Older people’s involvement in research: whys, hows and so-whats

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Icebreaker

• What is your name?
• How old are you?
• Why are you attending today’s event?
• What has been the most interesting thing you have learnt so far today?
Questions

• Why should older people be involved in research?

• How might older people be involved in research?

• What challenges might arise from older people’s involvement in research?
Whys

The UK Political Arena

Share of the 'grey vote’

1991 23.7%
2021 33.7%

- more regular voters
- baby boomers
- challenge conservative voting
- technological change

(Evandrou 1989 in Bernard and Phillips)
Whys

The UK Political Arena (continued)

‘Grey Power’: Action for Change
• Association of Retired Persons over 50 (ARP O50)
• British Pensioners & Trade Unions' Action Association (BP&TUAA)
• National Pensioners' Convention (NPC)
• Older Women’s Network (OWN)
• Older Lesbian Network (OLN)
• Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW)
• Standing Conference of Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens (SCEMSC)

EC
• Federation of European Retired Persons (FERPA)
• European Pensioners' Parliament: European Pensioner's Charter
• European Court of Justice
Whys

The UK Political Arena (continued)

Challenges for ‘Grey Power’:

• heterogeneity
• ageism in politics
• constitutional constraints
Whys

The UK Policy Arena

Modernisation agenda:

• Learning network (DSS 1998)
• Better Government for Older People (BGOP), 1998
• National Service Framework for Older People (DH, 2001)
• Link-Age (DWP, 2004)
• Opportunity Age: Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century (HM Government, 2005)
• Partnerships for Older People (DH, 2006)
• Putting People First (DH, 2007)
• Don’t Stop Me Now: Preparing for an ageing population (Audit Commission, 2008)
• Empowering Engagement: A Stronger Voice for Older People (DWP, 2009)
Whys

The UK Research Arena

• User groups/researchers/movements
• British Society of Gerontology (BSG): Averil Osborn Fund
• Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)
• INVOLVE (previously Consumers in NHS Research Support Unit)
• Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
  Growing Older (GO) research programme
  http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/gop
  New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) research programme
  http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/researchfunding/newdynamicsofageingprogramme.asp
Whys

Purposes of Involvement

• Producing research considered relevant and important by older people
• Developing skills amongst older people
• Understanding what ageing means to older people
• Ensuring research has a bigger impact
• Challenging ageist assumptions
• Generating campaigning resource data

(Barnes and Taylor, 2007)
Hows

• In reference groups (e.g. NDA)
• In steering groups and as research advisors
• As active subjects in the research
• As researchers
• As commissioners of research
An Example of a Study Involving Older Women as Researchers
ESRC
GROWING OLDER PROGRAMME

http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/gop
Older Women’s Lives and Voices: Policy and Participation in Sheffield

• The Project Team:
  Lorna Warren, Tony Maltby, Joe Cook and Rita Saddler

• The Volunteers:
  Norma Clarke, Pat Hadfield, Pam Haywood-Reed, Lilleth Millen, Movania Parkinson, Judy Robinson, Jean Wilkinson, Winnie Winfield and Ying Wah Cheng.
OWLV Project Goal

To increase knowledge and awareness of issues that affect the quality of life of older women and their desire and ability to have a say in the services which are available to them.
Participatory Methods

100 Black Caribbean, Chinese, Irish, Somali and White British women, aged 50-94 years.

• Discussion groups
• Volunteers/Life Story Interviews
• Project video
Methods-Based Issues in Older People’s Involvement

- Recruitment
- Practical arrangements
- Commensurability of meanings
- Ethical concerns
Implications for Good Practice

- conflicts of interest
- ‘usual suspects’
- exploitation
- resources
- variable involvement
- representativeness
- from participation to implementation
- accessibility
- withdrawal
- skilled researchers
Experience of Involvement:
Norma Clarke, volunteer researcher (OWLV)

When academics are doing things, it’s just lip service. Black people don’t want lip service without construction. We need to look at how we make things better for people. If we have too many academic words that people don’t understand, then it’s not constructive for the people who try to get things going. You have research, then you have provision out of it. That’s what I go for and what most black people go for. So when we were doing the project, it was nice to include things and that the academics didn’t have too much say. Most people want research and then something doing.

Here’s a pen. You research the usefulness of the pen. Then after you’re researched it you go and use the pen. That’s what people want. When the government is giving money for research, they must do it to get outcomes.
So-Whats?

• Different people have different experiences and therefore know things from different perspectives.
  
  EG of giving birth to a child.

• Older people may have a different way of knowing the world.

• Dominant groups are ‘epistemologically disadvantaged’ when trying to research non-dominant groups and their experiences (Harding, 1987).

• In contrast, members of non-dominant groups are aware of both their own understandings of their lives and situation as well as those of the dominant group(s) and are therefore better placed to generate critical questions from their standpoint.

• Relevance of the social model of disability.
New Ways of Asking Questions

Why do you find it hard to open this jar?
Why do you find it hard to open this jar?

What is it about the design of this jar which makes it hard for you to open?
New Ways of Representing Ageing...
LOOK AT ME!
IMAGES OF WOMEN & AGEING

http://www.representing-ageing.com/

New Dynamics of Ageing
Funded by the Economic & Social Research Council
The Project Team

The interdisciplinary team includes:

• Social Gerontologists (Dr. Lorna Warren, Professor Merryn Gott);
• Art Therapist (Professor Susan Hogan);
• Photographer/therapist (Rosy Martin);
• Cultural Development Agency (Eventus).
The Project Goal

To use participatory visual methods to:

• Explore media and cultural representations of older women;
• Engage older women in image-making as a novel way of challenging stereotypes;
• Enable older women in Sheffield to create and comment on their own images of ageing and old age; and
• Exhibit new and alternative images of older women and solicit responses from a variety of audiences.

http://www.representing-ageing.com/