

Digital Transformations

Tackling crucial issues for a digital age, such as intellectual property, cultural memory and identity, and communication and creativity



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Curating Childhoods: Developing a multimedia archive of children's everyday lives

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Executive Summary

In a digital age of pervasive social media, when older ideas of public and private seem to have been turned 'inside out', how do we manage tensions between the responsible desire to protect children and young people with the equally strong imperative for them to participate and be heard and seen in public culture? This project worked collaboratively with young people, their parents/carers, researchers and archivists to explore these questions, asking what young people could teach professionals about curating 'data' and how professional researchers and archivists could help young people and families better understand the implications of having their data documented, stored, shared and re-used. The project enabled us to establish a new collection on 'Everyday Childhoods' at the Mass Observation Archive, containing documents on children and young people's lives, as well as materials for participants, researchers and archivists exploring the ethical issues involved. The project inspired a number of creative initiatives through which children and researchers are working together to reveal the public archive as a site for creative and respectful collaboration. Our project findings identified a lack of understanding of the meaning of archiving and re-using data among young people and families. We therefore suggest further exploration is needed into the ethics of digital data sharing and privacy for children and young people that brings together public and private sector practice.

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Summary report

1. Meeting our objectives:

The Curating Childhoods project addressed its first objective 'to generate new dialogues between young people, archivists and researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences around the challenges of curating and publically sharing data' through the Curating Childhoods workshop event. This event brought together young participant researchers, their families, researchers and archivists at the Mass Observation Archive, enabling an exchange in knowledge between the stakeholders and learning was documented in the Curating Childhoods Workshop Report.

The project has succeeded in its second objective ambition to 'establish a multimedia collection on 'Everyday Childhoods' at the Mass Observation Archive' (publically available from the end of January 2016), including both material generated through the Face 2 Face study and material generated through an expanded call for young people's contributions to the annual Mass Observation 'May 12th' diary day. The work has given rise to detailed ethical reflection and debate within the archive and the research team, and learning is being shared through a range of avenues. This includes a specialist working group on the ethics of research with children and young people at the University of Sussex and contributions to national and international debate, guidance and training on research ethics with children through the ESRC, NCRM, EdSS and ERC.

Our third objective 'to provide young people, archivists and researchers with new resources for reflecting on practices of curating, sharing and managing digital and multimedia data' has been met through the creation of a series of short films addressing ethical issues available for use with researchers and the public. These materials as well as a series of scenarios for exploring 'informed consent' for archiving are being made available initially through the project website and blog, academic outputs, and will be promoted through the Mass Observation Archive site once the collection is made public.

Our final objective to 'contribute to discussions on the wider ethical implications of researching and documenting children and young people's lives in the digital age' has been addressed through a series of events that open the archive and archival processes up to young people, including the Curating Childhoods workshop (targeted at past research participants and their families), the 'My Life in a Day' event (a public event targeted at children and families) and the 'My Object Stories' Hackathon (targeted at young people aged 13-16 years). Each of these has explored the challenges of researching young people's lives in a digital age and learning from these events has been documented and shared, initially through project reports and increasingly through academic outputs associated with the study.

Developing the theme of children's publics, the project team have acted as advocates for promoting inclusive and collaborative methods for researching for and with children and young people in a digital age. This has included publicising and sharing simple and effective digital methodologies such as the 'day in a life' and 'favourite things' approaches (adopted by a number of other projects nationally and internationally), promoting an inclusive yet responsible approach to research ethics and extending participation to include involvement with data archiving and reuse. In particular the collaboration with Mass Observation has revealed the potential of the archive as a key site for public engagement and the re-animation of archived data.

2. Project findings:

The project team have identified the following findings as a result of our work:

- Understanding of the ethical implications of data archiving and re-use are not self-evident and demand exploration if consent is to be informed (for both adults and children).
- The archive is a potentially creative space for co-production and collaboration with children & young people.
- The relationship with data creators/ depositors is an important aspect of the archive's work that demands attention. When does research data become archive data?
- There is potential for the re-use and animation of archived data as part of a 'live methods' approach (Back & Puwar, 2012).
- There is potential for further exploration of the ethics of digital data sharing and privacy for children and young people that brings together public and private sector practice.

3. Reflections on learning:

(i) Evolution over the period of funding and sustainability:

The amplification fund provided 12 months of funding to realise the potential of an ESRC funded project (also relatively short - 12 months). The project team have also enjoyed financial support from the ESRC National Centre for Social Research to support the provision of a two day training event, and from Cultures Communities Network+ to supplement funding for the 'My life in a Day' workshop with the Mass Observation Archive as part of the Brighton Fringe Festival, and to support a Hackathon event as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science, undertaken with Mass Observation and the Sussex Humanities Lab. The programme of work associated with the Curating Childhoods project's findings will continue into the future under the umbrella of the 'Everyday Childhoods' collection and website. This work is now integrated into the Sussex Humanities Lab, a major institutional investment that is co-directed by Thomson and which has secured continuity of employment for Berriman.

(ii) Collaborations:

The project enabled a range of collaborations – effectively tracing the complete circle of a digital information project: connecting members of the public with researchers, archivists, education outreach workers, computer scientists, and media content developers. Working together on events such as the hackathon enabled us to collaboratively explore the distinctive contributions each professional makes, helping to identify new connections and notice disciplinary distinctions. As part of the project we have also connected to a wide group of researchers across the humanities and social sciences, as well as those working in market research and product development. A planned impact event for 2016 will focus on sharing good practice in ethics across the private/ public sector divide.

(iii) The transdisciplinary space of the digital archive:

The project has enabled us to locate what was initially conceived as a social science project within a digital humanities framework – revealing the importance and potential for digital datasets for the future of archives as well as providing inspiration for design

(see also Geiger et al. 2010 and Stanley 2015). Lessons from the project are being used to inform the ethical and methodological strategies underpinning a range of projects, the institutional governance process at the University of Sussex, and wider national and international debates and methodological training in the humanities (via CHASE) and social sciences (Sussex DTC and South East consortium). One of the most important consequences of the project has been to explore the tensions and synergies that exist between how the humanities and the social sciences conceive of the archive and the re-use of archived data. We consider the public archive as an important and secure platform for these kind of transdisciplinary conversations as diverse communities of interpretation and use grow up around the archive. Our aim is to use the Everyday Childhoods collection at the Mass Observation Archive as a focal point for the sharing of good practice as well as inter and transdisciplinary insight. A continued challenge is to involve commercial archives and publishers in these conversations

(iv) Beyond disciplinary ethics:

The ethical challenges posed by digital transformation are a concern that need to be addressed through partnerships across and beyond the humanities and social sciences. Our own project benefited from the unique expertise of researchers, archivists, computer scientists, education officers and documentary makers - each bringing their own perspectives and sets of expertise. We also discovered the importance of engaging with the emerging forms of 'everyday expertise' around digital transformation. Through public engagement events with children and families, our project was able to develop new forms of knowledge exchange around the curation and sharing of children and young people's data in a digital environment. Rather than relying solely on the ethical language of social scientists and archivists, we were able to draw on a rich vocabulary of 'respect' and 'mindfulness' that represent young people's everyday concerns about their own digital data.

4. Future plans

Building on the findings of the Curating Childhoods project we are are planning a series of workshops aimed at exploring different practices of engaging with children and young people's data across the public and private research sectors. So far, our research has principally focused on public (academic and archive) and personal uses of digital data. Significantly absent from these discussions have been the practices of commercial research practitioners across market research, and consultancy and data analytics firms. All of these researchers routinely collate and analyse digital data generated by or on children and young people (Buckingham, 2013; Chung & Grimes, 2005), and yet little work has been done to bridge the ethical practices and concerns of public and private researchers. Through a series of knowledge exchange workshops, we will aim to expand foster new ethical understanding and shared expertise across public and private sector researchers around children and young people's digital data. Building on our existing set of 'best practices' resources, we will seek to develop a wider cross-sectoral perspective of how researchers engage with children's digital data. We also see the Everyday Childhoods collection at the Mass Observation Archive as providing a platform for the development of collaborative grant bids in the future.

5. Dissemination and outreach and impact

Methods of dissemination and outreach have included staging events as part of public festivals; utilising social media for advertising and sharing open access project materials and reports; convening multi-professional meetings; presenting findings at academic conferences and writing scholarly outputs. The Everyday Childhoods website has been the primary portal for project outputs and since January 2015, Google Analytics records the website as receiving over 6000 page views from a global audience of over 3900 visitors

Immediate project impacts have centred on participants and a connected academic community. Planned future impacts will include bringing project findings and materials to a wider audience and cultivating a secondary user community around the 'Everyday Childhood' collection. The ethical learning from this research will impact other researchers in the humanities and social sciences through reference to the materials in institutional and professional guidance. By reaching out to private sector data archives and re-users we hope to extend the impact of our research across sectors with a view to demonstrably influencing policy formation in this field.

References

Buckingham, D. (2013). *The material child: Growing up in consumer culture*. Cambridge: Polity.

Chung, G. & Grimes, S. M. (2005). 'Data mining the kids: Surveillance and market research strategies in children's online games'. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 30(4): 527-548.

Geiger, T., Moore, N. and Savage, M. (2010) *The archive in question*, NCRM working paper 16. http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/921/1/Moore_review_paper_march_10.pdf

Stanley, L. (2015) Whites writing whiteness project website <http://www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk/>.

Links

<http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/everydaychildhoods/>

The everyday Childhoods website – portal for multi-media case studies, project blog and outputs

Project outputs

'Everyday Childhoods': A new collection within the Mass Observation Archive

that includes: The dataset from the 'Face 2 Face' study is the cornerstone of a new collection at the Mass Observation Archive, which will also include new and existing material generated by children as part of the May 12th Mass Observation and responses to directives. This includes an online open access multi-media case studies (now available) which will be joined by the 'raw data' in 2016..

Open access materials exploring the ethics of archiving and re-using material collected with and by children and young people, available now through the project blog.

Three events modelling different public engagement strategies around the data archive and re-use:

- The 'Curating Childhoods' workshop (December 2014) - aimed at children and young people whose data is included in the 'Everyday Childhoods' collection.
- 'My Life in a Day' workshop (May 2015) - a public Brighton Fringe Festival event aimed at children and families.
- 'My Object Stories Hackathon' (November 2015) - an ESRC Festival of Social Science event aimed at teenagers aged 12-16 years.

Public presentations:

Capturing Everyday Temporalities with qualitative longitudinal methods. NCRM Advance training course June 22-23 2015, The Keep Brighton.

Journal of Youth Studies Conference 2015: Contemporary Youth, Contemporary Risk. Copenhagen, March 30 – April 1 2015. Presentations by Berriman and Thomson.

Publications

Berriman, L. & Thomson, R. (2015) Curating Childhoods workshop report [available at <http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/everydaychildhoods/files/2014/10/Curating-Childhoods-Workshop-Report-Smaller.pdf>]

Berriman, L. & Thomson, R. 'Moral Landscapes of Teenage Social Media'. Article commissioned by A-level journal *Sociology Review*.

Berriman, L. & Thomson, R. (2015) 'Spectacles of Intimacy? Mapping the Moral Landscape of Teenage Social Media', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(5): 583-597.

Thomson, R. & Arnott, S. (2015) Days of our lives: Making and sharing multi-media documents of everyday mothering'. *Studies in the Maternal* 7 (1) [available at http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/Thomson_Arnott_SiM_7_1_2015.html]

Thomson, R. and McLeod, J. (2015) 'New frontiers in qualitative longitudinal research: an agenda for research' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18 (3): 243-50

Digital Transformations



Digital Transformations is one of the AHRC's Strategic Themes, which were Identified through the Future Directions for Arts and Humanities Research Consultation in 2009. The themes provide a funding focus for emerging areas of interest to arts and humanities researchers. Professor Andrew Prescott, AHRC Digital Transformations Theme Leadership Fellow, has said:

"The AHRC Digital Transformations theme is about more than the creation of online editions or the digitisation of books, manuscripts or pictures. It is about fostering completely new methods of scholarly research and discourse. It will encourage arts and humanities researchers to work with scientists in developing new concepts for digital technologies to explore our artistic and cultural heritage. It will show how the theoretical insights generated by the arts and humanities enable us to better understand the profound changes currently occurring in identity, culture and society. Researchers in the arts and humanities will create new relationships with creative and cultural businesses, memory institutions and technology producers. The digital has already profoundly transformed the arts and humanities; the AHRC Digital Transformations theme will show how the arts and humanities can transform digital cultures."

Further details about the theme can be found on the AHRC's Digital Transformations web pages at:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/digitaltransformations.aspx>

