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# Co-producing 'masculinities': researching domestic spaces



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With  
'Roger Forbes',  
'Darren & Carol Huntington' and  
'Harvey, Jack & Dave Phillips'



# The 'Being a Man' study

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- ▶ Qualitative, multi-method pilot study
  - Life history interviews
  - Videod participant observation/go-along
  - Photography
  - Participant auto-ethnographic video/video diaries
    - Review of data with filmmakers and their subjects



# Analysing auto-ethnographic films

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What 'story' is each person telling in...

- ▶ setting the scene;
- ▶ how footage was directed;
- ▶ situations and people encountered;
- ▶ what/who is absent?



Darren (45): *“I’ll be recording domestic chores and normal everyday things that might or might not contribute to me being a man”.*





# Heteronormative reflections

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- C But to [other prospective male participants], that wouldn't determine whether they're feminine or masculine. So, to them (..) filming something with me wouldn't show (..) d'you know what I mean?
- D But to a, but then you look at, yes it would (.) because we're heterosexual, so we've got a man/woman relationship; that would define me as being a man.
- C But you don't even think (.) So that's what I'm saying... you wouldn't have thought the relationship between me and you was a (..)
- A (.) It's a given?
- D Yeh, yeh, prob, so I don't consider that side of it, in terms of definitions of being a man, but part of it is, being a man, to be with a woman... er,
- C Because most men would, probably (.) think, OK, it's about how I bring up my different sexes of, my children, how I deal with my children, how I do chores,
- D Yeh, and also that definition of man-stroke-woman, if you look back from more traditional masculine-stroke-feminine roles within a domestic environment pretty much is, what is traditionally seen as women's work and what's traditionally seen as being men's work,
- 



# Roger (51): *“here’s me on my Lonely island”*

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# Accessing the emotional self

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*“I’m not particularly keen on this part of my life, in the sense of dropping the children off at home, or a house where I used to live, whether you’d describe it as a home is another question, I never really felt at home there because it’s where my ex-wife wanted to live... so I didn’t have much say... so many things I was excluded from, important decisions... It’s really not nice being away from [the children]. I think there’s a couple of significant misconceptions in separation, if you like, er, that the man is... always pleased to go, that he doesn’t mind being away from the kids... Interestingly, I don’t know of any men who feel that way, in terms of the children, at all. So every time I drop them off, it is actually quite painful, er, (.) it really is (...) I wish I weren’t separated from them, but I am (..) so you just have to try to make as good a fist of these things as you possibly can. But it doesn’t make for an easy life, emotionally, sometimes (.) but hey ho, that’s the way of the world sometimes. As long as they’re happy it doesn’t matter in many respects whether I’m happy I suppose. I’m just [Laughs] I’m just here to pay the bills and make things happen, which was pretty much what my marriage was like (?) there was a degree of cruelty in that as well, and which I’m pleased to be away from”.*

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# Dave (47), Harvey (13) & Jack (11): “*private lives*”, “*normal conversations*”

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A What was the story that you wanted to tell?

H Er, just, you know, normal conversations, like, *the private lives of a man and what they do with their kids*. I don't really know, really, what they do when they're not around with their friends, or drinking or being stupid... I just wanted to do it so, like, *I wanted, like, em, you know, not for it to all be planned* and “you say this and you say that”, just, y'know.

A *Spontaneous?*

H *Yeh because that's the best, isn't it, so it's unexpected, because we normally talk about random things like that.*

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# “Random talk”

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D So would you ban Page 3 if you could then then Harvey?

J No, er, I mean yeh!

D You can say what you like.

H Of course I would!

D Jack wouldn't.

J If you were a sad loner, I'd feel sorry for them.

H Who the hell would want some fat, old, sweaty guy looking at you with just bras and Ann Summers knickers on?

J Ann Summ, oh I tried to go into Ann Summers.

H (.) What did you want to go in Ann Summers for?!

D Yeh Jack, what did want to go into Anne Summers for?

J I didn't know that it was a rude shop!

H Oh really?!

D What did you think it was?

H Oh, I know! Jack saw the bunny thing outside and thought it was a pet shop!

D Did you mistake Ann Summers for a pet shop, Jack?

H [Laughing] Dad, Jack probably thinks that Playboy is a toyshop!

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# Some conclusions...

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- ▶ Makes visible the complexity of how being/becoming 'a man' is subjectively experienced.
- ▶ Provides **insights into perhaps unguarded interactions** between fathers/children away from direct gaze of researcher.
- ▶ **Facilitates access to aspects of emotional self** that may be withheld using other methods.
- ▶ **Significance of what is missing/absent** and what this reveals about the taken-for-grantedness of particular aspects of identification.
- ▶ **'Masculinity'**: a complex, subjective, lived, embodied, reflexive set of practices **subject to interpretation and slippage** – where social recognition is intrinsic to its performative enactment.

