



## Reflections on Secondary Analysis of the 'Siblings and Friends' Data

Sarah Baker

### Background

The *Your Space! Siblings and Friends project* (Timescapes project 1) explores change and continuity in children's relationships with their family and friends as they grow older. The study follows the experiences of over 50 young people from a range of family backgrounds and geographical locations across Britain. Participants were first interviewed in 2003-2005, when they were aged between 6 and 13 (Wave 1). They were interviewed again in 2007 when they were aged 10 to 17 (Wave 2) and in 2009 when they were aged 12 to 19 (Wave 3). As part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Timescapes programme, data gathered in the *Siblings and Friends project* will be archived for future use.

I was asked to conduct secondary analysis of interview data collected during Wave 2 and 3 of the project and to focus specifically on participants' hopes for their parents' futures. I was tasked with writing a short report suitable for the media and with the wider dissemination of my findings. As one of the first researchers outside of the Timescapes consortium to conduct secondary analysis of data collected in the programme, I was also asked to reflect on my experiences. These experiences are the focus of this report.

Before I begin this discussion, I would like to say a little about my academic background. Like the researchers who conducted the original interviews, my past experience influences the way I approach, organise and analyse data. It also goes some way to explaining why I found certain documents more useful than others.

Prior to starting this project, my experience of secondary analysis and archival research was rather limited. Although I come from a cultural studies background and I am used to drawing on a wide range of sources, my research has mainly been ethnographic. What experience I did have came from analysis of documents held in the Mass Observation archive at the University of Sussex and the Art and Design archive housed by the Victoria and Albert Museum. The material that I studied in these archives was significantly different from the data gathered in the *Siblings and Friends project*. The Mass Observation archive documents were written by participants. In the Art and Design archive I was studying visual material such as press cuttings, images and ephemera. In both cases, I was researching a different historical timeframe: the 1950s and 1960s.

Whilst research for the *Siblings and Friends project* started 7 years ago, the last wave of interviews has only recently been transcribed. Thus, although another researcher had conducted the interviews, the process of analysing the data collected in the *Siblings and Friends project* was more similar to my experiences of ethnographic research than my time spent examining archival material.

### Preparation

In order to familiarise myself with the project I was given information about Timescapes and the *Siblings and Friends project*. The project outline was particularly

useful because the details about research design and methodology helped me to locate the study in the wider research context.

I was also given interview schedules and information about the activities that had been completed by participants. These documents were helpful because they prepared me for what to expect before I started to read the transcripts. At this stage, it would have also been useful to know the motivations for asking each question in the interview, including why participants had been asked about their hopes for their parents' futures. Because I had direct contact with those involved in the primary research I was able to find this out. The response enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the theoretical and methodological position from which the research was conducted. Thus, I think that a sheet outlining the reasons for asking specific questions would be useful for future researchers.

## Approaching and organising the data

I was given interview transcripts and base data<sup>1</sup> on CD. I began by printing out and reading the transcripts of one participant. I read both interviews conducted in Wave 2 and 3. Throughout the research I have preferred to read all the interviews of participants across timeframes, rather than reading across Waves. This has given me a more complete picture of participants and the changes in their lives over time.

Despite adopting this approach, initially I found it quite difficult to piece together the circumstances of the participants. For example, without a brief introduction to Alannah's home, school and family life I found it hard to contextualise the interview transcript. I turned to the base data generic to Timescapes, but it did not help. This was partly due to the format of the base data (see figure 1 below), which I found difficult to cross-reference with the codes given in the base data guidelines<sup>2</sup>. The content of the base data, numbers rather than qualitative descriptions, made this process even more difficult.

Figure 1 - A section of the base data spreadsheet

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
	PROJECTNO	PSEUDONYM	CASEID	HSEHLD	DOBIM	DOBY	GENDER	MARSTATUS	LFSTATUS	HRSWORK	CURRJOB	EVNT
2	1	CARL	01	1	1	1995	1	0	7	0	0	0
3	1	FELIX	02	1	1	1993	1	0	7	0	0	0
4	1	RICHARD	03	2	12	1990	1	5	7	0	0	0
5	1	HOLLY	04	3	2	1994	2	0	7	0	0	0
6	1	JAZZYB	05	4	11	1991	2	0	7	0	0	0
7	1	STEVEN	06	5	1	1990	1	5	7	0	0	0
8	1	ASHLEY A	07	5	5	1993	1	0	7	0	0	0
9	1	DAISY	08	6	8	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
10	1	MARSHALL	09	7	10	1990	1	5	7	0	0	0
11	1	MARK	10	8	2	1995	1	0	7	0	0	0
12	1	RACHEL	11	9	8	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
13	1	EMMA	12	10	7	1994	2	0	7	0	0	0
14	1	CHELSEA	13	10	7	1994	2	0	7	0	0	0
15	1	ANNE	14	11	7	1991	2	0	7	0	0	0
16	1	MAYA	15	12	1	1996	2	0	7	0	0	0
17	1	ALANNAH	16	12	8	1990	2	5	3	0	0	0
18	1	DJ KIZZELL	17	13	8	1994	1	0	7	0	0	0
19	1	SAMI	18	14	2	1991	1	5	7	0	0	0
20	1	MICHAEL	19	15	11	1992	1	0	7	0	0	0
21	1	JIM	20	16	8	1992	1	0	7	0	0	0
22	1	LOUISE	21	16	11	1999	2	5	2	0	Full-time Receptionist	0
23	1	NAS	22	17	8	1992	2	0	7	0	0	0
24	1	LIZZIE	23	18	7	1992	2	0	7	0	0	0
25	1	ALLIE	24	18	5	1994	2	0	7	0	0	0
26	1	DANIELLE	25	19	6	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
27	1	KATE	26	20	6	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
28	1	FLORENCE	27	21	6	1992	2	0	7	0	0	0
29	1	TSOBEL	28	21	6	1995	2	0	7	0	0	0
30	1	ASHLEY B	29	22	5	1992	1	0	7	0	0	0
31	1	DANIEL A	30	23	9	1993	1	0	7	0	0	0
32	1	SAPPHIRE	31	23	3	1995	2	0	7	0	0	0
33	1	KIERA	32	24	3	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
34	1	IZZY	33	25	5	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0
35	1	JOHN P	34	26	11	1993	1	0	7	0	0	0
36	1	BETHANY	35	27	4	1993	2	0	7	0	0	0

To address this issue, I started to draw up brief qualitative summaries of the participants to remind me of their circumstances whilst I was reading the transcripts. These descriptions helped me significantly. For example, it was useful to know at a

<sup>1</sup> An excel spreadsheet containing data on a wide range of participant characteristics and circumstances was compiled during Wave 2. The spreadsheet is generic for all the Timescapes studies and is designed to aid analysis across Timescapes projects and enable links to national quantitative datasets to be established.

<sup>2</sup> The base data guidelines are outlined in a separate Word document.

glance that Nikki's Mother worked in the advertising industry (known for its long working hours) when Nikki was talking about their relationship. Therefore, I think pen portraits of all participants would be useful in the final archive, for example:

*Nikki, female, aged 14 (Wave 2) and 15 (Wave 3). White British. Lives in South West London in large house. Goes to private school. Mum works in advertising, Dad does volunteer work and is a 'stay at home Dad'. Nikki has two younger brothers.*

After reading about 10 interview transcripts and speaking to the primary researcher about these problems, I was sent the field notes. These documents were invaluable and because I was becoming more familiar with the project I began to depend less on my own summaries: so much so that I read the final 15 transcripts without producing them. Despite this, I think that pen portraits remain useful as introductions to the participants and for quick reference when reading the transcripts.

The field notes were not only valuable because they provided further detail about the participants, but were helpful regarding the primary researcher's background, her feelings when entering the home and the context of the interview. For example, the field notes written about the interview with Daniel B give possible reasons for his ambivalent relationship with his parents. They also detail the good rapport between the interviewer and the participant, which made for 'quite an emotional interview'. In other cases, the field notes document judgements of taste and class influenced by the primary researcher's own position and cultural background. For example, when discussing the area in which Bethany lived she writes that:

*'[t]he village was very attractive and had a really nice feel to the place – it reminded me of the village I grew up in'.*

This type of information is useful because interview discussions are contingent and co-constructed by the researcher and the participant. The background and experiences of the researcher are also vital when thinking about the ways in which participants have been classified, particularly in terms of social class. It is for this reason that I think that interviews with primary researchers would be a useful addition to the Timescapes archive. If these are not possible at this stage in the project, I would advise any researcher using the data to read the field notes before analysing the interview transcripts in detail.

## **Analysing the data**

Although it took me a long time to familiarise myself with the circumstances of the participants, I found the interview transcripts easy to follow. Even when participants were completing activities that were not verbal<sup>3</sup>, the effort made by the interviewer to describe events made me feel as if I did not miss out on valuable data.

I was given some interview transcripts to analyse that were fully anonymised and some in which the names of participants' friends and family had only been partially changed. In general, the transcripts that had been fully anonymised were easy to follow. In places, however, the codes used to represent participants' friends (e.g. Friend 1, Friend 2) were slightly confusing.

After reading all the transcripts and documenting participants' feelings about their parents' futures in a spreadsheet, I grouped the responses according to discursive themes. I then needed to undertake more detailed contextual analysis of the type of response and the life circumstances of the participant. To do this I had to produce a table that included data specific to the *Siblings and Friends project* (see figure 2 below). Because the model for the Timescapes base data is generic, information such as whether participants share a bedroom, details about the participants' houses, the areas in which they live and their schools are missing. I found this data vital in order

---

<sup>3</sup> 'One of the activities that participants were given involved placing the names of their friends and family on a 'circle map' with those they were closest to in the centre.'

to build a picture of the lifestyle of the participant. Due to my particular perspective on social class - that class is made through everyday practices, tastes and lifestyle choices - these details were especially important.

Figure 2 – Project-specific 'base data'

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
		NAME	WAVE	AGE	ETHNICITY	GENDER	SIBLING RELATION	LOCATION	HOUSING TYPE	SCHOOL TYPE	PARENTS' OCCUPATION	RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS	SIBLING RELATION
1													
2	THEME: MATERIALITY												
3													
4	Repayment												
5		Alisha	3	18	Asian Pakistani	F	One older sister	Surrey - Suburb	Gated community	Single sex school	Mother owns and runs art shop	Very close relationship with Mother	
6		Ashley A	2	14	White British	M	One older brother	Outer London - Suburb	Suburban cul-de-sac. Medium sized, comfortable and well-furnished home.	State	Dad is a Postman. Mum is a part-time office worker	Close to all his family and both sets of Grandparents. Bright and bubbly about his family.	
7		Kiera	2 and 3	14 and 15	Asian Vietnamese	F	One sister	Inner London - Urban	Large local authority estate in east london	State	Dad is a newspaper printer. Mum not in paid work	Not that great. Thinks that her parents are strict.	
8		Lady Loud	2	16	Black African	F	One older brother and one younger brother	Inner London - Urban	Flat in a large council estate. Now more with more furniture	Private school	Mum is cleaner. Dad is a security guard.	Gets on really well with her Mum and Dad.	
9		Michael	2	14	Black African	M	One older brother and one younger brother	Inner London - Urban	Small house on the edge of a 1900s estate. House packed full of things	?	Dad is a postman and Mum is a theatre nurse.	Closer to his Mum because he spends more time with her.	
10		Misha	2	15	Asian Bangladeshi	F	Four older sisters	Inner London - Urban	Large Victorian townhouse. Beautifully furnished	Private school	Mum is not in paid work.	Feels responsible for her Mum. Feels closer to her sisters.	

In order to make analysis easier for future researchers using secondary data collected as part of Timescapes, a table with base data specific to each project would be beneficial. In the case of the *Siblings and Friends* project, I think it would be helpful to include more qualitative descriptions of lifestyle in the table.

## Using the data

Although I am still in the process of writing up my findings, the authorship guidelines<sup>4</sup> are clear regarding the secondary use of the data collected as part of Timescapes.

## Summary and recommendations

To summarise, I found that the data collected in the *Your Space! Siblings and Friends* project was accessible and all the documents had been created with the secondary researcher in mind. After analysing the data I feel that I have a comprehensive picture of the participants and their feelings about their parents' futures.

Some of the other documents were slightly less helpful and because of this I would like to make a few recommendations. Based on my experiences of secondary analysis I think that the Timescapes archive should include:

- Detailed data tables for each project (with qualitative descriptions where appropriate).
- Field notes for each project.
- Interviews with, or details of, primary researchers.

Sarah Baker  
February, 2010

<sup>4</sup> A guidance document outlining good practice relating to authorship of outputs resulting from Timescapes work has been compiled by Rosalind Edwards in consultation with the Timescapes consortium.