



Men in Midwifery: 40 years of the 'perfect social experiment'

John Pendleton

Midwife, Senior Lecturer & PhD
Researcher



- ▶ A 'mono-gendered' profession
- ▶ Conflict narrative
- ▶ Obstetrics versus midwifery
- ▶ A profession under siege
- ▶ The Sex Discrimination Act 1975



▶ = Radical Change & Rupture?



0.3 % of midwives in the UK and 0.6% of midwives globally identify as men

(NMC, 2019; Sannomiya et al., 2019)



The experiences of men who work as midwives in the UK: An interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

- ▶ 15 interviews
- ▶ 12 interviews analysed to date
- ▶ Early stages of data analysis
- ▶ ‘Equality’, ‘Representation’, ‘Diversity’ a common theme



Oppressed Minorities

- ▶ ‘I’m the only man. Yeah, it does feel a bit lonely.... Maybe I’m able to empathise [with women] because of my own lived experiences as a gay man?’ (Juan)
- ▶ ‘It ticks another box, you know, like “we’ve got a BME, we’ve got a male!”’ (Karl)
- ▶ ‘The older midwives [were] more accepting than the younger midwives, but I also found that the erm,.. the black African... The Afro-Caribbean midwives were more accepting than the white midwives and Irish midwives were more accepting.. And I don’t know whether that’s because of, you know, being minorities and.. seeing what.. being a minority can be like.. and me being a minority .. Whether it sort of gelled something in them’ (Simon)



Representation

‘There’s BME representation... and I think actually if there were more positive adverts surrounding men within midwifery... that would bring more men into the profession.’ *(Karl)*

‘I don’t feel we actively encourage men ... to actively consider midwifery... I think there’s a lot we could learn from our European colleagues...’ *(James)*

‘The right men should be in midwifery, I don’t believe we should have more men just... you know, to do with the equality stuff.’ *(Alan)*



Shifting Narratives

- ▶ ‘As much as I’ve tried very hard... to increase the number of men in nursing as well as midwifery... I’m acutely aware when I look out at a class and there’s 100 young to middle aged women in the class, that my entire team of colleagues are women... every day, you know, I’m aware of it...’
↓
- ▶ ‘It’s not that I don’t want more men in midwifery, but I think it’s the wrong... it’s the wrong focus.’
↓
- ▶ ‘In nursing I can understand that argument because half of the patients you’ll care for are men. That argument doesn’t hold up in midwifery because 100% of those we care for are women... so I don’t accept the argument that there needs to be more men in midwifery’ (Adam)



Discrimination

- ▶ ‘And they’ll [mentors] just go to the service user and ask the question, ‘Are you ok to have a male student midwife...?... I just didn’t really know why we were being introduced in such a way.. I don’t go to women and say ‘are you ok to have a Chinese student...’ (Juan)
- ▶ ‘If there was another profession in the same situation, it probably wouldn’t be acceptable nowadays.’
- ▶ ‘I was chairing the disciplinary panel.. they were trying to unpick this complaint made against this midwife because he was male or was there a real problem.. there was a real perception amongst the staff like, ‘Oh he will say that it was because of his gender that this complaint was made!’ (Jake)
- ▶ ‘I’ve been told countless time by Heads of Midwifery, ‘Oh... it could be classed as sexual discrimination to refuse a man!’ (Alan)



Shifting Narratives

- ▶ ‘Why? Why am I prevented from entering a room? Surely if I get given the opportunity of maybe opening my mouth and talk to these service users for two minutes they’ll just realise that I’m a human being’



- ▶ ‘Maybe feeling... feeling... what’s the word I’m looking for? It’s not discriminated... feeling.... [long pause]. I can’t think of a word, the word discriminated sound really, really, erm, big, I don’t know why.... Not being accepted, perhaps, by certain service users...’



- ▶ ‘Women, to be quite honest, were just trying to help themselves and sometimes, I’m quite sure, the decision that they were making were not even their own preferences, they were driven to make those decisions by peer pressure, family pressure, their husbands or cultural pressures...’ (Juan)

Discussion (Ahmed, 2017)

Internal Conflict

- ▶ ‘When you expose a problem you pose a problem... It might then be assumed that the problem would go away if you would just stop talking about it or if you went away’ (37)
- ▶ ‘When we start using words like sexism and racism... we sense there will be real consequences’ (36)
- ▶ ‘We embody diversity by appearing in way that is inconsistent with the norms of an institution... Diversity work is then the work you do because you do not fit with a series or arrangement’ (125)
- ▶ ‘If you are given the benefit of the doubt, you have to ensure your conduct justifies the benefit’ (128)
- ▶ ‘You have to demonstrate that you are willing to ease the burden of your own difference’ (131)

(White) Male (Status) Privilege in Midwifery = Liminality

- ▶ So much **political work** begins with moments of disorientation. Disorientation involves failed orientations; bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape. (132)
- ▶ ‘Minorities are **subordinate** groups whose members have significantly less **control** or **power** over their own lives than do the members of a dominant or majority group.... (Schaefer, 2015)
- ▶ ‘To queer whiteness is thus both to speak of it, and in so speaking to remark upon the oddness of the fact that **it must be explicitly spoke of in order to be challenged**’ (Riggs, 2010)
- ▶ ‘Men as a group, and white, middle-class men in particular, enjoy a range of economic and social privileges regardless of their occupation... yet the framing of men in nursing journals ... hinges on identifying the discursive male nurse with historically oppressed groups... rhetoric on men in nursing **appropriates the language and emotional force of calls for social justice** while ignoring the distinct advantages that white men in particular enjoy’ (Cottingham, 2019)

40 Years of 'The perfect social experiment'

=

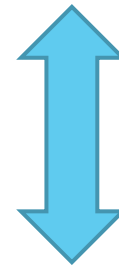
Radical Change? Or Stasis?

From the report on the
'experimental scheme', 1982:

- ▶ 'It may be that women are being expected to accept something that is being done not so much in their own interests but **in support of a principle such as equality for male nurses.**'
- ▶ 'If male nurses are admitted to the profession it will not be so much because they are wanted in it but because people can **see no very good reason for keeping them out**' (Speak & Aitken-Swann, 1982:78-79)



▶ 'Why are you here?'



▶ 'Is it alright if I'm here?'



Any
questions?

References

- ▶ Ahmed, S. (2017) *Living a feminist life*. Durham: Duke University Press
- ▶ Cottingham, M. (2019) The missing and needed male nurse: discursive hybridization in professional nursing texts. *Gender, work and organization*, **26** (2): 197-213
- ▶ NMC (2019) *The NMC Register*. London: NMC
- ▶ Riggs (2010) On accountability: towards a white middle-class queer 'post identity politics identity politics'. *Ethnicities*, **10** (3): 344-357
- ▶ Sannomiya, M., Sasagawa E., Hikita, N. Yonezawa, K. & Haruna, M. (2019) The proportions, regulations and training plans of male midwives worldwide: A descriptive study of 77 countries. *International Journal of Childbirth*, **9** (1): 5-18
- ▶ Schaefer, R. (2015) Minorities. In: Wright, J. (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Edinburgh: Elsevier Science
- ▶ Speak, M. & Aitken-Swan, J. (1982) *Male midwives: a report of two studies*. London: Department of Health & Social Security