Making the Long View: Perspectives on context from a qualitative longitudinal (QL) study

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Abstract

Questions of context and reflexivity have been central to recent debates about the archiving and re-use of qualitative data but these questions have been understood in different ways. In this paper, we suggest that our experiences of attempting to analyse, interpret, write-up and, more recently, archive the (prospective and retrospective) biographical data we have collected over the decade 1996-2006, can shed useful light on these questions. First, we consider the lack of analytical closure involved in QL research, the habit of constant re-contextualisation and the complex understandings of time we formed as a consequence, arguing that, whilst qualitative data may be historically embedded and subjective, it can never be understood as being ‘out of time’ or ‘beyond the reach’ of the same or other researchers. In the QL context, the researcher becomes a subject of the research and, as such, a form of researcher’s reflexivity is required that recognises movement and contingency in all aspects of analysis, interpretation and representation. Then we outline how the understanding of time that emerged over the period of our research: biographical, historical and research time – provided us with a useful conceptual framework for re-contextualising our study in the form of an archive.

The paper begins by describing the dataset; our motivations for attempting to archive it and our aims for the Making the Long View project.

Introduction

We think that the debate on archiving has become too polarised in terms of ardent supporters on the one hand and quali-sceptics on the other. We think there is mileage in accepting that qualitative archiving has advantages and drawbacks and that some qualitative datasets may be more usefully archived than others. (Parry and Mauthner, 2005, pp. 340)

We are writing this paper at a moment when the ‘strange’ and ‘extraordinary’ silence around the question of re-use of qualitative data noted by Paul Thompson as late as the year 2000 has increasingly been filled by the noise of debate (Bornat, 2006, p.1). The debate was initially polarised but we are beginning to see attempts to intervene and bridge the gap by prominent ‘quali-sceptics’ (Mauthner, Parry and colleagues (1998; 2004; 2005) and ‘ardent supporters’ (Bishop, 2005) alike. Both the polarisation of debate and recent attempts to intervene have turned on the nature of a key feature of qualitative research itself: namely the understanding
that meaning is made (rather than found) within the context of the research encounter and through the reflexive practices of the researcher. Different perspectives on these meaning-making processes have divided opinion on the efficacy and ethics of reusing qualitative data. On one hand, commentators consider that the ‘cultural habitus’ of the original researcher is always beyond the reach of another researcher (Hammersley, 1997, pp. 138-9) or even the same researcher at a later date (Mauthner et al, 1998) and argue that, as this context can never be re-captured, it closes off the idea of archiving and reuse. On the other hand, supporters of archiving have advocated practical measures to capture at least some data on context and reflexivity from the original research encounter and record basic information on the research process (Bishop, 2004). A third element to the debate has been introduced by those who question the centrality of past research encounters to the ‘new’ interpretation and analysis of ‘old’ data, emphasising the productive role of the contemporary context and research relationship in meaning-making (Gillies and Edwards, 2005) and describing this process as ‘re-contextualisation’ (Bornat, 2006; Moore, 2005).

This is a good moment to contribute, not least since the development of the debate tends to reflect our own journey through these issues. Over the past ten years, we have secured funding from the ESRC to conduct a QL study (comprised of three consecutive studies) of young people growing up in the UK. We began by taking the position that our methodology (repeat biographical interviews) made it inappropriate to archive the data, in that it was too ‘sensitive’ and revealing. At this stage we had no idea that the study would carry on beyond the initial 3 year funding cycle. We referred to our position on archiving in our grant applications and were granted a waiver of the obligatory requirement to deposit ESRC-funded studies with ESDS Qualidata. Our position has changed over time, influenced by a growing understanding of the significance of the longitudinal dataset and our desire to do justice to the full analytic potential of the data as well as the considerable resource that has been invested in it. We have now begun the task of preparing this dataset for others to use.

In this paper, we build on arguments made by Moore, Bornat and others by outlining the lessons that we have learned about context and reflexivity in working with a QL data set. We also explore the implications of these lessons for preparing and opening up this data set to others: our openness to the task of archiving and, hence, to looking for ways of overcoming the many ethical issues involved (which we are unable to discuss in detail here) is the most obvious. However, we focus in particular on the habit of constant recontextualisation and the multi-dimensional understandings of time that both grew from the experience of attempting to analyse, interpret and write-up a QL data set. In our latest effort to recontextualise the dataset - in the form of an archive - we have drawn on the distinction between three elements of the temporal that evolved alongside our strategies for analysis, interpretation and writing-up: research time (the timing of the research process, including the subjectivity of the researchers), biographical time (the young people’s biographical progress through time), and historical time (including the coincidence of the ‘waves’ of fieldwork and the contextual dimension of what else is happening (both local and global) at the moments we interview the young people) (Thomson and Holland 2003). The website that serves as our ‘holding bay’ for the evolving archive is structured accordingly and the paper briefly describes the content (current and potential) of these different sections. We first give a brief description of the dataset and methods employed to generate it: important contextual information for outlining our approach to the task of archiving our data set and our reflections on constant re-contextualisation.

The Inventing Adulthoods dataset

Inventing Adulthoods is a QL study that follows young people growing up in five different areas of England and Northern Ireland at the turn of the 21st century: an inner city area, an affluent area in a commuter town, a disadvantaged housing estate, an isolated rural area in England; and contrasting communities within a Northern Irish city. Not initially planned as a 10 year qualitative longitudinal study, it combines three consecutive studies funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and based at London South Bank University between 1996 and 2006. The study did not follow a single age cohort, but began in 1996 with a sample of young people whose ages ranged between 11-17 years, in 2006 they were aged 17-28.
Individual interviews were the main research method, but focus groups, memory books, lifelines and questionnaires were also employed. The first study involved questionnaires (N=1800), focus groups (N=62) individual interviews (N=57), and research assignments (N=272). The other two studies followed 121 young people, largely drawn from these samples. This sample fluctuated with each of five more interview rounds, dropping to 64 at the final one in 2005.

Table 1

| Inventing Adulthoods samples | Age | Questionnaire | Focus Group | Interview | Lifeline | Memory Book | Research Assignment |
|------------------------------|-----|---------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|---------------------|
| Youth Values 1996-99         | 11-17 | 1800 | 356 | Int 1 54 |          |             | 272                |
| Inventing Adulthoods 1999 - 2001 | 14-23 |     |      | Int 2 121 | Int 3 98 | Int 4 83     | Revisited           |
|                              |     |     | 62 grps |           | 104       |             | 49                 |
|                              |     |     |         | Revisited | 70        |             |                    |
|                              |     |     |         | Int 5    | 64        |             |                    |
| Youth Transitions 2002 - 2006 | 17-28 |     |      | Int 6    |           |             |                    |
The focus of investigation changed for each study: the first, ‘Youth Values’, sought to map young people’s moral landscapes; the second, ‘Inventing Adulthoods’ focused on the transition to adulthood; and the third, ‘Youth Transitions’ on the generation and maintenance of social capital. However, a central concern throughout these studies was the dynamic interplay between the individual, the resources available to them and the structuring effects of time, locality, class, gender and so on. Interviews mapped the processes of young people’s transitions and changing experiences within core biographical domains (work, education, leisure, domestic), documenting changes in the adult identities they constructed; in their coping strategies; and in their plans and aspirations for the future.

The resulting dataset is both formidable in scope and inspiring in its potential for methodological and theoretical advance, with potential for application to policy and practice. Each round of interviews is stored

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**Table 2**

| Inventing Adulthoods | Total interview sample | Age | M  | F  | Et h | W c | M c | NI | Dep. Est. | Inne r city | Leafy suburb | Rura l area | Extr a Grps |
|----------------------|------------------------|-----|----|----|------|-----|-----|----|-----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Youth Values 1996 – 1999 | Int. 1 57 | 11 - 17 | 25 | 32 | 4 | 44 | 13 | 20 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 7 |
| Inventing Adulthoods 1999 – 2001 | Int. 2 121 | 14 - 23 | 58 | 63 | 19 | 85 | 36 | 42 | 21 | 14 | 20 | 18 | 6 |
| | Int. 3 98 | 14 - 24 | 40 | 58 | 12 | 66 | 32 | 34 | 17 | 12 | 19 | 15 | 1 |
| | Int. 4 83 | 15 - 25 | 38 | 45 | 11 | 53 | 30 | 28 | 11 | 12 | 18 | 14 | - |
| Youth Transitions 2002 – 2006 | Int. 5 70 | 17 - 26 | 28 | 42 | 9 | 43 | 27 | 27 | 5 | 9 | 17 | 11 | 1 |
| | Int. 6 64 | 19 - 28 | 26 | 38 | 9 | 39 | 25 | 27 | 7 | 8 | 14 | 8 | - |

1 1 African-Caribbean, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Mixed Race, 1 Black British
2 3 African-Caribbean, 3 Vietnamese, 2 Mixed Race, 2 Black British, 1 African, 6 South Asian, 1 Southern European, 1 Mauritian
3 2 African-Caribbean, 3 Vietnamese, 2 Mixed Race, 1 Black British, 1 African, 2 South Asian, 1 Southern European
4 2 African-Caribbean, 3 Vietnamese, 2 Mixed Race, 1 African, 2 South Asian, 1 Southern European
5 2 African-Caribbean, 3 Vietnamese, 1 Mixed Race, 1 African, 2 South Asian
6 2 African-Caribbean, 3 Vietnamese, 1 Mixed Race, 1 African, 2 South Asian
and most are coded in NUD*IST, thus facilitating cross-sectional analysis. We are (eventually) aiming to digitize most data for each case. Case data includes: audio-tapes, (in 25 cases) digital audio, digital and paper transcripts of individual interviews (up to 6 for each individual). In a majority of cases there are also lifelines (a means of exploring how young people project themselves into the future through planning, aspirations and imagination; a memory book (a technique development from a range of disciplines geared to encouraging young people to draw together material they saw as relevant to their current and future identities – see Thomson and Holland 2004); and a values questionnaire, completed at round one interview and round three. A small percentage of the sample has also participated in audio-taped focus groups on one or more occasions. Case material also includes first level analysis: in the form of narrative analyses and a case profile. The former captured processual features, substantive content, and researcher’s reflections soon after each interview. The latter synthesised these analyses at a later date.

Table 3: Overview of case data (* Data not available for all cases.)

| Data type                        | Inventing Adulthoods       |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Individual interview audio-tape + digital audio* + transcript | Waves 1-6*                 |
| Focus group transcript*          | Waves 1 and 4              |
| Lifeline*                        | Waves 2 and 4              |
| Memory Book*                     | Wave 2                     |
| Questionnaire*                   | Waves 1 and 3              |
| Narrative analysis               | Waves 2, 3 and 5           |
| Case Profile                     | Waves 1-6                  |

Although we have no plans for further interview rounds currently, we are maintaining contact with a considerable proportion of our sample and have not ruled out returning at some point in the future or ‘passing the mantle’ to other appropriate researchers (Kemper and Royce, 2002).

Making the Long View of the Inventing Adulthoods dataset: motivations

Making the Long View was one of five projects funded under an ESRC Demonstrator Scheme for Qualitative Data Sharing and Research Archiving (QUADS) between March 2005 and August 2006. It explored creative ways of overcoming ethical and practical obstacles to creating wider access to the Inventing Adulthoods dataset in the form of a contextualised ‘mini’ showcase archive that would enable researchers and other potential ‘users’ outside the project team to gain a sense of what data set consists of and thus its potential. A central part of the project was to prepare for re-use the data of ten original research participants - who consented, were interested and felt able to take part in the consultative process that we understood the archiving process to entail. It also began establishing a network of potential dataset users and provided a useful resource for re-users of (longitudinal) qualitative data and an exemplar for those considering QL studies in the future. From the outset we have envisaged that different users will have different interests in the data set. As such we have had to balance the impulse to mediate the data (in order to make it manageable) with the recognition that other users will wish to access data in a raw and unmediated form.

Our aims for Making the Long View were ambitious for an eighteen month project but, despite encountering a number of unknowns along the way (e.g. from the need to re-collate our data and store it by case rather than
sweep to underestimating the length of time and level of precarious investment required in the selecting, cleaning and anonymising process), the showcase archive of ten cases was prepared and a potential host to provide access and support to dataset users identified and established. We were fortunate in receiving funding to continue this work for a further four years from February 2007 in the context of a large scale, qualitative longitudinal study based in a number of UK universities but led by Dr. Bren Neale at the University of Leeds. *Changing Lives and Times: Relationship and Identities Through the Life Course (Timescapes)* explores the significance of time in people's lives via seven projects that collectively span the life course (Neale 2005). These projects will document the personal lives and relationships of children and young people, adults in mid- and later life in order to explore changes in personal relationships and identities at different life stages.

As noted earlier, our motivations for attempting to archive the study were several. An important one was both ethical and practical. Despite a good track record on publishing and disseminating the component studies (www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods/publications/index.shtml), the sheer volume of data and the degree of investment in its collection was such that it increasingly felt irresponsible not to find ways of giving wider access to this unique resource. Despite familiar concerns about compromising the confidentiality we negotiated with our participants at each round, it seemed far more unethical to shy away from exploring solutions to these concerns and effectively admit that this data could not be used. We owed it to both to study participants and funders alike.

We had also become involved in the growing interest in QL methodology in the UK (Thomson et al, 2003; Holland et al, 2004; Elliott et al, forthcoming 2007). The process of becoming acquainted with the evolving debate prompted by ESRC initiatives in this country involved taking a look at how such issues are handled in other disciplines and fields. Our discovery of innovative examples of ethical and participatory practice in, for example, anthropology and visual sociology (Pink, 2004; Kemper and Royce, 2002) coincided with an important moment in the Inventing Adulthoods study: the sixth round of interviews was coming to a close and we were taking stock of the sheer volume of data we had produced and debating the study’s future. This coincidence provided an impetus for opening us up to the idea of attempting to make a start on archiving the study. As interest and debate about ‘secondary analysis’ grew and much of this was founded on ‘looking back’ to classic sociological studies, we also felt it was important to contribute from a position of ‘looking forward’. A further driver for attempting to overcome the ethical, practical and epistemological barriers to archiving and re-use was linked to the nature of context and reflexivity within QL methodology itself: one that presents and builds on challenges to the current terms of debate about the ‘secondary analysis’ of qualitative data.

**Constant recontextualisation: context and reflexivity in a QL study**

*The interpretation of data is generally perceived to be dependent on the primary researcher’s direct knowledge of the context of data collection and analysis obtained through their own personal involvement in the research.* (Heaton, 2004:30).

In revisiting their own ‘old’ data, Natasha Mauthner, Odette Parry and colleagues found that ‘the dynamic, dialectical and reflexive nature of a particular research encounter … both described but also delimited the meaning of the data’ (Mauthner et al, 1998: 736); that this epistemological position was ‘incompatible with generating new findings and theories’ from ‘old’ data; and that returning to data was ‘very different, intellectually and emotionally, to gathering and analysing data for the first time’. They concluded that, ‘when we revisit this data, what we are returning to is not ‘raw’, but constructed data informed by a well-formulated set of ideas which guide and shape our return experiences’ (Mauthner et al, 1998: 738), arguing that a recourse to practicality does not address what is basically an epistemological problem. In their view, the distinction between the background (or contextual data) and the data themselves advocated by those who
support archiving interview and observation data is a false one, since data ‘cannot be treated as discrete entities’ (Mauthner et al, 1998: 742).

This assertion that the historically embedded subjectivity of qualitative data places it out of reach of all but the ‘naively realist’ secondary analyser (Mauthner et al, 1998: 743) has been challenged by commentators seeking to intervene and reconfigure the terms of debate. Their challenge rests on the importance of understanding all temporal processes. For Bornat (2003, 2005, 2006) ‘bringing time in as a determining characteristic’ of the whole research process (including the data) is one of the four ‘rewards’ of ‘secondary analysis’, an awareness of the temporal features of the process adding ‘further richness and complexity to any interpretation’ (Bornat, 2006: 8). For Moore, Mauthner et al.’s critique of ‘secondary analysis’ ironically underestimates ‘the temporality of the context and reflexive production of the data’, in that it overlooks the contemporary context and consistently leaves the data behind in the past, in the original project that produced the data (Moore, 2005: 14-15). The fact that we can never ‘go back’ and re-experience the moment of data collection/production is a consequence of our position as researchers in time, rather than a ‘problem’ of secondary analysis or ‘old data’. Whether the gap is a week or 10 years, we are always revisiting data and analysis within successive historical moments.

Viewed from this perspective, the re-use of data is not a methodology that utilizes ‘pre-existing’ data (Heaton, 2004) but ‘primary analysis of a different order’, the contemporary production or the ‘recontextualisation’ of data (Moore, 2005: 21-22; Bornat, 2006; Bishop, 2005 & 2006; Savage, 2005). Reflexivity is also understood and operationalised differently from the way it is used in Mauthner et al.’s arguments. Adkins’ work on reflexivity, suggests that ‘reflexivity in relation to knowledge practices concerns a speaking position constituted in terms of a mobile relation to identity on the side of the knower in relation to the known, a position from which there are a number of exclusions’ (Adkins 2002: 86, quoted in Moore, 2005: 16). Drawing on Adkins, Moore argues that Mauthner et al.’s reflection that they ‘had moved on’ in their personal lives, disciplines, substantive interests and theoretical positionings since collecting the data they revisited renders the data, the disciplines, the respondents immobile, enabling ‘… the researcher to have moved, and to produce herself as a more sophisticated academic’ (Moore, 2005: 16). It also downgrades their earlier selves as ‘naïve, unknowing and inhabiting a different knowledge world’, ‘divided off into a different universe of time’ (Bornat, 2006:10-11). By way of contrast to Mauthner et al., Bornat emphasizes the benefits of revisiting old data with an altered ‘cultural habitus’, arguing that the new insights and awareness of more recent subsequent theorising from a different life stage can lead to a ‘useful transformation’ of the data collected earlier (Bornat, 2006: 6). Recent examples of secondary analysis reinforce this view suggesting that that returning to a data set can shed light on shifts within the discipline which shape what we look for and ‘find’ in our data (Goodwin and O’Connor 2005, Vickerstaff 2003).

This perspective on context, reflexivity and re-use of data is close to our own experience of working with QL data and resulting approach to these questions. We enter these debates from a somewhat different perspective than that of researchers revisiting the classic sociological studies of the past or their own ‘one-off’, ‘snapshot’ qualitative studies, since our research spans a decade and we still maintain both contact with participants and a consistent core research team. As such, we have been continuously revisiting and recontextualising our participants, our data, ourselves, our theoretical and methodological approaches and substantive interests over a number of years as a matter of course. We are acutely aware that our research subjects are changing, and that any attempt to interpret or explain their lives, must be seen as provisional – constrained by the demands of a sociological genre of analysis and writing. Whilst all the core team were involved in analysis, three researchers, each responsible for one or more of the five research sites, were involved in interviewing throughout the study. Hence, all of us were in the position of analysing data generated by another team member, with some also analysing data they had generated themselves. Some insights into our approach to analysis and interpretation illustrate issues of context and reflexivity in our QL context and the implications for perspectives on archiving and reuse of qualitative data. These insights may also have implications more generally for research that involves teams, be they studies snapshot or QL.
Biographical methods attempt to capture a temporal process. This is usually achieved retrospectively, through a *reconstruction* of events but prospective longitudinal methods, like our own, involve ‘walking alongside’ a research subject (Walker and Leisering 1998, Neale and Flowerdew 2003). Biographical QL research is, then, by its very nature, open-ended and lacking in analytic closure. Each new round of data collection challenges the authority and stability of previous interpretations (McLeod, 2000: 49; Thomson and Holland, 2003). Although this ‘provisionality of interpretation’ is not exclusive to QL work, it is more easily contained in a ‘snapshot’ study, where methodological reflection is largely safe. In a QL study, ‘since time is and our social actions and circumstances are contextual’ time and change processes are themselves contextual (Saldana, 2003: 9). The ‘cultural habitus’ of both research and researched shifts at each stage of data collection and analysis and this produces an exponential reflexivity on the part of both – a reflexivity that recognizes change and avoids fixing any actors in, and aspects of, the research process in the past. Our own analysis and interpretation was further complicated by the sheer scale of our QL dataset: as it increased, it became more difficult to complete the analysis of one round of interviews before another was conducted, further complicating the problem of distinguishing between contemporaneous insight and retrospective hindsight (Thomson and Holland, 2003).

In our experience, this process of constant recontextualisation of biographical data over time increases the need to acknowledge that interpretation is integral to data generation as well as analysis. Making our process of interpretation explicit as the research process progressed, therefore, became important. Shortly after each interview, interviewers conducted a ‘narrative analysis’. Guided by a schedule (www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods/capturing/research_time/inventing_adulthoods/adulthoods_5.shtml), this allowed us to capture the narrative character of each interview and to follow the narratives of a single individual over time, simultaneously identifying the continuity of an individual’s narrative resources and the contingency of each ‘occasioned account’. After interview rounds 4 and 6, narrative analyses for each young person were drawn together to produce a ‘case profile’ www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods/capturing/research_time/youth_transitions/transitions_6.shtml. These, we feel, capture the ‘kaleidoscope approach’ in which ‘each time you look you see something rather different, composed mainly of the same elements but in a new configuration’ (Stanley 1992: 158; Thomson 2004).

One of the hallmarks of our QL study is that we structured the research in such a way that participants, on the whole, developed a relationship with one researcher over the study period (Thomson and Holland, 2003; Henderson et al, 2004; Henderson et al, 2007; www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods/capturing/research_time/methodology/index.shtml. For the 64 young people still in the study at last interview, this relationship was largely based on five/six interviews, and phone calls, emails, cards and letters in the intervening period. Capturing and reflecting on this continuous but shifting research relationship became an essential part of our analysis. Researchers’ reflections on the interview and their hopes, fears and predictions for the interviewee therefore formed part of each narrative analysis, with reflections on interesting issues relating to foresight and hindsight arising in process of analysis incorporated in case profiles. The resulting (dated) record of researchers’ contemporaneous observations allowed us to map the process of interpretative revision in an explicit way. As data accumulates the researcher has more material to reflect on and on which to build interpretations. Some early ideas are confirmed by later research encounters, and others fall by the wayside. There were many possible lives for the young people we were following, but only the one as lived. In this analytical process the changing feelings of the analyst becomes useful data, and the researcher becomes a research subject in a QL study in a similar way to that within secondary analysis. The following excerpts from a researcher’s predictions and research process notes for Maisie over time, give a flavour of this:

Interview 1: Felt that she genuinely wanted to do the things she talked about and that she had a great deal of determination – but that she also didn’t have the resources to draw on. Also, with ill-health and teen pregnancy hanging around her in the ether, that it was going to take a lot to pursue her dreams. Hoping she would, fearing she would not be able to.
Interview 2: Showing determination, hanging on in college and no signs of further pregnancies. The sense of agency that came across in the interview felt limited – by her poverty (underlies much of what she says and does, it feels), her health, her compliance with her boyfriend. I felt I was wrong and hoped so.

Interview 3: I’m seriously in awe of this determined young woman who seems to achieve against all the odds. Although she is not finding university exactly easy. Holds down two jobs and funds and runs her family home and cares for her ailing mother and siblings. It all feels so shaky but she just seems quietly determined to make it happen. Definitely got it wrong on the agency front – this girl is made of steel!

Interview 4: Interim contact had left me seriously concerned. Did not feel that there was sufficient support to see her through. However, she has, with the support of uni staff and her friends, turned things around, it seems, at the moment. She is more confident that she will complete this time around. I so hope she does and feel confident that if there is a way, she will – such is her fortitude. However, there are some many chaotic factors to consider and, although she is desperate to get away from the locality, she also clearly feels a strong sense of duty towards her family.

(Researcher Notes 1999-2005)

The experience of conducting a QL study has shown us how an attentiveness to research process can help us frame what comes to be understood as ‘data’ as a record of contingency and coincidence, as well as well-worn social patterns. The accumulation of such data, alongside data on the research relationship, interpretative labour and speculation, contributes to a rich methodology where lived lives, storied lives and researched lives combine and resonate. The promise of a QL data set such as Inventing Adulthoods is that it might show how, over time, possible lives cede and real lives cohere. However, as we have found, the challenge of a QL data set becomes most acute when we seek to represent it to an audience: be that in the form of writing, archiving or visual representation.

Recontextualising a dataset that captures change over time:

...Whatever kind of notion of context we construct will always elude the future researcher who will come along and use data for purposes we can’t even imagine now. (Moore, 2006)

Faced with the question of how to re-contextualize our dataset for future users, these lessons about time, context, reflexivity and representation have stood us in good stead. We were unhampered by the illusion that we could ever do all the work in advance and provide future users with a static ‘whole picture’ or predict every use made of the dataset. We were also already well-stocked with data providing detailed insight into the research process. Understanding and working with the multi dimensional and kaleidoscopic nature of time and with the complex relationships between multiple contexts had been central to our investigation of social change and to our evolving QL research process. Analysis of our QL dataset did not just involve longitudinal analysis of cases. At each interview round, cross-sectional analysis captured a moment in time for the sample as a whole. Data were coded descriptively and conceptually and these repeat cross-sectional analyses compared for change. Bringing these two analytic projects together has been very challenging but it has been important to look across and through time and explore the intricate connections between the micro and macro dimensions of social change.

Time has, understandably then, been central to the process of ‘looking forward’ to the needs of users of the dataset and to our thinking about how to re-contextualise it. Practically, our archiving process will be a long
one and we have had to adopt a staged, as well as exploratory approach: limiting ourselves to preparing ten cases initially and to working on a particular aspect of context. Whilst conducting this first stage of the work, we have been publishing any completed work (not requiring restricted access) on a project website (www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods): a vehicle for storing material until the showcase archive is completed, hosted and supported, as well as for publicising the project. It has been practically and symbolically difficult to reflect the complex understanding of time and context our QL work has entailed in the organization of material for the archive – in that we found that using a timeline (1996-2006) as an organizational tool was the most practical solution. However, we have also employed the distinction between three concepts of time that evolved during our attempts to grapple with analyzing, interpreting and writing-up the study as a structuring device within this: Research Time, Biographical Time and Historical Time.

Structure of Research Time www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods

The Research Time section of the website describes the general methodological and theoretical ‘story’ of the study, documents each of the component studies across a timeline (1996-2006) and provides a ‘taster’ for the ‘researcher as research subject’ data that will be available in the eventual archive.

The methodology section includes descriptions of aspects of research design, analysis and interpretation, research process and relationship (e.g. sample maintenance, engaging young participants in the research, the role of gatekeepers, researcher reflections on the interview process, maintaining a research team, researcher style and approach, consent, confidentiality). ‘Taster’ data on the following topics are also included: researcher’s fieldnotes, predictions and reflections on the research process; and young people’s reflections on being involved in the research and on listening (Interview round 5) to audio-tapes of rounds 1-4. We have also added a further layer of researcher reflexivity to our dataset in the archiving process in the form of data from an interviewer’s focus group on the research process conducted at a moment at which we had decided not to plan further rounds of data collection and concentrate on analysis and archiving whilst maintaining contact with our sample. Excerpts from this are also included in the ‘taster’ data. Unlike the rest of our audio data, this was recorded digitally and, eventually (when server space allows), we hope to make these excerpts available in audio.

Table 4 Inventing Adulthoods ‘contextual’ data

| Researcher fieldnotes       | Wave 1-6 |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Researcher’s reflections on research process | Waves 2-6 |
| Young people’s reflections on research process | Wave 4 |
| YP reflect on own tapes    | Waves 1-4 |
| Interviewer’ focus group on research process | Post-Wave 6 |

‘Research Time’ also documents in detail the ‘nuts and bolts’ of each of the three component studies. For each study, this includes a brief overview, its funder and funding code, its objectives and research questions; a downloadable copy of each study’s final report; and a description and downloadable copy of each research tool and its method of analysis, temporally located on the study timeline.
The re-contextualisation that this section represents is complete and on our website. The remaining two sections are still in process at the time of writing.

Biographical Time

This section reflects the greatest strength of the dataset, its rich accounts of individual young lives through a decade. We envisage that this section of the website will eventually provide the interface between the archived case data (initially ten cases) and the data user but it will also work as a ‘taster’ for the case data. The initial, minimalist version of this ‘taster’ on our project website includes a one-page overview of each of the ten cases that summarises their biography, a list of their data and links to a) information about the locality in which they grew up and a summary of the ways in which this locality shaped the lives of young people growing up there (also on this page); and b) information about the process their data has undergone.

We want to make the archive as engaging and visually interesting as possible, and are currently negotiating with the Open University, a key user of our dataset, to use further ‘taster’ data in the form of biographical and locational film material based on study participants and research sites. Other possibilities for inclusion in this ‘taster’ section include edited case profiles and excerpts from memorybooks www.lsbu.ac.uk/inventingadulthoods/capturing/research_time/inventing_adulthoods/adulthoods_7.shtml. We have been unable to include a discussion of ethics in this paper but, briefly, we re-negotiated the young people’s consent verbally at each interview round and gained written consent forarchiving, a majority of the ten young people also taking up the option to continue being consulted through the archiving process. Clearly, any inclusion of audio and visual data would be cause for further consultation.

Historical Time

Historical time is about looking at the way in which people are located in different epochs and in relation to different external events, circumstances and environments, both locally and globally. Historical time is already present within both Research and Biographical Time sections of the website through the device of the timeline. However, we aim to represent historical time in two additional ways.

Firstly, this will reflect the temporal structure of the fieldwork, eventually (when relevant techniques are more advanced and established and the archive is hosted and supported) providing an interface between the data user and the cross-sectional data. We have struggled to devise a minimalist ‘taster’ section to date but we have a number of data sources to consider for possible inclusion: six rounds of interview data, coded and stored in NUD*IST; questionnaire data, coded and stored in SPSS; a ‘big picture’ database (providing an ‘at a glance’ overview of case data according to key topics and themes of the study); NUD*IST analysis for interview rounds 2 and 4; and summary narrative analyses (narrative accounts of locality based on narrative analyses of individuals).

Secondly, we had hoped to provide contextual information on the historical time through which the young people in the study lived, at the local as well as the global level. Keen to provide a link between the macro and micro levels of social change, we initially thought of selecting and describing some key moments in youth policy, youth culture etc and key aspects of social change (e.g. the Information and Communication Technology revolution; the Northern Irish Peace Process; the Millennium) and linking these in some way to our cross-cut findings on each subject. A more realistic approach may be to create links between the data set and existing online resources such as the chronology of youth policy published by Gill Jones and Robert Bell and located at Keele University www.keele.ac.uk/depts/so/youthchron/. These decisions still have to be fully thought through and there is much work to do to develop a conceptual selection framework. This could well
be the work of the future archive’s host or, perhaps, its users. Our experience of writing up this data has shown us that a conjuring of historical context is crucial in any attempt to represent the data to an audience, yet the nature of this context depends enormously on the particular purpose of the representation. In our view, most academic users of the data will come to the archive with their own intellectual projects, imagined audiences and historical narratives with which to frame the material. However, it may also be the case that this kind of historical context is more important for non-academic users.

Additionally, we would like to ‘show’ something of how the research localities changed over time but aware that this is complicated by questions of anonymity and confidentiality. We already have some material available but this exercise would also involve returning to the local archives of the five research sites.

**Conclusions**

...the most valuable qualitative datasets for future re-analysis are likely to have three qualities: firstly, the interviewees have been chosen on a convincing sample basis; secondly, the interviews are free-flowing but follow a life story form, rather than focussing narrowly on the researcher’s immediate themes; and thirdly, when practicable re-contact is not ruled out. (Thompson, 2000: 41)

In his attempt to address the ‘strange’ and ‘extraordinary’ silence, Paul Thompson outlined the key qualities of what, in his experience, would be the most valuable qualitative datasets to open up for re-analysis. Whilst we make no claim to having created a ‘classic’ study of the future, the Inventing Adulthoods dataset is very rich in life story detail and based on a national sample that may or may not be ‘convincing’ in Thompson’s terms. We have also begun the somewhat daunting process of archiving it, keeping in mind a range of potential users. We have approached this task as a continuation of our ongoing experience of constant recontextualisation. However, what makes this current project different is imagining a user that is not already part of our research team. The first stage of the archiving project was a practical battle with the material data set: turning tapes into digital files, turning cross sectionally organised material into biographical cases, tracking down missing tapes, fieldnotes and files. We then faced the enormous task of cleaning and anonymising, all of which took much longer than anticipated. Alongside these practical considerations, we created a window into the imagined archive, a working website through which we signed off agreed versions of research tools, accounts of research design and methodological development. The time line has been a central organising mechanism for this, and we have elaborated the complex nature of our research process through categories of research time, biographical time and historical time.

The experience of conducting and now seeking to share a QL study convinces us of Bornat’s argument for time to be at the centre of the whole research process. In our view it does not simply add richness and complexity to interpretation, but is an irreducible part of both the data and the analytic process. It is inescapable, even though much social science methodology seeks to do just this: escape time. As Mauthner and colleagues suggest, data is always historically embedded (as are researchers) but we would argue that this does not put it ‘out of reach’. We are never ‘out of time’ and this is the burden that is always on us in seeking to make sense of, and give meaning to, the material that we call ‘data’. In this paper, we have shown how we have built on the key analytic threads of the original study in order to provide the foundation for the next layer of recontextualisation that will take place when people decide to reuse this data. The contextual material that they find in the archive will be the material we have recorded on an incremental basis over the course of the whole study as well as the material we have conjured in the face of the challenge of representing the data to others.
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