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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Coltart, C., Henwood, K., & Shirani, F. (2013). Qualitative secondary analysis in austere times: ethical, professional and methodological considerations. *Historical Social Research*, 38(4), 271-292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.38.2013.4.271-292>

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## Qualitative Secondary Analysis in Austere Times: Ethical, Professional and Methodological Considerations

*Carrie Coltart, Karen Henwood & Fiona Shirani\**

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**Abstract:** »Qualitative Sekundäranalyse in schwierigen Zeiten: Ethische, fachliche und methodologische Überlegungen«. Recent debates in qualitative secondary analysis (OSA) have sought to move beyond polarising arguments in order to develop more nuanced perspectives on the epistemological, analytical and practical opportunities and challenges associated with its methods. This is generally to be welcomed, although there are also signs of unhelpful primary/secondary divisions finding new forms of expression. Focusing on definitional issues and wider contexts of OSA helps to explain the possible sources of ongoing tensions while affording tentative insights into potential opportunities and synergies across the primary/secondary spectrum. Building on work undertaken within the Timescapes Qualitative Longitudinal study, the article also highlights some under-examined costs and risks that may come along with new opportunities created by secondary analysis. Issues of over-privileging secondary analysis claims, making and the timing of qualitative secondary analysis are foregrounded as requiring further consideration if researchers are to take seriously lingering suspicions and fears about qualitative secondary analysis and not dismiss them as simply reactionary or self-serving.

**Keywords:** Ethical challenges, qualitative secondary analysis, epistemology, qualitative longitudinal research, team working.

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Print Version of: Coltart, Carrie, Karen Henwood, and Fiona Shirani. 2013. Qualitative Secondary Analysis in Austere Times: Ethical, Professional and Methodological Considerations. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 14 1, Art. 18 <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1301181>>.

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## 1. Introduction

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Since the mid-1990s there has been an ongoing national (British) and international debate about the potential and problems of secondary analysis in qualitative research (QSA) (e.g. Corti 2000; Hammersley 1997; Heaton 1998; Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen 1997; Mauthner, Parry and Backett-Milburn 1998; Thorne 1994, 1998). More recent discussions (Hammersley 2009; Heaton 2004; Irwin and Winterton, 2011a, 2011b; Moore 2007) mark a rise in optimism about overcoming the impasse in QSA, running counter to some qualitative researchers' perceptions of the overwhelming problems of secondary analysis, including the perceived impossibility of meaningfully transporting qualitative data into new interpretive contexts (see Broom, Cheshire and Emmison 2009; Heaton 2004; Mauthner et al. 1998; for more on this perspective). Recent years have seen a flurry of mainstream sociological QSA projects (e.g. Bishop 2007; Gillies and Edwards 2005; Irwin and Winterton 2011a, 2011b; Irwin, Bornat and Winterton 2012; Savage 2007) which have focused to varying degrees on methodological, conceptual and substantive developments. While perhaps necessary to move the debate forward, the warmly received focus on conceptual and substantive developments has meant that concerns about the professional and ethical challenges posed by QSA have sometimes been pushed towards the background in secondary analysis work, or viewed as less vexing than previously thought. Nevertheless, discussion and development around ethical and professional issues has also moved forward, particularly, though not exclusively, through primary researchers (e.g. ethnographers) who have turned their methodological and ethical reflexivity to address the now well-rehearsed "problems" associated with QSA (Dicks, Mason, Williams and Coffey 2006; Gillies and Edwards 2011; Williams, Dicks, Coffey and Mason 2008). While many of these researchers view the challenges of QSA as substantial though not insurmountable, some articulate deeper concerns when weighing the costs and challenges of QSA against perceived benefits (at the same time questioning simple characterisations of the debate as one between supporters and opponents) (Mauthner and Parry 2009; Parry and Mauthner 2004, 2005).

Based on ideas and work undertaken within the scope of the Timescapes study (see below for details) (e.g. Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomson 2012; Holland, Henderson and Thomson 2006; Neale 2007; Thomson 2007) we feel that these discussions have yet to exhaust the range and complexity of ongoing and evolving challenges surrounding QSA. Of particular salience is the way secondary analysis is being promoted as a strategy for qualitative researchers to navigate profound socio-cultural and political-economic challenges and changes (Mason 2007). For example, QSA may be seen to offer a cost-effective way of maximising methodological and substantive insights from existing research (Corti and Bishop 2005). Alternative strategies could be en-

visaged to maximise such benefits e.g. the provision of time and funding to extend the work of primary teams, rather than rely on new researchers to study under-utilised data – with all the attendant complexities this brings. Potentially, investment in the work of primary teams could prove equally cost effective, build up cumulative insights, and it could give added momentum to strategic research developments and for collaborative work (e.g. to do with teamwork practices, configuration and longevity). However, such an approach has not found favour, with new initiatives leaning heavily towards provision of national infrastructure, public data resources and capacity for wider integration (via international standards). An important concern for us in highlighting these debates is to focus attention onto the dilemmas and tensions implicated in navigating change, not least so that they might be more self-consciously grappled with, if not neatly resolved.

In light of the fact that secondary analysis is now a key research council funding priority in the UK, with the Timescapes project promoted as a qualitative data set for others to mine,<sup>1</sup> we highlight what we see as key contemporary ethical/professional challenges of QSA at different, albeit linked, individual, relational and institutional levels. One conclusion offered is that to move beyond a “climate of suspicion” surrounding QSA (Mason 2007) researchers might be productively engaged around a professional and ethical agenda which emphasises the multiple productive pathways for reworking qualitative data and building knowledge across the primary/secondary spectrum.

The subsequent sections of this article are divided as follows. In the background section we outline some of the definitional issues in qualitative secondary analysis, setting out a position which owes greatly to the work of Janet Heaton (1998, 2004). We then go on to briefly chart the (relatively recent) emergence of an archiving and “data sharing”<sup>2</sup> culture in UK qualitative social science, noting also more contemporary developments such as the promotion of secondary analysis as a strategy for managing the multiple challenges and pressures currently faced by the qualitative research community (e.g. Mason 2007). After outlining some relevant features of the Timescapes study, we put forward the Men as Fathers project perspective on the key epistemological issues that have been at the centre of rumbling debates about qualitative secondary analysis since the mid-1990s. We then go on to discuss some key issues that we see as requiring greater attention: the over-privileging of the work of and claims for secondary analysis; the intensification of ethical and representa-

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<sup>1</sup> See ESRC 2012 Secondary Analysis call, available at <[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/\\_images/SDAI\\_Phase\\_1\\_2012\\_Specification\\_tcm8-19221.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/SDAI_Phase_1_2012_Specification_tcm8-19221.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> We deliberately place the term “data sharing” in quotes in recognition of the fact that the term might be loaded so as to suggest that secondary analysis is equally welcomed and evenly beneficial. While secondary analysis may rightly aspire to these values and outcomes, as we will argue, achieving them may be much more challenging in practice than this somewhat benign term suggests.

tional challenges faced by primary researchers as new lines of research are spawned by secondary analysis; and the timing of secondary analysis. We conclude by arguing that sensitivity to these issues, among the many other uncertainties and risks already linked with qualitative archiving and secondary analysis, might be crucial to garnering greater support for their promotion as part of a broader strategy by the qualitative research community to navigate change and challenge.

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## 2. Background

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### 2.1 Definitional Issues

Key authors on secondary analysis (e.g. Hammersley 2009; Heaton 2004) point out that it is a nebulous and slippery concept. For the purposes of our argument it is therefore important to clarify understandings of the term qualitative secondary analysis and its relationship to both quantitative definitions of secondary analysis and overlapping approaches such as qualitative meta-analysis. Definitions of secondary analysis vary depending on: the types of pre-existing quantitative and qualitative data (including the extent to which data can be understood as pre-existing; Moore 2007); how the functions of secondary analysis are conceptualised; as well as assumptions about *modus operandi* (Heaton 2004).

In an attempt to set out a working definition of qualitative secondary analysis, Heaton usefully identifies some tentative, broad-brush distinctions between quantitative and qualitative secondary analysis, and importantly, overlapping qualitative methodologies such as meta-analysis and documentary analysis. Below we briefly summarise what she identifies as key definitional points and grey areas (see Heaton 1998, 2004 for a more detailed discussion). Firstly, while both quantitative and qualitative secondary analysis draw on pre-existing data to investigate new or additional research questions, quantitative secondary analysis more commonly uses data from projects such as omnibus surveys (designed to supply data for sundry secondary studies) which may not be subject to much (if any) primary analysis. A principle of qualitative secondary analysis on the other hand, is the use of data derived from previous qualitative studies; data originally collected and analysed for other purposes. Secondly, the use of secondary analysis as a means of verifying or refuting the findings of primary studies is generally accepted in quantitative secondary analysis, but is much more controversial in the context of key epistemological and methodological debates on qualitative secondary analysis. Thirdly, while it is often assumed in quantitative secondary analysis that such studies are carried out using data collected by other researchers, the re-use of what Heaton terms “auto-data” (self-collected data sets), either on their own, or in conjunction

with independently generated data, is a recognised strategy within work on the re-use of qualitative data sets (Mauthner et al. 1998; Szabo and Strang 1997; Thorne 1994; West and Oldfather 1995).

Distinctions can also be drawn between qualitative secondary analysis and related methodologies including documentary and conversation analysis and meta-analysis. In broad, although by no means clear-cut terms, secondary analysis can be distinguished from documentary and conversation analysis in terms of the types of data used (non-naturalistic and naturalistic data). Naturalistic data describes data collected with minimal interference by researchers, whereas non-naturalistic or artefactual data describes data solicited for the purposes of social research. Pre-existing qualitative data may take the same format (e.g. life stories and diaries) but can be classified differently (as naturalistic or artefactual) depending on the extent to which the data have been “found” or “produced” by researchers. Despite their use of pre-existing, and often independently produced data, documentary and in particular conversation analysts do not tend to envision their research in terms of conventional “primary” and “secondary” distinctions. Because the data used in documentary and conversation analysis is normally regarded by exponents as naturalistic, it is assumed “to be open to analysis by all on an equal basis” (Heaton 2004, 8); as such these approaches are not generally regarded as secondary methodologies.

Turning now to the similarities and differences between qualitative secondary analysis and meta-analysis, Heaton suggests that a key distinction arises from meta-analysis’s focus on synthesising the research findings of previous studies (rather than using “raw data” to explore new research questions). On the other hand, the interpretive techniques used in some versions of meta-analysis (e.g. “aggregated analysis”: Estabrooks, Field and Morse 1994), and the commitment to producing new interpretations and developing theory (also a focus of meta-ethnography: Noblit and Hare 1998) overlaps conceptually with the aims of secondary analysis. The boundaries between these two methodologies also blur in a recent, well publicised qualitative secondary analysis project (Irwin and Winterton 2011a, 2011b; Irwin et al. 2012) which aims to re-examine and re-work data from multiple linked projects as a means of synthesising data and building knowledge.

Heaton refers to “aggregated analysis” as an apparent hybrid methodology and her emphasis on the sometimes overlapping qualities of these different methodologies underlines the fact that there is no neatly defined space or set of aims unique to qualitative secondary analysis. Similarly, Heaton highlights the high internal variation in the types of data, functions and practices adopted by exponents of different methodologies which draw upon pre-existing data.

Some researchers may feel that Heaton’s definitions of qualitative secondary analysis, in particular her inclusion of research which re-uses self-generated “auto-data” overcomplicates the picture, and that the challenges and potential of “revisiting” data are of a significantly different order to those associated

with re-using data from projects in which the secondary analyst had no primary involvement. However, we feel that there is merit in Heaton's more inclusive (if blurry) categorisation of qualitative secondary analysis in overcoming unhelpful "us" and "them" characterisations of primary and secondary analysis. Heaton's perspective encourages primary researchers to explore opportunities (e.g. by forming collaborative [short and long term] partnerships; seeking funding) to usefully revisit/re-use their own and other researchers' data as "primary-cum-secondary" analysts. Her approach also challenges blanket assumptions about the positioning of secondary analysis vis-à-vis primary research (absence versus presence at proximal context of data production) and therefore encourages more nuanced, reflexive and context specific approaches to the potentials and challenges of qualitative secondary analysis.

## 2.2 Historical and Institutional Context of Qualitative Secondary Analysis

Heaton (2004, Chapter 2) traces both the emergence of qualitative secondary analysis, including its shaping by historical and technological developments in data archiving and data sharing, and the accompanying, ongoing debates about the opportunities and challenges of sharing and re-using data in quantitative and qualitative research. A key turning point in the development of qualitative secondary analysis in the UK was the establishment of the ESRC funded Qualitative Data Archival Resource Centre (Qualidata) at the University of Essex in 1994 (and now incorporated into the Economic and Social Data Service [ESDS]). Qualidata facilitates the archiving of qualitative data and promotes the archiving and sharing of all types of qualitative data across the social sciences. Heaton situates the establishment of Qualidata within a wider context of national and international developments in archiving and re-use, noting the delayed development of qualitative vis-à-vis quantitative re-use (while Qualidata was not formed until 1994, the Social Science Research Council Survey Archive, now the UK Data Archive has been active since 1967) and the longstanding tendency to view the practical, epistemological and ethical challenges of re-using qualitative data as more problematic than the reworking of quantitative data. However, Heaton is unambiguous about wider trends, charting the rise of a "data sharing imperative" in the UK and US social sciences in support of "open scientific enquiry" (2004, 22). Debates about the problems of re-using qualitative data are well-rehearsed (Broom et al. 2009; Corti 2000; Hammersley 1997, 2009; Heaton 1998, 2004; Hinds et al. 1997; Mauthner et al. 1998). Key issues identified include the time and financial costs associated with archiving; the "fit" between the specificity of qualitative data and secondary research questions; the importance placed in qualitative research on researcher involvement in data generation and proximate knowledge of the research field; and

ethical issues around the perils of “data sharing” (in particular maintaining participant anonymity and confidentiality).

Recent growth in qualitative secondary studies in sociology (Bishop 2007; Gillies and Edwards 2005; Savage 2007; among others) has arguably helped to dampen some of the methodological and ethical concerns about QSA, although these secondary studies have mainly been conducted on “historical” archived data sets. A strategy of re-using data from well-known studies where the findings and contributions to knowledge are already established circumvents many problems including professional concerns (e.g. about first rights over publication), albeit as it raises some new ones (i.e. the ethics of (re)presenting key historical figures in social research in the re-analysis of their “unedited” field notes, Gillies and Edwards, 2011). Despite the recent flurry of QSA projects there are still many who question whether the investment in archiving and “data sharing” initiatives are having much impact in terms of stimulating widespread interest in secondary analysis approaches and data sources (Parry and Mauthner 2004, 2005). However, the argument that primary researchers’ investments in preparing data for archiving are wasted in a context in which qualitative researchers continue to prize the value of “being there” (during data collection generation) has been challenged of late. For example, Mason (2007) suggests that the “distance” regarded as inherent to secondary analysis strategies can be configured not a weakness but as a potential strength – enabling new perspectives on old questions. Moreover, “distance” may encourage researchers to “think big” by going beyond the proximate contexts of primary research to address major theoretical and substantive policy issues – all of which are areas where qualitative research could acquire more “impact”, enabling it to flourish in the future.

Mason is enthusiastic about the way secondary analysis and “data sharing” might operate on many fronts to confront the challenges and changes facing the qualitative research community. Working through the challenges of QSA (especially the ethics of “sharing” and “reproducing” data) encourages researchers to be at the forefront of attempts to make sense of and respond to the redrawing of boundaries of public and private space as a result of new technologies and changing cultural attitudes about privacy and identity. The focus on developing data resources and research capacity through QSA is also seen as a tactical move which speaks productively to the broad (quantitatively driven) agendas of the research councils. While we recognise that Mason is making some very important points we believe (and assume that Mason would too) that space also needs to be opened up to reflexively explore some of the potential dilemmas and tensions involved in strategies for navigating change, problems presumably amplified by the difficult economic climate. This includes consideration of whether particular strategies of sharing/pooling data may inadvertently create

“winners” and “losers”, albeit in ways that are no doubt far from straightforward.<sup>3</sup> Other issues include whether the particular language and approaches sometimes associated with QSA (e.g. the language of “going beyond” and “scaling up”) can be seen to be in unhelpful tension with the popular language and purported strengths of qualitative research (texture, nuance, depth). We explicate these points further in the analysis and conclusion section which follows the study overview.

### 2.3 The Timescapes Study

The Timescapes Qualitative Longitudinal study (2007-2012) was the first major qualitative longitudinal study to be funded by the ESRC<sup>4</sup> in the UK. Distributed across five institutions in the UK (Leeds, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Open and London South Bank Universities), it explored how personal and family relationships develop and change over time. The broad aim of Timescapes was to scale up and promote qualitative longitudinal (QL) research, create an archive of data for preservation and sharing, and to demonstrate and encourage re-use of the resource. Timescapes achieved these aims through a network of empirical projects, the creation of an archive of QL data, a secondary analysis programme and a range of training and capacity building activities.

Timescapes explored relationships that span the life course through seven empirical projects. These projects tracked individuals and family groups over time to document changes and continuities in their relationships and identities. The study explored how such changes were “worked out” in different socio-economic, historical and cultural contexts. The constituent projects gathered a wealth of information about micro level social experience, and built pictures of context through exploring family and intimate relationships, friendships, localities and patterns of interaction and subjective experiences over biographical time.

The authors of this paper are members of the Men as Fathers (MaF) study; one of the seven constituent projects of the UK distributed Qualitative Longitudinal Timescapes study. The Men as Fathers project was set up as a qualitative longitudinal investigation to study social and psychological issues relating to transition and change in the lives of men as first-time fathers. Key research questions guiding the project were how do men interpret changes in relationships, identities and lives as they enter parenthood, and do how they negotiate masculinities, fatherhood and risk across biographical time?

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<sup>3</sup> We would see strategies for “data sharing” and pooling as meriting consideration in their own right, although we do not address this issue as a main focus in the current article.

<sup>4</sup> The ESRC or Economic and Social Research Council is the government body providing the major source of funding of social research in the UK.

Archiving, data sharing and secondary analysis have been important foci in the contexts of efforts to link and synthesise work of the constituent projects. A core development within the study has been the creation of the Timescapes Archive gathering together the rich data generated through the empirical projects into a composite resource for sharing and re-use. Linked to this, the Timescapes Secondary Analysis Project is a freestanding project within the study which has sought to address methodological questions around undertaking effective secondary analysis and explore substantive and conceptual questions around social change through the re-use of individual and combined Timescapes primary project data sets.

Separately from the Timescapes Secondary Analysis Project, the three constituent Timescapes “parenting projects”: Dynamics of Motherhood, the Work and Family Lives project and the Men as Fathers project instigated a more informal, serendipitous cross-project initiative with the network. This initiative focused around a mutual interest in high profile and hotly debated work on intensive parenting and, in particular, tentative findings produced by one of the projects about moral parenting identities and gendered division of risk in this contemporary context (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart 2012). One opportunity the projects identified was to pool data from the Timescapes “parenting projects” to allow a comparison of tentative findings and to see whether more complex patterns emerged by looking beyond the scope of the original project sample (cf. Thorne 1994; West and Oldfather 1995). Another identified strategy was to seek to produce a meta-analysis of gender and intensive parenting issues, informed by strategies such as “meta-interpretation” (Weed 2005) and “aggregated-analysis” (Estabrooks et al. 1994), by conducting a comparative, iterative analysis of relevant published project findings.

While it is too early for us to report on substantive or analytical developments of the cross-project initiative we believe that it is timely to share insights we have already garnered about the tricky ethical and professional considerations and negotiations involved in transcending the boundaries of established primary project working practices. Our positioning within the forward thinking and highly innovative Timescapes study arguably allowed us to develop “thick” understandings of these issues from multiple perspectives, as a result of our synchronous experiences of primary research, team working, cross-project secondary analysis/synthesis and as an originator project for an independent secondary analysis project. Under-explored methodological and professional issues are given greater clarity by adopting a relational ethics lens (Edwards and Mauthner 2002) and addressing research collaboration as a methodological issue in and of itself (Cornish, Zittoun and Gillespie 2007), while their wider resonance is affirmed by situating them within the current day economic, political and research environment. While the focus of this paper is on ethical and professional issues, they are also shown to blur in significant ways with conceptual and methodological questions about effective secondary analysis, there-

fore speaking to debates about the positioning, status and future of QSA in UK social science and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.4 Epistemological Concerns

Epistemological issues in qualitative secondary analysis are not easily disentangled from ethical and professional concerns, especially because epistemological concerns lie at the heart of debates on qualitative secondary analysis (debates which have sometimes been characterised as “moralising” and “polarising”, see Bishop 2007; Mason 2007). To avoid our argument being cast in such divisive terms it is important for us to briefly specify our (tentative) position on the epistemological challenges of qualitative secondary analysis.

A key thread within the epistemological debates is the idea that proximate knowledge of the original research context is vital for making sense of the nature and scope of qualitative research data and that the forms of this knowledge (direct experience, memory, relationships with participants) are not “transportable” either into research archives or new research contexts (see Broom et al. 2009; Heaton 2004; Mauthner et al. 1998). According to Mauthner et al. (1998, 733) “the conditions under which data are produced are inescapable”, yet this issue is seen to be inadequately addressed by proponents of re-use who, they suggest, implicitly adopt the “realist” position that data can be “made whole” (through the provision of background data) “returned to anew and mined for the purposes of generating new substantive findings or theories” (736).

This debate has been complicated in recent years by those (e.g. Bishop 2007; Moore 2007) who suggest that this argument creates a false dualism between primary and secondary research, in so far as all research generates data and knowledge via the retrospective reconstruction of proximate context (e.g. the view that once an interview has taken place most of the data is constructed via research artefacts such as transcripts). Here the challenge for secondary analysis is perceived not as recreating the original context of the research, but persuasively “recontextualising” the production of new data. This argument also gains traction in the context of arguments emphasising that the uniqueness of the researcher-subject relationship and the context bound nature of knowledge risks positioning qualitative research as an “esoteric science” whose fruits are incredibly difficult to share beyond proximate contexts (see Broom et al. 2009). Hammersley (2009) questions whether the “recontextualisation” argument genuinely resolves the epistemological challenges facing QSA, although he too is committed to finding a viable epistemological basis for data re-use and sharing. For Hammersley the idea that “anything goes” in data re-use

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<sup>5</sup> While this article reflects primarily on UK specific experiences, it raises questions of far wider relevance to the international social research community.

(provided the “recontextualisation” of data is sufficiently intellectually rigorous) jars with the emphasis in qualitative research on systematically and meticulously documenting realities however complex and slippery, a process which implicitly assumes that data is not solely a construction of the research project but also represents (albeit not in a transparent or straightforward way) realities which exist independently of the research process. From this point of view, proximity to the original context of research can be seen to grant a certain amount of privilege, for example in terms of being able to draw upon proximate knowledge to judge the “fitness” or “relevance” of data in terms of secondary research questions and agendas (see also Heaton 1998, 2004).

Similar perspectives have been articulated elsewhere and in relation to other dimensions of secondary analysis debates (ethical and practical issues). For example, Williams et al. (2008, 6) argue that the original researchers should remain “central in making decisions about the re-use of archived materials, as it is [they] [...] who are (theoretically at least) best placed to consider the values, opinions and well-being of their original research participants”. Blaxter (2007) also criticises the practice of only analysing “raw” data in secondary analysis and suggests that a great deal of salient proximate knowledge (e.g. the institutional and practical context of research as well as social, historical and local cultural contexts) can be engaged with by re-using other analyses and research reports generated by the original project (although she does not see this in straightforward terms e.g. as “filling the gaps” in proximate knowledge). Williams et al.’s contribution to the ethics of data archiving and re-use would also suggest that there is an implicit imperative on secondary researchers to acknowledge the “moral rights” of researchers (and participants) as the creators of the original work. One way to meet this imperative, following Blaxter, might be to re-use (and reference) the original project outputs and not to treat the data as “freestanding”.

Regarding the (problematic) practices of treating data as freestanding, it is worth commenting on how Heaton (2004, Chapter 3), in her review of qualitative secondary research in health and social care, points out that the majority of studies (86%) were undertaken by researchers with at least some first-hand knowledge of the context in which the data were originally collected and analysed. This pattern contrasts with conceptualisations of the secondary analysis of quantitative data in which it is often assumed that such studies are carried out using data collected by other researchers (see Heaton 2004, Chapter 1). It is such a view that serves to promote the perception of data in secondary analysis as freestanding, for example, when Bishop states: “by definition, reflexivity about the actual encounter in real time is not possible [with secondary analysis]” (2007, 10-1). The adoption of quantitative assumptions about re-use by some qualitative researchers is understandable given the ambiguity surrounding secondary analysis (Heaton 2004; Hammersley 2009). However, overlooking existing recognition given to the re-use of auto-data by qualitative researchers

(e.g. Thorne 1994, 1998) risks universalising specific models and modes of secondary analysis, potentially to the detriment of others, if due consideration is not given to their strengths and potential.

The Men as Fathers research team's synchronous experiences of primary research, team working, cross-project secondary analysis/synthesis and as an originator project for an independent secondary analysis project can provide further evidence of the inadequacy of a polarised language of dualism in debates around qualitative secondary analysis. In our team working practices we have experienced the enriching benefits of bringing multiple theoretical/methodological lenses to the data. This has happened, for example, given our practice of utilising team members' different intellectual biographies and sensibilities to develop bespoke analyses (Henwood, Pidgeon, Parkhill and Simmons 2010) of the research data – a practice which can be seen as driving the “recontextualisation” approach. Moreover, members of the team have not felt paralysed because they have not always “been there” at the moment of data collection/generation. On the other hand, confidence, despite a lack of proximate knowledge in some cases, is intimately intertwined with our close associations with other team members and with the project as a whole (including in-depth understandings of its scope, aims, outputs and philosophical and methodological underpinnings).

Close ties to the project and one another have proven to be incredibly valuable in terms of providing checks and balances against misinterpretation. Team-based discussions have highlighted how a very carefully constructed and confident analytical position can sometimes be shown to be mistaken in light of proximate information not provided in a transcript or fieldnotes. Our discussions have shown that tone and emphasis in talk are not always easy to produce in transcripts and yet can have an important bearing on the credibility of seemingly plausible lines of analysis. In the case of a participant discussing his feelings of awkwardness about taking his infant to a supermarket in a sports car during the working day, one team member suggested that the father may have been concerned about being labelled as demonstrating a reckless/risk taking rather than responsible/caring paternal masculinity. However, the researcher who undertook the interview argued that the father was instead emphasising his awkwardness as emanating from the incongruity/lack of fit he experienced between his identity as a successful working man (signified in part by his ownership of an expensive sports car) and his identity as a father/hands-on carer to an infant child. A plausible line of analysis based on theories of masculinity and the transcript data was therefore deemed not sufficiently credible in light of knowledge (albeit partial and imperfect) arising from the interpersonal encounter between interviewer and interviewee. This highlighted how proximate knowledge does sometimes need to be privileged (and sought), even though there have been other times when this privilege has not been treated as automatic or final (e.g. in terms of what can or cannot be said about the data). The

Men as Fathers research team is comprised of individuals with distinctive, yet overlapping intellectual trajectories and sensibilities and sometimes these have manifested themselves as differences about the kinds of inferences we feel competent or confident making based on the evidence and knowledge we have to hand. For us these differences represent healthy and productive tensions and we have not experienced them as an overwhelming barrier to ethical and professional team-based working, although at times this has forced us to make difficult decisions about when to continue working as a whole team and when to split our work and outputs.

Our experiences of trying to pool data and analyses in our cross-project work and as a primary project subject to secondary data re-use add further nuance and complexity to our view on the potential and challenges of QSA and are explored further in the subsequent sections. The salience of proximate knowledge to successful re-use is not something we identify as a straightforwardly “realist” position but as an important (though by no means sole) dimension of an interpretive epistemology that we see as potentially cutting across primary and secondary research. Regarding approaches within the wider social science literature to which our approach can be usefully aligned, Ken Plummer’s work on life histories as both resource and topic (2001) provides a useful example of a reference point for our own non-dualistic and heterogeneous epistemological positioning.

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### 3. Contemporary Issues and Contestations in QSA

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#### 3.1 Over-Privileging of QSA as a Knowledge Building Strategy

High profile developments in debates about QSA (Mason 2007; Irwin and Winterton 2011a, 2011b) have sought to turn the well-rehearsed argument about the weakness of secondary analysis (distance from the proximate context of research) on its head by emphasising the potential benefits of distance in developing powerful secondary analyses that “go beyond” the situated nuances of proximal context in order to take in more data/evidence (from multiple primary sources); answer broader conceptual questions and develop theory. While the privileging of proximity is not entirely discarded it is apparently dethroned: “overplaying proximate context may privilege description over explanation. Grounding knowledge claims will often entail stepping outside the specifics of the data and relating it to our theories, and to other evidence” (Irwin and Winterton 2011a, 17). However, as primary researchers we would take issue with the implicit suggestion that the distance afforded by secondary analysis (a distance which is seen to allow it to take in more data sets, perspectives and evidence) boosts opportunities to answer broader questions and develop theory. We would argue that this reflects a quantitative epistemological position (the

myth of the omniscient researcher) which has been soundly critiqued (Haraway 1991; Henwood and Pidgeon 1995). The notion that primary researchers' investments in proximal context risks producing overly descriptive accounts is also one that can be rebutted, we believe deservedly so, in the light of sophisticated accounts that exist of analytical practices for deepening and strengthening the kinds of epistemic claims associated with qualitative inquiry. For example, a key analytical strategy underpinning ethnographic and constructivist approaches to qualitative research is to consider both the "bottom up" or "proximal" (situated, interactional contingencies of talk and action) and "top-down" or "distal" contexts (cultural, socio-economic, institutional discourses, meanings and relations) and to bring both levels into dialogue with one another (see Dicks et al. 2006, following Holstein and Gubrium 2004). Dicks et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of providing this overall "substantive context" as a prerequisite for subsequent secondary analyses (as a challenge to the notion that data can ever be "raw" or "freestanding") and in light of this it seems strange to attempt to carve a unique role for QSA in terms of boosting the explanatory power of qualitative research by bridging proximate and distal contexts.

Meta-analysts such as Weed (2005) share QSA goals of building theory and boosting the explanatory power of qualitative research but suggest that pooling disembodied data sets in order to develop enhanced explanation is inconsistent with an interpretive epistemology. Weed places a great degree of importance on trusting the research and findings of primary projects (or discarding them as evidence) before focusing on the challenges and opportunities of synthesising research carried out in diverse times, places and spaces. According to Weed (36), returning to data is not a valid way to proceed because:

it is not possible to re-interpret the original findings and retain a focus on meaning in context. The context in which the research is located will be inextricably tied in with the original interpretations. Consequently, the original interpretations must be trusted, or the study should be excluded from the analysis.

Weed is trying to tackle the challenge of "scaling up" qualitative research in a way that is respectful of its interpretive philosophical underpinnings; he sees the "transportability" of data issue to be insurmountable, and a focus on studies and findings (with original findings reconceived as "data" and "evidence" for synthesis) as a way around this. We see merit in Weed's strategy of working across and synthesising qualitative research, not least because it gives greater recognition to the role of primary research in strategies to boost the explanatory power of qualitative analyses, as opposed to relegating primary research projects to the status of "niche" cottage industries and "data suppliers" to the "larger enterprises" (major reviews, QSA etc.). At the same time, and consistent with our epistemological position, we are more positive about the possibilities offered by secondary analysis as part of the broader researcher reper-

toire or toolkit, for example to further mine sets or subsets of data in fresh ways or from different temporal, situational perspectives.

Also integral to accounts of qualitative research practice are issues around protecting the rights of participants (and not just in terms of the usual requirements such as intellectual property, confidentiality and informed consent). We are in favour of qualitative primary and secondary researchers finding ways to work together in this regard. It has to be possible for all parties to practice high standards of ethical reflexivity as they see it, and in recognisable ways, throughout the primary and secondary research process. Qualitative researchers, in particular, seek to promote sensitivity to the (often fraught) politics of representation and reception surrounding research (see e.g. Coltart and Henwood 2012; Henderson et al. 2012). Finding less confrontational and more synergistic ways of presenting arguments and establishing epistemic claims to warrant secondary analysis might make this more possible. Primary and secondary researchers may not always agree on specific interpretations of data but a receptiveness to feedback from researchers with greater proximate knowledge of the contexts of data generation, and an approach to re-use which respects the character and ethics of qualitative research practice should go some way toward ensuring that remaining differences between primary and secondary research teams reflect healthy tensions within intellectual inquiry.

### 3.2 Working with Professional and Ethical Issues: The Timing of QSA

Methodological and conceptual debates on QSA might be seen to have moved beyond the impasse which sees data archiving and QSA and the “unique” (relational, intimate and reciprocal) dimensions of qualitative research as incompatible e.g. the idea that the personalised, relational, multi-modal character of qualitative data makes it less “transportable” than quantitative data (Broom et al. 2009). On the other hand, the imperative of “data sharing” may be stacking the terms of this debate in favour of the optimists so that more sceptical positions are easily overlooked. In this context, it may be difficult for primary researchers’ concerns about the practice of QSA to be registered as anything other than re-articulating “old” and no longer valid positions, or worse as signalling a self-serving resistance to innovative practice. Given the time-consuming work of preparing data for secondary use, which may come at the expense of other more highly valued “outputs” (Hadfield 2010), in extreme circumstances there is a potential for primary researchers to become “data donors”; producing data for others to analyse (Heaton 2004). This has particular implications for career building and would indicate a privileging of objective textual knowledge over that which is embodied and contextual (Mauthner and Doucet 2008), arguably going against a central epistemological tenet of qualitative research.

Secondary analysis is inextricably dependent upon the intellectual and practical labours of primary researchers and research teams. The costs and benefits of secondary analysis arguably need to be spread relatively evenly between primary and secondary research teams if the exchange between primary and secondary analysis is not to become overly one-sided in favour of the latter. Concerns that the work undertaken and resources generated by primary research will be unfairly appropriated by secondary analysts need to be addressed (at least to some extent); we start the process by raising a number of key questions and by considering some key issues.

When high levels of cooperation are going to be required of primary researchers by QSA, attention does need to be paid to – and ways found to appreciate – the sorts of professional issues that are likely to arise in the course of such work. Accepting that it might not always be obvious how to do this, it is important that secondary projects acknowledge the longevity and strength of the intellectual investments and practical contributions of primary researchers, and their differing institutional positions. Likewise, there are challenging questions arising for primary researchers such as “how far are they obliged to support the work of secondary analysts?”

Given what we know of the challenges posed to secondary analysis (based on assessments of “fit” and “context”, Hammersley 2009), one way in which primary teams might be expected to be of considerable assistance to secondary analysis is by offering feedback about potentially productive lines of inquiry. But what are the consequences of primary teams being in such a position, and are there different expectations about what should be done about this? For example, do primary researchers have to evaluate the work of secondary analysis on its own specific terms rather than those of the primary project, even if so doing might be detrimental to the primary team’s own work? In the (not unlikely) event that disagreements arise over what has and has not been agreed to by different parties (e.g. about what represents an original rather than a closely related research question), and this has implications for rights to publish, what are the implications for publishers of journals? Do they need to be made aware of this and, if so, how and by whom?

Data archiving and secondary analysis may raise different sets of challenges and concerns depending on whether it runs concurrent with or subsequent to the work of primary research projects. Lucy Hadfield, a researcher on another project in the Timescapes programme, has outlined the complex, ethically demanding and time-consuming process of preparing data for secondary use, which has been intensified by the simultaneous process of collecting and preparing data, unique to the Timescapes experience (Hadfield 2010). Concurrent strategies may be advantageous to secondary analysts in the sense that they may be able to have higher levels of engagement with “intact” and “focused” research teams, although they may also present greater practical challenges around accessing the data when primary researchers may lack time to prepare

data for others to use (Heaton 2004). From the primary project point of view, the time consuming task of preparing data for archiving and subsequent re-use may detract from the work of primary data analysis and producing findings. This is likely to be a particular concern given that the deposit of data within national archives is not given equitable recognition as other research outputs such as publications (Hadfield 2010).

A related concern for primary researchers is the theoretical, methodological and impact agendas of secondary analysts (what is the scope and purpose of data re-use?) and whether any overlap may create unnecessary pressure and competition among primary and secondary teams as they simultaneously seek to publish and disseminate original work and findings. Attempts to privilege primary or secondary research claims are also understandable as researchers attempt to justify their existence and worth in a squeezed funding climate but this does little to encourage the kind of cooperation and mutual respect required for both to flourish. Research projects, especially when in receipt of significant amounts of public funds, are expected to deliver on their own substantive and intellectual goals, and to make efforts to create a long term legacy in terms of their contribution to knowledge. Inevitably, therefore, secondary analysis work is far more likely to be welcomed by primary teams when secondary analysts present themselves as allies and not competitors to the original team.

One of the arguments put forward in support of qualitative secondary analysis is the ability to approach the data set from temporally and historically, as well as analytically, distinct perspectives than that of the original research team. However this becomes more questionable in concurrent analysis, which loses some of these distinctions and arguably their associated value. Where concurrent analysis may offer distinct potential is in conducting analysis across multiple projects, and in offering an opportunity to draw data from a number of studies to address relevant themes, as has been the case for Timescapes. This holds out possibilities for creating knowledge-building synergies between the work of primary and secondary analysts, but with some important provisos (as discussed above): that the project team's intellectual investments are recognised along with their ongoing efforts (beyond immediate, time limited phases of data collection and analysis) to create long term legacies. Additionally, it would be useful if primary project teams could engage with the increasing demands that are made of them to pursue impact trajectories with support from secondary analysts – or at least without impediment.

The argument that projects (particularly publically funded ones) and data represent a public resource that should be shared for public benefit is an important and legitimate driver of secondary analysis, but arguably should not displace concrete albeit complex issues about power, ethics and inequality in research environments and interrelationships, together with the far from unrelated issues to do with assuring research quality. For example, depositing data in an archive is seen as beneficial by providing a practical resource for second-

ary analysis as well as making the research more transparent. This is arguably particularly important in qualitative research where little of the raw data makes it into the final report (Arksey and Knight 1999), therefore mining the data to its fullest extent is described as an ethical imperative (Bryman 2008). However in order to deliver the “high impact policy and practitioner relevant research”<sup>6</sup> envisioned by research sponsors, it is important for secondary analysis to take place in a timely and careful way to avoid producing poor research which risks detriment to both primary and secondary projects. In light of the particular challenges related to concurrent primary and secondary analysis, discussed above, it is unclear whether the timing of making data available for secondary analysis has any bearing on how the data is valued as a public resource.

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## 4. Conclusion

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In light of apparently increasing prioritisation of qualitative secondary analysis, we have sought to bring into view some of the debates around the contribution and challenges of this approach. By raising critical awareness of these issues, we do not mean to suggest that secondary analysis is not a valuable endeavour or that it cannot produce insightful and impactful findings, instead we hope that foregrounding these issues will prompt discussion around the various ways in which qualitative data may be reworked.

A main focus for discussion in the near future is likely to be the relative merits of different kinds of qualitative analysis arising from efforts to re-use newly available data resources, together with the accompanying resources – sometimes referred to as meta-data and contextual data – that are designed to assist with the interpretation of archived qualitative data. The kinds of discussions we envisage will be additional to ones that have occurred previously about the extent to which data deposited in established archives such as Quali-data have been used. Such discussions may or may not involve finding fruitful ways to build on the published work of originating project teams and contribute to their intellectual legacy. Timescapes’ projects have provided a fairly extensive project guide for the Timescapes data archive in an effort to encourage data re-users to take account of the work of the originating project, although there can be no guarantee that this will happen. Also related to this issue of “cumulative knowledge building”, it would be unfortunate if efforts on the part of research teams to support a cultural shift to enhancing resources for the qualitative research community resulted in the development of hierarchies of claims about the worth of analyses. We would be disappointed too if this in

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<sup>6</sup> See ESRC Secondary Analysis Initiative Phase 1: <<http://esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/19214/latest-opportunity-3.aspx>>.

turn fuelled a continuing lack of regard for interpretative qualitative social science in an effort to provide findings quickly with ready data (e.g. for use in policy). Policy needs to be supported by rigorous analyses and committed projects no less than the other kinds of academic work that may be better equipped to mature like wine (one of the goals of QL study) and, hence, retain its value. By drawing on our own varying experiences of QSA (as primary analysts preparing data for secondary users, in a mixed team where people have different relationships to the data, and in attempting to take forward a collaborative team approach to SA) we have highlighted some of the issues we see as particularly troubling. For example, concurrent primary and secondary analysis magnifies a number of issues; particularly the ethical boundaries between researcher, participant and secondary user, which are often relevant but less acute for the analysis of historical datasets. We therefore highlight the timing of secondary analysis as a particularly important area for future consideration.

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