



## Real Life Methods

Part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

# Tracking Young Lives over Time. A review of the longitudinal literature on young people and the Young Lives and Times study

Anna Bagnoli  
University of Leeds



## Qualitative Longitudinal research

---

- Qualitative enquiry which investigates the textures of daily lives through and in relation to time.
- Time is appreciated as a social construct, in its different dimensions (biographical, generational, historical, industrial, cyclical).
- QL research captures the dynamics of agency and structure, subjective understandings of causality, and how these relate to shifting social structural conditions. It explores the intersection of biography and history, taking into account the personal and the social, the micro and the macro, as lives unfold.

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## 5 threads in the longitudinal literature on young people

---

- Risk taking
- Parental divorce
- Structural dimensions of inequality
- Education and learning
- Transitions to adulthood

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## 1. Risk taking

---

- Smoking
  - 2 patterns of smoking, recreational and regular, class based
    - Krange and Pedersen (2001)
- Alcohol consumption
- Drugs consumption
- Suicide attempts
- Sexual behaviour
  - Teenage pregnancy

‘Sturm und Drang’ view of young people reflecting adult concern to control

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Teenage parenthood

---

High incidence in the UK in comparison to the rest of Europe

- Analysis of data from NCDS on children born in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of March 1958
- Young parents are more likely to come from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds
- Still high incidence in younger generations
- Worsening of economic conditions of young parents
  - Kiernan (1997)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## 2. Parental divorce

---

- Death of a parent is potentially more disruptive
- Young people's well-being is related to their relationships to parents
- Links to a variety of lifestyles factors and risk behaviours
  - Sweeting, West and Richards (1998)
- Divorce may not necessarily be a major event
- Focus on the immediacy of young people's lives
- Value of studying change in the lives of all young people
  - Neale and Flowerdew (2003)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

### 3. Structural dimensions of inequality: class and gender

---

- Study on 30 girls born in 1972/73 first seen at 4, then at 10 and 21. Second group of 8 girls born in 1978, who were 6 at 1<sup>st</sup> wave
- Psychic aspects of class
- Evidence that same educational performance is differently interpreted in different classes
- Reproduction of status is important for the middle classes
- ‘Survivor guilt’ of high achieving working class girls
- Continuing importance of the class structure in contemporary UK
  - Walkerdine et al (2001)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

### Girls

---

- 5-year study of 100 girls, ages 7 to 18
- Educationally privileged sample, 20% working class and 14% non-white
- Adolescence is a high risk time for girls. Even in a privileged setting, evidence of a loss of voice and a struggle to authorise their experience. Losing self for the sake of relationships. Either ‘going underground’ or outspoken resistance.
- ‘Voice-centred relational method’
  - Brown and Gilligan (1993)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Boys

---

- Working class boys, aged 14 to 16
- Visual methods
- Clash between different constructions of masculinity: a private, vulnerable identity is opposed to another, public identity, which is assertive and peer-oriented
  - Walker (2004)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## 4. Education and learning

---

- ILP tracking learning, identity and pupil careers of 2 cohorts of children from 4 to 16
- From a very early age on, children's learning is influenced by social factors
  - Pollard (1985)
- 3-year study of secondary school pupils in year 11
- Young people's learning careers are non-linear and never a simple product of rational choice
- They are linked to other experiences and there is a significant change in identities between the ages of 15 and 19
- Significance of class, gender, and ethnicity
  - Bloomer and Hodkinson(2000)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Education and learning

---

- 'The 12 to 18 study': Australian project on the effects of different forms of schooling
- Investigating gender and class subjectivities, as well as the interaction between structural conditions and individual biographies
  - McLeod (2003)
- 2-year study of 15 young people at a 6<sup>th</sup> form college between the ages of 16 and 18, when making educational choices
- Middle class attitudes to education are varied. Cultural capital and ethos are important. Also friends have an impact on choice and on what is considered feasible. Feelings of guilt also among the middle class pupils.
  - Brooks (2003)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## 5. Transitions to adulthood

---

De-sequencing and protraction in time of youth transitions, 'structured individualisation'

- Furlong and Cartmel (1997)
  - 10-year study on young people aged 15-19 at 1<sup>st</sup> wave on perceptions of adulthood
  - Gender and class are shaping these perceptions
    - Plug, Zeijl and Du Bois Reymond (2003)
  - Inventing Adulthoods, a 10-year study of young people aged 11-15 at 1<sup>st</sup> wave, from 5 contrasting UK communities
  - Range of methods, young people speaking for themselves
  - Continuing importance of structural differences
  - Relationships still important to young people, the majority envisage a partnered future.
    - Henderson et al (2007)

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## The Young Lives and Times study

---

- A prospective qualitative longitudinal project
- Methodologically innovative
- Diversity in sample
- Perspective centred on the current experience of being a young person
- Focus on relationships, which are under researched

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Research Questions

---

- How do young people construct their personal relationships and identities over time?
- What is the relative significance of family/peer group/school and community in their daily lives and how does this change through their teenage years?
- What values do young people draw upon in constructing their relationships and identities? What are the sources of their morality?
- 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?

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Sample and design

---

- 50 young men and women with diverse backgrounds in terms of class, ethnicity, locality and physical and mental abilities, contacted at age 13 (year 9).
- Recruiting via schools and via community centres and youth clubs from five contrasting communities, from disadvantaged to advantaged, from inner city to rural. Sample boosting for particular groups.
- Participants will be tracked over 10 years. They will be met for interviews at 12/18 month-intervals throughout this time. However, data collection will be a continuous process, thanks to the variety of ethnographic tools employed.
- Fieldwork is currently ongoing.

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Multidimensional methods

---

There are three dimensions to the methods involved in this study, which link the micro picture to the meso and macro levels, connecting qualitative with quantitative approaches:

- In-depth ethnographic study, carried out with a creative range of tools.
- Qualitatively driven survey, exploring processes as well as patterns.
- Links to large-scale national survey tracking 20,000 young people (DfES Longitudinal Study of Young People in England).

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Ethnographic methods

---

Participatory approach adopting a wide and flexible range of tools which are modelled on different questions and individually suited to participants' own preferences:

- Focus groups
- Open ended interviews
- Time-lines
- Self-portraits and drawings
- Collage
- Diaries (paper, electronic, photographic, video)
- Photographs (researcher's and participants')
- The video walkabout, shadowing
- Participants' own videos, individual and group made

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Project funding

---

- Phase 1 of the project (2005-2008) is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under Dr Neale's ESRC Fellowship 'Time, Texture and Young Lives', and under the 'Changing Lives' stream of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods 'Real Life Methods' Node.
- Phase 2 (2008-2011) is funded under the ESRC 'Timescapes' consortium.

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods

## Research team and contacts

---

### The Young Lives and Times research team:

Dr Bren Neale      [b.neale@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:b.neale@leeds.ac.uk)  
Dr Anna Bagnoli    [a.bagnoli@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.bagnoli@leeds.ac.uk)  
Dr Sarah Irwin      [s.irwin@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:s.irwin@leeds.ac.uk)

### Project associates:

Dr Jon Prosser, Prof Jennifer Mason,  
Prof Inge Bates, Prof Phil Hodgkinson,  
Dr Aisha Walker

Real Life Methods, part of the National Centre for Research Methods