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Irwin, S and Winterton, M (2011) *Debates in Qualitative Secondary Analysis: Critical Reflections*. Working Paper. Timescapes Working Paper Series, 4 . University of Leeds , University of Leeds. ISSN 1758-3349

<https://doi.org/10.5518/200/04>

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Debates in Qualitative Secondary Analysis: Critical Reflections

A Timescapes Working Paper

Sarah Irwin and Mandy Winterton

2011

Timescapes Working Paper Series No.4

ISSN: 1758 3349 (Online) (Print)

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Summary

This paper is a companion piece to Irwin and Winterton (2011). The current paper takes as a focus some issues relating to the possibility for, and effective conduct of, qualitative secondary data analysis.¹ We consider some challenges for the re-use of qualitative research data, relating to distance from the production of primary data, and related knowledge of the proximate contexts of data production. With others we argue that distance and partial knowledge of proximate contexts may constrain secondary analysis but that its success is contingent on its objectives. So long as data analysis is fit for purpose then secondary analysis is no poor relation to primary analysis. We discuss some examples of secondary analysis in practice. We further discuss debates regarding research contexts, with reference to practical resources, and to evolving historical contexts of research. We argue there is much to be gained from more critical reflection on a set of ‘middle range’ issues regarding how contextual saliences are conceptualised, or assumed, within methodologies and extant data sets. In developing our ideas about secondary analysis we argue for more critical reflection on how effective knowledge claims are built. It is this agenda which we develop in the companion working paper, with specific reference to building effective secondary analysis across Timescapes data sets.

1. Introduction

Within Timescapes, the Secondary Analysis (SA) project looks both within and across the longitudinal data produced by seven constituent research projects. Whilst the projects have distinct research aims, designs and populations, collectively all seven projects span the life course and all focus on aspects of transitions, relationships and identities over time. By looking across the linked data sets the SA project will be able to examine social processes (e.g. relating to identities, relationships, and transitions) in diverse contexts and is well placed to identify dimensions of continuity and change over time in how people experience, understand and negotiate their lives.

This working paper considers some of the issues raised by undertaking secondary analyses of qualitative research. It is a companion to another working paper (Irwin and Winterton 2011). There we describe how we are conducting the Timescapes SA project, and reflect on a series of SA issues arising, including building our knowledge of the data sets, sampling, establishing bases on which we can build meaningful comparison across data sets, and developing strategies for working analytically across data sets. There we also describe our research focus and early exploratory analytic work. Here we offer a review of literature on secondary analysis and reflect on examples of practice which shed light on some of the diverse approaches to the re-use of qualitative data. We consider epistemological issues about secondary analysis as a practice which can generate valid knowledge. We also explore the vexed question of context and researcher presence, issues which have been discussed in great detail within the literature on secondary analysis. We argue for greater attention to the bases on which claims can be made, insisting that adequacy must be guided by research in practice. Secondary analysis is a practice undertaken by many colleagues in Timescapes as well as ourselves. We are offering a view, then, from a specific perspective and context: as secondary analysts tasked with working across Timescapes projects. We hope to show where the Timescapes’ SA project is situated with respect to these issues.

2. Approaches to qualitative secondary analysis

Secondary analysis we take to refer to the (re)using of data produced on a previous occasion to glean new social scientific and/or methodological understandings. Secondary analysis is an established

practice within quantitative research and there is a drive towards extending qualitative data re-use and analysis. Qualitative research is labour intensive and frequently produces a wealth of data (including methodological and analytical data) that does not get used in subsequent analyses. Secondary analysis thus enables greater use to be made of qualitative data beyond the project which originally produced them. The ESRC has for some time expected applicants to collect new data only if they can show that there is no suitable archived data to draw on and it also expects wherever possible that any newly acquired qualitative data should be made available for archiving for future use by others (for discussion see Mason 2010, Bornat 2005)ⁱⁱ. Among practitioners also, the struggle to meet competing institutional demands (e.g. to publish, teach, undertake research and secure external funding) means that using already existing data may be seen as a more attractive option compared to embarking on a new wave of data collection. However, whilst cost or resource efficiencies may be a relevant factor in decisions to undertake qualitative secondary analysis (see Bishop 2007, Mauthner et al 1998) the resources required to undertake it should not be underestimated. The time and effort needed to identify, locate and filter various forms of data, particularly where they are not amenable to forms of digital recording and copying, mean that using existing data cannot be regarded as inherently more efficient than gathering new primary data (see also Gillies & Edwards 2005, Savage 2005b).

Efficiency of course is not an adequate driver of methodological choice, although one might suggest that a positive element of the quest to maximise investments in qualitative research is that the profile and potential of secondary analysis is being promoted. Hopefully researchers will become more aware of substantive reasons for exploring previously collected data and will recognise the analytic potential available in extant qualitative data sets. We next illustrate some of the ways in which qualitative secondary analysis (QSA) can reveal fresh insights from already existing data. We are aware of the sensitivities of using such terms as already existing data, and of the contested nature of much QSA terminology. These issues are explored in the paper. There are a variety of reasons why researchers may undertake QSA, some of which are cited below. The re-use of previously collected qualitative data may be undertaken in order to:

- assess the credibility of new research and/or the generalisability of small studies by looking at established data (see Hammersley 1997)
- supplement one's own primary data, e.g. as exploratory analyses prior to new data collection (e.g. Hinds et al. 1997)
- provide rich descriptive information, e.g. to provide an historical perspective (e.g. Bishop 2007, Bornat 2005, Gillies & Edwards 2005)
- reveal new methodological insights by reflecting on previously conducted research (e.g. Mauthner et al 1998, Savage 2005; Bornat 2010)
- generate new findings by analysing 'old' data from a 'new' research context and/or lens (e.g. Gladstone et al 2007, Holland & Thomson 2009; Bornat 2010; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989)
- gain further insight on hard to reach populations or sensitive topics without further intrusion into vulnerable populations (e.g. Fielding & Fielding 2000, Gladstone et al 2007)

These uses are not mutually exclusive of course and QSA research may incorporate a number of the above objectives. In order to contextualise the above list, and as a means of illustrating the breadth of QSA research, this section will present just a few examples of how the method has been used in different ways to produce 'new' sociological insight from data produced by an earlier research project.

In order to generate new findings QSA researchers may change the unit of analysis or select purposively from the sample used in the original study. For example, Gladstone et al. (2007) report

on their decisions to return to data they had collected six years earlier as part of a research project which was designed to examine young people's motivations during a first episode of psychosis. The research involved interviews with practitioners, family members and the young people who had experienced the condition. The researchers explain how their interest in returning to the data grew from their sense in the first data collection period that the parents' transcripts were presenting stories about how they came to seek professional help for their children. The fact that this was not sought as part of the interview, but was a feature of so many parental narratives suggested to the research team that this was an important part of parental experience. The QSA of parental interview data by Gladstone et al (ibid) is designed to throw light on the factors which were influential in family decisions to seek or not to seek help from mental health service providers at that time. Their QSA undertaking has become part of a larger study which will compare recent experiences of similarly placed parents so that the research can address aspects of continuity and change over time in such processes.

The above research also illustrates how QSA research may involve prioritising a concept or issue that was present in the original data but was not the analytical focus at that time. Bishop's investigation (2007) into contemporary eating practices involved (re)using data from two previously conducted research projects, Blaxter & Patterson's (1982) *Mothers and Daughters* and Thompson's (1975) *The Edwardians* (both as cited by Bishop 2007). In her own analysis Bishop prioritised aspects relating to 'convenience' foods and family eating practices that were contained (respectively) in these two archived studies. In neither study was convenience food or family eating practices the focus of the research. Blaxter & Patterson's research used in depth qualitative interviews with grandmothers, mothers and daughters in the same working class families to explore the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Within the variety of topics covered in the interviews there were responses to a few questions where respondents were asked about how to maintain health and where they were probed about the role of food if this was not spoken of. Thompson's larger oral history study sought to document a wide variety of dimensions of social change, and included some questions about meals and family life. Bishop (ibid) thus (re)used data that had been produced by others in a particular context in order to provide an historical dimension to contemporary debates about de-socialisation and individuation of family eating practices.

A third illustration of the uses of QSA research reveals value in revisiting previously produced data in order to understand those findings from within a new context. As Savage's (2005b) QSA of Elizabeth Bott's (1957) classic study of families illustrates this can produce fresh insight into established research and concomitantly reveal new knowledge about methodological processes. In this example, archived research data such as journal entries, research logs and personal and institutional communications were used to reveal how personal, inter-personal and institutional change and politics impacted on the analytical perspectives and theoretical directions adopted as the research continued. For Savage, reconstruction of the original research is not possible nor desirable. His particular interest lies in the scope for secondary analysis of classic studies to offer insights into method and the process of research (Savage 2005b). QSA can offer insights into process, but also 'progress', that is, the ways in which research is embedded in historical contexts and how knowledge is produced within such contexts.

The three studies presented above illustrate the diverse ways in which re-use can lead to new revelations, both methodological and substantive, and do so with data from earlier primary research which the researchers were and were not part of. Throughout the paper other accounts of QSA research will also be presented as a means of illustrating the potential of this method, and in order to explore some of the issues raised by the practice. We turn next to a consideration of some issues arising in current debates about secondary analysis. In offering a critical review of such debates we

set the scene for discussion in our companion working paper (Irwin and Winterton 2011), in which we elaborate our secondary analysis strategies and a series of concrete research questions building on the Timescapes data sets.

3. Secondary analysis: researcher presence, context and knowledge claims

3.1. Introduction

Whilst the earlier examples of QSA research (Gladstone et al 2007, Bishop 2007, Savage 2005) were used un-problematically to illustrate the reasons for and value of qualitative data re-use, the practice of qualitative secondary analysis has been accompanied by extensive discussions of methodological, ethical and practical concern. Some concerns are founded on the particularity of the relationship between the original researcher(s), their research participants and the data originally collected. The centrality of these relationships to qualitative research has led some to see the re-use of qualitative data as quite clearly circumscribed. For example, Mauthner and her colleagues (1998) argue that its value is limited to offering methodological insights, and that it is not capable of enabling new substantive and theoretical advance. Whilst more positive, Hammersley too has identified a range of difficulties for effective secondary analysis of qualitative data (Hammersley 1997). Against such scepticism, many other writers have emphasised the value of re-use and secondary analysis. Mason (2007) and Savage (2005a) in particular believe that attention should now be directed towards more productive avenues of enquiry within this analytical practice. Mason (2007) warns of QSA effectively ‘shooting itself in the foot’ by perpetual academic introspection, further arguing that social scientists could lead the advancement of methods for working with the wealth of personal and social data being deposited electronically around the globe (e.g. social networking sites, blogs etc). Savage (2005b) concurs that QSA needs to move on from the validity/limitations debate. For him, the efforts of QSA researchers would now be better spent reporting on actual QSA methodological practice and findings so that the method and the field of methodology will progress.

Whilst in agreement with the desire to ‘get on with it’ we briefly revisit debates about the implications of QSA. The brief review offers a helpful platform for discussing our own QSA work. We do not attempt a comprehensive review of literature but rather focus in on some specific, if influential, pieces and draw from them some issues we see as most salient to our own project. We address concerns around researcher presence, contextual information deemed necessary for effective data re-use, and linked epistemological issues explored by various writers. In so doing we make explicit some of our own thinking about the philosophy and practice of data re-use and secondary analysis. (There are other important issues arising besides context and researcher presence, relating to the practice of secondary analysis which we discuss in the companion discussion paper).

Additionally there may be new returns to be gained from revisiting debates about QSA. For example, we concur with Bornat (2008) that the potential insight to be gained from cross-disciplinary dialogues between diverse communities of QSA practitioners is still to be explored. As an oral historian Bornat (2008) notes the widespread and creative re-use of earlier data within historical research and contrasts that with the restrictions she perceives sociologists impose on their re-use of data. Bornat (ibid) suggests that constant deliberations about whether it is possible to produce valid, ‘new’ knowledge by re-using data that already exists (and has been collected by others for purposes different to those of the intended secondary analysis) is stifling opportunities to progress secondary analyses. For her there is a balance to be struck. She suggests that sociologists could learn from the more creative practices of historians whilst historians need to acknowledge the kinds of theoretical

debates around the re-use of previously produced data that emerge among QSA practitioners within the field of sociology. In her words,

“If historians gain from the practices of sociologists who are interested in what happens when data is re-used, then equally sociologists might also gain from accepting more creative and interpretive approaches to archived data which recognise the potential for re-use as a means for fresh and newly informed conceptualisations of old concerns as well as the re-contextualising of emergent ideas within a broader time perspective.”

(Bornat 2008:3)

3.2. Researcher presence and knowledge claims

Within a qualitative research paradigm the production of data is inextricable from the various contexts in which those processes take or have taken place. Thus the influence of the wider historical, biographical, social and political landscapes in which research gets funded and in the midst of which researchers and participants construct their relationships and conversations and analyses, means that research data is always already recognised as subjectively constructed within a constellation of multiple circumstances. It is this recognition of the contextual dynamics of data production that is the particular strength of qualitative research. So what does this mean for QSA? Is it crucial, possible or even desirable for those undertaking QSA to access the unique insight inherent in the original research in order to construct valid new meanings? How does the constructed nature of qualitative data impact on the potential to subsequently ask new questions of it? If the original context is so important, how can researchers deal with the gaps in data (as a practical and epistemological matter) faced by those who wish to re-use it? We consider some concerns raised by researchers that distance might undermine data re-use. We will argue that secondary analysis may be constrained in particular ways, yet may be expansive in others. The case will be made not simply on abstract methodological grounds but through the practice of research and knowledge building. This is the philosophy in practice for our developing secondary analysis research project.

What does distance from the original context mean for QSA research? Does direct involvement in the original data production offer unique insights that can never be recovered? Hammersley (1997) proposes that even the same researchers returning to their own previously produced data will experience some sense of dislocation from that original context. Indeed it is precisely this kind of experience that led Mauthner, Parry and Backett-Milburn (1998) to conclude that QSA is subject to limitations primarily because of the subsequent researcher's distance from the original context in which data were produced. For Mauthner and her colleagues (1998) the particularities of the initial research engagement are inaccessible to subsequent users, and this in itself delimits the possibilities for valid substantive findings to emerge from secondary analysis. They reflect on their return to different research projects they previously had been part of, seeking to generate new theories or findings from their data. They felt unable to recapture the context of their own previous research endeavours, and that this new distance equated to a 'loss of privilege' (Mauthner et al 1998, p. 742) that had negative implications for the validity of qualitative data re-use. They document their belief that their earlier data reflected the specific (inter)personal and intellectual configurations at the time of collection. For example, Parry recognised, within her ethnography of a naturist group, her original identification with the moral strategies of the research participants. Backett-Milburn subsequently detected an intuitive appreciation of her participants' lives that was evident within her data collection and analysis which she was unaware of at the time. (Like the participants in her research, Backett-Milburn was also a mother with similarly aged children). From this perspective, primary researchers have a specific and privileged relationship to the data they generate, through their relationships with research participants and the immediate context of the research. The implication is that this generates

forms of reflexivity, and knowledge and insights which are not available to analysts coming to the data as re-users. In turn, it is implied that such knowledge is key to the adequacy of subsequent analyses and claims being mounted on the data. We will later suggest this latter claim needs more overt consideration than reflected in the literature.

There are some echoes of the concerns of Mauthner and her colleagues in the arguments developed by Hammersley (1997; 2009). He too highlights the intuitive element that resides in much qualitative research work due to the unique engagement that the original researcher has with the populations they research. Whilst he references particularly ethnographic methods to illustrate the implications of this 'unique' relationship he suggests that 'much the same problem' arises with other sorts of data (1997:139). The unique engagement of the primary researchers and their subject is perceived as a problem for qualitative secondary analysts, unable to capture that unique relationship to the data. For Hammersley:

“For one thing, in the process of data collection researchers generate not only what are written down as data but also implicit understandings and memories of what [primary researchers] have seen, heard, and felt, during the data collection process. For instance, not everything that is experienced in the course of participant observation or in-depth interviewing will be or can be written down. Nevertheless, it will often be drawn on tacitly and perhaps sometimes consciously, in the course of analysis, perhaps playing an important role in making sense of the data that have been recorded”

(2009: 3). Emphasis in original)

However, as we will see, for Hammersley the absence of such 'head notes' (2009) is not necessarily damning for re-use projects. Much depends in the specifics of what is being attempted. This is a line we echo, and will elaborate later on. A potential difficulty which persists is that the original researchers' presence, and aspects of proximate context, permeates the data in ways that are not always evident for subsequent users of the data (e.g. Bornat 2005; Hammersley 2009). It may be possible to recover salient aspects of context as data re-users. As noted elsewhere, it may be the issue arises too for primary researchers, for whom salient aspects of context may alter anyway in the course of the research. Further, there is no guarantee that primary researchers will gather all information needed to make comprehensive sense of the data they generate. Puzzles often arise, and the same puzzles and questions may arise for secondary as for primary researchers. Nevertheless, as Hammersley (2009) notes, whilst there is an overlap in issues facing primary and secondary researchers here, they are differently positioned and difficulties may be sharper for secondary analysts. Like others he sees this issue as one to approach pragmatically, rather than a blanket critique of secondary analysis.

Some have offered quite a forceful criticism of the notion that primary researchers' presence is an important mechanism in the production of more valid analyses. Mason (2007) and Van den Berg (2005) each warn against taking 'being there' as a means to claim privileged insight. From Mason's perspective:

“The idea that only those involved in initial data generation can understand the context enough to interpret the data is not only anti-historical but it puts enormous epistemological weight onto the notion of 'successful reflexivity', that is that researchers can be successfully and extensively reflexive ...”

Mason 2007:5

For Mason there is a need to disrupt the notion of the privilege of the original and instead to recognise the validity of multiple reflexively-produced interpretations of data. She argues that it is the adequacy of the researchers' reflexivity rather than their proximity to the original context in which data were produced which is the key to producing more valid analyses. She says:

“If we acknowledge a more complex politics of reflexivity and interpretation, then it is not difficult to see the epistemological value in allowing for a range of reflexive interpretations of data, some from close range and some from a distance.”

Mason 2007:7

In some ways this echoes the argument of Moore (2006). In challenging Mauthner and her colleagues, Moore is concerned that they over-privilege the insights available at the time of research compared to those which can be gained through re-use (Moore 2006). Data is constructed in both primary and secondary analysis, never 'given', and she argues that secondary analysis is more closely aligned to primary analysis than accepted by Mauthner and her colleagues. "...we can come to understand re-using qualitative data not as the re-use of pre-existing data, but as a new process of re-contextualising data" (Moore 2006, pp; also cf. Broom et al 2009). She therefore argues that we should conceive of context as part of the research undertaking, whether it is primary or secondary, that these strategies are more closely aligned than sometimes presented, and that we should see secondary analysis as being not about analysing pre-existing data but about re-contextualising data. This puts it on a more equal footing with primary analysis, as well as reminding users of the continual relevance of the socially shaped nature of data and its interpretation.

For Hammersley (2009) this critical engagement has value yet he believes that the emphasis on the socially and contextually made nature of data runs us into trouble. He argues we should retain a concept of data both as given, and as constructed, and that Moore overstates the similarities between primary and secondary analysis. For Hammersley it is more productive to distinguish between data, as that which is collected or generated in the course of research, and evidence, as the analysed data which provides the grounds for inference and for the descriptive and explanatory claims which are made. This allows us to see that both primary and secondary analysts move between data and evidence. Hammersley's reflections on separating out evidence from data, then, are useful in allowing us to recognise that primary and secondary research have a somewhat different positioning. However this does not mean that primary researchers are necessarily arbiters of knowledge or insight which may be gleaned from their data. Primary analysts have a privileged relationship to the data they have generated, but do not necessarily have a privileged claim on the arguments which can be made from that data. Sociological data will support different *theoretical understandings*, and *'being there' is not the final arbiter of the adequacy of such understandings*

We now make some summary points regarding the scope of secondary analysis. We contend that blanket condemnation or appreciation is unwarranted, and discrepant views sometimes arise from too aggregate a conception of what such analysis can do. We argue rather for a critical engagement through which we can develop grounds for building and evaluating knowledge claims. We take it as given that all data sets and research projects could be revisited to learn about methodology in practice, and to offer insights into the history of method and of research more generally. Our focus here is with strategies for the re-use of data with reference to its initial objects of analysis, in order to access evidence which will enhance our conceptual and theoretical understanding of specific substantive social processes (that is, using research projects as a means to an end and not an end in their own right).

Type of method

The research method used in primary data generation is very important to the relevance of, and potential for, secondary analysis. This appears to be minimally considered in the literature we have surveyed. Diverse qualitative research strategies will render the resulting data more or less amenable to secondary analysis. Ethnographic research where analyses are built upon forms of cultural immersion, identification and theory building will mean that data, and the inter-personal relationships from which it stems, are more tightly bound up with the researcher and do not stand as a body of evidence which is independent of that primary researcher. In contrast, a series of semi-structured interviews are more separable, as a body of evidence, and therefore potentially much more readily grasped within secondary analysis. The original research strategy, clearly, will have different implications for re-use. It is likely that most if not all archiving projects are more akin to the latter model. As we will see Timescapes projects are generating many diverse forms of data including a range of visual and diary data which will be archived. The former is often used for eliciting further interview data and again is less bound up with the researcher than would be ethnographic data.

Being there

Researcher presence will have different saliences across different research projects, designs and questions. Presence always provides a privileged position in respect of the data generated (although it is not a guarantor of sufficiency in respect of contextual information). Primary researchers will have a specific and privileged relationship to the data they generate, having direct relationships with their research participants and the immediate context of the research. There is no doubt that for researchers 'being there' can provide particular kinds of insights. However, presence does not necessarily provide a privileged position in respect of efficacy of analysis or theoretical development. As suggested, not being there may have very detrimental consequences for an ethnographic understanding, where meaning making may not only require 'being there' but also hinge on a process of personal (intellectual) change. Qualitative strategies based on interview or other data generation 'external' to the researcher means that not being there will be less of an issue. Further, at the level of theoretical development, 'not being there' may not matter that much. Whilst distance may be something of a barrier for QSA to negotiate, it is not a general obstacle. Distance may open up new avenues of enquiry. Indeed, as we have seen, distance achievable by those originally involved, as by secondary analysts coming to the data for the first time, may engender new kinds of insight into the data.

From knowing context to knowing limits: building knowledge claims

Exactly how problematic is the partiality of the secondary analyst's lens on the primary research and contexts of data collection? That depends on how we understand the task of the analyst. For Hammersley (1997) "... what is crucial for the testing of knowledge claims is not how those claims were produced but their cogency in light of the evidence" (p. 135). This is part of an argument of the purposelessness of seeking to recreate primary research. However, we can make the same case for research based on secondary analysis. We will not benefit from circling within questions of exactly how data was produced, the reflexivity of primary researchers, or the contextual information we have available. As Hammersley (1997) argues, this would mimic an auditing of research projects, and wrongly imply that veracity comes from some exact reconstruction. Indeed, it may be that undue emphasis on context and 'presence' itself encourages a particular mode of engagement with data, a mode which tends towards description, and a sense that the 'answers' reside within the specific data set, rather than in theorisation of how the data articulates evidence to address specific research questions.

Re-users will have to make do with what is made available to them. It is the point at which specific, potentially unknowable, aspects of context interfere with our ability to make analyses which are fit

for purpose that we need to pay particular heed to these issues. Research may proceed effectively where ‘we know that we don’t know’; it is where ‘we don’t know that we don’t know’ that problems may arise (cf. Hammersley 2009). The difficulties for secondary analysis will be more or less severe depending on whether there is a risk of systematic misinterpretation of data (potentially from across diverse sources) and whether there are checks that can be made on our interpretations with reference to other sources of evidence. Many of our research questions will be based on, and draw from, wider bodies of evidence in such a way that forms of verification may be sought from outwith, as well as within, the ‘raw’ data sets. Grounding knowledge claims will often entail stepping outside of the specifics of the data set, and relating it to our theories, to other evidence and so forth. It seems to us that a good deal of the discussion about re-use and secondary analysis proceeds with very broad brushstrokes. There is no single right or wrong here. The central issue is about adequacy in the grounds on which we build, develop and test knowledge claims (cf. Bishop 2009). Greater focus on the criteria by which such knowledge claims are justified will be part of an expansive programme of research.

4. Doing secondary analysis: some principles into practice

Demonstrating the worth of secondary analysis will be best developed through effective practice. We are seeking to develop such practice through the Timescapes Secondary Analysis Project. Our developing strategies for undertaking analysis are outlined in the companion discussion paper, along with sets of emerging research questions which ‘fit’ available Timescapes data (Irwin and Winterton 2011). For our present purposes then, and with a view to elaborating further some of the scope for SA in practice, we briefly describe two studies, seeking to highlight a few pointers in the doing of secondary analysis. We consider Fielding and Fielding’s (2000) QSA of Cohen and Taylors (1972) research into prisoners’ experiences of their confinement, and Savage’s (2005) QSA of Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhoffer and Platt’s (1969) Affluent Worker study. The authors of both these projects of data re-use are reflexive about the contexts of the primary and the secondary analysis, reveal the scope for generating new analyses and arguments based on data re-use, and they show how data is used as evidence (cf. Hammersley 2009) in support of differing arguments. This recognition of diversity of interpretations leads us not to relativism but provides additional resources for enhancing our understanding of social processes (and of how different categories and analytic frameworks shape what is seen and thus what is understood). So although the Fieldings (2000) end their article on a liberal note that “(T)hose of a postmodern cast of mind may also find .. a sense of the polyvocality that is implicit in any secondary analysis of qualitative data” (p. 688), both their study and that of Savage seem to us to reveal that a more expansive understanding may be enabled by the understanding the grounds for divergences between primary and secondary data analysis.

Fielding and Fielding (2000) see a primary rationale of secondary analysis as building on previous qualitative research whose data is so often under-utilised. They are interested specifically in its scope for enhancing understanding of the experiences of hard to reach groups. Whilst they agree with the point made by Mauthner and colleagues (1998) that data are produced within the specific context of personal research relationships and all the contingencies within that (historical, biographical and political) they do not agree that this limits the potential of SA to methodological exploration. They provide an account of their secondary analysis of a major piece of criminological research (Cohen and Taylors 1972 book *Psychological Survival*, based on research conducted in the late 1960s). They offer an alternative, if potentially complementary framing, of the data over 30 years later. Fielding and Fielding document the steps they took in order to address aspects of the context (relationships between researchers and participants, Home Office, prison reform groups, research council, researchers’ notes and prisoner notes on drafts). They also provide wider contextual details about the social, political and historical configurations in which the research was undertaken. The authors

provide a sense of the intricacies of undertaking SA where data are dispersed, incomplete or missing, yet they effectively justify their conclusions through how they construct their evidence. In presenting an alternative reading of the primary data, Fielding and Fielding are at pains to point out they are not suggesting Cohen and Taylor 'got it wrong'. A body of data can often support more than one analytic interpretation. The secondary analysis there is about exploring what themes were not taken up, and they provide a different kind of account of the data, and a rather different set of conclusions about the experiences and meanings of prison life to inmates. In terms of lessons that we may draw for secondary analysis we see here how data supports different kinds of interpretation. In turn these are embedded in different purposes (methodological, analytical and political). It is another example of the scope of secondary analysis and helps reveal ways in which research is embedded in particular historical contexts, yet also offers evidence through which we can access 'real lives'.

Savage (2005a) was able to re-use the complete fieldwork and analytical documentation available from Goldthorpe and colleagues' research reported in the Affluent Worker series. Their study was undertaken in the late 1960s with affluent manual workers in Luton, and its central argument was that class remained important even in contexts of growing affluence amongst manual workers. Such workers were not new entrants to the middle class, retained a working class position (albeit a largely privatised one), and perceived class largely in terms of income differences. Savage's attention to the systematically collected, qualitative aspects of the Affluent Worker archive (lost in the original researchers' deductive methodology and final analysis) afforded him a re-appraisal of the arguments advanced by Goldthorpe and colleagues (1969). The original authors found ambivalence in participants' perceptions of class. Seeking to make sense of their participants' views with reference to a model of ideal types of working class images of society, the authors concluded that the male manual worker sample they interviewed saw class in pecuniary terms, rather than in terms of power and/or status. Savage, re-using the qualitative data generated by the Affluent Worker team, argues that the original analysis obscured another interpretation, one more readily made in light of subsequent understandings of class and perceptions of inequality. For Savage the pecuniary interpretation of class arose from analyses framed by Lockwood's conceptualisation of working class images of society (Lockwood 1966, cited in Savage 2005a). Such understandings were deemed to be shaped in one of 3 ways, relating to power, to prestige or to money. Thus whilst Goldthorpe and colleagues show evidence in their data that workers describe a distinct upper class, their general argument is of the dominance of a picture of class inequalities based on income and a graduated hierarchy. Savage, in his re-reading of their data (based on extensive responses to open ended questions about the meaning of class), argues that workers' talk of money, whilst dominant, also intersects with a perception of power and status inequalities. Savage attributes more conceptual importance to the extent to which people identify an upper class, and distance themselves from it. This he reads as an aspect of their accounts of their own ordinariness and individuality, and the functioning of class inequalities through an individualistic ethic in contemporary society (Savage 2005a).

In analysing the qualitative aspects of the data in ways that the original researchers did not he is able to reveal new evidence from what was obscured to view in the original research framing. He concludes

“...we see how the process of abstraction, which is necessary for a piece of work to endure, involves reading data in a particular way. By returning to the archived qualitative data we can expose some of these absences.”

Savage (2005b: para 41).

In many ways, Savage's reading aligns with the arguments of the authors, as Savage says his re-analysis, with its rather different conception of class in the accounts of participants "...can be closely allied to their own stress on instrumentalism" (Savage 2005a, p. 942). The apparent bafflement of the original fieldwork interviewers at respondents' 'inability' to talk readily about class as part of their own lives in the terms given them is, for Savage, more readily accommodated within a concept of class as "...a necessary, though also shadowy, concomitant of people's individualism" (Savage 2005a, p. 943). The data appears to support the development of a rather different conceptualisation of social class, which seeks to accommodate the troublesome gap between popular images and sociologists' categories. In undertaking this conceptual project Savage also seeks to demonstrate how returning to past recorded accounts may allow scope for re-interpretation freed from the primary researchers' conceptual framing. In so doing he implies there is scope for enhancing our resources for understanding the present, based as it often is on mythologised perceptions of recent history.

So far we have offered a brief consideration of researcher presence and knowledge of proximate context within discussions of the possibility of effective secondary analysis of qualitative data. We have suggested that primary and secondary analysts are differently positioned with respect to the data and that secondary analysis may be constrained. This will depend on a variety of factors. Crucially, however, it is the use of data as evidence in the service of building enhanced understanding or explanation which will be the proper grounds on which to assess secondary analysis. In this there are strong echoes of what matters in primary analysis. Since we are in the process of undertaking analysis of Timescapes data we have offered up for discussion other examples of research in practice. These illustrate some of the scope for secondary analysis, in terms of developing new insights from available data generated by other researchers for other purposes. Our Timescapes secondary analysis project has a somewhat unusual remit in that we are not seeking to revisit a single project, nor to link single project data to some primary analysis of our own. Rather we will be working across subsets of the Timescapes projects. In this paper we have sought to position ourselves in relation to debates about the possibility of effective secondary analysis, and consider some methodological challenges and opportunities it provides. In the companion Working Paper (Irwin and Winterton 2011) we elaborate various principles for undertaking analyses, with consideration of the intermeshing of methodological and conceptual issues. In the last section of this paper we return to the vexed question of context and offer some observations on dimensions of context, and social explanation, which are under-explored in the literature.

5. Reflections on context

In section 5.1 we briefly consider some discussions of the contextual information seen as practically supporting data re-use and secondary analysis of archived data. In Appendix 1 we document the sorts of information we believe would help us in our work as secondary analysts and, by extension, we believe could facilitate broader and effective data re-use. In the subsequent section we consider the researcher's role as part of the context of data collection, and in section 5.3 we go on to make some observations on issues of context which have been under-explored in the literature on secondary analysis. These relate to how we conceptualise context. In particular we suggest that much consideration has been given to proximate contexts which surround data collection/generation, and to the historical and epistemological contexts of research, yet it is also important to be attentive to a 'middle range' set of issues relating to how we conceptualise the contexts in which our research participants are situated and which may shape their lives in important ways, yet which may not be captured through the detail of proximate context, however precisely this is rendered.

5.1. Documenting context

There is a great deal of overlap between discussions of context, issues of ethics and archiving. Ethics and archiving are undertakings in themselves within Timescapes. They draw on their own extensive literatures and colleagues are developing guidance and protocols fit for a large scale, complex, collaborative body of qualitative longitudinal research. In addition the Archive is developing protocols about what information on context will be essential, and desirable, for re-users. As secondary analysts we are contributing to this process. There are different kinds and levels of contextual information which are useful for secondary analysts. In this section we briefly point to established criteria for documenting minimal relevant aspects of context. It would be simply repetitive to detail them here so in preference we add some reflections on aspects of context which we have not seen much discussed in the literature.

Presence within, or absence from, the original context of data production does not in itself imbue subsequent analyses with greater or lesser validity. Nevertheless evidence on context can be an important part of grasping and re-contextualising of a study within secondary analysis (Moore 2006, Bishop 2006, Bornat 2005, Hinds et al 1997). To this end reasonably extensive documentation of the original research context can provide secondary users with greater access to important elements of context (See also Baker 2010 for a secondary analyst's perspective on, and lessons drawn from, working with data from one of the Timescapes projects). As Bishop (2006) points out, it is misguided to think that everything about context can be captured during the conduct and archiving of the research. For example, who knows at the outset of a project, and still as it progresses, what the relevant contextual information might be? Qualitative research is not a linear process, and ideas and aims are refined as it progresses. What is thought to be relevant and therefore worth recording at one stage may prove to have little relevance later on. Conversely, contextual information not formally recorded at one particular time may emerge as having been relevant at a later stage. Thus the issue of access to all salient data confronts all qualitative researchers. In this respect secondary analysts are not very dissimilar to primary analysts. Nevertheless, as Bishop notes, there is broad consensus that more contextual information only enhances the potential for data (re-)use and analysis (Bishop 2007).

What criteria should be utilised for the recording of contextual data? Bishop (2006), Hinds and colleagues (1997) and Van Den Berg (2005) provide useful frameworks for thinking about what kinds of information need to be available for re-users to orientate them to the context in which the data they are using were produced. Bishop's (2006) framework incorporates that of Van Den Berg (ibid) and others and she suggests that a common and useful framing device for thinking about context relates to proximity and distance from the actual interactional event under review. Thus the multiple levels of context may be identified as the interactional, the situational and then the wider cultural or institutional contexts. Bishop's framework has the advantage of a practical orientation, informed by working with researchers depositing to the UK Data Archive and to Timescapes, and it sets the scene for the kinds of requirements needed for qualitative data to be re-used.

Interactional/Conversational context. Bishop elaborates a proposal for a model transcript, and specific guidance is being followed in the transcription and deposit of Timescapes data sets. Additionally experience and guidance on preparing data for Archiving drawn from Timescapes and related projects is available on the Timescapes website. ^{iii iv}

Situational contexts include those of both the setting and of the project. Contextual data about the setting identified by Bishop (and Van den Berg 2005) includes a minimum set of criteria about the

participants, including age, gender, marital status, occupation and the location of the interview. Timescapes base data is potentially more expansive covering educational qualifications, parental occupations and HE attendance, household income, religion, country of birth, and who participants live with. The collection of base data for Timescapes projects has been undertaken to facilitate a summary description of the individual project samples with reference to socio-demographic data. The data corresponds to questions asked by the UK Household Longitudinal Study (Understanding Society) and provides a brief summary of the socio-demographic profile of project samples. However, it could additionally be considered to supply some systematically recorded context in terms of participants' circumstances.

Institutional/cultural contexts include those that relate specifically to the project and those that then relate to the wider cultural contexts (Bishop 2006). Bishop calls for documents charting the development, processes, instruments, design, sampling and anonymisation strategies and outputs to be available for secondary analysts.

We have indicated some sources on the practical requirements for depositing data. As the authors would all concur, data does not speak for itself, and contextual information is not going to allow it to do so. As Gillies and Edwards state "...context is not about filling 'gaps' in the data, but rather illuminating the very particular perspectives knowledge was (and is) created from" (2005: para 27). In undertaking secondary analysis of project data we are evolving a detailed sense of the kinds of contextual information which is, or would be, useful. We will be working with the Archive team in elaborating this. In the meantime we include, as Appendix 1, a list of contextual information which would support re-use and secondary analysis of Timescapes project data.

5.2. The Researcher Role: contexts of data production

An important debate that engagement with secondary analysis has opened relates to the extent to which the 'real life' context of data production should be revealed. For effective SA to take place, contextual data regarding the data collection processes needs to be available. Bishop and Van den Berg note the relative absence of such information in published research findings. For Silva (2007) this is understandable given that academic careers depend on rational sanitised accounts that enable researchers to be able to portray themselves as competent or expert. She notes,

'To reveal fallibility is simply not part of the game.' Silva 2007:4

Pragmatic reasons for research choices are rarely revealed even though these surely impact on the research design (e.g. convenience; methodological strengths or preferences, optimising extrinsic outcomes (cf. Silva 2007)). The wider context of an audit culture may add to the pressure for more openness in terms of the methodological decisions and processes employed during the research undertaking. However, there are concerns that the pressure of such scrutiny may stifle the intuitive and unstructured creativity of qualitative work. Silva suggests that whilst we are involved in this messy process 'academic consecration' demands that we present it in a different light. Nevertheless, she believes that greater transparency should not be seen as a threat to academic careers, as it is key to the quality of knowledge outcomes (Silva 2007).

There is a relative absence of such revelations in published work, but archiving data and information on contexts of data production may render visible much information about the process of producing, as well as analysing, data. The potential of such scrutiny also has implications for researchers, in terms of their academic careers and self-image, which is an important dimension to be taken into account during the SA endeavour (Silva 2007; Hadfield 2010). Further, the move towards open

access digital data archiving, and pressures on researchers to comply, generates ethical issues for them as well as participants, and risks undermining professional autonomy and integrity (Mauthner and Parry 2010).

5.3. Some observations on context as a conceptual issue: how contextual relevancies are rendered through methodological strategies

Clearly more rather than less contextual information appears useful for secondary analysts, yet its precise uses and value will vary depending on the particular project at hand (Bishop 2006). It seems to us that there has been discussion about exactly what contextual information could be usefully supplied, in quite practical terms (as discussed above), and also reflection about the contexts of knowledge production. How for example do evolving theoretical frameworks impact on the ways in which research questions are framed, and on what we can 'see' through different ontological and epistemological positions (e.g. Moore 2006; Savage 2005; Gillies and Edwards 2005; Mauthner et al 2008). These are important questions. However, within the literature on context in secondary analysis there appears less discussion of a set of 'middle range' conceptual issues relating to context. To illustrate we can take a simple example. We might supply extensive detail of context, including proximate, situational, and cultural contexts and suppose that we increase our chances of understanding not only the circumstances of our research participants, but also insights into why they think and act in particular ways. However, we may not grasp this opportunity without a well developed conceptual understanding of how relevant contexts hold salience for the phenomena under examination. We may understand context to be the salient environment in which participants move. In turn this may mean many things. To cite just some examples, we may see it as being about their physical environment, their housing, and neighbourhood, we may see it as about resources available to them (economic, cultural, social), we may see it in terms of important social relationships and ties, or in terms of reference groups and social networks. Further we will work with different assumptions about how we can access relevant contextual information within our research (cf Mason 2002; Irwin 2008). This is not just a case of the range of our data collection strategies, but also of understanding how assumptions about salient context are embedded within such strategies. What is deemed relevant shapes what we see, through research designs and through the ways in which questions are asked, and how they are asked. This has been more the concern of those undertaking historical comparative research (e.g. Savage 2005a; Gillies and Edwards 2005; Duncan 2010) although it is recognised as an issue for secondary analysis of contemporary data (Moore 2006). Nevertheless we warrant that it merits some detailed attention. The issue relates to how research designs, methodological strategies and data collection tools access multi-faceted problems in potentially quite particular ways, and how our initial conceptualisations of such problems lie within the data, and its presumed uses.

A central strength of qualitative research is its capacity to furnish contextual detail and to enhance understanding of the salience of contextual diversity in lived experience. Theorising context lies close to the heart of many qualitative research projects, where context is often an object of analysis. Its perceived salience shapes how projects are conceived, what data is deemed relevant and so forth. For example, it may allow us to challenge simplified behavioural models of action and reveal the cultural and moral embeddedness of social action (e.g. Duncan and Edwards 1999). The concern with contextual relevancies also lies near the heart of the recent expansion of interest in data generation strategies which move away from established interview and participant observation traditions. Many seek more 'ground up' strategies, such as visual methods, walking interviews, relational mapping exercises and other techniques which seek to get closer to people's lived experiences and 'real lives' than may be possible in conventional interview formats (e.g. Emmel and Clark 2009; Mason and Davies 2009). Indeed many Timescapes colleagues are working with a variety of methods precisely to try and capture a more comprehensive understanding of people's

lived experiences in a similar, ‘grounded’ way believed to be more in keeping with how people perceive, and live, their lives (cf. Mason 2002). Here we can see how ideas about dimensions of context, salient to people’s experiences, are themselves embedded in the research methods and data generation strategies being used^v.

The Timescapes projects exemplify research designs which build on theorisations of how context is salient to the phenomena under investigation. All make use of a range of data collection strategies designed to access key aspects of context. One example might be how, for some projects, participants are involved by virtue of their positioning within family and inter-generational groupings. Rather than simply ask individuals about inter-generational relationships from their perspective, these projects seek to access the associated relationships and dynamics through a range of techniques. Additionally, the Timescapes empirical projects all contain (diverse) theorisations of ways in which longitudinal data enables understanding of evolving lives and, through researching continuity and change offer a potentially very revealing lens on context. That is, particular conceptualisations of the nature of salient contextual information are embedded in methodological decisions and data collection strategies, and will encourage particular ‘readings’ not just of data, but of the nature of the social phenomena being researched.

How do these observations have a bearing on the conduct of secondary analysis? They highlight context as a domain for conceptualisation and, potentially, for analysis in its own right. Longitudinal data have much light to shed on the salience of context in people’s experiences, beliefs and actions. Many of the Timescapes projects are themselves exploring how the longitudinal perspective allows points of comparison through which contextual relevancies are thrown into relief (e.g. Holland and Thomson 2009; Emmel and Hughes 2009). Making context visible is an important objective and outcome, a rationale for diverse forms of comparative analysis. For secondary analysts too, the longitudinal nature of Timescapes data sets will be a key resource for conceptualising contexts and their salience for participants’ social actions, beliefs, decision making and so on.

Additionally, we can use contextual diversity across Timescapes projects as part of a comparative strategy for theory building. The linked but diverse nature of the projects offers another potentially very productive resource. Through identifying and conceptualising features within project data, and building understandings of key processes which might hold beyond the confines of a specific data set, we are potentially able to build comparisons across data sets to test, refine and extend our hypotheses (comparing in like, and unlike, contexts for example). Again, as an analytic strategy, this should offer another vehicle for moving between the specific and the general.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have laid out some of our philosophy in practice in the Timescapes project. We have reviewed debates about secondary analysis, with a focus on divisions made between primary and secondary research, and on issues of context. We have argued that whilst primary researchers may have unique insights into the data itself, this does not necessarily extend to privileged interpretation or explanation. To claim as much may be both methodologically limited (relevant primarily to ethnographic forms of research) and theoretically reductive (in that alternative interpretations are denied). Examples of qualitative secondary analysis demonstrate the insights to be gained from acknowledging the legitimacy of multiple interpretations derived sensitively from the same data. Ultimately it is the fit between data and research questions rather than proximity to the original context that will enable analytic sufficiency and validity.

Concerns that secondary analysis is undermined by lack of access to contextual data available to primary analysts suggest an idealised conception of the completeness of the original researcher's awareness of relevant contextual data during the research process. There is greater possibility for QSA researchers to be missing pertinent contextual data which may impact on their findings, but this difficulty also exists within primary research. With Hammersley, we have argued that rather than debate the respective roles of primary and secondary researchers in conducting valid analyses, a more productively drawn distinction is between data and evidence. Primary researchers have more privileged knowledge of and access to primary data, but both primary and secondary analysts will construct data as evidence in the service of some empirically grounded set of arguments and knowledge claims. How effectively such arguments are made can be judged against usual criteria of social scientific explanatory adequacy. Presence at the point of data generation is not a final arbiter. In addition there are risks that overplaying proximate context may privilege description over explanation. Grounding knowledge claims will often entail stepping outside of the specifics of the data, and relating it to our theories, and to other evidence. Rather than dwell with the question of the possibility of effective secondary analysis, we have sought to describe our position in more positive terms, and orient towards questions of adequacy in the grounds on which secondary analysts build, develop and test knowledge claims. Greater focus on the criteria by which such knowledge claims are justified will be part of an expansive programme of research.

In the literature on secondary analysis and context there have been discussions oriented to practical issues in documenting context, as well as discussions regarding historically and paradigmatically embedded research contexts, through which current researchers can 'excavate' or reconstrue data from different theoretical positions. We have suggested that there is relative dearth of discussion of a set of middle range issues relating to context. Ideas about the salience of context are present in how we frame our research questions, the methods we use and the data we generate. Theorising and analysing context, then, should be part of a critical secondary analysis.

We have argued that the value of secondary analysis will proceed from practice, and have briefly reviewed some examples, given that our own analyses of Timescapes data are currently under development. However, we hope to have shown some of the principles on which we are proceeding, relating to the possibility of effective secondary analysis, and the scope for treating context as a resource. Our analytic strategies for working with and across the Timescapes project data sets are documented in the companion working paper (Irwin and Winterton 2011).

Appendix 1

The list below headlines some key domains we believe would ease the task of data re-users and therefore facilitate effective secondary analysis. This is a ‘wish list’ from the SA project team, who have been working during Timescapes projects research period, and started before the archiving of much Timescapes data. We are therefore working on moving ground in terms of what is being archived (as we have typically been working with data provided directly to us as the SA team). As we see it this list is quite minimal, although in terms of project resources it may appear onerous. In particular, a profile of projects’ participants is a task some, but not all, projects will be undertaking. Non-Timescapes readers need be aware of the very significant amount of work that goes into archiving data including many tasks not discussed here, such as anonymising transcripts and other data.

Desireable documentation which would facilitate the task of secondary analysts

An orientation to the project:

1. **Record of publications, presentations** etc which explain and /or draw on the archived data.
2. **Research design**
 - a) Brief context and logic of research design (in each data collection period if appropriate).
 - b) Is research exploratory or question driven? What are the questions?
 - c) What is the fit with Timescapes logic? Description of qualitative longitudinal design, including account of the kind of QL study undertaken. What are the key questions which benefit from the longitudinal design?
3. What were the **sampling decisions** and how do they relate to the research questions?
 - a) Was the desired sample achieved? How does the sample relate to wider empirical evidence across the population and/or theoretical issues?
 - b) Are there implicit as well as planned ways in which the sample is structured (for example, does opting into the study have implications for understanding the extent to which participants ‘stand for’ a wider population, or provide insights into wider experiences (e.g. even within their target populations, studies will often recruit particular kinds of people, in respect of background, education, identification with project aims etc). Would it be helpful to offer reflections /insights into this?
4. **An overview of what data is provided as part of the project.**
5. Projects would usefully supply **a descriptive profile of each participant**

What form should this take? A descriptive profile could relate to units of data (interview; diary; by wave); and / or could be an overview of the participant. Ideally it would be both.

Most useful would be a descriptive but broadly ‘factual’ account, describing a person’s circumstances, biography, key life course changes, family/household context, etc and an indication of the points at which they were interviewed.

It is sometimes said that which facts to include will reflect the primary analysts’ interests, and may encourage particular readings of the data. However, if it is broadly ‘factual’ and follows a similar format across the projects it would certainly facilitate the work of re-users.

6. **Relevant contextual information?**

We propose inclusion of information about the context of interviews (or other forms of data collection) if this is deemed relevant to secondary analysts. We do not document precisely what contextual information would be usefully supplied: this is being steered by project teams themselves and by the Timescapes Archive team. We suggest that it would be useful (with Bishop 2006) to think of different levels of context. At the most detailed level this could pertain to annotations within transcripts (see endnote 2). At a meso level it could pertain to a note about the fieldwork context. At a macro level it could usefully include notes regarding the broader socio-demographic, economic and social policy context in which the research was conducted.

7. An opportunity to **highlight areas within the data which might be rich for (further) analysis**. Should projects take an opportunity to state areas they think might be ripe for analysis by secondary analysts? This might be construed as overly directional. Alternatively it could be construed as an additional resource for secondary users (including students who might come to the material with exploratory purpose).

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ⁱ We are grateful to Joanna Bornat, Nick Emmel, Ros Edwards and Libby Bishop for their helpful comments on this paper.

ⁱⁱ Go to <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/data-policy.aspx> for a summary of ESRC data policy.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are many issues that can be addressed here. One area we have not seen discussed in the literature is about decisions regarding the representation, within transcripts, of 'natural' speech. Within some transcripts participants' strong regional/local accents are reproduced not only in terms of colloquialisms or local modes of expression, but also in the phonetic spellings of particular words. For secondary analysts, these do provide a sense of the person, but there is a broader theoretical argument to be recognised here and that is the convention of phonetic presentation applying primarily to accents that we have thus 'othered'. They are

invariably working class and conventional orthodoxy is that presenting marginalised voices in this way is a politically sensitive way for researchers to give voice to under-represented groups. Yet would we spell particular utterances of more middle class participants in this way? We are certainly against the imposition of some kind of ‘standardised English’ within transcripts, as that would surely be a step backwards, politically. However, is it fair that we may be so keen to locate some participants as working class but refrain from paying as much attention to locating other participants as middle or upper class by replicating their utterances in such sensitive ways? Unless such presentation work is applied uniformly do we risk normalising (and rendering invisible) the class specific location of privileged voices against which others are positioned? For an interesting discussion of power dynamics in the representation of people’s voices in research writing see Standing 1998

^{iv} It could be useful for archived transcripts to contain visual and sensory data which were evidenced at the time and probably noted (if not formally recorded) by the interviewer. For example, a participant responding ‘mmm’ is ambiguous for re-users who were not privy to the original encounter and may subsequently be open to different interpretations. Simple annotations in the transcript, e.g. [said in agreement], [contemplative], [disinterested], [dismissive] etc would prove useful for later users. If any activities that occurred during the interview could actually be noted in the transcript that would be useful also. This may refer to formal data production activities that are a planned part of the interview event, such as the production of a drawing or the explaining of another visual document, since the introduction of an activity into an interview may not read logically in the final transcript document. Unplanned activities and sensory data, such as a participant staring out of the window, texting, seeming anxious or excited etc could also be useful to have included in transcripts at the appropriate points. This kind of contextual information may help to orient the re-user to the dynamics of the interview at the time the words are being said (rather than, or in addition to, a set of interview notes written up after the fact and deposited elsewhere in the archive). Such detail may help the re-user to understand the conversational context in which the data were produced.

^v Enhancing authenticity and depth of detail about lived experiences is accompanied by rapidly improving technologies for storing and retrieving a proliferation of data (‘found’ as well as generated through research). It is important that we ensure a parallel advance in strategies for recruiting this wealth of detail to general explanatory purposes, theory building and linked resources for critically informed evaluation and effective social intervention.