Preparing Qualitative Longitudinal data for sharing and re-use:
Making the Long View Lessons for Timescapes 2009

These lessons are drawn from the experience of a longstanding research team funded to explore the processes of preparing qualitative longitudinal (QL) data for sharing and re-use AFTER DATA COLLECTION WAS COMPLETED. Some lessons are also drawn from the organic connection between the Making the Long View (MLV) project and the Making of Modern Motherhoods (MoMM) and Dynamics of Motherhood (DoM) projects.

Collecting QL data in the archiving context
- Problems concerning confidentiality can be anticipated in advance with archiving in mind. For example, ensuring that visual data does not include people or faces may mean that it can be archived and shared. Excluding identifying data from data collection is easier than removing this information later on (MoMM insight*)*
- Informed consent can be developed within ongoing research relationships by informally feeding back to participants' emergent interpretations of their data and encouraging participants to think about what they are happy to have included in the archive. This can work well when negotiating the collection of visual data (getting participants to choose what to photograph encourages them to imagine the archive) (DoM insight) (Note: The Family Resemblances Project of Real Life Methods also found negotiation over individual images very effective, in their case, for publication and presentation rather than archiving.)

Consent and confidentiality
- Take a positive approach. Whilst it is never possible to promise 100% confidentiality, you can negotiate with respondents on this basis
- Get the balance right between consultation and creating too much work for both researcher and researched, and between giving enough and too much information for informed consent
- Be mindful of the difficulty involved in managing the iterative relationship between data preparation and the consent process: investing intensive labour into a relationship that could fall apart
- Confidentiality, the control and ownership of data are often unclear and confused in research projects. A commitment to archiving data demands that these questions are distinguished and addressed

Data storage
- Take a pragmatic approach to making technological decisions (e.g. digital audio file type), balancing quality and future-proofing with budget and storage space
- Giving due consideration to the future will pay dividends as the study develops over time: storing data both by case and cross-sectionally is likely to provide the most effective solution
- Beware of data proliferation: the risk of breaching privacy and confidentiality increases as team members transfer data files to mobile data pens and laptops

- Store a (regularly updated) back-up of all data files in at least one alternative location to the main research office
- Version control is also an essential ongoing process. Ensure that a 'Mistress' copy of all data files is stored in the main office and updated and backed-up regularly
- Data protection is high on today's research agenda but the fine detail can easily be neglected under the pressures of researchers' daily experience. Ensure that all data files stored as the definitive version before undergoing any further preparation for archiving have no original names linked to id. numbers etc.

Preparing data for sharing and archiving
- Sharing data with trusted colleagues in a collaborative context can require a different level of data preparation to that required for archiving: the former is short-term and usually involves maintaining responsibility for some degree of control over the data, the latter is long-term and requires entirely 'letting go' of your data to the archive. It is in the latter context that finding creative ways of anonymising QL data – unless it is largely to be time-embargoed or otherwise access-restricted – becomes essential to researchers' comfort and peace of mind
- It is important that the research team discusses how long they wish to have responsibility for and control over access to the dataset, particularly when making decisions about what archived data should be protected by time-embargo or restricted in other ways. The question of who has responsibility is also vital question to resolve
- Enhance and negotiate archiving consent as you go but, in the QL context, leave anonymisation as late as possible
- The work of enhancing transcripts may be conducted by others but sensitive anonymisation that maintains the quality of QL data is most effectively conducted by those immersed in the dataset in question (and may also involve the research participant as part of an ongoing, consultative consent process)
- Enhance transcripts of recorded interviews on a case-by-case basis, re-listening to audio and filling any gaps or correcting any errors made by transcribers. Replace earlier versions with the enhanced version
- Enhancing transcripts is a laborious task, it is useful to 'double-up' and use the opportunity as another level of analysis, noting themes, ideas etc. It can also be useful to note the possible issues/names that may require anonymising at this stage –making it possible, for example, to find and replace names identified at this stage
- Anonymisation of QL data is a cumulative process: it is difficult but essential to hold all of the following in the balance when making anonymisation decisions: internal (to the research team and to Timescapes more broadly) and external 'audiences' for the dataset; cross-case and cross-research site considerations
- Keeping comprehensive tracking tables in a standard format is essential to this cumulative process, allowing a return to transcripts from a particular case or research site the approach to anonymisation develops over time
- Perspectives on the need for and level of anonymisation necessary may change over time during a QL study, as anonymisers become more comfortable with the process. Distance in time from data collection can bring an increased level of objectivity to the process and a decreased level of anxiety

- If working with an existing dataset, listen to or read all interviews for a case before anonymising, but as noted make preliminary notes on data to be anonymised themes etc
- It is essential to maintain consistency in anonymising across a research site. Consistently replaced names of places and people maintain the richness of the data far more effectively than 'Friend 1, 2' etc. The application of this depends on keeping tracking tables
- Research sites vary in the degree to which they can be identified and need protection
- Save and back-up enhanced and anonymised copies of transcripts

Recontextualising datasets and capturing researcher data
- Field notes (and any interim methods of analysis such as case profiles) form an important part of a QL dataset, providing a window on changes over time in the research process, research relationship, research location(s) and researcher identity – as well as in research participants. As such, it is important to consider ways of either anonymising these or otherwise ensuring both participant' and researcher' confidentiality. Researcher' consent is important here
- Researcher process notes are an essential part of preparing data for archiving and sharing
- No two projects are the same, the issues involved in archiving and representing qualitative data will vary in detail
- Different users will have very different contextualisation needs
- When providing contextual data, establish boundaries between what your work and the work of future dataset users should be

Maintaining a QL research team
- A non-hierarchical, collaborative team approach and low investment in the advancement of academic careers amongst some team members is essential to the long-term maintenance of a core QL research team (MLV, MoMM, DoM insight)