Young Lives and Imagined Futures:

Insights from Archived Data
edited by Mandy Winterton, Graham Crow and Bethany Morgan-Brett

Graham Crow (University of Southampton)
Sarah Irwin (University of Leeds)
Dawn Lyon (University of Kent)
Bethany Morgan-Brett (UK Data Archive, University of Essex)
Mandy Winterton (University of Leeds)

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1. Biographical Notes

Graham Crow is Deputy Director of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, and Professor of Sociology at the University of Southampton where he has worked since 1983. He is part of a team funded by the South East Coastal Communities project looking at life on Sheppey past and present which has made use of the material archived by Ray Pahl from his study of the island in the 1970's and 1980's.

Sarah Irwin is a Reader in Sociology and the Director of the Centre for Research on Families, the Life Course and Generations (FLaG) at the University of Leeds. Her specialist interests include sociology of the family and family change, education, class, gender and inequalities, and research methods. She has published extensively in these areas. Sarah leads the Secondary Analysis Project of ESRC Timescapes and is also running a project on parenting, social class and family life.

Dawn Lyon is a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Kent. She is interested in the sociology of work, the meanings work has for people, and the (gendered) interconnections between work activities undertaken in different socio-economic relations, and has published in these areas. She has collaborated with Graham Crow and others as part of a team funded by the South East Coastal Communities project looking at life on Sheppey past, present and future which has made use of the material archived by Ray Pahl from his study of the island in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bethany Morgan Brett is senior project officer at the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex. She works on an ESRC-supported project which is part of the Researcher Development Initiative (RDI), which supports the training and development of researchers in the social sciences at all stages of their career. Bethany is also part of the Qualidata team and in this role she undertakes qualitative data enhancement and documentation activities that include creating resources and materials to promote re-use and secondary analysis.

Bren Neale is Professor of Life Course and Family Research in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. She specialises in policy related research on the dynamics of family life and childhood. These have included studies of the transition to marriage, family and professional care of terminally ill people, and the changing lives of parents and children following divorce. As Director of the ESRC Timescapes Initiative, Bren has been researching new conceptual and methodological understandings of time. She has contributed to advances in Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) research methods and supported the development of projects across academia, government and the voluntary sector. As part of her work in establishing the new Timescapes Archive, she has advanced a 'stakeholder' model for the archiving and re-use of complex longitudinal data. Her empirical research under Timescapes has focused on the changing lives of young people, as part of which she is tracking groups of teenage fathers and disadvantaged black young men.

She is a founding co-editor of a new international journal: *Families, Relationships and Societies*, published by Policy Press, and is an elected member of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Mandy Winterton is a Research Fellow on the ESRC Timescapes Secondary Analysis Project at the University of Leeds. With Sarah Irwin, she is involved in theorizing and exemplifying the analytical possibilities related to the reuse of qualitative data. Mandy's other teaching and research interests are in the intergenerational dynamics of social mobilities, with particular reference to classed, and gendered relationships to Higher Education.

2. Foreword: Young Lives and Imagined Futures
Professor Bren Neale

The idea for this working paper collection arose from a very successful one day seminar on Young Lives and Imagined Futures, held at the University of Leeds in November 2010. The event was organised by the ESRC funded Timescapes Initiative, in collaboration with the UK Data Archive. It brought together researchers from varied disciplines who were engaged in a methodologically diverse range of studies, to share insights on how young people perceive their future lives. The seminar presentations are available on the Timescapes website; in this working paper we provide an overview of the contributions and the rich discussions that ensued from an audience of over 90 delegates. We go on to report on the insights emerging from two projects that have taken different approaches to the re-use of 'futures' data. Overall, the seminar enabled us to give focused attention to three core areas of scholarship within the Timescapes programme: a substantive concern with the lives of children and young people; a theoretical and methodological engagement with the temporal dimensions of experience; and diverse methodologies for sharing and re-using data across new and extant datasets. I will say a little about each of these areas below.

The concern with children and young people and the dynamics of their lives is part of a substantive focus within Timescapes on how lives unfold through the life course and across the generations. More specifically, there is a concern with how the life chances of young people are forged, enabled or constrained over time, both biographically – in terms of personal and relational factors, and historically - through wider structural processes, including shifting socio-economic and policy environments, and the structures of gender, generation, and locality.

As the name implies, Timescapes is also fundamentally concerned with the salience of temporal processes. Time is a complex and endlessly fascinating phenomenon, not simply the medium through which we do research, but an important topic of enquiry in its own right. One important facet of temporal experience is the complex relationship between past, present and future. Time theorists (Adam and Grove 2007) remind us that we only live in the present, and that both past and future are imaginary realms. However, we cannot live in the present without a sense of where we have come from and where we might be travelling to. As we live in the ever shifting present, we continually re-interpret the past, overwrite our biographies, and reframe our orientations to the future. The past, seen as oral and social history, hindsight, heritage, and memory is a well established field of enquiry. Freeman (2010), for example, shows how hindsight produces self understanding and plays an integral role in the shaping of moral life. The future, in contrast, is a relatively neglected topic. Yet it emerges as vitally important. Imagined futures may well influence the direction of the paths that people follow, and an analysis of future orientations and aspirations opens up new possibilities for understanding the seeds of change.

The young people's accounts, gathered through a variety of writing exercises, provide rich insights into their envisaged life journeys. Their imagined futures are made up of more or less attainable aspirations, but also flights of fancy because the future always admits of the unplanned, the unforeseen, the unknowable, the intervention of external factors beyond the control of individuals, which may influence the shape of things to come. However, the accounts from the young people presented here are, in the main, far from unrealistic; the vagaries and fluidity of individual life journeys in the spheres of work and family life (unemployment, divorce and bereavement, among others), are strikingly anticipated in these writings, thereby reinforcing the notion of the life course as the negotiation of a passage through an unpredictably changing environment (Harris 1987: 27-8). These varied accounts also hint at some realistic correlations between the forging of young people's future aspirations, and their socio-economic backgrounds and circumstances, while allowing also for the role of human agency in confounding such correlations. Indeed, how young people's aspirations relate to the reality of their unfolding lives is a complex matter and worthy of further investigation. Whatever the concrete aspirations of young people, their general orientation to the future – their varied time horizons - are also important factors to take into account. Some young people have been described as drifters, living in an extended present and with short term horizons. Yet others are characterised as planners or innovators, with the propensity to pioneer new life paths. But whatever the nature of their aspirations, what does emerge from these accounts is that young people are aspirational, with the capacity to exercise their agency in negotiating the structural conditions of their lives.

The third area of scholarship reflected in these papers is a methodological one. The Young Lives seminar brought together a rich variety of data sources on imagined futures with the potential for sharing and re-use. These included intensive qualitative studies - both historical (Ray Pahl's Isle of Sheppey study, 1978) and contemporary (data gathered through four Timescapes projects, 2007-9)). They also included large scale longitudinal cohort and panel studies (the National Child Development Study 1958 cohort, the Youth Survey of the British Household Panel Survey, the British Cohort Study, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England). The papers in this Timescapes working paper draw on previous studies that have included asking young people to offer more or less unmediated imaginings of their futures. As Graham Crow shows, the corpus of research using this method is wider still, offering even greater scope for comparison. The futures data were gathered in varied ways, from formal essay writing tasks, administered through schools, to informal accounts, gathered through and contextualised within in-depth interviews. The age of the young people and their brief for constructing their narratives also varied; children of primary and secondary school age were instructed to write about life at the age of 25; in Sheppey, those about to leave high school were asked to imagine themselves in older life and reflect back on their biographies. The way that questions are framed and asked is likely to impact on the resulting data, making comparison a challenge; but despite this the potential for enhanced insights across such datasets is significant. Bringing qualitative and

quantitative data sources into conversation with each other is increasingly valued as a means of combining breadth with depth of analysis. The juxtaposition of historical and contemporary sources is no less valuable for, as Graham Crow and Dawn Lyons show, it enables us to interrogate historical data with contemporary research questions, and with updated protocols and ethical procedures, and thereby to find new ways of interpreting past lives.

The sharing and re-use of qualitative data is one of the fastest growing areas of social science research practice, fuelled by dedicated funding initiatives and programmes such as Timescapes. In a climate where the primary collection of qualitative data is increasingly under pressure, making good use of extant datasets, which are often under-utilised, is more of a priority. An interesting development in Timescapes is the potential to combine primary with secondary qualitative research; bringing new and extant data into a common analytical framework offers the potential to expand the evidence base and create more robust findings. Working with time is never less than complex and exciting; we hope that this collection of papers will fuel further interest in advancing temporal methods and re-using extant datasets to create new and distinctive forms of knowledge.

Bren Neale: Director of Timescapes.

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3. Introduction

Mandy Winterton, Graham Crow, Bethany Morgan-Brett

On 15th November 2010, Timescapes and the UK Data Archive (UKDA) hosted a seminar 'Young Lives and Imagined Futures: Analysing and Re-Analysing Narrative Data on Young Lives.' The seminar investigated data on young people's orientation to their future lives. In addition to engaging with time and young lives, the seminar also explored methodologies for primary and secondary analysis of historical and contemporary datasets. In this working paper we bring together two papers from this event: Graham Crow and Dawn Lyon's 'Turning points in work and family life in the imagined futures of young people on Sheppey in 1978' and Mandy Winterton and Sarah Irwin's 'Youngsters' expectations and context: secondary analysis and interpretation'. These papers are significant together because they both draw on secondary analysis projects, constructing new insight from archived data collected by others and for other purposes. These two papers draw heavily on similar kinds of data to explore young people's lives and imagined futures, although in very different ways. Yet it is worth noting that they were never pre-designed to sit so readily side by side. There was no discussion between the authors at any point beforehand. It was entirely fortuitous that they offered, by the extent of their similarities and difference, stimulating insight about the possibilities of qualitative secondary analysis when placed side by side. Before introducing these two papers, we provide some insight into the context of the day. We can only map below the nature and diversity of the research that was presented and cannot do justice here to the complexity and richness of the research that was offered. For the interested reader, the presentations for this event are available on the Timescapes website[i]

3.1 Overview of the seminar

Presentations on the day utilised data from a range of historical and contemporary studies, by colleagues within and outwith Timescapes. The opening paper in the seminar was by Jane Elliott, and built on her programme of research analysing a subset of essays from the National Child Development Study, a cohort study of 17,000 people born in one week in 1958. Jane provided an analysis of the gendering of the accounts of the NCDS participants in the essays they wrote, at age 11, about their anticipated future lives, situating the essays in the context of the wider NCDS data set. The analysis explored the extent to which gender played a role in the essays, written in 1969, and thus in young people's expressed imaginings of the future. The application of discriminant function analysis confirmed the strength of association between key features of the essays (including aspirations) and the gender of the young people who wrote them. Jane asked whether 'mis-categorised' essays, where a person's gender was wrongly assigned on the basis of predictor words, might provide evidence of young people constructing futures that were innovative for their gender. However, in reviewing the 'atypical' cases identified by the model, it emerged that most cases were attributable to quite trivial reasons. For

example, a girl's mention of football increases the likelihood she is classified as male within the model, but a reading of the essays reveals such mentions to be negative and culturally coded, still, as female. Jane argued that there was therefore little evidence that young people in the cohort were imagining gender-innovative futures, even where seemingly atypical cases were identified.

Heather Laurie's paper presented both methodological and substantive insight into young people's imagined futures from her mixed-methods analysis of data from the British Household Panel Study. The purpose of a mixed method analysis for Heather was to use open ended responses within a mostly structured survey to extend understanding gained solely by analysis of the quantitative data. Drawing on the brief qualitative responses in the survey Heather followed case studies of a sample of young people aged 11-15 from waves 4-8 (1994-1998) of the youth panel survey. By examining statements in successive years that young people made regarding their job aspirations and reasons for these, Heather was able to reveal something of the lived experiences of these teenage respondents and gain insights into young people's expectations and motivations. Qualitative insight was used to reflect on the ways in which familial circumstances and structural processes (such as social class) played a role in young people's (changing) expectations, adding understanding to that gained by quantitative analyses.

The final paper of the morning, by Ingrid Schoon and Julia Ashby, provided a wide lens on young people's aspirations and eventual outcomes and drew on data from three national cohort studies, (the 1958 NCDS, the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study and the 2004 Longitudinal Study of Young People in England). Their analysis of data from 16 year olds in each study showed successive increases in occupational and educational ambitions across the cohorts. This positive picture was linked to changed labour markets and educational norms, although balanced by evidence that historical patterns of social inequalities were still evident over time. By applying Latent Class Analysis to data from the two earlier surveys, Ingrid showed links between particular characteristics of teenagers at that point (e.g. their own aspirations and academic attainment, those of their parents, the age of their mother etc.) and likely adult roles (e.g. a parent in a traditional family, single etc.). In unpicking these relationships the authors were able to highlight diversity within different paths to adulthood. However, they also noted a polarization emerging between young people making faster transitions to adulthood and others with much slower transition journeys. Although complex, these are influenced by existing social and gendered inequalities. The paper ended with reflections from NCDS participants who had been interviewed as part of the study when in their 50s. This provided a different kind of contextual understanding on young people's imagined futures, with earlier aspirations viewed from later life. Collectively, the data presented by Ingrid and Julia showed the shifting and multiple constructions of young people's aspirations and transitions to adulthood, and the links between wider social and structural contexts and their personal and familial characteristics.

The other papers built solely on qualitative data. Jeni Harden presented an analysis of data from 'Work and Family Lives', one of the qualitative longitudinal empirical projects which is part of ESRC Timescapes. Jeni's paper provided inter-generational accounts of imagined futures, constructed from accounts of families within the study. In the study, parents were each interviewed individually, as were children, and there was also a family interview. The analysis of interview data revealed how the future was conceptualised in various ways amongst participants. It was presented as part of a progressive narrative, as something imbued with risk and/or as a moral process involving values and responsibilities. The importance of education in constructing a more successful future was evidenced in the paper alongside beliefs also that young people's futures were now riskier and different compared to parental experiences a generation ago. The research showed that families believed they were laying the foundations for their children's futures in current family practices, including the transmission of values. Jeni explained that the Work and Family Lives research team had detected some differences in how the future was conceived among families of different socio-economic backgrounds, although the study sample limited the inference that could be made at this stage. However, she noted that despite the influence of wider social structures on what families expected of their young people's futures, their narratives remained individualistic.

3.2 Understanding imagined futures through archived data

We hope to have conveyed the diversity, depth and richness of insights into young people's imagined futures produced within the seminar. We will now provide a brief orientation to the two remaining papers of the day, which constitute this working paper. They both build on secondary analyses of archived qualitative data.

Presenting a paper co-authored with Dawn Lyon, Graham Crow presented findings from their reuse of qualitative data from Ray Pahl's Isle of Sheppey study. They analysed essays written by young people about to leave school on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, in the midst of the economic recession in the late 1970s (c.f. Pahl 1978). The youngsters were asked to write as if they were near the end of their life, and to write about what had happened to them over that lifetime. These were written in school and could be fairly expansive. The resulting 142 essays saw limited use within the original study or by the academic community at that time. At the time of the original analysis, thinking about young people's transitions was dominated by an assumption that they progressed through prescribed life stages, such as employment, marriage, parenthood etc. Whilst many essays did conform to this kind of pattern, Graham and Dawn's analysis reveals the extent of diversity from these traditional biographies, at least in youngsters' accounts, that went unrecognised in analyses informed by the dominant analytical framework at the time. In their analysis of turning points within the data, Graham and Dawn foreground how young people anticipated future lives that diverged from previous (i.e. normal) familial

trajectories that were forged in the relative stability of a Fordist era. Whilst aspects of young people's familial and social histories were incorporated into their constructions of the future (such as continued expectations of apprenticeships) Graham and Dawn reveal how young people wrote also about disrupted plans and unsatisfied ambitions. Their analysis shows the extent of imaginings of bereavement, widowhood, step-parenting and divorces in the essays, and many instances of young people anticipating that they would lose their jobs or that planned occupational paths would not be fulfilled. In the paper Graham and Dawn locate their own analyses within the wider landscape of Pahl's insight at the time, illustrating the kind of sensitivity and contextual understanding that is essential for secondary analyses of qualitative data.

In their paper Graham and Dawn promote the value of participants' unmediated essay data as a source of insight. In addition to revealing new substantive findings (as exemplified in their research), they also highlight the methodological benefits to reusing data produced in this way. They suggest that, from a ground up analytical perspective, reading unmediated essay data can lead to researchers rethinking their analytical frameworks. Additionally, and on the basis of their own experience, seeing the words of young people expressing their worldviews unprompted by particular questions or direction, can make researchers realise they may have held pre-conceptions about the research population now given a voice.

Within the remit of the Timescapes Secondary Analysis project, Mandy Winterton and Sarah Irwin are exploring the potential reuse opportunities within the Timescapes data archive. In their paper they describe some possibilities for developing insights into young people's imagined futures by working across different Timescapes studies. They show how the process of reviewing the wealth of data *across* projects has opened up new avenues of enquiry. The kind of inductive, ground up analysis they document may resonate with many researchers who use archived qualitative data. Even those who search archives with a clear set of research questions in mind may have to reflect on what the data will allow them to consider and to amend their research aims accordingly over time.

Timescapes research has explored young people's expectations using a variety of methods. The 'Young Lives and Times' study and the 'Siblings and Friends' study asked young teenagers to complete a short writing task that echoed the 1958 NCDS essay exercise. For Mandy and Sarah, like others in the seminar, these essays shed light on young people's understandings of the world and as such are reflective of the particular contexts in which they were produced (e.g. Elliott 2010). In her presentation based on a paper co-authored with Sarah Irwin, Mandy explored the essays with reference to socio-economic diversity, as manifest in expressions of intentions to attend university. In the context of an era of mass higher education in the UK, where unprecedented proportions of young people become the first in their families to aspire to and/or attend university, their analysis explores differences in the ways young people imagined their university futures. Rather than using project meta-data to pre-classify individuals according to background, Mandy initially

considered whether expressions of their futures in the essays could reveal insights into the kinds of backgrounds of the authors. Having built a picture of diversity in this way (which in the event mapped closely onto extant socio-demographic data), Mandy and Sarah selected 'anomalous' cases for more in-depth case study analysis. Their paper explains the need to develop more qualitative understandings of socio-economic relationships to higher education that capture the experiences of young people from diverse familial and/or social origins. They draw on interview and other data to explore how study participants' aspirations towards higher education develop and change over time in particular contexts. By selecting strategic cases for further analysis in this way, their paper has some methodological pointers for secondary analysts who may need to navigate their way through large complex data sets in order to construct social explanation. On a more substantive note, their paper speaks to the necessity of pursuing cultural understandings of social class processes. This includes understandings of class diversity and how class divergent futures evolve.

3.3 Conclusion

In qualitative research, so much of the data collected along the way are only partly utilised by the researcher(s) who originally produced them. There is increasing recognition of the potential insight lying undiscovered within such unused resources. More prolific reuse of extant qualitative data has required epistemological questions related to the status of such data to be addressed (see for example, Irwin & Winterton 2011). As the two papers which follow illustrate, as long as there is adequate understanding of the contexts in which data are originally produced, extant qualitative data can be used as evidence for further social explanation and/or theoretical development. From entirely different data sets and with very different methodological approaches, these two papers show the significant potential to re-use existing data for new insight, in this case, in terms of understanding young people's imagined futures.

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4. Turning points in work and family life in the imagined futures of young people on Sheppey in 1978

Graham Crow, Dawn Lyon

4.1 Abstract

Many researchers have used the method of asking young people to write essays charting the courses that they imagine their future lives will follow. One such project was undertaken in 1978 by Ray Pahl among a group of mainly 16-year-olds on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. These essays were archived and have been reanalysed[ii] and the themes compared with those developed by the original research team. Particular attention was paid in the reanalysis to what the young people's essays contained in relation to the idea of turning points. The essays include a good number of transitions that fit the model of the conventional life cycle that was commonly reproduced in the social science literature of the time. But they also contain many others that involve a range of turning points that have become increasingly familiar foci of social research. The value of the imagined futures essay method thus includes the possibility that by opening up a window onto young people's world views, the material generated encourages researchers to re-think their assumptions and analytical frameworks.

4.2 Introduction

In May 1978 the sociologist Ray Pahl arranged for classes of mainly 16-year-olds on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent to write essays imagining their futures. One hundred and forty two pupils (ninety boys and fifty two girls) were asked in English lessons to imagine themselves towards the end of their lives, looking back and recounting what had happened. The ostensible purpose of the exercise was modest. Pahl was in the early stages of what was to become a major project on Sheppey that would last for a decade, with outputs that included his influential 1984 monograph *Divisions of Labour*. In the spring of 1978 Pahl was still unfamiliar with the island's economic, social and cultural structures, and was only two months into his pilot study. The essays were part of his efforts to improve his understanding of how the chronic economic challenges of the period were affecting ordinary people's everyday lives. The essay writers were facing a bleak future as the labour market which they were set to join was characterised by historically high and rising unemployment, concentrated (then as now) disproportionately among young adults. The timing of the exercise for the essay writers, 'about ten days before they were due to leave school' (Pahl, 1978: 259), was propitious for opening a window onto their world views, and for feeding into wider debates about what could be done to alleviate their adverse situation.

The only publication to come directly out of the essay-writing exercise was a four-page article by Pahl in *New Society* that appeared later in 1978, entitled 'Living

without a job: how school leavers see the future'. In that article Pahl acknowledges that his analysis there does not do full justice to the essay material which 'would be extremely hard to interpret without some knowledge of the local context. As this improves, I may wish to modify my present interpretation' (1978: 262). In fact, the reinterpretation was to be undertaken less by Pahl than by others. First, Claire Wallace took the material as a key reference point for her own (1987) linked study of young people on Sheppey growing up in and out of work, conducted among the succeeding cohort of fifth formers on Sheppey whom she surveyed, interviewed (and some time later re-interviewed) and amongst whom she also conducted participant observation. Secondly, Pahl's decision to include the 1978 essays amongst the materials from the Sheppey study that he deposited in the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex has meant that they are open to re-study, or 'revisiting' (McLeod and Thomson 2009: ch.7) by other researchers, including the authors of this paper. Our aim in this paper is to report on our interpretation of the essays as they relate to the idea of turning points, and to discuss what this reveals about the value of the method of asking young people to imagine their futures.

The concept of the 'turning point' is a key one for analysing life histories. As Andrew Abbott has noted, turning points involve the redirection of paths, not the movement from one stage to another in a predictable trajectory. In the study of people's movement through life, there are 'regular trajectories and on the other hand radical shifts' (2001: 243); turning points relate to those latter situations which have the effect of 'jolting' people 'into and out of trajectories' (2001: 244). In theoretical terms, the concept directs analysis away from the regularities of the life cycle and encourages instead thinking in terms of the life course, a framework which has become familiar in recent decades but which was not an established one at the time that the 1978 essays were written. The fact that the essay authors were about to leave full-time education gives a special significance to Abbott's description of the moment at which people enter the job market as one that can be 'a quite chaotic turning point' (2001: 247). It is reasonable to suppose that this moment in young people's lives will be one of heightened reflection on how far their futures will conform to predictable patterns. It is also reasonable to expect that the norms of the life cycle into which they have been socialised will be open to question in the context of economic upheaval and uncertainty, such as that which characterised the later 1970's, when the gendered nature of these norms was being reassessed.

This idea of unconventional times leading to people reassessing conventional wisdom fitted Pahl's thinking. It was captured in his opening question 'How do young people view the prospect of leaving school when the likelihood of finding a job is slim?' (1978: 259). Pahl's analysis certainly pointed to some interesting findings on this score, but our re-analysis shows that there is much more that can be made of the material than he was able to present in his short *New Society* article. In particular, we argue that our analysis of the essays captures all instances where events that do not fit the traditional life cycle feature in the young people's anticipated futures. If conventional wisdom has it that becoming an adult involves 'obtaining a stable job and creating a new family' (Murard 2002: 51) then events

such as unemployment or divorce take on a particular significance. This analysis of all of the essays for what they say about these topics responds to the familiar criticism of qualitative analysis that cases cited may be atypical of the sample as a whole. Pahl's concerns about the charge of 'cherry picking' from the data only those cases that support the author's preferred argument are on record elsewhere (Spencer and Pahl 2006: 221), but our analysis provides reassurance on this score, and contributes to the debate about 'scaling up' the findings of qualitative research.

4.3 Conventional and unconventional trajectories: work

Pahl's interest in the topic of young people's imagined futures was spurred partly by his suspicion that the dramatically changed economic circumstances of the day would produce significantly altered conceptions of how ordinary life will unfold, compared to the findings of researchers such as Thelma Veness (1962) who had used the imagined futures method in a very different era of full employment and rising prosperity. But any expectation that the essays might convey a sense of innovative ways of 'getting by' that he suspected low levels of formal employment opportunities were producing, an initial finding from his ethnographic work among adults, was not borne out. Certainly there were some essays (1) that anticipated periods of unemployment lying ahead rather than a smooth transition from school to work:

> *'I remember like it was yesterday I went for an interview 3 month or thereabout's before I was due to leave school. This was for the merchant navy but failed the entry test, it was quit a blow for me I felt rejected yet again. My dad recond that he could get me a job at Blueitts but there were no vacancies as yet. I left school and on to the dole with thousands of other people' (essay 16, male).*

> *'For the first six months I couldn't get a job anywhere, then I got one as a typist in a typing pool' (essay 141, female).*

> *'I was on the dole for six months after leaving school, until I got a job in a garage' (essay 42, male).*

Some of these essays involved getting a job only after a degree of adjustment of expectations, and thus a turning point of a sort:

> *'After leaving school at 16 years old my first employment was in a factory. This employment was only found through four months hard slog looking for a job, even then I was not happy in the job that I did' (essay 19, male).*

> *'I left school when I was sixteen, the job I was after was a clerk at a paper*

mill in Sittingbourne. But I did not get it as I was not qualified enough for the position. All the other jobs that came my way, I did not like, so I spent my first year on social security, on this I was getting about ten pounds a week' (essay 21, male).

'jobs were scarce so you had to take what you can get' (essay 30, male).

'my life was exactly the opposite of what I wanted. I had a job that wasn't worth a spit in [the] eye' (essay 38, male).

'I gave up the hope of becoming a teacher as only about 1 in 100 people leaving college get a job...After having trouble finding a job I started to do childminding' (essay 92, female).

'I longed for something exciting and challenging. But yet again I had to settle for second best. I began working in a large cloths factory' (essay 104, female).

Other essays, related stories of success in achieving work with help from family members, although there were fewer of these than might be expected on the basis of the literature on job search.

'I went straight on the dole for a couple of months until my brother got me a job with him in a garage' (essay 115, female).

'Luckily, due to a lot of help from my father I became a clerical assistant in the Civil Service at Chatham dockyard' (essay 104, female).

'My fiance's parents ran a very successful lorry business and after a short while I went to work as a secretary there' (essay 97, female).

Sometimes this work was unappealing:

'Mum found me a nice office job. I took it without a word of protest.... The rebel in me had died.... I wasn't content but I just had to accept it' (essay 4, male).

These examples are one way in which family relationships featured prominently in the essay writers' accounts of the key influences on their lives. This theme of the importance of family is one to which we shall return.

A particularly striking feature of the essays was that the culture of apprenticeships remained powerful, especially among the boys (who, as was noted above, made up the majority of the sample).

'It was hard finding a job, I failed a few chances, but eventually got what I

wanted locally, a craft apprenticeship' (essay 27, male).

'In July 1978 I left Sheppey comprehensive and in September I began a technician apprenticeship at Marconi-Elliots' (essay 3, male).

'I left school at the age of sixteen in July 1978 and tryed very hard to get a job and eventually got an apprenticeship at Sheppey Auto Garage, I was very pleased' (essay 125, male).

Pahl took a keen interest in the issue of apprenticeships, and later sought to encourage local employers to expand their numbers (Pahl and Wilson 1986), but already in 1978 it was clear to him that aspirations among the essay writers were overly-optimistic. As he argued,

'The chances of 16 year old school leavers in this particular area doing anything more than unskilled work are very low. Last year, only about 10 per cent got apprenticeships or went into further education. This year the proportion is unlikely to be higher. The overall rate of the registered unemployed fluctuates between 8 and 12 per cent, but for youngsters it is evidently very much higher, particularly in the summer when it may reach up to 30 per cent' (1978: 259).

Wallace also described how by the late 1970's 'the tradition of skilled craft training for boys' had been 'broken' (1987: 19), so it is instructive that a full third of the boys envisaged success in securing apprenticeships, despite the prospect of this being achieved having been in decline for nearly two decades following the closure of the Royal Naval dockyard at Sheerness in 1960. Aspirations to gain apprenticeships were not the stuff of fantasy, but they do suggest that there was something of a cultural lag between the expectations of the young people and the rapidly changing realities of their environment.

The essays included further examples of anticipated turning points later in the working lives of some of the authors, including several who fulfilled their ambition to become self-employed and run their own businesses.

'Three years later [aged 32] I did something I had always wanted to do, become self-employed' (essay 3, male).

'I decided to start a business of my own when I was 35' (essay 35, male).

'After eight years as a representative I felt confident enough to go into bussiness on my own' (essay 43, male).

'As my family were now a little older, I had decided to work again, I started my own little business at home' (essay 98, female).

'Keith and I went into our own business and it has prospered ever since'
(essay 101, female).

In a few cases the ambition to build their own home was added to that of achieving economic independence through self-employment, confirming Wallace's observation that 'the image of the self-made, self-employed, and self-building man is a popular local archetype' (1987: 13). Again what is suggested is that the essays' contents are rooted in a particular cultural context, and while they are undoubtedly infused with optimism and hope, they are generally not the stuff of fantastic dreams.

4.4 Conventional and unconventional trajectories: family

If many of the turning points in the essays that related to work were ones that anticipated an adjustment to the new economic climate in which unemployment figured more prominently and aspirations for preferred types of work had to be scaled down, the turning points described that related to family relationships also revealed a certain hard-headed realism about the prospects for achieving ideal outcomes. Of course, there were several examples of essay writers, both boys and girls, anticipating ideal family lives. One girl met her future husband at a Christmas party at work, and another married someone she had known in childhood:

> *'he was so nice and kind. We went out for about two years and then got engaged. We were the happiest couple anyone could imagine... We finally got the house of our dreams, a big house with a big garden' (essay 101, female).*

> *'We were very lucky really in our marriage... Our life has been very happy and has lasted a long time we have now been married coming up 40 years and are still as happy as the day we met... We are going to be so happy in our retiremen just the two of us' (essay 92, female).*

A third essay writer anticipated leaving school at 16, going to work in a factory, then moving to Northampton to live with her grandmother, where she worked in a shoe factory for four years. Her comment that at this point 'I did a good days work, I got married without any doubts' (essay 95, female) also fits the conventional marital ideal.

This idealised picture was by no means universal, however, and Pahl himself had cautioned against regarding the essays as the products of mass popular culture. Rather, he remarked that 'Any suggestion that teenage magazines befuddled the girls' minds with romantic dreams would be hard to substantiate from the evidence of these essays' (Pahl 1978: 261); they contained several other narratives besides the standard romantic ideal of a classic white wedding followed by marital bliss. The

same could be said about the boys' essays not being simple reproductions of mass media-based images.

This point can be seen very clearly in the case of the author of essay 96, who imagined herself working in a shirt factory and dreaming that she would 'go off to Canada and marry a rich millionaire and…live happy ever after, just like it was said in story books'. Instead she met Robert, who was a year younger than she was. Her essay anticipated their marriage and move to near Doncaster, and having four daughters, with her working as a bar assistant. Her husband was a motor bike racer. 'Although I didn't mind Robert going racing, I was always sure some kind of accident would happen and it did'. In the account, Robert became confined to a wheelchair and needed care, so the author gave up her job to look after him, but said this was 'all she ever really wanted'. She imagined by the end of her life their four daughters all having grown up with children of their own.

It is notable in imagined futures essays for partners to be written out of scripts completely by being killed off, and this set of essays is no exception in this respect. One essay writer whose career had taken him to Australia recounted the death of his wife in her mid-thirties, subsequent to the birth of their fourth child:

> '*Five years later Sybil died of cancer and shock after one of the twins, Jill, was killed in the mighty Tamu river*' (essay 62, male).

Fatal accidents also fit this pattern. The partner of one essay writer 'turned to drink' because of his difficulties in adjusting to growing older and was involved

> '*in a car accident and was killed instantly. The police report said "Death while under the influence of drink"*' (essay 99, female).

This latter episode led the author to consider suicide, but other accidental bereavements were anticipated less as fundamental turning points requiring major readjustment and more as harsh realities of life to which accommodations had to be made. One essay writer was married and had a son, Mark, aged 'about 13' when her husband

> '*was tragically killed in a car crash. We were both heartbroken, but we pulled ourselves together, and I got another job. I wouldn't say Mark and I were rich, but we were quite well off*' (essay 117, female).

Lone parenthood was not anticipated as leading to poverty, in this case at least.

Divorce was another route through which lone parent families could be created, and it featured in several of the essays, both boys' and girls'. The author of essay 6 passed his exams at 16, was accepted as an apprentice mechanic for four years, during which time he joined a rock group and got engaged. 'I couldn't get married until I was twenty because I didn't finish the apprenticeship until then'. The couple

moved to Essex for work reasons and had two children, but the author joined a new group aged 33, gained a record contract and spent increasing amounts of time touring. Aged 35 his wife divorced him because 'she couldn't take no more'. The children stayed with their mother. He wrote that 'This really broke me down and I went on to taking drugs as a lot of musicians did at that time…. Then I became religious, something I never expected to happen. This brought me out of drugs. I was religious until I was forty eight, but I retired from the music seen at the age of forty five'. Lonely and suicidal, his situation was redeemed by a surprise visit from his children. 'They had married and had two sons and a daughter each' and his eldest grandson asking for advice on what to do with his life led to him to reflect that 'my life had been a failier. I only warned him to take care and think.'

If this narrative of success, failure and redemption is unusual among the essays for the vividness of its detail, it is nevertheless not alone in mentioning divorce as a turning point. One male author anticipated getting married aged 34 having travelled the world, and although he and his wife had a child a year into their marriage, it did not seal the union:

> *'Eventually when I am thirty-eight we are divorced on the grounds of being sick of each other' (essay 7, male).*

A similar image of married life is conveyed by the essay writer who had got married aged 25 thinking he loved the girl whom he had been 'knocking around with', only for things quite quickly to fall apart:

> *'At first all things went well but gradually we began to drift apart until we were arguing every other minute and the littlest thing could set us of. It was inevitable that we would get divorced' (essay 10, male).*

Among the essays written by girls are some which are similarly matter-of-fact in their descriptions of marriage:

> *'I fell in love, god when he walked in the door, I knew he had to be mine. We were married six months later cos I was in the club. I lost the baby and we were divorced one year later'.*

This author then remarried but her second husband's adultery led to another divorce, followed by further retribution:

> *'Later I heard he was killed in a car crash, I didn't even bother to mourn' (essay 119, female).*

Another got divorced as she approached the age of 40 when 'Things started going wrong with the marriage' (essay 122, female), with custody of their children going to her ex-husband. She remarried five years later, but had only eight years with her new husband, who died of heart failure in his early fifties.

A third girl envisaged getting married aged 27 to a Frenchman after a whirlwind courtship of two months, 'and the marriage only lasted a year'. The narrative continues by recording how

> 'later on I got involved with another frenchman but I didn't get married again even though I was pregnant... things between us [began] to fall apart until I left and came back to England where my mother looked after the baby while I went to work' (essay 134, female).

Further diversity of family forms is recorded in the case of the girl who foresaw bringing up her own children being followed by adoption of another child, into what it needs to be noted is an area whose inhabitants are predominantly white:

> 'When we went to the adoption home, I saw a boy of seven who was all by himself, he was the one I choose. Some people said I was a fool to adopt him because he was black, but that never mattered to me' (essay 114, female).

Another girl recounted what may, given the age at which she wrote the essay, have been her actual situation rather than an imagined one:

> 'when I left school I lived with my stepmother, my real mother left all of us children and my father when I was twelve then my father died two years later'.

Certainly there is real strength of feeling in her account of getting married:

> 'My real mother came to the wedding as well but I wouldn't invite the man she had ran off with, I always have hated him and always will' (essay 116, female).

This hints, at least, at some direct experience of step-relationships in her life, rather than any simple process of imagining her future starting with a blank page.

4.5 Discussion: the value of imagined futures essays

Jane Elliott has argued that the content of essays written in response to the instruction to imagine themselves in the future 'provides insights into children's understandings of the social world and their place within it' (2010: 1082). This comment is made in the context of reporting on 13,669 essays written by 11-year-olds asked in 1969 as part of the National Child Development Study to imagine their lives when they were aged 25, but the point holds true for children of different ages and for different exercises involving varying lengths of time into the future. The

same conclusion can be drawn, for example, from Paula McDonald and her colleagues' analysis of 819 essays written in 2008 by 819 14-16-year-olds in Australia asked to imagine themselves to be their parents' age (McDonald et al 2011), from Chilla Bulbeck's study of 420 young people in Australia in 2004 asked to imagine themselves '70 or 80 years old' (2005: 74), or from the 107 'lifelines' analysed by Thomson and Holland (2002) in which young people predicted what their situations would be aged 25 and 35. It is clear from the 142 essays written by 16-year-olds on Sheppey in 1978 that they were well aware that the world was changing around them. This was not limited to the worlds of work and of family relationships that have been explored here, but these were particularly prominent areas of focus, and it is instructive that both remained central matters of concern for Pahl and his colleagues in the Sheppey study.

Thus, in *Divisions of Labour* Pahl argued that 'we must approach the notion of work in new ways' (1984: 1) and although the 1978 essays are not mentioned directly in the book, there are plenty of echoes of the forces described in the essays that shape how the trajectories of individuals' working lives unfold and the consequences that these can have for their households. The narrative device of contrasting the fortunes of two cases who from the outside appear to have very similar starting points is used effectively to compare the differing fates of two couples, Jim and Linda and Beryl and George, to convey the arbitrariness of the process of social polarization. In using this device Pahl follows the essay writer who recounts a successful life, married with children and grandchildren, wealthy enough to be living in a six-bedroomed house, but who wrote

> *'sometimes I wonder what would've happened if I hadn't been lucky in business, if I didn't make the money I had now. Would I be like my school friend Mark who is still working at the factory job he found when he was sixteen, and how lucky I thought he was to take home £40 a week' (essay 15, male).*

The 1978 essay writers were among the first cohorts of school leavers to have to adjust to the move away from the old certainties of the Fordist era, and already in this remark it is possible to detect a re-evaluation of the idea of a job for life. It was passages like this in the essays that led Pahl to comment that 'I found the general level of awareness and introspection impressive and alarming' (1978: 60) – impressive for the sociological perceptiveness of the young people who wrote them, but alarming for the awareness of the constraining nature of their environment.

One of the essays showing such awareness was by a boy who envisaged leaving school at 16 and working in a factory, being 'out nearly every night drinking', continuing to live at home but with increasing family friction.

> *'By now my parents had began to question me about moving out of their house (father mainly) and thinking of setteling down finding some property and getting married of course'.*

Married aged 27 but soon divorced, he reached a turning point:

> *'After looking back at the past I had realised that now at 30 years old I had dun bloody sod all with my life and had no goal, this is when I decided to return to night school and get some decen qualifications'.*

He remarried aged 35 and climbed up the career ladder and the social hierarchy:

> *'I had money in my pocket and my own property, not to say one of the more luxurious car moddles produced in Russia. I thought of all those years between the age of 16 and 30 and shamed my self because how I had wasted them' (essay 19, male).*

The pertinence of Pahl's comment that 'I had to keep reminding myself that these were 16 year old lads' (1978: 60) is one that will be appreciated by anyone reading the essays.

The theme of wasted lives continued to engage Pahl's attention. In the case study of Linda and Jim, who feature in *Divisions of Labour* to illustrate the situation of a household at the sharp end of the process of social polarization, their elder daughter approached leaving school and facing an uphill struggle to find employment. Pahl described this as 'The transition from school to....' (1984: 289). Wallace's study made the point more explicit: it was a transition 'From school to no work'. This disruption of work transitions inevitably had knock-on effects for family transitions, since 'Many of the assumptions surrounding the transition to marriage and parenthood are predicated upon full employment' (1987: ch.4, 153). The conclusion reached by Pahl and Wallace on the basis of several years' investigation using a range of research methods, that 'Young adults argued that they would postpone getting married until they had saved up the money for a house, a proper wedding and the material goods for the matrimonial home' (1988: 140), fits very much with the initial message contained in many of the essays.

The report of a further piece of research undertaken by Pahl and Patricia Wilson into Linda and Jim's extended family includes the comment that sociological textbooks based on dated or partial evidence mean that students 'learn a sociology that is widely at variance with their own personal experiences' (Wilson and Pahl 1988: 262). It is unlikely that any of the 1978 essay writers would have studied sociology, but if they had they would have found few points of connection with their narratives of divorce, lone parenthood, stepfamilies, living with grandparents, and widowhood. The essays pre-date the process of 'rethinking the life cycle' that led family scholars to replace the mechanical notion of a set series of stages by the more flexible concept of the life course. The latter concept came to be preferred because of its greater capacity to capture 'the power of the individual to change the road that is followed' (Bryman et al 1987: 2), not to mention the potential for individuals to be knocked off course by forces beyond their control. Just as Elliott's analysis of the

NCDS essays concludes that their message is a more subtle one than 'a false dichotomy between the genders' (2010: 1086), so the 1978 Sheppey essay writers can be seen to point beyond conventional thinking about trajectories through life fitting the neat life cycle model.

Of course, the status of such essays is open to debate. Pahl's notes made while reading the essays (which are included in the materials from the project that are archived) include some assessments that the essay writers are engaging in fantasy, and in his *New Society* article he expressed the view that 'Inevitably, there were some who fantasised about sexual conquests, private flying licences, and trips round the world' (1978: 60). He took this view of other types of data collected on Sheppey as well, arguing that people had the capacity to seek to impress their audience by fabricating implausible 'stories of stealing fast cars, racing policemen down the motorway and similar, often illegal, daring exploits' (1995: 150-1). But for every essay that is fantastic there are others whose authors' points of reference are firmly grounded in their current realities. Some clearly draw on conversations that they were having, or were expecting to have, with their parents, as in the case of the girl who wrote

> '*When the day came that I was going to leave [school] I was quite worried because I hadn't got a job in hand. Well when I did leave I stayed at home and I can remember my mother telling me to go out and get a job but I knew it wasn't so easy to go out and just get one' (essay 140, female).*

Another's mother was more sympathetic:

> '*There I was walking out of the school gates for the last time... to find a job and start in the working class. It took a few weeks writing letters going for interviews and so on, mum would tell me not to worry about it a job would come along soon. But you do worry' (essay 102, female).*

The idea of young people's culture being the product of critical engagement with their parents' culture is found in the literature of the time (Hall and Jefferson 1976), and it helps to make sense of not only the topics covered in the essays but also the language in which it is expressed.

Indeed, perhaps it is more surprising that the method of asking young people to use their imagination produces on the whole narratives that are readily intelligible and plausible rather than fantasies. As Elliott notes, the invitation to imagine themselves at some point in the future 'allows scope for them to create a cast of characters with whom to share their imagined future world' (2010: 1082), but prominent among the resources on which they have to draw will be those of their everyday lives. One essay writer reflected on the task that he had been set by asking 'how can you right about something that has not happan or may never happen [?]' (essay 64, male), but then discussed how career prospects were related to educational attainment, which in his case limited his options and he described how he joined the army. The armed

forces were identified as career routes by 11 (8%) of the essay writers, mostly boys, a career that necessarily involved travel off the Island. These and other essays in which the authors envisaged moving away helped to sensitise Pahl to the important issue of why unemployment rates on the Island were so high. He reported that 'one of the first things I was told about Sheppey was that there were some people still living there who had never been off the Island' (1984: 144) and the high rates of youth unemployment on the Island were attributed by some people to a supposed reluctance on the part of young people to travel. Pahl's caution regarding folk wisdom led him to seek firmer evidence relating to this perspective, a decision that made sense in the light of the fact that no fewer than 55 (39%) of the essays include geographical mobility beyond the county of Kent (of which Sheppey is only a small part).

The essays proved to be a more reliable pointer to young people's behaviour than the stereotype of the immobile Island dweller. One of the participants in Pahl and Wallace's research into youth unemployment who was reinterviewed as part of our project in October 2009 remarked on the value of social science as a means of challenging such stereotypes:

> *'One of the things about the Isle of Sheppey is that there does appear to be a slight low self esteem amongst people, it tends to get put down by a lot of people, Islanders, and there's lots of myths floating around. What was good about his [Pahl's] report was that it cleared up a lot of those myths, showed them to be unfounded. One of the myths was that young people never want to travel off the island so their employment prospects are very low because they want to stay on the Island, they don't want to travel. But in his report he found that a tremendous lot of people commuted off the Island. A lot of young people went to Canterbury College and to schools in Rochester and what have you, so that wasn't really proved to be true. It's true that if you ask young people if they haven't been off the Island much they've been schooled on the Island and their first thought is if they've got to get on a train and change here and change there, it's going to be a mission, but that would be the same for anybody leaving school'.*

It is only an indirect benefit of the essays that Pahl and his team went on to study young people's propensity to travel off Sheppey for work, but it nevertheless provides a good example of how the contents of imagined futures essays written by young people can help to shape the agenda of research projects that go on to use other research methods, as well as having an intrinsically interesting content. The value of these essays having a specific geographical reference point also allows for comparisons to be made with other areas, such as the deprived neighbourhoods of Teesside studied by MacDonald and his colleagues (2005) who found highly localised careers among young people whose job search was restricted to the limited spatial reach of their social networks. It would also be possible for researchers to follow up essay writers at a later period, and to compare anticipated

futures with the realities of people's lives as they have been lived, in much the same way as Goodwin and O'Connor (2010) have done with young people interviewed in Leicester in the 1960s about their working lives. The case for the value of imagined futures essays can thus be made in various ways, and the voice that they give to young people is one that it makes sense to continue to seek to hear.

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5. Youngsters' expectations and context: secondary analysis and interpretation of imagined futures

Mandy Winterton, Sarah Irwin

5.1 Introduction

ESRC Timescapes is founded on 7 primary research projects that collectively span the lifecourse[iii]. All projects have shared interests in family life, relationships, biography and life course transitions. They are all qualitative longitudinal (QLL) studies, and as part of Timescapes all have a commitment to data archiving and reuse. Timescapes also includes a Secondary Analysis Project, designed to explore the method and practice of data re-use by working across Timescapes project data. Both authors work on the Secondary Analysis Project and the work we report on here is based on our reuse of data made available to us by the project teams (and which is concurrently being deposited in the Timescapes archive).

Timescapes holds a range of evidence on young people's perceptions of the future. For our analysis we drew on data from two projects, 'Siblings and Friends: the changing nature of children's lateral relationships' (SAF) and 'Young Lives and Times: the crafting of young people's relationships over time' (YLT). Both studies focussed on the evolving biographies, experiences and understandings of young people and utilised a variety of methods to do so. Common to both projects was an 'essay' writing exercise were young people were asked to imagine their future life at 25 years old, a task which mirrored an exercise undertaken as part of the 1958 National Child Development Study. We suggest the Timescapes data offers some interesting evidence on contemporary social divisions. In this working paper article we report on some early analysis of the essay data and how it relates to other evidence on young people's backgrounds, exploring some of the links between familial and educational contexts and expectations of the future, particularly regarding going to university. We consider cases where expectations and backgrounds appear to align closely, suggesting a familial context in which expectations to progress to higher education (H.E.) are entirely the norm, and are part of young people's sense of themselves even in their early and mid-teens. Elsewhere university forms no part of young people's horizon of expectations. However, we go on to identify cases which seemed 'anomalous', that is where university appears as part of young people's expectations but in a very provisional way. We take these cases as particularly interesting ones to explore in greater depth. In this way the essay writing data we took as a starting point provided interesting clues as to productive lines of inquiry. In following these up we reflect on the experiences of members of a group of great interest, that of prospective first generation higher education students. Throughout we reflect also on methodological issues in the reuse of qualitative data.

5.2 Working across Timescapes projects

Three Timescapes projects either focus on or include young people as participants: 'Siblings and Friends' (SAF), 'Young Lives and Times' (YLT), and 'Work and Family Lives: the changing experiences of young families' (WFL). Between them they have employed a variety of methodological strategies to capture young people's understandings of their lives, including their relationships, significant events and expectations of their futures. Most young people have participated in three interviews over the lifespan of the projects (although 3rd wave data was not available to us at the time of the analysis reported on here). Alongside the interviews, the three studies have employed a range of techniques including, between them, future and retrospective timelines, self-portraits (pictorial descriptions of interviewees sense of who they are and their interests), relational maps (pictorial descriptions of how close they feel to significant others), futures essays, questionnaires and vignettes (to name but a few) in order to access young people's perceptions of their lives.

Whilst all of these projects hold some common points of connection, they are independent and have distinct research aims, questions and designs. The studies have also been carried out by research teams comprised of researchers with diverse intellectual interests, skills and histories and every interview and/or research encounter has produced data constructed under a unique configuration of circumstances. We have contributed elsewhere to epistemological and theoretical debates about the implications of context for the secondary analysis of qualitative data (see Irwin and Winterton 2011a, b). Here we explore the relevance of contextual specificities as they emerged during our analysis.

Across the projects, accessing young people's understanding could be done in a number of ways. Young people may have been asked to *imagine what their life might be like,* to say *how they saw themselves* or *what they thought they might be doing* at specified points in time. In some instances they were asked if they had any hopes or fears for the future, or if there was anything they would like to happen in the future. Further, incidental insights could appear in sections of the interviews not explicitly directed towards the future. For example, in one project participants were asked to describe what they thought was good or bad about their lives. This could sometimes lead to talk about the future implications of current good or bad aspects of their lives, e.g. current poor grades (a bad aspect of their lives) could mean not being able to go to university (illustrating a university-future orientation). So expectations about imagined futures were produced in diverse contexts. These are hardly new methodological revelations, but we suggest it is easy to overlook the extent of contextual specificity in data production. As secondary analysts we suggest that re-users have to become attuned to recognising these kinds of contextual variances in the construction of new evidence for their analyses (c.f. Hammersley 2009).

In part, the work we report on was designed specifically in order to work across two projects. We therefore chose as a specific focus the imagined futures data from the essay writing exercise. Participants in two projects YLT and SAF were asked to complete short essays that mirrored a similar exercise undertaken by participants in the National Child Development Survey (when they were 11 years old)[iv]. In most cases the task was completed in their own time at home, rather than in an interview, and participants were instructed to spend no more than 30 minutes on it. In practice the time they spent varied significantly. In some cases the interviewer was present and participants spent no more than a few minutes noting down some bullet points. In other cases they wrote quite extensively and some returned their accounts by email to the project researcher[v]. The exercise title was:

Imagine you are now 25. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work at the age of 25.

There were 42 essays in total, 18 from YLT and 24 from SAF.

One of us (Mandy) undertook to review the data across all the scripts. In so doing she felt she was reading or seeing social class differences in the ways in which young people perceived and, to a degree articulated, their futures. Concerned she might be reading too much into the data we agreed she should document the diversity in the data as she saw it and then look at if, and how, her classification compared with one we might arrive at through an examination of available socio-economic data on the young people's familial background. This included parental occupations and participation in H.E. and their current educational contexts. Whilst it might be more usual to consider diversity on the basis of socio-demographic data *and then* consider if, and how, youngsters expectations related to this, we also wondered if it would be revealing to look at this question 'backwards', asking what young people's expectations might suggest, if anything, about their diverse backgrounds.

This might be a rather obvious thing to do in some ways, since there is ample evidence to show how social class inequalities shape young people's expectations for the future. However, the exercise was made more interesting by two features. One is a methodological one relating to the project samples. In both studies, and in 'Young Lives and Times' in particular, although an original aim was to secure a socio-economically diverse sample, in practice it is heavily weighted towards middle class participation, with some but limited numbers of working- and intermediate-class participants. At points, then, we are looking at divisions within the middle class. Overall, what we accessed was not a sharp divide between the presence of very clear H.E. expectations and the absence of any such expectations. Rather we accessed data from those with very clear H.E. expectations and explored it in comparison with data from youngsters who have very provisional H.E. expectations. The size and significance of the latter group has been increasing alongside the expansion of higher education in the UK in recent decades and is a particularly interesting group for understanding the dynamics of change and continuity.

5.3 Higher education within young people's expectations

Before we consider the 'imagined futures' data it is helpful to note some recent research on continuity and change in the transmission of expectations and educational opportunities across generations. Large scale quantitative cohort studies show consistently that familial background and expectations remain crucial to understanding the shaping of youngster's own outlooks (e.g. Schoon & Parsons 2002, Croll 2008, Feinstein *et. al.* 2008). Young people's motivations and aspirations are strongly related to their educational and/or occupational outcomes, but motivation and attainment are heavily mediated by the social class of parents (e.g. Schoon & Parsons 2002). This may be directly in terms of material provision (e.g. more affluent families have the resources to provide circumstances that support their child's learning) and indirectly (e.g. higher educated parents tend to hold higher expectations for their children).

Qualitative research has been able to show how this happens, although attention has mostly settled on the experiences of youngsters from more disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. Archer *et. al.* 2003, Evans 2009, Reay 1998). Such research revealed the sense of cultural distance that led to young people perceiving universities as places for people very different to themselves, (be they spectacularly clever, necessarily affluent, and/or simply 'posh'). It also showed how the lack of financial resources and knowledge of H.E. processes and/or benefits acted as deterrents for young people from poorer or non-HE households contemplating university futures.

There has been less research into the experiences of growing numbers of young people who aspire to become the first generation in their household to attend higher education. Statistically, they are a very significant minority (see Croll 2008). Notable studies with such young people (Brookes 2004, Byrom 2009, Pugsley 2004) reveal they may or may not be from disadvantaged backgrounds. The young people contemplating H.E. in these studies are from very diversely resourced family backgrounds and the research reveals some of the ways in which particular institutional, familial and personal resources count in the development of H.E. aspirations. Such research is important in highlighting the diverse contexts in which increasingly, young people are developing (with varying degrees of stability) H.E. aspirations in families without a history of university education.

As we will see across these two Timescapes studies, university appears today in many young people's accounts of their futures. However, it does so in very different ways. In cases where young people have a parental background of H.E. it is typically embraced as part of their identity and sense of themselves now and in the future. In other cases it features in a much more provisional way.

5.4 Early analytic themes

Reviewing the essays, it was relatively easy to assume that particular styles and content said something, implicitly, about the context of particular family circumstances. Indeed it was difficult *not* to 'read in' presumptions about individuals' backgrounds. For example, assumptions of having finished university, of gap years and/or future travel, of lifestyles expressed with literary flourish suggested participants from middle class households with high levels of educational capital. The examples of Emilia, Felix and Katie, shown below, illustrate the point.

Emilia, YLT, age 15

> I have finished my medicine course at Edinburgh University, and am now training to be a forensic pathologist. I have a little green car which I use to get around. I live in a small flat with a good friend. In the evenings, I read, do work related to my training and take Catalan classes. Occasionally, when my friend is out I play my clarinet. Eventually I will finish my course and move to Barcelona. I email old school friends every now and then, and they update me with their lives. I am still writing stories, in spiral bound notebooks which litter the floor and the desk. The flat is quite clean, as we keep it in good condition. I take the train down to Leeds during the holiday, and visit my family.

Felix, SAF, age 16

I have graduated from uni three years ago and am now working for a company, covering the photography side of things. Good salary and a small flat in North/East London (Hackney, Islington or Shoreditch). Have a girlfriend, longterm relationship. Own a small car which takes me and mates camping for weekends every now and then.
Swim three times a week and occasionly use local gym. Often at Bars/Clubs on Friday nights, less often on saturdays, and sundays relaxing.
Planning a holiday for a few weeks to NZ to see family.

Katie, SAF, age 15

I have finished university, working as maybe an a junior architect or in an office with something to do with the media.
I think I will maybe live in London - not in Leeds. I don't have any family yet, although I might live with my boyfriend.
I think work will be a main part of my life but I will still have time to visit friends from school/university. I might not have time to do many of my hobbies I had when I was younger but will still enjoy doing them when I have the chance.

Conversely, other participants in the studies talk about being a parent by the time they are 25 years old, do not mention university, and offer a more factual rather than contemplative descriptions of lifestyle. Of themselves these seemed potentially indicative of family contexts which differ from those above, perhaps not middle class or perhaps where an expectation of going to university is not part of young people's identity. The essays of Dan and Sapphire that follow indicate in different ways, less expansive horizons in respect of university, lifestyle and travel. They are both more factual than contemplative, although this may of course reflect different school contexts and a familiarity with this kind of writing task. It may simply reflect different degrees of engagement with the question.

Dan: SAF, age 17
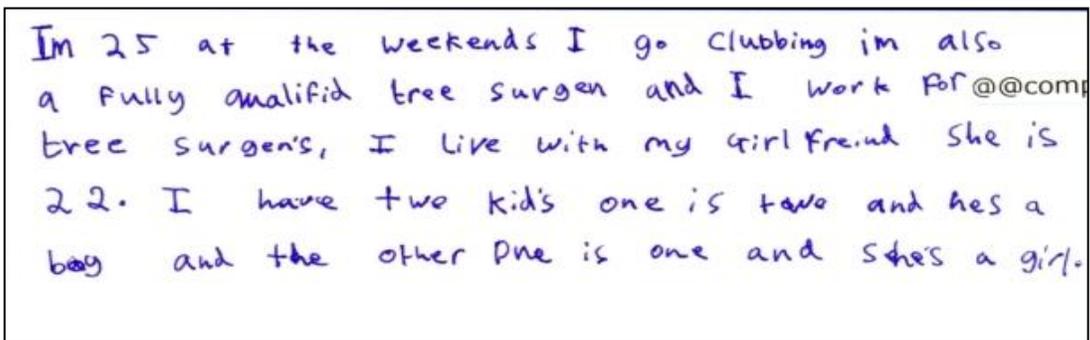
Im 25 at the weekends I go Clubbing im also a Fully qualified tree surgen and I work For @@comp tree surgen's, I live with my Girl freind she is 22. I have two kid's one is two and hes a boy and the other Pne is one and she's a girl.
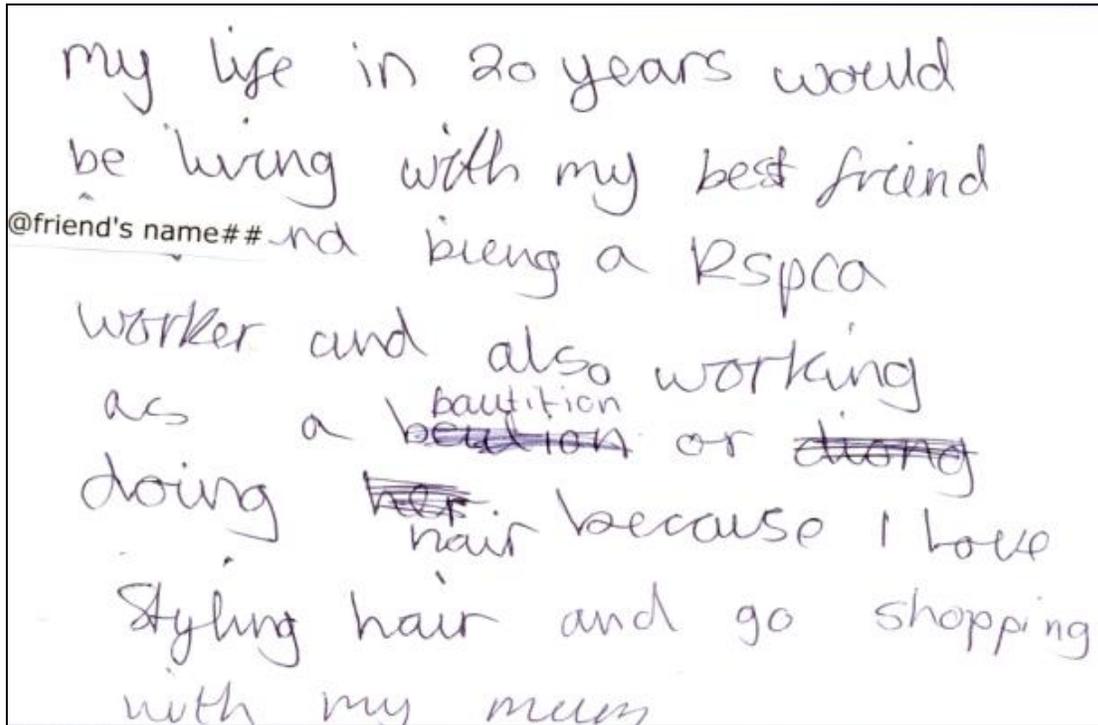
Sapphire, SAF, age 13

Mandy completed the exercise of 'mapping' young people by virtue of their expectations. Amongst the essays were a number which seemed slightly anomalous, where for example essays mentioned both university and having started a family at the age of 25, dimensions which would not usually go together. We then checked how all essay responses related to parental occupational and educational backgrounds. Unsurprisingly there was a strong correspondence between the nature of expectations and familial background. Youngsters for whom university seemed an almost natural and certainly assumed part of their futures came from families where at least one parent had been in education.[vi] However, we drew from this further interest in the small group of anomalous essays, where parents had no H.E. background themselves yet youngsters mentioned going to university themselves, and/or having a graduate job. Here as we will see orientations to university and graduate employment were provisional. We` present below the cases of Kate, Maddie and Jen who illustrate the dynamics of classed relationships to H.E. being forged after two decades of a mass H.E. sector in the UK.

Kate: Kate was a participant in the 'Siblings and Friends' study. She lived in local authority housing with her mother who worked part-time as a school meals worker. She was estranged from her father and no-one in her family had been to university. However in her essay Kate showed aspirations for a graduate occupation:

Kate, age 15
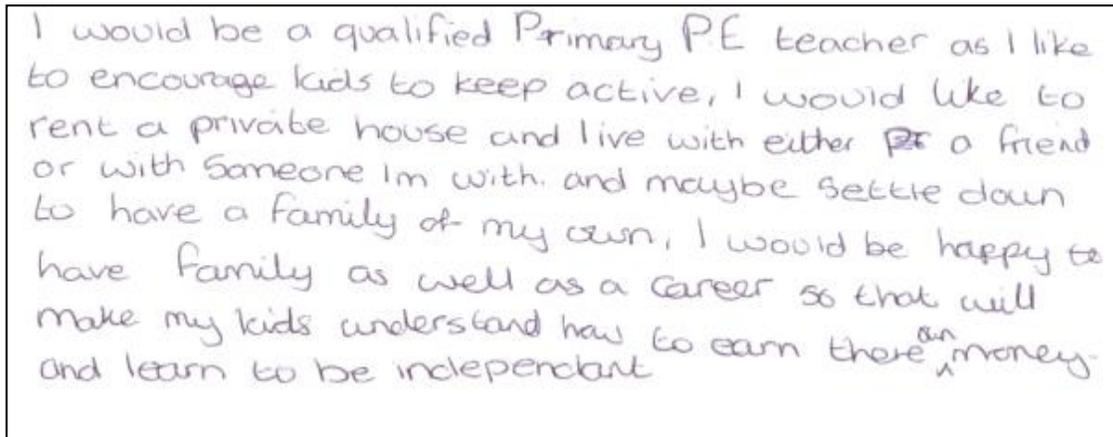
> I would be a qualified Primary P.E teacher as I like to encourage kids to keep active, I would like to rent a private house and live with either a friend or with someone Im with. and maybe settle down to have a family of my own, I would be happy to have family as well as a career so that will make my kids understand how to earn there own money. and learn to be independant

Despite seeing herself as a teacher, Kate did not mention having been to university in her narrative. Perhaps she did not know that she would need to go to university to become a teacher. In her interviews she knows she is definitely going to college, but does not look beyond that. In her essay Kate also mentioned having a family at age 25 which we saw as another socio-economic indicator. We noted also the context in which she talks about money, about wanting her kids to understand how to earn it themselves. We thought this could be reflective of a background where the distribution of household money might have been an issue.

Later in the study we learnt that it was not necessarily a career in teaching that Kate aspired to, but rather a desire to do something that involved sport. In an interview:

> I: So what do you want to do?
> Kate: Something to do with sport like a PE teacher.
> I: Oh excellent! So something sport-related
> Kate: Sport ... I want a job working with sport. I just like it for some reason.

The provisional nature of her expectation may in part stem from circumstances in which this participant is not embedded in any family expectations of going to university nor other contacts which might engender such expectations.

Maddie: Maddie, from the 'Young Lives and Times' study, lives with her mother and long-term step-father. Her biological father is deceased. There is no parental H.E. in her family. Her step-father 'is something to do with electric' and her mother works in a job centre, yet Maddie mentions attending university, as well as travel in her essay.

Maddie, age 15

> At the age of 25 I am now a key stage 1 in year one class. I really enjoy it + enjoyed university when I was 18 I went to australia for a year + it really matured me, I am now married with one child + want more than one child, My husband + I live in a regular house + earn enough money to go abroad + buy our child toys to keep her/him happy and content. I enjoy life + love the family aspect. I love spending time with my family + am lucky enough to have still kept in touch with lots of my friends, after I came back from australia me + mollie got a flat together. I met my husband when I was 20 + we married at 22. I want 3 or 4 children I'm still in touch with most of my family + see my mum alot. That's it really.

These are activities we would more readily associate with the imagined futures of young people from professional households. However, to imagine oneself married and with children at 25, as Maddie does in her essay, is more associated with those from non-professional home environments. Maddie also mentions money, albeit in a different way from Kate. Nonetheless, a concern to have sufficient money in their future is more of a feature of participants' essays from lower socio-economic households.

Interestingly, we discovered that Maddie's brother was at university as she participated in the study. Thus whilst she may become a first *generation* H.E. entrant in the future, she would not be the first child in her family to take those steps. In her interview we get the following insight into her understandings of the H.E. sector and her place within it:

> *'Oh, I were hoping to [go to university too] but because my brother … he were the first one to go to university, it's easier when you're the first one in*

the family to go. So he were the first one in the family so it were easier for him to get there but because I'm going to, because he's going to university this year, to Leeds, but because I'm the, I'm the second one to go to university, he's really brainy and he found it hard to get in and he were the first one so I don't know how I'm going to get there. But I really, I hope I do but I don't know how I'll do it, but I might have to go to a, a lower university than that and one that doesn't expect as highly from you.'

<div align="right">Maddie</div>

On the face of it, Maddie may be seen to be expressing here what has been found in other research with young people from non-university families (e.g Archer *et. al.* 2003, Reay 1998), that young people with non-university educated parents construct the H.E. sector as the preserve of 'really clever' people. She may also be seen to exemplify another kind of phenomena among potential first generation H.E. entrants evident in that body of research. Her expectation that she will probably have to go to a 'lower' university reflects earlier research evidence among potential first generation university students where it was more common for such students to see themselves most likely to fit in with, or get into, institutions at the lower end of a perceived institutional hierarchy (e.g. Reay 1998). This kind of systematic devaluing of the self is seen largely in social class terms. However, the issues raised by Maddie's account is that actually, she is basing her opinions of the H.E. sector not on some imagined middle-class 'other', which is commonly the case in other studies. Her opinion of students is founded much closer to home, and her judgment of herself as lesser, is in relation to a sibling rather than any socio-economic framework. Insights such as this remind us about the importance of contemplating the diversity of factors that influence young people's aspirations to university.

Jen: Finally we consider Jen, a participant in the 'Young Lives and Times' study. Unlike the earlier two cases, Jen stood out as anomalous only at the point we brought her essay together with evidence on her family background. From Jen's essay alone we had placed her in a non-professional background quite unproblematically. In it, there are no aspirations for university, travel or a professional occupation.

Jen, age 15
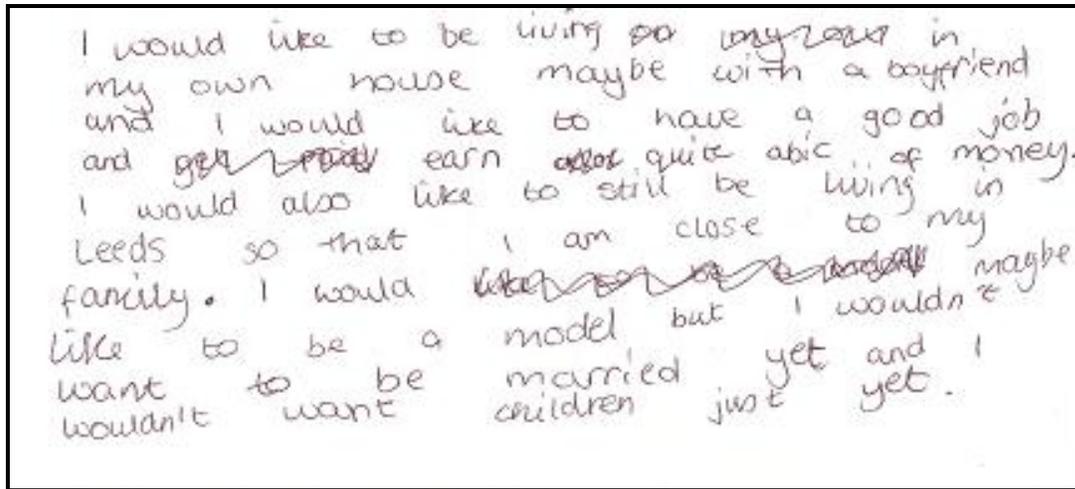
I would like to be living so long long in my own house maybe with a boyfriend and I would like to have a good job and get pretty earn alot quite abit of money. I would also like to still be living in Leeds so that I am close to my family. I would like or maybe model but I wouldn't like to be a married yet and I want to be children just yet. wouldn't want

However, other available data from the YLT questionnaire survey indicated that she thought it very likely she would be going to university in the future and when she was asked directly, in the interview, about her future educational trajectory, then she is clear about the presence of university.

> *'Then when I'm 17 I'd still be in sixth form, then when I'm 18 I'd have to be at university'.*   Jen

There is no indication why she would *'have to be'* at university, whether she is relaying some kind of sense of external pressure to go to university, whether she is excitedly relaying her own internal compulsion, (i.e. that she would simply have to go to university in order to be fulfilled), or whether she is stating what she sees as an 'obvious' thing for her to be doing.

From data in the interview and questionnaire we learn that Jen is from an affluent household. Neither parent went to university. They have both achieved success in the private business sector and have paid for their daughter to attend a private school. Their investment is a clear sign to Jen that education must be important. Yet university made no appearance in her imagining of her future, and her imagined occupation given in her essay is not a graduate occupation. Jen's imagining of being a model in the future is maintained over the two waves of data we are analysing here, alongside her more provisional constructions of a university future. Her expectations of modelling seem more assured based on the fact that she had already been scouted for such a career at a fashion show, and also based on her own understanding of her academic ability. When asked why she wanted to be a model, she replies:

… like, I'm not very, like, academic, like, I'm not very, like, good at working and stuff so I don't know it could be, like, it's like, a different thing to do.

Jen

We could (very) tentatively suggest that the absence of any mention of university in Jen's relatively unmediated essay response suggests that H.E. is not yet embedded as part of an imagined future for Jen. When she is questioned directly about her educational trajectory she clearly positions university in her future (in the questionnaire and later in an interview). We might be seeing the development of a more assured H.E. future based on the kind of educational support available to Jen (via the parental home and private school), despite her own understanding of herself as not academically able and despite alternative aspirations for a modeling career.

5.5 Conclusion

In this working paper we have described the process and the logic of investigating the socio-economic dynamics of H.E. aspirations in the way we have. We have worked across two Timescapes projects, SAF and YLT, to incorporate a wider breadth of young people and thus extend the analytical reach of our work, (and as part of our remit to work with data *across* Timescapes data sets). Whilst selection of our analytical case studies hinged in part on data replicated in both studies (the essay writing exercise), as we have shown here secondary analysts can build further understanding from different forms of data produced in diverse research contexts.

The essay writing exercise undertaken in both studies in many cases reflected the household and socio-economic contexts in which their authors were located. This was most evident in those essays where university ambitions matched the university history of their parents. It has been most productive to identify and investigate those young people imagining university futures (or graduate jobs) in the context of non-university educated households. Identifying 'anomolous' cases in the way that we have has shown the ways in which contingency is manifest in the imagined futures presented and discussed by the young people across these projects. In the cases presented here, our early work on two waves of data has shown different levels of contingency in the H.E. imagined futures of three young people in diverse familial contexts. Kate appears to be imagining a graduate future from within the least resourced family. There is no H.E. experience around her and she lives in the poorest socio-economic circumstances. Her expectations are highly provisional, and nebulous. Maddie has the advantage of a sibling in H.E., yet we see that her own H.E. ambition is anchored on her understanding her brother as a typical university student. To have some, albeit restricted, understanding of university experience appears to have mixed consequences for Maddie at this stage. Jen allows us a different insight into the contingency of imagined university futures

among potential first generation H.E. entrants. Her H.E. journey seems more secure (one assumes the influence of her private education also here) although it seems it is not yet a firm part of how she sees herself in the future. She maintains alternative conceptions of her future, as a model, and also lacks confidence in her academic abilities.

These three case studies, (and there are many other examples within the Timescapes data), remind us of the need to acknowledge the diverse configurations of socio-economic mobilities that are part of wider patterns of social reproduction. In order to have a greater understanding of reproduction, we need to understand the dynamics of inter- and intra- class diversity (see Brooks 2004, Croll 2008, Irwin 2009). This small piece of secondary analysis has uncovered something of that complexity by focusing on young people's expectations of university futures.

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[i] http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/events-dissemination/past-events-presentations/young-lives-and-imagined-futures-analysis-and-re-analysis.php

[ii] The essays are quoted from here largely unedited, reproducing their original spelling and punctuation, but inserting occasional words in square brackets for clarity of meaning.

[iii] The core qualitative longitudinal Timescapes studies are:

- *Siblings and Friends: The changing nature of children's lateral relationships,* (PI: Professor Ros Edwards LSBU). This project tracks the lives of 50 children from mid-childhood to young adulthood to explore the nature of sibling and friend relationships and experiences and how these change over time.

- *Young Lives and Times: The Crafting of Young People's Relationships and Identities over Time* (PI Professor Bren Neale, University of Leeds). This project follows an age cohort of young people from varied backgrounds as they grow through their teenage years and into early adulthood.

- *Work and Family Lives: The changing experiences of 'Young Families',* (PI: Kathryn Backett-Milburn, University of Edinburgh). This project explores the ways in which families reconcile their work and family lives over time by drawing on the changing experiences and perceptions of a diverse sample of 14 families with children of primary school age.

- *The Dynamics of Motherhood: an Intergenerational Project*, (PI: Professor Rachel Thomson, and Professor Mary Jane Kehily, the Open University). This study explores the transition to new motherhood in contemporary times, observing diversity within the current generation as well as how motherhood has changed historically over generations. It considers how becoming a mother changes women's identities and how the arrival of a new generation changes family dynamics.

- *Masculinities, Identities and Risk: Transition in the Lives of Men as Fathers*, (PI: Professor Karen Henwood, University of Cardiff). This research examines the impact of fatherhood on a diverse sample of men from the time of pregnancy to eight years later.

- *Intergenerational exchange: Grandparents, social exclusion and health,* (PI: Dr. Kahryn Hughes and Dr. Nick Emmel, University of Leeds.) This project generates insights into the lived experience of social exclusion among a sample of grandparents aged 35-55, within a low income neighbourhood.

- *The Oldest Generation: events, relationships and identities in later life,* (PI: Professor Joanna Bornat , the Open University). This project focuses on the experiences of a diverse sample of people over the age of 75. It examines the dynamics of older people's relationships and identities in the context of the changing structures of family life and service provision.

[iv] NCDS collected a variety of developmental, health and socio-economic data from 17,000 participants born in one week in 1958. Follow up data was collected at ages 7,11,16, 23 and 33.

[v] We acknowledge the work of the researchers: Dr. Anna Bagnoli on YLT and Dr. Susie Weller on SAF.

[vi] See Irwin 2009 for earlier work on YLT in this area.