

PROJECT 2 - YOUNG LIVES AND TIMES: THE CRAFTING OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES OVER TIME



The Young Lives and Times project follows a group of young people from varied backgrounds through their teenage years and into early adulthood. The project specifically explores young people's personal lives and relationships, and the construction of their biographies over time.

The project is designed to 'walk alongside' the young people over a decade as their lives unfold, and is interested in significant 'turning points' within their lives. Themes that the project explores include life chances and wellbeing, as well as the significance of friendship and family.



MEG

Meg was thirteen at the time of the first interview, and lived with her mother, father and sister. However by the second interview Meg's parents had separated and she remained living with her mother, but saw her father regularly. Both maternal and paternal grandparents live locally. Meg's interests included, going to the gym, netball, Thai boxing, and ballet. She cites her family and friends as being very important within her life.

CHANGING IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE:

The example of Meg shows the importance of revisiting participants across time, as their views and ideas may change. In her 'when I'm 25' essay Meg suggested she would like to be a model, however, by the next interview her ideas had changed quite substantially as the quotes below demonstrate.

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

You have up to 30 minutes to do this.

I would like to be living on my own in my own house maybe with a boyfriend and I would like to have a good job and get paid to earn quite a bit of money. I would also like to still be living in Leeds so that I am close to my family. I would like to be a model but I wouldn't want to be a model yet and I wouldn't want to be married yet and I wouldn't want children just yet.

EBONY

Ebony was thirteen at the time of the first interview for the research, and living with her mum and two sisters, whom she has good relationships with. Ebony had other family members living close by, including her grandmother, auntie and cousin. Ebony's hobbies include reading and seeing friends.



INTERVIEW EXAMPLE

Interviewer: Right okay. And I think in the first map you put Kate Moss as someone from like a role model. Would you still agree with that now or?

Participant: No [laughs].

I: No [laughs].

P: I don't know what I was thinking [laughs].

I: And so also with jobs, I remember in the past I think you mentioned to Anna that you might be quite interested maybe in modelling, would that be the case still?

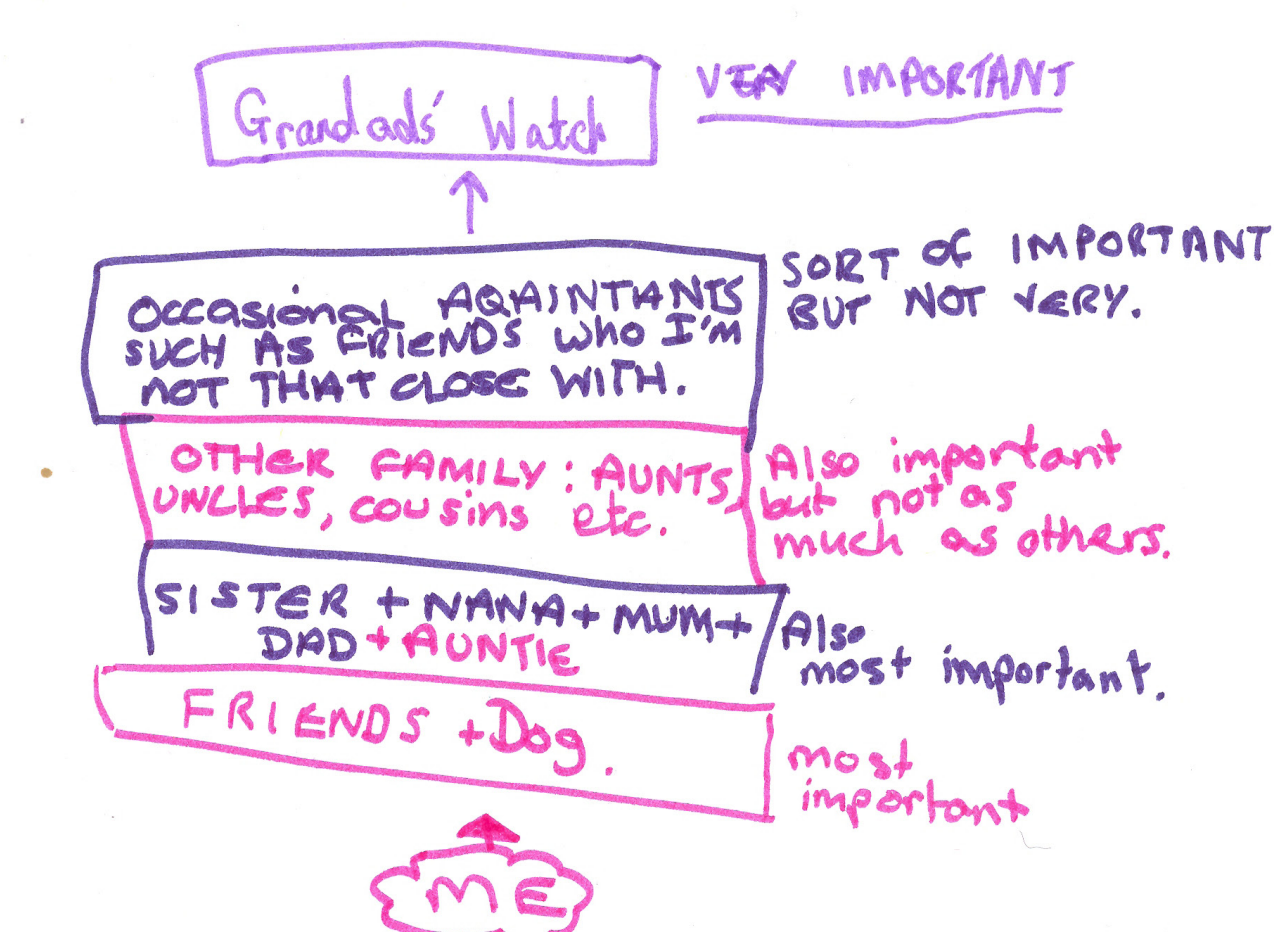
P: No.

I: No, why not?

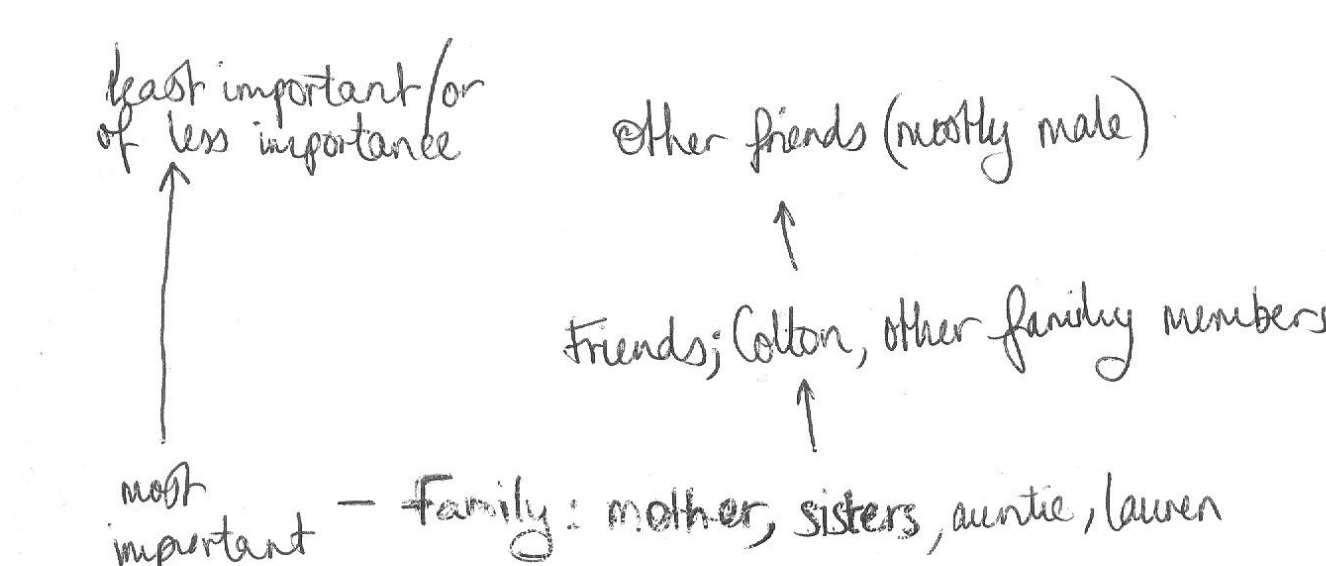
P: I don't know [laughs], I just...I dunno.

Ebony's early relational map shows her dog and friends as being the most important things to her, whereas in the later relational map her friends and family have switched in the ranking, with her family assuming more importance. For young people the pressing concerns of friendship and their peers are perhaps reflected in Ebony's earlier relational map. As they grow older they see the importance and significance of their family support which is perhaps more assumed at an earlier age. Ebony's first relational map also indicates the importance to her of her grandfathers watch, yet the significance of this item has either changed or been lost by the second map, where it is not mentioned. Ebony differentiates in the later map between friends and other male friends, suggesting the importance of female friends at this adolescent life-stage. The relational maps show change and in doing so reflect the changes of the young life course. In our research visual guides such as relational maps and timelines are not used in isolation but are significant talking points, enabling us to draw out the reflections of the young people about what is important to them and the changes they perceive over time.

INTERVIEW 1



INTERVIEW 3



FOLLOWING FATHERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEENAGE PARENTING OVER TIME



The original Young Lives and Times project is currently being boosted by research with a small group of young fathers (who are under the age of 25). Timescapes is working with a regional network of specialist service providers to explore the experience of becoming and being a young father. The project is exploring early fatherhood as part of the life journeys of the young men, their histories, family backgrounds and future aspirations. The aim of this project is to produce in-depth knowledge about the life chances of young fathers and their children.

Ciaran's timeline demonstrates a compressed childhood, with him identifying 'adult' experiences, such as smoking, sexual activity and ultimately parenthood, as occurring at a young age. The past timeline also demonstrates some of the complexity of relationships for young fathers, for example access to their children and re-partnering. Despite having had a lot of life experiences within a relative young life, Ciaran's future timeline shows a clear plan for where he would like his life to head, and this follows quite a traditional route, with work, a house, driving and possibly more children appearing on the future timeline. Thus whilst young fathers may have had complex pasts, they often desire a traditional future and have goals for how to achieve their desired future.

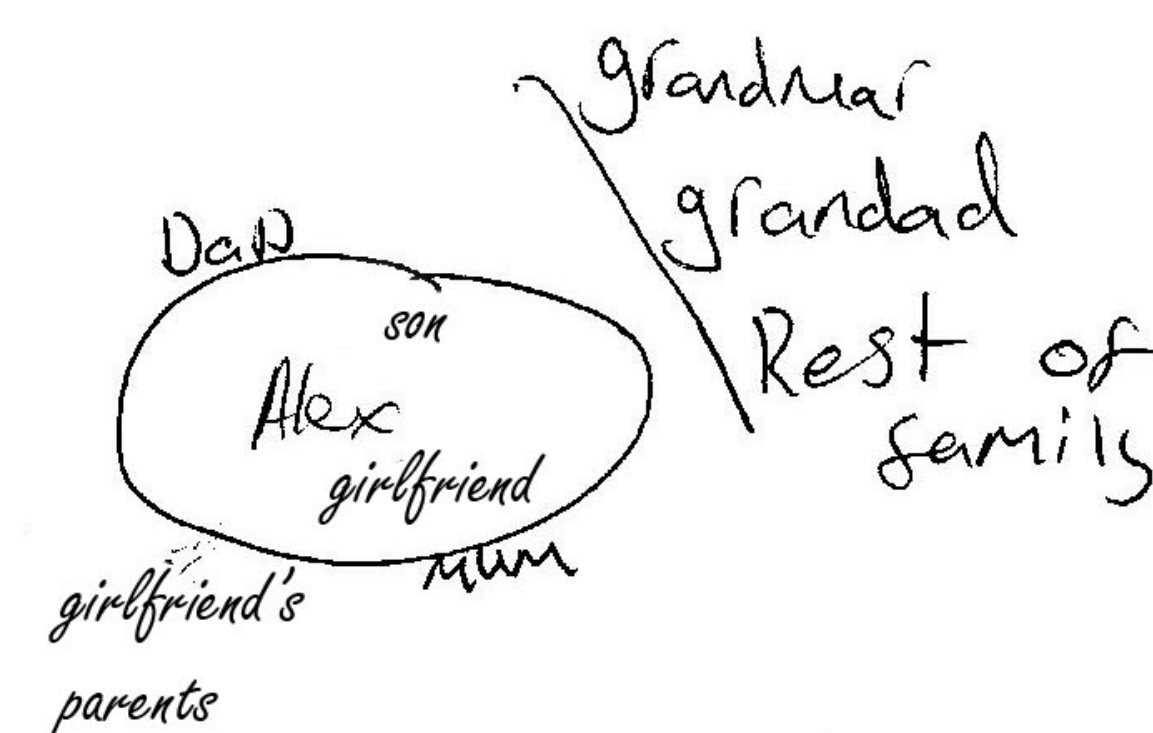
PAST

Age of 6 had operation / Age 9 new home / Age 11 high school / Age 12 lost virginity / Age 12 started smoking
Age 15 found out pregnant with twins / Age 16 college / Age 16 lost contact with twins / Age 18 new college / Age 18 re-gain contact
Age 19 / Age 18 new girlfriend / Age 18 new flat

FUTURE

19 go through next year at college / 20 get apprenticeship / 20 fully decorated flat / 20 stop smoking / 21 get job / 21 have kids on my terms
22 pass driving test / 25 run own business / 25 buy car / 29 have baby / 29 have baby

Alex's relational map demonstrates the significance becoming a father has in the lives of young men. Within his map, the centre of his relationships are his son and partner. This, his new family group, is seen to be closest to him, showing the significance and importance attached to them. His 'old' family group, i.e. parents are then on the periphery of this, demonstrating his shift to adulthood, despite his youth, and of now having his own family unit. Beyond his parents, Alex then has more extended family members, such as grandparents, again showing a distancing across generations in terms of his closeness of relations.



Becoming a parent is a very emotive time within a person's life, but for Jamie the sense of nervousness about becoming a parent was vastly overwhelmed by the joy and excitement of the birth of his child and his desire to become a good father.

"Well before he were born and listening to fathers, it didn't sound true. But then once, I thought 'nah but you're just a soft lad or something'. I thought I bet he must be an emotional lad or, but once, once you become a dad it's, I don't know, it's hard to describe. It's impossible to describe, I think. It's just overwhelming. You are responsible for something that's...that's can't be independent and needs help. I don't know. Just, you have to be there for him don't you. You have to sacrifice things to make their life better. But I suppose obviously I, well I've got a crap dad so obviously I want to be total opposite and be a good example to him. Like, I don't know, being a dad, it's hard to describe, I don't know. It's like I was in love with a girl when I were younger, I were with her for her years. And her, I thought I'd have never beat that feeling, ever. I thought it were irreplaceable when, when we first split up. But once he were born I realised that were nothing. What's, it don't even come close". JAMIE

Dave identifies many positive aspects to being a young parent, and sees his family unit as being closely bonded together via his son. He approaches fatherhood via traditional gender roles and feels strongly about the importance of a two parent household for bringing up children. These parenting values can be seen as a response to his own complex family relationships and upbringing. Dave feels fatherhood was an important turning point in his life, giving greater direction to his life and restraining him from the possibility of taking a more chaotic path. Fatherhood for Dave has been a stabilising force within his life, offering him a perceived better future, and motivating him to improve his life chances.

Becoming a parent as an opportunity for a better future:
"Like I told her that I'd be there for her. And I were there for her. I told her I'd be there at the birth, I were there at the birth, you know what I mean. If I say I'm gonna do summat I do it, simple as. It, I don't like being one of them people who always get talked about, always say, always being told that 'oh yeah you, you say you're gonna do stuff but you don't do it, you know what I mean. Or like most blokes, as soon as they find out that their girlfriend's pregnant they are gone. You know what I mean. They think 'oh freedom's gone. Oh I need to go there'. But I didn't see it as that if you know what I mean. I just saw it as 'oh it's a better start to life' DAVE