Virpi Ylänne* and Pirjo Nikander

Being an 'older parent': Chrononormativity and practices of stage of life categorisation

https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2019-2036

Abstract: This article investigates the discursive practices of older first-time parents in interview interaction. Our focus is on the ways in which cultural notions surrounding the timing of parenthood are mobilised, and how speakers orient to potential discrepancies between the category 'parent' and their own stage of life (SOL) or age category. The data corpus comprises qualitative interviews with 15 heterosexual couples and individuals in the UK who became parents between the ages of 35–57 years. Examining reproductive biographical talk at midlife at a time when the average age of first time parents is rising and delayed parenting is increasing across Western countries provides a testing ground for the analysis of norms concerning the 'right time' of lifetime transitions, and age-appropriateness more generally. Inspired by Elizabeth Freeman's notion of 'chrononormativity', our analysis demonstrates that 'older parents' engage in considerable discursive work to bridge temporal aspects of their parenthood. Moreover, we show how the notion of chrononormativity can be theoretically and empirically elaborated through the adoption of membership categorisation and discourse analysis. In explicating how taken-for-granted, temporal notions of lifespan events are mobilised, our findings contribute to research on age-in-interaction, social identity and categorisation, and on the methodology for analysing the discursive age-order and chrononormativity more broadly.

Keywords: chrononormativity, lifespan identity, stage of life categories (SOL), membership categorisation, MCA, parenting

***Corresponding author: Virpi Ylänne,** Centre for Language and Communication Research, ENCAP, Cardiff University, John Percival Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, Wales, UK, E-mail: Ylanne@cardiff.ac.uk
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9042-5501
Pirjo Nikander, The Doctoral School, Tampere University, Tampere FIN- 33014, Finland, E-mail: Pirjo.Nikander@tuni.fi
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9884-8947

1 Introduction

The human life course is traditionally depicted as a series of transitions through stages, roles, and age-specific challenges or milestones. Our day-to-day mundane interaction is full of age marking, with subtle and more direct 'age-telling' and interactional and institutional displays and appraisals of life course positions. Categories and formulations of age are made relevant 'in implicit or explicit ways, as we position each other in lifespan implicative ways, or describe and account for our own and others' actions in talk' (Nikander 2009: 264). While undeniably biologically determined, age, life course maturation, and change are interactionally negotiated and contested, as work by interactional sociolinguists and cultural gerontologists has shown (e.g. Nikander 2002; Coupland 2009). Culturally shared norms and assumptions concerning age-appropriate lifestyles and milestones are in constant flux, however, and may lag behind people's actual everyday practices. This 'structural and cultural lag' (Riley 1987; Hareven 1994) means that individuals at the forefront of new trends and alternative lifespan timings may subsequently feel caught between the social norms and expectations and their own situation.

In this article, we examine accounts of 'older' first-time parents to produce a systematic analysis of the discursive practices of stage of life (SOL) categorisation in their talk. Specifically, we look at how age categories – mobilised, or alluded to in conjunction with the category 'parent' – or family categories like 'mother' or 'father' are handled in interview interaction. Central to our analysis are 'categorical practices' (Stokoe 2012: 277) that revolve around 'the ideal time' of parenting, being 'off-time' or 'out of step', as well as chrononormative notions concerning parenthood and lifetime transitions. The article aims at updating and testing current understandings of social and discursive norms regarding parenting and age, and the extent to which 'older parents' orient to their parenthood as a marked or a 'troubled category' (Reynolds and Wetherell 2003). The research questions for this study are as folows:

> How do interviewees mobilise, characterise and challenge temporal aspects of their parenthood?
>
> What are the potential discrepancies between parenthood and one's chronological age and how do they surface and get resolved in talk?

In addressing these questions, we aim to contribute empirically and theoretically to research on age norms, age identity construction and chrononormativity.

What follows is a literature review and the introduction of the main theoretical concepts and frameworks underpinning our study (Section 2). We then

summarise the data gathering and analysis procedures (Section 3). The data analysis (Section 4) provides detailed examples of our findings, illustrating our analytic foci, and the discussion and conclusion (Section 5) brings together our contribution to research on age norms and discursive constructions of late parenting and their related category memberships.

2 Literature Review

We start by situating the study in relation to contemporary demographic parenting trends and exemplify related previous research (Section 2.1). We then identify relevant theoretical concepts and analytical traditions which have motivated our research questions (Sections 2.2 and 2.3).

2.1 Delayed parenting

Examining reproductive biographical talk at midlife is timely as the average age of first-time parents is on the rise, and delayed parenting is increasingly common across Western countries. For example, in England and Wales the average age of first-time mothers in 2016 was 28.8 years (*Office for National Statistics* (ONS) 2017). Whereas the majority of mothers of all new-borns (i.e. not just first-time mothers) in 2016 were aged between 25 and 35, more babies were born to mothers between the ages of 35 and 39 than to those between 20 and 24 years. The same was the case for mothers between 40 and 44, as compared to those under 20 years. Two-thirds (68%) of all babies born had fathers aged 30 and over (*Office for National Statistics* (ONS) 2017). Our focus is to examine 'older' (over 35 years) first-time parents' accounts of their parenting experience.

Temporality, timing and transitions through the lifespan have been studied particularly in ageing research. Settersten and Hägestad (1996: 178), for example, point out that expectations "about the proper timing and progression of events and roles, or the ways in which individuals in a culture go about dividing life into meaningful segments" construct age norms for a predictable life-course, linked with laws and policies that structure rights and responsibilities based on chronological age. These norms constitute reference frames that guide assessments of being 'on time' or 'off-time', which in turn may influence a person's self-esteem. For example, "deviating from social clocks may generate unfavourable comparisons of the self with others" (Barrett 2005: 166). But how rigid are such views of lifespan stages? There are different factors at play effecting change

in behaviour, e.g. cultural factors (e.g. attitudes towards contraception); medical and biological factors (e.g. improvements in Assisted Reproductive Technologies [ARTs]; ageing women's improved health); financial factors (e.g. time it takes to get professionally established), among others.

Previous literature on late parenting has demonstrated such concerns both in parent interviews and in media texts. In particular, late parenting has become associated with various risks. Interviewing women who had had their first baby at age 35+, Locke and Budds (2013), for example, found that risk discourses about decreasing fertility with increasing maternal age accelerated decisions about pregnancy and hurried reproduction. Regarding identity management, Friese et al. (2008) discuss the potentially stigmatised identities of older infertile mothers (who conceived via In-Vitro Fertilization). Destigmatising practices included 'normalising' older motherhood by trying to 'pass' as a younger mother (e.g. via appearance) or by linking older motherhood with discourses of 'good mothering' (see also Budds et al. 2016).

In British news media representations, a continued scrutiny of motherhood by teenagers, older women and those delaying motherhood – seen to challenge traditional forms of motherhood – is observed by Hadfield et al. (2007) (see also Ylänne 2016). Similarly, Shaw and Giles (2009) report negative orientations in UK news media relating to the 'unnaturalness' of older mothering. In contrast, Mills et al. (2015) find predominantly positive or neutral representations of childbearing in women over 35 in British media. These representations generally endorsed delayed childbearing, via extended coverage of celebrities and mothers below the age of menopause. Ylänne (2017) shows how postmenopausal mothers are largely represented as 'others' and as agents of choice in the twenty-first century UK print media. The current study provides an extension to previous research on late/delayed parenting, which has predominantly focused on motherhood. Analysing interview data from the perspective of participants' discursive membership work, our main emphasis is not on gender but on age identities. We will now link our focus of age category membership construction to the theoretical concept of chrononormativity.

2.2 Chrononormativity as a theoretical concept

Recently, lifetime chronological order and temporal transitions have been approached through the notion of *chrononormativity*. This concept, introduced by Freeman (2010), builds on the Butlerian (e.g. 1990) notion of heteronormativity and refers to temporal norms that benchmark the appropriate time for lifespan, and particularly career transitions (such as promotion or retirement).

We wish to adopt and expand this concept and see chrononormativity as a fruitful conceptual framework for the discourse analysis of situated age negotiations. Freeman also discusses 'chronobiopolitics' as a process that "extends beyond individual anatomies to encompass the management of entire populations" (2010: 4). This speaks to schemes of events or strategies for living, including marriage, reproduction, and childrearing.

To date, chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics have, however, predominantly been used for the analysis of lifetime career transitions. Riach et al. (2014) refer to it as a key aspect of the temporal corollary for gendered and sexual life course expectations. They explore cultural chronologies that affect not only the organisational lives of men and women, but also delineate the "assumed and expected heteronormative trajectories that may include … ideas about the 'right' time for particular life stages surrounding partnering, parenting and caring vis-a-vis career progression, promotions and flexible working" (2014: 1678). Similarly, Leonard et al. (2017) analyse negotiations of chrononormativity by older workers starting a new career through apprenticeships. They show how being 'out of joint' on a non-standard pathway is managed (2017: 21).

In this paper, we study transitions by studying parenthood as a case-in-focus. Our hypothesis is that despite increasing flexibility concerning the right timing, and the medical Assisted Reproductive Technologies that also facilitate flexibility, parenthood stills remains a largely contested category. Examining how transition and membership in the category 'older parent' is managed in talk thus presents an excellent case for studying stage of life (SOL) categories in interaction.

2.3 Stage of life categories in interaction

In recent years, discursive work on age and ageing has emphasised the constitutive role of language in lifespan identities, as embedded in various everyday interactional, institutional or inter-generational sites. Work on stage of life (SOL) categories in talk has, for instance, tested post-modern claims of flexibility and 'cut-and-paste' notions of ageing and the baby-boom generation. Nikander (2002, 2009) has shown how categorisations and accounts that go against the speakers' chronological age are typically followed by moral buffering that discursively defuses, and makes such claims more acceptable. Research on institutional encounters focused on SOL categories has analysed, for instance, doctor-patient interaction (Coupland and Coupland 1999), young people's helpline talk (Cromdal et al. 2017), interprofessional meetings and decision-making (Nikander 2003, Nikander 2007), and psychological radio counselling (Thell and Jacobsson

2016). These show the detailed ways in which stage of life categories are invoked for the purposes of specific institutional and interpretative goals.

This study seeks to unfold how stage of life (SOL) categories are put to use when talking about chronological age and one's identity as a parent, as well as patterns that may emerge in how age norms are made relevant. Is age constructed as a flexible or, alternatively, a constraining developmental and social category? Membership Categorisation Analysis is one avenue to examine this.

As a part of his early studies on categorisation, membership categorisation devices and category bound activities, Sacks discussed the uses of the stage of life collection (Sacks 1974). He referred to SOL categories as positioned categories which means "that 'B' could be said to be higher than 'A,' and if 'B' is lower than 'C' then 'A' is lower than 'C' etc." (1974: 222, see also, 1992: 585). As a collection of positioned categories (A<B<C), the stage of life device also provides members with the means of making positive or negative evaluations or judgements. Stage of life categories, in other words, furnish speakers with common sense notions of progression and expectations on behaviour concerning the activities of a member of a particular category (e.g. Silverman 1998; Nikander 2002). Age categories, as membership categories more generally, are inference rich. For example, on hearing that someone is 14-years-old or '50-something', we easily mobilise notions of their typical characteristics and places that a member in these categories would belong to. Reference to age or SOL categories or category implicative attributes and activities thus form part of the common sense logic within which people also talk about themselves as 'older parents'. Notions of discrepancy between their chronological age and the category 'parent' by speakers themselves thus becomes one focal point for the analysis.

3 Methods, data and analysis

Our analysis draws on Membership Categorisation Analytic (MCA) research in showing how chrononormative notions of age might operate, and whether meanings or moral transgression concerning the correct timing of life course transitions surface in talk about parenthood. We are also indebted to and influenced by work in other analytic traditions and methodologies, including discourse analysis; social constructionism (e.g. Burr 2006); postmodernism (e.g. Giddens 1991); interview research (e.g. Baker 2004), as well as Goffman's (1959) notions of presentation of self and impression management. We critically engage with these traditions and concepts in the analysis. Before providing

analysis of our data, we summarise some relevant aspects of MCA and the data collection process.

Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) is an ethnomethodological method for analysing talk and interaction. MCA unravels speakers' use of categories (of e.g. gender, ethnicity, age) as part of their identity work. A central focus in MCA is the use of Membership Categorisation Devices (MCDs). MCDs are, according to Sacks (1992: 238), "collections of categories for referring to some persons, with some rules of application, where these devices can be applied to populations and members apply them to populations to say things about them". MCDs function to group categories collectively. For example, the categories 'baby' and 'mother' belong to the MCD 'family'. Of analytical importance to us are also the notions of 'category bound activities', that is, activities that are linked to categories, as well as category bound attributes. Following Hester and Eglin (1997), we tease out the discursive detail in which categorisation and the ascription of predicates to categories allows members to show their emic understandings of who is who in relation to whom and so display their understandings of society.

The data corpus comprises 15 semi-structured interviews with nine heterosexual couples and six individuals in England and Wales (four female, two male, also heterosexual), who had become parents for the first time between the ages of 35–57 years, either naturally (eight couples), via assisted reproduction (six couples), or via both routes (one couple). The interviewees were recruited via children's day nurseries, personal contacts and adverts placed in a childbirth trust charity newsletter. This resulted in participants who had a broadly similar profile, although the sample is not fully representative. The occupational status of all the interviewees was that of skilled professional; all had qualifications at further education level and most had completed university (in some cases postgraduate) level of education. Although the number of participants in this study is relatively small, they fit the current demographic profile of older first-time parents. The sample also displayed variety regarding the exact age of transition to parenthood and the circumstances surrounding conception, ranging from a 'total accident' to several years' fertility treatment, and thus captures some of the different possible profiles of late parents.

Table 1 summarises some demographic details of the participants. Pseudonyms replace all real names.

All interviewees were either married or in a long term relationship with the other parent of their child/children and resided in the UK. The audio-recorded interviews were conducted face-to-face by the first author; they took place in the interviewees' homes (12 interviews) or at University premises (three interviews) and lasted between 35 and 65 minutes each (total length of

Table 1: Interviewees' demographic profiles.

pseudonyms	age	occupation/education	child(ren)
Emma & James	47; 54	BSc + MBA; PhD	Son 3 yrs
Maria & Tom	42; 43	Architect; architect	Son 6 yrs, daughter 2 yrs
Fran & Roger	43; 57	General practitioner; University lecturer	Son 2 yrs
Tim	42	University lecturer, PhD	Sons 4 yrs and 21 months
Anna & John	43; 45	Nurse; nurse	Expecting son (28 weeks pregnant)
Gill & Chris	44; 39	Brand marketing manager; operations director	Sons 6 yrs and 4 yrs
Megan & Kieron	50; 50	Former export manager; engineer	Daughters 14 and 7 yrs
Julia & Jan	41; 50	Former management consultant; MBA	Daughter 8 months
Helena	59	Accountant	Twin sons 2 yrs
Gail & Peter	61; 61	Retired teacher; farmer	Sons 20 + yrs
Carol & Paul	49; 50	LDD careers adviser; IT project manager	Son 7 yrs
Jane	42	Flight attendant	Son 7 months
Nigel	45	MA Linguistics & Literature	Son 3 months
Frances	40	Teacher/road safety officer	Daughter 3 yrs, son 4 months
Pam	41	Civil servant	Son 10 months

recordings is 11.5 hours). The participants gave informed written consent before recording commenced and received a further debriefing afterwards. The relevant Research Ethics Committee approval was sought from the first author's University. The recordings were transcribed using *Transana* transcription software, broadly adopting Gail Jefferson's model of conventions (Atkinson and Heritage 1999; see Appendix).

Interviews are one of the most popular methods of data generation in social science research, although not favoured by many MCA practitioners (as talk is not seen as 'naturally occurring'). Following a discourse analytic take on interview data, we view interviews as interaction on its own right and as situated social action (Nikander 2012). In line with Baker's perspective, we see interviewing as

> an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge, including their knowledge about how members of categories routinely speak; questions are a central part of the data and cannot be viewed as neutral invitations to speak – rather, they shape how and as a member of which categories the respondent should speak; interview responses are treated as accounts more than reports – that is, they are understood as the work of accounting by a member of a category for activities attached to that category. (Baker 2004: 163)

The exact order of questions in the interview guide and any follow-up questions was adjusted in line with interviewees' talk. Once the interviews were transcribed, repeated listening of the recordings together with the transcripts enabled the identification of any reference to age and parenting in the data, adopting MCA as our main line of analysis. In addition, the interviews were coded for other relevant category formulations, accounts for reasons for late parenting, and references to advantages and disadvantages of late parenting. In the analytic section to follow, data extracts are used to provide evidence for patterns relevant to the theoretical issues of parenting, identity and chrononormativity.

4 Data analysis: Stage of life categories in talk on parenthood

4.1 Temporal, psychological, relational and economic arguments

Given the nature of the interview on a topic outlined from the outset, speakers readily mobilised a range of *temporal* details surrounding their circumstances of becoming a parent. An example of this is Extract 1 (R=researcher/interviewer; Tim = interviewee).

//(1)

1 R: I was wondering if you could just tell me a little bit
2 about (1.0) your parenting (.) experience erm how
3 is it that (1.0) you didn't come (.) you didn't
4 become a parent sort of in your twenties or
5 ((slight [laugh)) a little bit earlier?
6 Tim: [((slight laugh))
7 Tim: er: I I suppose the <u>main</u> reason is: you know to
8 become a parent you have to have someone to
9 become a parent with=
10 R: =yep!=
11 Tim: =erm: and: er: you know relationshipwise I didn't
12 really get into (.) a: good relationship until erm
13 my final year of my PhD so that's when my wife

14 and I who ((smacks lips)) she was doing a PhD in
15 the year below me (.) so I met her in=
16 R: =right
17 Tim: two thousand (1.0) erm: and we got together
18 eventually in two thousand and two I think
19 R: yeah
20 Tim: erm:: a:nd we were engaged in two thousand (1.0)
21 and (1.0) um eight married in two thousand and
22 nine and our son was born two thousand and ten
23 R: right=
24 Tim: =so um: (.) it w- wasn't a case of (.) not wanting
25 children [it was] a case of
26 R: [yes]
27 Tim: not having a relationship to to do that in

The shared laughter early on marks the topic of the timing as perhaps something to be expected but also as potentially sensitive (Widdicombe 2017). Answering the interviewer's initial question, Tim immediately mobilises the category pair parent–parent to provide a key reason for postponed parenthood. Common sense notions (thus "you know" in line 7) such as one cannot parent alone provide the discursive setting for a (chrono)logical sequence of events that typically follow each other for parenting to happen. The category pair mother-to-be (my wife) – father-to-be (myself) becomes further qualified as a "good relationship" (line 12) that only took place late in Tim's PhD-studies, and dissociates him from someone "not wanting children" (lines 24–25), instead invoking a 'victim of circumstances' frame (Van de Wiel 2014). Late parenting is thus normalised and the journey to the membership of the category 'parent' constructed as following an expected pattern, albeit slightly delayed. The precise year references for his engagement, marriage and the birth of his first child (lines 20–22) further establish the steps along a normative timescale. Analytically, these types of accounts, then, display adherence to a (hetero)chrononormative succession of a stable pattern: relationship – marriage – children. The reasons for later parenting are described as deviations in timing – 'simply' not meeting the right partner earlier.

Fitzgerald (2012: 307) proposes that MCA is relevant to "any discipline interested in aspects of identity and social knowledge", and thus it by implication links with our concerns. MCA can reveal categorial resources and procedures that speakers use which relate to issues such as morality or beliefs. Maturity emerged as one such resource in our data. When considering possible advantages of late parenting, the interviewees frequently referred to their *psychological* characteristics, described as positively developed with age. The

temporal and psychological arguments in interviewees' categorisations were often formulated *relationally*, with other – younger – parents or with their own former selves, as exemplified in Extract 2.

(2)

1	R:	so having become a parent then (.) at forty (.)
2		um (.) ... do you see that there might be any
3		advantages of being a bit older?
4	Pam:	um I think there's yes (.) um I think I know who
5		I am (.) a lot more (.) and I think I can
6		advocate for myself and for him ((referring to son))
...		
7		and I think I'm less prone to I think just
8		because of life experience I've seen a little bit more
9	R:	mhm
10	Pam:	than most ((talks to baby)) you know in an emergency
11		if I think he's ill or if something happens
12		I tend not to panic
13	R:	yeah
14	Pam:	um comparing that to (.) some of the other first time
15		mums (.) who seem to get (.) you know who get
16		very very worried about things very easily
17		the only thing I can attribute to that is is age
18	R:	right [okay]
19	Pam:	[um] and just because I've uh seen (.) a bit more
20	R:	yeah
21	Pam:	and been in these situations of mild panic a lot more
22		frequently so it takes a little bit more to faze me

Psychological maturation is invoked by Pam in lines 4–6 in her reference to being more self–aware and confident now than before. The reference to age-related calmness ("I tend not to panic", line 12) is followed by a strategy of comparison, whereby a contrast between "other" first-time mums and "I" is mobilised. Pam describes herself as less anxious than her younger peers, which she attributes to her age and life experience. Getting "very very worried about things very easily" (lines 15–16) is categorised as an undesirable quality for a parent of a young infant, whereas Pam's ability not to be so easily "faze[d]" (line 22) places her in a contrastive and an advantageous position. Thus the quality of resilience is mobilised with the category 'late parent', whereas anxiety and

worry, as well as inexperience with unforeseen circumstances ("mild panic"), are attached to the category 'younger parent'.

Temporal relational categorisations vis-a-vis one's younger self included references to earlier psychological immaturity as well as limited financial circumstances. An example of the latter is given by Megan and Kieron, who talked about their life circumstances as a young couple, which were categorised as non-optimal for family life.

(3)

1 Megan: we had [no money]
2 R: [yes yes]
3 Megan: [((laughs))
4 Kieron: [we had absolutely no money at all...and to have
5 Kieron: brought a child into that
6 R: mmm
7 Kieron: I don't know how we would've coped and the child
8 would have had (.) [nothing]
9 Megan: [nothing]
10 Kieron: we were living in an area that we could afford
11 to live in (.) but didn't want to live in as well
12 so we would've brought a child into an area
13 that we didn't feel connected with (.) and
14 it would've kept us there for a very [long] time
15 Megan: [yeah]

Megan and Kieron's former selves are thus presented as inhabiting an economic category that was undesirable and a place category that was unsuitable for parenting and potentially disadvantageous for their child(ren), too. They contrast this later in the interview with their current lifestyle comprising a comfortable home and regular holidays for their daughters. The SOL categories are positioned along economic hierarchy, with young newlyweds at the bottom with "no money" and "nothing" to provide a child with. This formulation can be seen to function as a legitimation strategy for postponed parenthood.

There are, then, potential tensions in self-categorisation regarding age and parenting that the participants are negotiating in our data: earlier self-qualities or lifestyles are categorised as non-compatible with parenting, whereas psychological maturity and stability in one's social position, accrued with age, are presented as positive attributes facilitating successful parenting.

4.2 Managing multiple temporalities

In line with chrononormative expectations of modern working life trajectories, establishing a career and taking time to study featured as explanations and justifications for late parenting in our data. Extract 4 is an example.

(4)

1	Tom:	I mean professionally we're both architects (.) and
2		architecture has a longer
3	R:	yes
4	Tom:	kind of educational lifespan that some than some
5		other ah vocations
6	R:	yep
7	Tom:	an:d you know (.) because of that you perhaps don't
8		leave college don't get a job don't get in to some
9		sort of financial security position until you're
10		a little bit older (.) I mean (.) neither of us left
11		college until we were in our (1.0) well I was tw-
12		twenty: four probably twenty five
13	R	right yes
14	Tom:	and I was- I was maybe twenty six twenty seven when
15		I actually qualified so we're already (.) you can
16		see there's already a gap
17	R:	mmhm mmhm
18	Tom:	you know in that sense [um:
19	R:	[yeah (.) yeah
20	Tom:	well nothing to stop you having children before (.)
21		but somehow it's not quite (.) it didn't seem to
22		work out that way [obviously] so that's
23	R:	[yeah]
24	Maria:	because it takes you a little bit longer to get
25		established and (.) and to get just the
26		financial (.) things in place

Tom and Maria acknowledge that there is "nothing to stop you having children before" (line 20) but invoke educational chronologies, typical to their profession (lines 1–5 and 24–26) as key prerequisites for optimal parenting, even if this means delayed transition into it. The mobilisation of the professional category 'architect' is offered as non-compatible with that of a 'parent'. Social norms

about being settled not just relationship-wise, but also professionally and financially before embarking on parenthood, are also invoked.

In Extract 4, the joint mobilisation of one's professional status and the pending category membership of a parent were presented through a chronological logic: one needs ideally to precede the other, and one's profession sets its own demands on the transition. The data also include examples where professional membership is presented as non-compatible with that of a parent. Julia worked for years as a management consultant, a job requiring international travel. She talks about her career and plans leading to the realisation of this non-compatibility.

(5)

1 Julia: erm (.) uhh (.) ok I had well I was in a career (.)
2 and I- I don't think the career was my (1.0) I
3 don't think I ever set out to have a big career umm
5 R: what was your career in?
6 Julia: I was in management consulting
7 R: right
8 Julia: erm (.) and I travelled a lot
...
9 Julia: erm and I was on a plane every week so (.) there
10 just wasn't (.) time to meet someone or to (.) erm
11 to be in one spot for any length of time=
12 R: =mmm
13 Julia: erm I'm always gonna be doing the same thing I'm
14 never gonna be in one spot it's never gonna be time=
15 R: =yeah
16 Julia: erm (.) it's really difficult how could you have a
17 family when you're on a plane every week what
18 would I do with the kid erm (.) so I left (.)
19 I left the job

Whereas in Extract 4 the profession of an architect and the category parent are co-selectable, in Julia's account in Extract 5 her profession is presented as a hindrance for realising both a long-term relationship and parenting. Moreover, place categories become mobilised: being on a plane is being in the 'wrong place' as regards family life and parenting responsibilities. The only way for Julia to be in the 'right place' to facilitate procreation and perform childrearing is rationalised as giving up her professional lifestyle.

Locke and Budds (2013: 526) suggest that although contemporary expectations favour personal independence for women before childbearing, women still face pressures for a certain kind of motherhood: "'delaying' motherhood until one is 'ready' for 'intensive motherhood' might be the best option for some women". Julia's account above resonates with these expectations. Another factor is that of the 'biological clock', referring to the discourse of limited timeframe for women to conceive and the challenges that age poses to fertility.

Several of the female interviewees referred to this 'bionormative' timescale, often conceptualised as a 'sudden realisation' and at times also a change of mind regarding the desirability to parent, closely tied with the chronological age of mid to late thirties. Jane, for example, characterised her dilemma, as seen in Extract 6.

(6)

1 Jane: never wanted to have a baby and then I said when
2 I was 38 I said I'm gonna have to start thinking
3 about it more and try to decide so I got to forty
4 and I was still kind of emming and erring...I was
5 still kind of (.) not sure don't really want to
6 no I don't think so and then I got to forty and
7 I started thinking it's kind of now or never

Transition into the category 'parent' is constructed as a deliberate choice (and sometimes lengthy deliberation) in our data, with a precise 'point' or limited chronological opportunity window ("now or never", line 7 above). Like the women in Budds et al.'s (2016) study, our interviewees also at times linked increasing maternal age with increased risks for the foetus. The category 'late parent' is thus particularly complex for women, resulting in a discursive tightrope of risk vs. the right time to parent. Chronological age and biological age play an important role in decisions to parent, weighed against social norms and expectations, in addition to personal ideals. Chrononormativity is thus tied with biological challenges for late parents, even in the current era of Assisted Reproductive Technologies. Biology thus poses some limits for the fluidity of age and social categorisation.

So far, we have seen multiple temporalities and 'clocks' guiding the timing of transitions into parenthood, ranging from educational, career, financial, relationship and physical/biological age concerns, which need careful management. These factors are clearly visible in the detail of how stage of life categories and transitions are mobilised and negotiated. To answer our first research

question, we can suggest that temporal aspects of late parenthood are mobilised via normalising late partnering, as well as educational, career and associated financial trajectories that work against young parenting. Temporal aspects of late parenthood are characterised and reaffirmed via emphasis on the benefits for parenting of accrued attributes like experience and maturity, which implies late parenting is good parenting; and challenged via talk about risks and limited timescales. These strategies discursively construct parenting chronologies that can accommodate chrononormative expectations ('parenting only when ready'), even when parenting is delayed.

4.3 Dealing with mistaken stage of life (SOL) identities

Becoming a first-time parent later than average can challenge normative age ordering, and as we have seen, the interviewees' discursive work deals with this challenge. Age and age order are often made situationally relevant in talk and interaction. Late parents, as objects of others' gaze, might subsequently be placed in an inaccurate stage of life category. In fact, our interviewees reported occasional mistaken SOL category attributions, as in the following two examples.

(7)

1 Helena: now when I'm with the children some people say
2 are they your grandchildren and I go no:
3 my (.) children (1.0) it doesn't
4 bother me ((laughs))

(8)

1 Roger: i- in some respect you know I I do sometimes
2 feel a bit well old when I interact with other
3 people you know cos a lot of- um (.) I'm sure
4 there's (1.0) quite a few people out there who
5 think I'm his grandfather rather than his father
6 R: and has that [ever happened]?
7 Roger: [and i- and that-] yes it has
8 (.) you know in the supermarket people say you
9 know oh grandad's taking you out shopping
10 is he and things like that

11 Fran: ((laughs))
12 R: ((laughs)) how did that make you feel?
13 Roger: erm: well not too bad that- you know I uh (.)
14 I just think oh you know (2.0) sad person who
15 thinks that people can't have children at- at my age

At the age of 59, Helena's SOL categorisation as a grandmother is age congruent, and her quick acknowledgement that this does not bother her (lines 3–4) is accompanied by laughter. Later in the interview, she in fact jokes about the prospect of starting a mother/grandmother and toddler group to get together with her peers who have grandchildren the same age as her children. Roger acknowledges that he "sometimes feel[s] a bit well old" (line 2), displaying some reticence in using the label 'old', perhaps as an indicator that the label is not his own, but others' attribution. The categories 'grandchildren' in Helena's account and 'grandad' in Roger's account are what "people say" or "think" in public contexts such as supermarkets or playgrounds. In the wider data, other institutional contexts, such as maternity hospitals, were also mentioned by others.

Helena's laughter (line 4) and Roger's negative other categorisation ("sad person", line 14), following their accounts of mistaken SOL categorisation, exemplify the buffering work in action (cf. Nikander 2002) regarding age categorisation. In fact, humour was a way to deal with prospective categorisations, too, as in the following example from the interview with Anna and John.

(9)

1 R: do you think there are any disadvantages?
2 John: ((long laugh)) yes my age [(laugh))]
3 Anna: [is- erm] (1.0) physical things you
4 know you probably get more tired (.) erm
...
5 John: yeah (.) yeah I mean I- I- I mean it's it might
6 be a negative for the child I suppose our being
7 (.) er: much older parents (1.0) I suppose
8 (1.0) when it comes to family sports day and
9 stuff and things like that [((laugh))]
10 R: [((slight laugh))]
11 John: doing the egg and spoon race with a zimmer frame
12 (.) but um (.) I s'pose that's if there is a
13 negative that that's it really but...we are quite
14 Anna: young (enough)

15 John: young in mind aren't we
16 Anna: yeah...we've kept our youth cause we've never
17 had any responsibility
18 John: mm

John's imagining of his challenging school sports day performance is a gross exaggeration of his age identity. Humorous contrast is drawn between the parent-bound activity on a sports day: egg and spoon race, and the age implicative icon of a zimmer frame (a walking aid typically used by older adults to provide stability). Whilst John's narrative is fictitious, it exemplifies a transgression of age norms, and the speaker's possible anxieties of how he might be perceived as "a much older parent" (line 7), managed through humour. The context of a school sports day is linked with a wider category of common public or institutional events and identity displays, marked by "and stuff and things like that" (line 9), assumed to be shared by the hearers. Interestingly, the potentially troubled category of an older parent of a young child is quickly followed by self-categorisations by both interviewees that downplay the effects of their age, first via "young enough" (line 14), then "young in mind" (15) and finally "we've kept our youth" (16), which are also more attitudinally than physically oriented. However, these further affirm the previous humorous categorisation as not true and as others' category.

The mistaken categorisations by others, in sum, are presented as non-threatening (e.g. Helen); stemming from biased viewpoints (e.g. Roger); or amenable to be 'laughed off' (e.g. John). One demonstration, then, of the discrepancy between parenthood and one's chronological age that surfaces in these accounts – our second research question – are mistaken SOL attributions by others. Such tensions are discursively resolved through humour and by presenting them as others' categories.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The key methodological contribution of this paper is in demonstrating how chrononormativity can be better understood through close analysis of talk. In addition, it provides an empirical testing ground for the analysis of whether norms concerning the 'right time' of lifetime transitions are becoming more fluid, as the postmodern claim goes (e.g. Giddens 1991; Neugarten and Neugarten 1996). Explicating how taken-for-granted, temporal notions of lifespan events are invoked, our findings contribute to research on age-in-interaction, social identity and categorisation, and

to the methodology for analysing the discursive age-order and chrononormativity in interaction more broadly. Our data indicate that despite recent demographic trends, social expectations about normative lifecourse chronologies regarding parenting seem slow to change. The concept of chrononormativity was operationalised through an application of discourse analysis and aspects of membership categorisation analysis, unearthing our participants' allusions to chrononormative and bionormative imperatives. These 'common sense' assumptions are available in the media, for example, and circulate in everyday and public discourses. 'Ideal' parenting ages and chronologies are visible in these accounts and form a reference point for moral evaluations regarding 'good' parenting. (Age) identity fluidity thus has limits and late parenting has proved a useful testing ground for these. We will now provide a summary of the main findings.

The analysis shows, first, that late parenting is characterised via category-bound attributes, such as maturity and stability. As a result, parenthood as a stage of life position is something not to be embarked upon before sufficient stability and experience is reached. In terms of temporality, late parents discursively mobilise strategies that normalise their parenting chronologies and allude to current occupational, educational and demographic trends. Age-bound attributes regarding youth as a period of immaturity, inexperience and financial struggle feature in our data, presented as non-compatible with ideal parenting. In contrast, membership and impression management in the category 'older parent' is constructed positively. Membership in the category 'first-time parent' is treated as compatible with middle-aged, yet also youthful identities, thus displaying some fluidity. In this sense, age identity constructions here can be seen as context-sensitive.

Second, moral aspects of parenting are also addressed in these accounts when late parents relationally position themselves higher in the hierarchy of 'good parents' vis-à-vis younger parents or their own younger selves along the attributes of life experience, but not always in the dimension of optimal fertility, for example. Hence, older first-time parents' self-categorisations display careful balancing of mature, competent, resilient and youthful qualities. Discrepancies between parenthood and one's chronological age are interactionally resolved through humour, through presenting them as irrelevant, or through focusing on the many advantages that age brings.

Third, age as a negotiated cultural category in relation to parenting presents a fruitful focus for research on membership categorisation, social norms and postmodern notions of identity construction. The production of recognisable membership categories is part and parcel of cultural competence, and a method "for putting together a world that is recognisably familiar, orderly and moral" (Baker 2004: 175). Without discarding the social constructionist belief

that identities are interactionally achieved and are multiple, we have shown how older parents construct parenting identities that treat chrononormative and bionormative assumptions as a backdrop against which their age and parenting identities are built. Norms about age-related psychological and biological qualities are discursively managed to construct positive parenting accounts, which nevertheless acknowledge maturational challenges. Age is thus referred to strategically as both facilitating stable parenting and a challenge that individuals need to manage. For example, in relation to women, the 'biological clock' discourse is in evidence. Age thus retains aspects of a factual and a numerical category in its discursive realisation, and becoming a parent remains a biological category as well as a gendered category.

Moreover, we set out to examine how chrononormativity can be better understood through close analysis of talk. By examining chrononormativity in action, we have shown how older first-time parents, on the one hand, discursively construct membership in the category 'parent' and, on the other hand, evaluate their membership in the relational pair parent – child. In the former category, late transition to parenthood is legitimised via chronologically 'common sense' demands posed by educational and career progression, or via assumptions of earlier developmental immaturity, as well as chrono-bionormative reproductive timescales. In the latter category, stage of life attributes, such as maturity and resilience, carry morally advantageous qualities in the world of parenting. The examination of speakers' discursive management of chrononormative assumptions reveals *what* these are in a given society/context. More importantly, our analysis also shows *how* such assumptions are used to challenge age-based norms and stereotypes, in this case about the 'ideal' age of parenting. Categorisation work and the discursive detail of chrononormativity in interview conversation appear then to build on the recycling of existing social/cultural categories, in part by constantly re-defining, challenging and affirming the conditions for assigning membership.

Acknowledgements: We wish to thank Alex Butterworth, Jessie Whittaker, Xin Dai and Dorottya Cserzö (all at Cardiff University) for their assistance in coding and transcribing the interview data. We also thank Prof. Alison Wray, Prof. Michael Handford, and the researchers in The Institute for Advanced Social Research article seminar (Tampere University), and the anonymous reviewers, for their useful suggestions on earlier drafts. And we also thank all the interviewees for their generous time.

Appendix Transcription conventions

(.)	micropause
(2.0)	pause in seconds
[ ]	beginning and end of overlapping talk
Underline	stressed syllable or word
:	lengthened sound
(( ))	contextual or paralinguistic information within double brackets
( )	uncertain transcription within single brackets
...	omitted material
?	question function of an utterance
was-	self interruption or correction

References

Atkinson, J. Maxwell & John Heritage. 1999. Jefferson's transcript notation. In Adam Jaworski & Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The discourse reader*, 158–166. London: Routledge.

Baker, Carolyn. 2004. Membership categorization and interview accounts. In David Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*, 2nd edn., 162–176. London: Sage.

Barrett, Anne E. 2005. Gendered experiences in midlife: Implications for age identity. *Journal of Aging Studies* 19. 163–183.

Budds, Kirsty, Abigail Locke & Viv Burr. 2016. "For some people it isn't choice, it's just how it happens": Accounts of "delayed" motherhood among middle-class women in the UK. *Feminism & Psychology* 26(2). 170–187.

Burr, Vivien. 2006. *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble*. London: Routledge.

Coupland, Justine. 2009. Discourse, identity and change in mid-to-late life: Interdisciplinary perspectives on language and ageing. *Ageing & Society* 29(6). 849–861.

Coupland, Nikolas & Justine Coupland. 1999. Ageing, ageism and anti-ageism: Moral stance in geriatric medical discourse. In Heidi E. Hamilton (ed.), *Language and communication in old age: Multidisciplinary perspectives*, 177–208. Garland: New York.

Cromdal, Jakob, Susan Danby, Michael Emmison, Karin Osvaldsson & Charlotte Cobb-Moore. 2017. "Basically it's the usual whole teen girl thing": Stage-of-Life categories on a children and young people's helpline. *Symbolic Interaction* 41(1). 25–44.

Fitzgerald, Richard. 2012. Membership categorization analysis: Wild and promiscuous or simply the joy of Sacks. *Discourse Studies* 14(3). 305–311.

Freeman, Elizabeth. 2010. *Time binds: Queer temporalities, queer histories*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Friese, Carrie, Gay Becker & Robert D. Nachtigall. 2008. Older motherhood and the changing life course in the era of assisted reproductive technologies. *Journal of Aging Studies* 22. 65–73.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self identity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.

Hadfield, Lucy, Naomi Rudoe & Jo Sanderson-Mann. 2007. Motherhood, choice and the British media: A time to reflect. *Gender and Education* 19(2). 255–263.

Hareven, Tamara K. 1994. Family change and historical change: An uneasy relationship. In Matilda White Riley, Robert L. Kahn & Anne Foner (eds.), *Age and structural lag*, 130–150. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Hester, Stephen & Peter Eglin. 1997. Membership categorization analysis: An introduction. In Stephen Hester & Peter Eglin (eds.), *Culture in action: Studies in membership categorization analysis*, 1–23. Washington, DC: International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis & University Press of America.

Leonard, Pauline, Alison Fuller & Lorna Unwin. 2017. A new start? Negotiations of age and chrononormativity by older apprentices in England. *Ageing & Society*. doi:10.1017/S0144686X17000204 published online 20 March 2017.

Locke, Abigail & Kirsty Budds. 2013. 'We thought if it's going to take two years then we need to start that now': Age, infertility risk and the timing of pregnancy in older first-time mothers. *Health, Risk & Society* 15(6–7). 525–542.

Mills, Tracey A., Rebecca Lavender & Tina Lavender. 2015. 'Forty is the new twenty': An analysis of British media portrayals of older mothers. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare* 6. 88–94.

Neugarten, Bernice & Dail A. Neugarten. 1996. The changing meanings of age. In Dail A. Neugarten (ed.), *The meanings of age: Selected papers of Bernice L Neugarten*, 72–77. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2002. *Age in action. Membership work and stage of life categories in talk*. Helsinki, Finland: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2003. The absent client: Case description and decision-making in interprofessional meetings. In Chris Hall, Kirsi Juhila, Nigel Parton & Tarja Pösö (eds.), *Constructing clienthood in social work and human services: Identities, interactions and practices*, 112–128. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2007. Emotions in meeting talk. In Alexa Hepburn & Sally Wiggins (eds.), *Discursive research in practice. New approaches to psychology and interaction*, 50–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2009. Doing change and continuity: Age identity and the micro-macro divide. *Ageing & Society* 29(6). 863–881.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2012. Interviews as discourse data. In Jay Gubrium, James Holstein, Karyn Mackinney-Marvasti & Amir Maravasti (eds.), *Handbook of interview research. The complexity of the craft*, 2nd edn., 397–413. London: Sage.

Office for National Statistics. 27 November 2017 release. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ (accessed 8 January 2019).

Reynolds, Jill & Margaret Wetherell. 2003. The discursive climate of singleness: The consequences for women's negotiation of a single identity. *Feminism & Psychology* 13. 489–510.

Riach, Kathleen, Nicholas Rumens & Melissa Tyler. 2014. Un/doing chrononormativity: Negotiating ageing, gender and sexuality in organizational life. *Organization Studies* 35(11). 1677–1698.

Riley, Matilda White. 1987. On the significance of age in sociology. *American Sociological Review* 52(1). 1–14.

Sacks, Harvey. 1974. On the analyzability of stories by children. In R. Turner (ed.), *Ethnomethodology: Selected readings*, 216–232. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Sacks, Harvey. 1992. *Lectures in conversation*, edited by Gail Jefferson. Oxford: Blackwell.

Settersten, Richard A. & Gunhild O. Hägestad. 1996. What's the latest? Cultural age deadlines for family transitions. *The Gerontologist* 36(2). 178–188.
Shaw, Rachel L. & David C. Giles. 2009. Motherhood on ice? A media framing analysis of older mothers in the UK news. *Psychology & Health* 24(2). 221–236.
Silverman, David. 1998. *Harvey Sacks: Social science and conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Stokoe, Elizabeth. 2012. Moving forward with membership categorization analysis: Methods for systematic analysis. *Discourse Studies* 14(3). 277–303.
Thell, Nataliya & Katarina Jacobsson. 2016. "And how old are you?" Age reference as an interpretive device in radio counselling. *Journal of Aging Studies* 39. 31–43.
Transana. https://www.transana.com/
Van de Wiel, Lucy. 2014. For whom the clock ticks: Reproductive ageing and egg freezing in Dutch and British news media. *Studies in the Maternal* 6(1). 1–28.
Widdicombe, Sue. 2017. The delicate business of identity. *Discourse Studies* 19(4). 460–478.
Ylänne, Virpi. 2016. Too old to parent? Discursive representations of late parenting in the British press. *Discourse & Communication* 10(2). 176–197.
Ylänne, Virpi. 2017. Representations of ageing and infertility in the twenty-first century British press. In Gail Davis & Tracey Loughran (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of infertility in history: Approaches, contexts and perspectives*, 509–535. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bionotes

Virpi Ylänne

Virpi Ylänne is Senior Lecturer in Language and Communication at Cardiff University, Wales, UK. Her research interests and most publications focus on discourse and lifespan identity in text, talk, and advertising and media imagery. She is also currently carrying out collaborative research on multiple roles and goals in nurse communication. Address for correspondence: Centre for Language and Communication Research, ENCAP, Cardiff University, John Percival Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff, CF10 3EU, Wales, UK, Email: Ylanne@cardiff.ac.uk.

Pirjo Nikander

Pirjo Nikander is Research Director of the Doctoral School at Tampere University, Finland. Her research interests include discursive psychology, ageism, inclusion and exclusion in working life, and the baby boom generation. Her publications include handbook chapters and articles on research ethics, discourse analysis, membership categorisation analysis, and transcription and translation. She has also co-edited books on women and ageing and the analysis of interviews. Address for correspondence: The Doctoral School, Tampere University, FIN-33014 Tampere, Finland, Email: Pirjo.Nikander@tuni.fi