**'Going back: 'Stalking', talking and researcher responsibilities in qualitative longitudinal research'**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the process of going back in qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) to gather later accounts of unfolding personal experiences. The design of interview-based QLR is usually premised on collecting data, over-time, around an unfolding experience or event. This design facilitates the establishment of an on-going research relationship and 'rapport' and the accessing of fluid and time-sensitive accounts of individual experiences, leading to more nuanced understandings of temporal subjectivities. However in practice maintaining a sample in QL research, which may span a number of years, can be challenging and the process of going back, complicated. This paper reflects on issues and responsibilities which can arise when researchers try to access and go back to participants, especially where experiences once optimistically narrated and future-oriented have unfolded in unplanned and personally unwelcome ways. Using researcher experiences and the data from later phases of two UK based QLR studies on transition to first-time motherhood and first-time fatherhood, the practical steps of maintaining contact, reconnecting with participants and going back are documented. How does the passage of time and changes in participant's lives alter research relationships, interpretations of data and researcher responsibilities?

**Key Words:** QLR, going back, time, narrative, motherhood, fatherhood

**INTRODUCTION**

The growing interest in and use of qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) emerges in response to more complex social worlds and conceptualisations of time (Henwood & Shirani, 2012a; Neale & Flowerdew, 2003; Miller, 2005, 2010; McLeod and Thomson, 2009; Thomson et al, 2003). This growth reflects an undertaking by researchers to understand and make sense of experiences as they unfold *over time*: leading to research findings which are sensitively attuned to the detail of individual experience and so are likely to be relevant to policy makers, stakeholders and others (Thomson et al, 2003; Corden & Millar, 2007; Neale, 2012; Shirani & Henwood, 2011). Interview-based, qualitative longitudinal research, increasingly undertaken from different disciplinary perspectives, enables accounts to be collected as biographically transformative experiences are lived through and/or reflected upon and narrated. Other QLR methods include archival document research, case studies, revisiting studies and a growing demand to archive and share qualitative longitudinal data (Neale, 2012; Thomson, 2007; Stanley, 2012). While qualitative research rejects positivist notions of fixity and prediction, qualitative *longitudinal* research emphasises the temporal dimensions of experience and understanding as well as problematizing linear constructions of time (Bornat, 2008; Henwood & Shirani, 2012a). QLR requires researchers to be sensitive to individual horizons and constructions of time and experiences lived through time, in ways that often do not overlap with societal assumptions and expectations. However, as practices of QLR are increasingly refined and the frontiers advanced, so different research considerations arise which require further scrutiny. These include the practical aspects of maintaining samples and revisiting participants over longer trajectories as well as significant issues associated with the accumulation of new data.

The practical steps of tracing individuals who have previously participated in our research can, at times, feel analogous to stalking - a usually unwelcome and dubious practice facilitated by and associated with internet technologies and social media. But these powerful tools can also be used to trace, find and confirm (unsuspecting) participants contact details and their (geographical) whereabouts and (even) current employment status, when going back in research. Using these tracing tools has enabled me to find and re-establish contact with research participants, providing new data collection opportunities. However the process has also involved feelings of ambivalence and some trepidation – is this the right person, will they remember the earlier study, will they be unhappy/angry at being traced and/or will they agree to be interviewed again? In this paper two QLR studies (described below) are drawn

upon to illustrate practical steps as well as ethical and philosophical considerations encountered as the two QLR projects were extended and participants revisited.

Taking a longer view and returning to participants to invite them to reflect back across episodes in their lives which were captured in earlier phases of a QLR study, raises a number of issues for the researcher. First, is *practically* how to locate and re-establish contact with participants and the ethical concerns associated with this undertaking. Next, the accumulation of new data which may provide alternative and/or contradictory versions of aspects of the earlier research (e.g. experiences of transition to first-time motherhood) prompt questions of what constitutes 'the data', as well as issues of authenticity as understood in relation to reliability and trustworthiness of accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Neale has recently deliberated, '*which* versions of events carry authenticity' (Neale, 2013:12 emphasis added). Additionally, the (re)ordering of past events collected in earlier interviews can offer the researcher novel opportunities to ask new questions of 'old' data in ways similar to secondary data analysis (Bornat, 2008). In turn, fresh analytical insights and dividends may be gained through the analysis of cumulative (over a longer time period) and so more richly layered and textured episodes of experience and narration. Going back into lives and experiences which have unfolded in unexpected ways, and reminding the participant of an earlier version of their self, can enrich theorising of temporal subjectivity, for example in relation to understandings of the storied human self (Miller, 2005). In the sections below these areas are reflected upon as the (current) process of 'going back' in QLR studies is undertaken (2013 - ongoing), but first a brief overview of the studies is provided.

***The studies:***

The two UK based qualitative longitudinal (QL) studies which are drawn upon in this article have broadly focused on women's and men's transition experiences as they have become parents for the first time. The initial 'Transition to Motherhood' study followed 17 women[2] through a year in their life as they became mothers for the first time (Miller, 2005; 2007). The participants were interviewed on three separate occasions; before the birth, in the early weeks following the birth and at a later interview when the baby was approximately 9 -10 months old. Semi-structured interview schedules were designed for each of the three interviews.

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[2] Sample details are described elsewhere in detail. See for example Miller, 2005

Recruitment commenced in 1995 and data collection was completed in 1998 and analysed/ reanalysed in subsequent years (2005, 2007 2012). Much more recently and following a serendipitous meeting with a researcher who had 'gone back' many years after the completion of a questionnaire based study, I decided that going back to the women in the original sample would be timely – their children would be approximately 18 years old – and fascinating. Going back would enable me to capture much later episodes of the women's mothering experiences and place these later experiences alongside their original transcripts, producing a longer view of mothering and motherhood experiences. University research ethics approval, which had not been a requirement when the original study was carried out (Miller, 2012), was gained for this later data collection phase in 2012 (see below) and the 'Motherhood revisited' study commenced in 2013. The rationale for undertaking this new phase of the original project – for going back – was recognition of what such a return may be able to illuminate. The interviews would be able to collect data at another transitional stage in the women's lives as they mother older, teenage children who will have reached an age (18 years) where decisions about futures associated with transitions to adulthood (for example, education and work directions) and other more immediate concerns can occupy both young lives and mothering identities and experiences. The research would also gather participant's reflections on how their mothering experiences had unfolded and the ways in which these could be narrated.

The companion QLR 'Transition to Fatherhood' study was commenced several years after the motherhood study, with interview data initially being collected between 2005 and 2007. However although this study followed the same research design as the earlier Motherhood study, it was decided once the study commenced to extend the time frame to include an additional (fourth) interview with the fathers when their child reached their second birthday (Miller, 2010). The sample in this study also consisted of 17 men[3] who were becoming fathers for the first time. During the interview carried out at 2 years, participants were asked if they would mind being contacted again if a later data collection phase should be added to the original study and there was general agreement among participants. In 2012 University research ethics committee approval was gained to re-contact the participants in the original Fatherhood study at the time their first-born child reached school age. The rationale for keeping the study 'live' was both to add to a gradually growing literature on early years

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[3] Sample details for this study are reported in detail elsewhere (See Miller, 2010)

fathering experiences and to return to a sample seemingly comfortable ('socialised') with the qualitative open-ended and iterative[4] interview format. Many had remarked on enjoying the opportunity to 'talk in this way'. In the extract below Joe reflects on having this (for him) novel interview space in which to think,

'none of your friends are ever going to ask you a question like about fatherhood, or anything and I've never sort of thought about that before. So for me it makes me think really about sort of questions that you never really thought of and it's been really helpful for me yeah. I've really enjoyed them' (Joe, Fatherhood Study).

Like Joe, many of the other new fathers remarked on enjoying the interviews and opportunity to think and 'talk in this way'.

## GOING BACK IN QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

The term qualitative *longitudinal* research of course infers temporality and the practice of returning and going back, whether that is to participants, data collected in earlier times and archived, or other forms of recorded personal histories (Bornat, 2008; Henwood & Shirani, 2012a; Mauthner, 2012; Stanley, 2012). Similarly QLR involves research relationships which 'need to be sustained and navigated' (Neale, 2013:15) and engages particular ideas of 'participation' (Birch & Miller, 2012) and ongoing 'informed' consent (Miller & Bell, 2012; Miller & Boulton, 2007; Wiles et al, 2008), which are typically different to those in one-off interview designs (Henwood & Shirani, 2012a; Henwood & Shirani, 2012b; Neale & Flowerdew, 2003). Whilst in quantitative research, problems of sample attrition have featured in methodological discussion, in QLR studies 'there have been few efforts to provide guidance on how to maintain contact with a sample' (Farrall et al. forthcoming, page no.; Ward and Henderson 2003). As noted earlier, this paper explores the process of rekindling research projects and prolonging their longitudinal dimensions in ways which had not been anticipated at their inception. This presents new challenges and responsibilities for the researcher, not only concerning the practicalities of tracing and re-accessing a sample - especially in one study where participants were accessed and recruited before email and other social media were mainstream research tools - but what is found if and when contact is made as lives unfold in unforeseen and, sometimes, personally undesired ways. In both the original Transition to Motherhood and Fatherhood studies I had been struck by how willing, once accessed, individuals had been to agree to subsequent interviews and, in the Fatherhood

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[4] After the first interview and at the start of each subsequent interview, I would begin by talking about what they the participant had said in their last interview. For example, "when we last met you said…., you were thinking about…, you said you were concerned about" etc…Clearly this approach prompts a particular type of reflection (see Miller 2010, Chapter 7).

study, to sign a consent form to this effect (Miller & Bell, 2012). Even though participants had been accessed during the antenatal period of a first pregnancy and could not know how their experiences would unfold, journeys into first-time parenthood were envisaged as relatively straightforward, 'natural' and so unproblematic. Of course experiences unfolded in all sorts of unforeseen and sometimes unsettling and baffling ways (Miller, 2007).

The practical process of maintaining a sample once accessed in QLR is now made more straightforward via internet and social media contact, sending project updates, newsletters and so forth. Indeed the advent and proliferation of the internet and social media has changed research practice in a multitude of ways (e.g. recruitment, different types of data collection, data archiving and dissemination) (Mauthner, 2012; Convery & Cox, 2012; Hookway, 2008, Meho, 2006). However in QLR commenced in the 1990s the internet based/ social media research tools now taken-for-granted did not exist or permeate research in the routine ways now often employed. In the original phase of the Motherhood Study contact (following snowballing and interest being expressed in the project) with participants was initiated and maintained by the postal service (postcards) and (landline) telephones across the duration of the project. A few years later, the subsequent Fatherhood Study used email and mobile phones/texts to initiate and maintain contact with the sample, sometimes beyond the final interview in the first phase of the study (e.g. participants sometimes sent updates on their baby and/or subsequent births). However even though the internet/social media had not been used in the Motherhood Study, these tools have been essential for tracing and re-contacting the original sample. I have also been sensitive to the fact that researcher and participant perspectives in relation to the significance of a project are likely to vary. This had been made clear in the original Motherhood study when, on re-contacting a participant several months after completion of a year of interviews, she had replied that the study seemed "so long ago that to be honest I'd forgotten about it". A concern in going back then is who will remember the original project?

Dropping back into people's lives in QLR takes the researcher into terrain which is familiar, recognisable and also unknown. The familiar and recognisable arises from the nature of QL studies which often explore participant subjectivities and episodes of change or transformation in intensive ways (for example, in the two studies reported here this was through regular in-depth interviews, postal and email communications, mobile phone calls and texts). But lives unfold in all sorts of unplanned ways and as researchers we go back into

unknowable situations. The practical process of going back in the Motherhood and Fatherhood studies once University research ethics approval had been gained to extend the projects has involved a range of different strategies. Because the elapse of time in the fatherhood study between the last interview and the new proposed (first-born child starting school) interview was only a matter of 3-4 years, and this was the more recent of the two QLR studies, I had email, mobile phone details and home/work addresses for the men, getting back in this study was more straightforward in terms of contact and re-access. But this did not mean that going back was without ethical consideration or did not pose questions for me as a researcher, especially in relation to 'coercion' and the sometimes 'therapeutic' nature of the interviews - issues returned to later (see Birch & Miller, 2000). In the motherhood study seventeen years had elapsed since the intensive year of transition interviews and the study information sheet was used to try to capture this and to reassure (see extract below). But I still had to find the sample, before this information sheet could be shared.

*I am contacting you now to see if you would once again be willing to be interviewed by me now that your child (born during the original study) is a teenager. I appreciate that many years have passed since the original study and that your life is probably very busy, but I would be very grateful if you could spare the time to be interviewed once again. Just as in the original study I am very keen to hear first-hand about your experiences of mothering a now older child - and the interview would be arranged at a place and time of your choosing.*

Extract from Information Sheet 'Motherhood Experiences: The Teenage Years'

### *Accessing samples – again: Some practical and ethical reflections and steps*

As noted earlier the methodological concerns with sample attrition found in quantitative research have until very recently, not been a similar concern in QLR (see Farrall et al. forthcoming). This is related in part to methodological concerns in quantitative research with sample size, representativeness and controlling for biases, and in such matters sample attrition needs to be accounted for. Even though QLR emanates from different epistemological concerns where subjective experiences, context and time predominate, rather than measurement and generalizability, being able to account for who participates in our research – and who declines and why - can be essential, perhaps especially so when researching transformative experiences over time. Record keeping (on a spreadsheet which can be easily updated) becomes an important research tool when retracing and maintaining

samples in QLR, both to build as transparent a picture of the sample as possible and also to guard against coercion (see below). The outcome of any attempt at re-access/contact should also be noted, for example that contact has been achieved, but interview declined (Farrall et al. forthcoming). Of the 17 participants in the first phase of the Fatherhood study, contact was established with 11 of the fathers and 10 have (so far) been interviewed.  Attempts were made to contact 4 of the other fathers (two were not contacted due to leaving the UK and other personal circumstances). Of the 4 participants who did not reply to various emails, text messages and posted letter requests, I am uncertain if contact details were correct, but I feel uncomfortable making repeated attempts at contact as this began to feel (potentially) 'coercive'. One father who was contacted and about to be interviewed illustrated why going back in QL research requires sensitivity. Finding James[5] had been a lengthy process, he had moved home, changed job several times and was eventually located (stalked) following google searches of Company web sites (based on my knowledge of his occupation) and finally contacted via the online site Linkedin UK, once his new job had been identified. Just as the interview arrangements had been confirmed via several email exchanges, I received the following email:

Hello Tina,

Sorry for the delay in getting back. Since we last spoke we have decided to separate. This is a bit of shock. I do not think it is a good time to do this?

Good luck with the research.

Thanks,

I responded expressing my sadness at this turn of events and asking him to contact me if he did want to re-join the study at a later date[6].  Tracing others has, not surprisingly, led to a range of responses ranging from enthusiastic to polite refusal (of those contacted, on only one occasion so far) as the emails below indicate:

Hi Tina

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[5] All names used to refer to participants are pseudonyms.
[6] I remain hopeful a future interview will take place.

Funnily enough I was talking about the study the other day and I would be more than willing to participate once again, a lot has happened since then!! (Fatherhood study)

Hello Tina

How lovely to hear from you. It's quite a coincidence that you should get in touch, because I was looking for something in my desk the other day and came across the tape you gave me after interviewing me! (Motherhood study)

Dear Tina,
I am sorry but I am unable to take part in the survey[7].
Kind regards,
(Motherhood study)

Re-accessing the women in the Motherhood study has been complicated by the elapse of time (commenced mid 1990's) and lack of up-to-date contact details. The internet and other forms of social media have been vital in locating and contacting these participants. The practical steps taken have included simple name searches (the more unusual surname the better) via google search engines, online search of the telephone directory 192 which provides information on household name, address, names of other occupants (used to check partner/husband names if noted in original interview transcripts) and electoral roll details as well as length of occupancy. Other modes of tracing participants have involved internet searches using any details I have about them, for example that they have a child aged 17 – 18 years, type of employment they (or their husband/partner) may have had at the time of the original interviews. Searching in this way, two participants have been found through different School Parents Association information pages on the internet in which their names and email addresses were found, a further two through online newspaper articles in which they or their (as it turned out, ex) husband[8] had featured and another through an online advisory service advertised on the internet (traced through earlier employment details and the participant's

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[7] I was interested that although the invitation email had talked about an interview, this participant used the word 'survey' in her response, suggesting she may not have recalled the details of the earlier phase and format of the study. I was also aware from another participant in this study that this participant had divorced and remarried since the original study, which also may have been a reason for her reluctance to be interviewed again – although this was not the case for others whose lives had changed in similar ways.
[8] What has become clear in going back in both studies is the number of participants who are no longer married or in the partnership they were during the first phase of interviews.

unusual surname). Following up one of the newspaper leads I was able to confirm that a participant had continued to live in the same geographical area and found a surname and initial match in a BT telephone directory. As I made the phone call it gradually dawned on me that the person on the other end of the line was possibly the 18 years old son (i.e. the baby born in the original phase of the QLR project) of the participant. This was confirmed when the participant returned my call and agreed to be interviewed again. Using snowballing techniques in the original study also enabled me to return to another participant as two participants were still in touch. Similarly, a 'gatekeeper'[9] used in the original phase of the Motherhood study and whose details I knew to be unchanged has been (recently) contacted and agreed to send my contact details via her Facebook page to her sister and a (now possibly estranged?) sister-in-law, both original participants in the study. It is not unusual to have some personal association with the gatekeepers we use in our research, which had been the case here, but I still felt some unease in using the gatekeeper in this way after so many years (Miller & Bell, 2012).

These forms of participant tracing have been extremely time consuming and have also confirmed how much personal information is held on each of us in electronic databases: at times I have felt like a stalker. Going back has involved ethically double-edged and ambivalent feelings as coercive practices and notions of consent are carefully and sensitively negotiated and managed. In the Motherhood study going back is a work in progress. Of the 17 original participants, 7 have so far responded to my contact attempts with 6 of these participants being interviewed and one participant declining to participate (see email above). Tracing contact details for the remaining participants continues and is only possible because the original information I held on participants was (safely) stored, rather than destroyed as now required by some ethics committees.

***Going back: some philosophical concerns and later 'new' data***

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[9] Gatekeepers were used in the original phase of the Motherhood study to approach women they knew who met the study criteria and ask them if they would be interested in participating in the study. If they expressed an interest they were given my contact details and asked to contact me.

Philosophical concerns can also arise as we (attempt to) go back to participants in QLR. These concerns hinge on broader questions of conceptualisations of time and how the elapse of time changes earlier interpretations – both by participants and by the researcher - of narratives and data (Bornat, 2008; Henwood & Shirani, 2012). These questions lead us to consider not only what constitutes 'the data'[10], but also how new reflections and interpretations by participants, facilitated by the passage of time, add to, edit and alter the earlier versions of personal experience. What too of earlier data analysis and theorisations? In practice the elapse of time in QLR provides new opportunities for secondary analysis of earlier interview data alongside primary analysis of the newly collected data. These simultaneous undertakings merge,  blurring what are usually regarded as distinct data analysis phases in other research approaches. But in the cases described here, this provides an analytic dividend, sharpening the analytic lens, as a primary focus in the original data analysis on how selves are understood and narrated through periods of significant (and gendered) transition can be revisited, extended and (re)theorised. The accumulation and weaving together of episodes of experience gained through QLR helps to illuminate - in these particular research projects - the 'tenuousness' of selves and selfhood, the ways in which powerful discourses shape what is felt to be permissible to say (when) and what remains unspoken, such that earlier theorisations can be confirmed, re-evaluated and refined.

The woven together accounts of everyday experiences, narrated in sometimes contradictory and edited ways, from different vantage points through parenthood journeys illuminate subjectivity as moving and reflexive.  Across the accumulated interviews, unfolding, individual stories reveal tenuous selves[11] in which 'core' and recognisable aspects of subjectivity are edited and *re*-narrated over time (Thomson, 2009). In these studies the use of an interview schedule with broad, open-ended questions *('I wonder if you can describe to me how you felt when….')* across the interviews invites reflection in particular areas, which are returned to in subsequent interviews. The elapse of time between interviews, especially in the Motherhood study, has a telescopic effect as distant (in terms of time) events are suddenly brought closer. Time then 'is central to the task of creating a moving picture of the lifecourse'

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[10] It is interesting to ask what constitutes 'the data' in this technologically rich age when even in research which does not have a longitudinal component, various contacts by email and mobile phone may have been made in advance of and following an interview. What exactly is 'the data' in these circumstances, the recorded interview alone? And how/will the other interactions around the interview have influenced how it is conducted and subsequently analysed?

[11] See Miller, 2005 Chapter 1 'A Storied Human Life: A Narrative Approach' and Chapter 7 'Conclusions and Reflections: Making Sense of Motherhood'.

(Neale, 2015) and the longer and moving view taken here helps to illuminate in important ways twists, turns and messiness as individuals 'negotiate' what at the outset are envisaged as unproblematic life-course (parenting) trajectories.

The original QLR Transition to Motherhood and Fatherhood studies collected data on anticipations, intentions and experiences of first-time motherhood and fatherhood. Narratives were future-orientated, with longer views of family lives (mostly) anticipated in optimistic ways. However in going back, interview data increasingly documents post-separation, post-divorce and single parenting experiences and the daily struggles and successes of managing responsibilities around paid work, caring and intimate relationships. Interestingly, among the first participants to respond to the new interview invitations in both studies were participants whose lives had changed significantly and in which they positioned themselves as having been catalysts for change. This again confirms the importance of documenting recruitment strategies and outcomes in longitudinal research and *who* make up our samples. In the Fatherhood study a participant who had left his wife and two children (3 months earlier) reflects upon this in the later interview (when his first-born child reached school age) in the following extract,

'As I say there were lots of things that [wife] and I have spoken about but certainly I think probably the strain of parenting sort of contributes to that because and we just got into a rut and like I say we stopped doing things as a couple. When there was the opportunity I guess to do things, [wife] just wasn't really keen, so it was almost like I say like a one parent family, it felt like to me, just living under the same roof' (Fatherhood Study)

Similarly, in the motherhood study, significant change was a feature of another interview where a marriage had ended and new relationship (recently) begun,

'We did the Relate thing in 2003 when he [ex-husband] was made redundant and we were going through a really bad time then because I was working and I'd come home and the washing up hadn't been done, the washing hadn't been hung out, nothing had been done and it just, I just felt angry…. … there was a lot of anger then. So we did the whole Relate thing. We separated for three months, he lived with [friends] and they were very good to him. Then we did Relate and got back together again and things were great for a while. But you know it all sort of unravelled again' (Motherhood Study)

As well as sharing much longer view insights into how relationships and family lives are experienced and managed, these later interviews felt as though they provided an opportunity not only for reflection, but also for setting the 'record straight' and having personal actions and new understandings of selfhood 'witnessed' by me the researcher. More so than in the earlier interviews, these later interviews have felt at times therapeutic as past events are made sense of and reordered (sometimes unwittingly) by the participants (Birch & Miller, 2000;

Thomson, 2012). Time, repetition and familiarity in QLR can heighten feelings of 'rapport' and 'trust' in the researcher as a (safe) confidante, as well as 'intrapersonal dynamics' to operate as relationships between researcher and researched also evolve and change (Thomson, 2012:1; Duncombe & Jessop, 2012; Lau Clayton, 2012).

 So, while the practical steps of re-establishing contact, reconnecting with participants and going back can be documented (Farrall et al. forthcoming), the effects of this on our participants may be less clear. A characteristic of the data collected in qualitative longitudinal research is its richness, resulting from the telling of subjective experiences around personal events and change. In the Motherhood study going back, especially after the interval of many years and when the focus of the original study has also reached a socially recognisable milestone (an 18th birthday), has begun to provide richly detailed data. This results from the same researcher conducting all the interviews (which is not always possible) and a sense of familiarity, rapport and 'trust' (for both parties) emanating from this. The going back interviews begin with a reminder of the last interview (which may have been 17 years earlier) using the participants words taken from the earlier recorded interviews. Extending the lens and inviting the women to look back over their mothering journeys has produced new insights into the original subject, for example experiences as subsequent children have been born (*and I remember when I was going through really bad postnatal depression following the birth of [second baby] and ringing the Samaritans'*) as well as casting light on developments, change *and* continuities in aspects of family and work lives and intimate relationships.

I was also aware that in the Motherhood study capturing the women's reflections back across the years in a *single* interview would be a challenge. I contemplated repeat interviews and made provision for this in my ethics application. In the end (and to date) I have only conducted single interviews, partly because these have been lengthy and participants have been kind enough to give their time in this way. However the interviews will likely have prompted reflection and so I have also used a post-interview 'diary', which I have emailed to participants, inviting them to write about any post-interview thoughts they might want to add. Responses have been varied, but the extract below demonstrates the powerful and rich, longer view reflections on experiences, which can be collected in (extended) QLR.

> I think when we were discussing motherhood on Wednesday ……. I'm not sure I said much about the positive sides. I didn't ever plan to have children and it took me ages to feel comfortable enough in my marriage to want to have a family but it turned out to be the best decision I ever made. I loved being pregnant, giving birth, I embraced the whole earth mother at home life when I could have had a career and even now I have teenagers I love being with them and still value mothering over my work, I collect them from school if they are ill and take time off to look after them, let them have parties in my house and look after them and their friends when they have too much to drink. I always plan my week to make sure we have some time together. I think what I am trying to say is that all that time and love invested in your children is worth it when you see them strong and happy in their own lives, and the relationships that I have with them and they have together are made from a very early age.
>
> (Gillian. Post-interview email diary. Dec 2013)

Interestingly, Gillian's husband had left the family home a year before the interview and in this post-interview diary extract, and in contrast to the transcripts from Gillian's earlier interviews in the first phase of the Motherhood study he is now erased from Gillian's account of *her* mothering and motherhood.

**CONCLUSION**

As Neale has recently noted 'adding time into the mix of a qualitative study heightens the need for ethical literacy' and this is certainly the case if a decision is taken to extend the timeframe of existing studies (2013:6). The increasing sweep of ethical regulation also means that 'going back' or extending a QL study in originally unplanned ways, may not be possible due to more recent ethics requirements about data storage *('data generated in the course of the research…must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project')*. Other procedures aimed at protecting confidentiality include '*disposing of information that can reveal the identity of participants or places carefully e.g. burning or shredding rather than disposal in wastebaskets*' be undertaken. These requirements, had they existed when the original Motherhood study was undertaken, would have prevented the tracing of participants and meant that the original transcripts may have been destroyed.  But researchers do have ethical responsibilities whenever they undertake any aspect of research: these can be heightened in qualitative longitudinal research as research relationships, 'trust' and associated expectations are established over a longer period. We have responsibilities to tread gently and ethically in our attempts to return to participants. This requires that we take care in the ways we trace and

(attempt to) maintain a sample especially in relation to any coercive practices, even though (and because) as QLR project timelines extend, a desire to maintain a sample may be felt even more keenly as time sensitive accounts of individual lives accrue. In particular, going back in QLR requires that ethics committees and researchers are able to sensitively respond to more fluid notions of informed consent, research participation and data collection. The longer view taken in QLR does not fit neatly into more traditional modes of research design on which ethics regulation has been based. In practical terms, and where consent forms are used, these could include further explanation of what longitudinal participation may involve and a check that participants (at least at the time) are happy to be contacted again in the future (using available internet/social media means) about (currently unplanned) aspects of the QLR study (e.g. further interviews). However, more philosophical questions about when a project (ever) ends as data archiving becomes more commonplace and so, when informed consent ends, complicates the picture further.

Going back in the Motherhood and Fatherhood studies has involved a range of internet based searching strategies via many internet sites and social media tools, which has confirmed that we are indeed an electronically surveilled society (Lyon, 2003). However using social media, for example a study Facebook page, and regular blogs can be a relatively straight forward, cheap and labour efficient way, to maintain a sample for example, through regular study updates, but it would not be appropriate for all types of sample. The benefits of going back in qualitative longitudinal research, which had initially studied transformative life events (becoming a mother and becoming a father), and collecting later, contemporary and retrospective narratives as the transition morphs into the everyday provides a time sensitive way to explore longer term experiences and individual/group discursive practices and identity work. The complexity of the narrative enterprise had become clear during the original data analysis and these later episodes now illuminate discursive practices longitudinally. Adding these later episodes of experience to earlier transcripts contributes to opportunities for theorising gendered mothering, fathering and parenting subjectivities and contemporary responsibilities and arrangements. In a small, nuanced and valuable way the collection of qualitative data over time gradually accrues to become a form of deeply layered, rich QLR 'big data'.

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