualitative research interview is a site of performance ([Holstein and Gubrium, 2003](#)). Just as we observe that identities are constituted performatively ([Butler, 1990](#)) we need to recognise that “what goes on in an interview is not only the telling of experiences that have already happened (the narrated events) but also a narrative event in which identities are performed and produced” ([Lundgren, 2013](#), p.671). Such a position recognises that we make sense of the world through telling stories (both to ourselves and others), coming to understand our social worlds through narrative processes and that the stories that we tell and share reflect our wider understandings of society ([Brunner, 1986](#)). As [Grenier \(2007\)](#) argues, social reality and how people discuss this reality are intertwined and in response to interview questions, material is presented in particular ways according to self-identity, audience and purpose. In thinking about the different levels at which talk may proceed within interviews, [Murray’s \(2000\)](#) typology of three narrative types – *personal*, *interpersonal* and *positional* – is useful. The *personal* level focuses on the specific, unique, experiences and feelings of the respondent. The *interpersonal* level pays attention to how the story is jointly constructed by the interviewer and interviewee and the particular words, images or metaphors that might be used. The *positional* level places emphasis on how people might position themselves in relation to the subject that they talk about – as [Flick \(2014\)](#) suggests, in relation to illness, a narrator might position either as a successful manager or a failing victim. This recognition that subject positions are created through talk (cf. [Miller, 2011](#)) has important implications for how we *do* interviews. For example, the interpersonal nature of narrative constructions is clearly important for thinking about old(er) age – the intended focus of the research from which the current paper is drawn – with narrative gerontology offering the useful insight that: “what one is in old age is not simply there for the asking but is actively produced in the telling” ([Gubrium, 2001](#), p.27).

Important to note is that it is not simply the spoken word that is important – performative acts also shape the interview dynamic. As [Pini \(2005\)](#) noted in her reflections on interviewing male leaders of an Australian agricultural organisation, performative and discursive acts were used by interviewees to [re]state their masculinity – including an assertion of their heterosexuality, presenting themselves as busy and important (through making reference to other appointments and looking at their watches) and positioning themselves as holders of ‘expert’ knowledge. Considering themes of ageing and masculinity together, [Tarrant \(2013\)](#) reflects on the co-constituted engagement between interviewer and interviewee and noted how interviewees constructed age and gender subjectivities both in relation to the interviewer, others and wider public discourses. In particular she notes how, as interviewer, she was positioned in multiple ways – both as “young enough to be their granddaughter,” as a “big girl,” as well as someone who might not take kindly to hearing about traditional gendered practices or sexist comments – in the narratives of respondents as they themselves performed multiple identities within the research encounter.

In addition to those studies reflecting on the interview dynamics between interviewers and interviewees are those, albeit smaller in number, which have focussed on interviewing couples/pairs. In their broadest sense, it is suggested that joint interviews offer the potential to analyse the overlaps and contrasts between the talk of the respective interviewees ([Eisikovits and Koren, 2010](#)) and interviewing two people *together* can give an insight into the respective partners’ perceptions on the same issues ([Mellor et al., 2013](#)). Counter to this is the suggestion, from interviews focussing

<sup>2</sup> For useful reflections on interviewing younger children both with and without parents see [Bushin \(2007\)](#) and [Riley \(2009b\)](#).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545749>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545749>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)