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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT ELECT OF CASAE/ACÉÉA (2021-2022)

On behalf of the *Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE/ACÉÉA)* executive board, we would like to welcome you to the conference and proceedings of *Adult Education in Global Times: An International Research Conference (AEGT 2021)*. AEGT 2021 is our first annual conference which is being held virtually due to the unusual circumstance of COVID-19. It, nonetheless, needs to be acknowledged though that the conference is place-based. It is held by the University of British Columbia (UBC), which is situated on the, traditional, unceded, and ancestral territories of the [Coast Salish Peoples](#), including the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and Stó:lō and Səl'ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

AEGT 2021 is our first global adult education conference in two decades. The last time that we had a global conference of similar scale was in 2000 when CASAE/ACÉÉA partnered with five international adult education associations for its annual conference. This time, AEGT 2021 is held in partnership with the *Adult Education Research Conference (AERC)*, *Adult Learning Australia (ALA)*, *American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)*, *European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)*, *Indian Adult Education Association (IAEA)*, *International Society for Comparative Adult Education (ISCAE)*, and the *Standing Conference on University of Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA)*. All these organizations were also partners of AEGT 2020, which was cancelled for obvious reasons. We thank the leaders of these organizations for continuing their commitment of their partnership to 2021.

We thank Dr. Tom Sork, the Conference Chair, for his extensive work on both AEGT 2020 and AEGT 2021. Without his assiduity, perseverance, resourcefulness, organization and direction, AEGT 2021 would not be possible. UBC is instrumental to the successful launch of the conference. Among others, we wish to thank Dr. Blye Frank, Dean of the Faculty of Education at UBC, Drs. Ali Abdi and Mona Gleason, Past and Current Head of the Department of Educational Studies (EDST), staff of EDST,

especially Carl Luk (Web Coordinator) and Shermila Salgadoe (Finance and Administration) for their commitment and support for both conferences. We also thank UBC's Faculty of Education *Research Infrastructure Support Services program*, staff of UBC's *Conferences and Accommodation Office*, EDST students: Jessica Lussier, social media liaison; Naiying Xue and Puthykol Sengkeo, volunteer coordinators; and all other student volunteers for their

support for the conferences.

Our gratitude is extended to Dr. Jude Walker, Dr. Suzanne Smythe, and Gabriella Maestrini for the AEGT 2021 Conference Proceedings. Some of the work presented in this conference was previously published in the conference proceedings that Dr. John Egan edited as part of the [AEGT 2020](#) conference – thanks John!

We also wish to thank all preconference organizers: Drs. Qi Sun (Chair), Haijun Kang, Bo Chang, Xi Lin, together with Xiaoqiao Zhang and Xiaoying Jiang, for *the Asian Pre-Conference*; Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, for *the 5th Bullying, Incivility, and violence in Adult, Higher, Continuing, and Professional Education Pre-Conference*; graduate students Marlon Sanches and Eluza Gomes as well as Drs. Arpi Hamalian and Audrey Dahl for their preconference in celebration of Paulo Freire's 100th birth anniversary and the 50th anniversary of the publication of his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Drs. Darlene Clover, Kathy Sanford, Kerry Harman, Suriani Dzulkifli, together with Nabila Kazmi and Tracey Murphy for *Feminist Aesthetic Pedagogies and Activist Strategies: Encouraging Feminist Imaginaries*; Eluza Maria Gomes and Yeonjoo Kim for *CASAE graduate student preconference on Anti-Racism and Adult Education*, and *The Coalition of Lifelong Learning Organizations* (Drs. Linda Morris, Annalisa Raymer, Christy Rhodes), *The European-North American Network of Learning Cities* (Denis Barrett) and *Asia-Europe Meeting - Education and Research Hub on Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub)* (Dr. Séamus Ó Tuama, and Joni Hendrick) for organizing *Research About and for Building Learning Cities*. Special thanks also go to Drs. Carole Roy and Shauna Butterwick for organizing our *Documentary Film Festival*, and to Susie Brigham for organizing the opening keynote panel.

We also want to express our gratitude to all other people who have volunteered their time to make the conference possible. Special thanks go to Drs. Robert McGray (Chair), Natalia Balyasnikova, Cindy Hanson, Jingzhou Liu, and Amea Wilbur for serving on the *Conference Paper Adjudication Committee*; Drs. Sharhzad Mojab (Chair), Sara Carpenter, Bill Fallis, and Seonaigh MacPherson for serving on the *Lifetime Achievement Award Committee*; and Drs. Roula Hawa (Chair), Kay Johnson, Karen Magro and Yidan Zhu for serving on the *Alan Thomas Graduate Student Paper Award Committee*.

Thank you to all the presenters and registrants. We hope you enjoy reading the proceedings!

Hongxia Shan and Cindy Hanson

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LEARNING AFTER MOTHERHOOD: UK WOMEN'S RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVES ON THE IMPACT OF HAVING A CHILD IN THE LIFE COURSE

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Abstract

Motherhood is a key event that characterizes female life course in societies; it has been analysed from different conceptual approaches and from several epistemological perspectives. Little attention has been paid to the relationships between motherhood, working life and adult learning, starting from a comprehensive perspective, allowing portrayal of the long effects of motherhood in women's life course trajectories. In this paper we analyse the impact of having [or not] children in women's lives starting from a retrospective and a reflective perspective of mid-life, directly from women's narrative accounts.

Keywords: Motherhood, life course, narrative learning

From a feminist perspective, motherhood and mothering are considered historically, culturally and socially defined. Because of its universal nature, motherhood as a construct also provides a lens for examination of societies and cultures. In Western and industrialized economies, motherhood has been discussed in association with gender equality and gender construction, welfare state characteristics, family policies, labour market wages and education levels (Biasin & Chianese, 2021).

The shaping of the female life course is often ascribed to, and its inequalities excused by, this reproductive choice (Lappegard & Ronsen, 2005); negotiating work and family spheres in order to attain a balance between them is predominantly conceptualized as a gender issue (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). The structure of labour markets require that women accommodate, differently from men, this crucial event. The decision to become, or not, a mother entails attempts to reconcile incompatible demands: working part time, delaying childbirth, delegating childcare, parenting at an older age, choosing not to have children.

Although the UK workforce participation rate of women has increased significantly, women continue to bear most of the childcare responsibilities. The presence of children impacts female paid employment, labour market position and the return to the labour force after pregnancy. Research into motherhood shows that having a child under the age of three reduced the likelihood of full-time employment; becoming a mother impacts on life transitions (Shirani et al., 2017); is closely related educational level, to the timing of motherhood and to the female wage gap (Viitanen, 2014).

Using longitudinal data from three cohort studies of people born in 1958, 1970 and 2000, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), UCL has explored the role of part-time employment in the occupational mobility of women, demonstrating the association between occupational downgrading upon childbearing and gender wage inequality (Budoki et al., 2012). The differences between women entering motherhood as teenagers or in their late thirties and early forties show age to be an important marker in the intergenerational transmission of advantage/disadvantage (Hawkes & Joshi, 2012).

In this paper we analyze personal accounts of what having or not having children has meant in women's lives, starting from the 1958-cohort longitudinal data set. Highlighting insider retrospective and reflective perspectives in female stories permits us to explore the meanings of motherhood from a distinctive viewpoint where narratives are ways adult women can reflect on their own lives, weaving dialogues and finding connections between experiences and life events. From this perspective, development in adult life may be understood as a self-learning process that requires continuous sensemaking, allowing transformations through critical reflection and insights (Biasin & Evans, 2019) starting from some key events of the life course. Our aim is to explore how women reflect upon how having [or not having] a child has impacted on their lives, focusing on relationships between work, family life and the experiences associated with having [or not having] children in the life course.

Methodology

We have carried out secondary analysis of data from 220 biographies of people born in one week in 1958 in England, Scotland and Wales, deposited in the UK Data Archive, NCDS Social Participation and Identity Project. From 110 interviews conducted with women at the age of 50 about personal histories and influences in their life courses, we selected a sub-sample of 12 to focus on the event of motherhood and its impact in the life trajectory, concerning specifically the decision to be a mother or the circumstance of not having a child.

Narratives depict the relationship between motherhood and working outside the home as a form of self-representation that leads to consideration of the impact in career pathways, in learning and education trajectories, in personal development and in social interactions. The links between having/not having a child, working and learning are investigated directly from women's retrospective accounts of their life course.

Having or not having children is not considered from the point of view of the "moralities" (Perrier, 2013), but as a relating variable connected to life experiences and self-development. While qualitative methodology is the approach selected, the reference paradigm adopted is from Narrative Learning Theory (Goodson, 2013). Narratives of motherhood are explored in analyzing the participant's voice in the selected sub-sample of semi-structured interviews. We utilized thematic, linguistic and narrative analysis to identify themes and categories in order to explore the meaning of motherhood provided by participants.

Our approach focuses not only on what is told, but also on self-evaluative and reflective intensity of expression about motherhood considered as a life event that constitutes a turning point that introduces a change in the developmental trajectory (Ronkä, 2003). We consider having/not having a child as a turning point that has been meaningful for the direction taken in the women's way of life and that is recognized, situated and evaluated by women themselves taking a long-term perspective on their lives.

Research and Data

We consider in this paper retrospective and reflective narrative accounts of three women who have borne children and four who have not borne children: "telling" cases that reflect differences in socio-economic and educational background. In the 3 selected cases of women who have had children, one (#127) has a working-class background, two (#20) (#74) have middle class backgrounds.

For cases #127 and #20, having children at the time they did lowered their lifetime earnings, as they reduced hours and took on temporary work positions while pregnant and while working. Both have worked through most of their adult lives, and both talk explicitly about ways in which motherhood has influenced them at key points in their lives.

In case #127, dislike of schooling combined with strong work ethic set her on the path to a skilled occupation - hairdressing, but she gave it up because of poor pay. When "pregnancies crept in"

she limited her paid work to “a few hours” at the school where first husband was caretaker. Having children did not take her away from skilled vocational track as she had already decided she didn’t like hairdressing and had gone into retail. Take up of part-time work after her children were born led her to decide eventually to go into the courier/delivery work (*I’m classed as self-employed*) which she enjoys and seems to give her some work satisfaction. There is a strong practical dimension: the children’s support as her ‘rocks’ is reflected upon retrospectively as practical and emotional, in helping her to cope and get over in difficult times and events. The relationship with children is also portrayed as reciprocal and, sometimes, a barrier. She wants to move abroad in later life but is held back by the prospect of leaving her ‘boys’ behind.

In case (#20) the woman’s work life had started in a professional job. Following her husband in his new job and then pregnancy led her to take up “locums” – temporary, infilling jobs fitting around children. Her account emphasises influence of children on work planning and the time she “puts aside for the children”. Reflections on motherhood make lateral connections with re-evaluating her marriage, divorce and career development. She emphasizes putting her children first and her concern that her children would not “miss out” by being in a single parent family. In this second case, the mother is aware of benefits arising from her practical engagement in her children’s out-of-school activities (for example, musical activities), reflecting that these created personal development opportunities for her as well as the children. The social organization of the family plays a central role in accounts of both women.

The third, contrasting, case (#74) is a woman who becomes a personal assistant despite encouragement from parents and teachers to “aim higher”. Later in life, after children, she embarks on completely new professional career as a social worker. Well-being and welfare of her one child is expressed as a consideration from time to time, as she reflects on leaving the abusive relationship of her marriage, job change decisions and her personal life (suitability of partners). Her daughter is portrayed as demonstrating independent behaviour from an early age and the mother’s reflections refer to ways in which she has accommodated her daughter’s needs and kept her safe, for example changing jobs because a change to her worksite made it difficult to get home in time for her “after school” caring responsibilities.

However, motherhood does not shape the overall direction of her life and, in contrast to the other two cases, she does not explicitly draw on the experience of motherhood as an experiential resource. Her account is driven by accounts of ‘testing’ confronting situations and acting on the spur of the moment (‘insight’) or with single minded determination.

In the wider sample, there are cases where not having children has been a clear life-decision; cases where having children would have been a preference but has not been possible cases were becoming a stepmother or step-grandmother to partners’ children and grandchildren is given importance in the narrative. These cases overlap.

Of four selected cases of women who have not had children, one, a university graduate from a working-class background (#165) made no mention of not having children in her reflections on her life story. Her life markers related wholly to her career and her current health challenges. A recurrent theme was the importance for her identity development of differentiating herself from her twin sister, from childhood onwards. She emphasises that her family was “poor” and as a twin, the few resources the family had for the children always had to be shared by two.

In case #175, the woman came from a “comfortable” background and had left school early to work in a bank, without considering further education. In her late teens and twenties, she had focused on work and her relationship with a man who was married to someone else, with children of his own. After his divorce, they eventually married and worked together in various business ventures. This woman describes herself as influenced by her father and husband. Looking back on schooling, she reflects that she has done better in life than someone who was always “top of the class”. She has stepchildren and step-grandchildren. Valuing being able to “choose when and what I do” pervades her account and she talks about how, recently, she has felt her independence, ability to choose have been

curtailed by obligations towards elderly parents-in-law and having to negotiate her preferences with her long-term partner.

The account of Case #149 emphasizes the costs of having children, materially and in terms of constraints on personal freedom. She notes that she gave up work for a time, which would not have been possible had she had the expense of children to care for. She also emphasizes the security of her, and her partner's working lives.

In case #214, a science graduate who became a small business owner and married a partner who had children from previous marriage, discussed briefly whether she had wanted to have 'her own' children: "I knew that the possibility was fairly slim. So, it's not something I'm really upset about. I'm fortunate that I've got goddaughters, a niece and grandchildren, albeit step grandchildren but they're very much just my grandchildren... So no, it just wasn't meant to be."

These selected cases reflect some of the diversity of life situations associated with not having children. They also reflect the modes of agency and learning profiles discussed in a previous paper: "contained"; "reactive"; "testing"; "consciously reflective" (Biasin & Evans, 2019).

Discussion

Motherhood is not a status. Having children or not having them is an empirical fact and an extended life event – women can have children over time and in varying circumstances; with different partners; the fact of "having children" or "not having children" is sometimes not a matter of choice, but involuntary – with consequences bound up with other life course dynamics (Letherby & Williams, 1999).

The accounts all reflect on a life palette of events. Nine event types recur in the wider population (Biasin & Evans, 2019) and each woman's account represents a subset. Most reflect on having/not having children as an extended event that has ongoing consequences. Reflections on life events reveal interdependencies as women reflect on what facilitated (or influenced or impeded) what they have been able to do, or become, in their lives so far, with health, bereavement, job changes all part of an evolving interpersonal and social dynamic.

Some accounts of women without children viewed motherhood as a life event with consequences that they have avoided, such as costs and commitments. For those who made a clear decision not to have children, this too is a life event with consequences, which they discuss in terms of relationships beyond the traditional notion of family. Most women's narratives, irrespective of having children or not, drew on experiential resources afforded by relationships with extended family, including siblings' families, stepchildren/grandchildren or working with children's charities.

How did these extended life events and relationships feature in the ways in which they moved their lives forward? The sample reflects the agency and learning profiles that we have identified previously in the wider sample: "contained"; "reactive"; "testing"; "consciously reflective" (Biasin & Evans, 2019). We elaborate that account by suggesting that the influences of having or not having a child on the life course are mediated by the women's abilities to develop critical insights into how they can move their lives forward. And these abilities are not necessarily connected to educational level. While these abilities are most apparent in women who are 'consciously reflective' in their expressions of agency and learning, there is some evidence of insight developing through the telling of the story, as well as in what is told, with glimpses of the macro influences of gender regimes in micro accounts of gendered expectations and roles.

Conclusion

Implications for adult education theory and practice arise from reconceptualization of relationships between learning and the experiences associated with having [or not having] children in the life course, based on the perspectives of women themselves. Previous research includes a body of

literature on how adult education can support women who have left paid employment to care for their children and have lost economically and in terms of confidence in so doing.

While research on women returners has undoubtedly contributed to moving the field forward there is also a danger of unintentionally reinforcing stereotypical assumptions about the life course in women who have and have not had children. In practice, career breaks can increasingly be afforded by women who have not had children, while women with children are often obliged to continue working to cover the costs of a family, irrespective of what they actually want.

Adult education's role is to support the ability to reflect on life course from a critical and reflective perspective in order to help adults to realize the emancipative potential of their unfolding lives (Stromqvist, 2006; Evans et al., 2013).

The dynamic of multiple activating events and relationships in women's lives demands sensitivity from adult practitioners to subtle variations not only in the ways the experience of having or not having children influences the life course trajectories but also variations in the critical intensity and depth of the learning processes involved.

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