

## Interview transcript

Interviewee: Jane Elliott (JE)

Interviewer: Libby Bishop (LB)

Interview held on: 06 March 2012

Location: Institute of Education, London

**LB:** Thanks very much for agreeing to meet, Jane. I wonder if you could say a bit more about why you decided to archive, or make available, the NCDS, the National Child Development Survey of qualitative data?

**JE:** The qualitative interviews that we carried out are amazingly rich, because we asked people to talk about their lives over the last week so that we get a sense of their professional activities, leisure pursuits, but also we asked them to tell us their life story. Now, there's such a lot of material there, and it can be analysed in a great many ways, so we're very keen for other people to be able to access that information, and to use it in their research.

**LB:** This might be a tricky question, but do you think, how big a role was the mandate for depositing data through the ESRC? Was that a deciding factor for you? Do you think you would have tried to offer the data, even if it weren't required by your funder?

**JE:** We certainly would have offered the data for archiving, regardless of what the funder stipulated. I think, particularly for this cohort who have given their time over the whole of their lives, it would be, it would just seem inappropriate not to make the materials more widely available to a great many different researchers who produced the data.

**LB:** That's so much like the - I have just done a review of the Inventing Adulthoods website and all the motivations are so similar - the vast quantity of data, and the sense that the participants, that was teenagers, so following their lives from aged 10 to about 20, they felt they'd given so much and they wanted to share it more widely.

**JE:** And I think it's important to say, as well, that when we collected the data, we made it very clear to the cohort members that we would be archiving the data, and it would be available to other

people. So I know, sometimes, people are a little bit worried about ethics, and sensitivity, and making people's data more widely available, but in a way I feel it's unethical to take up people's time, and then the data not to be fully exploited.

LB: So most of your participants were quite supportive of the idea of further sharing of their data?

JE: Yes. And I think it helps that they've been part of this long-standing, long-running cohort study – literally since they were born – so they've developed and built up a trust with us, and they feel they're part of a reputable study, and they hope it's going to be of use to future generations. So then our side of the bargain is we need to make sure that data is available.

LB: You said about the actual process of depositing itself, how that wasn't all entirely smooth-sailing, and I'll come back to things that could change. But overall, how did you experience the process?

JE: Yeah, we found it reasonably smooth. I think, to tell the story from the beginning, we had thought about anonymising the interviews, and it was always our intention to anonymise the interviews. I think until we'd actually collected the data, done the interviews, and examined the transcripts in detail, we hadn't thought through how time-consuming it would be to do the anonymisation, because it's not just about anonymising the name of the person you're interviewing, but actually anonymising perhaps their head teacher in a small market town, for example, which could potentially identify them. So then you need to anonymise the name of the small market town, the name of the school that they're a teacher in, and similarly equally there might be identifying features about members of their family, their parents, and so there's quite a lot of intensive work that needs to be done, and we were really pleased that the Archive was prepared to work with us on that, and take on a lot of the burden of the anonymisation.

LB: Were there other things that we, as the ESDS service, if you will, could have done differently, should think about in the future, to support you better as a depositor of a critical resource like this?

JE: I think it would be helpful to have input from the beginning of a project, so I think, you know, it's important that anybody, in the future, who's thinking of collecting data for deposit, does think through these resource issues of how long it will take to do anonymisation, so it would be helpful to have that sort of proactive involvement. And perhaps if people are getting funding from ESRC, for example, the ESRC could do more to put people in touch with the Archive right from the beginning of a project. I think the other thing was, we could have communicated better while the anonymisation and preparation was going on, because I think that some of the staff at the Archive were doing some very detailed work that went over and above the anonymisation in terms of summarising the interviews. And given that there's such a bulk of material there, it would have been better to be able to do it more rapidly and not give such high quality summaries.

LB: That's very helpful. And I think, on the costing issue, in particular, we know the ESRC will contribute funding for preparing data for archiving, but I think, too often, people don't even think that's authentic, or are somehow hesitant about looking into it. I think it's an area we need to work on as well, as well as not over-processing our data, which is a concern also. Do you have any – we've perhaps alluded to this already – but do you have any other kind of advice for people who are preparing or thinking of depositing data? In particular, people who might be sceptical or reluctant, anything about what you would tell them about the deposit process?

JE: I think, sometimes, people are anxious that by letting the data go, other people are going to quickly write publications and they're going to be improving their career, and somebody else – sorry, I'm not putting this very well for the tape – but I think people are sometimes concerned that the data is in some way their intellectual property, and that there's a danger that researchers will repeat analyses and that there will be a waste of effort, but I think, often people do use data in very different ways, and from different disciplinary theoretical foundations, and so it's well worth putting the data out there. I think the only other advice is to get in touch with the Archive early on, to understand more about the process. And I think the issue about documenting data. I think people are sometimes put off documenting data to a high enough standard that it will be really useable by other people. I think it's important, if you're going to re-use data yourself, maybe that you collected five or even ten years ago, you've got to document that data for the "you" in the future – you will not be able to keep it all in your head. So I think it's quite a useful process, the documentation and systemising data for the research team themselves.

LB: What do you - it's almost like thinking of a child – what do you hope for the future, for the data, in terms of its opportunities for re-use? How would you like to see it re-used by other people?

JE: Oh, the data includes quite a lot of information about people's daily lives, and things like the voluntary work they're doing, the work they're doing caring for their parents – I would hope that some of that is really helpful to understand the sort of pressures on people's lives when they're in their fifties. I think it could also be used even by quantitative researchers who want to generate new hypotheses that they might test with the quantitative data, though I'd hope that—and people from much more quantitative—with quantitative expertise would read maybe just a few of the transcripts, so that they get more of a sense of holistic lives, rather than lives split up into variables, and that that will help them then to frame some good research questions and some models that they could then estimate using the quantitative data.

I also think it could be helpful for people who are thinking about doing their own interviews, to see, you know, the way that we framed questions, and they might want to use some of our formulations or change them somewhat, see how people responded to different questions – and that would be true both for qualitatively and quantitatively – that people who want to do a survey of people in their fifties or early sixties, would be able to use this particular age-group - these interviews carried out with people when they're 50 - to see: "Well, how do people talk about things and conceptualise

them?" But I think there's a whole lot of work that could be, where it could be useful methodologically, but I think, also, as I've said, because the data's so rich, that people, and also because there's really quite a lot of interviews there, because there are 220 transcribed interviews, if somebody's interested in quite specific groups- perhaps people that are living on their own, in their fifties – that there will be a sub-set of about 20% of that sample who are living on their own, so then that means that there are maybe 40 interviews that somebody can look at in detail, without looking at the whole sample. So I'm hoping that people can use some of the data from the 1958 quantitative data, to identify sub-groups that they might look at qualitatively.

LB: Okay. Thank you very much. Anything else you'd like to add or comment on?

JE: No, I don't think so.

LB: Okay. Thank you very much.

End of interview