Older people without children

Conference Item

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Older people without children

Jill Reynolds Solo Living Seminar 26th Oct 2009
What do we know about the old and childless?

In my research for The Single Woman: a Discursive Investigation I found that participants without children often conflated ‘singleness’ and ‘childlessness’.

It’s only been for decades that we can’t assume single=childless

There’s relatively little work, either quantitative or qualitative that considers childless as a category in its own right
What I would like to do is:

• A qualitative longitudinal examination of the subjective experience of people aged 60+ who do not have children

• Explore, through interview transcripts, the discursive constitution of ageing and childlessness
Inclusive sample

- Couples – living apart or together
- Single people, divorced or widowed
- Re-interview selection from The Single Woman
- Heterosexual or homosexual
- ‘Lost’ children – death? include through divorce?
- Acquired ‘step-children’
The Oldest Generation

• Compare with Timescapes study of the oldest generation – people over 75 – sample found through kinship networks so only one person without children.
Areas to explore

• How do childless older people make sense of their lives?
• What markers of time are used?
• Are patterns of sense-making gendered?
• How are agency and choice worked with?
• What expectations or plans do they express?
• Differences or similarities in the talk of childless and the talk of those who have children?
• Annual routines used to maintain contact?