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Timonen, V., Scharf, T., Conlon, C., & Carney, G. (2012). *Re-conceptualising intergenerational solidarity and justice through the grounded theory approach*. Paper presented at 10th Annual Conference of the European Network for Social Policy Analysis 2012, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

Document Version:
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Re-conceptualising intergenerational solidarity and justice through the Grounded Theory approach

Timonen, Virpi* Conlon, Catherine* Scharf, Thomas** and Carney, Gemma**

*Trinity College Dublin

**National University of Ireland Galway

For presentation at the ESPAnet conference, Edinburgh, 6-8 September 2012

Stream 13 on Intergenerational Justice (Chair B. Searle)

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Rationale

Conceptual rigidity and taken-for-grantedness around intergenerational solidarity (and justice)



Operationalized narrowly

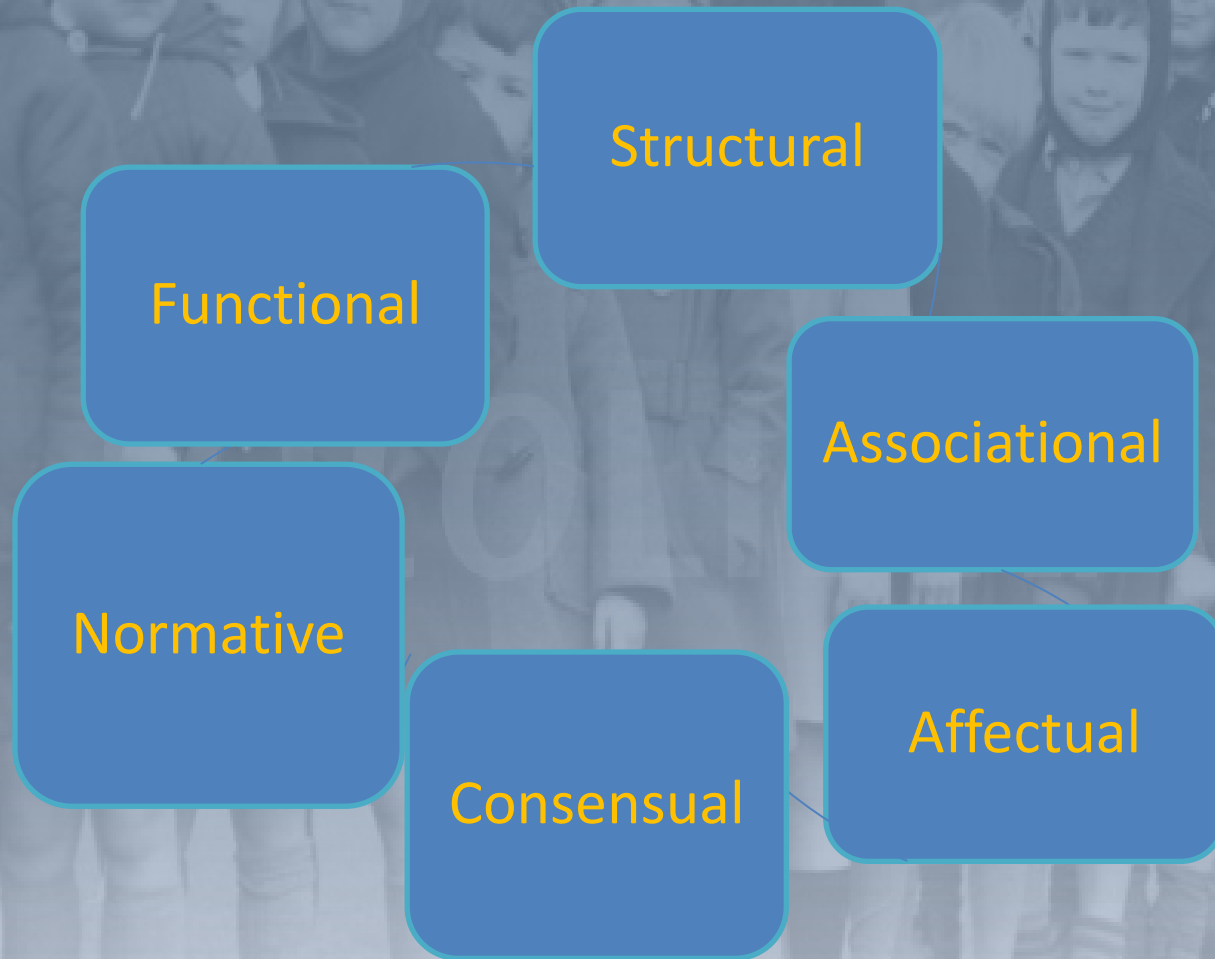


Used glibly for political (and research) purposes

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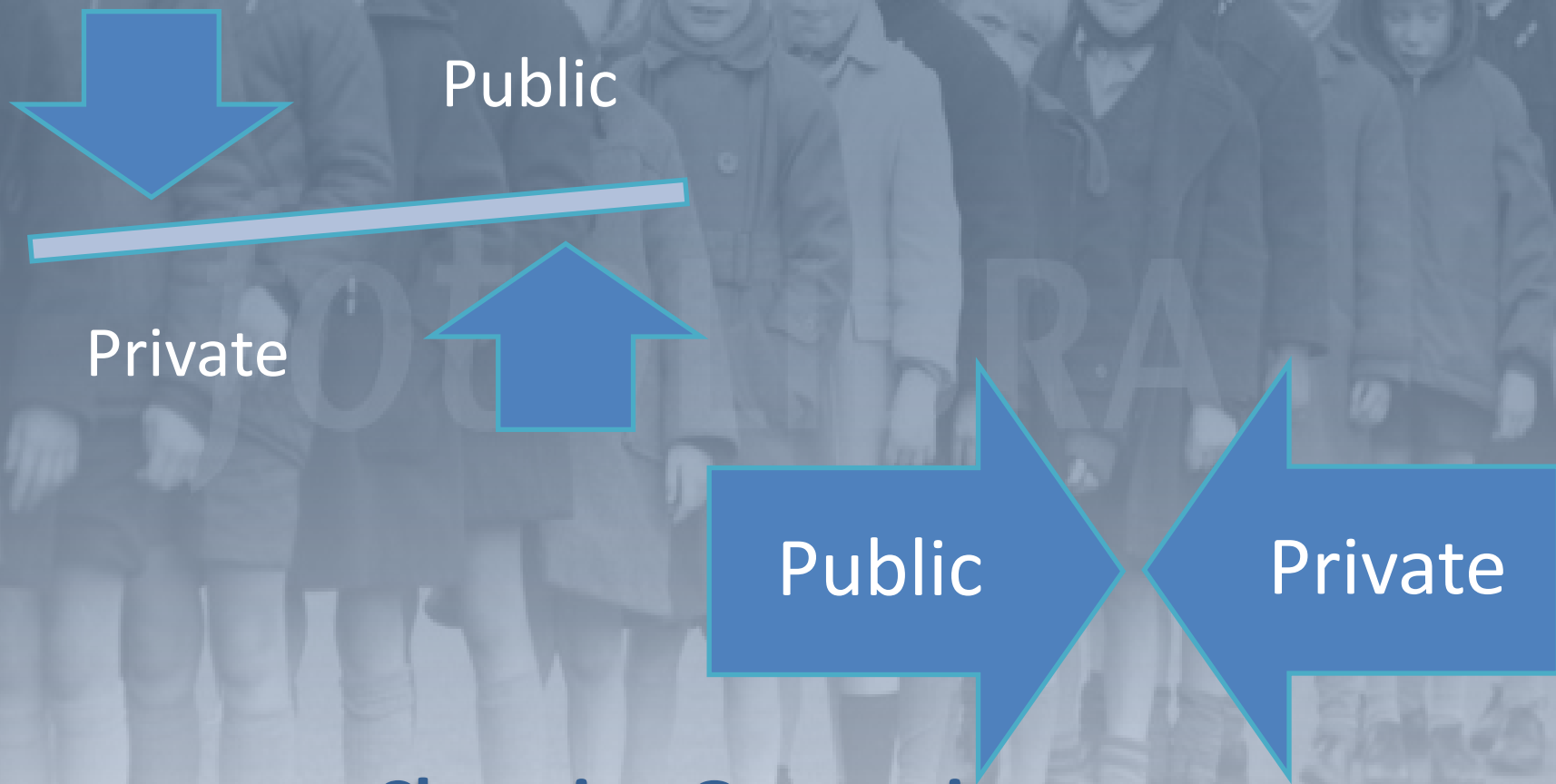
Intergenerational solidarity (conflict) in parent-adult child relations (Bengtson et al.)



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Public and private solidarities: zero-sum / mutually reinforcing



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Aim

To theorise IGS in Ireland / contemporary post-industrial societies on the basis of everyday experiences and practices among people of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

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Approach: Grounded Theory

Allow research participants to recount their perceptions and experiences of the *give and take* between themselves, family (social network) members and society at large

- *When not forced to make choices between 'more' or 'less' resources for 'the young' or 'the old', what will people say about the give and take between generations, and what does that tell us about IGS?*

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Study context in brief

- Liberal welfare state
- Deep recession caused by a property market bubble & overexposure of the banking system to the property sector
- Currently very tight fiscal policy
- Emigration: 250,000 since 2008 (c.f. current population of ca. 4.4 million)
- > 10 % of residential mortgages in long arrears
- 3,000 “ghost estates”

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Method

- 100 interviews conducted 21 September 2011 - 9 July 2012
- Purposive & snowball sampling from 7 diverse geographical locations in the West & East of Ireland
- Interviews ranged from 31 to 160 minutes in duration, average duration 72 minutes
- All interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim
- The interview data spans a total of 3,737 pages and 1,172,503 words
- Method fully documented, replicable and available for use in other country contexts

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Sample by sex, age, SES

Class	Men (N= 46)				Women (N = 54)				Totals
	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	
High SES	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	36
	4	5	8	3	1	10	3	2	
Middle SES	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	27
	1	4	3	2	4	5	3	5	
Low SES	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	18-25	26-50	51-74	75+	37
	6	4	5	1	6	6	4	5	
TOTALS	11	13	16	6	11	21	10	12	100

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Interview guide of 10 questions, 4 core questions into which temporal dimension introduced by interviewer

- Can you tell me about the **help and support**, if any, you are **receiving from other people**? [‘receiving – private’]
- Can you also tell me about any help and support **you are giving to others**? [‘giving – private’]
- Thinking about Ireland as a whole, in what ways do you think that you are **contributing to Irish society**? [‘giving – public’]
- What do you see yourself **receiving from the State**? [‘receiving – public’]

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Findings I – Intergenerational distributional conflict does not feature

Participants see no need to juxtapose public expenditure on older people with expenditure on younger people: the idea of taking from one generation in the interest of another barely features



Pitting generations / age groups against each other in survey research can force choices that are not 'real' – but rather artificial constructs

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Exception to strong support for older people's entitlements

[The medical card] should be means tested...that blanket over seventies [free health care] was a magnanimous gesture...without too much thinking behind it. (...) I think you have got to look after yourself from the cradle to the grave.

Martha O'Flynn, 69, high SES

** All names used are pseudonyms*

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The locus of perceived injustice and unfairness

...lies completely outside the intergenerational sphere. Instead, critique is directed at two very different groups:

- (1) politicians and (highly paid) public sector workers
- (2) recipients of some means-tested welfare benefits

➔ Conflict and perceived unfairness / injustice are inter-sector and 'inter-class', NOT inter-generational

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Findings II: Intra-family practices of solidarity strongly defined by class

- Wealth leads (enables) individuals to 'contract out' elements of intergenerational solidarity, in particular care (of both children and older family members)
- Wealth in combination with cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1996) enables strong resourcing of children by parents in possession of these resources

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Lorna Gogan, 79, high SES

I brought [my children] always to museums and places of historical interest. I was always trying to broaden their education, I suppose. I made sure that they were always aware of current affairs and things like that. (...) my daughter...is doing all the things that I did with her, with her kids now...one of [her daughter's children] was weak at maths and she has a tutor coming into the house...She is making sure that he will overcome that problem. She is not just sitting back and waiting for the teachers to do it.

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Elaine Heaney, 45, high SES

I have three sons, they have all been pumped with sports from the time they are six... hurling, Gaelic [Irish national games], tennis, rugby, soccer, swimming (...) what I am doing is keeping them active, keeping them fit, keeping them social... I do feel it is probably a little bit excessive but I kind of feel 'is that not what everyone is [doing] at the moment?!' It is quite exhausting, it is quite exhausting, it is expensive, it puts pressure on you in every respect. In some ways it is gratifying though...it is good for their development.

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Formation of children's life chances as a (neglected) mode of inter-generational solidarity

- Resourcing, or *formation*, of children is the single most influential and long-lasting generational family practice that influences life chances and key outcomes throughout the life course
- Research and policies remain poorly attuned to this pattern that is strongly defined by class (and gender)

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The autonomous family

- The reliance on the family constitutes the deep roots of inequality in (Irish) society
- The increasing orientation of many welfare states in a familialist direction augurs movement towards or reinforcement of the kind of patterns of intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage that our data so strikingly illustrate

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Generational observing & expectations regarding solidarity

- Older interviewees observed the nuclear family of today 'closing in' on itself in a manner that leaves less time for older family generations. The generational orientation is seen to be increasingly 'downward' – investment into children becomes heavier and heavier.
- Expectations regarding future family care from adult children and their families were particularly low among middle and high SES older adults whose adult children and children-in-law were in employment – and who had in many cases already saved up money to pay for their own care privately.

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“Unquestioned obligation” – class-based and gendered

I shouldn't be paid to look after [my grandmother] (...) when it's your family I feel like it's kind of your duty (...) I do everything, the washing, the drying, the feeding, the bathing...I have to do everything for her (...) Your family is your family.

Stacey Kennedy, 19, low SES

[My mother] doesn't care, but if something happened [to her] tomorrow I'd be the first there. (...) regardless of anything. A hundred percent. (...) [because] [s]he's your mother and you'll always only have one mother.

Kylie Quinn, 25, low SES

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Perceptions of IGS are class-based

- Class is the central variable that, together with gender, either 'binds' or 'frees' from extensive intra-family solidarity
- Social policies in most countries are currently very poorly attuned to this pattern
- Corroborates Kohli's (2006) postulate that the 'generational cleavage...masks the continued existence of the class cleavage between the wealthy and the poor'

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Findings III: IGS in an intermediate sphere between State and family

- In socially disadvantaged communities, intergenerational community involvement served to offset impacts and risks attached to poverty and social exclusion
- In advantaged neighbourhoods such involvement serves the function of enhancing one's social capital
- Men involved in an organised or 'institutionalised' way (e.g. boxing!)
- Women involved in caring for people at community level (e.g. meals-on-wheels services)

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Conclusions I

- In the light of everyday practices, perceptions and beliefs recounted by our participants, solidarities are strongly class-based & gendered – something that most current research and theorising neglect / underestimate
- Focusing on age, cohort and generation in the absence of attention to gender and class can produce deeply misleading findings and argumentation

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Conclusions II

- What is perceived in the 'private' sphere of family relations ('generational observing') influences our expectations regarding family solidarity
- Practices and expectations around the formation of children and care of ageing parents are closely inter-twined – and again, strongly class-based and gendered

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Conclusions III

- Intergenerational solidarity at societal level cannot be understood without taking note of what is much closer to most people's lived experience, namely solidarity at family level
- Here we echo Goerres and Tepe (2011) who talk about the 'socially constructed nexus between the family and the welfare state', which evinces 'motives of reciprocal exchange between generations rather than pure age-based self-interest'

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Conclusions IV

- Inter-generational solidarity (or conflict) can be expressed and studied at the interface between families and State
- This 'third sphere' of solidarity lies within the community settings that are more proximal for most people than 'the State'
- Attempts to measure inter-generational solidarity in societies have tended to ignore this sphere where many of our participants felt they were making important contributions

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Thanks & Acknowledgements

- ❖ All 100 participants.
- ❖ Scientific Advisory Board of *Changing Generations*, and in particular Prof Kathy Charmaz who first developed the constructivist Grounded Theory method and has advised the research team on applying this method.
- ❖ The Atlantic Philanthropies who fund the study.

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