

INVENTING ADULTHOODS: MAKING THE LONG VIEW

THE RESEARCHERS PERSPECTIVE



This project is a unique qualitative longitudinal study of young people, running since 1996 in five contrasting locations in the UK – a city in Northern Ireland, a disadvantaged estate in the north of England, a rural area, a leafy suburb, and an inner city site. Each site had a dedicated researcher, responsible for the sample and the data generation. The researchers talked with the young people about their lives, tracking them from school, to home, to work, through the ‘critical moments’ that changed their pathways. During the project the experiences of the young people have been documented within academic outputs, so this exhibit explores a different perspective of the research; that of the researchers’ experiences of these longstanding research relationships.

Researchers following young people as they grow up, cannot know what to expect each time they return. This board shows the researchers’ thoughts, feelings and predictions for two young people at each interview point, as all move through time into the unknown future, offering another perspective on the experience of exploring young people’s lives in this way.

Nat is a young man from a middle class family living comfortably in the commuter belt of a city. Here the researcher gives her thoughts, feelings and predictions for Nat and describes critical moments he has experienced at each interview

FIRST INTERVIEW AT 18

Interviewer

I feel Nat may have better chances if he works more. Spending money is important to him, but he does not want to study or work to get it.

Critical Moments

Parents threaten to divorce
Father has a medical emergency

SECOND INTERVIEW AT 19

Interviewer

Nat is a very likeable young man who will get nowhere fast if he doesn’t pull his finger out, but he’s hampered by the unsettled nature of his family life he’ll probably be even more in debt by the time we next meet.

Critical Moments

Split up with girlfriend
Disappointing A level results
Enjoying red & racy new car

THIRD INTERVIEW AT 19+

Interviewer

I’m worried about this lad. He has been quite severely affected by the traumas involved with his parents’ marriage. He is quite sensitive & concerned about things, but could easily go off the rails.

Critical Moments

Parents plan their divorce
Got GNVQ in Business Studies
Started university

FOURTH INTERVIEW AT 21

Interviewer

Hard to say - having not got down to doing anything for the last two years he’s just done really well in his exam re-sits! Can he sustain this? He admits he’s lazy but I’m hopeful he can sort himself out.

Critical Moments

Parents separate, & mother & siblings leave England.
Failed Uni Year 1
Retook Year 1, and got an excellent result

FIFTH INTERVIEW AT 23

Interviewer

He’s a real mixture of charm, ability, laziness, casualness and good intentions. I honestly don’t know what to predict. I’d like him to get through his degree, but I’m not sure he’ll try hard enough.

Critical Moments

Failed Uni Year 2
Got driving ban
His view is that ‘Life is one long critical moment & it would take 15 hours to tell!’

RESEARCHER COMMENTS ON NAT OVER TIME:

..He treats me as a combination of friend, interviewer, and counsellor; ‘I feel quite attached to this young man and concerned for his well-being;’ ‘I feel he’s had more of a raw deal than many others from this school;’ ‘It doesn’t seem to me that he has much control in life.’

RESEARCHER COMMENTS ON MAISIE

Maisie has struggled against this quite brutal localised world with inward looking and narrow views and social horizons throughout the study, towards a much more globalised lifestyle and world view. Education has been her route but sheer will and determination has been her key motor.

Maisie is a young woman from an embedded working class family living in a disadvantaged estate in the north of England. The researcher gives her thoughts, feelings and predictions.

Maisie offered no critical moments but her interviewer sees her life as a series of critical moments, including loss of a baby before the first interview, when she realised she was really not ready for motherhood; her own mother’s serious illness and operations; constant incidents with her siblings and their need for care and support, demands of doing at least two jobs whilst following a university course. Her interviewer had many telephone conversations supporting Maisie over time.

FIRST INTERVIEW AT 17

Felt Maisie genuinely wanted to do the things she talked about– but with ill-health and teen pregnancy it was going to take a lot to pursue her dreams. Hoping she would, fearing she would not be able to.

SECOND INTERVIEW AT 18

Showing determination, hanging on in college. The sense of agency felt limited by poverty, health, & compliance with her boyfriend. I felt I was wrong and hoped so.

THIRD INTERVIEW AT 20

I’m seriously in awe of this determined young woman. She’s not finding uni easy but holds down two jobs funds, runs and cares for her family. Definitely got it wrong on the agency front – this girl is made of steel!

FOURTH INTERVIEW AT 22

Didn’t feel there was sufficient support to see her through. But she’s turned things around. I so hope she does & feel confident that if there is a way, she will – such is her fortitude



RESEARCH TEAM

Sheila Henderson
Janet Holland
Sheena McGrellis
Sue Sharpe
Rachel Thomson

