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Synopsis:

Walking alongside young people

Young lives and Times (YLT) is Project 2 within the Timescapes initiative. Project 2 has been tracking the lives of a variety of young people within a Northern city. The aim of the project was to explore the experiences of young people over time, focusing on transition points, such as growing up and becoming parents. The project explores the importance of youth as a formative time for people as they move into adulthood, forge new relationships and consolidate a sense of future. The ethos of the project is to 'walk alongside young people' as they move through the changes that early adulthood entails.

Foundations of the project:

The young lives and Times project within Timescapes emerged from Neale's ESRC Fellowship 'Time, Texture and Young Lives: Developing Qualitative Longitudinal Research' from 2006-2008. The project was boosted in this previous phase via the NCRM (Real life methods node Leeds/Manchester) from 2007-2009. The node work, under the direction of Bren Neale and Sarah Irwin, helped in the foundation and development of the strong empirical dimensions of this project, grounding them in a multi-method approach.

Young Lives and Times (YLT) is a dual aspect project, involving the tracking of a main cohort of young people (hereafter 'The YLT sample') as well as a subsidiary sample population, Following fathers (FF) which offers a 'critical case' of a different aspect of youth, giving depth and socio-economic variance to the research, in terms of the exploration of the lives of participants with different backgrounds. The project also initially involved an MA piece of research (*Black Aspirations* by Sarah Finney, 2010) with a sample of under privileged young black men to be followed up later within the remit of the YLT project, this however was taken no further than the MA work due to commitments to produce secondary analysis by the research team on the YLT sample and the strength of the FF work which has been developed extensively by the director and research fellows.



Research questions:

The major remit of the project has been the exploration of relationships and life changes which have been tracked over time. The research questions therefore reflect this, focusing upon issues such as:

- How do young people construct their personal relationships and identities over time?
- How do young people define, experience, balance and move between their family, friendship, intimate and community relationships over time?
- What are the changing values and sources of morality that young people draw upon in constructing their relationships and identities?
- How do young people make sense of their past, present and future? How do they refine their ideas at different turning points in their lives as they 'overwrite' their biographies?
- What opportunities and constraints exist in young people's lives and how far is the notion of 'life planning' applicable to them?
- How do diverse aspirations and subjective experiences relate to standard dimensions of social difference and inequality?

Advisory groups and participant involvement:

The Young lives project has been participatory in its nature, with focus groups at the outset of the project offering young people their chance to give direction and input to the project. The choice to use a multi-method approach also fits in with the participatory ethos of the project, in that participant generated data methods, such as timelines, relational maps, self portraits, as well as visual contributions such as video diaries, have been a strong feature of the research, allowing participants to not only have their say via interviews, but also to document and detail their views/experiences in other ways.

An advisory group for the YLT sample was set up under the Real life methods node and convened by Anna Bagnoli. This group was comprised of both academics and practitioners to give their input into the work and its aims. Within the FF's sample we have honed our techniques for such work with practitioners and a network of both academics and practitioners has been set up to inform the next phase of the study.

Ethics:

Research with young people requires careful and appropriate handling of ethical concerns and consent. For the young people in YLT, parental/guardian consent was sought prior to the interviews, explaining what the project entailed and seeking agreement to their son or daughters participation in the project. This was appropriate for a sample of young people aged 13-14. Consent was directly sought from the young people themselves and for subsequent waves, when the young people were in their mid teens, consent was negotiated directly with them without parental involvement. The participants were given information about the project and their consent was sought regarding participation in fieldwork, the use of the data in publications (subject to appropriate anonymisation, i.e. the use of pseudonyms and pixilation of faces in photos) and for the data to be archived for reuse. For the sample of young fathers, similar consent procedures were used, tailored to this particular sample. They were given a project information sheet, and their consent sought, again regarding data archiving, use and reuse. The young men all wanted their names to be kept on 'their' data, so ethical considerations about



reuse, such as anonymising other identifying features was of paramount concern given the use of real names (albeit only first names).

All participants (YLT and FF) were given the option to withdraw from the research at anytime, and some did leave the project. Changes in the research team on YLT, and changes in the project funding and information sheets raised some ethical issues, with regards to continuity of contact and new researchers approaching the participants. This had to be handled carefully and in one case required seeking renewed consent with a parent as well as the young person.

About the researchers:

At the end of the project, the team comprised Bren Neale, Sarah Irwin, Carmen Lau Clayton and Esmee Hanna. Anna Bagnoli was the researcher involved in the first phase of the research, funded prior to Timescapes, while short term, temporary help was given by Sarah Finney and David Mellor.

Professor Bren Neale:

Bren is the principal investigator of YLT, Director of Timescapes, and 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. 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

Dr Carmen Lau Clayton:

Carmen is a Research Fellow for the Young Lives Project at the University of Leeds. She joined Timescapes during Wave 3 of the YLT and has taken a lead role on the FF’s work. Her thesis, completed at the University of Leeds was concerned with the UK Chinese diaspora which looked at generational and cultural patterns for various British Chinese households. Specifically, British Chinese parenting, children’s agency and intimacy levels between parents and children. Carmen also works at Leeds Trinity University College as an associate senior lecturer in child and family welfare studies. Carmen’s research interests include childhood, young people, family life, personal relationships, ethnicity and culture.

Esmee Hanna:

Esmee is a research fellow for the Young lives and times Project at the University of Leeds. She joined Timescapes during the FFs study, working on analysis of the FF’s data, as well as secondary analysis of the YLT sample. Esmee has also overseen the co-ordination and preparation of the YLT and FF’s data for archiving within the Timescapes archive. Esmee’s research interests focus around young people, specifically in relation to the political, undertaking a thesis on the student movement of the late 1960s in English universities at the University of



Leeds. She also teaches Social sciences within the Open University and has taught for a number of years within the School of Sociology and Social policy at Leeds.

Sampling:

YLT: 29 young men and women aged 16 to 17, with diverse backgrounds in terms of class, ethnicity, locality, ability, and family circumstance, participated within this sample. They were recruited into the project via schools and youth groups. Focus groups, (of which there were 9 in total), were the key means of developing a sample, utilising the school and youth groups as a ‘way in’ to the population, to then generate interest in participating in the fieldwork on a one to one level.

FF’s: The FF’s sample was sampled through the local Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Initiative of the City Council, and then predominantly accessed via a key gatekeeper (A practitioner working with young men) who introduced the project to the young men and made introductions of the men to the project team. Teenage fathers are a difficult to reach group, with no obvious sampling frame which makes sampling and access a challenging aspect of the research. Thus the use of a gatekeeper in this way allowed a ‘way in’ to an otherwise hard to reach group. The sample comprises 12 young men, which is a significant number given the issues of accessing such a sample and in comparison with sample sizes in related projects. The sample also varies in age (all being under 25), ethnicity and family situation.

Retention and attrition:

Retention rates for YLT are not as strong as for FF’s. There was a loss of 8 participants between Waves one and two, and a further 1 by Wave three, giving an overall loss of 9 participants, accounting for approximately one third of the sample. Varied and complex staff situations (notably the changing of research fellows across the project) can in part account for this loss of participants, although for young people changing priorities as they juggle school, family and friendships, makes attrition an inevitable aspect of research with this type of population group.

*Table 1: Number of participants at each wave for YLT**

| Wave | Number of participants |
|-------|------------------------|
| One | 29 |
| Two | 21 |
| Three | 20 |

*Figures also reflect the number of participants whose data has been archived

FF’s:

Retention rates among the FF’s sample was high. The use of incentives to re-numerate the participants for their involvement, coupled with the strong engagement of the participants with the project, predominantly through a desire for young men’s voices about fatherhood to be heard, appears to have driven the strong retention rates. The involvement of the practitioner was also crucial in terms of maintaining the sample. Of the 12 participants, there are three waves of data for 10 participants, which shows’ the high level of engagement with the project and the attention to sample maintenance during the project.



Table 2: Number of participants at each wave for FF's

| Wave | No. of Participants |
|-------|---------------------|
| One | 12 |
| Two | 11 |
| Three | 10 |

Methods:

The project involved an intensive tracking of young lives using a rich array of ethnographic methods: participant observation, conversational interviews, written accounts, and the joint production of sound and visual data. The project was participatory in nature, with methods employed flexibly in line with participants' individual styles and preferences.

Listed below are the methods employed across the project, although it is worth noting that not all methods were used for both YLT and FF's (see final report for further details):

- Repeat interviews
- Focus groups
- Self-portraits
- Timelines
- Relational maps
- Photo elicitation
- When I'm 25 essays
- What are they thinking exercise
- Walkabouts
- Online discussion group
- Repeat 'official' photographs
- Diaries and video diaries
- Participants' forum and drama workshop
- Collages and artwork

Analysis/re analysis:

The YLT data was coded using 'Atlas' for the earlier phase of the project, with a transition to Nvivo/Framework under Timescapes.

Waves one and two of the FF's data set was coded using a series of colour codes relating to the thematic, supported by analytical observations and reflections which were inserted via the use of comments on the transcript documents. The third wave has not received this treatment as yet due to the time constraints of the project and the need to ready the data set for archiving. At this juncture the plan for analysis will be taken forward by Carmen Lau Clayton in the months that will follow the end of the project proper.

In terms of reanalysis, the YLT data has already been fruitfully used with the secondary analysis project of Timescapes (led by Sarah Irwin, with Mandy Winterton as research fellow). The reuse of the data has used double anonymisation to ensure protection of participants' identities in line with the consent and ethical assurances of the project. A short exploratory project by Esmee Hanna, exploring the possibilities of using timelines and relational maps as a 'way in' to



secondary analysis of divorce has also been undertaken with comments on these explorations being set out in Spring 2012. No secondary analysis work has been undertaken on the FF's data set at the time of writing.

Archive preparation:

The data preparation of the YLT and FF's projects has occurred in a number of linked and sequential steps. Transcripts for waves one and two of YLT were anonymised by Anna Bagnoli, readying them for archiving. Wave three due to staffing constraints has not been anonymised so will be archived under restricted access. FF's data, from all three waves has been anonymised by Laura Davies. The data has been anonymised using the framework set out in the Timescapes anonymisation guidelines (see: www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/data-archive for links to this guidance) and has remained sensitive to the consent and wishes of the participants, for example the FF's participants all elected to use their real names in the data, whilst the YLT sample all selected their own pseudonyms.

Reflections on the anonymisation process: Laura Davies (YLT data preparation officer)

The task of anonymising data from the project Following Fathers ready for ingest into the Timescapes Data Archive presented some interesting challenges and illuminated the need to consider anonymisation as a central part of the data collection and archiving process. As Robert Stephenson (2011) notes in his review of the data preparation process on the allied project Timescapes 'Your Special Siblings and Friends' Project Guide, the time needed to undertake this important stage of data preparation should not be underestimated. It should be considered as an integral part of the research process when data archiving is intended and, where a project is staffed by a changing team of researchers, maintaining clear records is crucial. For example in this project the primary researcher had created a series of pen portraits and these, along with data in the form of relational maps, proved very helpful in unpicking the intricacies of participants' lives.

One of the central challenges in anonymising data for the Following Fathers project role was to maintain the confidentiality of the participants whilst also maintaining the clarity of their life stories and preserving the richness of the data. As the participants had all chosen not to have their identity protected with the use of a pseudonym, the anonymisation of the wider contextual detail of their lives and the people about whom they spoke was a crucial part of meeting ethical guidelines around the protection of research participants' confidentiality. As some fathers were in complex situations regarding their children with the active involvement of social work teams and/or ongoing disputes with their child's mother about their contact maintaining a high level confidentiality was crucial. Adding further complexity, as well as analytic interest, was the closeness of the family and friendship networks of the young men. For example in some cases the men spoke of relationships with people that could not be easily categorised, such as in a case where the participant's uncle was also their child's mother's partner. Others had complex networks of extended family including numerous siblings, half siblings and step siblings. In these cases the insights of the primary researcher were particularly important in working out who was who and deciding how to allocate the anonymised coding to the people discussed in the interviews.

Negotiating this complexity of the participants' lives meant that in some cases the simple categories of 'partner' or 'brother' did not adequately explain the relationships. For example, over the course of the longitudinal data collection, some participants spoke about a number of intimate relationships as they separated from their child's mother and established new partnerships. In these cases a variety of codes were used to convey the relationships as they stood at the time of that particular interview, for example @@ex partner###, @@son's mother### or @@current girlfriend###. Where appropriate explanatory notes were added to clarify the chronology of these relationships within the participant's life story. In one case, the participant had children with more than one



woman and in these cases the women were referred to as @@son's mother## or @@twin's mother## so that future secondary analysts are able to identify the relationship connections.

In conclusion, it must be recognised that the task of anonymising a large corpus of qualitative data is a time consuming one. A data preparation guide is essential to ensure that the task is completed in a methodical and effective way and this, combined with the insights of the research team, is the key to maintaining data clarity whilst also protecting participant confidentiality.

The next stage in the archive preparation of the YLT and FF's data was undertaken by David Grainger, who was brought in specifically to undertake this task, this work was undertaken in conjunction and coordination with the Timescapes Data archive officer, Brenda Phillips. The process of organisation, file naming and metadata production, is a time consuming and labour intensive process. Accuracy at the preparation stage is central to the smooth ingest of data, thus extensive resources were needed for this to ensure that the data sets were 'clean'. The need for organisation was all the greater for YLT as this was a data set that has been through a number of researchers hands over the course of the projects lifespan, thus it had been arranged and organised in a myriad of ways, so an external view on the dataset to organise and document it for archiving was an essential part of the preparation process of the YLT dataset. This summary guide is also part of the archive preparation process, allowing secondary users to situate the research, which we as a team see as fundamental to the contextualisation of QL datasets. In total for YLT and FF's samples, 896 files were prepared and archived within the Timescapes archive.

Reflections on data preparation by David Grainger (YLT data preparation officer)

The Young Lives and Times data set is a large and diverse one, including a variety of different types of data, with no one scheme suitable for any given wave, or for any given participant. In this, of course, it reflects its researchers' commitment to methodological diversity and experimentation, the evolution of their thought through the project's lifespan, and the variety of staff who have been involved.

Of course, all of this presents particular challenges for the person preparing the data for archiving, who must make the data set comprehensible and approachable for those wishing to re-use it. The first step in doing this was to go through all of the data which had been kept as part of the YLT project, and list everything which was present. The guiding principle here was to keep as much of the data as possible, and so only a small amount of images were not kept for archiving, where large numbers of photographs had been taken which depicted the same subjects at the same time. Even then, this decision was only taken in consultation with the research team, to establish definitely that the data that was being omitted did not add anything of further analytic value.

Preparing this data set highlighted the key role for the research team in guiding data preparation, especially when this is being done by someone who was not involved in the original research. This guiding role can be performed in two ways. Firstly, and more obviously, the researchers can inform the preparation officer if there is important data which might not be stored in the most obvious place, and can answer any questions which might arise. Secondly, and especially where research has been carried out by a large and changing team of researchers, the preparation officer's task can be made easier by careful data storage and management throughout the project. In this case, there were records of when interviews had been carried out, and what kinds of visual data to expect from each participant. It is crucial that these records are kept consistently across the waves of a longitudinal project, and as the research personnel changes, so that a data preparation officer brought in at the end of the process can ensure that all of the data has been archived, and is being presented as the researchers would wish it to be. I would like to



thank the members of the Timescapes research team who have provided these two kinds of guidance for me, and I hope that the data set in its archived form reflects the hard work that has gone into the research

Policy, practice and public engagement:

A major policy output relating to the FF's work, was the production of a Policy briefing paper (Neale and Lau Clayton, 2011- see outputs list for full reference) launched at the Timescapes Policy conference held in June of 2011. This briefing paper situates the needs of young fathers based on the preliminary findings of the research, stressing the importance of good timely support of young men who are making the transition to fatherhood whilst simultaneously making the transition to adulthood. The FF's project has had an ongoing practice dialogue with the gatekeeper of the research. Interviews with the gatekeeper, conducted by Esmee Hanna in Spring of 2012, formed part of this narrative, allowing for reflexive and reflective engagement about the project between team and practitioner. Such interviews allow the value and usefulness of the research to be assessed from both the academic and practice viewpoint, and to strengthen the policy and practice insights of the team prior to analysis and the production of outputs from the dataset.

In terms of public engagement, the ESRC festival of social science has been a platform used to showcase the work of both of the data sets. The most recent Festival, in October of 2011, took the form of an exhibition of information about 'Family lives over time', based on the research conducted within Timescapes. The work of YLT and FF's was displayed in two A1 posters, exploring context about the project, its findings and what they mean in terms of understanding young people. The Festival event (organised by Jamie Knipe and Esmee Hanna) was a great success in terms of public engagement and a key opportunity to showcase the work of the project. (See Appendices for scaled down versions of the boards and the event report).

The YLT project was also showcased in previous Festival of Social science events. In 2009 a drama workshop was held for the participants of the YLT project, in which they were encouraged to think through changes in young peoples' lives and issues related to identity via the medium of drama. This event, held at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, culminated in a piece of drama being produced. Concurrent to this workshop was a public exhibition of work from the YLT research, featuring video diaries, collage and photos.

To go in journals

Irwin, S. (2010) 'Working Across Qualitative and Quantitative Data. Childhood, Youth and Social Inequalities', *Forum 21, European Journal on Child and Youth Research* 6, pp.58-63

Irwin, S. (2009) 'Family Contexts, Norms and Young People's Orientations: Researching Diversity', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12(4) pp. 337-54

Neale, B. and Lau-Clayton, C. (in progress). Following Fathers: The Lived Experience of Young Fatherhood over time. For submission to *Families, Relationships and Societies*.

Outputs:

Journal Articles

Bagnoli, A (2009) 'Beyond the standard Interview: The Use of graphic Elicitation and Arts Based Methods' *Qualitative Research*, Special Issue 9 (5) pp.547-570



Bagnoli, A. and Clark, A. (2010). 'Focus Groups with Young People: A participatory Approach to Research Planning', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13 (1) pp.101-119

Technical Reports

Neale, B and Lau-Clayton, C. (2011) 'Following Fathers: The Lived Experience of Teenage Parenting over Time', *Timescapes Policy Paper Series*, www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk

Neale, B. and Morton, S. (2012) Creating Impact through Qualitative Longitudinal Research. *Timescapes Methods Guides Series*. Guide no. 20. www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk

Hanna, E and Lau-Clayton, C. (2012 forthcoming) 'Capturing Past and Future Time in Qualitative Longitudinal Field Enquiry – Using Timelines and Relational Maps', *Timescapes Methods Guide Series*, Guide no. 5. www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk

Other

Wiles, R., Prosser, J, Bagnoli, A, Clark, A, Davies, Holland, J, S, Renold, E. (2008) *Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research*, ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper

Conference Papers

Bagnoli, A. and Irwin, S. (2008) 'Young People Displaying Families: Visual (Re)Presentations as a Lens on Family Life', *Displaying Families Seminar organised by the BSA Family Studies Network*, 15/01/2008, University of Hull

Bagnoli, A. and Neale, B. (2007) 'Tracking Young Lives over Time: A Review of Longitudinal Evidence on Young People and the Young Lives and Times Study', *Evolution and Sociology stream at the 8th European Sociological Association Conference*, 3-6/09/2007, Glasgow

Hanna, E. (2012 forthcoming) 'Qualitative Longitudinal Insights into the Impact and Significance of Divorce Upon Young People's Lives', *British Sociological Association (BSA) Conference*, 11/04/12, Leeds

Hanna, E, and Lau Clayton, C. (2012 forthcoming) 'The Use and Value of Timelines and Relational Maps in Qualitative Longitudinal Research', *British Sociological Association (BSA) Conference*, 11/04/12, Leeds

Lau-Clayton, C. (2012 forthcoming) 'Qualitative Longitudinal Methods and Practitioner Engagement: Examples from the Following Fathers Study', *British Sociological Association (BSA) Conference*, 11/04/12, Leeds

Lau-Clayton, C. (2011) 'Following Fathers: The Experiences and Support Needs of Young Dads', *Young Men's Forum*, 11/10/11, Leeds

Lau-Clayton, C. (2011) 'Following Fathers: The Experiences and Support Needs of Young Dads', *European Sociological Association (ESA) Conference*, 08/09/2011, Geneva

Lau-Clayton, C and May, J. (2011) 'Following Fathers: The Experiences and Support Needs of Young Dads' *Timescapes Policy Conference*, 14/06/2011, London

Prosser, J and Bagnoli A (2009) 'Exploring Young People's Lives: Using Visual Methods with a Qualitative Longitudinal Study'. In Martha Nengeling, M. (ed.) Selection of Articles from the *Second International Qualitative Research Conference*, Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico: imprenta Universitaria, 265-274*A

Prosser, J. and Bagnoli, A. (2007) 'Visualising Temporality: Visual Methods in Qualitative Longitudinal Research', *Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Exploring ways of researching lives through time workshop*, Real Life Methods Node of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, March 2007, London South Bank University*A

Appendices:

<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/FSS%20Event/project-2.pdf>