

The Right Time for Fatherhood?
A Temporal Study of Men's Transition to
Parenthood

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This thesis is submitted to Cardiff University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Recent birth statistics indicate a trend towards delayed parenthood, with the average age of first parenthood apparently increasing. This has prompted concern and debate from fertility practitioners and the media about the appropriate age for parenthood, with such cultural anxiety about timing leading to questions about the health and sanity of older mothers. Alongside these concerns about advanced age, teenage parents are identified as problematic as they are deemed insufficiently mature to take on the demands of parenthood. Thus the age of the mother appears increasingly significant for determining whether the transition to parenthood can be established as 'moral': an important indicator of good parenting in contemporary intensive parenting culture. The voices and experiences of fathers in these discussions have largely been silent, yet as men's attitudes are as significant as women's in understanding fertility behaviour, the way in which men negotiate the timing of fatherhood requires exploration.

This thesis draws on the experiences of 53 men aged 15-54 and in a range of occupations and relationship situations when they became fathers for the first time, in order to consider their timing decisions and the impact this has had on their lived experience. Longitudinal qualitative interviews were carried out with the majority of these men before they became fathers and over the first year afterwards, with some also interviewed eight years later. The qualitative longitudinal design provides an in-depth contextualised understanding of participants' experiences and the implications that timing decisions have for other aspects of their lives in both the immediate and longer-term. The thesis also expands temporal focus beyond the discussions of time use that dominate the current literature to highlight the centrality of temporality to the experience of fatherhood and consider the appropriate methodology for eliciting temporal data.

The data indicate that ideas about right time remain pervasive and are closely linked to understandings of what constitutes a good or moral parenting identity. The participants' detailed accounts demonstrate how age and timing decisions can have a significant impact on the lived experience of fatherhood, affecting stability, isolation and intergenerational relationships amongst other factors. The apparent continuation of a standardised trajectory and the challenges of deviating from this have implications for individualisation and life course theories. The thesis provides a detailed exploration of the way in which men negotiate the timing of fatherhood, thus making a significant contribution to the currently limited literature on men's fertility decision-making. The analysis identifies factors which are particularly important to men's transition to fatherhood, and those which potentially cause conflict for the couple.

By taking a temporal approach, the thesis contributes to methodological and theoretical debates about temporal research, whilst also highlighting the importance of accounting for temporality in the experience of contemporary fatherhood.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It's ticking, the sands are slowly dropping
(Alun)

1.1 Background

Simon's quote describes a common dilemma of determining the right time for parenthood. The challenge of choosing the right time to have a child is especially pressing for increasing numbers of people as many of whom may wish the average age of women going back to 2018 at 29.1 years and the average age of fathers 32.6 years (ONS 2019). A recent review from the Office of National Statistics detailing the costs to child modules have included in twenty years range to a survey of public opinion posing the question 'when is the right time to be a baby?' (The Times, 15/02/19; BBC, 15/02/19; Guardian, 27/05/18). Despite the gender-neutral phrasing of the question, many respondents focused on women's decision-making, proving the importance of women's crucial role in establishing the 'right time' for parenthood and how this has changed over time. The review notes no correlation to contemporary cultural mores around the role of motherhood; questions of when to have a child are often framed in terms of the



outside a celebration of how fathers as 'hyper-achievers'...

Introduction

The problem is and I mean this all goes back to one of the reasons why we had a kid this year, me now being 36 but 35 at the time. Um and that was for five years I was very much of the opinion that I couldn't see how it would fit in with my working side. Um you know between us we conspired to delay having kids for that reason predominately. Um and I am still not sure I still can't see, I still can't see how it fits I mean I don't know, what do you do? They just don't fit they just don't bloody fit, and um it would be great to um I mean yes yes yes yes it would be lovely to have a situation where they did fit. But I am not in that situation, (Simon, 36, sample A, one year later)

1.1 Background

Simon's quote describes a common dilemma in negotiating the right time for parenthood. The challenge of ensuring the 'fit' he describes is apparently leading increasing numbers of people to delay childbearing, with the average age of women giving birth in 2008 at 29.3 years and the average age for fathers 32.4 years (ONS 2009a). A recent release from the Office of National Statistics¹ detailing that births to older mothers have trebled in twenty years triggered a flurry of media articles posing the question 'when is the right time to have a baby?' (The Times, 15/05/10; BBC, 26/05/10; Guardian, 27/05/10). Despite the gender-neutral phrasing of this question, these articles focussed on women's decision-making, prompting criticism from readers that men's crucial role in establishing the 'right time' for parenthood had been overlooked. Such an oversight proves no exception to contemporary cultural anxiety around the timing of motherhood; questioning the health and sanity of older mothers (Hadfield *et al.*, 2007) alongside a celebration of later fathers as physically heroic.

¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369>. Office for National Statistics' annual fertility statistics

The trend towards delaying has prompted widespread concern from fertility practitioners about age-related infertility as the number of IVF patients soared between 1985 and 2005 from 3,717 to 32,626 (HFEA, 2009). However, akin to the media discourse, there has been an evident bias towards a focus on women in the existing research on fertility decision-making. Yet as men's attitudes are as relevant as women's to understanding fertility behaviour (Jamieson *et al.*, 2010), it is clear that the way in which men negotiate the timing of fatherhood is an issue which needs to be explored. There has been reluctance amongst feminist researchers to focus on men and fatherhood out of concern that it may yield men new confirmation of their importance to, or power over, women and children (Segal, 2007). However, feminists have also recognised the benefits of redefining fathering to include nurturing as a way of making masculinity less oppressive; for example, a focus on fathers as equally nurturing parents as having the potential to disrupt traditional notions of masculinity and make for greater gender equality (Silverstein, 1996). Indeed a 'good' of intimacy between fathers and children stressed in popular culture is its humanising and civilising influence on men themselves (Jamieson, 1998). In addition, an empirical neglect of men in relation to the timing of fatherhood may reinforce a view of women as primarily reproductive, positioning them as responsible for what has been described as a 'crisis' of delayed childbearing (Simpson, 2010). Therefore in order to rectify this imbalance it is essential to explore the experiences of men.

My own interest in the topic began when I was approached to co-write a chapter on delayed fatherhood. As fertility practitioners, the book's commissioning editors expressed a concern that men were persuading women to delay parenthood as children were less important to them. However this simplistic explanation was not evident in our data, and was quite distinct from the chapter eventually written (Henwood, Shirani and

Kellett, 2011). Instead, analysis suggested that the decision-making process was complex and detailed, not forgetting all those for whom the pregnancy is ‘mistimed’ by being delayed or unexpected. The process of writing this chapter highlighted an existing gap in the literature, providing the impetus for the PhD research to explore the issue of timing in more detail. Finally my own experience as the child of late-timing parents, and the daughter-in-law of early timers, gives a personal interest in the research topic as I consider and live out some of the longer-term impacts of these timing decisions.

1.2 Introduction to the Study

The thesis study is closely linked to the ‘Men as Fathers’ (MAF) project at Cardiff University on which I worked as a Research Associate for the duration of the PhD. Led by Professor Karen Henwood, the study is one of seven empirical projects – each exploring a different life course stage – alongside a ‘living archive’ which comprises the UK-wide Timescapes network. Timescapes is the first major qualitative longitudinal study to be funded in the UK, designed to explore how personal and family relationships change over time at different stages of the life course. Being part of a large-scale network, involvement in meetings, conferences and ethics round table discussions has proved invaluable for the development of the PhD as I was able to actively engage in reflexive discussions about temporal research. Similarly, being a member of the ESRC ‘Fertility Pathways’ Network² provided important insight into issues of fertility decision-making from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The MAF project is based on a study which originally took place at the University of East Anglia, involving thirty men who became fathers in 2000. This study lay dormant

² <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/psych/home2/esrcfertilitynetwork/index.html>

for several years until the sample became part of the Timescapes network, with nineteen of these men revisited for a further interview in 2008/9, as well as an additional sample of expectant fathers from South Wales recruited in 2008. Finally I conducted further interviews solely for the PhD in order to further explore the lived experiences of those who have an off-time transition. The blend of samples from different time periods provides unique data which allows me to consider some of the longer-term implications of timing, otherwise impossible to do within the PhD period. Whilst I collected a significant proportion of the data in my role as project researcher, I am also indebted to the two previous researchers who carried out many of the interviews. This meant that the thesis involved both primary and secondary data analysis, an issue which is explored in chapter four.

The entirely qualitative research is based on an emic, interpretivist epistemological position which is attentive to the life worlds and voices of individuals (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001), recognising the importance of listening to people's accounts as a legitimate way of generating data (Mason, 2002; Back, 2007). The majority of existing studies on fatherhood represent one-off 'snapshots' (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003) from single interviews or survey questionnaires, giving little indication as to how men may think differently about fatherhood at other points in their life. The focus on dynamic lives lived in and through time which is central to the qualitative longitudinal design of Timescapes therefore provides greater opportunity to consider fluctuations and change across the life course. Part of the Timescapes agenda has been to foreground temporal research, based on the inherent temporality in QLL design. Although an interest in time is not new (Crow and Heath, 2002), the recent 'temporal turn' in Sociology has prompted a resurgence of interest. Embedded within the wider network aims, the thesis aims to foreground time as both vehicle of analysis and topic of study, providing both

methodological and substantive insights into temporal research, which is uniquely placed for capturing the dynamic experience of participants' lived lives and told stories (Squire, 2008). Methodologically, the thesis aims to highlight the temporality inherent in the research design, whilst also exploring new techniques for the elicitation of temporal data.

1.3 Research Aims

The research takes a qualitative approach, grounded in an interpretivist philosophical position focussed on how individuals actively assign meaning to their experience over time. Thus the main aim was to explore the experiences of men through interviews which allowed them to respond in their own words. More specifically, the PhD focuses on five main research questions, each of which relates to a chapter in the thesis:

1. How do men decide when the right time for fatherhood is?
2. Does an off-time transition influence the lived experience of fatherhood?
3. What are the longer-term implications of timing decisions?
4. How can foregrounding issues of time and temporality further illuminate the experience of fatherhood?
5. What methodological strategies are best suited to eliciting temporal data?

Based on these questions, the thesis provides a contribution to the existing literature both substantively and methodologically.

1.4 Structure and presentation of the thesis

In order to further situate the contribution of the thesis, **chapter two** provides a review of the substantive and theoretical literature which has informed the PhD. The chapter begins with a contextualisation of fatherhood within contemporary research, policy, and media discourse; whilst the second section provides an insight into temporal study, particularly situating the PhD within a life course approach.

Chapter three then details the methodological and ethical approach of the research; from epistemological underpinnings to documentation of research procedure. Discussion pays particular attention to issues which are accentuated in temporal research; from data collection to analysis. This chapter also provides some detail of the sample groups, before a brief reflection on the way participants' accounts are represented throughout the thesis.

Chapter four blurs the distinctions between methodology and results through a hybrid focus on methodological findings. This chapter details the variety of techniques adopted or devised for the project and PhD research in order to generate temporal data. Using the common temporal divisions of past, present and future, the chapter explores how participants were encouraged to extend their temporal horizons; particularly through visual methodologies.

The following four chapters represent the empirical findings of the PhD research, each corresponding to one of the first four research questions. **Chapter five** focuses predominantly on the experiences of those men who described their transition to fatherhood as occurring at the right time, in order to explore how 'right time' is constituted. Participants' responses are initially interpreted in light of existing discussion

around individualisation and the persistence of the standardised life cycle, with new insights to inform this debate.

Chapter six explores the experiences of those who represented their transition to fatherhood as off-time. The chapter begins with the accounts of men who described pregnancies as unplanned or delayed, before moving on to consider the particular factors which marked the experiences of younger and older fathers as different. Discussion focuses on the implications of isolation from the security of following an anticipated temporal trajectory.

Retrospective data is the focus of **chapter seven**, which considers how participants decided on the timing of second or subsequent children; an issue which has been overlooked in the literature but holds particular implications for measures of fertility. The second part of the chapter explores how one group of participants viewed their fertility timing decisions eight years later. This chapter illustrates how attitudes to timing change across the life course in relation to present experiences, highlighting the importance of understanding participants' lives as dynamic.

The final results section, **chapter eight** broadens the focus to demonstrate the pervasiveness of time and its centrality to the experience of contemporary fatherhood. Expanding the existing literature on fatherhood and time, which predominantly focuses on time use, the chapter foregrounds the multiple and often contradictory experience of time through exploring participants' accounts from the birth of their child through to expectations of the future. Discussion pays particular attention to gendered understandings of time, currently an underdeveloped and contradictory area of the literature

Chapter nine is the concluding section, bringing together the significant findings of the PhD in light of the existing literature and highlighting implications for future research.

Due to the wealth of data I was able to access for the PhD, I have chosen to present thematic examples from across the data set, often to demonstrate the commonality of responses, rather than focussing on case studies of individuals. Although case studies arguably better illustrate the dynamic, temporal qualities of participants' lives by illustrating continuity and change in their accounts over time, using data from across the samples allows for a wider range of voices to be heard. In line with this, I have included a large number of quotes in order to illustrate participants' responses in their own words to demonstrate the basis for my subsequent interpretations, which are presented alongside.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Well people had said this before you know,
once you have a baby you never have the time.
And then the reality of it sets in
(Jason)



2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the current literature on fatherhood and temporality in order to situate the thesis within existing research. The first section considers some of the reasons for researching fatherhood through a focus on contemporary fatherhood culture, whilst the second section situates fatherhood in a temporal perspective by considering the literature on time. Given the vast amount that could have been included to provide a historical account of fatherhood, I have attempted to focus on issues of time and change as most relevant for the thesis.

2.2 Why Fatherhood?

Researching issues relating to gender has been, for a time, synonymous with researching women (McKee and O'Brien, 1983). Therefore despite their powerful position in society, men have sometimes been overlooked in social research; being at the centre has meant they have not been seen via a critical gaze (Whitehead, 2002). There has been a proliferation of public and scholarly interest in fathering (Edwards *et al.*, 2009) as exemplified through recent texts, such as those by Dermott (2008) and Featherstone (2009), as well as the journal 'Fathering'. However those studies that have centred on fatherhood have traditionally chosen to focus on the extent of men's involvement with children and practices of fathering, often quantitatively measured, or the cultural construction of fatherhood (Throsby and Gill, 2004). Research illustrating the lived experience of fatherhood remains relatively scarce, meaning expectant fathers can continue to be described as the 'forgotten parent' (Diamond, 1986). Whilst motherhood has long been recognised as a key life event for women, major events in men's lives are seen to focus on work (Oakley *et al.* 1984; Greene, 2003). However, particularly with increased cultural emphasis on father involvement, it is naïve to suggest that fatherhood

cannot also be experienced as a life-changing experience by men. Whilst voluntary childlessness may be increasing, parenthood continues to be something that the majority of adults will, and expect to, experience (Oakley *et al.* 1984; Maines and Hardesty, 1987; Gillespie, 1999), therefore making fatherhood the object of study provides crucial insight into an important aspect of male identity.

2.3 Time for a Change – Transformations in the Father Role

Whilst the ‘new’ involved father is typically seen as a product of recent times, men of previous generations have also reportedly had significant involvement with their children. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, it has been suggested that parenting roles were less segregated due to the blurring of home and work. However, when separation occurred due to changing work practices, women became associated with the home and childcare whilst men were moved to the peripheries of childrearing as head of the family and provider. This breadwinner ideology, situating the man as the central provider for the family, has been pervasive and still forms an important part of fatherhood identity today (Featherstone, 2003; Miller, 2010). However other aspects of fatherhood have developed and receded over different time periods, as described in La Rossa’s (1997) book ‘The Modernization of Fatherhood’. For example, the importance of the father as a masculine role model was highlighted during the 1930s as a way of emphasising masculinity not dependent on employment during the economic recession, whilst in the post-war period there was a focus on men’s involvement in childcare after concerns about the feminisation of childrearing whilst men had been absent. The 1960s was a key period for changing views of the father and a proliferation of alternative family formations. With a huge increase in single parent families there was concern about father absence and

portrayals of fathers began to depict them as incompetent (Quinn, 2006), suggesting that the centrality of the father role began to be questioned.

Despite arguments that the 'new father' is evident long before this (La Rossa, 1997; Weiss, 2000), the 1970s are generally seen as the decade in which this ideal became popular. Conceptions of fatherhood around this time suggested that fathers should participate equally in childrearing as part of an egalitarian relationship, and the image of the 'co-parent father' who would share in children's care was popularised. Rotundo (1985) argues that during the 1970s the 'androgynous father' emerged, related to a blurring of gender roles. In line with these ideas of father involvement, this is the decade when fathers being present at childbirth began to be socially accepted and encouraged.

The 1980s marked a resurgence of concern about absent fathers, characterised as lacking commitment to their families compared to fathers in the past. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) note the late 1980s saw a moral panic about absent fathers and rising unemployment, leading to the decline of the 'male breadwinner'. In media representations at this time there is a return to traditional fatherhood and tougher masculinity (Bruzzi, 2005). The 1990s contrast between emphasising the good, involved father and the image of the deadbeat dad proliferated in the 1980s. Despite current emphasis on men's involvement in childcare, information and services remain predominantly focussed on women. This illustrates an implicit assumption of mothers as primary parents.

Though the picture of changes in fatherhood is inevitably more complex than this brief account suggests, it provides an indication of how socially-endorsed conceptions of fatherhood change over time according to social events and conditions, therefore

accounts must be culturally and historically situated. Contemporary accounts highlight a discourse of involved fatherhood which involves emotional openness and egalitarian role-sharing (Samuels, 1995; Dermott, 2003). There have been many studies that compare father involvement in previous generations with contemporary experiences (Pleck, 1997), particularly contrasting the 1970s with today, although the utility of these can be questioned as there is a lack of consensus as to what 'involvement' actually entails. Whilst the quantitative time that fathers spend with their children may have changed over the generations, it has been argued that the activities they engage in remain the same, with play, activities and companionship being the main areas of father involvement (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003), suggesting change in the culture rather than conduct of fatherhood (Walker and McGraw, 2000; Dermott, 2003).

2.4 The Involved Father

Although, as previously noted, there is some contention over whether the involved father is actually new (La Rossa, 1997) I will use this term in discussions of contemporary fatherhood to highlight the current cultural emphasis on men's involvement in childcare. Men are now not only expected to be involved with the child, but also engaged during the pregnancy and birth as an equal and active partner and parent. Whilst at one time the proportion of fathers attending the birth was miniscule, today attendance figures are between 93% and 98% for those men who live with their partners (Kiernan and Smith, 2003; NHS, 2005) showing a dramatic shift towards emphasis on father involvement. It is generally accepted that men's participation in childcare is beneficial for both father and child (Pleck, 1997) and involvement has become an important aspect of being a good father according to men's own accounts (Henwood and Procter, 2003; Morman and Floyd, 2006). Dermott (2003) contends that men see involvement as an essential part of

modern fatherhood, giving it priority over breadwinning, which emphasises a significant shift in popular conceptions of the father role. However, Dermott (2008) later notes that when money is scarce it is likely to get greater attention, which may be one reason why the importance of providing was not emphasised by her affluent participants. There is some ambiguity over the term 'involvement' as almost all the fathers in Dermott's study saw themselves as involved despite widely contrasting situations in regards to childcare and paid work, meaning almost all fathers could be described as 'new fathers'. In their qualitative study of men's and women's accounts of parenthood, Clarke and Popay (1998) note a contradiction in men's accounts; whilst on the one hand men speak of a need for involvement, this is often tempered by a resistance conditional on cultural representations that motherhood is mandatory and fatherhood discretionary, thus fatherhood is seen as involving a greater degree of choice and interpretation (Lewis, 2002; Miller, 2010).

In discussing fatherhood, Dermott (2008) draws on Jamieson's (1998) work to conceptualise contemporary fatherhood as intimate, suggesting that this allows for emphasis on aspects fathers themselves view as most significant, such as sharing emotions and expressing affection. Despite the common theme in the research literature remarked upon by Jamieson (1998) that men are less intimate than women, there has been a shift towards positioning fathers as active, intimate and emotionally engaged (Miller, 2010). Dermott (2008) suggests that invoking intimacy as a framework resolves the apparent gulf between culture and conduct. Such 'disclosing intimacy' is not voluntary and equal in the context of the parent-child relationship (Jamieson, 1998) but places importance on fathers 'being there' for and 'really knowing' their child. Snyder (2007) suggests that intimacy underlies notions of quality time rather than quantity time, thus is not about sharing equally in childcare with mothers (Featherstone, 2010).

Despite concerns about the discrepancies between the culture and conduct of fatherhood, research has indicated that men would like to be more involved with their children than they are able to, be the biggest barrier cited being lack of time due to paid work commitments (White, 1994; Burgess, 1997). Gatrell (2005) contends that the contemporary culture of long working hours is not conducive to involved fathering, yet fathers' social identity remains inextricably linked to their occupational status and being able to provide for their children, so they are constrained from taking up a participatory role in childcare (also Neale and Smart, 2002; Henwood and Procter, 2003). As Lupton and Barclay (1997:2) note

'Men are generally still expected to participate fully in the economic sphere, to act as providers for their families, and are encouraged to construct their self-identity as masculine subjects through their work role.'

Whilst there have been changes in aspects of fatherhood that are prioritised at different time periods, models such as the work-focussed father permeate all. However, whilst still a central aspect of a fatherhood role (Premberg *et al.* 2008), breadwinning is no longer seen as a legitimate form of fatherhood where men are exempt from more active involvement. Dermott (2008) suggests that fathering and breadwinning have become unshackled but that this is masked by the continuing importance of wage earning for material wellbeing and male identity. Thus the picture of fathers' relationship to breadwinning remains complex and contradictory.

In addition, it has also been suggested that mothers' gatekeeping produces a barrier to father involvement, as women are reluctant to relinquish the traditional domain of their power (Abraham, 2002; Gatrell, 2005; Dunn, 2006). However, motivations for gatekeeping are arguably linked to women's unequal position in other spheres and should be eliminated in egalitarian partnerships (Segal, 2007). Despite these barriers to

participation, overwhelmingly the picture is that fathers are more involved than they used to be (Pleck, 1997), standing in a different relationship to time compared to their own fathers, as men today believe they spend more time with their children (Daly, 1996a). However this is not necessarily a new assertion, as Weiss (2000) describes similar responses from men who became fathers in the 1950s.

There have been a large number of studies into father involvement and influencing factors behind this, which cannot be detailed here (for examples see Fox and Bruce, 2001; Sanderson and Sanders Thompson, 2002; Masciadrelli *et al.* 2006; Gaunt, 2006). One important aspect of the father role, in which particular changes are apparent, is in relation to masculinity. As Lamb (1995:34) notes:

‘In the 1950s gender-appropriate masculinity or femininity was the desired goal; today androgyny [sic], or gender-role flexibility is desired. And whereas father involvement in the 1950s seemed to be associated with greater masculinity in boys, it is associated today with less gender-stereotyped gender-role standards in both sons and daughters.’

As briefly noted in the introduction, it is important to pay attention to issues of masculinity in a discussion of fatherhood, partly due to the transformative potential that new fatherhood offers for oppressive forms of masculinity. The following sections will consider the connection between fatherhood and masculinity, particularly in relation to discourses of hegemony.

2.5 Masculinity

Some have suggested that contemporary expectations of fathers seem completely at odds with traditional notions of masculinity, the speed of these changes creating ‘a crisis in

masculinity' (Brittan, 2001:53). It has been argued that media publicity around the 'crisis of masculinity' depicts men as exhibiting anti-social behaviour in response to insecurity about their role, focussing on socially and economically marginal men. Subsequently, discourse about the crisis of masculinity is class-specific (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002; Scourfield, 2001). It has also been suggested that the new father ideal is only salient for middle class men, whilst for working class fathers it clashes with their self-image as comprised of traditional facets of masculinity (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Plantin *et al.*, 2003). However, research by Clarke and Popay (1998) has contested these claims.

Frosh (1997) contends that with the changes in socially approved forms of fatherhood already discussed, men find themselves fluctuating between caricatures of the prohibitive patriarch and the over-involved mother. This viewpoint suggests men are unsure what is expected of them in terms of fatherhood as they have no role models to follow. However Segal (2007) argues that evidence for the crisis of masculinity shows that the most significant differences are between groups of men rather than between men and women, suggesting an important emphasis on multiple masculinities. Parenting allows men to express intimacy and tenderness (*ibid.*) which engenders moral transformations (Doucet, 2007) and provides the opportunity for a different kind of masculinity. Therefore, whilst a sense of uncertainty over how to be an involved father during pregnancy is an evident concern for some men (Shirani and Henwood, 2011a) the extent to which it is relevant after the birth is questionable.

Despite cultural emphasis on more androgynous parenting roles, it has arguably been easier for women to re-claim qualities traditionally associated with masculinity than for men to own their feminine qualities (Featherstone, 2003) as women are likely to experience fewer sanctions for boundary crossing (Thorne, 1993). Whilst parenting

allows men the opportunity to express intimacy and tenderness, some still report concerns about negative reactions from relatives and male peer groups as childcare remains seen as a predominantly female domain (Segal, 2007). That traditional beliefs about gender retain a significant hold on conceptions of masculinity is supported in part by evidence that suggests unemployed men do not take on more responsibility for childcare (McKee and Bell, 1986) although this has more recently been contested (Waller, 2009).

Though the utility of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has been questioned, it is useful to engage with here when thinking about socially endorsed forms of masculinity, as Connell's work has had a profound and pervasive influence on the study of men and masculinity (Coles, 2009). Connell (1995, 2005) uses the term hegemonic masculinity to refer to the culturally exalted form of masculinity; a normative ideal to which men are supposed to aim. Studies that indicate the difficulties men experience in attempting to align masculinity and involved fathering (as discussed above) ultimately rely on notions of a traditionally hegemonic masculinity associated with strength, occupational success and emotional unavailability. Whilst masculinity may be compromised by some behaviours, it is possible that men may bolster their identity by accruing masculine status in other domains (Vandello *et al.* 2008; De Visser, 2009). More recent research has suggested that hegemonic masculinity has appropriated and reconfigured previously subordinated forms of masculinities as a result of demands to be 'sensitive and real macho all at the same time' (Allen, 2007). Whilst in previous decades some men have expressed a reluctance to be involved in childcare for fear of being seen as 'soft' (Oakley, 1979), in recent years there has been increasing cultural emphasis on involved fathering, promoting the man who is actively and publicly engaged in childcare (Morgan, 2001). This engagement in childcare as masculine is seen as something

particular to the current generation of fathers (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Benn, 1998). Subsequently it could be suggested that there has been a shift from cultivating a public masculinity around work to creating a private masculinity around fathering (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007) representing a new hegemonic ideal of the involved father, willing and eager to engage in childcare (Johansson and Klinth, 2008). Brandth and Kvande (1998) contend that it is hegemonic men – using this term to refer to those men with strong labour market ties – who have the influence to change hegemonic masculinity to include new elements such as childcare, thus questioning the extent to which this ideal is salient for working class fathers. Dermott (2008) similarly suggests her rationale for the study's sample of affluent middle class fathers was to consider the experiences of those who might be best placed to take action towards achievement of 'new' models of fathering. However, as noted above, research by Clarke and Popay (1998) contests the notion of a class-specific relationship to involved fatherhood.

The strength of Connell's work lies in the conceptualisation of multiple masculinities, allowing us to consider the relations of types of masculinities to one another, illustrating the fluidity of gender relations and power (Hearn, 2007). However, hegemonic masculinity arguably overlooks the variety of dominant masculinities that exist under this umbrella term (Coles, 2009) and fails to consider how different strata of the population hold diverse conceptions of what is masculine. Instead it is argued that masculinity should be understood as differently interpreted and experienced. Despite the contentious nature of the term, Wetherell and Edley (1999) suggest it should not be rejected outright. Instead they prefer to think of a multiplicity of hegemonic sense-making in the construction of masculinity where men negotiate, rather than assimilate or resist, the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Ultimately it is important to recognise the multiple and

fluid nature of masculinity, which changes over time, space and across the life course of individual men, as noted by (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001:18):

‘In other words, since masculinity is something that one ‘does’ rather than something that one ‘has’, it would be appropriate to say that men ‘do’ masculinity in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings, depending on the resources available to them.’

This argument moves away from suggestions of a biologically fixed identity to contend that masculinity is a performance, which is essential for being accepted into a community of men. Therefore rather than one form of fatherhood masculinity, it is noted that there are many competing discourses, some hegemonic over others depending on the context (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). This understanding of gender identity as socially constructed and performed differently across the life course (Spector-Mersel, 2006) is adopted in this thesis.

Before moving on to focus on issues around the timing of fatherhood, recent policy discourse will briefly be discussed as this contributes to current conceptualisations of fatherhood.

2.6 Fatherhood Policy

Lewis (2002) suggests that fathers entered the policy agenda in the late 1980s at a time when there was a moral panic about their absence. This was shortly followed by the introduction of the 1991 Child Support Act, which made it a legal requirement for fathers to financially support their biological children. Such policy attention overwhelmingly focuses on fiscal contributions rather than fathers’ approach to care, ultimately continuing the association of fathers with providing (Lewis, 2002;

Featherstone, 2010). Contemporary policy constructs fathers as problematic due to their absence – and therefore a subsequent lack of male role model for children – or their lack of commitment and involvement positions their commitment to families as increasingly fragile (Williams, 1998; Clarke and Popay, 1998; Coley, 2001).

In contrast to the UK policy arena, Bergman and Hobson (2002) focus on the Swedish context. In 1994 the ‘Daddy month’ was passed in Sweden as a policy aimed to tempt more men into being primary care-takers by enabling them to take one month’s leave during their child’s first year, which cannot be transferred to their partners. Instead of creating a divide between cash and care, Swedish policy and discourse has shaped men’s identities and interests around participatory fatherhood and gender equality, with men’s rights to care recognised in law and policy. In comparison, UK government guidelines indicate that men are entitled to two weeks paternity leave paid at a maximum of £124.88 per week to be taken within 56 days of the birth (www.direct.gov.uk, May 2010)¹. Yet for many men this is not an affordable option, which results in them taking less time off or using some of their holiday entitlement (The Guardian, 2007). In contrast UK women are entitled to six weeks at 90% of their average gross weekly earnings, followed by a further 33 weeks at £124.88 per week (www.direct.gov.uk, May 2010). This situation clearly emphasises that social policies for men have prioritised their role as workers and citizens whilst women have been framed as wives and mothers (Williams, 1998). Comparing the UK with Scandinavia shows that whilst the discourse on equal and active parenting has been long established in Sweden, the new fathering discourse is not yet fully embedded at a social and cultural level in England (Plantin *et al.*, 2003). Whilst the culture of fatherhood may have changed to encourage greater involvement, it appears the

¹ The coalition government have promised a ‘system of flexible parental leave’ (Miller, 2010). However it appears that the most effective policies for increasing father involvement are those which aim to break with traditional gender patterns and provide some father-only leave rather than make leave available to either parent (Brandth and Kvande, 2009; O’Brien, 2009).

policy situation has not followed suit and therefore presents limitations to change in the conduct of fatherhood.

The preceding section of the literature review has attempted to provide a broad picture in order to contextualise contemporary fatherhood. The remainder of the chapter will focus more specifically on the timing of parenthood, beginning by situating this within life course research.

2.7 Timing and the Life Course

Holstein and Gubrium (2003a) advocate a symbolic interactionist perspective towards life course research, concerned with how individuals actively assign meaning and significance to experience over time within the context of group life and social interaction. Individuals have to manage a repertoire of multiple social roles and, by receiving social feedback from these, come to see themselves in terms of distinctive life stages or age categories. Through this they suggest that life stages are consensual realities built up from shared understandings, role enactments and transitions, experienced through the dynamic processes of social interaction, against a background of broader social changes. O'Rand and Krecker (1990) argue that the timing and ordering of early life events related to major life domains (education, marriage, work) lead to heterogeneous outcomes later in the life course and therefore produce heterogeneity within cohorts. They imply that many people go through the same stages but have very different experiences, thus pathways rather than stages are the empirically valid metaphors of the life course as it is an individual-level construct.

Elder (1998a) (see also Giele and Elder 1998) sets out four principles of the life course approach, which have been interpreted in relation to fatherhood by Roy (2006)

1. Historical time and place – the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime
2. Timing in lives – the developmental impact of a succession of life transitions or events is contingent on when they occur in a person's life
3. Linked lives – lives are lived interdependently and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships. When one person makes a role transition this affects linked others; sons become fathers and fathers become grandfathers, creating emergent co-biographies. For example, delayed parenthood is also likely to result in delayed grandparenthood (Parke and Neville, 1995) so has significant connotations for the child-grandparent relationship, but also means that delayed parents are more likely to have the demands of caring for a young child and an elderly parent simultaneously. This interdependence between self and other links life course theories with symbolic interactionism (Rosenmayr, 1982)
4. Human agency – individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances. Individuals actively make decisions and organise their lives to achieve goals

These four aspects come together through the funnel of timing, and ill or off-timed events can have adverse effects (Macmillan and Copher, 2005). Heterogeneity in the timing of parenthood may be suggestive of different life course trajectories for early or late timing parents; separation into a small number of pathways rather than complete dissolution of standardised routes (Helms-Erikson, 2001). Helms-Erikson (2001) suggests that the implications of a given transition depend on the timing of the event

relative to normative patterns and cultural expectations. Whilst earlier periods in the life course such as adolescence and early twenties may show great variability (Rindfuss *et al.*, 1987; Amato *et al.*, 2008) later phases such as parenthood remain more rigidly defined (Neugarten *et al.*, 1965; Fallo-Mitchell and Rhyff, 1982; Gee, 1990; Peterson, 1996). Hogan and Astone (1986) suggest that there are culturally embedded normative timetables which people internalise and use to describe themselves as on- or off-time. These timetables structure the ways in which individuals conceive of their own development and plan and interpret their life course.

Timing is a variable that may help to explain the divergent ways in which parenthood is experienced (Bouchard *et al.*, 2008) as life course theorists propose that the impact of an event has much to do with its timing (Neugarten, 1976; Elder, 1998a; Macmillan and Copher, 2005). It has been suggested that off-time transitions may be experienced as crisis-like and are less likely to be shared with one's peers, which could result in isolation. Thus in an age-graded society, with social norms for the performance of roles, the timing of transitions is likely to affect role performance (Elder, 1994; Nguyen, 2004). Whilst an early transition to parenthood could be experienced as problematic, late parenthood is more likely to be planned and subsequently less likely to be experienced as crisis-like (Cooney *et al.*, 1993). The lived experience of parenthood at these divergent life stages also appears to differ substantially (Walter, 1986). That the social norms governing the timing of role transitions are so prominent means that those that are off-time may have serious consequences for role performance and for the timing of subsequent transitions (Pears *et al.*, 2005), as well as cumulative effects for other life domains (Nguyen, 2004). These are issues which will be discussed throughout the thesis.

In her study of female psychological development, Greene (2003) emphasises the importance of time in people's understanding of who they are. She describes how humans are future-oriented and involved in planning and setting goals as a way of organising life and establishing meaning, arguing that people are chivvied into a constant preoccupation with what comes next. Using Neugarten's (1968) notion of 'social clocks' to refer to an internalisation of social norms to do with timing at the level of the individual, Greene discusses how these socially enshrined timings impose expectations about what people are supposed to be doing and have done at various ages, therefore being off-time can have major repercussions. The following quote illustrates the centrality of timing, sequence and duration to the experience and meaning of each stage. This follows Elder's (1994) definition of social timing, which incorporates not only the incidence of events but also their duration and sequence based on relevant expectations and beliefs related to age.

'The order in which things are said and done, their placement before and after one another is a large part of what they will come to mean: part of how they mean what they mean. Sequentially is the time dimension within (through) which persons mobilize and organize the enactment of practices and the presentation of self-identity that comprise the order and meaning of modern society.'
(Rawls 2005:173-174)

Age is often applied as a standard to judge the 'proper' timing of life events or 'timeliness' of life transitions. The individual is then placed in a logical social temporal order of being 'on' time (or not) in their development (Mills, 2000). Amato *et al.* (2008) advocate looking at the whole life course rather than a single transition in order to provide deeper understanding, as '*Transitions have different meanings, precursors, and consequences depending on when they occur in the life course and where they fit within larger sequences.'* (p1272, original emphasis). Earle and Leatherby (2007) found that individuals encounter

difficulties in describing their own experiences without reference to 'expected' life events. Their study of involuntary childlessness highlights how time can become a commodity which threatens personal identity against normative life course expectations; people felt they lacked control when they could not conceive on time. Looking at an unexpected life event such as infertility, which participants experience as deviation from the norm, highlights continuing expectations of a normative life course trajectory (see also Exley and Leatherby, 2001; Shirani and Henwood, 2011b). Therefore decisions about transitions are constituted in the knowledge that there are good, bad and right times for doing things (Adam, 1989).

Townsend (2002) suggests there is a hegemonic 'package deal' which men feel the need to obtain, including; owning a home, having a steady job, being married, and having children. Also invoking a symbolic interactionist perspective he argues that the life course and its 'script' are mutually constructed in a sequence of interactions. Townsend contends that this script highlights an underlying normative life course pattern, although there is enough flexibility to allow considerable variation. However he argues that this variation is a reflection of varied circumstances rather than divergence from common cultural ideals. Marsiglio (1995) suggests that 'cultural and subcultural scenarios' provide basic guidelines for how fathers should act. These guidelines are then used to manage interactional situations through an 'interpersonal scripting process', whilst men privately construct images of how they want to portray themselves as fathers through 'interpsychic scripting'. These three factors indicate that some elements of a normative standard of fatherhood remain but are individually interpreted and lived out. Townsend (2002) suggests that decisions about the four aspects of the package deal are inter-related and combined in an appropriate sequence. In his research he found men emphasised wanting to get everything out of their system before having children but not being old when their

children are growing up. These two potentially competing discourses interact to restrict the timing to a culturally appropriate period within the much larger range that is possible. The men in Townsend's study recognised parenthood as a period of restrictiveness (see also Premberg *et al.* 2008), suggesting having one's own life is incompatible with having children, but this is compensated for by a period of irresponsibility earlier in the life course.

With its emphasis on life stages and the timing of transitions, the life course approach has been seen as overly deterministic. However this may suggest confusion with the life cycle approach. The life cycle implies a rigid set of transitions (Exley and Leatherby, 2001) or predictable circuit of life stages related to maturational or generational processes (O'Rand and Kreckler, 1990). Rather than focussing on stages and ages of human development, the life course approach seeks to prioritise timing and transitions (Hareven and Adams, 1982) exploring how social processes are constructed across the life span, where current life stage is a reflection of cumulative past events and an anticipation of future trajectories (Mills, 2000). The life course can be seen as an interactional accomplishment, a social form that people produce and use as they make sense of everyday lives (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) suggest that the life course consists of a configuration of abstract meaning, categories and labels attached to experience through interpretation, as social life is continuously constructed and made real through talk and interpretation. The life course approach thus serves to represent and make sense of things people experience in relation to time, suggesting that people are actively involved in formulating their experience.

Elchardus and Smits (2006) sought to consider claims about life course destandardisation, which suggest decisions about the timing and sequence of important

transitions have become more individualistic, with individuals creating choice or 'do-it-yourself' biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, such approaches have been critiqued for reifying reflexivity over the enduring institutional effects of the family (Gilding, 2010) and suggesting that the practicalities and necessities of life can easily be taken care of (Jamieson, 1998). From the questionnaire data they collected, Elchardus and Smits found strong consensus concerning the ideal age at which transitions should take place, concluding that there is a persistence of the standardised life cycle. These findings suggest that life is ordered on the basis of a chronologically rigid temporal structure, yet as people still view their futures as relatively open, this may influence perceptions of individualisation. Overwhelmingly, the importance of adhering to an often implicit but socially approved life course sequence is acknowledged. Whilst some studies have contested this with arguments for increasing differentiation (Hogan and Astone, 1986; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991; Hanson, 2003; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Schoen *et al.*, 2007; Scherger, 2009), it is acknowledged that people may now have more life course options to follow, but there is no evidence of increased 'turbulence' and no indication that the order of states become less predictable (Hareven, 1982; La Rossa and Sinha, 2006; Elzinga and Liefbroer, 2007), indeed some suggest it is becoming increasingly uniform (Hareven, 1995).

With recent emphasis on individualisation, life course perspectives are less popular for their emphasis on commonality and normative trajectories, although these are increasingly pluralised. Bertaux (1982) acknowledges that there is a discrepancy between individualistic ideology and the actual reality of social relationships shaping lives, suggesting we need a social environment that provides space for individual action but is stable enough to allow the individual to project the self into the future in order to develop identity. This relates to Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security, derived

from a sense of continuity in regard to events in one's life. Similarly, Zinn (2004, 2005) argues that biographical certainty is a pre-requisite for action, including future projections. This certainty with regard to one's own life always happens with reference to norms about the 'right' way of life, which provides a sense of stability and makes the future to some extent knowable. This perspective suggests some degree of normative expectations remain and are necessary for individual decision-making. Hunt (2005) contends that given the postmodern turn it is arduous to suggest that people go through clearly demarcated stages as in previous decades. However society continues to shape and limit life experiences and life chances. Despite indications of individualization processes, the idea of agency without limits seems inappropriate, as is the idea of a destandardisation in the sense of dissolution of life course structures.

2.8 Making the transition – when is the right time?

It has been suggested that the transition to parenthood is a time of risk, change and 'tremendous turmoil' (Shapiro *et al.* 1995:3). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that the increasing risks posed by parenthood mean that people no longer assume they will have children, instead it has become 'the question of children' (see also Scherger, 2009). Their theory of the detraditionalisation of intimacy suggests that love, family and parenthood are under the assault of market biographies, leading to contradictory pulls and demands, meaning that children become a topic for negotiation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), as with increasing individualism and the possibility of a life of one's own, having children is an occupational, financial and existential risk that people are more reluctant to take. Similarly, Williams (2008) suggests that fathering is less prescribed and increasingly a response to personal biography and circumstances, rather than being modelled on traditional ideas of what it means to be a father. He indicates a

complex picture of increasingly individualised fathering, where fathers have to make sense of their role in light of the variety of fathering models they are presented with.

Gross (2005) reconsiders this detraditionalisation of intimacy, arguing that theorists have overstated their case. He suggests that whilst the regulative tradition of lifelong marriage has declined, it remains a powerful meaning-constitutive tradition, persisting as a guiding cultural ideal and hegemonic image (see also Gilding, 2010). In addition, such perspectives overlook more practical aspects of relationships, presuming a world in which the necessities of life are easily taken care of (Jamieson, 1998). Whilst there have been significant departures from family practices of previous generations, the nuclear family as an abstract ideal remains overwhelmingly dominant, retaining a hold on life course intentions and practices. Smart (2007) argues that the individual is not a free agent but is embedded in culture and history, which is manifest through forms of everyday behaviour. Whilst people have scope for decisions, they do not form individually crafted biographies as if they were free flowing agents. Smart uses the term 'personal life' to encompass this sense of individual reflexivity. However, this approach has been critiqued for overstating reflexivity (Gilding, 2010).

Currie (1988) considers reproductive decision-making amongst women, noting that the perceived 'right time' for motherhood was influenced by a set of requirements such as employment security, being in a stable relationship and having suitable accommodation, similar to the 'package deal' outlined by Townsend (2002). She argues that there is no best or right time, but rather it is a matter of avoiding the wrong time when these pre-requisites were not fulfilled.

'Clearly, within the context of these interviews the notion of 'time' is an [sic] euphemism in that it did not refer to age and, in most cases,

did not refer to an identifiable point in the respondent's life. Rather, the term 'time' refers to a configuration of material circumstances.' (Currie 1988:243, original emphasis)

May (1982) conducted a similar study but instead was looking at readiness for fatherhood. Like Currie, May found that stability in the couple relationship and relative financial security were important pre-requisites for embarking on parenthood. In addition, it was imperative that the men had a sense of closure to the childless period of their life; being able to complete any life goals they had set for themselves before having a family enhanced feelings of readiness for fatherhood. May found that most men in the study did want to become fathers at some point, therefore the decision was not about whether to have a child but when would be the best time to do so. In research with young people, Gordon *et al.* (2005) found marriage and childbearing to be the 'lynch pin' of their imagined futures (also Anderson *et al.*, 2005; Brannen and Nilsen, 2007; Scherger, 2009), with comparable findings in research with young men (Edley and Wetherell, 1999; Frosh *et al.*, 2002). Similarly Townsend (2002) found that the men in his study described major life events as natural or inevitable, rather than the process of conscious deliberation, but felt in control of the timing. Therefore in contrast to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, these studies suggest it is not a question of 'if' but 'when'.

In a consideration of when the right time is to embark on parenthood, it is also important to contemplate what constitutes the wrong time (Currie, 1988). One way of doing this is through studying men's responses to and involvement in abortion decision-making as an indicator of when they believe is the wrong time for them to become a father. Reich (2008) argues that men's narratives of abortion experiences reflect aspects of hegemonic masculinity based on a dominant culture of fatherhood that defines competent masculinity in narrow terms. For the men in her study, abortion was a choice

for those who did not feel ready to fill the father role, with all the connotations this carries; including being an economic provider and having children in a stable relationship. Reich notes that for several of the men, these pregnancies were experienced as an interruption to their plans for the kind of family they wanted because they had occurred out of time. Similarly Kero *et al.* (1999) found that for the men in their study the primary motive for abortion was family planning; it was not the right time to have a child, noting that the intention to have children is dependent on the fulfilment of certain prerequisites. There are inevitable limitations with these data sources due to the relative invisibility of men in abortion decision-making; however they are indicative of the importance of timing.

2.9 Delayed fatherhood

There is a tendency to assume that embarking on fatherhood at an older age is a new phenomenon particular to the current generation of first-time fathers. Research by Brannen and Nilsen (2006) involving four-generation families found that men who became fathers in the 1960s married and had children at a fairly young age, with their transitions into work, marriage and fatherhood happening almost simultaneously. This is contrasted with the current generation of fathers, who achieved fatherhood over a longer period of time via an extended youth phase and subsequent pattern of staggered life course transitions, which inevitably meant they became fathers at an older age (Brannen, 2002). However, Brannen and Nilsen found that the transitions of the oldest generation in their study (who became fathers in the interwar years) showed more similarity to patterns of the current generation. The authors conclude from this that socially accepted timing of parenthood changes over time; with young parenthood being considered normative in one period yet deviant in another. Similarly, Mitchell (2006) notes that

whilst dramatic changes have occurred in the timing and nature of first parenthood, age at first parenthood has also been higher in other time periods; such as the 1930s. This supports research which has indicated that delayed fatherhood becomes more prominent in historical periods of economic difficulty (Rindfuss *et al.* 1984). However the study is based on women and presents modal patterns, which inevitably masks diversity.

In recent years there has been a marked trend towards delaying parenthood. ONS Fertility Statistics (2009b) show the number of women aged 30-34 having children first overtook those aged 20-24 during the early 1990s, then overtook those aged 25-29 in 2004, and is continuing to rise (ONS, 2007), marking a steady increase in the mean age for giving birth. Most statistics tend to focus on the age of the mother at first birth, so it can be difficult to get a picture of fathers' ages, although research has shown that a man is on average two years older than the woman with whom he has his first child (Anderson, 1998), which indicates that men are becoming fathers on average later than women become mothers. ONS Birth Statistics (2009a) suggest in 2008 the average age for mothers was 29.3 and fathers 32.4. However, these statistics are for all births; there are no figures on mean age of first-time fathers as no information about previous children born to fathers is collected at birth registration (Stanage, 2008, personal communication). This means that figures below relate to all births.

Statistics show that in 2008 the mean age for fathers was 33 within marriage (ONS, 2009a) compared to 27 in 1971 (ONS, 2001a). In 1991 the most births within marriage were to men aged 25-29, but by 2001 this had increased to ages 30-34 (ONS, 2001a), with two thirds of babies in 2008 fathered by men aged 30 plus (ONS, 2009c). In 1998 10.6% babies born within marriage were to fathers aged 40 and over, but by 2008 this figure was 16.3% (ONS, 2009a). In 1993 fathers aged under 35 accounted for 74% of

live births within marriage in England and Wales and only 25% births were to fathers aged 35-54. However ten years later these percentages were 60% and 40% (Bray *et al.*, 2006). These figures suggest an increasing trend towards delayed parenthood.

It is worth paying some attention to the differences between births according to parents' marital status as the average age at first birth is likely to be higher within marriage. There has been a trend towards delayed marriage, with the average age at first marriage 32.1 for men and 29.8 for women in 2008 (ONS, 2010). There has also been a rise in non-marital births, with 45% of births outside marriage in 2008, compared to 38% in 1998 (ONS, 2009a). Wales is slightly different in this respect as the only constituent country of the UK where more than half the births (53%) were outside marriage (ONS, 2007).

One explanation for 'perpetual postponers' is Tanfer and Mott's (1999) contention that increasing numbers of children born outside of wedlock, along with declining marriage rates and an increase in divorce, signifies a weaker commitment of men and women to one another, which consequently makes them less likely to embark on parenthood. Similarly Dennis and Erdos (2000) argue that, with increasing liberation from the family as an institution, men have more freedom to follow their own interests and are less attached to their partners and children. However, the simplistic explanation offered by these accounts – that men are disinclined to accept the commitment and responsibility of parenthood – are assumptions based on statistical trends, which fail to consider the accounts of men themselves. Other research has indicated high levels of commitment in cohabiting partnerships; using data from the Millennium Cohort Study, Kiernan and Smith (2003) found that 97% of babies born to cohabiting parents had the father's name on their birth certificate, and over 90% of married and cohabiting fathers were present at the birth of their child. Similarly Parke (2004) notes that many unmarried parents are

strongly connected to each other; mothers want the assistance of fathers in raising their children and fathers want to be part of their children's lives. Research in this area has been predominantly quantitative and the need to pay attention to the lived experiences of older parents has been acknowledged (Parke and Neville, 1995; Kiernan and Smith, 2003).

Age at first parenthood varies according to socioeconomic classification. For example, the percentage of mothers aged 35 plus is twice as high among births to fathers in management or professional occupations compared to fathers in routine or manual occupations (ONS, 2009c). Mitchell (2006) observes fluctuation in the transition to parenthood, as since the 1950s there has been a trend towards young people leaving home later and beginning their families at increasingly older ages, thus delaying the 'complete' transition to adulthood. This trend is particularly apparent among young people of higher socioeconomic status, as those with higher levels of education, from wealthier families and from urban areas are likely to have children later than their rural counterparts (see also Hogan and Astone, 1986). Thus education level appears to be one of the most important factors in differentiation of life course pathways (Scherger, 2009). Previous research has shown that delayers are more likely to have certain characteristics than on-time or early parents. For example, as well as having higher educational levels, those leaving it late are more likely to have higher occupational status and are more likely to be in egalitarian relationships (Roosa, 1988; Cooney *et al.* 1993; Berrington, 2004; Bouchard *et al.* 2008). By spending longer in education, transition to employment occurs later, which in turn could delay the transition to parenthood (Pears *et al.*, 2005). Heath (1994) supports these suggestions, proposing that married couples are now investing more time in their education, careers and financial stability, which is likely to offer them a higher salary and more freedom once they do embark on parenthood. Similarly, the

transition to fatherhood is often experienced as leaving behind bachelor life to become responsible (Fagerskiold, 2008), so with an extended youth phase this transition inevitably becomes delayed.

Whilst the desire for involvement is frequently highlighted by men prior to the birth, partners' maternity leave or giving up work can leave men with a heightened sense of being a provider and increased worries over money (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Belsky and Kelly, 1994), therefore amplifying the importance of extrinsic work values (Kirkpatrick-Johnson, 2005). It appears that occupation is still of critical importance to men's identity, with financial costs and reduced career opportunities being perceived as a major risk that comes with having children (Liefbroer, 2005). Thus Liefbroer suggests that prospective parents weigh up the costs and rewards to establish the least risky time to have children, meaning the higher the perceived costs the longer first childbirth is postponed. It is argued that economic costs and personal risks of childbearing have increased, especially for women, and delayed marriage and childbearing are used as strategies for navigating an uncertain, competitive economy (Fussell and Furstenberg, 2005). From examination of statistical trends, which indicate that the majority of births occur within the age range of mid-twenties to mid-thirties, it appears that some periods of the life course may be judged less risky to have children than others. It is possible then that delayed parenthood is a strategy used for minimising risk.

Bergnéhr (2007) suggests that reproductive decision-making is imbued with contradictory ideals. Similarly to the studies outlined above, she found that a lot of importance was placed on 'doing other things first' and having a stable relationship with a partner before having children. Children are seen as tying people down and making it harder to be flexible and mobile, which are highly valued characteristics of a society permeated by

what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) call 'institutionalised individualism'. Riblett Wilkie (1981) supports this by contending that over time the wish for a period of freedom without children has become increasingly important. She argues that this period is one of transition and preparation rather than a rejection of parenthood, meaning childbearing inevitably becomes delayed. Therefore what appears to be postponing childbearing may actually be postponing making decisions about childbearing, although leaving this too late can inevitably be problematic from a fertility perspective (Daniels and Weingarten, 1983).

2.10 Implications of Delayed Fatherhood

The trend towards embarking on parenthood later in life has attracted media attention and concern about the effects of delaying. However, publication of this trend has focussed on anxieties around the health and sanity of older mothers (Hadfield *et al.*, 2007), whilst examples of celebrity fathers who leave it late are often celebrated as physically heroic (The Guardian, 2006). There has been concern among practitioners involved in couples' fertility decision-making that men are unaware that they too have a fertility time limit and are oblivious of the risks of postponing. As a woman's age increases so does the risk of infertility, particularly after age 40, whilst male fertility also declines with age, albeit less dramatically. In addition, the risk of birth defects, some cancers and schizophrenia are significantly increased with older fathers (Bray *et al.*, 2006). Late-time parents are also likely to have less biographical time with their children due to ill health and mortality (Friese *et al.*, 2008), whilst children of delayed fathers may feel a stigma attached to having older parents; associated with their appearance and inability to participate in physical activities (Hamand, 1994).

The concern amongst fertility professionals is that men may be persuading their partners to delay childbearing, which results in increased risk to fertility (te Velde, personal communication, 2007). There has been a lack of research on men's contribution to fertility decision-making to support or refute these claims and existing results are mixed. Waller and Bitler (2008) found that it was not unusual for partners to have different pregnancy intentions, which significantly affected behaviour during pregnancy. However this study focussed on unmarried parents from urban areas so intentions of other groups may vary considerably. Other research shows that men's intentions are remarkably consistent with women's (Berrington, 2004), although it should be noted that this particular study interviewed couples together, so the desire to present a united front to the interviewer may have influenced results. Further research into men's fertility decision-making is therefore necessary.

Alongside the adverse health outcomes of delayed parenthood there are also potential social disadvantages; such as less energetic parenting and decreased likelihood of the child benefiting from long-term relationships with grandparents (Bray *et al.*, 2006). In addition, financial advantages that delayed fathers may initially be able to offer children potentially erode over time, as older fathers bear the costs of having children later in life, and therefore may have to work for longer periods (Nguyen, 2004). In contrast, there have been several studies examining the effect of delayed parenthood on the father-child relationship and results have been largely positive. Research has shown that late-time fathers are likely to spend more time with their children and be more nurturing towards them as well as reporting more interest in parenting and greater confidence in the role (Cooney *et al.*, 1993; Heath, 1994; Parke and Neville, 1995). Children of older fathers have also shown better developmental outcomes such as greater cognitive competence and empathy (Pleck, 1997). Studies on the 'outcomes' of delayed parenting have

overwhelmingly focussed on the child and have failed to engage with men's accounts of the impact that delayed fatherhood has had for them. The study by Cooney *et al.* (1993) is an exception to this, finding that delayed fathers were more likely to report a positive effect from parenting as well as enhanced marital relationships. Macmillan and Copher (2005) contend that early parenthood is part of life course decapitalisation as it is generally coupled with shorter educational careers and diminished employment during the early twenties. It has been suggested that later fathers are more likely to have planned their child, therefore will be more prepared and experience parenthood as less of a shock to the system. Palkovitz *et al.* (2001) support this with findings that early-time fathers experienced a 'jolt' in their transition to parenthood, which brought about a major lifestyle change, whilst on- or late-time fathers perceived fatherhood to be a 'gentle evoker of latent tendencies' as they had previously had the opportunity to get things out of their system and were now ready to settle down. Whilst there may be adverse health consequences, it is important to consider potential social advantages for children born to older fathers who are more likely to have progressed in their career, to have achieved financial security and have had a chance to gain self-confidence and maturity (Vanden Heuvel, 1988; Bray *et al.*, 2006). Delaying parenthood gives individuals the opportunity to gain some life experience and do the things they want before devoting attention to a child; described by older parents in Daniels and Weingarten's (1983) study as knowing what they are missing and not minding missing it.

2.11 Early transitions

Most young men anticipate becoming fathers at some point in their lives (Edley and Wetherell, 1999) although young parents may describe this occurring earlier than anticipated. Duncan *et al.* (2010:20) highlight the way in which teenage parents are

envisaged as immoral in popular and policy discourse 'because they have deviated from the cost-benefit calculative, future-oriented planned pathway of life.', thus represent the problem of not planning. Teenage parenthood has been the focus of media debate but tends to be positioned as a social problem, polarised as a class issue as supposedly 'easy' or 'out-of-control' working class fertility is seen as a threat (Tyler, 2008; Edwards *et al.* 2010). The assumed conflation between young motherhood and single mothers (Duncan *et al.*, 2010) may be one reason why the experiences of younger fathers has been overlooked, or gathered through the eyes of the mothers, providing a rather one-sided view (Reeves, 2006). There appear to be particular risk factors associated with young parenthood, such as fragmentation and social exclusion, spending time in care, poor school experiences, own parents being young parents, and low family socioeconomic status (Dearden *et al.* 1994; Pears *et al.*, 2005; Reeves, 2006; Woodward *et al.* 2006) with young fatherhood itself representing an indicator of disadvantage (Sigle-Rushton, 2005; Teenage Pregnancy Research Programme, 2006). However, Duncan *et al.* (2010) argue that teenage parenthood is best seen as a symptom of a disadvantaged life rather than the cause of it.

The research on young parenthood overwhelmingly focuses on negative aspects, although recent attempts have been made to focus on the positive elements. For example through interviews with young fathers, Reeves (2006) found the men describing parenthood as making them more responsible, in contrast to their previous reckless and often criminal behaviour. In these situations, partner or child were often positioned as 'rescuers' or 'saviours' from a destructive life path (Perrier, 2009), thus the pregnancy could be experienced as a positive 'turning point' (Duncan *et al.*, 2010; Formby *et al.*, 2010). Some young parents may also see pregnancy as a route out of their own hardship and unhappiness, allowing them to gain independence from their birth family by creating

a loving family of their own (Walter, 1986) and providing a sense of capability and satisfaction they were unable to gain through paid employment due to poor qualifications (Cater and Coleman, 2006). Daniels and Weingarten (1983) consider the timing of early parenthood, noting that for many young parents having a child provides a way out of an identity jam; declaring that one is no longer a child themselves.

This section has detailed the literature on timing, which is a central focus of the thesis. However other aspects of temporality are also important for an understanding of fatherhood, some of which will be considered in the remainder of the chapter.

2.12 Time

Though it is inaccurate to suggest that time has been neglected in sociology (Nowotny, 1992), the embeddedness of time in the normalcy of everyday life can keep it hidden from critical gaze (Daly, 1996b). What is lacking is a coherent approach to studying or conceptualising time (Adam, 1990). There are often rash generalisations into past, present and future (Bergmann, 1992) or assumptions of time as equating to quantitatively measured clock time, whilst non-quantifiable aspects related to social and cultural experience remain largely underestimated (Mills, 2000). This lack of cohesion emphasises the multiplicity of time and illustrates how it can be measured and conceptualised in a variety of ways. Whilst time has been rationalised and universally measured in the form of clock time, it is also frequently conceptualised as a resource, exemplified in the way people talk about wasting or spending time. We can recall memories, imagine futures, distinguish between work time, family time and own time, all taking place within the overarching time frame of the life course. We can also think of psychological time as opposed to quantitative measures as it encompasses our pasts and futures as well as our

presents (Salmon, 1985) and moments of time are often experienced as qualitatively uneven (Lyman and Scott, 1989). As Adam (1995:12) contends:

‘There is no single time, only a multitude of times which interpenetrate and permeate our daily lives. Most of these times are implicit, taken for granted, and seldom brought into relation with each other: the times of consciousness, memory and anticipation are rarely discussed with reference to situations dominated by schedules and deadlines. The times expressed through everyday language tend to remain isolated from the various parameters and boundaries through which we live in time. Matters of timing, sequencing and prioritizing stay disconnected from collective time structures, and these in turn form the rhythms, the transience and the recursiveness of daily existence.’

Adam argues that death is the master shaper of biography; that ultimately our awareness of inevitable mortality is in our consciousness when time-planning, yet people are now living longer and death comes at the conclusion of full lives. With longer life expectancies it should follow that people have more time to do things and feel less time pressured, yet a general sense of ‘lack of time’ appears synonymous with modern culture (Pasero, 1994; Southerton, 2003). Related to this experience of lacking time is concern about fertility time limits; whilst childbearing may have been delayed, it cannot be postponed indefinitely due to awareness of the ever-ticking biological clock and consequent decline of fertility, as discussed above. Subsequently, conceptions of a lack of time could be a significant influence on the timing of parenthood. La Rossa (1983) argues that an understanding of time is crucial when considering the transition to parenthood, as for many new parents their experiencing of time is one of the most fundamental ways in which their lives change following the birth (also La Rossa and La Rossa, 1981). He describes the birth of a child as ‘the introduction of a person who refuses to follow the temporal rules’, making the family more aware of their previously

taken for granted schedule and consequently exacerbating the feeling that they are constantly running out of time.

Existing research has highlighted a gendered experience of time. Masculine temporalities are described as linear and future-oriented, focussed on achievement and progression; for example Giddens' (1991) concept of 'colonising the future' carries particularly masculine connotations. However challenges to these anticipated futures through unexpected life events are often experienced as a 'jolt' causing people to fundamentally alter the way they think about time (Bury, 1982; Maines and Hardesty, 1987; Charmaz, 1997; Zinn, 2004; Exley and Leatherby, 2007; Shirani and Henwood, 2011b). In contrast to a masculine linear orientation, women's time is posited as contingent, related to the process time of family caring responsibilities (Maines and Hardesty, 1987; Daly, 1996b; Odih, 1999). By focussing on dichotomous explanations, such approaches lack the complexity of contemporary theorisations of multiple gendered identities. This is an issue which I have previously problematised (Shirani and Henwood, 2011b) and will be discussed further in the thesis.

For fathers, attempts to reconcile work time and family time can be problematic, resulting in choices and trade-offs (St John *et al.* 2005). Yet although quantity time may be difficult, concern about not spending enough time with children can seemingly be negated through 'quality time' (Kremer-Sadlick and Paugh, 2007); where focussing solely on the child for a brief period of time is seen as compensation for spending a large proportion of time away from them at work. The flexibility of work and the amount of time fathers are able to spend with their children has been found to be greater for delayed fathers (Walter, 1986) and therefore could be an influential factor in postponing parenthood in light of contemporary cultural emphasis on father involvement.

2.13 Summary

By outlining historical and policy conceptualisations of fatherhood, this chapter has contextualised contemporary emphasis on the ideal of involved fatherhood and highlighted the topic as an important area of study. Fatherhood is a potentially life-changing experience, which holds implications and opportunities in relation to identity, particularly masculinity. Current models of highly involved fatherhood underline parenting as temporally demanding and 'intensive', which can potentially be seen as incompatible with other life goals. This conceptualisation is an important factor in timing decisions, as some research suggests people put off parenthood until they feel able to cope with this demanding task. This may be one explanation behind the trend towards delayed parenthood, which is a cause of concern for fertility practitioners. Life course theories have highlighted timing as a central aspect of how an event is understood and experienced, with significant repercussions for those who are 'off time', yet there has been little consideration of the lived experiences of this group, particularly over the longer-term. The topics of both fatherhood and time have a substantial literature base, yet little attention has been paid to combining the two and the insights such an approach could offer. In addition, despite the important consequences it holds for the timing and subsequent experience of parenthood, men's fertility decision-making has received relatively little attention in the research literature. Such an approach also holds significant implications for debates on the persistence of the standardised life cycle and theories of individualisation. The contribution of the thesis therefore lies in the attention to these issues of fatherhood and temporality both in substantive and methodological terms.

Chapter 3

Methodology

I mean the most valuable resource in the world at the moment is time
(Barry)



3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological approach of the thesis, beginning with a discussion of qualitative interviewing and qualitative longitudinal research (QLL), reflecting particularly on the application of these methods to temporal research. This is followed by a reflexive discussion of my experiences conducting the interviews and some of the ethical issues involved in the research. Procedures and rationale of sampling are then considered, before presenting some detailed demographic information about the sample. Finally the chapter ends by reflecting on the process of analysis and representation.

Given the documented need to pay attention to the lived experiences of off-time parents, as discussed in the literature review, a qualitative approach to data generation was most appropriate for the PhD and project research. Grounded in an interpretivist philosophical position focussed on meanings and interpretation, qualitative research offers rich, varied strategies for investigating social life (Mason, 2002; Henwood, 2008). Qualitative research has a strong orientation to everyday events and knowledge that prioritises subjective understandings through attentiveness to the life worlds and voices of individuals (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001). This provides the researcher with detailed personal accounts from participants of how they see the world, composed in their own vernacular language (Scott, 2009). This distinct ontological position suggests that people's knowledge, views and experiences are meaningful properties of social reality, which research questions are designed to explore (Mason, 2002). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000:10) note

'qualitative researchers ... are committed to an emic, idiographic, case-based position, which directs their attention to the specifics of particular cases'

This interpretivist epistemological position foregrounds the importance of listening to people's accounts as a legitimate way of generating data (Mason, 2002; Back, 2007). Such rich accounts are therefore regarded as a highly authentic and valid source of knowledge given their potential to reveal how participants make sense of the everyday world (Scott, 2009).

3.2 'It's nice to have your opinion listened to' – Hearing fathers' accounts

Of all qualitative research methods, interviews are probably the most widely used (Bryman, 2008), and have been described as representing the 'gold standard' in research (Silverman, 2010). It has been suggested that interviews are not only more common in research but in social life more generally, which makes for an 'interview society' (Silverman, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). The qualitative interview has been described as a guided conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) or conversation with a purpose (Kvale, 1996), which seeks to encourage the interviewee to elaborate their responses. Unlike structured interviewing, there is greater flexibility to follow up points of interest raised by the participant and discuss what is meaningful to them, rather than imposing a pre-existing interview structure. In addition, the emergent nature of qualitative research, in terms of its flexibility to pursue new lines of inquiry, means cross-connections may develop as one interviewee says something that can be immediately pursued (Charmaz 2006, 2002) and used productively in subsequent interviews with others (Franklin, 1997).

Semi-structured are the most common form of interviews in qualitative work, providing flexibility in listening and responding to what participants have to say (Arksey and Knight, 1999). These interviews are loosely structured around an interview guide with

key questions in order to ensure the researcher's main areas of interest are covered, also allowing an element of comparability across the sample (Bryman, 2008). Whilst there is some structure, interviewees have the opportunity to answer on their own terms (Arksey and Knight, 1999) and the interviewer is able to probe (May, 2001). This approach is advocated for the flexibility it affords to pursue lines of thinking introduced by the interviewee (Franklin, 1997) or joint meanings that may emerge (Warren, 2002), arguably reducing the power imbalance between researcher and interviewee (Gabb, 2008). By paraphrasing or interpreting during the interview, the researcher can also encourage the participant's responses or clarifications where possible (Kvale, 1996; Franklin, 1997).

Several researchers advocate having an interview guide with ready-formed questions and probes to increase the researcher's confidence, allowing her to concentrate on what the person is saying (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Charmaz, 2006). By ensuring that the main research topics or questions are noted on this *aide memoire*, the researcher can cover her own areas of concern whilst providing the opportunity to follow up areas of interest to the participant. During the research I found the interview schedule was a useful prompt, but one I used less frequently as I moved through each round of data collection and was better able to recall the important questions.

Some have been critical of semi-structured interviewing for taking too much of an objectivist stance and using standardised schedules, instead arguing that each participant is different, therefore it makes sense to treat them differently (Gomm, 2004). During this research project, interview schedules became less standardised in later rounds of data collection as participants' accounts accumulated and there were individual issues to follow-up. The interview schedule also changed as data collection progressed, informed by what questions worked well, or not, and any issues participants had raised that I had

not included in the questions. However, having some standardised questions provided a useful point of comparison across the sample.

3.3 'I've ruined the rest of your questions haven't I?' – Conducting the Interviews

Although the interview schedule was mainly used as an *aide memoire* rather than a list of questions to be rigidly adhered to, I paid close attention to how questions were worded and ordered. Yates (2004) suggests beginning with background information, before moving on to discuss participants' views and opinions. Or as Corbin and Morse (2003:342) describe:

'As with any good novel, the narration begins with background information about the persons' lives and the events leading up to the event of interest. Slowly, the layers of a participant's life are peeled back, exposing the self to varying degrees, thereby moving the narration into the next phase.'

Subsequently my own interview schedules began with some brief information on the participant's background, then issues such as thoughts on good fatherhood or reactions to the term 'father'. Potentially more difficult or personal questions – such as those about relationships with partner or parents – were embedded in the middle of the interview when rapport had hopefully been established and the participant would feel more comfortable talking about potentially difficult or emotional experiences. I attempted to break contact with participants in a positive way by discussing more general and positive topics (Charmaz, 2006) such as hopes for the future or feedback on media articles. At the end participants were always thanked and told how valuable their participation had been (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

I would follow Charmaz's (2006) assertion that my own interviews were informed by a symbolic interactionist emphasis on learning about participants' views, experienced events, and actions, thus allowing the men to discuss fatherhood in their own words to show how they make sense of their experiences; an approach which suits the exploration of the complexity of men's lives (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2002). Some participants reflected on the different interviewing styles of the project researchers, suggesting they favoured the relaxed conversational style that I had attempted to follow, in contrast to more detailed prompting and probing. Whilst my own approach worked well with the majority, some participants were fairly reticent and gave only limited responses. Schwalbe and Wolkmir (2002) suggest a helpful technique for when such 'minimising' occurs; to invoke what other men have said in previous interviews. This strategy proved so useful that I employed it with all men across the sample, using responses of other participants, findings from other research and media articles. Participants appeared to feel more confident when they knew what others had said and could agree or disagree, outlining their own views. This encouraged responses and allowed men to speak in their own words whilst providing an element of comparability across the sample.

3.4 Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLL)

Most of the studies of fatherhood cited in the literature review represent one off 'snapshots' (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003) from single interviews or survey questionnaires, giving little indication as to how men may think differently about fatherhood at other points in their life. Postmodern sociological perspectives in particular highlight a dynamic world in constant change, the nature of which can be difficult to elucidate with a snapshot approach. In contrast, a QLL study provides the opportunity to consider fluctuations and changes across the life course and the repercussions of these. Both

quantitative and qualitative longitudinal research consider issues of change over time, yet a qualitative approach towards transitions, such as Timescapes, recognises that these changes are differentially experienced and interpreted. They thus seek to gain insight into 'the subjective experience of personal change' (Thomson *et al.* 2002:337).

There is little consensus as to what constitutes a QLL study other than suggestions that it takes 'a lonnnnnng time' (Saldaña, 2003:3) involving several occasions of data collection. Lewis (2007) describes QLL as research which seeks to explore change over time through more than one episode of data collection, thus emphasising temporality. Indeed it is this focus on time, particularly the interplay of the temporal, personal and cultural through focus on time and texture, which makes QLL unique. The 'long view' (Thomson, 2007) offered by QLL allows exploration of how changes emerge and are lived out in the context of individual lives. Data collection is frequently scheduled for specific points or at particular intervals to capture and explore changes which occur over time and the processes involved with these changes (Farrall, 2006) although change often takes time to emerge. Particular life events or transitions are frequently the focus of QLL research, yet change cannot be assumed even in these circumstances (Saldaña, 2003). Our own project design provided what we have termed intensive (three interviews over the first year) and extensive (eight years later) data collection to provide both 'as it is happening' accounts and a longer-term perspective.

It has been suggested that QLL offers a process-oriented view of social life due to its attempt to capture change 'as it is happening' (Ruspini, 1999; Saldaña, 2003; McLeod, 2003; Holland *et al.*, 2006). However QLL interview studies' claims about process can be challenged on the basis that they provide a series of contextualised snapshots rather than an account of change as it happens (Farrall, 2006). Unlike an ethnographic approach of

continuous immersion in the research setting, interview-based approaches rely on meeting with participants at particular intervals where they may be asked to retrospectively reconstruct what has happened since the last interview. However for many studies, including our own, interviews remain the most appropriate method of data collection. The issue of process is discussed further in the following chapter.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003b) suggest that positioning the interview subject as active means they hold facts and details of experience but also in the process of offering them up for response, constructively add to, take away from and transform facts and details. Although claims to process may be contested, the QLL researcher can explore participants' retrospective reconstructions or anticipations so all periods of the research are described (for example by asking 'what are you planning over the next few months?' then at the next interview 'what happened for you over the last few months?') but recognising that these are contextualised accounts based on the participant's present situation. The narratives built up from this type of data collection then offer insight into how pasts and futures are variously constructed at different life stages and across time, illustrating not only change in material circumstances but also in constructions of the past and anticipations of the future. This means that stories told on one occasion will be different from another, influenced by context and interviewer, representing potential divergence between 'lived lives' and 'told stories' (Squire, 2008). In this approach it is not the interviewer's role to tap the subject for meaning, but to incite respondents' answers and activate narrative production through comments and questions (Charmaz, 2006). This research is based on an understanding that there is no past to be captured, understood and described in its pure essence; there is only a past – or plurality of pasts – constructed from the point of view of an ever changing present (Järvién, 2004).

3.5 'It's nice that you've come back' – The benefits of QLL

The benefits of qualitative research in general, such as rich understanding of subjective experiences, are expanded by QLL, providing in-depth and contextually sensitive data with good explanatory value (Vogt, 2002; Henwood and Laing, 2005; Holland, 2007). The accumulation of data in QLL provides a better understanding of the individual, although not necessarily the 'truth' of that person (Thomson and Holland, 2003), offering a more substantial base for writing about identity than a one-off approach (McLeod, 2003). Following people over time also provides an opportunity to explore how and why they make individual choices that then add up to particular cumulative trajectories (Corden and Millar, 2007a). QLL studies can elucidate the experiences of those who fall outside the statistically defined norm, or enable researchers to understand the importance of what might be statistically insignificant differences (Holland *et al.* 2006; Farrall, 2006). In addition, larger processes of social change can be considered through how they are played out through individual trajectories (Gabb, 2008), as researching over time makes clearer the interplay of individual agency and shifting cultural conditions (Miller, 2010).

The flexibility of qualitative research is particularly important in a longitudinal context which seeks to foreground the subjective experience of personal change (Thomson *et al.* 2002) as the researcher is able to tailor interviews for each participant based on previous responses, gaining rich data as participants reflect back on their earlier thoughts (Farrall, 2006). This is likely to make the research experience more meaningful for participants, indicating that the researcher has taken the time to read and think about their previous statements, which they may no longer agree with. Reflecting on previous responses also enables the researcher to refine leads or check interpretations with the participant, reducing the possibility of harm through misinterpretation (Charmaz, 2002; Richardson

and Godfrey, 2003). This proved a particularly useful approach in our own research, as participants' previous comments could be reflected upon in light of their current experiences. In the qualitative longitudinal interviews she conducted, Miller (2010) found that unlike mothers, fathers did not revise their narratives in subsequent interviews. She therefore suggests that the telling of difficult experience is less problematic for fathers than mothers. However, our own data indicate a different picture, with certain issues becoming easier to talk about at different points in time. For example, in early interviews one father gave the impression of a current happy family life, whilst eight years later he recollected that this had been a particularly difficult time in his relationship with his wife, which eventually led to separation. Whilst these problems were present at the time of the initial interviews they were too difficult for him to talk about; it was only several years later when the situation was resolved that he felt able to discuss his past experiences. Discussing the same situations at different time points can therefore provide quite different data, offering a deeper understanding of subjective experience and how experiences of past, present and future change over time. Charmaz (2002) suggests that as the present changes, so may the participant's view of past events and of their 'self' because the present frames the past. As Corbin and Morse (2003:343) have noted:

'Participants may move back and forth in time and between events and sometimes even contradict themselves. These contradictions do not necessarily negate the story. Rather, they are indications that by telling their stories, participants are trying to make sense out of significant events in their lives, a clarity that might have eluded them until they sat down to talk.'

The temporality of QLL inherent in asking participants to reflect back or project forward allows them to articulate challenging experiences in the past too difficult to discuss at the time, or anticipate a time when difficulties will be alleviated, thus indicating their occurrence in the present (Shirani and Henwood, 2011a).

The biggest barrier to conducting QLL research is that it is incredibly time and resource intensive (Farrall, 2006) as it inevitably occurs over a longer period of time than a one-off study. For a QLL project to be successful it also requires a significant commitment from participants (Porter and Bhattacharya, 2008) as it can take a considerable amount of their time, which is likely to be problematic for some groups. A significant minority of our participants said they could not give more than an hour at a time, and time inevitably became more squeezed for them post-birth when they were balancing work and new family life. This potentially creates problems of attrition, although attempts were made to guard against this through regular informal contact with participants.

3.6 Researching temporally

The need to take account of people's dynamic lives has led to the development of longitudinal methodologies, which embody the notion of time (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). By bringing time and change to the centre of research (Holland, 2007) we are able to map the social world temporally (Elliot *et al.*, 2008). An understanding of time as fluid and changing recognises that participants' thoughts, actions, emotions, attitudes and beliefs are all dynamic through time (Saldaña, 2003). Through QLL we seek an understanding of the individualised circumstances of participants' everyday lives to understand how they move through time, use time or relate to time (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Some temporal aspects of QLL methodology remain implicit in the collection of data over time, however reflexivity is also central as participants are asked to reflect back or project forward (McLeod, 2003). This reflexivity means recognition that past and future both influence how the participant experiences the present (Corden and Millar, 2007b; Brannen and Nilsen, 2007) through repercussions of past decisions, or preparations for future trajectories. In addition, the task of analysis is complicated for

researchers as data collected in the future will affect analysis and interpretation of data in the present (Saldaña, 2003).

A QLL study with repeated contact inevitably leads to a different relationship with participants from that usually achieved within a one-off interview. Prolonged engagement is likely to assist rapport, and potentially facilitate a greater degree of disclosure, creating genuine familiarity with participants (Adler and Adler, 2002; Thomson and Holland, 2003). Charmaz (2006) suggests that interviewers learn when to explore a point further with probes as they become sensitive to their participants' concerns and vulnerabilities, which is easier through increased contact in a QLL study. Consequently researcher continuity is emphasised as fundamental for the success of QLL research (Daniluk, 2001; Saldaña, 2003; Thomson and Holland, 2003).

During the course of the 'Men as Fathers' project I had experience as both a subsequent researcher and continuous researcher. As a subsequent researcher I did 'eight years later' interviews with a group of men who had been interviewed up to three times by a female researcher, I also did second and third interviews with South Wales men who had been interviewed once by a male researcher. Finally, I was a continuous researcher for the remainder of the South Wales sample. At the end of the interviews participants were asked to comment on the research experience, particularly with regards to researcher continuity or change. Those who had had a continuous interviewer all said this had been important to them because of background knowledge.

Yeah it helps, you've got the story. Even if you've, I know you're reading the notes in front of you just to prompt you occasionally but you have got the story. (Barry, 37, sample C, one year later)

It's nice really 'cause, especially 'cause you've been like from before she was born, it's nice to have that continuity... it's nice as well you can see how I am and you kind of know from my background, especially with my parents as well, that I do cry a lot – I haven't cried today – but I do cry a lot and I think you've got your head round that really. It's nice 'cause I feel comfortable telling you about my parents as opposed to somebody else come along I'd have to go through all that again, you know to skim the level with my parents, don't go in detail about it. (Joe, 32, sample C, one year later)

However amongst those who had a different researcher, all participants said it did not matter as we had all 'done our research' by looking through their previous transcripts and were familiar with what had been said. Our participants generally felt that we were not in contact with them frequently enough for researcher continuity to be particularly important. Whilst continuity may have been relatively unimportant for our participants, it is likely that other more vulnerable groups may place a higher value on speaking to the same researcher. In contrast, from my own perspective, conducting the interviews was much easier when returning to participants I had met previously than those who were new to me, although by the third round of South Wales interviews there was little difference.

Although continuity has benefits in terms of rapport, it raises the risk of loss of objectivity and accumulation of a partial perspective (Holland *et al.*, 2006). Yet studies using multiple interviewers have the potential for added layers of complexity to develop (Matteson and Lincoln, 2009). Difficult early relationships between a researcher and participant due to reactions to personal characteristics or interviewing style could also be avoided in later interviews by introducing a different interviewer who may find it easier to establish rapport. Therefore whilst continuity continues to be preferable, lack of continuity is not necessarily problematic and can offer new ways of approaching the data (Shirani, 2010).

In conventional approaches participants have been conceived as passive vessels of answers, arguably reflecting a masculine paradigm of how to do research (Oakley, 1981). Conversely, contemporary positions recognise interviews as interactional, with narratives constructed *in situ* as a product of talk between participant and researcher (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003b), positioning participants as ‘active meaning-makers’ (Warren, 2002). This approach also locates the interviewer as an active participant in the co-construction of these accounts whose influence on the research needs to be accounted for (Franklin, 1997; Richards and Emslie, 2000; Manderson *et al.*, 2006) in recognising the ‘situatedness’ of the interaction (Ellis and Berger, 2002; Broom *et al.*, 2009). This insertion of the researcher’s perspective is unique to qualitative research, and his or her impression management is an important part of the qualitative interview process (Matteson and Lincoln, 2009; Broom *et al.* 2009). By making visible the situated production of talk, showing how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied (Franklin, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003), such transparency and reflexivity represent important quality criteria for appraising qualitative research.

3.7 ‘You can let your guard down more with a woman’ – Interviewing men

Despite remarks more than a decade ago that the issues surrounding women interviewing men had been largely overlooked (Williams and Heikes, 1993) it remains a topic which has received relatively little attention in the research literature. Earlier research often focussed on women’s experiences of interviewing men in an employment context (Easterday *et al.*, 1977) yet interviews on personal and family matters can also be fraught with contention. Female interviewers have frequently commented on the difficulty of reconciling their feminist views with interviewing men (Arendell, 1997; Lee, 1997;

Willott, 1998). It has been suggested that such interviews can be oppressive for the feminist interviewer as she is unable to express alternative views (to sexist comments) and the situation affirms the typical model of male-female verbal exchange with the female as placid listener (Smart, 1984). However, traditional gender expectations may mean it is easier for a female interviewer to gain men's trust and elicit discussion of intimate topics, as they are likely to be more comfortable revealing emotions and discussing feelings with a woman than they would be with another man where masculine heterosexual identity needs to be performed (Stein, 1986; Allan, 1989; Williams and Heikes, 1993; Arendell, 1997; Willott, 1998; Pini, 2005; Manderson *et al.*, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Broom *et al.*, 2009). Despite concerns about researching men as legitimising their dominant position, as discussed in the introduction, I would suggest that parenthood is one area in which men perhaps remain marginal and it is important that these stories are heard. I therefore took Arendell's (1997) approach of offering men the opportunity to discuss their experiences in their own words, regardless of whether it was what I wanted to hear.

3.8 Research Spaces

Initially the decision was made to try and interview men in their homes where possible. Several participants commented on how busy they were and partly through a sense of obligation to minimise any inconvenience it was deemed most appropriate that I should offer to go to them. There were many other benefits to interviewing men in their own homes; that they were in an environment they felt more relaxed in, that I could see their home surroundings, which often presented valuable contextual information, and that I was often able to observe interactions between participants, their partners and children. However interviewing men in their homes also increased the likelihood of disruption and

introduced the possibility that partners could overhear, which may have inhibited some men's responses. Some men chose to be interviewed at their workplace or the university as this was more convenient, but this was only taken up by a small number. Public spaces were considered but felt to be inappropriate due to noise and lack of privacy so were avoided where possible. I noticed a difference between meeting men in the private space of the home and meeting them in a semi-public workplace. At home the encounter appeared more casual and friendly, whilst meeting in a semi-public space was generally more formal and almost always began and ended with a handshake (rarely initiated by me). These interviews tended to retain an air of formality and it became more difficult to discuss particularly personal issues, such as the men's relationships with their partner.

I had some initial concerns about going alone to the homes of men I had never met and had only minimal information about. This is not to position all men as dangerous, but as I had little information to judge whether or not to feel threatened by the prospect of meeting participants in a private setting, it remained prudent to be cautious and realistic about the potential for trouble as (Lee, 1997:555) notes:

'it would be naïve to consider one-to-one interviewing as an entirely safe proposition. This is so because of the very nature of much fieldwork. People previously unknown to the researcher come forward in response to appeals for informants and offer to discuss their experiences. The researcher, delighted to have accessed responses, arranges a meeting - but does so without any concrete guarantee that the respondent's motives are nonthreatening, or that they will remain so in the fluid context of the interview.'

Most of my concerns were alleviated before the interviews began, however on some occasions the situation or participants' behaviour was somewhat unnerving. For example, one participant's residence in an isolated area with no mobile phone reception and my reliance on him for transport highlighted my sense of vulnerability. Another occasion

where I felt rather anxious was a first interview with a young father, a man to whom English was a second language. When I arrived at his flat I was shown into a living room where the curtains were drawn. Although this did not make it dark it obscured us from view. A friend of his was sitting in the room smoking. Whilst setting up the equipment I chatted to the participant whilst his friend walked around the room and spent some time standing directly behind me, not speaking to me at any point. At the time I found this quite threatening and turned and asked if I was in his way. Before the interview his friend left (although returned around halfway through) and the situation became more comfortable. Reflecting on the interview afterwards I felt his friend may have been present to reassure the participant and help if needed with his English and understanding, although at the time I was quite unnerved.

3.9 'The lady from the university' – the impact of personal characteristics

Manderson *et al.* (2006) argue that sex/gender is only one factor that influences research relationships. Age and class also structure social relationships, including those that develop in research settings. Prior to data collection I anticipated that gender would be the biggest issue during interviews, yet in many situations I felt that age was more influential. During the course of the project and PhD I interviewed fathers aged from 15 to 54, with their ages, and their reaction to my age, providing quite different interview experiences. At the time of interviews I was aged 23-25, apparently younger than some men were expecting. Whilst this did not appear to be problematic in most cases, some of the older respondents commented on the age gap between us. For example, when reflecting on how a young nurse had given him advice about contraception after the birth of his child and his embarrassment about this, Lawrence commented:

The nurse we had was very young, probably about your kind of age; I don't know what you are but looking very young anyway,
(54, sample D, post-birth)

Consequently this may have influenced how participants spoke to me and what they felt was appropriate for us to discuss. Paternalistic behaviour was most common among the older respondents, who may have felt this was the most legitimate way of interacting with a young woman (Easterday *et al.* 1977; Herod, 1993). Alternatively the focus of the research topic may have emphasised this trait. When asked at the end of the interview to reflect on their experiences of participation, no-one said that the age of interviewer was important.

I was rarely asked if I had children myself and took this as an assumption that I was too young to do so, as I was more frequently asked whether I would like children in the future. Several of the men made comments to the effect that I would understand when it was my turn to become a parent, assuming therefore that I would at some stage have children.

Yeah I think I've become closer because you can appreciate what they went through, you can appreciate your parents more when you have your own children, believe me, believe me Fiona you will appreciate them. When you see it yourself and you know what they've gone through (Alun, 33, sample A, post-birth)

When asked, I believed it was best to imply that I may have children in the future, as someone who was not interested in having children may have been perceived as an inappropriate person to discuss parenthood with. I generally felt that my childless status acted to my advantage by positioning the men as knowledgeable subjects whilst I could act as the 'ignorant student who has to be taught' (Lofland, 1971) meaning they may have been more confident in their accounts than they would have been if talking to someone

with experience of parenthood, particularly given the concerns they expressed about their own lack of knowledge.

It has been suggested elsewhere that when the researcher is female it is useful to contemplate how participants may have responded differently to a man and vice versa (Pini, 2005). The data that I have used for the thesis was produced by three interviewers, so has enabled me to consider whether participants may have reacted to each person differently. Between us we encompass diversity not only in gender but in age, relationship status, professional status and physicality. We have in common that we are all white and childless. Although, when asked, most of the participants were ambivalent about the sex of the interviewer, it did appear to have an effect on participants' responses. Several times men expressed comments that could be interpreted as sexist and when being interviewed by a female researcher tended to pre- or post-fix this with "I'm not sexist but ..." which never happened with the male interviewer.

Yeah I think it is easier to be a natural mother than it is to be a natural father. Which it shouldn't be, it shouldn't be and it is probably sexist of me to say that there is such a thing as a natural mother. (Christian, 33, sample B, post-birth)

But you don't get any recognition of it I don't get any extra pay for it I don't get anything for it. And it makes me wonder if it was a female if she would handle you a little bit different, and that is not being sexist because I am not a sexist. (Malcolm, 32, sample A, post-birth)

But you know your daughter I think you always look at, don't get me wrong it's probably a sexist opinion but I think you always look at girls as being more vulnerable than boys. But that's the way I am I'm afraid (Joe, 31, sample C, pre-birth)

When making these comments it was often with an air of apology, that it was not necessarily the right thing to say to a female researcher (Arendell, 1997; Gatrell, 2006).

When the interviewer was male there were no instances of any attempts to justify answers, the word sexist was never mentioned. These responses highlight the benefit of qualitative interviewing; men felt able to express comments that could be interpreted as sexist to a female researcher because they subsequently had the opportunity to explain their response and articulate a justification in the shared understanding of the interview (Williams and Heikes, 1993). The sex of the interviewer therefore did not appear to inhibit participants' responses but altered the frame within which they were presented.

When asked to reflect on their experience of being part of the research, several participants said they found it easier speaking to a woman, or expressed concerns about speaking to a man as they perceived this to be more challenging in terms of masculinity. They felt that it was easier to express emotions to a woman and would have been more reticent with a male interviewer.

I think it's probably easier to talk to you than it is a man about these things. Just because get two men in a room talking sappy things about being a dad is probably a little bit more reserved. But I did that stage before Poppy was born. So if anything it's probably a little bit easier to talk to yourself I would say
(William, 30, sample C, one year later)

With a few exceptions I was surprised at the similarity in participants' accounts between interviewers and what they were prepared to disclose or discuss. In general, the men enjoyed the opportunity of being actively listened to (Olliffe and Mroz, 2005).

The experience of 'interviewing men' is often referred to in all-encompassing terms as if men represented a homogenous group, when in reality the category is internally diverse (Schwalbe and Wolkmir, 2002). My experiences varied considerably between interviews based on the participants' reaction to me and their openness to talk. For example, men

who had experienced therapy or counselling were used to talking about themselves in a one-to-one interaction and appeared to translate this to the interview setting. I mean to suggest that whilst there are some important issues to consider, 'interviewing men' is an unhelpful label which masks distinctions between men.

3.10 A note on reflexivity

Given the importance of the researcher/participant relationship discussed above, the interview needs to be analysed as a co-constructed event where the researcher must be reflexive about her own participation in the research (Henderson *et al.*, 2006). The research relationship subsequently becomes a focus of analytic attention, so a clear record of this is needed (Thomson and Holland, 2003; Holland, 2007). Reflexivity in locating the self as a gendered being in the research has been encouraged in order to acknowledge the researcher/researched relationship in the co-constructed interview (Coffey, 1999). Whilst earlier discussion about the influence of gender on the interview dynamic has adopted essentialist conceptions by failing to consider the impact of other social attributes (Herod, 1993), I have attempted to account for these, particularly in reference to age. These attributes did have an effect on interviews, yet it was not uniform, with each participant reacting differently. As Plummer (2001) notes, despite the researcher's best intentions, there is an elusive element of 'personal factors' that cannot be anticipated. I would argue that my age and gender made me a non-threatening person to talk to, perhaps facilitating disclosure about emotional issues. However, it may have been that as a professional person I appeared threatening to some men, particularly younger fathers, making them conscious about how they expressed themselves. By recognising that who respondents think you are affects what you get told (Richards and

Emslie, 2000) I have attempted to acknowledge my own influence on the interview accounts.

In addition to the demands placed on participants, the repeated interviews required in QLL can be a draining experience for the researcher as relationships with participants develop and understandings of their lives deepen. Through constant preoccupation with the data the nature of the researcher's relationship with participants can become masked and over-emphasised. Although I believe there was genuine familiarity with participants created through the QLL dimension of the research (Thomson and Holland, 2003), it would be presumptuous to assume that the researcher has a powerful effect on participants' lives (Luff, 1999). However this may be an issue for studies with more frequent researcher-participant contact, or designs based on mutual disclosure.

3.11 Ethics

Ethical issues are paramount in social research, relating directly to the integrity of a study (Bryman, 2008). Ethical research is not only important for ensuring the wellbeing of participants, but to make sure that the field is not spoilt for future researchers (Ryen, 2004). There are various ethical guidelines available to researchers. In my own research I followed those outlined by the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002) and the study was approved by the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences research ethics committee. These guidelines proved useful for outlining some of the major issues. However, these abstract universal standards are challenged by a focus on situated ethics (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002), which recognises that all ethical acts are situated in socio-political contexts that require the researcher to make decisions in particular settings (Simons and Usher, 2000). Timescapes upholds a concern with situated ethics, noting

that ethical principles are mediated within research practices and cannot be applied invariantly to all research settings. In this section I detail some of the main ethical issues I encountered and how these were negotiated.

3.11a Informed consent

One of the most commonly cited ethical issues in research is obtaining informed consent (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2000). Prior to initial interviews, we provided participants with an information sheet detailing what participation would involve, including the length and format of the interview as well as how data would be stored and used. This information was reiterated at the start of each interview before the tape recorder was switched on, emphasising the participant's right to stop the recording and their right to terminate the interview at any point. Corbin and Morse (2003) note that at the start of an interview participants are not always aware of the course the discussion might take or what secrets they might divulge, as the dynamic nature of qualitative interviews makes it impossible to predict with certainty what might transpire. Therefore, the unfolding and emerging process of qualitative research means that participants cannot be fully informed about the potential consequences of the research (Cieurzo and Keitel, 1999; Wiles *et al.*, 2004). The shifting nature of research is problematic in terms of informed consent (Warren, 2002) particularly with longitudinal research. Subsequently it became necessary to engage in 'process consenting' to update participants and confirm their willingness to participate at each stage. Participants were reminded of the ethical safeguards outlined above, and after each interview they were asked how they found the research process and if there was anything they would like to have removed from the transcript. Whilst one participant said '*if there's something I don't want people to know I just won't tell you*' others used this option if they had mentioned personal details about another person who had not given permission to be included in the research. At each interview participants were

updated with information about the project, such as archiving developments, and these were also communicated through written briefings sent out to participants. Obtaining informed consent prior to the first interview was an important ethical safeguard, yet due to the dynamic nature of the research, consent had to be ongoing and reconfirmed at each interview.

3.11b Anonymity

Sieber (1992) suggests that it is crucial to assure participants of anonymity, whilst it should also be made clear how far this could be afforded (BSA, 2002 n18). Our research participant information sheet detailed the anonymisation procedure for replacing all names, place names and work details with pseudonyms, whilst personal details would be kept confidentially in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. This was also reiterated at the beginning of each interview and all participants said they were happy with these safeguards. However on a couple of occasions during the interviews, often when relaying something particularly sensitive about another person, participants wanted verbal confirmation from me that the data would be anonymised. Murphy and Dingwall (2001) suggest that respondents may feel embarrassed about the opinions they hold, and subsequently may feel more comfortable to discuss how they feel if they know they will not be identified. Some participants were unconcerned with anonymity and suggested that they would not mind being identified, however the same anonymisation procedures were applied across the sample.

Whilst anonymity is a condition of participation in most research, issues of confidentiality and intrusion are magnified in longitudinal research (Farrall, 2006; Holland, 2007) as information about the individual is gradually built up. For the Timescapes projects, confidentiality was a significant concern because of commitments

to archive full transcripts to facilitate data sharing. Archiving raised the biggest ethical challenge for this data set as we had to ensure that participants were not identifiable without making too many changes to the transcript, as this might erode the reusability of the data. With longitudinal research, masking the identity of participants became increasingly difficult as more detailed information about them was accumulated over several rounds of data collection. Preparing data for archiving raised difficulties in balancing the interests of participant, researcher (who would be identifiable in the archived data), project and secondary user (Hadfield, 2010), issues which have not yet been fully resolved. Participant anonymity was held as the most important aspect, whilst ensuring that the integrity of the data was not compromised.

3.11c Emotional experiences

Some participants experienced the interview as a therapeutic encounter which gave them the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and views. The majority of these men talked about the research process itself as cathartic, finding it 'good to talk'. However on a few occasions it appeared that the interview process had brought up various emotions for the participant which they had not necessarily expected, as it was easier to talk about these issues to a relative stranger (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2003). Whilst the display of strong emotions should not necessarily be regarded as problematic, some men appeared uncomfortable with emotions that had erupted unexpectedly. On these occasions the researcher stayed with the participant for a while after the interview until the participant seemed more comfortable. As part of the interview design, the question schedules were organised to end on more positive and neutral topics, although the semi-structured technique allowing participants to deviate meant this did not always run as planned. During one interview which I conducted the participant became emotional and had a few tearful episodes. He described himself as someone who always 'cried like a baby' and was

used to expressing his emotions in encounters with a therapist. He became tearful when talking about difficult episodes such as a miscarriage and the abuse he suffered as a child. Each time I asked if he was happy to continue and reiterated that we did not have to talk about these topics if he was uncomfortable. However when this participant – and other men who became tearful in interviews – became upset, they all said they were happy to keep talking about the subject and found it helpful to do so.

When discussing difficult topics, questions were often framed with ‘this is a bit of an unusual question’ or ‘this is something you may not have thought about’, in an attempt to facilitate participants’ comfort through some preparation (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2003). Participants often raised sensitive topics themselves, such as their experiences of miscarriage, which could be probed by initially asking if they were okay to talk about this topic (what Hutchinson *et al.*, 2003 refer to as ‘process consenting’) or saying ‘since you brought it up’ (Schwalbe and Wolkmir, 2002).

One issue particular to longitudinal research is participants’ concern that they are setting themselves up to fail. This was a significant concern for one participant who felt that by documenting his life and future aspirations he would be ‘accountable’ if things did not work out as planned. Whilst it was made clear that this was not the intention of the research, he was concerned about how he would feel if unable to meet his own expectations and disliked being reminded of his previous responses. No other participants have mentioned these concerns although it is likely that they will be relevant for others. For example, another man commented that he liked to be reminded of his previous responses but this was also ‘painful’ for him as his life had not turned out as expected. This is a significant issue in how subsequent interviews can be approached, requiring a careful balance between aspects participants like to be reminded of and areas

which have not met their earlier expectations. Sometimes it can be easier raising these points after a significant time interval when earlier goals can be rejected as 'naïve' or 'unrealistic' by participants, therefore reducing concerns that they have not been met (discussed further in chapter five).

In focussing on ethical issues there can be a tendency to look at the research in negative terms for the participant; however it can also be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. As Oliver (2003) notes, people may find participation interesting and if they know their views are valued and appreciated it can heighten feelings of self-esteem. Similarly Gubrium and Holstein (2002) suggest participation can be empowering for respondents by providing a space for their story to be heard. As Kvale (1996:36) describes:

'A well-conducted qualitative interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee. It is probably not a very common experience in everyday life that another person ... is interested only in, sensitive toward, and seeks to understand as well as possible another's experiences and views on a subject.'

When asked for reflections on their participation, a large number of the men stated that they appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences in an area that was overwhelmingly associated with women. For some young fathers in particular this proved a valuable opportunity as they felt their views otherwise went unheard.

3.12 'Are there a lot of people like me?' – Detailing the Sample

Bryman (2008) suggests that the lack of transparency which is sometimes a feature of qualitative research is particularly apparent in relation to sampling, most notably how participants were selected and how many participated. Subsequently in this section I aim

to make clear my own sampling strategies and illustrate some demographic details of my sample. More detailed descriptions of each participant can be found in appendix 1.

Throughout the thesis I refer to participants based on four different sample groups, as follows:

- **Sample A** – 19 men who became fathers for the first time in 2000 (in East Anglia - EA). Interviewed once before the birth and up to twice in the first year afterwards. Also interviewed once in 2008.
- **Sample B** – 11 men who became fathers for the first time in 2000 (in EA). Interviewed once before the birth and up to twice in the first year afterwards. Could not be traced in 2008.
- **Sample C** – 15 men who became fathers for the first time in 2008 (in South Wales - SW). Interviewed once before the birth and up to twice in the first year afterwards.
- **Sample D** – 8 men interviewed once in 2008/9 during the first 12 months of first-time fatherhood (South Wales and South West England). These men were specifically sampled for PhD research based on age at birth (under 22 or over 40)

Sample A and B were recruited simultaneously and therefore for this section I will refer to them together.

I was not involved in the recruitment of samples A and B, who were all recruited within one month through emails to university colleagues, advertisements in local newspapers and through local GPs. In contrast, recruitment in South Wales, which I was largely responsible for, was a much longer process as the above strategies produced only three participants. In South Wales our most successful recruitment avenue was the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), who helped us to access five participants through distributing leaflets at antenatal classes. Leaflets were also widely distributed in various public venues,

although this led to only one respondent. The table below details successful recruitment strategies.

Table 1: Successful recruitment strategies:

Strategy	Number Recruited
Newspaper advertisement	19 (EA)
Local GPs	7 (EA)
Personal/colleague contacts	7 (1EA, 3SW, 3 PhD)
NCT	6 (5 SW, 1 PhD)
University advertisement	6 (3EA, 1 SW, 2 PhD)
Support agencies (e.g. Surestart, training programmes)	3 (2SW, 1 PhD)
Recruitment agency	3 (SW)
Leaflets	1 (SW)
Specialist website advertisements	1 (PhD)

Due to the small number of young fathers in samples A and B, when recruiting in South Wales concerted efforts were made to ensure these men were represented, inevitably making recruitment a longer process as they were harder to access. This initially involved working with people involved in supporting young men (such as youth offending teams, alternative education programmes, Surestart) but due to the low response rate from this approach, a recruitment agency was employed to specifically target younger fathers, although this also had a much lower success rate than anticipated. Whilst many men could be relied upon to make initial contact themselves, it was often necessary for the research team to initiate all contact with young fathers; obtaining their contact details in the first place proved particularly problematic. I continued to use these strategies for my PhD recruitment, along with websites targeting parents in specific age groups, and personal contacts. Whilst I obtained a small number of PhD participants through my own acquaintances, I had not met any of the participants and had little information about them prior to the interviews.

3.13 Sampling rationale

Patton (2002) notes that qualitative inquiry focuses on a comparatively small group, purposively sampled to include information-rich cases and gather detailed data. A purposive strategy attempts to establish a good correspondence between the research questions and sample (Bryman, 2008). Although not all qualitative research uses purposive sampling techniques, I felt this was most appropriate for my study. For example, given the importance of timing to the experience of an event, as highlighted in the literature, for sample D I wanted to specifically target those who may have experienced it as 'off time'. Initially thinking about this in terms of age I purposively sampled men who were younger and older than the statistically defined norm of 25-35 years (ONS, 2009a). 'Theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) refers to a similar strategy of seeking respondents who seem likely to epitomise analytic criteria in which the researcher is interested (Warren, 2002). Theoretical sampling is a technique which advocates recruiting interviewees until categories achieve theoretical saturation (Bryman, 2008). Or as Arksey and Knight (1999) describe, to keep trying to increase sample size until you are not hearing any new points. The difficulty with this strategy is not being able to know in advance how many participants might be necessary, therefore making it difficult to plan resources. Early on I anticipated recruiting ten participants to the PhD to provide in-depth interviews with five younger and five older fathers, on the basis that I would recruit further if I felt this was necessary. However, given theoretical saturation (Glaser and Straus, 1967), the decision was made to stop at eight.

Qualitative samples tend to be significantly smaller than quantitative, although there is a lack of consensus about what constitutes an appropriate size (Bryman, 2008). Although a relatively small sample size if intending to make generalisations to the general population, the theoretical saturation achieved from a diverse group of participants suggests there is

no reason why their experiences would not represent commonalities with a wider group of fathers. Williams (2000) suggests that it is possible for interpretivist sociologists to make '*moderatum* generalisations': more limited than total generalisations but with a greater validity than other kinds of categories that might derive from cultural characteristics, based on cultural consistency in the social world. Instead of attempting to evaluate qualitative research in quantitative terms, Knight (2002) argues that qualitative research makes an honest and systematic attempt to understand the people sampled, providing in-depth knowledge that can deepen understanding. Similarly Patton (2002:185) notes:

‘The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size

Yates (2003) suggests that QLL studies sample a small number of people but are not small-scale studies as they are carried out over several years with multiple interviews. Whilst fifty three people were interviewed across the PhD and project, this produced 141 interview recordings and transcripts, as well as visual material, generated over an eight year period. The point of dealing with a small number of people in a lot of detail is to see specificity and context in fine grain, therefore the meaningfulness and contribution of QLL studies with a small number of participants lie in multiple acts of design, comparison, reflexive interpretation and dialogue with the broader field (Yates, 2003). Returning to the same participants over time meant detailed responses accumulated, providing a substantial basis for writing about identity (McLeod, 2003). By ensuring that men from a variety of age groups and occupational backgrounds were represented in the project we aimed to explore some of the diversity in fathering experience, although even within a relatively demographically homogenous group there was a huge variety of

experiences. In addition, through my PhD sampling strategy I sought to target those men who are often missed out of quantitative studies to get an in-depth understanding of how they experienced the transition to fatherhood.

An important aspect of QLL research is maintaining a sample throughout the study to avoid attrition. As there were often long periods between interviews I attempted to keep in touch with participants through brief emails or telephone calls to ensure contact details had not changed. This was particularly important for trying to ensure as many young fathers as possible remained in the study as many of them moved and/or changed telephone numbers between interviews. However, based on my experiences over an eighteen month period of data collection, I anticipate it would be particularly challenging to keep young men in a sample over a long period of time, a difficulty experienced by other Timescapes studies (Weller, 2010).

3.14 Sample Demographics

The following section illustrates how the sample is comprised in terms of age, occupation and relationship status across the four sample groups. The dynamic nature of QLL means many of these categorisations changed across the research, so I have used data from the time of the first child's birth to allow greater comparability across the four groups.

Table 2: Samples by Age

Age	Sample A	Sample B	Sample C	Sample D	Total
23 and under	0	1	3	4	8
24-27	2	1	2	0	5
28-31	6	2	5	0	13
32-35	9	6	2	0	17
36-39	1	1	2	0	4
40+	1	0	1	4	6

It is perhaps unsurprising that the largest proportion of the sample are in the age range 28-35 years, encompassing the most common age for fatherhood within marriage according to ONS Birth Statistics (2009). However the majority of these men come from samples A and B. In contrast for sample C where concentrated efforts were made to target a range of age groups the sample is dispersed more evenly. This is to allow a range of voices to be heard and lived experiences of fatherhood explored. Partners ranged in age from 16 to 45 at the time of the birth. 21 men had older partners, 20 had younger partners and the rest were the same age. Age differences between the men and their partners ranged up to eighteen years. Sample D participants were recruited specifically to expand the age range of the sample in order to explore the experiences of those who made the transition to fatherhood earlier or later than average, thus giving voice to those with different experiences.

Categorising participants according to occupational or class status proved problematic given changing occupational status across the research. In addition, lack of coherence between official classifications and the men's own understanding of their occupational and class positions made such categorisations unhelpful and therefore this has not been used. However each participant's occupation is detailed in appendix 1. Although incorporating fathers across all occupational groups, the samples included a large proportion of participants from higher occupational backgrounds. Whilst it is not

unusual in social research for the sample to be skewed towards those who understand the educational endeavour of the research and seek to support it, we sought to include those who were in more difficult circumstances and were less likely to come to us (Hemmerman, 2010). Ultimately, just under half the sample described having working-class backgrounds, which indicates the sample as being more diverse than objective categorisations would suggest. Expectant fathers are an almost invisible group, making targeted recruitment strategies particularly difficult (with the exception of NCT groups for attracting middle-class participants). Post-birth the men were much more visible in terms of a fatherhood identity and in a small number of cases men in unusual circumstances were recruited to the study soon after the birth of their child rather than during pregnancy.

The sample is ethnically homogenous with the majority of participants describing themselves as white British. Two men were white European and one was South African but all had lived in the UK for several years. No attempts were made to include or exclude people from particular ethnic groups in any of the samples. However the populations we recruited from are some of the most ethnically homogenous in the UK as in both East Anglia and Wales over 95% of the population identifies as white British (ONS, 2001b). This suggests that specifically targeted efforts would need to be made to reach people from different ethnic groups in this area. In the South Wales sample six participants identified as Welsh whilst nine had Welsh partners. The significance of national identity varied considerably across the group.

Table three illustrates relationship status before and after birth, although this status changed throughout the research.

Table 3: Relationship status by number of participants

Relationship Status	Relationship status at conception	Relationship status 6 months post-birth¹
Married	33	36
Cohabiting	12	11
In a relationship but living separately	7	0
Single	1	5

Three of these marriages and four cohabitations occurred after conception, most of which were described as prompted by the pregnancy. Four couples separated within the first six months post-birth, with two further separations over the course of the study. Two cohabiting couples also married several years after the birth of their first child.

One of the most important elements of the data for the PhD focus was the timing of fatherhood within men's lives. Even within the more homogenous parts of the sample (in terms of age) there was significant variation in the men's timing, and subsequently their lived experience of fatherhood. The table below indicates the timing experiences that men discussed, categorised by age, which was a key factor in recruitment.

Table 4: Timing of fatherhood

	23 and under	24-27	28-31	32-35	36-39	40+	Total
Right time	0	3	10	8	0	3	24
Mistimed	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Semi-planned	1	0	0	4	0	0	5
Unplanned	7	1	1	2	1	1	13
Delayed	0	0	2	1	3	2	8

Table four illustrates the range of timing experiences which men described, although these categories inevitably mask diversity. The table illustrates that unplanned pregnancy

¹ One (married) father unknown as lost contact after interview 1

is overwhelmingly the experience of the youngest group, whilst the experience of delayed pregnancy is spread more evenly amongst different age groups. These themes will be expanded upon further in the following chapters.

When planning my PhD the original intention was to focus specifically on the timing of fatherhood. Based on the East Anglia data there appeared to be little change in the men's views on timing over the first year. It was only eight years later that some opinions had altered. The lack of apparent change compounded with the difficulties I experienced in accessing participants led to the decision to do one-off interviews with participants with those recruited specifically for the PhD rather than QLL study. As my theoretical understanding of temporality improved and I began to notice the extent to which time was embedded in the men's accounts, both implicitly and explicitly, the focus of the PhD widened to include these new and interesting aspects. Subsequently a QLL design could have provided insightful data in relation to temporal understanding, as I have used the Timescapes data to illustrate. However for the issue of timing, only a substantial gap would have been likely to yield significantly different data as participants could see longer-term repercussions of their timing decisions.

3.15 Analysis

It has been suggested that transcription is a form of analysis as it inevitably involves an element of data reduction (McLellan-Lemal, 2008), informing how data are selected and constructed as analysable (Van den Berg, 2005). Sample A and B interviews for rounds 1-3 were transcribed by an external agency, whilst I chose to carry out all the remaining transcriptions for the project and PhD (n=72). This was inevitably a time-consuming process, yet offered many benefits, particularly when they were interviews which I had

conducted; I could record facial expressions or other non-verbal behaviour in the text, the number of sections marked 'inaudible' were significantly reduced due to greater familiarity with the interview, and transcripts could be anonymised and formatted to required conventions as I typed. In addition, as an early stage researcher, transcribing helped me to evaluate my own interviewing approach so I could alter my strategy for future interviews where I felt this was necessary. Finally, transcribing provided increased familiarity with the data, offering the opportunity to identify recurring concepts (McLellan-Lemal, 2008), thus representing an early stage of analysis. Transcripts were fairly detailed, including prosaic, paralinguistic and other non-verbal features, such as pause length and emphasised words (Squire, 2008) in order to retain as much information as possible for future reuse.

The large amount of textual material produced in qualitative research can be analysed in a variety of ways (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) but the consensus is that it involves making sense of data (Tesch, 1990; Creswell, 1998). I initially chose to analyse the data thematically across each round of interviews as they were conducted. I took a grounded theory approach to the research where analysis was an ongoing activity, so I was aware of emergent themes that could be followed up in later interviews (Arksey and Knight 1999; Bryman, 2008; Rubin and Rubin 2005). Although grounded theorists have existing knowledge and ideas about the research subject before entering the field (Clarke, 2006), the approach emphasises openness to all possible interpretations of the data, thus is data-driven. In other words, grounded theory emphasises the generation of theory from data, rather than imposing pre-existing concepts, ensuring that theoretical ideas are grounded in data (Charmaz and Henwood, 2008).

Each transcript was imported into Atlas ti software for the 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) of interviews. Sections of the text were highlighted and labelled with a particular code which I felt best encapsulated the essence of the extract. These codes generally emerged during analysis, although some categories which had been used to inform data collection – such as 'timing' – were also used as codes. In longitudinal data collection, extracts from earlier interviews could be incorporated into the interview schedule to remind participants how they had previously constructed their accounts; also enabling developing concepts to be further explored (Miller, 2000). Given the large size of the data set, the code and retrieve function of the Atlas ti software proved particularly valuable.

The data set was analysed in two main ways; thematic or cross-sectional analysis of each wave of interviews to explore key issues across cases (Lewis, 2007; Shirani and Henwood, 2011b) and case studies of each individual across all interviews (Shirani and Henwood, 2011a). QLL effectively triples the analytic burden by demanding cross-sectional analysis, longitudinal analysis and the articulation of the two (Farrall, 2006). Thematic analysis could be conducted throughout data collection, yet the accumulation of case study material meant the longitudinal analysis occurred later in the study. The QLL design meant that new data held implications for existing interpretations, highlighting their provisionality (Saldaña, 2003; Henderson *et al.*, 2006). However, the amount of data for each individual ultimately served to deepen insight into subjective experiences. The focus on timing experiences appeared best suited to a thematic analysis across all interviews rather than a case study approach, although some participants' longer term reflections are discussed in chapter seven.

3.16 Secondary Analysis

In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative data is seldom re-analysed, partly due to a culture of individualistic ownership and assumed risk of decontextualisation (Fielding, 2004; Van den Berg, 2005). Yet issues of missing information or contextual details are often present in primary research, particularly when research teams share data one another have collected (Corti and Thompson, 2004; Gillies and Edwards, 2005). The Timescapes study has a central commitment to archive data generated by all the projects into a composite resource for sharing and re-use. All those who participated in the project as funded under Timescapes were asked for their permission to archive data, and all gave permission for anonymised transcripts to be included. The archive provides a practical resource for the secondary analysis of qualitative data, making the research more transparent. This is particularly important in qualitative research where little of the raw data makes it into the final report (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

Re-use of qualitative data is a topic which has evoked considerable debate polarising on the one hand a position that qualitative data are special and cannot be re-used by others, and on the other that data should be open to others, not least because they are expensive to produce (Mason, 2007). Therefore mining the data to its fullest extent is described as an ethical imperative (Bryman, 2008). On one side it is argued that the original relationship between researcher and participant is crucial to the information provided, and the secondary user is no longer bound by the same ethical responsibilities (Richardson and Godfrey, 2003; Hofferth, 2005; Gillies and Edwards, 2005). Others suggest that qualitative data is capable of being revisited from multiple perspectives, and used to answer different research questions to those envisaged by the original data collector (Kelder, 2005). In addition to significant concerns about ethical safeguards for participants, researchers may have concerns about leaving themselves open to criticism in

their visibility to secondary users (Bell, 2004; Bishop, 2007), although this arguably makes better and more transparent research (Corti and Thompson, 2004; Silva, 2007).

The issue of context is one of the biggest barriers to re-use of qualitative data, yet some have challenged the way in which context is understood (Silva, 2007). Rather than view secondary analysis as mining pre-existing data, Moore (2007) suggests it is more productive to think of re-use as a process of reconstructing and recontextualising. From this perspective, data are also co-constructed in secondary analysis through encounters with the transcript and audio recordings (Bishop, 2007). It has also been suggested that making information available about the interview interaction can go some way to providing the relevant context for secondary analysis. For example, Van den Berg (2005) advocates including information on setting and visible personal characteristics, which are likely to influence the interaction. However, others have suggested that a recognition of the embodied, contextual knowledge of the researcher as important is incompatible with the foundationalist premise of secondary analysis, which implies meaning and understanding can be divorced from the practices of data collection (Mauthner and Doucet, 2008).

For the thesis, drawing the line between what constituted primary and secondary analysis was not straightforward. There is a continuum from data generated in a project I had no involvement with, through to data I collected exclusively for the PhD. I have decided to describe analysis of data from the three rounds of interviews in 2000 as secondary analysis, whilst describing everything else as primary analysis. As I was not part of the research team when the first three rounds of interviews for samples A and B were conducted and have analysed data from a slightly different perspective to that originally intended, I have termed my involvement with these interviews as secondary analysis. Re-

visit interviews with sample A in 2008 however have a different dynamic. Although I only conducted a small number of these interviews (5 of 19) I was a member of the research team and had a significant involvement in designing the interview schedule. This provided me with the opportunity to include questions particular to my PhD interests around time and timing. Subsequently I term my engagement with this data as primary analysis. I have also drawn a similar distinction with sample C data, where questions aiming to elicit data for the PhD were built into each round of interviews; the majority of which I conducted. Sample D data collected specifically for the PhD is less problematic and represents a more straightforward example of primary analysis. These difficulties in establishing a distinction between primary and secondary analysis echo an ongoing debate in the literature on this issue (Hammersley, 2010). I have drawn the distinction on the basis of my involvement in research design and data collection, acknowledging that blurring between the two renders steadfast distinctions problematic.

3.17 Representation

Jipson and Litton (2000) note that representing others is an issue fraught with ethical danger, as the researcher has the power to misrepresent participants. This concern is most prominent during the process of interpretation and dissemination as the researcher may interpret the data in a different way than the participant intended. This concern is unlikely to ever be completely alleviated, as postmodernism emphasises diversity of meanings and their fluidity; all accounts are created by the writer and all writings are interpreted by the reader, not necessarily as the writer intended (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In attempt to minimise misrepresentation, during later interviews I frequently checked my interpretation of their accounts with participants and this gave them the opportunity to further explicate anything I had misunderstood. Other research has asked

participants to comment on their analysis and interpretation to ensure that understanding was accurate. However, it would have been inappropriate to place more demands on the time of our participants, as they often stated how busy their lives were. They were able to see their interview transcripts and project publications, although few chose to do so.

Qualitative research is unique in the insertion of the researcher's perspective into the analysis of data. The researcher holds a dual role as both researcher and a research subject due to the co-constructed nature of the encounter, which adds a complex layer to the subsequent analysis of data (Matteson and Lincoln, 2009). I have attempted to account for my own place in the research in relation to personal characteristics and how this influenced the data collected. Although further reflexivity is advocated by some authors (Day, 2002), there is a danger that this becomes an opportunity to 'wallow in subjectivity' (Finlay, 1998) and such solipsistic exercises contribute nothing to systematic understanding (Delamont and Atkinson, 2004). My ethos has been to privilege the accounts of participants, as the research emphasises the importance of hearing their own words, rather than my own experiences.

3.18 Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodological approach of the thesis from epistemological underpinnings to processes of analysis and representation. My own approach to qualitative interviewing has been situated within the existing methodological literature, whilst I have also attempted to highlight the value of QLL in the unique contribution it can make to temporal research. By speaking to participants over time we can explore the changes and continuities in their experiences and opinions, which are influenced by present circumstances, past experiences and future expectations. This arguably is a better

reflection of lives which are not static but dynamic, acknowledging that views and experiences change over time.

The chapter has also provided reflexive discussion of my own experience and influence on the co-constructed interview data through accounting for my presence as a gendered being in the research process. This is an attempt to continue debates about women interviewing men, which have received relatively little attention in the research literature. Some of the ethical issues encountered during the research have also been discussed. Whilst many more issues have arisen and been debated by the Timescapes network, I have chosen to focus on those which had the most relevance for the PhD research. Finally the chapter has provided detailed information about the sample and sampling procedure, concluding with processes of analysis and representation.

Through detailing methodological and ethical procedure, this chapter has attempted to make the process of conducting the research transparent; a quality criterion for evaluating qualitative research. Reflections on methodology continue in the next chapter which discusses visual methods established and used in the study, with particular focus on their value for eliciting temporal data.

Chapter 4

Eliciting Temporal Data

I always tend to think about the future
and I can see this is only the beginning
and pregnancy is just like the prologue really.
Everything else starts from then, and it is a long time.

(Kenny)



4.1 Introduction

Given the PhD focus on timing and temporality, it was important to consider how temporal data could be collected. This chapter blurs the division between method and results by presenting methodological findings in order to foreground techniques developed in the PhD and project research for eliciting temporal data. The chapter focuses on the past/present/future divide highlighted as important in Mead's (1932) work. This distinction is recognised as simplistic (Bergmann, 1992), but provides a useful organisational format for presenting the findings. In order to go beyond these boundaries, the final section of the chapter considers participants' wider thoughts about and experiences of time.

Mead's (1932) work has been influential in theorising about time as he considers the power of temporal organisation for the creation of social order, particularly through the partitioning of time into past, present and future (Flaherty and Fine, 2001). Mead sees the self as a temporal process, aware of one's own finitude through an understanding of oneself as mortal. He emphasises the present as the paramount form of temporality, described as the space of reality. Conversely, past and future are multiple, subject to change and reinterpretation. This division of temporal experience into 'then, now and next' (Henwood and Finn, 2010) can be seen as representing a progress narrative. For example, Felski (2000) suggests that individuals make sense of their identities by endowing them with a temporal *gestalt*, to describe a 'life time'. This process of understanding one's life as a project encompasses and connects the random segments of experience through past, present and future. Given this perception that current life course stage is a reflection of cumulative past events and an anticipation of future trajectories (Mills, 2000), and the emphasis on longitudinal studies with a dynamic orientation recognising past, present and future as interpenetrating (Bell and Mau, 1971),

this chapter focuses on methodological strategies which aimed to project the men forwards and backwards in time.

Visual techniques proved important in the elicitation of temporal data. The centrality of the visual to the cultural construction of life in western societies has meant that people are confronted with an array of visual images in day-to-day life (Rose, 2001). This ‘ocularcentrism’ (Jay, 1993) has increasingly led researchers to consider how visual methodologies can be included in research techniques. The Men as Fathers project incorporated four different approaches to visual methods:

1. A collage of images used to represent a diversity of fathering experiences, presented to expectant fathers in sample A and B¹
2. A historical sequence of images of fatherhood from Victorian to present day, presented to expectant fathers in sample C
3. Five images taken from media stories in 2009 to represent some issues in contemporary fathering, presented to fathers in sample C at interview 3
4. Participants’ personal family pictures, discussed with sample A in interview 4 and sample C in interview 3, also in other interviews when initiated by participants

This chapter foregrounds the visual techniques used in the research, highlighting the implications this holds for eliciting temporal data

4.2 Qualitative longitudinal data (QLL)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the collection of temporal data is inherent in the design of a qualitative longitudinal study as participants are revisited at different periods

¹ As the collage did not elicit temporal data it will not be discussed in the thesis. For further discussion see Henwood Finn and Shirani, 2008a; Henwood, Shirani and Finn, (2011).

in time. This helps to capture changes and continuities in the participants' narratives, as their views and interpretations alter in relation to lived experience. One way these fluctuations have been explored in this research project is through a consideration of men's relationship to involvement (Shirani and Henwood, 2011a). This analysis considers how participants described their relationship to the discourse of involvement at different periods in the child's life, highlighting an underlying future-orientation in the men's accounts. For example, during his partner's pregnancy, Rick articulated feelings of exclusion and looked forward to being able to have full involvement after the birth of his child, emphasising his desire to be involved in all aspects of childcare.

I think just being with the child, holding the child, cuddling, giving affection, bathing, contact, you know, close contact, is the thing which I really look forward to. (Rick, 35, sample A, pre-birth)

However, like many of the men, after the birth he was surprised that he continued to feel excluded and was unable to have the kind of involvement he had anticipated, which was experienced as frustrating. He remained focussed on the future, imagining a time when he would have greater involvement with his child.

I feel that there is more to come. As Imogen develops I will develop my ability to be a father that will grow and evolve and develop with her. (Rick, 35, sample A, post-birth)

Eight years later Rick had become more involved but had not anticipated the strains associated with this in terms of the demands it placed on him. This prompted him to continue his future-orientation to a time when he imagined that these pressures would be alleviated.

I mean I guess I don't know, you look at life transitions and now this is the bringing up kids part, phase, obviously that'll come to an end and they'll grow up hopefully and go their own ways, sort of

preparing for that transition. I'm quite looking forward to it. Some people have this thing of being quite devastated when their children leave home and that they've lost their life purpose, I don't think so, I think I'll be quite looking forward to it (amusement) to doing something else you know. (Rick, 43, sample A, eight years later)

Brannen (2005, 2002) suggests that a constant state of busyness leaves little time to contemplate what lies beyond the present. However this does not appear to be the case in our own data, as individuals who experience temporal compression project forward to a period when these pressures will be alleviated. Daly (1996b) suggests that whilst the present is the site of our disillusionment, the past and future maintain dreams in relation to family life, which is evident in Rick's continuing future-orientation. This brief example illustrates how temporal data is produced through a QLL design by highlighting the changes in Rick's relationship to involvement across the first few years of his child's life; from anticipating greater involvement, to looking forward to this being alleviated. This contrasts with a one-off 'snapshot' study at a single point in time, which is embedded in a particular temporal moment. Such temporal data therefore can add depth to understanding about important issues in relation to parenthood, such as involvement, by reflecting on the nuances in men's accounts as they change in relation to lived experience. This subsequently provides greater insight into the subjective experience of personal change (Thomson *et al.*, 2002:337).

As discussed in chapter three, there have been debates about the extent to which QLL studies capture the process of change, or if, in fact, they represent a series of one off 'snapshots'. Whilst the interviews clearly occurred at discrete moments in time, participants were encouraged to reflect back and forward during each interview. This meant that the period between interviews was also discussed; for example asking participants at one interview what they expected over the next few months, and when

revisiting asking them whether this had been the case. Although this may not appear processual in the way that continuous involvement with participants over a period of time would allow, it is more than a series of snapshots as continuity and changes in narratives are carried across the interviews through temporal reflection. For example, when asked about participation in a QLL study, some participants reflected a sense of the processual in light of the continuity they experienced across interviews;

actually what we've done is had a conversation across three interviews rather than three separate conversations almost, that's what it's felt like to me anyway (Richard, 38, sample C, one year later)

The attempts made by the research team to encourage participants to reflect back and project forward are considered over the course of this chapter.

4.3 Looking back

In each interview participants were asked about their relationships with their own parents. The most detailed discussion of this happened in the first encounter when the men were asked to reflect back on their own childhoods and their memories of being parented. These accounts were then built on through further questions in subsequent interviews, considering how relationships with parents had changed over time; particularly in relation to the generational shift experienced after the child's birth. One challenge with asking men about their early experiences is that many professed to have poor memories, recalling little of their childhood relationship with parents beyond a reflection that it was 'good'. This was often described as a contrast to partners, who had detailed memories of childhood.

I mean well now at older level (2) my memory isn't that good actually from when I was really young but you know being a teenager, maybe I drunk too much when I was at uni I dunno.
(Neil, 29, sample C, pre-birth)

I have a crap memory of my younger years, so I really do not remember anything prior to the age of about ten so I couldn't really tell you how I'm faring as a parent relative to how my dad's faring.
(Marcus, 31, sample C, one year later)

This could reflect a reluctance to discuss their own childhood experience at a stage when men appeared keen to focus on the present by emphasising the joys of impending and actual parenthood. In contrast, those who described negative relationships with their parents often had strong memories of childhood experiences and provided much more detailed accounts, which motivated them to be very different with their own child, as Joe's extract illustrates.

It wasn't a father-son relationship I'd wish on anybody; dad was quite a forceful man. At ten years old he um perforated my eardrum and turned me (partially) deaf. ... But yeah it's (1) in a way my dad's changed me for the better 'cause at least I know how to be a good dad, hopefully. (Joe, 31, sample C, pre-birth)

These reflections on their own childhoods were relatively limited but provided an interesting insight into the ideas about fatherhood that the men had formed in relation to their own experience of being parented.

4.3a Timelines

Prior to initial interviews, sample C participants were asked to complete a timeline of significant events in their life in an attempt to aid the researcher in discussions about their past by providing some background data. Sample A participants were also asked to complete a timeline before they were interviewed again eight years later. An example of



the timeline the men were given is illustrated below, designed to provide minimal information so as not to be too directive. This timeline approach proved a useful tool for concisely summarising life histories, triggering memories and facilitating comparisons between participants (Davies, 1996).

Figure 1 - Timeline

Please map on the timeline below any significant events/achievements/turning points in your life
Event: _____
Age:

Some participants provided detailed information, which led to interesting discussion about past experiences during the interview that would possibly not otherwise have emerged. For example, asking Richard about his note that *'age 18/19 was the happiest point in my life'* at the end of the interview elaborated discussion about the challenging relationship he had with his parents, which was then discussed further in subsequent interviews.

Some men suggested that they filled in the timeline in relation to the research topic, highlighting significant events in wider family life rather than other aspects of identity, such as work, which they may have done in a different context. Others provided limited information or did not complete the timeline as they felt unsure about how to do it or what was expected of them, found it too time-consuming, or preferred to talk about their experiences rather than write them down.

Fell into the too hard category I think (amusement) ... It's always easier to talk about something than think about it yourself when you've got other things to think about.
(Simon, 43, sample A, eight years later)

The timelines produced some useful data which enabled prompting in the interviews, although the lack of information provided by several participants would throw into question their utility as a stand-alone tool for data collection. Such an approach also raises criticisms for emphasising an implicit understanding of time that is linear and sequential (Davies, 1996) which may be quite different to how participants themselves would narrate their past (Savage *et al.*, 2010). Alheit (1994) argues that 'life time' suggests a distant horizon and stands for the 'sequentialisation' of separate actions and experiences to ensure subjective continuity and coherence. Subsequently, it is likely to be organised according to the principle of linearity, which was reflected in the timeline design. Davies (1996) suggests that such 'life lines' risk overstating events without getting at the deep structures or processes that lie behind them, failing to adequately capture temporal complexity.

The men were asked a similar question in the interviews about significant past experiences, in response to which several interviewees asked whether they were expected to respond chronologically. This suggests that it made more sense for some to discuss experiences in terms of their influence and implications, rather than in a linear frame.

4.3b Historical Images

In an effort to elicit further data about past understandings of fatherhood, we used an historical sequence of images to document changes in representations of fatherhood over time. These were presented to participants in sample C at the end of the first interview, during pregnancy, when they had no experience of being a father themselves. This was an attempt to encourage thinking about past ways of doing fatherhood, not necessarily accessible through talk alone. As Harper (2002:23) notes:

‘Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph and it leads to deep and interesting talk.’

The images represented fathers from the Victorian era through to the present day in an attempt to draw out culturally salient discourses about continuity and change in perceptions of fatherhood². Each image was presented individually in a chronological sequence. When presented with the image, men were asked for their reactions; what they did or did not like, and later in the sequence often compared the image to those which had gone before.

The first sequence picture of a Victorian father overwhelmingly elicited a negative response from participants who saw it as an outdated mode of fathering. The father was perceived as being distant from the emotional life of the family, which the men failed to identify with in terms of their own expectations. Reactions to the 1950s image portraying a father kissing his housewife and children goodbye before leaving for work received somewhat more mixed reactions. Most of the men challenged the representation of a clear breadwinner/housewife divide that would not represent their own experience, anticipating a more egalitarian division of labour. However some made positive identifications with the man’s role as provider, still seen as an important aspect of father identity.

The fact that he is able to provide for his family, earn enough money, he’s got the pride from doing that, that’s appealing, um so there are elements of that that will be in my relationship. But I don’t want the child to see two separate parents work and looking after, I want it to be quite equal really, if you know what I mean.

(William, 29, sample C, pre-birth)

² Images could not be reproduced due to copyright. Descriptions of the images are included in appendix 2

As the sequence progressed to representations of fathers closely involved with their children, the men related this to a cultural shift in representations of 'new' fatherhood and were more likely to identify these images with their own expectations of involvement. The narrow focus and detailed probing involved in this strategy led to criticism that the researchers were directing and determining the men's responses³. Whilst this was perhaps inevitable to an extent, engaging with visual representations of historical and modern themes enabled the participants to identify aspects of the past in the present and how they remained relevant for their understandings today (Henwood *et al.*, 2008). Pink (2001) challenges the notion of imposed framings, suggesting images are made meaningful through the subjective gaze of the viewer, as each individual produces photographic meanings by relating the image to his or her existing personal experience, knowledge, and wider cultural discourses. Therefore what is important about images is not just the image itself but how it is seen by particular spectators in particular ways (Rose 2001). Presenting the images as a sequence meant that several men re-evaluated their comments on the initial images in light of the later ones, identifying positive aspects of earlier versions of fatherhood, which did not otherwise emerge from talk alone. In addition, presenting the images at the end of the interview meant some new issues were raised in the discussion, which would otherwise have been overlooked. For example, Harper (2002) suggests that using historical photographs or pictures from a perspective that the participant would not normally think about can lead to new awareness for the participant, referred to as 'breaking the frame'. Finally, presenting publicly available images offered men another way of engaging with fatherhood when they had no experience of being a father themselves. The sequence proved a useful supplementary

³ Comments on paper Henwood, K. Shirani, F and Finn, M. (October, 2008) Use of visual methods in the men as fathers study. Presented at CRFR Conference 'Understanding Families and Relationships Over Time', University of Edinburgh.

technique for gaining data about understandings of past versions of fatherhood, although would be questionable as a stand-alone strategy. This technique has been described and evaluated in depth elsewhere (Henwood, Shirani and Finn, 2011; Henwood and Shirani, in press).

4.3c Personal Images

In the third interview with sample C, and fourth interview with sample A, participants were asked to bring some of their favourite photographs to discuss in the interview. The aim was to generate images that could evoke memories and emotions embedded in biographical experience, exploring their temporal extensions (Adam, 1995) in everyday life, to reveal more about the lived experiences of men and fathers. Photo-elicitation strategies have been criticised for representing an ideal form of family life rather than a reality, raising questions about the utility of such an approach (for discussion see Rose 2003, 2004; also Chalfen, 2002). However, several participants suggested they liked happy pictures precisely because this did not represent the daily experience of family life, enabling us to access discussion of less enjoyable aspects of parenthood, such as dealing with conflict between children.

Participants were not asked specifically for family photographs but all images provided focussed on the children, with around half also including fathers, and a smaller number including mothers. Sample A fathers were asked to reflect on why they had chosen the image and what they liked about the way it represented family life. Many images were of children only, but where the men were depicted, participants were asked to reflect back on how they remembered feeling at the time and how they felt now, in an attempt to glean insight into the changing experiences of fatherhood. As photographs involve

storing and displaying the 'rememberable' (Hurdley 2007) this often led to discussions about the participants' memories of the time the picture was taken.

I: So looking at him (picture of participant) what did he become after being a father, what changes, what did he kind of

Hair went grey (laughs)

I: Hair went grey. Because I mean looking there's certainly no doubt about you being proud there

Mm, oh yeah very much so. Well and again you know it's also partly an ego thing; look at me, I can father a child you know responsibly within the context of a loving relationship and it's not an accident, it's not a haphazard thing that's happened to me in life, this was planned and we saw it through and we're still together and we're hopefully gonna make the best of it. (Kenny, 49, sample A, eight years later)

In this discussion the interviewer's own interpretation of the image is highlighted, which leads Kenny to re-live the feelings of pride he remembers. This focuses specifically around how the timing of fatherhood was a planned choice, which he sees as making him more responsible than those who fall into the parenting 'trap' (discussed further in chapter five). In contrast, Ashley appears to find the task more challenging, suggesting some men were unsure how to 'analyse' their pictures in this way (Chalfen 2002, Pauwels 2008).

I: So looking at him now (4)⁴ I guess this was a couple of years ago but (5) could you describe him as a father for me?

What then or now?

I: Well, looking at him, so a couple of years ago

Um, (sighs) from the picture or?

I: Well yeah just to prompt you

⁴ Number in brackets refers to length of pause in seconds.

Um, (4) seems happy um, (4) relaxed, but then I was on holiday so I would be relaxed (laughs). Yeah just somebody who seems fairly at ease I s'pose, yeah. It doesn't really give much away 'cause there isn't really much of a background. Yeah (4) someone who's fairly happy with his lot. I tend to scowl a lot on photos so I'm actually smiling. So yeah that would probably be all I could glean from the one.
(Ashley, 38, sample A, eight years later)

Some participants in sample A suggested that their children caused them to reflect back on their own childhood experiences at the same age, although this talk often arose during the interview conversation rather than in discussion of photographs. Such reflection overwhelmingly happened with sons rather than daughters as participants could more easily draw on physical resemblances. For men who did not describe positive relations with their own fathers, this reflection often proved confirmatory in reassuring them that they were doing things differently.

I mean he's a little bit like me to look at in some ways ... and I think that's important to me, and I think some of that, some of that kind of regard I have for him is that little bit selfish, it's like you know, you're passing on your genes to another generation and you're looking at yourself in the new pattern of genes ... I'm, it's just made me think so much about my own upbringing, about how when I was eight how ... my dad would suffer from depression and all sorts of things and he used to bring that into the family quite a bit ... And with all that going on, I look at Daniel and I (1) often think how it was for me when I was eight and I just try to think to myself how important it is that I don't give him that (1) baggage to carry around, that I give him the good stuff. ... Yeah, no, if I see him being popular with his school friends then I think, oh, I was quite as popular as him ... And I think, oh, I'm quite popular at work.
(Terry, 46, sample A, eight years later)

Given the centrality of these reflections for some men in sample A and the significant implications it had for their fathering experience, it was decided a similar strategy would be used with sample C. During discussion of family photographs one year after the birth of their child, men in sample C were asked if the child caused them to reflect back on

their own experiences of childhood. Whilst they were not asked about a particular point, overwhelmingly these men suggested that they could not remember much about childhood, especially what it was like to be one year old. In the discussion of these images, the men were keen to emphasise the present joys of fatherhood and did not discuss the difficulties in relation to the responses the image evoked in the same way sample A participants had done eight years later. It may have proved too challenging to do this with a young child where the men described personalities and interests as not yet being formed, unlike those with older children.

In response to their personal images, sample C participants were asked to reflect back long-term on their own childhoods and short-term in relation to their expectations during pregnancy. Most men failed to make connections with their own childhood, framing their pre-birth thoughts in the context of health concerns; as long as the child was healthy they had no further expectations. This may not necessarily be the case as some had articulated detailed expectations during the pregnancy, but men appeared unwilling to talk about their earlier expectations once the child had arrived. The following quotes illustrate men's responses when asked if prior to the birth they had any expectations about what the child would be like or look like.

Never probably did really. Um (6) no the overriding thing as I said before is we want her to be happy really, so yeah that's probably the driving force in what we do really.

(Richard, 38, sample C, one year later)

I'm not really a big forward thinker I s'pose but yeah I imagined we'd all be doing fun stuff, having fun, yeah. I didn't really think that far ahead I s'pose. I mean I knew we'd have our own little family and it would be lovely so yeah. I think early on before he was, the main thing was that he would be healthy and Rebecca would be healthy and it would all be good. (Neil, 30, sample C, one year later)

I was hoping she wouldn't have my nose (amusement). But no to be honest with you I didn't really care, I didn't really care what she looked like as long as she was healthy I didn't really kind of give a monkeys. (Joe, 32, sample C, one year later)

Although using publicly available images raised some challenges, presenting them at a time when men did not have experience of fatherhood and their own images to draw on proved useful. In contrast, later interviews worked best with personal photographs, imbued with memories and personal significance. However the age of the child was significant in how far the men were able, or willing, to reflect back. As Timothy notes:

I think it's more about the here and now with a baby; you're constantly thinking about what's going on at that particular point in time. (Sample C, 28, post-birth)

It has been frequently noted that the past is subject to reinterpretation from the standpoint of the present to fit current purposes (Adam, 1995; Flaherty and Fine, 2001; Greene, 2003) therefore there is no past to be captured in its pure essence (Järvinen, 2004). Asking the men to reflect back at each interview highlighted this, as contradictions were raised when their pasts were differently presented due to their current circumstances, particularly noticeable in talk about their own parents. Alongside the potential insights offered by visual methods, QLL data is therefore well placed to illustrate the way in which the past is a contingency fluctuating in accordance with lived experience (Daly, 1996b).

4.4 The here and now

As part of the focus on temporality, it was also important to explore the contemporaneity of men's fatherhood experiences. In early interviews, participants were

asked about their own father's transition to fatherhood, and what they thought the differences or continuities in fathering experience were between the generations. Most men suggested they were more involved fathers now, with a more egalitarian division of labour than in previous generations. They indicated a cultural shift which placed greater importance on father involvement, making it easier for men today to be more engaged with their children.

I think it's become almost cool to be a dad that's involved rather than (2) I guess like the 1950s image of the father leaving the house with a bowler hat, pipe and briefcase and coming home at nine o'clock for supper and not seeing the children until they're eighteen. I think they're, well we're not like that now thankfully
(Jeffrey, 41, sample C, one year later)

I think culturally you know I think you're kind of expected to be quite touchy-feely these days and if you're not you're a bit odd you know. So it's a lot easier to be affectionate and to be loving you know. I think it comes quite easily really.
(Rick, 43, sample A, eight years later)

We're a lot more hands-on perhaps than perhaps our fathers and grandfathers were but I think that's the way we've gotta go ... I think it's a benefit, it's a lot better. I don't think the father should be looked any more as the scary figure or the kind of person who should be looked after; we've been at work all day I'm sure we can look after ourselves in the evening. So yeah I think modern man has changed ... Just general parenting skills as well; we're not disciplinarians anymore, we're "dad I wanna have a cwtch"⁵ "okay have a cwtch, tell me your problems, what's happened?" kind of thing, and that's the way I want it to be. Come home from work every day, see my little girl, first thing I always do "how's Eira, is she okay?" you know ask after her. I don't think in the old days that happened, definitely not with me and Carys (sister) (Joe, 31, sample C, one year later)

⁵ Welsh term meaning cuddle

Whilst this was a fundamental way in which men demonstrated their difference from previous generations, other research studies have shown that this is not necessarily new (Weiss, 2000).

4.4a Contemporary parenting culture

One area in which contemporary understandings of fatherhood were raised was in discussions of how, or if, men sought information and advice about parenting; particularly considering discussions with their own parents in relation to this. Most commonly men suggested that advice was not asked for but given anyway, mainly by mothers, whilst others indicated that they would turn to their parents with queries. However several men felt that their parents were out of touch with modern parenthood and therefore would be unable to offer anything helpful.

Yeah the practical things is really what we talk about but they can't really help with the practical things because it's a different era, you don't, their attitude was very much you push the baby into the bed or you push him into the cot, you shove a dummy in his mouth and you wait for him to stop screaming. That was the era I grew up in and it's just a different era now ... no there's nothing practical they could really tell us, the world's moved on since they had children.

(Barry, 36, sample C, post-birth)

But my (2) my mother I don't know, I was saying to my brother if it wasn't for the fact that he and I existed I would wonder if my mother ever had children (amusement) ... Sometimes I'm not sure they have an appreciation of parenting; when Isaac's asleep upstairs generally speaking you might think you might want to be a little bit quiet, my mother's ... making the most God awful racket which woke Isaac up and was "oh sorry, you should have told me to be quiet" I'm like "surely it should have been a natural reaction mother" (laughs).

(Marcus, 33, sample C, post-birth)

Men suggested that their partners were much more likely to ask advice from their own mothers than men were from their fathers. Some framed this in terms of their fathers

lacking knowledge about parenthood as they had been distant breadwinners, whilst others suggested that, for their fathers, parenting was not something men talked about.

The men recognised a proliferation of parenting advice literature in recent years, so much that it could be confusing knowing which to follow. Whilst some read unprompted, others relied on their partners to point out relevant information, or described 'sneaking' a look, suggesting they perhaps did not feel comfortable accessing and reading this material themselves.

my wife reads books all the time and she, erm, she edits them for me to read each bit, "just the bit you need to know"
(Brendan, 29, sample B, pre-birth)

I mean a lot of it's presented to me by me wife, you know, she'll, she'll sort of say 'Oh, look in this book' and you know, 'this is what's going on at the moment' (Greg, 24, sample A, pre-birth)

And all along, we bought books to try to get some background, we've had books on pregnancy and the fathering of pregnancy and all this, and I have been reading them slyly rather than sitting there. I don't know why I do it slyly. I think she thinks I'm not totally interested, but I'm probably more interested than she knows. So I've been trying to gen up on quite a bit of it. (Malcolm, 32, sample A, pre-birth)

Similarly, when asked about their knowledge of online parenting sites, few men admitted looking at these but nearly all said that their partners accessed them for information. When asked about this difference, men suggested that these sites provided unreliable information and they would rather trust their own instincts, whilst their partners were more likely to seek reassurance (Shirani *et al.*, in press).

To further discuss contemporary discourse about parenthood, sample C participants were asked for their views on whether they thought a culture of ‘intensive parenting’⁶ existed – where parents are expected to invest increasingly in the child – and if so whether this was a contemporary phenomenon. This followed on from discussions of childrearing in previous generations, as they were asked to consider whether parenthood was more demanding today. Many men recognised the notion of intensive parenting and related it to the proliferation of childrearing advice, which created the perception that it is possible to raise a perfect child (Shirani *et al.*, in press). This quote from Timothy illustrates his perception of this issue and the pressure it creates for parents, relating it to contemporary media examples.

I certainly feel that I want to get it right and um have the perfect child ... I think just by the fact that all that information’s out there it kind of gives the impression that you can bring up your child in a perfect manner and you’ll be able to find the solution to everything ... And I kind of, from the books out there you think well actually I should be able to read one of these and it will give me the answer... But certainly yeah all these things imply that if your child is unruly or not doing anything as you expect it to be doing it’s basically your fault, you’ve brought them up, do something about it. It’s true it is your fault but I think it could be a lot less accusatory programmes and everything else. I think they do kind of say “yep you’ve done this to your child”. Supernanny’s a classic example “look what you’ve done to your child” and they all cry and weep and “oh God what do we do now?” So yeah there is that pressure definitely. It’s just from the pure information out there. ... I guess the point is there’s certainly an impression that you should be able to solve each and every problem, (29, sample C, one year later - his emphasis)

Other men recognised ‘intensive parenting’ and perceived this to be a contemporary phenomenon for middle-class parents, becoming polarised from those who fail to take any responsibility for, or lack goals for their children. For example, Kevin described responsible middle-class parents who ‘set standards’ for investment in the child through

⁶ As highlighted by the parenting culture studies group www.parentingculturestudies.org

the shared goal of sending the child to university, representing an 'idyllic' lifestyle. He contrasts this with 'non-working class' parents, who lacked aspirations for their child, shirked their responsibilities and were under no societal pressure to fulfil them. This bifurcation that participants like Kevin noted was also seen as a facet of contemporary fatherhood.

4.4b Contemporary Images

In the third interview, sample C participants were shown a selection of five publicly available images designed to illustrate media representations of contemporary fatherhood⁷. Men drew on their knowledge of the stories behind these images to make wider claims about changes in the culture of fatherhood, or about society in general.

I think in 2009 it's the age of the modern man isn't it and it's the age of women's rights as well. So the two things go hand in hand; it's equal responsibilities, equal opportunities ... He'd (celebrity) never have showed his softer side twenty or thirty years ago would he, probably. That's (politician) possibly been going on for a long time with politicians. That's (teenage father) just the way we seem to be going in this country, which again makes me sound like a boring old man but we've always got like the worst ... teenage pregnancy rates, highest levels of crime and drug and alcohol related problems. It just seems like society's cracking up a bit in this country sometimes. Um (3) yeah so all very different looking at those (William, 31, sample C, one year later)

The men also recognised the diversity of images as being something contemporaneous, distinguished from perceptions of the one distant breadwinner model attributed to previous generations. However the men varied in the extent to which they embraced this diversity, with many expressing concerns about teenage fatherhood or the 'pregnant man'

⁷ See appendix 2

image widely circulated in the media at the time as representing 'disturbing', 'strange' and 'unacceptable' models of fatherhood.

4.4c Personal Images

During the initial interviews, many participants chose to introduce and discuss the scan pictures. The scan pictures appear to have a particular temporal significance for participants in documenting stages of the baby's development and the point at which it becomes 'real' and 'safe' to tell other people about the pregnancy (Draper, 2002). Looking at later scan pictures also illustrates the baby's development, which itself assumes temporality (Rose 2003, 2004). These pictures represent a significant temporal moment and can be a particularly relevant way to engage with participants by offering some indexicality. For expectant fathers, the scan pictures were important as a visual representation of and engagement with their child during pregnancy, when otherwise they may feel quite detached. For example, Alun describes the scan picture as an important moment in his conceptualisation of the unborn foetus as his baby daughter.

Um, I think it was probably the twelve week scan more than this one; this was fantastic to see her but in the twelve week scan when we were first told the sex, when we first saw the heart, you know we saw the heartbeat and the movement and it looked like a baby ... That's probably the point at which you know you think "that's my little girl in there". (Alun, 33, sample C, pre-birth)

4.5 Thinking ahead

In addition to the various attempts already discussed, several strategies were used to encourage men to think about the future. It has been suggested that anticipation is a key temporal aspect in the social construction of identity, as attentiveness to the future reflexively influences the present (Daly, 1996b). As interactive selves we assume that the

future will be intelligent and ordered (Järvinen, 2004) as futures are constructed according to perceptions of biographical certainty (Reith, 2004). Theories of individualisation which describe 'open' futures subject to individual choice and agency place onus on individuals to know their projections, and the eventual outcomes (Adam and Groves, 2007). The future is thus seen as not only calculable but controllable (Adam, 1995) shaped to our own plans and intentions (Adam, 2006). This anticipation and projection appears to be supported in our data, with many men having specific assumptions about how their futures would unfold; discussed further in the following chapters.

Along with the timeline (discussed above), participants were asked for a written response to the question 'where do you see yourself in ten years time?' at the end of a pre-interview questionnaire collecting basic demographic information. Several men expressed their dislike of such questions and, like the timeline, some men did not complete the question because it was deemed too challenging. Others responded in the vein of 'I have absolutely no idea'. Even those who did write detailed answers tended to indicate that they had no specific plans and it was challenging to think so far ahead. When discussing his written answer during the interview, Barry responded;

You asked on your form what do I see myself doing in ten years' time and I wrote I don't know. That's a genuine answer 'cause ten years ago I was um (2) I was a teaching assistant at [institution name] and to say that I'm down here working in [South Wales] and my main occupation is being an expert in [subject], it just wasn't in my mind (amusement). (Barry, 36, sample C, pre-birth)

Responses like Barry's were common, suggesting that the men did not have specific ideas about the long-term future; a sentiment reiterated when they were asked directly during

the interviews. Yet at other times during the interview conversation they often alluded to detailed plans for the next few years, suggesting they were engaged in planning ahead.

I've got a lot of responsibility for planning; I'm the one who tends to look fifteen years ahead - I have actually been looking at child trust funds and who's got the highest rate of return on them, it's that kind of level of planning. Um, it's me who's going to look at things like where are we going to be living in five years 'cause I don't think this is the place for a child to be, not my favourite place for a child to be growing up because there just isn't the space for them. I tend to take more of a planning view I think, I tend to look at things a lot more long-term whereas Theresa's a lot more instinctive, do things today type person. So I'm the one who'll kind of pick where we're going to be living. (Barry, 36, sample C, pre-birth)

Data like Barry's raise questions as to why men who are clearly engaged in planning for the future appear reluctant to state this when asked directly. It may be related to the notion that detailed planning carries negative connotations of rigidity, which goes against the value of flexibility espoused by a society permeated by 'institutionalised individualism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). It also highlights the difficulties in getting temporally informed responses when asking a direct question about time and planning, yet demonstrates that these insights can often be gleaned obliquely.

A future-orientation was evident in some men's discussion of the challenges of fatherhood. Those who found their current phase of life particularly demanding as temporal pressures were compounded, creating a 'time squeeze' (Southerton, 2003), often looked forward to a phase of their life where these pressures would be alleviated and they would have more time for other aspects of their life (as illustrated in Rick's case, discussed above). For example, the experience of temporal compression and high level of demands that were currently felt prompted some men to be forward-looking to a time

when they would be alleviated. This was sometimes described as reaching a stage where they would be 'redundant' as a father.

I kind of think that's what my idea of a father is; to get to such a stage I'm not necessary almost. In some ways, you know, you know, I prepare them for the world so they will be able to stand up on their own and cope with whatever life throws at them. So that would be my ideal goal I think; to make myself redundant. ... and then, hopefully have a good relationship but rather than independent it's one of interaction, you know, nice loving emotional interaction rather than just dependent on me (amusement).

(Keith, 40, sample A, eight years later)

For others, thinking about the future was a source of anxiety because of this potentially impending redundancy and the prospect of no longer being central to their children's lives.

I can sort of project forward to a time when they don't need us in the sense that they need us now, perhaps our role becoming a bit redundant then. I don't look forward to that bit ... because I don't know how I'll be redundant I'll be (amusement) you know I don't know how much they'll still feel that they want to come and talk to me and take my advice, do you know what I mean? You know that is the unknown. (Kenny, 49, sample A, eight years later)

These reflections about the future, which could be seen as going against a discourse of involved fatherhood which positions time with the child as always pleasurable, were unlikely to arise as a direct response to a question in the way that positive experiences of fatherhood did.

4.5a Personal Images

In the discussion of personal images, men were also encouraged to project forwards in thinking about what the child might be like as s/he got older, and what it would be like

to be a father at a later stage in the child's life. The image was used as a prompt for discussion, although interview questions also explored the issue. Most men were resistant to describing their hopes or expectations for the child's future, suggesting it did not matter as long as the child was happy. However others suggested that the happiness rhetoric was a standard response they were expected to make, and in fact had more specific ideas.

I just want her to be happy. No I'm lying, my wife says that and it's embedded in my mind, I don't just want her to be happy I want her to have everything; I want her to be well educated, I want her to have a job she loves, to have a partner - man or woman - a partner who worships her as well. I want everything and I'm going to be disappointed if she doesn't get it all, so yeah forget happy, happy's important but there's other things too.

(Alun, 33, sample C, post-birth)

That most of the men did not want to discuss specific aspects of their child's future may reflect their desire to not be seen as imposing rigid expectations onto their child. Instead it was emphasised that good fathers gave the child the opportunity to develop according to his or her own interests and abilities and supported them in this. Conversely, bad fathers were those with specific ideas for their child's future, seen as attempts to live out their own unrealised dreams through the child.

You know if he suddenly develops a love of dinosaurs I'm not going to say "actually you need to like football" or if he likes football say "you should like rugby really". 'cause I think that, I think that would have such a negative effect of trying to make someone do something they don't want to do, especially at that age ... 'cause you do feel that some parents, well they do definitely live through their kids, some parents are horrible forcing things onto their kids that they wanted, they couldn't do ... and you're thinking please don't ever let me end up like that. (Kevin, 33, sample C, post-birth - his emphasis)

When the child was very young, several men suggested that it was too early to tell what their child's future would hold until they had more of an idea of the child's personality and were thus reluctant to express specific ideas.

4.5b Temporal questions

In researching issues of gender and time, the literature indicates a linear temporality and future-orientation associated with masculinity, in contrast to a cyclical, present-oriented feminine understanding of time (discussed further in chapter eight). To address this issue, in the third interview with sample C, participants were asked directly about this future-orientation and if they thought their own view was different to their partner's. Overwhelmingly the men agreed with the reported research that future-orientation was masculine, giving examples from their own experience by contrasting their long-term orientation with their partner's present focus. Without speaking to female partners it is unclear to what extent they would agree with this gendered depiction of temporality, although it appears unlikely that women are not concerned with the future. It may be that the way in which the question was framed – by presenting a statement about gendered temporality – had an influence on the way participants responded. Nonetheless, prior to being asked this question many participants did indicate a future-orientation, often becoming increasingly focussed on the long-term after the birth of their child. The men tended to relate this to their responsibility for financial provision, which was frequently described as a man's role. This was particularly magnified after the birth whilst partners were on maternity leave so economic demands for the men were prominent. Such a future-orientation was also illustrated in the way a few men suggested that passing on their genes to the next generation meant they had 'finished', describing a completion of life.

Yeah, lots of, everyone says “best thing you could ever do, changes your life, brilliant, fantastic” and it goes back to, you know I feel I am sort of completing my life, you know passing everything on to the next. I’m not planning on dying tomorrow or anything but it’s definite you’ve got an offspring to go forward; you know they’ll take your genes forward and whatever else. So it is a sort of completion in my mind, the whole circle of life or whatever you want to call it, I do firmly believe that. (Kevin, 33, sample C, post-birth)

Regardless of their orientation for their own future, most men had ideas about their child’s future as this was seen as an important aspect of good parenthood. For example, Adam described how he did not think about his own future but did plan for his son’s as *‘it would be negligent of me to not think of his future or work towards that’*.

Often this concern with the child’s future meant financial planning, commonly talked about in terms of enabling the child to go to university.

I hope to put the children through university if that’s what they want, if they get that far. Um, (2) like I said we moved to a much bigger house four years ago um, so our future we see as being here, um, (4) financial provision for the future is something I’m obviously fairly in to ... Obviously I plan for the children’s future as well ... So I have given quite a lot of thought to future things. I mean you can’t make them go to university if they don’t want to or they haven’t got the aptitude for it. You can’t, you shouldn’t really guide them in their careers either, you know let them find out what they’re good at and do it. But be there to support them when they’re doing it. So a lot of it is unmapped territory. But you’ve got a sort of game plan that, no matter what happens you’re going to do this, this and this for them. (Vincent, 38, sample A, eight years later)

One challenge of using visual techniques to prompt talk about the future is the lack of publicly available images. Historical and contemporary images of fatherhood are widely available and provided the opportunity for men to draw on their knowledge and assumptions about the models of fatherhood represented. However, perhaps inevitably,

no parallel images existed for future fatherhood⁸. This meant that any discussion of the future rested on men's perceptions of their own, and their child's, biographical trajectories, rather than wider cultural or historical transitions. Whilst these biographical reflections provided valuable data, it meant that using images to discuss the future was more limited than for discussions of past or present.

4.6 Wider thoughts

As part of the research design, attempts were made to consider other aspects of temporal experience. In some interviews participants were asked directly, with varying degrees of success, whilst in others temporal understandings emerged during the conversation. In the fourth interview with sample A, participants were asked 'what do you think of when you hear the word 'time'?' For many participants answering this abstract question proved challenging, although elicited a range of responses. The list below details only the responses to this specific question, although other reactions to time were discussed in the interview.

- Not enough
- Passing quickly
- Passing slowly
- Potentially finite
- Valuable
- Not to be wasted
- Children wishing life away, parents trying to drag them back
- Slipping through, wanting to stop it
- Boundaries between work time and family time
- Frantic pace of life
- Routine drift

⁸ An image search resulted mainly in pictures of men with their pregnant partners, or clothing to advertise the wearer as an expectant father

The most common response related to a lack of time, as many participants' reaction to the question was 'not enough'. In this way time was highlighted as a valuable resource, experienced in terms of its lack. Looking at photographs often highlighted the pace of change, as by freezing a moment they testified to time's relentless melt (Sontag, 1978). A general sense of lack of time appears indicative of modern culture (Pasero, 1994) and the greater density of routine activity in middle adulthood (age 35-54) gives rise to an experience of temporal compression (Daly, 1996b). This scarcity appears to highlight the value of time for participants, who contrasted their own temporal understanding with that of their children, or themselves when they were children. Children's experience of time was described in terms of it passing slowly, particularly in reference to summer holidays seeming to last forever. In contrast, the temporal compression experienced by most men at their current life course stage as they attempted to combine the demands of work and family life gave rise to this sense of it passing quickly. In addition, some suggested that this time squeeze meant lack of time for reflection, which also contributed to the sense that time was passing quickly.

I mean three kids all go to school and nursery, every day the big ones come home with the book bag, both of them, which has stuff in it, stuff we have to do; you know forms we have to fill, money we have to send, bookings we have to make, reading we have to do, comments we have to write, for both of them. And um, and it's difficult to find the time to do that when there's three of them that all need to be put to bed for example. So there's a definite time thing there and er (2) I think if, I don't know I mean I sometimes wonder whether I have a very sort of ineffective way of engaging with the world but um (2) I find that if I don't actually reflect, take time to reflect on something then it just goes from my memory. It's almost like packing the thing in and making sure it's organised correctly in my mind and if I haven't done that then I forget it probably. So I'm, you know this leads me to write things down, this leads me to make lists and, 'cause I'm just not very good at mental planning, I have to structure things or else it doesn't work. And I think that's, that's a sort of feeling of letting memories go by not even having them in the

first place sort of thing. And er, that feeling of losing memories, which I'm sort of a bit aware of from time to time; just not being able to remember things that were really good at the time. Er, I guess that accelerates the, this feeling of time flying you know, exactly 'cause where's the past gone? (Simon, 43, sample A, eight years later)

In contrast to the majority of participants, two men described their experiences of time passing slowly. These men were not in full-time employment and had one child each (largely cared for by other family members), meaning they were less exposed to the demands of work and family time than other fathers. These men recognised their experience of time as being different from others around them, who were seen to have a hurried pace of life. For Adam this sense of time passing slowly was related to having achieved everything he wanted, therefore his bonds to the future could be loosened (Charmaz, 1997).

(2) time is um (2) we live increasingly, we live frantic lives, busy lives. ... Time seemed to have just sped up, everyone was increasingly becoming, everyone was losing time and obsessed with trying to grab time for themselves. And time doesn't seem to be going fast for me; it seems to be going slower ... there can be a tremendous amount of pressure on people to live life as fully as possible within the limits of time. I've kind of done everything I really want to do in my life; I don't feel the pressure of time.
(Adam, 43, sample A, eight years later)

Southerton (2003) suggests being busy or harried has become the main symbolic source for a full and varied life. This is highlighted in Howards's data as he reflects on his changing experience of time in relation to the amount of things he had to do, suggesting he had been happier at busier periods in his life.

When I get to the end of my life I shall wonder where it's all gone I think, but yeah as I sort of sit here now and generally experience it I think it goes past quite slowly really ... I would think you see at times in the past, when we first bought a house for example I was quite

busy 'cause I was doing renovations ... I think then it probably didn't pass so slowly but I'm kind of guessing 'cause I don't really remember how I felt. I think I was a bit more content then at that time when we first got a house 'cause I was quite enjoying renovating it. (Howard, 44, sample A, eight years later)

These reactions to the word 'time' provide some insight into temporal understanding, which was contextualised by other aspects in the men's accounts. For example, Bruce's perception of time as 'potentially finite' was related to his father's diagnosis with terminal cancer and death a short while later at the age of 64. Responses were also related to age, with older fathers apparently preferring to reflect on the past, or more reluctant to look forward.

I always feel that I'm behind, I always need another few hours in the day and an extra day in the week, another week in the month, always always ... It is slipping through like this. Time is like a rope and I can't, my hands are burning too much that I can't hold on to it to slow it down efficiently. I always want to be and I always, I worry about stuff and I always want to be back in time. I never want to be forward, I always want to be back. ... Um, yeah well the future for me is I tend to worry too much about the future. What might happen if? I spend huge amounts of time wasting time on thinking what might happen if? What might happen if? And Daniel has just added to that. (Terry, 46, sample A, eight years later - his emphasis)

Whilst it was hoped that the visual data would provide new possibilities for temporal reflection, this did not happen as anticipated, as it often appeared difficult for the men to engage in detailed discussion about personal images. Some discussed these difficulties, or declined to take part in the visual sections of the interview as they felt this was not meaningful to them. This highlights that whilst visual techniques proved a valuable supplement for our own data collection, it appears that there are some samples where it would not work as a stand alone strategy.

One participant, largely unprompted, provided a detailed discussion of a photograph, which touched on many aspects of temporality. The photograph was taken at a family wedding several years before the interview took place⁹.



This extract is reproduced here, with words particularly salient to temporality highlighted, and discussed afterwards.

That's Matilda the youngest, this was taken when we first moved ... it was interesting 'cause we'd just moved down and it was almost for me a lot about rites of passage you know; 'cause the wedding obviously is a rite of passage, getting married. And it's interesting 'cause there's Matilda sitting on a monument which is a war memorial, that's obviously a transition, death as a transition you know. And we'd just moved down so that was a major transition. But it was interesting 'cause um for me at that time it was all about change, there's all the movement going on in the picture you know. It was also kind of a celebration of change and of transitions. And um (2) I guess you know the thing about children is it's inevitable, change is a kind of an inevitable thing, a process; they're changing and

⁹ The participant gave permission for the image to be reproduced in the thesis

developing and growing up and we're changing. It's a sense of celebrating that really and going with it, flowing with change and going with change, learning to adapt, learning to adapt to the children as they grow and emerge as persons you know. Um so it had quite a strong resonance with me at that time (2) as something to celebrate really you know. Because those children are no longer that, that's a snapshot obviously, 'cause they're now, I mean Matilda was about eighteen months there, now she's five and a half and a totally different person, as is Imogen. That's probably one of the lovely things about parenthood is that fluidity, that flowing and changing, you can go with it and learn with it ... But that was a very, that was a very um special time. (2) And I think you know sometimes it's being able to step back, you're so busy, so caught up with work and home and things that you worry about (2) ups and downs, crises you know, and it's finding time sometimes to step back and er celebrate things, the successes and things that've gone well. ... become a father and someone addresses you as dad you know, so it's a fundamental change in identity. Fundamental and irreversible change in identity you know, it's a very profound thing. But being, life being life you just get on with it you know and don't spend a lot of time thinking about it really you know. But just it does completely change you. It's holding on to that freshness ... I think sometimes it's worth trying to do that with children; come home and see them and see them as fresh, as though it's the first time you know, and sort of remind oneself of that you know. Every day is different you know.

(Rick, 43, sample A, eight years later)

Rick was unusual in the extent to which he analysed the picture, likely to be influenced by his discussion of the image with another audience on an earlier occasion. His reflexive discussion emphasised several important aspects of time in relation to fatherhood, raised across the men's accounts.

1. **Rites of passage** – although the other men used different terminology, such as life phases or stages (discussed in chapter five), this seemed to be an understanding many of them shared. This included important changes such as moving house, getting married, and often having a child as the most important of all.

2. **Death as a transition** – during pregnancy and soon after the birth many men became more conscious of their own mortality and attempted to adopt healthier lifestyles. After the birth some men talked about being 'finished'. For sample A participants interviewed eight years later, the death of significant relatives – particularly their own parents – highlighted the issue of mortality.
3. **Movement and change** – the moving figures in the background were seen as representative of busyness and a fast pace of life. This hurriedness was seen as indicative of contemporary life, conducted at a faster pace than for previous generations. The sense of temporal compression this gave rise to was often reported by the men with young children.
4. **Children as change** – it appears that a linear temporal focus towards the possibility of something new would be at odds with the perception that parenthood was the last 'tick box' and no further planned changes lay ahead. However, men often suggested that children were constantly changing and would therefore always represent something new. This then provided a sense of progression without any significant changes in circumstances for the men, which suggests that fatherhood can be described as a continuous transition (Draper, 2003a).
5. **Snapshot** – the image itself represents a particular point in time and can evoke powerful memories of the depicted situation. Often looking at the images highlighted the fast pace of change to the men as they

reflected back on how they and their children used to look. In this way images were used by some of the men to document family life, particularly significant events, which marked their progress through life, and time.

6. **Stepping back** – an opportunity to reflect was something the men found they were missing, which compounded the sense of time passing quickly. Many of the men therefore described their participation in the research as presenting a valuable opportunity for this kind of reflection. Being able to step back from the hurried pace of daily life was an unusual occurrence, and further highlighted this tempo to the men.

7. **Fundamental and irreversible change** – some men felt a significant identity change after the birth of their child, suggesting fatherhood had become the most important part of their identity. For Rick this irreversible change includes his experience of fatherhood as a demanding task from which he can never take a break. The irreversible change also reflects a sense of linearity in the inability to go back.

8. **Holding on to the freshness** – whilst children did represent a source of change, the pace of this slowed down considerably after the first few years, leading some men to comment on their routine existence. Not wishing the child's life away but appreciating the enjoyable aspects of day to day life with them was something the men often aspired to, although this could be difficult. Attempts were made to step outside

the routine existence and reinvigorate with the notion that every day is different and offers something new.

4.7 Reflections

This chapter has detailed the various attempts made throughout the project and PhD study to elicit temporal data. Each strategy provided data which supplemented the interview conversation, often evoking responses due to the photograph's particular form of representation, which therefore may not have been uncovered by other means (Harper, 2002; Sweetman, 2009). However it would be challenging to use any visual strategy as a stand-alone technique. For accessing data about the past, historical images of fatherhood proved useful, allowing men to reflect on their perceptions of fathers in previous generations and highlight aspects of these models of fathering that remained salient today. The men did not tend to reflect back in relation to their own family pictures, although they did so to an extent when discussing experiences of their own childhood. One possible alternative strategy would be discussing images from the men's own childhoods, although there are likely to be practical challenges involved in obtaining these images (e.g. kept by other family members, only available in hard copy rather than digital format).

Data about contemporaneous experiences were the simplest to elicit as participants were keen to share the joys, and to a lesser extent the challenges, of their present experiences as expectant or new fathers. This was particularly the case soon after the birth, whilst it was easier to encourage greater temporal reflection when the men had older children. Salmon (1985) suggests that middle adulthood is the period in which men and women live most intensely in the present due to their experience of extensive pressures on time,

therefore it may be easier to encourage temporal extensions in accounts with individuals at other stages of the life course.

Discussion of the future proved the biggest challenge as many men appeared reluctant to describe their anticipated futures when asked directly, and there were no suitable publicly available images to discuss future fathering in wider terms. This reluctance to discuss the future when explicitly asked is intriguing, suggesting an aversion to being seen as someone who plans. However talk about the future often emerged in responses to other questions, such as challenges of fatherhood, as indicated in Rick's account discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which suggests men do think about the future. In addition, their own assertion of a masculine future-orientation would indicate that they are engaged in some level of future planning. This reticence made it challenging to discuss the future directly; instead such insights were often gleaned obliquely.

Other aspects of temporal experience emerged from the data or were asked about directly; such as changes in time use, experiences of time. Visual images could have potentially made a contribution here, for example representations of a father trying to combine work and family life, although the use of such images in early interviews with sample A proved to be of limited value¹. The use of visual materials and additional techniques such as the timeline provided extensive data from some participants, however others suggested that they did not like these approaches as they were often unsure how to respond, or did not relate to images in a way that initiated an emotional response. Therefore whilst these techniques proved useful, they could not be used in the same way for all participants. Similarly, asking directly about time could be perceived as being too abstract and whilst some relished the challenge of answering such a question, others were unsure how to respond. Having a methodological toolbox with different techniques to

elicit temporal data therefore appears most appropriate as the interviewer can adjust the focus on each aspect depending on the participant's response. One particular strength of qualitative longitudinal data in this respect is that earlier interviews indicate the kind of approaches each participant likes, so later interviews can be tailored to suit the individual.

Through detailed discussion, this chapter has evaluated the original methodological techniques engaged in the research, suggesting new approaches for the elicitation of temporal data. This chapter concludes the methodological aspect of the thesis and discussion now pays further attention to substantive findings.

Chapter 5

When is the right time?

I've had my time; I've had thirty two years of me
and now it's time in my thirty third year to have time for someone else.

It's a good time; I enjoy it.

(Joe)



5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins the substantive results section of the thesis by focusing on men's decision-making about the timing of parenthood. In order to address the circumstances of being off-time, it is helpful to first think about how the men described the 'right time' for fatherhood. In their first interviews all participants were asked whether the pregnancy was planned and if they felt this was the right time or not. The terms planned and unplanned proved less contentious than the terms un/intended or un/wanted (Barrett and Wellings, 2002) but this simplistic dualism failed to capture the complexity of the men's experiences in relation to timing. Towards the end of this chapter I further explore the accounts of some men whose experiences could not be described with these terms. However this chapter focuses on the men across all four samples who initially described pregnancies as planned and occurring at the right time. These fathers were aged between 24 and 41 at the time of conception, with an average age of 32, which corresponds with national statistics on the average age of fathers (ONS, 2009a).

This chapter focuses on right time as defined in participants' accounts, yet it has been suggested that 'right time' is in fact an ideological construct. In her research on women's reproductive decision-making, Currie (1988) argues that right time is a euphemism that does not refer to age or a particular life point but a configuration of material circumstances, suggesting that the rhetoric of 'reproductive freedom' obscures the way in which structural antagonisms are internalised as personal challenges, highlighting this as a process of individualisation. Therefore, she contends, the notion of 'right time' reflects a personalisation of responsibility for problems generated by structural processes, which implies that these problems could be solved by judicious planning. This critical reading of right time as illusory will be reflected on in light of participants' responses throughout the chapter to consider its relevance for decision-making about fatherhood.

5.2 Chronological and biological time

In the first interview with each participant the question of timing was raised; was the pregnancy planned, and, if so, what made now the right time to have a child? The men were also asked for their views on others who became fathers at an early age (late teens and early twenties) and older fathers (forties plus), and whether they could imagine themselves in either situation. For the majority of participants there was a strong sense of there being a culturally approved 'good' age to have children, which seemed to range from late twenties to late thirties, with anything outside this bracket viewed as less desirable. Anyone younger was seen to lack the necessary maturity and stability, whilst older fathers would have difficulty keeping up in terms of energy and be too far removed from the experience of childhood today.

I think age does matter, it can matter, it's easier to tune in with a young kid if you're younger than if you were older. Age will make it more difficult for me to understand the children in the way they behave when you're getting old than when you're yourself younger (2) listen to children's music and stuff like that and the computer games they play, things like that. (Eric, 34, sample A, pre-birth)

Several of the men independently cited 25 as an arbitrary age when a man would begin to be mature enough for fatherhood, suggesting that anyone younger than this might have difficulties in reconciling their own individualistic desires with the demands of a child. Young adulthood was viewed as a period of self-fulfilment through gaining life experiences and having fun, therefore anyone who made an early transition to parenthood was seen as missing out on this important phase. Participants were reluctant to state an upper age limit for fatherhood, although questions were raised about how appropriate it was to have children in one's fifties due to concerns about ill-health and mortality. The men related chronological age to maturity – something they viewed as a pre-requisite for fatherhood – although they recognised in practice that it was unlikely to

be such a straightforward relationship. Defining late twenties to thirties as the best age for fatherhood was described across the sample as offering a good balance between maturity and remaining 'in touch', and between life experience and energy.

I guess that's quite a good time 34, you know there's a certain wisdom, a certain maturity, sensitivity, and you can run around a bit.
(Adam, 42, sample A, eight years later)

We're at the age now where you know we're not old by any means, in our thirties but we're not old. Yeah it's just a good time now; I'm still young enough when the kid's in their teens to run around the football pitch with it, so yeah it's a good time. (Joe, 31, sample C, pre-birth)

Having life experience and maturity were viewed as making a father more tolerant and wise, benefits that he would subsequently pass onto his child. However it was important not to have too large an age gap between parent and child so they were still able to relate to one another. Being able to run around and play with children – particularly boys – was also viewed as an important aspect of fatherhood. These issues will be considered in more detail during the course of this chapter.

Participants were rarely critical of men who had chosen to become older fathers and they did not appear to associate any risks with this. Instead they were more likely to problematise older maternal age, discussed in terms of a ticking body clock.

Erm, well yes, I mean I think she probably would have had a child earlier on if it had been purely down to her but it's been taken now really because time is running out for her,
(Howard, 36, sample A, partner 34, pre-birth)

Yeah I think she was in more of a hurry than I was to have children, I guess 'cause she's a couple of years older than me. So although I'd been ready three or four years ago, for me it wasn't a case of time running out whereas for her you start to worry.
(William, 29, sample C, partner 31, pre-birth)

The language used in these extracts provides a vivid representation of the biological clock placing temporal restrictions on the window of childbearing possibility. Here talk about 'hurry' and 'time running out' suggests that men see their partners as having a reproductive time-limit, based on their chronological age. Concerns about partner's age generally began when she reached her early to mid-thirties, with most partners aged 34 and over described by the men, and often also by health professionals, as older mothers, which carried negative connotations in terms of risk. Participants felt that conception may become more difficult after this age, along with greater risks to the baby because of declining maternal health. Very few participants felt that they had an age limit to conception themselves and overwhelmingly concerns about age were centred on partners, even when men were significantly older. This placed temporal biological restrictions decidedly in the realm of women, which may serve to help men avoid some of the responsibility for reproductive decision-making.

Men did express some concerns about their age, but these were more commonly related to a perceived decline in physical fitness and being out of touch with the child, rather than inability to conceive or possible health risks to the baby. Despite increasing longevity in the UK, across interviews rising age was associated with physical decline and increasing frailty, which some felt began as early as their late thirties. Men often commented that the pregnancy and birth encouraged them to think long-term, which led to anxiety about their age and concerns about getting old. However, these age concerns often only became apparent during pregnancy or after birth rather than when planning for children.

I think it makes you realise your own mortality as well. You kind of, you know you think you've got a baby when it's born, when it's thirty I'll be sixty five or something and you don't want to create it and miss out on all, you want to watch your kids grow up and enjoy them

don't you so I think it does, it does make you think more about your own health and your own mortality. (Pete, 35, sample B, pre-birth)

For some participants, concerns about being an old parent carried connotations of lethargy and possible ill-health, which several men also associated with feelings of embarrassment for the child. For Pete, this prompted him to be more mindful of his own health in an attempt to improve longevity. This new health-consciousness was reflected by a large number of participants across the samples.

You sit down and you think yeah I need to have some lunch and a sensible diet, not just a bacon roll or something like that. So I do, I want my child to grow up and have a father when my child is ready to get married. And perhaps for me to see my grandkids someday. So yeah I do take my health into account that I need to make a change to a few things, (Frank, 27, sample B, pre-birth)

Erm, well yes, if you are fit and healthy and able to run round and do things, then obviously it means you can participate a lot more with the child, which is I think good for both points of view. Erm, you know, a child gets someone to play with him around the park other than their own friends, erm, and that's another reason why I don't want to be a very old father because I still want to win at sports day in the father's race (amusement). (Vincent, 30, sample A, pre-birth)

Being healthy was seen as important in two ways; firstly it was necessary for the men to be active with their child, which was seen as an important fatherly role. Like Vincent, several men commented on the importance of being able to win the dads race at sports day, suggesting concerns about health and fitness also retained an element of competitiveness with other men. The second way in which being healthy was important was in terms of longevity and making sure they are around for the child whilst it is growing up. Events such as the child's marriage or birth of grandchildren were frequently cited as important moments they wanted to witness, as Frank highlights. These issues are explored further in the following chapters.

Participants frequently discussed their understanding that the culturally acceptable age to become a parent has changed over time so the 'right time' is now later than in previous generations. Delaying parenthood until one's thirties was also seen as a middle-class trajectory, with emphasis on the moral aspect of choosing to become parents rather than making the transition as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. This extract illustrates Vincent's perception of these issues, in addition to his reflections on body time, timing and socially approved trajectories.

My wife's three years older than me and she was sort of fairly keen on it, she was a bit worried that her "clock" was starting to tick and we didn't really want to be "old" parents. I know parenthood's got, tends to be a lot older now, people used to have kids when they were 18, everybody did, whereas nowadays it's mainly, erm, well it's not as many people, it's more sort of professional people perhaps having a little bit little later and also actually got through university and that sort of thing. So that's the main reason we didn't want to be very old, we thought well "we've been together for two years" we got married, and we thought well, "ideal time". (Vincent, 30, sample A, pre-birth)

It may be that right time in relation to age and biology is less problematic for men, who do not perceive themselves subject to the same reproductive time limits as women; therefore this potentially relieves men of some of the responsibility of deciding on right time.

5.3 The next logical step

For most of the on-time fathers, right time appeared to be constituted by fulfilling a sequence of age-related goals so they reached the stage where parenthood became the next logical or expected step.

I think it sort of starts when you sort of get a job then if you move out if you meet someone, get the ring on the finger.... It's sort of ticking off little boxes and once you've sort of got a child on the way I think that's the full set for a lot of people.

(Gary, 28, sample A, pre-birth)

I think the timing is brilliant ... we're both done with running round, we've done our travelling, meeting people, go and do whatever else, both happy to settle down and we're happy with each other. So that's it you know, the next natural step is to have a child then, financially we were okay so it all made sense. (Kevin, 33, sample C, pre-birth)

These extracts suggest that having a job, being in a stable relationship, having one's own family home and having time to travel and pursue interests are things which should be done before embarking on parenthood. Each of these issues will be discussed in turn over the remainder of this chapter. However these sequences are not as straightforward as these quotes indicate and a number of other temporal aspects come into play; namely durations and intervals (Elchardus and Smits, 2006). For example, the couple relationship must have had an appropriate duration so as not to be seen as 'rushing into things', yet must not remain childless for too long as questions about fertility were likely to be raised, which held implications for masculinity.

Yes, very much, people are pleased and happy. In many ways it suggests that previously they were saying, 'Oh well, why not?', 'Better cover that one up', kind of thing, and "not ask any more questions about that one". Because, if I was 35, then most people in a lot of the countries I go to would have expected that they should have children. Yes, so now, I mean, I have no idea, I suppose I'm speculating, but maybe they're thinking "Oh well, he's not infertile then", kind of thing, which they might have been thinking, or "she isn't", or something like that. (Simon, 35, sample A, pre-birth)

Simon's ten year relationship was lengthier than most when becoming a parent and he suggests this might have led to questions being raised as to why the couple did not have children, with speculation about fertility. However a relationship of less than two years

was seen as an insufficient duration, raising concerns about stability and creating perceptions of rushing. From two and a half to five years of marriage was seen as most appropriate; having some time as a couple but not waiting too long so fertility is questioned. This careful balancing highlights how variability in the duration of life course stages is restricted by these unspoken limits, indicating the extent to which the timetable of socially approved life course progression appears ingrained in the men's consciousness.

In addition to the relationship, having a stable job and appropriate housing were seen as pre-requisites for embarking on parenthood. Ideally the men would have been working in a secure job for an average of around four years, with a steady income and they would own a suitable house. Many participants bought houses or moved during the pregnancy or when trying to conceive, idealising larger houses in more suitable 'family' areas (Townsend, 2002). Throughout their responses to questions about right time, the men frequently cited the importance of being settled or secure in terms of relationship, finances, employment and home.

I feel settled in my relationship, um, we own our own home now – that's something we wanted to do – so that's in place, the marriage is in place. Um we're both round about 30, which seems like a nice time because you've got the experience of living and enjoying your twenties but you don't feel like you're going to be too old when the child's reaching teen-age, so it seems the right time from that point of view. (William, 29, sample C, pre-birth)

Just 'cause we're both very settled now, she's been working as an optometrist for two years now, I've been down here with [employer] for four, we've lived in this house for just over two and a half years, so it's, everything is very settled. I guess it just felt right in the time to move on and start something else in our life.
(Timothy, 28, sample C, pre-birth)

It was, we were settled, we had a house, we had good jobs (2) we had um, we'd done everything that we wanted to do in the short-term ... We always did plan to have children and if we weren't having them then when were we? (Barry, 36, sample C, pre-birth)

The importance of having stability and security before embarking on parenthood was echoed throughout the interviews, including those where it was not in place. Being settled was seen as giving the baby the best start in life, and giving the men themselves the best chance of coping with a demanding task by being well-resourced. Research amongst young adults has also highlighted their views on the importance of having these factors in place before taking on the responsibility of children (Gordon *et al.*, 2005) suggesting that plans are made earlier in life for this sequencing of events. Ensuring financial stability was often described by participants as a man's role, which could be one explanation as to why men choose to delay, as discussed further in section 5.7.

5.4 A life of one's own

The idea that parenthood and having a life of one's own were mutually exclusive was suggested in many of the accounts. The 'on-time' fathers felt that having some time to themselves, often to go travelling and gain other significant life experiences, was something important to do before having a child, as it would be difficult to do afterwards because of the restrictive and demanding nature of parenthood. This individualistic period was seen as an important part of the life course that provided the man with valuable experiences, which would be beneficial for fatherhood. When asked to reflect on what it would have been like for them to have their children earlier, many of the men expressed a concern that they would have been missing out.

I think that I might have resented it later on in life missing out on the things in life that I did do through my twenties. Um because I know that when the child comes it will put an end to a lot of what you could have done before but you now certainly wouldn't be able to do after. (Jack, 30, sample B, pre-birth)

I think you should basically just, have a bit of, get a bit of living done, because there are certain things you can't do once you've got the burden of a child; you can't go out partying every night, you can't go travelling the world necessarily, you can after a bit but there'll be no major foreign holidays for us, even if it's just financial implications of that. Um, just basically having a normal life, getting it under your belt before settling down, (Anthony, 31, sample A, pre-birth)

Oh no, no, I mean people say "Oh, you have your children first and then your life", or "Your life first and then your children", I mean, in a simplistic way it's true but I'd rather have had my life first and then have children, because to me it's a choice as opposed to just falling into, you know, the kind of parent trap, you know, doing what, what your parents did or even doing what your parents might have told you not to do, it's to do the same as them.

(Kenny, 41, sample A, pre-birth)

For these fathers it was important to 'get a bit of living done' before becoming parents, otherwise they may have resented their child for holding them back. Kenny also distinguishes his own situation from his parents' early transition to parenthood; described as a 'trap' they fell into. In contrast, the way he has organised his own life by leaving parenthood until later on suggests that fatherhood is a choice rather than an unintended consequence. Emphasising the element of choice was crucial in being constructed as moral and responsible (Perrier, 2009). Several of the men suggested that the fact they had chosen to have a child also indicated that they were mature enough to have chosen to take on the related responsibility, and felt that this made them more manly, as emphasised in contemporary discourses (Morgan, 2001; Vuori, 2007). Consequently an unplanned pregnancy was associated with irresponsibility, contradicting notions of mature and responsible fathering. Parenthood was seen as a responsible and demanding

ask where mothers and fathers would have to invest a large amount in the child.

However, such an investment was seen to provide emotional rewards. By making an active choice to have a child, such a 'planned project' may indicate a high degree of expectation and pressure on the child to provide satisfaction in the parents' lives (Walter, 1986).

When asked about their decision to become parents at this moment in time, several participants indicated that they had left the timing up to fate, believing that whenever the pregnancy occurred would be the right time. However fate did not completely dictate timing; only when stable employment, housing and relationships had been secured did couples relinquish control. In this way, stories about fate deciding corresponded with identifiable changes in material circumstances (Currie, 1988). Thus for many men fate only intervened when there was no longer a reason not to become parents, it being easier to 'let fate decide' rather than making a conscious decision for parenthood (Currie, 1988).

5.5 Joining the club

Signs of socially approved timing also came from other people in the same age cohort having children; particularly friends and siblings. Once others began to have children, this acted as a signal for the men that fatherhood was something they should be thinking about; seeing other people cope with parenthood served to reassure them that they could do the same. Going through the transition to parenthood at the same time as peers was a confirmation for men that they were following a socially approved trajectory and offered them a comforting sense of shared experience and being in it together, which several men described as 'joining the baby club'. For Joe, other people the same age having

children acted as a signal that it was something he 'should be doing' in order to keep up with them. This highlights how standards in relation to timing and sequencing are activated through linked lives (Heinz and Krüger, 2001).

I think you know as you get older it becomes more and more important I think because perhaps in society you see older people with, people who are the same age having kids and you think "oh I should be doing that now". So yeah it is, I think it gets more important as you get older, it's more like a career path really; you have the job that you want, you have the house that you want, you get married and okay what else? - Oh yeah right. It's a goal, you've got to be a dad now, that's what it is yeah so I think it's important (Joe, 31, sample C, pre-birth)

Parenthood is depicted as a goal that most people expect to achieve after job, house and marriage – the other constituent elements of Townsend's (2002) 'package deal' – therefore it is seen as important to make the transition to parenthood in order to progress along the life path. Living in a dynamic world means that standing still (in this case by not having a child in time with peers) is equated with falling behind (Adam and Groves, 2007) or an indicator of inadequate development (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

For other participants, younger siblings and friends having children before them indicated that they had somehow become out of place, not progressing in their lives at the same pace, and this acted as an impetus for thinking about having their own children.

My mum and dad had four children and I'm third in the row, so you see your older brothers and sisters getting married and getting settled lives with children more and less and there's like a gap and my younger sister is seven years younger than I am so it was about two years ago that they had their baby, so it's like, oh yeah, I'm just not in there in the middle or so ...

I: But you noticed there was something you were not doing, you hadn't done something that the family had

The rest of the family, yeah definitely
(Eric, 34, sample A, pre-birth)

The idea of being out of place relates to a linear temporality focused on progression and achievement, described as a masculine orientation towards time (Daly, 1996b; Felski, 2000). Indeed a few fathers described the motivation for having a child in terms of keeping up with the Joneses; it was something other people were doing and they did not want to miss out, they too wanted to have the 'full package' and be seen to achieve this at the same pace as others.

I've got friends who have never left [place name] and have lived there but they've got a family, so (2) from a sort of 'one upmanship' point of view even though we've travelled all over the world, we've got these amazing stories, these amazing things, they had probably something you know I didn't have; you know they had a family and a child so they've got that whole thing that I know nothing about. You know my sister's got children and she's constantly saying "oh George did this and that" and it's not something I've got so it's something I wanted, or I want, (Kevin, 33, sample C, pre-birth)

For many of the men who had all the pre-requisite stability factors in place, friends having children provided a significant jolt to thinking about parenthood, raising the question if not now then when?

We've now been married four years, been together six, so we've now done a lot of things that we wanted to do in our lives, as in holidays ... we have done up till now, done more or less everything we've wanted to do, or more or less anything, within reason, but everything we've wanted we've been able to buy and now I think we both come from a family orientated background, so that was something we've always said that we would like children, and like lemmings we might as well have one. (Jason, 32, sample A, pre-birth)

Jason's response indicates that when they had done, achieved and acquired everything they wanted there was no longer any reason to delay parenthood, so there is a sense that

'like lemmings' they decided to follow the normative pathway to parenthood and have a child because it is the usual thing to do, something they always assumed would happen (Lewis, 2006, Maher and Saugeres, 2007; Miller, 2010).

Critics have countered the idea of a standardised life course by emphasising greater choice and diversity in life course trajectories, leaving individuals to make their own futures. It is emphasised that embarking on parenthood is now a choice, unlike previous generations where it was an assumed life course stage (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). However a large number of men in this study who described the pregnancy as occurring at the right time suggested, like Jason, that they had always assumed that they would be a parent, so the question was not 'if' but 'when'. These men appear to be following what Zinn (2004) terms a traditionalization mode of biographical certainty, based on the reproduction of given action patterns which appear to be natural or self-evident. For such individuals, decisions about working life or family formation are not an issue of whether to go ahead with them but of fine tuning; when and under what circumstances the individual events of a traditionalised sequential pattern should be realised. This suggests a strong sense of conformity amongst participants, although the experiences of those with less conformist attitudes will be considered in the next chapter. In this situation, timing becomes an increasingly important way for individuals to demonstrate choice and agency.

5.6 Something Missing

If all the above 'pre-requisite' stages were in place, some men experienced the feeling that something was missing in their life, for most this was thought to be a child-shaped gap.

You know, we're ripe for a bit of something to think about really, I think, and a baby will fulfil that role. (Simon, 35, sample A, pre-birth)

I had thought, I suppose that what I thought might be lacking was just a general thirty-something lack of achievement. ... Then, I suppose, the slow realisation that maybe what was lacking wasn't that but was a need for something else to complete the family, to complete the family dynamic. It may be, having to look after someone and care for and nurture, is what we're missing.

(Charles, 33, sample B, pre-birth— his emphasis)

Once they had been successful in careers and had formed loving, stable relationships, many of the men articulated the desire for a new challenge, something which would add meaning to their lives. The reward for having children today lies almost exclusively in their emotional value (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), therefore they are perceived as able to provide the meaning participants were searching for. After achieving these prerequisites, some of the men experienced feelings of emptiness around a routine existence. For these men, parenthood represented another opportunity for fulfilment, which would involve taking a back seat to prioritise the child. There was a definite sense of having had one's turn and now providing an opportunity for someone else to have a chance at life; as Charles indicates in his desire for someone to 'look after', 'care for and nurture'. This could also be viewed in terms of linear progression; at a stage in their lives where they had established career, status and relationships, having a child offered a chance to progress in another direction. Thus the new life phase is legitimated through recourse to biography as it represents a 'climb' (Alheit, 1994).

The thing that springs to mind, is just the chance to be really good at something (2) ... The chance to give the child a great life but also for me personally the chance to be a great father, to be able to look back and say "I might not be doing a fantastic job but hey, I'm a brilliant father" and I can die a happy man knowing that I'll have done something really good in my life, so that's where the achievement comes into it I suppose. (William, 29, sample C, pre-birth)

Having a child because there was something missing was differentiated as motivation by participants from having a child because there was something wrong. Something missing implies existing fulfilment and a desire for new challenges, whilst something wrong suggests a flaw in the base of stability, having a child to fix a problem rather than for the additional pleasures it brings, which was viewed as inherently irresponsible.

As discussed in the literature review, Bergnéhr (2007) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest that families restrict the freedom to achieve self-fulfilment. However many fathers in this study suggested that parenthood offered them a sense of completion and a different kind fulfilment to that achieved through following individualistic desires. Perhaps parenthood is best seen as the final piece of the jigsaw, fitting in best when one's own desires have been satisfied first. Therefore it is not necessarily helpful to view parenthood as opposed to self-fulfilment as this overlooks the dynamic nature of lives where what constitutes fulfilment changes over time. It appears that men often view themselves as making better fathers in their thirties because they are then able to have an individualistic phase during their teens and twenties; having time to do what they want before committing to putting someone else first. Whilst not straightforwardly compatible with individualisation and autonomy, parenthood offers a different form of self-fulfilment based on the capacity to prioritise, nurture and care for someone else.

Becoming a father enables a different or expanded sense of masculinity, where the value of expressing emotions in a close, involved relationship with the child is recognised. Some participants suggested that this was part of a hybridised masculinity (Beynon, 2002; Connell, 2005); being a soft and emotional man at home, returning to a more 'macho' stance at work. In this way, it appears that men make situationally specific choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour (Wetherell and Edley 1999).

All me mates know, I think they were quite surprised by it in lots of ways. But then, we all have different personas, don't we? I've got a different persona, Malcolm the prison officer, and a different one, Malcolm the partner, so I think they was all quite surprised when I said I was going to be a father. I'm very happy with me relationship and I can't wait for it, so I don't care what other people think. If it was leading on to, that's what you were going to say, well, what do they think of it - I can't wait. I'm all gooey in a sense. I don't mind showing I'm gooey 'cause there's no harm in showing things.
(Malcolm, 32, sample A, pre-birth)

I'm anything but emotional when I'm with my friends

I: Anything but emotional?

Anything but emotional when I'm with my friends, yeah. But obviously I can be around Mia yeah, I think that's spot on

I: So being all those different things at different times really

Yeah there's a time for everything.
(Aaron, 16, sample C, one year later)

Here both Malcolm and Aaron describe their embodiment of different types of masculinity at different times; the relationship with the child allowing them to be 'gooey' and 'emotional'. This suggests another avenue in which fatherhood can provide self-fulfilment; through an expanded sense of masculinity.

5.7 The trend towards delaying

Given the apparent prevalence of a standardised life course trajectory it is worthwhile considering the reasons behind a trend towards increasing age at first fatherhood based on the responses of the study participants. Prior to the interviews men were asked about their own education and work experiences, and that of their parents. Around half the men in the research had been to university, a much higher proportion than they reported

for their own parents. The average age for first time fathers in the sample who had been to university was 34, compared to 28 for non-university educated fathers. This supports research that suggests with an increasing amount of time invested into higher education, the transition to employment and financial independence occurs later than in previous generations (Mitchell, 2006; Scherger, 2009). The transition to employment and having a secure income was described as an important life event by the vast majority of participants. Although the ideal of the man as a sole breadwinner has apparently become less prominent in recent years as increasing numbers of women are entering the workforce and there are more dual earner families, in practice men still appear to view the role of provider as fundamental to fathering. The importance of financial security before embarking on parenthood is a commonplace idea in men's accounts (Jamieson *et al.* 2010), highlighting the way in which providing remains linked to male identity.

I think it's just the way men think; you think that you're the one who needs to make sure the finances are in place that you can afford to look after them, which isn't a conscious thing, it's certainly not a sexist thing, it's just the way men's minds work I think, they feel they've got to be the provider. My wife and I earn similar levels of money and both work just as hard, you just feel in yourself that it's your responsibility to make sure that's in place and so you take on a bit more of that, more of the planning and the organising, and make sure you've got the funds. (William, 30, sample C, post-birth)

However for fathering practices to be perceived favourably by mothers and children, men needed to do a bit more than just earn, or just look after the 'big picture' (Lewis and Welsh, 2005) and are expected to spend time with their children, share all aspects of childcare and be emotionally open, warm and demonstrative (Henwood, Shirani and Kellett 2011).

In addition to postponement for economic reasons, a delay may be related to individuals' readiness to take on the significant responsibility of parenthood, as highlighted by an 'intensive parenting' discourse. Individuals choose when this phase of intensive parenting will best fit into their life course (Daniels and Weingarten, 1983); therefore with the perception that parenthood is becoming increasingly demanding, individuals may be prompted to delay for longer periods of time.

Based on the sample A and B data, Henwood and Procter (2003) found that there were some areas of tension in men's experience of 'new' fatherhood; providing cash and care, valuing selflessness and autonomy, and negotiating fairness, equity and decision making. The men showed a clear preference for involved fatherhood, in contrast to the disciplinarian figure associated with previous generations, which was seen to have inhibited their fathers in developing relationships. However, these raised expectations meant that prior to the birth some men were anxious about making the change to being a selfless, sensitive child-centred parent and questioned their ability to do so. Children were seen as a big commitment, requiring a substantial increase in responsibility. To be prepared to take this on, the men had to feel that they had done everything they wanted first and were ready to settle down. In addition, as people are likely to have fewer children, they have the responsibility to invest more in them. The implication of this is that with the perception of parenthood as an increasingly responsible task (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), men are waiting until they are emotionally mature enough to fully commit to it, which may be one reason why the average age of fatherhood is increasing.

The demands of childrearing in an intensive parenting culture mean that people are increasingly delaying until they feel ready to take on this responsibility, having pre-

requisite stages or 'optimal conditions' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) in place, which inevitably means becoming a parent at an older age. However, this is justified as a middle-class, moral trajectory. Some researchers, such as Perrier (2009), have critiqued the concept of 'right time' as based on a middle-class chronology of education, career and then parenthood, as participants such as Vincent outlined (discussed above), whilst those from working-class backgrounds are seen as being on a faster track without the mediations of progressive stages and the surety of a career as time passes (Bynner *et al.*, 2002; Macvarish and Billings, 2010). Whilst some working-class men in our research indicated similar linear trajectories, others who did not fit socially approved pathways articulated their own moral position based on alternative life course trajectories they could have followed.

I and everybody I know expected it a lot sooner than what it is ... because they all thought "he's gonna be like his uncle and have kids when he's 16, 15/16" but I'm the good one in the family so, you know, I waited a bit longer than what they all expected ... I think I've grown up and matured quite a lot since the age of 16 (2) because, I dunno, I used to go round with the wrong people you know and used to do stupid things, but I'm out of all that now ... I think now it's time to settle down you know ... I think I've lived my life a lot, at the end of the day the way I look at it is I'm not getting any younger, (Nathan, 24, sample C, pre-birth)

Although comparatively young, Nathan describes how he has delayed parenthood until he felt mature and responsible enough, following a period where he was able to live an individualistic life. In this way his decision to delay parenthood shows similarities to the trajectory articulated by middle-class men, although occurring at an earlier chronological age.

5.8 Semi-planned

During this chapter's discussion of right time I have presumed synchronicity in the couple's family planning, as the majority of men indicated they felt ready for children at the same time as their partners. However a small number of men described the pregnancies as 'semi-planned' suggesting that they were not completely comfortable with the timing of conception. When asked about the timing of these pregnancies the men had difficulty articulating their experiences as either planned or unplanned, problematising such simplistic binary distinctions. All these semi-planned pregnancies occurred in situations where the woman reportedly felt it was the right time and wanted a baby, whilst the man would have preferred to wait. Whilst some men in the 'right time' sample had encouraged their partners to wait until they were ready and felt this had not been significantly problematic (although their partners may have felt differently), the men in the semi-planned group talked in terms of 'giving in' to their partner's desires for a child, and often described it as her right to have one. The majority of these men had partners who were older and were concerned about leaving it too late; therefore timing was motivated by the female biological clock.

oh the baby's come really quick, but my wife is 38, so that's one of the reasons why we knew ... if we wanted another addition to our family to go for it pretty quickly otherwise you're getting older and the risks involved there and the baby's not being completely, well basically malformed babies, diseases. (Eric, 34, sample A, pre-birth)

I would simply put it was now or never because of her age and ideally I would have liked to have waited. ... I don't think that I am ready. But I don't think that I am not ready, I mean I don't think, I know that I am not ready but who is ready? And it is who you love and feel these things for, and I realise it is now or never ... Um the waiting we couldn't wait any longer ... and we didn't have much time and it was kind of now or never. And the decision was kind of made for us really basically. (Adam, 34, sample A, pre-birth)

For both Eric and Adam the pregnancy happened fairly early on in their relationships, with decisions framed in terms of 'now or never' due to concerns about risk related to advancing maternal age. There is a recognition that these pregnancies occurred relatively quickly in the relationships and that the men would have preferred more time as a couple first. However both these participants had stepchildren and this was expressed as a reason for not waiting; they were already parenting. In many of these semi-planned situations men had agreed to try for a baby yet believed conception would take longer than it did in reality, hence Adam's comment that 'the decision was made for us'.

For others the pregnancy was not problematic in terms of their relationship circumstances as they had been together for several years, but was not the ideal time because of work situations.

I think that's the risk, the risk is having a child now; maybe it wasn't the ideal time in my career to have a child. ... It's just that, okay in an ideal world where would we be? Well the sort of debt that I've accrued being a student for eleven years off and on isn't cleared, my career could be advanced a little bit more, so that's the risk of having a child now, just how much I'm able to do.

(Alun, 33, sample C, pre-birth)

Lynn is 38 years old. Like I said, we've been together like four years or more. She felt her biological clock was ticking, and she wanted another child. My situation was, and still is really, in theory, working away ... and being a part-time father. That wasn't the way I wanted to go. I wanted to be there full-time. I wanted full responsibility for my child. So I relented and said, let nature take its course, but I didn't realise nature could work so quickly (laughs) so obviously, with the body clock going, or so she states, then the boss rules.

(Malcolm, 32, sample A, pre-birth)

For both Alun and Malcolm the pregnancy did not occur at the right time in their careers and thus introduced an element of risk. Due to his return to higher education in his mid-

twenties, Alun had not had the same opportunity as other fathers of the same age to establish a job he felt was sufficiently secure and well-paid. He felt that waiting would have been preferable as it would also have enabled his wife to become a stay-at-home parent, as she had wanted. Malcolm wanted a transfer so he could work in the area and not be absent for several nights a week, which made him feel like a 'part-time father' and raised concerns about missing out during these absences. In these interviews both men talked about their partners' sudden and strong desire for a child, apparently based on biological impulses, which led to them 'relenting' despite their reservations. Whilst it was not the ideal time from their perspective they both emphasised that they were ready for fatherhood and could cope with it, distinguishing themselves from those who had unplanned pregnancies and were perceived to be unprepared.

All fathers who described the pregnancies as 'semi-planned' experienced some relationship problems, with two relationships breaking down soon after the birth. This was a much higher rate than amongst those who agreed it was the right time. It appears that asynchrony in timing decisions was more problematic for relationships than transitions experienced as unexpected by both (Cowan and Cowan, 2009). The pregnancies also frequently coincided with periods of work-related stress for these men. However due to the small number of men in the 'semi-planned' category, such claims would need to be further substantiated.

5.9 Reflections

Throughout data collection and analysis, the similarities between participants' transitions and the apparent rigidity of their life course timetables was striking, suggesting the pervasive influence of socially approved trajectories. Whilst some have proposed moving

away from notions of a fixed sequence of normatively defined stages through which we are all expected to pass (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Vickerstaff, 2006), others have presented evidence to indicate the continuing significance of following a normative life course sequence (Elchardus and Smits, 2006) and even an increase in uniformity and rigidity (Modell *et al.* 1978; Hareven, 1995; Daly, 1996b). Data presented in this chapter indicate a high level of agreement between participants in relation to right time, suggesting certain assumptions about a normative life course prevail. This does not just relate to achieving the necessary pre-requisites but doing this in sequence and for an appropriate duration (Rawls, 2005).

As noted earlier, whilst claims have been made for increasing individualisation, many participants in this study held a longstanding assumption that they would become parents and did not regard it as an active choice amongst possible options. This supports research which suggests a high proportion of young people see parenthood as desirable and a certainty in their own future trajectories, constituting a 'lynch pin' of future lives (Maines and Hardesty, 1987; Gordon *et al.*, 2005). Given the apparent pervasiveness of a normative pathway discussed in this chapter, this approach may imply that participants carefully plan their life course according to a strict schedule, but this is not necessarily the case. Some participants had mapped out a life trajectory with age-related goals, but most had a vague idea of what direction they would like their future to take and often the next phase only became apparent when the previous one was embarked upon. For example, several men found thoughts about having children only occurred to them when they were married and thus in a suitable relationship for family life. The majority of men had a notion that they would become fathers at some point in the future but this always remained in the future until they realised there was no longer any reason to wait. Given the imprecision of this notion, it is striking that so many men reached fatherhood

through the same pattern of life course transitions with little variation in terms of age. This may be down to an internalisation of socially approved trajectories measured in terms of age-related goals (Hareven, 1982; Hogan and Astone, 1986). In this way, time is an organising feature of mutual social interaction, as social orders result from an aggregate of individuals pursuing their separate projects together (Rawls, 2005).

Participants recognised that current socially approved trajectories were different to those of previous generations; drawing distinctions from their own fathers, who had overwhelmingly made the transition to parenthood at an earlier age. The men were not reflexive about how these changes had occurred and, whilst it highlighted fluctuating cultural ideals of right time, it did not appear to influence their own desire to fit in with contemporary patterns.

The careful balancing, sequencing and duration of each life course stage discussed by the men and the lack of variation between their accounts of this suggests an ingrained socially approved timetable of life course progression, with parenthood as a key marker of adult status. For those whose lives panned out according to this sequence, following this socially ingrained trajectory was experienced in terms of achievement and progression; however it raises particular challenges for those whose lives do not unfold in this way, as discussed further in the next chapter. Some participants who described it as the right time discussed the way they had to negotiate these ideals; for example meeting a partner later in life and awareness of apparently ticking biological clocks could mean a transition to parenthood early in the relationship in an attempt to stay on target. This frequently appeared to have repercussions later in life when participants expressed the wish that they had had more time as a couple before becoming parents (see chapter seven). Subsequently, such institutionalisation of experience can potentially be harmful.

Some men suggested that they had longer-term life plans, which offered a sense of confirmation and satisfaction when they were achieved on target.

I feel like I'm where I always wanted to be as well if that makes sense, I've always felt like I wanted to be married with a baby now, this is a good age for me I think and I wanted to have a baby this age. It feels right actually, it feels really good. (Neil, 29, sample C, one year later)

However not matching anticipated trajectories was not always a source of anxiety as retrospectively these goals were often viewed as unrealistic. As the future becomes the present, an opportunity occurs to assess the adequacy of beliefs and desirability of goals. Therefore old images of the future may be revised (Bell and Mau, 1971). For example William talks about his youthful ideas of settling down in his early twenties as at the time he saw thirty as being old. However his perceptions of what constituted old altered as he aged himself; when reaching 22 he still felt too young to settle down and therefore this was postponed, which has worked out for the best.

Well this is going back to when I was 17/18; at that time I thought it would have been about 22/23. (3) I'm pleased it wasn't, but when I was that age I assumed it would be younger than it is now, you always see 30 as being so old (amusement) - which it isn't - but at the time you see it as being so old ... I'm really pleased it worked out the way it has. I feel a much better person for having spent my twenties doing that kind of thing rather than being settled down ... being married or living in my own home or whatever I could have been doing at 22.
(William, 29, sample C, pre-birth)

This temporal reconfiguration was one way in which initial goals could be dismissed as unrealistic thus alleviating any pressure that they had not been achieved. However, for some men, not reaching the desired stage on time was a source of anxiety. Participants indicated that they felt women would be more anxious about not becoming a mother 'on target' because of the preoccupation with biological clocks, discussed above. Several men

cited their partners as saying they wanted to be mothers by the age of thirty, yet participants themselves rarely related such stringent time limits.

Some men in the sample suggested that becoming a father in one's thirties may make it easier to reconcile with a sense of masculinity based on a choice to take on responsibility, and their confidence at emotional involvement. For example several men discussed going through a phase in their teens or early twenties where they were adamant about never having children, as it would have compromised their sense of masculinity to express any paternal sentiments. This was supported when data about involved fatherhood was presented to a group of teenage non-fathers as part of the research dissemination. These young men used homophobic discourses to distance themselves from any man who was interested in something so feminised as caring for a child. By their late twenties and early thirties many of the participants talked about being comfortable with themselves and more self-confident than they had been in earlier years. This more stable sense of identity and masculinity therefore was less compromised by fatherhood; instead they embraced a form of masculinity which advocates emotionally involved parenting.

This chapter has offered an insight into the seeming importance of adhering to a rigid socially approved, though often implicit, life course sequence, and the consequences of not doing so, illustrating the significant influence that timing has on the experience of fatherhood. The apparent persistence of the standardised life course (Elchardus and Smits, 2003)¹ suggests a high level of consensus and even increasing rigidity in relation to the timing of significant life course transitions. The imposition of these expectations about what people are supposed to be doing or have done at various ages therefore has

¹ I use the term life course rather Elchardus and Smits' life cycle, to avoid the rigidity associated with a life cycle approach, as discussed on page 20.

major repercussions for those who make transitions off-time and their understanding of temporality (Greene, 2003). Similarly to Currie's (1988) findings, the men discussed in this chapter appeared to view right time as a configuration of particular circumstances. However, with the exception of those who made a 'semi-planned' transition, the men did not experience any anxiety about aligning these stages, therefore achieving the right time was attainable. In contrast, right time was a more problematic concept for those who made earlier or later transitions given the challenges they experienced in reconciling pre-requisite stages. The experiences of 'off-time' fathers will now be considered.

Chapter 6

An off-time transition

I think that day I spent quite a few hours on my own
just thinking “oh god how am I gonna manage with this now?”
I’ve gotta be honest, when it’s unplanned it’s not a nice
feeling finding out, it’s not at all
(Owen)



6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to consider the ways in which a transition can be viewed as off-time by discussing the accounts of men across the samples who experienced unplanned and delayed pregnancies. The second part of the chapter explores the wide-ranging implications of an off-time transition for both younger and older fathers.

When planning the research, age initially seemed the most appropriate way of classifying whether someone had made an on-time transition to fatherhood or not, as age is often applied as a standard to judge the 'proper' timing of life events or 'timeliness' of life transitions (Mills, 2000). Neugarten (1968) uses the term 'social clock' to refer to strongly held norms in a society which dictate the age-appropriateness of activities. This social clock is an internalisation at the level of the individual of social norms to do with timing; either related to the biological clock or socially enshrined. This imposes expectations about what people are supposed to be doing or have done at various ages, therefore being off-time can have major repercussions (Greene, 2003). Through age-based expectations the individual is placed in a logical social temporal order of being on time or not in their life course development, particularly evident in relation to forming partnerships and fertility decision-making (Mills, 2002). Age therefore plays a major role in our sense of others as reference figures for ourselves and provides a standard against which we judge our own lives (Salmon, 1985).

For this research I classified those who made the transition to fatherhood several years outside the normative age range (25-35)¹ as indicated by statistical data (ONS, 2009a) as being off-time in terms of age, which formed the basis of my recruitment criteria for

¹ Most births within marriage are to fathers aged 30-34, most birth outside marriage to fathers aged 25-29. However these figures reflect all births rather than first birth only

sample D. Whilst age appeared to be one of the most significant aspects, other factors contributed to a transition being off-time, such as unplanned or delayed pregnancies.

6.2 Unplanned

Whilst identifying a pregnancy as unplanned was contentious for some, thirteen men described their partner's pregnancy in this way, just over one fifth of the total sample. These fathers were aged between 15 and 47, with a mean age of 26. Eight of these thirteen were young men who had generally assumed that they would have children at some point in the future, but not at such an early stage in their lives. Describing the moment they found out about the pregnancy, all men talked in terms of 'shock', which suggests that a time norm has been violated (Daly, 1996b); something happened which was not in the men's anticipated life trajectories. Several young fathers also felt that their own lives were over now that they had the responsibility for another person; as pregnancy was perceived as a negative event that could prevent achievement of specific life goals (Marcell *et al.*, 2003; Corkindale *et al.*, 2009). The quotes below indicate some responses upon finding out about an unplanned pregnancy.

14 yeah (2) I was 14, still in school and I dunno I just (2) didn't think I was ready for a baby, ... just too young and too much life ahead of me, didn't want to have kids yet until I was older, tie me down and things like that ... I didn't really think much about becoming a dad you know, just thought maybe I'd have kids when I'm older, when I'm a bit older and I have a house and I'm settled down, thought I may have children when I'm older but it happened sooner than I thought like. (Aaron, 15, sample C, pre-birth)

I was stunned... once I saw the two little blue lines come up I thought "oh my God my life's over" (Craig, 20, sample B, pre-birth)

These quotes are indicative of how most young fathers described feelings of concern upon finding out about the pregnancy as it meant drastic changes to their lifestyle. All young fathers experienced the pregnancy as an interruption of their planned futures, although to varying extents. Johnny and Seth were the only middle-class young fathers, with the pregnancy occurring during their time as university students. They had imagined becoming fathers in their late twenties/early thirties when more financially secure and stable and also more mature – the pre-requisites discussed in the previous chapter.

Um (2) I dunno, what was my reaction? It was definitely “oh shit” sort of thing (amusement) ... yeah (2) not necessarily having children at the moment but I’d definitely thought I’d really like kids. ...Um (2) I suppose old enough to have got through med school and the first couple of years as a junior doctor, would be on a decent salary. Um (3) you know just a bit older, sort of more mature and everything I suppose (amusement). (Johnny, 22, sample D, post-birth)

Although an early transition to parenthood has been equated with greater responsibility and seen as an integral part of the individual’s adult development (Walter, 1986), for some young fathers, an unplanned pregnancy was related to irresponsible behaviour, and contributed to feelings of immaturity. For example, when Seth found out about the pregnancy he described feeling ‘really young’, comparing himself with schoolmates who had made an early transition to parenthood. This highlights his sense of returning to a childlike identity, rather than parenthood representing a marker of adulthood.

I still, I think it just made me feel really young again and I was like a fifteen year old and seeing people that I went to school with getting pregnant and going “oh no you can’t do this”, it just took me back to being like that age, it’s what I felt like when I heard, found out Lorna was pregnant. (Seth, 22, sample D, post-birth)

Four young fathers were employed in manual occupations and had also imagined becoming fathers in a few years time when they were more financially stable. Some of

their biggest concerns centred on their ability to provide financially for the child, and in some cases, their partner. The two youngest fathers were not in education or employment when they found out about the pregnancy. Whilst they too would have liked to have waited, the pregnancy motivated them to attain qualifications in order to get a good job to be able to provide for their child. Thus whilst it remained the self-described 'wrong time' to have a child, it did motivate positive life changes for these two young men, acting as a 'saviour baby' to help them get back on track (Perrier, 2009).

Two of those who experienced unplanned pregnancies were amongst the older fathers in the sample, who had assumed that at this stage in their lives they had passed the chance for having children. Early on in their marriage Richard and his wife discovered they were unlikely to have children and decided not to pursue any medical interventions to aid conception. Over a decade later when they conceived naturally, Richard described the pregnancy as a nice surprise. However the 'surprise' element meant numerous concerns for Richard about how he could incorporate a baby into his already full life, after he assumed it was something that would never happen to him.

I think coping with the baby will be fine. It's the relationship between having a baby and what I do with the rest of my life because there's no baby-shaped space at the minute and it's about time one created a baby-shaped space because I realise we need one, well particularly time, both for the baby and for my wife. But that's quite an abstract concept really, how I turn that into a practical reality I'm not quite so sure about really, so that's probably the thing I'm most anxious about (Richard, 37, sample C, pre-birth)

Unlike fathers in the previous chapter who experienced a child-shaped gap, Richard described a sense of contentment with his existing life and could not see a way to reorganise this to incorporate the temporal demands of a child. As the pregnancy was

unplanned, Richard may also have been less motivated to make these changes than fathers who had decided that now was the right time for a child.

Fathers who experienced unplanned pregnancies often talked about taking one day at a time and dealing with short-term goals, as thinking about the long-term implications of parenthood and the impact of this on future life plans was overwhelming (Shirani and Henwood, 2011b). This is a significant contrast to the 'right-time' fathers who felt fatherhood had motivated them to think long-term (discussed further in chapter eight). Similarly to Richard, at 47, Phillip thought the age for having children was passed until he discovered that his partner was pregnant.

I'd kind of gone through many years in life where I actually really didn't want children at all, then got to a stage where I thought if it happens it happens fine, then got to a stage thinking actually I might regret not having them, and then I got to a stage thinking well I probably won't have one now anyway, and now I've got one (general amusement) ... [I'm] Still quite scared, still quite scared by the long-term implications. But dealing with it on a day-by-day basis, trying to get as much out of it as I can on a day-by-day basis. Um (2) exploring it (3) it's something I'm sure as each day passes I'm slightly more at ease with, slightly more pleased about. But yeah it's still a huge undertaking, still a big change. (Phillip, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Phillip's account suggests passing through the various stages discussed in the previous chapter but going past the appropriate window for having children. For Phillip this unplanned pregnancy was experienced as scary and a 'huge undertaking' to embark on at this stage in his life. When his daughter was seven months old he described himself as increasingly happy about fatherhood, although it had raised numerous concerns about having someone dependent upon him as his own health was deteriorating and working became more difficult. The increased pressure to provide was experienced as particularly stressful at a time when he had hoped to be slowing down.

Three men whose partners had unplanned pregnancies were in the 'on time' age range of 25-35. Two had thought they would probably have children in the future and one had decided that he did not want to have children at all. Anthony and Cheryl had only recently begun a relationship when they found out about the pregnancy and were both in short-term jobs that they had been hoping would fund their emigration in a few years' time. Whilst initially deciding on a termination, neither felt they could go through with this in practice. The pregnancy brought about a huge life change by halting all their plans to emigrate, instead bringing about financial pressures related to settling down and providing a stable environment for the baby. However, the three fathers who experienced an unplanned pregnancy in their thirties could more easily reconcile this within their life plans than younger or older fathers, as it fitted into a phase when friends and siblings were in a similar position, and many of the 'pre-requisite' factors were in place.

Around half the men who experienced unplanned pregnancies considered the option of a termination. Whilst in principle this was a serious consideration, in practice many couples felt it was not something that they could go through with. Most of the men talked about it ultimately being their partner's decision as she had the embodied experience of pregnancy, and they would support whatever she decided. Previous research has suggested that men have trouble weighing up the costs and benefits of termination themselves and passing responsibility for the decision to their partner is one way of avoiding this dilemma (Corkindale *et al.*, 2009). Reasons for terminations centred on it not being the right time; participants questioned whether they were the right age or stable enough to cope with the responsibilities of parenthood. Two participants in the 'right time' group discussed their experiences of having abortions in previous

relationships because it was not the right time in their lives for parenthood (see Jones *et al.* 2008, and Kero *et. al.*, 1999, for a discussion of abortion and timing).

Some fathers described the pregnancies as ‘mistimed’ or ‘off’ although clear that they were not planned. These men appeared reluctant to call the pregnancy unplanned as they had intended to have children at some stage, and felt that ‘unplanned’ carried negative connotations. Whilst these pregnancies generally came as a surprise, the men played down the difficulties they experienced and emphasised their pleasure at the news.

I thought you know, so on one hand it wasn't the timing, we probably were looking to try sort of next year, so it was a bit off timing wise but it's no problem. (2) And it was good because you know it meant for us, I think the response was it doesn't matter about the timing because you know we had thought that we might not be able to have any kids, so actually from that point of view it was a relief that it happened

I: Okay so maybe a little bit earlier than you'd intended

Yeah

I: But manageable and kind of alright

Intended if not planned shall we say (amusement)
(Bradley, 25, sample C, pre-birth)

Throughout his interviews, Bradley sought to distance himself from stereotyped views of young fathers as irresponsible (Formby *et al.*, 2010), emphasising how he had achieved the necessary pre-requisites (as discussed in chapter five) over a shorter time-period. In this way he positioned himself as mature, unselfish and responsible in contrast to those who wasted time by postponing too long. The men who described pregnancies as off-timed rather than unplanned were all in stable relationships with secure jobs. Therefore, although pregnancies may have been a surprise, they could be more easily coped with

than unplanned pregnancies to those in more chaotic situations. As with those who described pregnancies as 'semi-planned' discussed in chapter five, this highlights the limitations of binary distinctions in relation to planning.

6.3 Delayed

Eight men across the samples experienced delayed pregnancy due to fertility difficulties. The length of the delay varied from one to ten years, although was generally around two years. During this period of trying, over half of the men experienced at least one miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy, which often led to further delay. All eight men had some medical intervention regarding fertility, ranging from initial tests to three babies being conceived through fertility treatment (IVF and IUI²), one via a surrogate and one after the partner had undergone surgery. The remainder were eventually conceived naturally.

The experience of delayed fatherhood raised issues for the participants about their control over time. Most people assumed they would conceive within a few months and when this did not happen there was a sense of time running out for them to do so. A process of chronometricalization or microtiming (La Rossa and Sinha, 2006) marked the period of waiting, with life geared around how long they had to wait to find out if there was a pregnancy and how long until they could try again, as the quote from Vincent, below, illustrates.

Erm, you know, trying to reassure her that everything was probably normal and it would happen, erm, and really trying to say, "Well, we've only got two weeks to wait and then we can sort of try again and then another two weeks after that we'll know". So trying to sort

² In-vitro fertilisation and Inter-uterine insemination

of put some hope on the subject because I was getting less and less convinced that it was going to happen.
(Vincent, 30, sample A, pre-birth)

This emphasises the couples' planning in relation to socially constructed clock time, despite its perceived incompatibility with biological time (Adam, 1995). Looking forward in the way Vincent describes is an attempt to minimise frustrations and disappointment in the present, injecting hope into future possibilities. Couples were generally sent away to keep trying until the medically defined right time to intervene. This period of waiting and expectancy is a temporality that forms part of everyday living (Adam, 1990) as daily life becomes focused around monthly cycles. Time also becomes a commodity which threatens personal identity against normative life course expectations (Earle and Letherby, 2007) as the window for achieving parenthood appears to be diminishing. Whilst many couples did not tell others they were trying to conceive for fear this would put too much pressure on them, when friends became pregnant and had babies this increased the pressure to keep up, again highlighting the significance of linked lives as discussed in chapter five.

When you see other people with their kids and they're coping you're like "you're a year younger than me, perhaps I should think about getting on with it really" so yeah it is, your friends do influence that ... It starts getting a bit of a grind then 'cause people start having kids and you want them, it's like "for God's sake" it's like a competition, not so much between men but you notice that between the girls, it's kind of "oh bloody cow, she's bloody pregnant before I am" ... I think it puts a lot of pressure on the wife whereas as the man you've just got to be supportive and kind of "yeah come on love, it'll happen one day" (Joe, 31, sample C, pre-birth)

Here Joe reflects on the disguised competition between friends to keep up and not fall behind by being the last to have children, also wanting to avoid the stigma associated with being infertile. As with many of the men in similar circumstances, Joe positions

himself in a supportive role; like Vincent, looking forward to encourage hopefulness. Whilst often discussed in light-hearted ways, the underlying tension during this period was evident. Most of the men talked frankly during the interviews about experiences of infertility, although all stressed that there was no medical reason for this, or if there was it lay with their partners. Had any of the participants reported male infertility it may be that a different understanding of temporality in relation to this would have been reached. The men indicated that they were only comfortable talking about experiences of infertility after a successful pregnancy had occurred due to the relationship between masculinity and infertility (Throsby and Gill, 2007). Participants reflected on occasions of teasing between friends or colleagues, often experienced as upsetting or troubling, which intensified pressure to conceive. The feeling that they were bodily constrained by time, as well as the need to keep up with normative life course expectations, imbued the period of conception and waiting with an overarching temporality that came to structure daily life.

Delayed fathers were generally more concerned about their increasing age and being 'old' fathers than any others in the sample; the mean age for the 'delayed' fathers across all the samples was 38 compared to 32 for the 'right time' fathers.

I do think about my age a lot more than I ever did before. Erm, you start going through, I never really thought about my age before too much, everyone thinks about it, but you start working out "Christ! that means when the baby's ten, I'll be..." this, that and the other, I can't quite think, "I'm going to be an old parent".
(Bob, 36, sample B, pre-birth)

I just get the feeling that 36 is quite old (amusement) ... but my wife's 34 and it's not particularly old to be having a child now but it's, you're reaching the second half of your opportunity to have children that you had before. So when we started trying we were 32 and I

probably thought that was a more natural, more common age, yeah.
So if anything I think I'm too old (amusement).
(Barry, 36, sample C, pre-birth)

With the imminent arrival of his son, Bob reflects on a heightened sensitivity about his age and concerns about the sizeable gap between him and his children, whilst Barry reflects on having passed the 'natural' age for having children³. Concerns amongst delayed fathers about their age became more prominent in later interviews when their children were older and the men themselves had reached their forties. These issues will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In addition to medical delays, some men suggested that postponing was also related to anxieties⁴ about fatherhood. For example, Guy described his own father as a poor parent and role model, and concerns that he would be the same prompted him to delay.

But it's something that I'm constantly aware, something that I worried (2) going back to why I didn't have, why I left it so late, I mean it's mostly about meeting the right person and finding the right time but there was always this worry about not being a good father because of my father (2) it's always been a concern of mine. So it's very conscious yes, very consciously aware of trying to be a good father in contrast to my father. (Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Seeing the child as a route to immortality, as several of the men did, was problematic for those men who did not want to reproduce their own, or their father's, faults. However the extent of this delay varied between participants; others rarely postponed as long as Guy had.

³ Concerns about 'naturalness' may be related to fertility treatment (Throsby, 2001)

⁴ The term is used here to refer to worries and concerns, rather than the clinical sense

6.4 The lived experiences of off-time fatherhood

Attention is now turned to the implications an off-time transition has for participants' daily lives and imagined futures. In conducting the interviews it became evident that many of the concerns or difficulties discussed were experienced by both older and younger fathers, albeit in different circumstances, therefore will be discussed together.

6.4a Couple relationships

Both unplanned and delayed pregnancies put considerable strain on couple relationships as individual, and joint lifestyles and trajectories, were reconfigured. Relationship separations or difficulties were more prevalent amongst those who described pregnancies as unplanned and particularly those who had semi-planned pregnancies, compared to those who had defined it as the right time. Younger fathers were the most likely to experience relationship difficulties, with half of this group experiencing a separation. Several young fathers suggested the pressures of parenthood had exacerbated existing problems and brought relationships to breaking point. However the small number of young fathers in the sample requires caution in these interpretations.

Yeah things were alright, they were good for a couple of months but I mean it just went downhill really, nothing got better

I: It was just a case, it wasn't anything to do with Mia?

No it wasn't, well I s'pose she may have caused a few problems, it doesn't help having a baby together, causes a lot of problems with her [partner's] parents and causes arguments.

(Aaron, 15, sample C, post-birth)

Several participants indicated competing desires in their relationships related to the 'off timing' of pregnancy. Some of the young working-class fathers commented that their partners had always expected to have a child at a young age as previous generations of

their family had done. In contrast, participants themselves, who invariably reported taking on responsibility for providing economically, had hoped to wait until they were more financially stable.

I think she always wanted kids sooner rather than later 'cause her parents, her mum is very, got a life where she's never done a days work in her life and very oriented around benefits and that. So I think Tara always had plans to go the same way ... So yeah I think she not necessarily planned it but was more, less surprised than I was, probably the best thing to say (amusement).

(Ryan, 19, sample D, one year later)

Not really no it wasn't planned. 'cause, well the first week I wasn't too happy about it 'cause I was like I'm too young and this and that, and she was like "oh but I wanted to do it" ... she wanted one when she was nineteen. Her sister had her first one at sixteen and she said when she gets to about eighteen or nineteen she wanted one ... Yeah she did it on purpose (laughs). (Luiz, 19, sample C, pre-birth)

Delayed fathers suggested that the period of trying was particularly difficult for their relationship due to the pressure of trying to conceive and dealing with disappointment when it did not happen.

The most challenging part of our relationship always has been the baby and why we haven't got a baby, that real frustration as to why we couldn't get pregnant, and she would get upset every month and it would be difficult for days when we found out the test was negative.

(Barry, 36, sample C, pre-birth)

Nonetheless they often reflected that the eventual conception brought them closer together and strengthened relationships.

Some older fathers suggested that they had not felt ready for fatherhood in their twenties and thirties, in contrast to women of the same age. These men tended to have significantly younger partners when they did make the transition to fatherhood.

So what I noticed is that when I was in my early thirties there were a lot of women around me who started you know feeling that clock ticking and were wanting to, I got into probably at least one relationship where it, where my partner really wanted to push towards a child and I wasn't ready for it, didn't feel that the relationship was right for that. So that's the experience I had in my thirties; of women in their thirties wanting to push towards a child, and talking about men I've noticed men are not so ready in their early thirties ... there is this biological clock in women that isn't in men, and that must have, you know rationally if I was a woman I would have felt that and wanted to rush to actually do something about it whereas I wasn't under that obligation.

(Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Such accounts emphasising the difference between men and women in terms of biological clocks indicate greater temporal pressure for women. As described in chapter five, concern about ticking female biological clocks often prompted decisions about the timing of parenthood. The centrality of this to decision-making places much of the onus on women and may be one way in which responsibility for deciding on right time can be avoided by men. From a medical and fertility perspective such a mindset is problematic, yet is arguably inevitable given the numerous competing factors which have to be reconciled in order to constitute right time.

6.4b Finances and work

As discussed in the previous chapter, those who had children at the self-defined right time frequently talked about how they had had the opportunity to establish a stable career with enough income to provide for the family. It was important that they could comfortably manage with the expenses brought by having a child, generally through having progressed to a particular stage in their careers. However, what constituted an acceptable income and standard of living varied considerably between participants, which contributed to differences in the timing of transitions.

All young fathers described having some financial difficulties, although to varying degrees. Those in their early twenties where pregnancies were unplanned felt that they had not had chance to establish themselves in their chosen careers as the pregnancy happened during or soon after achieving qualifications. These men generally suggested that fatherhood would not prevent them from following their chosen career paths, although this often meant strained financial circumstances in the present and foreseeable future. The main difficulties relating to parenthood that young fathers articulated were constrained choices; not being able to provide their child with the best start as they were forced by circumstances to live in areas with low cost housing and high crime rates. When asked to contrast his experience of fatherhood with those who make the transition on time, Johnny responded:

Er (3) what's the difference? Um yeah in more of a position to choose, to determine things about your life and your son's life [if becoming a father in one's thirties]. You're in more of a position to choose where you want to live; we live here 'cause it's good for university and ... we're still going to be living here when he starts school so essentially there's no choice in terms of neighbourhood and stuff. I never wanted to bring up a kid in the inner city, that's essentially what I'm doing now for the first few years ... I want to move, essentially I don't want to live here as quick as possible because essentially it's a shithole (amusement). I dunno it's, I suppose to develop snobbish tendencies it's not a nice area and I'd quite like to move away, 'cause you know (2) 'cause it's essentially full of sort of young chavs. A friend who babysitted the other week got a star keyed into her bonnet, a couple of weeks ago someone had their windscreen smashed in, there's always the odd sort of headlights going awry you know. It would just be nice, you know I don't want him to grow up in that environment.

(Johnny, 22, sample D, post-birth)

Other fathers were in temporary jobs whilst they hoped to find more lucrative and interesting careers elsewhere, although this was often put on hold with the arrival of a baby and the need to provide for it financially. This led to some concerns about being

trapped in low-status employment, whilst contemplating the future they perceived they could have had if they had not become a father.

I started working at [factory], it was probably the worst job I've ever had in my life. And then you get the feeling sinks in you know of I could be doing this for the rest of my life because I've gotta provide for this child until the child's at least 16/17/18 you know what I mean? And then by then I'd be old, I've still got no qualifications, I've still got none of this, the only experience I've ever had is when I was working in [factory]. ... It's great being a dad but there's still always that thought in the back of your head and there will always be probably till the day I die 'what would have happened if I hadn't have had...'. (Owen, 18, sample D, one year later)

For some young fathers not in work, education or training, the baby provided an impetus for gaining qualifications or finding employment in order to provide financially and as a role model. In this way, conception could provide an opportunity to strengthen or embark upon a more conventional path (Augustine *et al.*, 2009) as illustrated by Aaron:

Definitely, that's what's done it really when Mia was born. You know things changed, I looked at things differently like I said, I looked at things differently; education I stopped thinking I don't wanna go school I'm just gonna stay in bed all day long; that's what I used to do, I used to stay in bed until about two o'clock and then just get out of bed and go out, I wasn't doing anything. (3) When she was born it just changed things ... I just decided I wanted to do something, go back to school and get GCSEs 'cause I don't wanna be growing up and, you know if I didn't go back to school then I wouldn't be doing anything now, I wouldn't be doing anything in September and I wouldn't have any GCSEs so I wouldn't have been able to get into college, so I'd have ended up stuck in a lazy job on the minimum wage. (Aaron, 16, sample C, one year later)

These young fathers were the most supported by their own parents, who offered advice and help with childcare as they generally lived locally. The youngest fathers also received extensive financial support from parents as some still lived at home. Therefore for these

young men some of the difficulties of parenthood were buffered by their own parents, who stepped in to provide some aspects of parental roles. This dependence was challenging as the men sought to emphasise their own status as fathers and their parents as supporting them in this in their role as grandparents.

Revisions to current lifestyle and imagined futures in light of an unplanned pregnancy appeared to have a classed dynamic. The working-class young men more frequently described their immediate need to find employment in order to provide financially for the child. Subsequently this altered their imagined futures, as some expressed concerns about being stuck in low status employment because of their responsibility to provide. In contrast, the two middle-class fathers did not change their future plans, continuing their higher education courses and incorporating the child into their existing situations. These men suggested that although this meant constrained financial circumstances in the present, where they were unable to give the child the best start they had hoped to offer, pursuing education would lead to better employment and subsequently a more secure financial situation in the future. However, these two men may have been more confident in pursuing this approach in the knowledge that their own parents could offer financial support if necessary, which was not always an option for the working-class young men.

Whilst older fathers tended to emphasise the benefits of being well-established in a career and having reached the level they intended, there were some anxieties about being an older parent in terms of work. Most men across the sample did not appear to have thought long-term about fathering a teenager or adult, instead focusing on the delights and demands of babies and small toddlers. However older fathers had some long-term concerns about having a child going to university and leaving home – and subsequently requiring a great deal from parents financially – at a time when fathers would be into

their sixties and seventies and looking towards retirement. This potential collision of life course demands caused concern for the older men in the sample.

I've thought yes I need to have a job and need to have money coming in. We need to make decisions about things - like where to live - looking ahead we need to plan, need security. And I have thought about yes vaguely, fleetingly, micro fleetingly, how old will I be when he's that age? That kind of thing. I just have to say well you do what I can. I will want to try and work as much as possible but at my age it's not ideal ... But yeah the future, we don't look very far to the future. I don't think either of us has been used to looking very far ahead, probably because we're pessimistic (laughs) it can only get worse (laughs). (Lawrence, 54, sample D, post-birth)

In this extract Lawrence reflects unwillingness to plan long-term, with some of the difficult future issues only thought about 'micro-fleetingly'. Again this indicates a strategy of chronometricalisation, as discussed above.

The responses from both groups suggest that the impetus to provide financially for the child was strongly ingrained; representing a central aspect of men's fathering identity (Townsend, 2002, Silverstein *et al.*, 2002, Featherstone, 2003). This was true across the samples more widely, although most difficulties in achieving this were reported by younger and older fathers. That providing was so closely intertwined with these men's conceptions of good fatherhood would suggest that being unable to provide holds significant ramifications for how men perceive themselves as fathers, as Adam indicated:

I suppose I can't give Joshua an awful lot of money, input in that way. That's always how I was I suppose loved; my dad would give me, we would have a lot of money and I can't give him that. ... I thought I wasn't being a proper dad, I wasn't providing enough emotionally or financially and my self-worth was greatly diminished as a result of that, it greatly contributed to me thinking Joshua would be better off without me ... I really believed it then, I'd be better off

dead because I couldn't provide money, money was the currency, money was love. (Adam, 42, sample A, eight years later)

Although involvement and spending time with the child was important, providing the best start was viewed as a non-negotiable aspect of good fatherhood, which could place limitations on the time spent with the child (Henwood *et al.*, 2010).

6.4c Intergenerational relations

As noted above, young fathers were often dependent on their own parents for financial and/or childcare support. Becoming a parent was one way in which young people could access forms of responsibility and recognition associated with adulthood, yet in doing so they generally confirmed their economic dependence on their own parents (Thomson, 2009). This frequently strained couple relationships and was one of the main reasons the men suggested they would have liked to have been older when becoming fathers. Ryan and his partner lived with his parents during the pregnancy and for several months after the birth. The high level of dependence on their own parents compounded the sense of helplessness Ryan described as a young father, and he found it difficult to establish a father role until the couple moved into their own home.

I think life experience plays quite a part 'cause like I say it's difficult enough being a new parent without having the money issues. Having to depend on your parents for living in their place and all the other things that go with it like. Yeah I think there is (3) like you say you know it would be stressful 'cause of lack of sleep and that, I think it's extra hard when like I say you're living in someone else's house, you're always constantly worried about money and trying to save where you can like. So yeah I would say it's probably slightly difficult, like I say more stressful ... especially with Tara as a young mother as well 'cause she was really dependent on her mother at first. You are made to feel - well I was anyway - I can understand how you feel well what's the point in me being here? I might as well go (laughs) if you know what I mean. (Ryan, 19, sample D, one year later)

Several of the younger fathers made the transition to parenthood before their older siblings; describing being on the receiving end of a range of emotions from hostility to concern in reaction to this. For those men who were the youngest in their families, having a child provided them with a new status and the rare opportunity to do something before their elder siblings. Here Seth reflects on a role reversal amongst his siblings where being the first allows him to take on the knowledgeable and responsible position usually occupied by his eldest brother Ross. Seth described himself as someone likely to go with the flow in contrast to his brother's emphasis on planning, which more closely resembled the men discussed in chapter five.

Yeah it's quite strange. It's gonna be weird like when, especially Ross has kids 'cause I would have done it already ha ha (laughs) ... I'm sure they're, they're really broody now but I'm sure they're going "no we have this schedule of years and what we're going to do, it's all planned out, we can't have children yet" (laughs) ... I spoke to him on the phone and he was more shook up and worried than me (amusement) it was quite funny to hear it. I was like "calm down Ross it's not that bad". Then after that when I'd sort of calmed down it was actually "yeah we're having a baby it's good, it's gonna be good fun" and he was still going "oh no". (Seth, 22, sample D, post-birth)

The parents of older fathers were aged between their late seventies and early nineties, inevitably the oldest grandparents in the sample. Most older fathers described their parents' ill-health or incapacity as preventing them from having a fully involved grandparent relationship. This could also create a double burden of care as men were expected to care for their elderly parents at the same time as a young baby. Several men discussed their disappointment at their own parents' limited role, particularly in the very early stages.

My parents are elderly, in their nineties in a care home near Birmingham so they missed out on the birth and so on. That for me was a bit of a, not traumatic, bit of a, after the birth very stressful

time for me because there was nobody here from my family to share the birth ... I felt more and more isolated that there's nobody here to share this. (Lawrence, 54, sample D, post-birth)

During the interviews, men were asked about their family's response to the pregnancy. Some of the older fathers suggested that there had been pressure from relatives, particularly parents, to conceive. However this generally came from their partner's parents so was seen to influence women much more than the men.

Yeah there might have been pressure but it didn't influence me in any way at all, I mean to the point where I didn't even think of that when you asked (laughs). (Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Um Jacqui's mum and dad yeah subtly, never explicit but there was a lot of implicit pressure, more on her than me, as you, naturally, they obviously know her better than they know me. But yeah there was, yeah dropping hints about all their friends becoming grandparents and that sort of thing, which obviously we ignored. But yeah there was implicit pressure. (Graham, 41, sample D, post-birth)

Older fathers were often in families with overlapping generations; with siblings sometimes becoming grandparents before the participant's first child was born. The men frequently reflected that it was difficult to discuss their experiences of fatherhood with siblings due to the large gaps between children, compounding their feelings of isolation by being out of sync (Conger and Little, 2010). These gaps also meant participants compared their parents' grandparenting of their own child with siblings' children several years earlier, reflecting that they could often not do as much as they had with the other children in the family.

Um certainly obviously the younger you are a grandparent the more active you can be. My brother's a granddad, he was a granddad at forty one and he's, he's got two grandchildren and he does a lot with them. Whereas Andrea's parents are mid-sixties, mine are mid-

seventies so they're kind of constrained by biology really, they won't be running after him quite so much I guess.

(Jeffrey, 41, sample C, one year later)

6.4d Isolation

Young men expressed concerns that fatherhood would propel them into a future life stage, radically altering their lifestyle and leaving them with nothing in common with their friends. Several were concerned about possible isolation, with fears that their friends would treat them as 'outcasts' if they could no longer partake in the same social activities. Alternatively, being the first meant the baby was seen as a novelty and of interest to friends.

I don't really have any friends who've got kids at all. Lorna's got like one friend who's got a child but I don't have any at all ... My sort of male friends I don't think have a clue, I don't think they could understand what it's like, they just don't have a clue about it really. ... They're interested but um I think a certain sort of like "yeah you can have it back" (laughs). (Seth, 22, sample D, post-birth)

It's difficult 'cause I don't actually know many people now that I did before Liam was born. Before Liam was born like I say you've got your friends who you go drinking with, I've lost contact with all them. Which you do regret but they're still going out doing their thing and there's only a certain amount of times they'll text you to go out before they stop texting like. (Ryan, 19, sample D, one year later)

Several young men reported radical changes in their friendship groups; moving away from those whose interests were no longer compatible (such as drug-taking, nightclubbing) towards forging closer friendships with those who had children, or who would be a good influence. For the most part, changing friendship groups was not overly problematic as the young fathers described themselves as more mature than others of their age and therefore not interested in the same lifestyle. There were some concerns about missing out on an individualistic life course phase, although it was suggested this

could be returned to in the future when children left home as participants would still be relatively young.

The older fathers who experienced unplanned pregnancies had few friends with children, and those who did were often parents to teenagers or older children. As with the young fathers, not knowing anyone in a similar situation led to feelings of isolation, which had a significant effect on the experience of fatherhood. Although most men had at least one friend or acquaintance who was a father and could potentially discuss parenting, they emphasised the importance of going through the transition to fatherhood at the same time as others. Although they met other parents during the pregnancy or in the early months they were generally younger, and older fathers reflected on difficulties in forging relationships due to this age gap. These men were the most likely across the whole sample to use parenting-related internet sites as they attempted to get information about later fatherhood or connect with other men in similar circumstances.

A bit alone, bit alone. In that very few of my contemporaries certainly have children anywhere near the age that Claudia is, I've got friend who goes back a long way who's got an eleven year old child but that's the nearest one in age. ... And in terms of people who've become a first-time father at my age, the only one I know is now sixty, no actually he's more than that, he's well into his sixties, so in terms of people of my own age group who are experiencing what I'm experiencing now there just aren't any. So I feel like I'm, there's not a lot of people I can talk to about what's going on for me, how I'm feeling and so forth because they've had children years and years ago, or they've never had children, or they're probably twenty five years younger than I am having a first child and their whole perception is different from mine, so there's a degree of isolation to it ... there's still that gap. There isn't really, I don't know how to get to know people that I can talk to comfortably about the experience of fatherhood, certainly not the experience of fatherhood at my age 'cause there aren't many people having children at my age (amusement) who knows where the next one is geographically? (Phillip, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Older men also reported dramatic changes in friendship groups as they often developed links with friends who had children and became more distant from childless friends. One father suggested that the couple's own transition to parenthood had caused childless friends to question their own decision not to have children, causing some tension and leading to a change in friendship groups. A few of the older fathers related incidents where friends asked them why they had waited so long to have children, or indicated that they assumed fertility difficulties were the explanation for childlessness. These questions were only asked during or after the pregnancy, suggesting to the men that other people's perceptions of them had changed when they became parents.

6.4e Age, health and wellbeing

Several of the older fathers expressed concerns about being perceived as old or elderly, particularly by their own children, and some were anxious that their children may be teased because of this.

I didn't want to leave it too late to become a father. Mainly because I didn't think it would be nice for the child to have a very elderly father (2) and that's something that, you know if I could I'd like to be ten years younger. But I'm not, I'm not going to be elderly while she's growing up so that's quite important... I mean you start getting, if you start getting late fifties/early sixties then you don't, okay people tend to live a lot longer now, but start getting ill um, you may not have the energy, you know and also wouldn't want to die while she's still young. (Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

I sort of feel I get, in the last few years I've felt I get rather tired in the afternoon after lunch at work, very difficult to stay awake if I've lost sleep. ... Um so er, so there's that, I mean just sheer stamina to be a father. Clearly later on I mean I will be older, he will want to do more things, more active things, so it's running round and so on, perhaps I don't want to run around. As you get older things can happen; legs break, they don't repair properly, you get problems. It can happen at any age but it tends to happen later on. Um so there

are reasons that way it could be a disadvantage to be an older parent, older father. (Lawrence, 54, sample D, post-birth)

I do have this fear of being the oldest dad at parents evening ... It's my biggest fear actually; turning up and being ten years older than all the other dads. I don't think it's gonna happen but you know I did have a worry about that ... I don't want my child ridiculed 'cause he's got an old dad, that's my fear. You know "who's that; your granddad?" "no that's my dad" that would be quite embarrassing for him wouldn't it? (Graham, 41, sample D, post-birth)

Being seen as old was a significant concern expressed by all the older fathers, to varying degrees. Maintaining or improving health and fitness became a priority for these men so they were able to keep up with their child. The importance placed on the father being active and participating in his children's activities led to a preference for girls among some older fathers, in the belief that they would like less physically demanding activities than sons and therefore being an older father would be less of a problem.

I think part of it [girl preference] might be to do with the fact that if I had a boy then I would sort of feel an obligation to, I don't know, play football and um (2) get involved with boy-ish things, and there my age might have started to become a factor. I know in, I don't know if they still do this but I know when I was a kid at school they'd have fathers against children cricket matches and stuff (laughs) and I sort of, by the time they get to that age - sort of ten/twelve - then I'd be in my late fifties by that stage so I don't know how (laughs) good I'd be in a cricket team. (Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

I think certainly my children are keeping me young because in order to really interact with them properly, probably I'm lucky I don't have boys because I'd have to start going to the gym (amusement) just to keep up. The little one's pretty energetic, the other one's the opposite. But certainly mentally and you know having to be on the ball, help them to read and learn to do maths and stuff.
(Kenny, 49, sample A, eight years later)

This girl preference in relation to perceptions of physical activity supports research by Daniels and Weingarten (1983) where sons of older fathers problematised advanced

paternal age and the restrictions this placed on joint activities. In their study, no daughters reported that their fathers had been 'too old' and no child of either sex problematised advanced maternal age. Thus the data appears to suggest that ageing seems to have particular implications for masculinity in relation to parenthood. The literature on masculinity and ageing is limited, particularly in relation to fatherhood, therefore further exploration of this issue with fathers and children as they grow older would be beneficial.

During his interview, Guy described his childhood perception of his own father as elderly and out-of-date. Being older than his own father when becoming a parent had led Guy to experience some anxiety, although he alleviates this by emphasising how he appears and behaves much younger than his own father did at the same age.

I always thought of him as an elderly father because he was 41 when he had me but I was fourth so he was not, he was actually probably only about 33 when he first became a father, but in those days it was fairly old, 41 in those days was fairly old. Yeah it's quite funny (laughs) he was sort of, and I was aware of that when I got to his age and thought "oh my God, I'm going to be as old as he was when he had me" and then I sort of passed that, so yeah that was a factor ... I think this goes back to behaviour rather than actual age; I think my father acted his age and also he drank and smoked a lot so that tends to age people. So I think, you know, I think that at my age he would have looked and acted older than I do.

(Guy, 47, sample D, post-birth)

Appearing young and fit was important to all the men across the sample, as being active with their children was perceived to be an important aspect of fatherhood. This issue was increasingly raised as both fathers and children got older, as discussed in the next chapter.

Conversely, younger fathers expressed the strongest preference for sons across the sample; all but the two who expressed no preference favoured boys. The main sentiment behind this was a perception that they would be better able to relate to sons due to their shared masculinity

Oh well I would have, at the time when I found out Kelly was pregnant and I knew I was going to have a baby I wanted a boy ... Well I'd just relate to a boy better really, I'd know what to do more with a boy and with a girl I don't know, girls things like their hair and their make-up, I haven't got a clue about all that.
(Aaron, 15, sample C, post-birth)

I think I'd wanted a boy 'cause I'm a boy, I've got a brother and I'd always done boys things. So I think from that respect I think I wanted one because I'd be more comfortable.
(Johnny, 22, sample D, post-birth)

During pregnancy or soon after the birth men can often feel excluded and less knowledgeable than their partners (Draper, 2003b; Shirani and Henwood, 2011a) however some participants felt this would be lessened by having a son. Men across the sample who voiced a son preference suggested this was related to their concerns about not knowing what to do as a father but believing it would be easier to be involved with a son as they understood what it was like to grow up as a boy. Feelings of marginality and not knowing how to be a 'proper' father were particularly strong amongst the youngest men, which may be why the perception that having a son would facilitate father involvement was most evident amongst this group.

6.5 Reflections

This chapter has considered the experiences of those who make the transition to parenthood off-time and the impact this has for other areas of their lives. Some

experiences appear common to both older and younger fathers; such as isolation from peers and the blurring of intergenerational relationships, highlighting the significance of asynchronous timing for the experience of a significant life course event. Embarking on fatherhood out of time was frequently described as requiring significant life changes in the present to ensure children were provided for; both financially and through parents' time. The majority of men adopted the discourse of new fatherhood based on involvement, emphasising the importance of the father as an active presence in his child's life (Collier and Sheldon, 2006) thus seeing fatherhood as a demanding and time-consuming task.

Age appears to be a major factor in determining whether a transition is experienced as off-time. For example, those who experienced an unplanned pregnancy in their thirties found it much less problematic to incorporate the changes required as they had often fulfilled many of the 'pre-requisites' and friends and siblings were in similar situations, providing a support network. Conversely, younger and older fathers frequently described themselves as the wrong or less natural age for fatherhood, highlighted by their difference to other new fathers. This supports the assertion discussed in chapter five of there being a culturally approved good age for fatherhood, indicating some of the challenges of living outside this.

Making an off-time transition to parenthood can bring about significant alterations to present lifestyles and future plans. Those who experienced an unplanned pregnancy had not anticipated becoming a father for several years and described a sense of being propelled forward into a future life stage, so that they missed out in the present. Conversely, older fathers who experienced an unplanned pregnancy described returning to a life stage they thought they had passed. In contrast, where pregnancy was delayed

men experienced this as an imposed pause; a barrier to achieving an anticipated life course stage on schedule. Maines and Hardesty (1987) distinguish between those who occupy linear temporal worlds, which rest on the underlying assumption of life course continuity, and those occupying contingent temporal worlds, which assume novelty in the life course; disruptions and deflections are expected. For those men who upheld a linear conception of temporality based on a time track of steady progress, an unplanned or delayed pregnancy challenged anticipated trajectories, provoking anxiety as the future became uncertain.

Isolation from the security of an anticipated trajectory can be particularly problematic in terms of ontological security, with potentially longstanding impacts for personal identity. One strategy for coping with a non-normative transition was a process of chronometricalisation; focussing on short-term milestones to avoid thinking about longer-term implications. In contrast, those who occupied more contingent temporal worlds found these changes less problematic as they were not used to planning for the long-term. Finally, for some young fathers, having a child gave them a sense of future that they had not had before. The baby provided a sense of purpose and acted as an impetus for change so they were encouraged to return to work or training. This chronometricalisation strategy is quite distinct from those who experienced a planned transition to parenthood on schedule, who extended temporal horizons to plan into the longer term, as will be discussed further in chapter eight.

Being outside the standardised trajectory was not wholly problematic, and both younger and older fathers emphasised some of the benefits of their non-normative position. For example, it was suggested that being somewhat outside the norm made it easier to behave as they wanted, as they were less concerned about other people's reactions than

they perceived fathers in the middle age range to be. Subsequently they felt it was easier for them to behave in emotional or playful and silly ways with the child. In addition, whilst lacking the comforting sense of collectivity described by those men making the transition to fatherhood at the same time as peers, those who were off-time felt more able to parent how they wanted without the interference, advice or judgement of other parents.

I s'pose 'cause we're the first ones doing it, besides parental stuff that we read it's essentially, I dunno, we're almost doing it how we like and not a hundred and one different inputs. There's still a lot of sort of inputs into us, but (2) you know, I s'pose also being younger I've got no inhibitions about acting like a prat around him, I dunno maybe I'd have been a bit more serious a few years, if I was a few years older. I'll quite happily walk around Sainsbury's just pulling faces and making noises at him or whatever.

(Johnny, 22, sample D, post-birth)

I don't fit any of the expectations of people up there (amusement) I'm an outsider as it is ... I don't fit any kind of, you know I don't work in a factory. I'm already so far beyond their perceptions of what I should be doing when they see me that it's by the by.

(Bradley, 25, sample C, one year later)

This position of not caring what other people think was discussed across the sample and suggested to be a particularly masculine approach. For example, when asked about seeking advice or information about parenthood almost all suggested this was something done by their female partners. In contrast, the men appeared more confident in their own abilities and judgements to do what is right, disregarding the opinions of others (Shirani *et al.*, in press). This stance may then potentially make an off-time transition easier for men than for women in some respects.

Much of the existing research studies, and indeed these initial chapters, have been focussed on the early implications of timing decisions and parenting an infant. The next

chapter aims to expand the discussion by exploring retrospective accounts of timing in order to provide a longer-term perspective.

Chapter 7

Retrospective perceptions of timing

You know it's kind of like a frantic football match;
it's only when the whistle blows you realise
you've been playing for as long as you have
'cause you're so engrossed in it you never really step back
(Marcus)



7.1 Introduction

This chapter predominantly focuses on the responses of sample A participants eight years after the birth of their first child in order to demonstrate the benefits of an extensive QLL data set for deepening insight into the long-term implications of timing decisions. This chapter in particular seeks to foreground the importance of retrospective data in a life course perspective, as Umberson *et al.* (2010:622) note:

If we compartmentalize individual studies into age-restricted snapshots, we fail to understand how parenthood shapes life trajectories in meaningful and lasting ways, as well as how certain key transitions and contexts may alter life trajectories.

The discussion engages with current concerns amongst fertility practitioners and aims to fill existing gaps in the literature through the use of retrospective data.

7.2 The Second Child

Although this thesis has focussed on the timing of the first child as a moment of significant life change from couple life to parenthood, it is also important to consider the 'right time' for subsequent children, as the circumstances are likely to be quite different from the birth of the first, something which is frequently overlooked. For example, Daniels and Weingarten (1983) found that the motivation for having a second child was often as much for the first child as for the parents; providing the first born with a companion and playmate in an attempt to offer a better chance at childhood, and relieving parents of some of the burden for entertainment. The most recent data from sample A participants eight years after their first child was born, when many had gone on to have further children, offers an insight into how the timing of the second child is negotiated. As intended family size has traditionally been used as a measure of fertility

(e.g. Coombs, 1974), despite problems with such a measure (Livi Bacci, 2001), the planning of subsequent children is an important area for research consideration.

It appears that second children were more likely to be planned than the first, with only one man in sample A reporting an unplanned subsequent child. Planning may possibly be related to the different factors motivating this decision, whilst greater understanding of what parenting involves may also lead parents to pay more attention to the timing of subsequent children. For those who had planned subsequent children, the level of planning appears quite extraordinarily detailed in some cases; down to attempts to have a child at a specific point in the school year, or to fit around employment calendars. Whilst the decision to have a first child can almost be left to fate within a window of appropriate time, the second child is more rigorously planned to fit in with the first. For most of the parents this ideal gap was around two to three years in order to allow time for the first child to become a bit more independent, yet not leaving it too long as a large age gap between children was thought to make the sibling relationship more difficult. Having children close together was also practically sensible as it was easier to fit subsequent children into existing childcare arrangements.

Yeah, it was a balance between wanting them close, and recovering I think physically and enjoying babies as babies without having to get pregnant all over again kind of thing. So um, you know birth's quite traumatic so Elizabeth needed to physically recover, get fit again and all the rest of it, so that was part of it. Um (2) I think that's about it really, but we also wanted them to be relatively close, we didn't want big gaps between our kids so they could play together and all the rest of it; that was I suppose the driving idea.

(Simon, 43, sample A, 8 years later)

For many parents who choose to have a second child, it offers them the chance to have 'one of each' to experience parenting both a boy and a girl, as most felt there would be a

different kind of parenting required. This 'one of each' ideal is a strong reproductive norm (Bowcock, 2007), so ingrained that it raises issues for men who do not conform to this. As Townsend (2002) notes, deviating from the two child ideal by having only one or more than four requires explanation. Some participants related the one of each ideal back to the issue of having a life first and then having children; several children would be too disruptive to personal life, which is set to continue for parents once children are older.

And we didn't really want any more than two either... Three's not a good number 'cause you can't play games with three people, four's too many. I just want to have the children experience but not be saddled down for the rest of our lives with lots of children.

(Vincent, 38, sample A, 8 years later)

Having only two children meant that the most demanding phase of parenting could be condensed into a smaller time period, so couples could foresee a phase when there would be fewer parenting demands and they would have more time to themselves again. Several fathers talked about their plans for travelling or having time to pursue their own interests once their children had left home. This indicates a view of parenthood as a specific life course phase where one is required to put one's own desires on hold as parenthood is seen as incompatible with other life goals (Townsend, 2002). Having two children condenses this to a manageable phase in the life course where parenthood can be experienced but also contained so one's own life can be returned to in the foreseeable future.

Those who experienced an off-time transition often faced particular challenges in the timing of any further children. Most young fathers suggested that they would like to have more children at some point, although wanted to wait until they were more economically stable. However, this created concerns about leaving a sizeable gap between their first

child and subsequent siblings, and the impact this may have on their relationship. Older fathers were most likely to express anxieties about having further children, as any age-related concerns they currently felt would be magnified for future children. The timing of subsequent children was therefore a significant concern given pervasive negative perceptions about only children (Mancillas, 2006; Bowcock, 2007).

Whilst pre-birth most fathers imagined having more than one child – generally two, occasionally three – post-birth a significant minority revised their expectations. For example, pre-birth only one of the sample C participants did not think he would have further children, whilst post-birth one third of this sample group thought this would be the case. It appears that a combination of financial constraints, relationship difficulties, traumatic pregnancies and labour, and parenting being more challenging than originally anticipated, influenced men's original future trajectories as they revised family size downwards.

The other thing is I don't think a second child is on the agenda at the moment, I think it's er (2) it's something my wife is, because we've struggled with Emily. If we'd had an easy first child we may have been keen for a second ... I think Emily would miss out if she didn't have a brother or sister but I hope that we would have (2) enough about us to stop, you know, her being a spoilt child.

(Alun, 33, sample C, one year later)

Participants' changing expectations highlight an inherent problem with using anticipated family size as a measure of fertility, as such a measure does not account for individual changes in attitude in light of lived experience. As with the first child, the choice to have further children is related to work, relationship and financial security. Some men have articulated how their choice to have a second child has become riskier in light of constrained financial circumstances brought about by the economic downturn

(Henwood *et al.*, 2010). Therefore the impact of these changing circumstances on anticipated and actual family size needs to be considered.

7.3 Retrospective Reassessments

With fertility researchers expressing concerns about the trends towards delaying parenthood (Tarin *et al.*, 1998; Frejka *et al.*, 2008; Nilsson, 2010) and attempting to encourage people to be more aware of their fertility in order to consider having children earlier¹, the focus rests on timing of conception and birth. By emphasising the transition to parenthood, social science studies also tend to focus on the early stages, which illustrate the immediate impact of timing decisions but give little attention to longer-term experiences of parenting older children (Dermott, 2008). From my study data it appears that would-be parents also tend to focus on the short-term aspects of parenthood in having a baby or young child, often giving little thought to later years of childhood and adolescence, perhaps unsurprising given the demands of an infant. However, timing issues are not resolved at birth but have different implications later in the life course, which receive relatively little attention. In the rest of this chapter I explore men's retrospective assessments of timing decisions to consider some of the longer-term repercussions arising from this. The aim is not to position the men's behaviour as problematic in terms of fertility decision-making, but to provide greater insight into challenges of fatherhood in relation to timing as they are raised or subside over the life course. All responses are from sample A participants when interviewed eight years after the birth of their first child.

¹ For example, the ESRC fertility pathways network

One of the benefits of using a longitudinal data set is that it allows for a comparison of timing decisions over time. When revisiting participants in sample A eight years later, the men were asked to think about the timing of fatherhood and whether, retrospectively, they felt it happened at the right time. The table below indicates responses from the original study and those from the follow up eight years later. Changed responses are highlighted.

Table 5 – Description of timing decisions by age

Participant	Age at first child's birth	Original response	Age at fourth interview	Fourth interview response
Greg	24	Right time	33	Right time
Sebastian	26	Right time	35	Right time
Gary	28	Right time	37	Right time
Ashley	29	Right time	38	Would like more couple time first
Bruce	29	Right time	38	Right time
Vincent	30	Delayed	38	Right time
Anthony	31	Unplanned	39	Unplanned
Keith	31	Right time	40	Would like more couple time first
Carl	32	Unplanned	43	Right time
Jason	32	Mistimed	40	Would like to be younger
Malcolm	32	Semi-planned	41	Right time
Adam	34	Semi-planned	43	Right time
Eric	34	Semi-planned	43	Would like to be younger
Ray	34	Mistimed	43	Would like to be younger
Howard	35	Right time	43	Right time
Rick	35	Right time	43	Would like more couple time first & be younger
Simon	35	Right time	43	Right time
Terry	37	Delayed	46	Would like to be younger
Kenny	41	Right time	49	Would like to be younger

This table illustrates how over half the men viewed their timing decision differently eight years later in light of their lived experience of fatherhood.

7.3a Right time

Six of the men who had originally felt it was the right time continued to believe this unequivocally eight years later. Here Bruce discusses the balance between energy and life experiences, as highlighted in the preceding chapters.

Ideal really, because looking back Jeremy came along um (2) just about when I was thirty, and I would say that's great because um both Angela and I had plenty of time to do the selfish singleton thing in our twenties and did, and we're still young enough to be active and involved and to go out and kick a football round the garden or take them down to whatever various things that they want to do, be fully involved. So for me that's something I'm really pleased with.

(Bruce, age 38, father at 29)

The average age of the ten men who retrospectively felt the timing was right was 31 when becoming a father, ranging from 24 to 36 at the time of birth. For each man, right time was not constituted only by age but by relationship length, life experience and career establishment, as discussed in chapter five.

In addition to those consistent in their perceptions of timing, four men who originally described the pregnancy as off-timed (semi-planned, unplanned, or delayed) retrospectively felt that they had become parents at the right time. These men believed they had achieved the right balance between age, relationship length, experience and energy. For this group, any potentially challenging situations at the time of the birth had largely been resolved eight years later and the men described happy family situations. Some commented that despite their initial reservations about the timing, they were glad the pregnancy had occurred when it did as they would not have wanted to be any older.

Adam's accounts of timing varied between interviews in conjunction with his relationship situation. For example, initially he described the pregnancy as planned in the

context of a loving relationship, yet when the couple were experiencing relationship difficulties he suggested the pregnancy was unplanned and had brought about additional stress. Finally he settled on describing it as semi-planned, with timing influenced by his partner's age. Whilst Adam experienced numerous challenges around the time of his son's birth and for some time afterwards, which could suggest the transition to parenthood was off-time, retrospectively Adam felt it had happened at the right time for him, and this view was strongly influenced by his belief in God's timing.

I think people will always say it's not the right time but who knows what the right time is. Of course I guess it's a mixture of the, having the faith even though at times I don't like directly drawing on my faith in such situations. I'm a person who often talks about God's timing, it's a complicated thing but I do think that God's timing with all the major significant things that have happened have been very good timing and um (2) I think recent events have made that very clear that the timing was (2) the timing was right.

(Adam, age 42, father at 34)

Adam's account highlights some of the challenges in defining right time by illustrating how participants revise the past in relation to present experiences (Adam, 1995; Flaherty and Fine, 2001; Greene, 2003). Although Adam was the only participant who specifically reflected on God's timing, a few participants suggested that it had been fate that decided the timing, and therefore it must have been right. When deciding to have a child, if there were no obvious reasons not to, many men said they left the exact timing up to fate, although generally only after relationship, jobs and homes had been established, as discussed in chapter five. Although personal lives and futures are generally seen as open, notions of fate and destiny have not disappeared (Giddens, 1991) apparently shaping the men's sense-making in relation to timing, as indicated by Adam.

7.3b Being younger

Two men who initially described the pregnancy as occurring at the right time, and four with off-timed pregnancies felt that they would like to have been younger at the point of having an eight year old child. The average age of this group when becoming fathers was 36, ranging from 32 to 40 at the time of birth. Ideally these men would have liked to have been between two and five years younger at their current stage because of their perceptions that they would have more energy to be active with the children and feel less tired. Despite a general increase in life expectancy and fitness at older age, the men associated ageing with a decline in physical fitness, particularly problematic due to the importance they placed on this as an aspect of fatherhood and masculinity. Some men also felt that they would like to be younger so they were more likely to be around for a larger part of their children's lives, and a few comments were made about the unlikelihood of becoming grandparents themselves.

Well I guess it's something that, we would always like to be younger and have children and feel that we could live long enough to see their children, maybe even their grandchildren, which is a sort of demographic trend. (Kenny, age 49, father at 41)

I do regret being a bit old for him. If I was a bit younger I would be more active and out there doing more adventurous things with him but, you know, my knees hurt and, you know, things are hurting and falling off and things and, I, you know, I'm not quite so physically active with him as I would like to be. We recently had his cousins up, some of which are teenagers and they were just tearing around playing, you know, football all afternoon and I can't keep up, and I regret being a bit old for that. (Terry, age 46, father at 37)

This significance of ageing and mortality was not always apparent when the child was first born but became more prominent as both parent and child got older. Several men indicated that physical fitness was an important aspect of their masculine identity,

particularly emphasising competitiveness and achievement in relation to other men, and played out in relation to fatherhood.

Hearn (1995) suggests that age has become a new source of risk to men and their masculinity, with concern about physical breakdown because it connects the masculine body with weakness and dependency. In their research on gendered attitudes to ageing, Halliwell and Dittmar (2003) found that the idea of ageing as detrimental to ability and functionality was almost exclusively a concern of men. In other research men have reported their efforts to take care of their bodies and satisfaction about doing this in terms of combating the body decline (Wandel and Roos, 2003). These themes were evident in our data as some men expressed concerns about declining physical fitness hampering their ability to 'do', whilst younger fathers tended to emphasise their physical abilities.

So yeah I think it'll be different um, hopefully I'll still win the fathers race on sports day when they're teenagers, if they have fathers days at sports days any more I don't know, probably not at high school sort of thing any more (laughs). But I still do quite well at the fathers race at the moment, I wasn't that old a father ... I go out to win, and I often do win 'cause I'm tall and strong and fit ... Some of the really old dads they struggle, they wheeze after the thirty yard dash and that sort of thing (laughs). So it's fairly important.
(Vincent, age 38, father at 30)

Here Vincent links his identity as 'tall and strong and fit' with age, contrasting himself with 'wheezy' older fathers unable to keep up. Eight years later this is one of the main ways he explains the timing of his transition to fatherhood as right. The importance of physical fitness was raised in early interviews (see page 132) but had become a much more pressing issue eight years later. This is likely to be related to a number of factors, such as; participants' advancing age, children's greater levels of activity, and the ill health

or death of their own parents. The centrality of fitness and activity in many of the men's accounts highlights this as an important aspect of good fatherhood which appears to have been relatively overlooked. Terry, whose concerns about ageing and declining fitness were discussed above, went on to describe himself as 'not a particularly masculine man' and was 'uncomfortable' with this. However he found that his sense of masculinity was bolstered by his son Daniel being complimented on his good looks, and his resemblance to Terry. Men like Terry who felt unable to draw links between masculine identity and physical ability sought other aspects of their fathering experience to provide a sense of masculinity. However the centrality of physical fitness and activity to masculinity across the entire sample was marked, which holds implications for older fathers and disabled men. The significance of these issues to the men suggests this as an important area for future research.

For one father, more future-oriented than most, his age was not a current problem but he felt it was likely to be in ten years' time when he expected his daughters to be leaving home for university and therefore requiring financial support from him at a time when he would be hoping to wind down and think about retirement.

I think maybe (2) perhaps five years earlier would've been good, about thirty, 'cause you know it's quite tiring at times (laughs). I mean forty three is still quite young but it's um, yeah it was a good time to have children definitely you know. I think where it might become more difficult is in about ten or fifteen years time when I probably want to wind things down. The kids are going to be, maybe if everything's alright with them still, are going to want to go to college, go travelling, meeting boyfriends or whatever, girlfriends or whatever their orientation is, and probably needing us in different ways you know. Um so um that'll be, I'll probably be in demand at a time when I don't want to be (laughs). (Rick, age 43, father at 35)

This potential collision of life course stages with different demands does not appear to be extensively thought about at the time of conception, but could give rise to difficulties, particularly financial, for older fathers in later years, which is an issue that has received limited attention (Nguyen, 2004). Inevitably, most men focused on fatherhood in relation to a young child, and only thought about dealing with teenagers once the child was born, yet some implications of their timing decisions only became apparent later in life. Considering how they recount their experiences and re-evaluate their decisions at a later time highlights the dynamic quality of the men's changing views and understanding in relation to lived experience, which is particularly apparent in QLL research.

Although these concerns about age were raised, all the fathers in this group justified their situation by explaining that parenthood could not have happened any earlier; they were not in a relationship or it was not the right one, careers needed to be built up, fertility difficulties delayed conception, or they simply did not feel ready any earlier.

I don't know 'cause part of me says I'd like to have had them younger in my life, part of me says how ready would I have been if I had? (Ray, age 42, father at 34)

Interestingly no men suggested that they would have liked to have been older when making the transition to fatherhood²; with younger fathers commenting that they would benefit from still being relatively young when their children left home and able to enjoy their own lives.

I think it's worked out well yeah. And long-term wise, I mean look where when they're gonna be – we come back to this where do you see, far off in time – and when they're thirty we're probably still gonna be quite

² Although some men wished they had spent more time as a couple first, they had not wanted to be any older when becoming a father. They described wishing they had met their partner earlier in life, which would have allowed more time together, rather than wanting to change the timing of parenthood in relation to their chronological age.

robust and with it so hopefully be young grandparents but not too young.
Yeah so I think it's worked out alright, so far.
(Sebastian, age 34, father at 26)

Several fathers in this group were in their early forties when they responded that they would like to be younger. Reaching forty was seen as a significant turning point in the lives of these men, which raised concerns around ageing; one man describing how 'I turned into a miserable old man on that day'. It may be that their close proximity to this significant turning point had meant they were more age-conscious at this time, which influenced their retrospective reassessments.

Some of the men in this group illustrate an inherent problematic in timing decisions; that in waiting until the necessary pre-requisites are established, which can take many years, they are older than they had hoped to be when making the transition to fatherhood, which had different implications later in life. Ray's comment that he would like to have been younger but would probably not have been ready highlights the difficult balance between the factors seen to constitute right time. For some groups these do not coincide, indicating the underlying structural antagonisms which mean that there is never a right time (Currie, 1988).

7.3c Relationship time

Three men talked about how they would have liked more time as a couple before the birth of their first child. This was discussed in terms of having the opportunity to do things together and form a solid relationship before the complications of children were added. Several men commented at some stage that they would like to have had more time together as a couple before having children, but this was generally not problematised because they expected to make up for this when the children left home;

linking back to the idea of having a life before and after children rather than simultaneously.

You know it would have been nice if we had met earlier and had some more life without children in some ways. 'cause that is probably something that would have been nice to have some more of, more time to ourselves. 'cause, you know, children are demanding and you know you accept that. (Keith, age 40, father at 31)

I suppose in retrospect we would have both liked a little more time on our own to do a few extra things, but we'll get round to that as they get a little older anyway, (Ashley, age 38, father at 29)

Those who suggested that they would have liked more time as a couple before embarking on parenthood had shorter relationships than many other men in the sample. Rick and Tanya had both wanted children for some years before they met and early on in their relationship decided to try for a baby. Whilst this decision was partly motivated by concerns about age and ticking biological clocks, the early transition has had significant implications for the couple's relationship.

We never really had a long courtship you know, we were kind of together for a few months then Tanya fell pregnant. (3) Once Imogen came along, once Tanya became pregnant and Imogen came along the whole parenthood thing kicked in you know (laughs) and we never sort of had a chance to revisit the court, the sort of spending time together really. So I think the relationship's inevitably been affected by that. We've given so much I think to the children that we probably haven't given as much to each other you know as perhaps we should've done you know. There's, I think we're both aware of that, um (2) yeah. (Rick, age 43, father at 35)

Rick's response that he would have liked more time for the couple relationship first and would like to be younger suggests that in his circumstances the necessary pre-requisites did not coincide, which complicates decisions about right time.

7.3d Changed perceptions

For some men who were unhappy about the timing of pregnancy when it happened, eight years later they felt it had actually been the ideal time. Malcolm was initially unsure because he was working away and had concerns about missing out, yet since working locally feels it has worked well in terms of balancing age and life experience. Similarly Carl, whose first child was unplanned, felt it worked out for the best and was glad he did not leave it any later, as the couple were intending to do. He relates this to physical fitness and ability to be active with his children, as discussed above.

I wouldn't like to think that I was gonna be a dad of young children when I was that bit older, 'cause I'd always said to Sophie that I didn't want to be a sort of wheezy dad who couldn't play football with his kids in the park. (Carl, 40, father at 32,)

For Anthony, the timing remained bad when viewed retrospectively, as they had decided not to have children and the pregnancy had involved significant changes to anticipated trajectories. However, eight years later Anthony was pleased with the way things had worked out and he was one of the most enthusiastic fathers of all.

No it was an awful time ... we hadn't been together for a great deal of time, we weren't sure that we were going to stay in the country. I think relationship-wise we were sane but I don't think six and a half months is a vast amount of time. We'd made a commitment to each other, she'd left her husband and we'd gone away to a different country and come back. So I think the fact that we were looking to move abroad, it was a bad time to have a child. And when we discovered Cheryl was pregnant we did bandy round the option of a termination (3) but we never pursued it ... all I can say is it all worked out for the best, we've got a lovely daughter you know and a good marriage on the back of it, it helped cement our relationship. But I still maintain it was bad timing, if I would have my time over again I would still deliberate over a termination as to whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing. But having said that we did make the right choice, it all worked out very well indeed, I wouldn't swap my daughter for anything. (Anthony, age 39, father at 31)

Anthony's case in particular highlights the benefits of longitudinal data analysis when contemplating issues of time and timing. The pregnancy was unplanned and occurred a short time into their relationship when they had little job and financial security, thus contravening many of the standard life course requirements other men indicated were necessary. However eight years later Anthony described how everything had 'gone rosily'; the relationship was strong, Anthony had been promoted and they had moved to a family house in the suburbs. Therefore despite originally being 'out of time', eight years later Anthony was in a similar position to those men who had planned pregnancies following a standard life course sequence. Anthony described his current position as achieved through both good fortune and persevering through difficulties, for example, finding the early years a huge financial struggle but being aided by working family tax credits and child allowance, which supported the family's eventual attainment of a 'middle-class lifestyle'. Whilst being off-time often had long-term repercussions, Anthony's case illustrates that this is not always the case. It may be that being on-time in terms of age helped to insulate him against some of the pressures experienced by older and younger fathers, as discussed in chapter six.

7.4 Reflections

The timing of the second child is an important issue, which has generally been overlooked in existing research focusing on the transition to parenthood. This chapter has illustrated how having a second or subsequent child is motivated by a different set of considerations, and is often more restricted than the timing of first birth as the age gap and relationship between siblings also had to be considered. The interviews which provide this data took place several years after the birth of the participant's last child and therefore do not fully capture any changing dynamics in the men's decisions about

timing. Considering changing responses in relation to the timing of the second child would be influential for research which uses anticipated family size as a measure of fertility. Subsequently further research with couples negotiating the timing of their second child would provide a valuable addition to the literature on timing.

Retrospective accounts offer a useful perspective on timing, illustrating how perceptions of right time have temporal variance and can be reconfigured in light of life experiences. What is considered the right time at one moment may be described quite differently at another point as the benefits and disadvantages change in relation to participants' current circumstances and experiences. This is illustrated in the way over half of the group described their timing decisions differently eight years later. These retrospective accounts suggest a more negative picture of delayed fathering than early parenthood discourse, as concerns about the later life course loom nearer, particularly in relation to masculinity and ageing. There has been little literature on this topic (van den Hoonaard, 2007) although masculinity has been depicted as something achieved through bodily performance, meaning that gender is vulnerable when this performance cannot be sustained (Connell, 2005). This holds particular implications for older fathers, who may be experiencing a decline in physical fitness related to ageing, and disabled men. Spector-Mersel (2006) illustrates an inverse relationship between masculinity and ageing, suggesting hegemonic masculinity 'scripts' are concluded in middle age. Several men used their current physical fitness, and subsequent ability to be active with their children, to explain why the timing of the transition to fatherhood had been right, contrasting themselves with older, unfit fathers. A changing sense of masculinity may thus be difficult to reconcile with ideals of involved and active fatherhood and relate to how men retrospectively evaluate their timing decisions. As paid work poses limits on time and space, fatherhood continues to be shaped in activity-based ways (Miller, 2010). In

addition, sports and physical activities can offer a clear and objectively measurable indication of a child's success (Gillies, 2009) and therefore fit with a linear and future-oriented masculine sense of temporality, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

It is perhaps significant that no men expressed a wish that they had been older when they had their first child. The intensive parenting literature has explored parental moralities, suggesting that moral selves are created in relation to a classed and aged other (Perrier, 2009). Shifts to a 'parenting as skill' approach sits uneasily with young parents (Macvarish, 2009), in contrast to those who have delayed in order to be able to have an individualistic phase in their earlier years. Whilst the youngest father was not revisited eight years later, and his may of course have been a very different story, retrospective accounts from the younger fathers in the group revisited suggest that they had achieved a comfortable balance with the timing of parenthood in terms of age and stability, which was questionable amongst the older fathers in the group. Thus these retrospective stories, facilitated by longitudinal data collection, provide a valuable insight into the longer-term implications of the timing of fatherhood.

Whilst this chapter does point to a more negative assessment of delayed fatherhood later in life, it is not the aim to imply a moralistic judgement that these men should have become fathers earlier; as such a decision would have different repercussions. This is illustrated in Rick's data as he discusses the challenges he and his partner have experienced in relation to making the transition to parenthood early in their relationship in response to their concerns about leaving it too late in relation to biological time. Instead by demonstrating the men's changing understanding of their timing decisions, the chapter illustrates how qualitative longitudinal research is best placed to capture these

changes as they occur over time in relation to lived experience. That different benefits and disadvantages emerge and recede over time lends further weight to the argument that, for some, right time is an illusory concept which masks the structural antagonisms underlying decision-making about the timing of parenthood (Currie, 1988). Focusing on this retrospective data provides an insight into the longer-term implications transitions hold for life trajectories.

This chapter concludes the explicit focus on timing that has been the central theme of the results section thus far. The following chapter broadens the focus to consider other aspects of temporal experience important for understanding fatherhood.

Chapter 8

Other times

It is not a balance that I am happy with because there isn't
enough hours in a day. And if there are enough hours in the day
I am too tired to do anything about it.

(Ray)



8.1 Introduction

In chapter two, discussion highlighted how the multiplicity of time is often left unacknowledged, viewed as the mere framework within which action takes place (Adam, 1998). This results in neglecting a level of understanding into participants' lives that temporal insight can offer us, therefore the challenge now is to make time explicit in social research (Adam, 1995). Daly (1996b:201) notes the centrality of time in lived experience:

'Time permeates all values, decisions, and actions. When pace, schedules, and temporal conflicts are raised to the surface of consciousness, time shifts from being an embedded and hidden dimension of family experience to one that lies at the apex of all activity.'

Thus far, analysis has focused predominantly on the timing of parenthood, yet many other aspects of temporality are important to men's understandings of fatherhood, as time is consistently mentioned by new parents in accounts of how life has changed (La Rossa, 1983). This chapter expands the focus of the thesis through an exploration of men's temporal experiences in relation to fatherhood. The discussion incorporates tempo, scheduling and the ideological function of time, before an extensive discussion of gendered time, thus engaging with current debates in the research literature.

8.2 Birth time

Time becomes particularly salient in a moment of transition, where daily patterns are thrown into flux and time can be experienced in a number of different and apparently contradictory ways. The birth of a child is a moment packed with existential meaning (Halldén, 1998) which significantly disrupts people's understanding of time, experienced simultaneously as fast and slow. After nine months of expectation, for many of the men

the baby's due date came and went with an air of anti-climax when the child did not arrive on time, as described below by Carl.

Erm, well obviously everything's geared towards the date they give you ... but the day comes and the day goes and it's not an anti-climax but it's a little bit of a letdown, I think, for Sophie that he didn't come on the date specified. The job she used to do she was very punctual and she sort of set herself a bit, high standard, so when he didn't turn up at the time (amusement), but of course it's just nature and you can't do anything about it but quite anxious times.

(Carl, 32, sample A, post-birth)

Carl's description highlights the temporal dimension of his experience by contrasting his wife's punctuality with the baby's lateness. Throughout this 'anxious time' of waiting there was a sense of having to put things on hold, the men often continuing at work but finding it difficult to concentrate as they anticipated their child's impending arrival. After this seemingly long period of waiting came a time of panic when the first stages of labour became apparent; a dash to the hospital where time was of the essence. In the men's accounts, this race against time epitomised their expectations of how the birth process would begin; as an event that disrupted normal routines and clock time.

Um well after the phoning to the hospital and we said that the contractions were so long and so far apart. And they said "oh you had better come in now", and sods law says it is about five o'clock on Friday teatime. So of course it is the busiest rush hour of the week. But looking back on it now well there is no worry you have got hours to spare. But at the time you think I need to be there in ten seconds flat. And er once we got to the hospital and got up to the delivery floor it was the third stage of the, what they call the waiting game. How long is it going to be before labour really speeds up? As it was it didn't speed up until sods law because they suddenly had a rush of people wanting to give birth for some reason. And they had put us down on the sort of after delivery ward, at which point two or three hours later everything really sped up.

(Gary, 28, sample A, post-birth)

This extract illustrates how men construed this disruption of time as central to the birth process. Gary refers to 'rushing' and 'speeding' alongside his experience of 'the waiting game'. For those who experienced a natural delivery, this experiencing of time as simultaneously fast and slow was not uncommon. Reflecting back, some of the men discuss how what seemed like a long, slow period at the time, actually passed quickly 'in the grand scheme of things'. This reflects the way that, in contrast to clock time, subjective time does not pass evenly (Salmon, 1985; Lyman and Scott, 1989; Geissler, 2002). However, for those men whose partners experienced difficulties in childbirth, time was described as passing too quickly, with no opportunity to savour the experience of their baby being born, as they were preoccupied with concerns for the health of their partner and child. In this respect time was understood as a resource, experienced in terms of its lack, which consequently had a significant influence on whether participants described the birth in positive or negative terms.

The unusual understanding of time during the birth of a child, where it is both fast and slow, expected and un-sequential, is a crucial element of the experience of birth. For Bruce, whose partner had a planned caesarean, the birth time was prearranged and subsequently he felt he had missed out on a fundamental part of the birth experience.

I think the two things sort of stood out, um firstly in the days when we went sort of we booked and it was this bizarre thing like booking in for an MOT or something ... And it seemed really bizarre to have an event like that you know in the same sort of way that you would book your service for your car or something. Um and it was the feeling just before the few days leading up to the first of March, especially the night before, was this weird feeling somehow we have got to go and pick up our baby or something. You know that normally you would think you know it is getting very soon now, and I am going to have the bags packed sort of like you know, and all hell will be let loose sort of three o'clock in the morning or something ...

It was, I wouldn't say it was anti-climatic, but it was a different sort of anticipation. (Bruce, 30, sample A, post-birth)

The birth frequently took place at night or early hours of the morning so normal routines were disrupted. This disruption of the normal order is seen as at once both strange and appropriate; only after a baby's birth is it acceptable to ring or visit relatives in the early hours of the morning. La Rossa (1983) describes the birth of a child as the introduction of a person who refuses to follow the temporal rules and this becomes glaringly apparent at the birth itself.

Previous research on birthing time has focused on the disparity between the rigid institutionalised (also described as masculinist) time of medical discourse and the labouring woman's embodied time (Simonds, 2002). However the centrality of time for men's expectations and experiences of the birth process is also evident, becoming a dominant feature in their accounts of childbirth.

8.3 Scheduling, balancing and allocating time

For some men the disruption of childbirth is soon surpassed by a strict regulation of time according to the baby's routine. The routine is directed by dealing with the baby's needs with everything else having to fit around this, or attempts to fit the child's needs around existing lifestyles. However, many of the men felt that all aspects of their lives had become more regulated.

I was looking through what I had written down in the diary before I came and it was like from the first couple of weeks and just before she was born and it was, it was just very much, you know, "Fed up with waiting" and that sort of thing, and then after it's just getting everything sorted again, because your whole life is suddenly turned

upside down and there's just, you start getting things done over the first few weeks and you start to get a routine. It all seems to get into a routine; I never looked at my watch and the clock so much in my life as I have done in the last five weeks,
(Ashley, 29, sample A, post-birth)

Having a routine was seen as something to be proud of; an indication that parents were in control and were coping with their new responsibilities well. This sets up the scheduling of family life, which is linked to perceptions of success as a family (Daly, 2002) and feelings of security (Alheit, 1994). A distinction could be drawn between those who felt they had imposed the routine themselves and those who felt they had developed one in response to the baby's own rhythm, influenced by the books and advice they had received during pregnancy. Nonetheless, the implementation of a routine was seen as a marker of success. Describing their daily routine also made visible fathering practices and the extent of men's involvement (Miller, 2010). For those who had not imposed a routine, time was experienced as disordered and unpredictable, which led to an unsettling sense of chaos, as Adam suggests.

And we have tried to get him onto a pattern of sleeping during the night but it has been difficult. So we are up three or four times during the night and Anne is up three or four times during the night. Um so she will get up a lot later and I will be getting up a lot earlier because I, my work, I am self-employed and I teach scattered hours throughout the day. So um there is no real structure at all really and that is the difficulty at the moment, there is no real plan or structure, everything is unpredictable. And um and um it is a little bit chaotic, I work from home so I am spending a lot of time there and seeing Anne. So it has been a bit chaotic. (Adam, 35, sample A, post-birth)

Although many of the men had anticipated a transition to a more routinised lifestyle, it could also be experienced as problematic as the rigid schedule meant that they no longer had enough time for themselves, which was seen as important for their own identity and

relationships. Here Keith reflects on his sense of 'rushing and racing', based on the demands of putting his son first.

Probably the biggest change I would think is the way you do things now and the way you did them before; everything is so much more rushed now, er, you know, whenever you go anywhere you're always conscious that you've got like this ticking time bomb in your car ... And I think this is probably the biggest shock, I've found this, that you can't plan things, constantly having to put yourself second to Jack, and, one of the biggest things to hit me and the biggest change was, you know, how much less free time I've got and, you know, constantly rushing and racing around, trying to fit things in and balancing between the two of you. And I suppose time alone as well has been sort of non-existent, that's the other thing that, you know, it's not just us two any more, there's three of us now.

(Keith, 31, sample A, post-birth)

Keith describes having to respond to the demands of the child, making it difficult to plan things or have any time alone as a couple. Whilst a number of men experienced this as challenging, others recognised that it was a temporary phase so were prepared to make sacrifices now as they could envisage a stage in the future where they would have more time to pursue their own interests. This suggests the men held relatively long-term future-orientations, an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter.

For the majority of participants, the time-consuming nature of a young baby and a full-time job left little time to spend with their partners as a couple, as Keith reflected above. Again this was described as a short-term issue and subsequently did not cause too much concern for most. A lack of time for the relationship became problematic with the way in which the men decided to spend their own time. Whilst many of the men felt they now had less free time for activities they had previously enjoyed, they generally still spent some time away from work and home engaging in these. Participants described this time as crucial for maintaining their self-identity, yet it was often met with resentment from

partners, expressed both explicitly and indirectly, who felt they had no time for themselves.

Well yeah, Tanya does get um she does get a bit fed up with me playing football because it takes me away Sunday morning and for an hour and a half on a Thursday evening. And when the fixture list came um I got the fixture list from my manager for the season. And you know I was looking where the hell is that fixture list got to? And Tanya had thrown it into the bin. (Rick, 35, sample A, post-birth)

I've cut down the amount that I go over the road for a drink a hell of a lot. Perhaps I need to cut it down more because Kim is still not happy with me even though it's been reduced by about four hundred percent. So I will never go over there all evening anymore whereas before Natalie was born I would do you know, and that's a big issue. (Greg, 24, sample A, one year later)

But she says "but you get to go out every Saturday night", and yes I suppose that is what it seems like ... I trot off into the sunset and play football for two or three hours and come home half past four five o'clock time whatever. And you know it is "he has been out all afternoon on a jolly", so I can see the point... I can understand it but I must admit I do begrudge giving it up but we will see what happens. (Ashley, 29, sample A, one year later)

For many of the men there was still time to do the things they enjoyed, albeit this was generally much reduced in comparison to before the birth, whilst their partners felt they did not have the same opportunities to pursue their own interests. Conversely some of the men whose partners became stay-at-home parents felt that the women actually had more individual time than the men did, as when they returned from work fathers were expected to take over the childcare whilst mothers had some 'free' time. This may explain why fathers of small children describe feeling more pressed for time than mothers (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005).

I think probably the father does have more of a role to play, I'm not saying more than a mother, obviously the roles are different, but

when the father, in my case is a sole breadwinner but also coming home I have to be a father when I get home, whereas my wife is looking after the baby and probably when I get home she can switch off and become herself again, spend some time on her own. From that point of view probably my time is going to be more condensed into when can I have time, so to speak, quality time on my own, it's not something that I cherish at the moment anyway so it's not too bad, but I, we'll have to see how things turn out, but a father who is willing to get involved has to realise that his time is going to be curtailed a bit. (Sebastian, 26, sample A, pre-birth)

Most men expected to have more free time as the child got older, although eight years later some felt similarly or even more constrained. This was significantly influenced by whether family members (particularly grandparents) lived nearby and could assist with childcare. Vincent's parents and in-laws all lived locally and offered regular childcare support, providing the couple with time alone.

Um, they pick them up after school on Tuesdays when Diane works later and they've been good enough to have them most Tuesdays. It's only for a few hours, they pick them up from school, give them tea, take them to Brownies and I take James to football training ... I mean it's great for the children and great for us as well so we can get rid of them a bit more, save a bit of money on babysitting fees. And the grandparents love it. Particularly my parents, they give the impression that they really really enjoy it. Which is, is good. And we do have little crises that occur and you just phone them up and they'll be there ... it's nice to just have the grandparents and say "look we need your help" and they're there to do it. It's very good to have that fall back situation. They're happy to do it you know.

(Vincent, sample A, eight years later)

When local family members did not offer childcare this caused some tension in family relationships as most had assumed that grandparents in particular would want a high level of involvement and could be relied upon for babysitting, particularly if they were retired. Those who lacked family childcare support found it much more challenging to

find time as a couple, which could have a serious impact on the relationship, as Rick indicates.

I guess we don't do special things together like going for meals or stuff like that. One of the things which was really apparent from the start is we've not had the kind of back-up support that certainly other people have had where um parents have been able to step in and have the children for a day or overnight, we've never had that, we've always had to have the kids 24/7. So we haven't had the backup where say parents have looked after the kids and given us a chance to spend time together, so I mean that's been unfortunate you know. (Rick, sample A, eight years later)

The pressures that some of the men felt on their time, which were particularly acute for those who lacked this family childcare support, prompted several of them to be forward-looking and focus on a point in the future when these pressures would be alleviated, as discussed in chapter four.

Throughout the men's early accounts time is depicted as a resource, described overwhelmingly in terms of its lack, as fathers perceived children to be influencing their experience of time (Daly *et al.*, 2009). For the majority of men in the early post-birth interviews, this stemmed from the fact that they were working full-time whilst their partners stayed at home, so they inevitably ended up spending less time with their child. This was further compounded by the fact that their working hours meant returning home just before the baby went to bed, often the child's most 'grisy' period. Many expressed some resentment at the amount of time their partners were able to spend with the child, yet this was accompanied by a sense of resignation as it was part of the father's role to work in order to provide financially. The conflicting demands of work and family life and the pressure this put on their time was a serious concern for most of the men, as indicated by Greg.

I feel as though my work, because my family's number one my work's got to be number one at the moment and it's that, it's that absolutely what seems to be an irreconcilable tension between the fact that you work, you are working for your family and you're trying to build a career. Because you know you want to spend, you're trying to build a career because you want the time and the quality time to spend at home. And you're building a career and as a result you're not getting that quality time to spend at home. So you're wanting both and if you don't have one you haven't got the other half, you know its um its really frustrating. (Greg, 24, sample A, one year later)

Disagreement about how time should be spent was a source of conflict for several couples and remained a predominant element of men's experiences, with one man temporarily moving out of the family home until the issue was resolved. Whilst the men felt they were missing out on spending time with their child when out at work, there was an assumption that this was inevitably part of a father's role and something they could do little about. In early interviews, men often expressed concerns about being less knowledgeable about parenthood than their partner. As all but three mothers took on the majority of hands-on childcare in the first few weeks whilst the men returned to work, women were spending more time with the child and gained practical knowledge about how to meet its needs. This often compounded men's feelings of being the secondary parent.

Well there are so many different aspects of childcare and I haven't got a handle on half of them ... a lot of it is down to feel and knowing. And because I don't spend anywhere near as much time with him because of being at work, and I come home and spend time with him. But because I haven't got that wedge of time in the middle I haven't got that cry is wind, or that cry is that. So that does, and it is not so easy to switch on, not so easy to switch on at all. Whereas Kerry might think you know that is a tired cry and I will be going what is it? What have I done? (Ray, 34, sample A, post-birth)

In later interviews there appeared to be fewer concerns about missing out on time with the child as the majority of men felt they had become more involved as their child grew older, although some still described feeling like the secondary parent. This was often described as a natural situation due to the 'innate' bond between mother and child, which was reinforced by the mother spending more time with the child as the primary carer. In this way, the amount of time spent appears to have implications for intimacy (Jamieson, 1998).

Yeah I still think there's very much a bond you know we come in here (laughs) every night sit for dinner and the kids run in and the first thing one of them will say is "Can I sit next to you mum?" and between them they fight over, both of them fight over who's going to sit next to Laura and then someone gets left having to sit next to me. And they sit, they argue in the car who's going to sit behind mum and the loser gets to sit behind me ... and we can be out and one of the kids comes and holds my hand and I'm like "Oh God! What you doing this for?" you know "Go and hold your mother's hand, that's who you wanna be with" (Jason, 40, sample A, eight years later)

Daly (1996b) suggests that with increased emphasis on involved fatherhood, men experience demands on their time similar to women in an attempt to 'have it all' through balancing work and family life. In discussions of family time, men emphasised the importance of spending time with their children, although indicated only a certain amount was necessary whilst anything beyond this was optional. Some men lamented that making time for family is costly, fixed in amount and largely beyond their control to change due to demands of paid work, which points to the ongoing power of the provider role for shaping the way men make decisions about time (Daly, 1996b). Other men suggested their own selfishness prevented them from spending more time with the children. In these situations men discussed how their partners – and sometimes the children themselves – encouraged the men to spend more time with the children.

However some of the men continued to view this time as optional, with the implication that their partner's time was not.

I mean (4) if I'm honest I probably don't devote enough time to the children. Um, you know I only get home at six and they go to bed at seven or half past ... Um, but I realise that I am quite guilty of that, I'm not quite so hands-on. I mean you could think that, it's only an hour and a half of time that you get to see them, so give them an hour and a half of undivided attention... If I go and sit with them, they'll not talk to me but come and sit on my lap and watch the television which is nice. Um, (3) but if I've got something pressing to do then I think: do I have to sit here and watch C-Beebies (laughs) with a child on my lap or can I make sure they're okay and go off and do something else? Um, and of course, unless they particularly, er, need me around I'll flitter around and do something else ... it's time and a certain amount of selfishness really.
(Vincent, 30, sample A, eight years later)

I'd like to be a bit more involved and doing things with her, which is another fault of mine I know, but again I find it hard to feel sort of, to (2) to do these things and um feel okay about them, not to sort of get angry or whatever because I don't want to be devoting that much time to sort of doing things with her. Um, which is a selfish thing, one of the aspects I don't like about myself.
(Howard, 36, sample A, eight years later)

When the men made these comments about not spending enough time with the child, presenting it in a humorous way or in terms of selfishness suggested that they felt it was something they should not necessarily be expressing. Dermott (2006) suggests that fathers in her study did not see time as a useful measurement of responsibility and commitment in relation to the nurturing of children. Instead, the desired father-child relationship could be achieved within a restricted time frame, unlike a good worker identity. Dermott found that because of this emphasis on 'caring for' rather than 'caring about', the men did not report competition over time. Whilst our research follows this to an extent, many men lamented lack of time with their children and expressed feelings of guilt over this, contradicting Dermott's (2008) findings.

Contemporary discourses of intensive parenting and putting the child's needs first are intertwined with a moral parenthood (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2000; Perrier, 2009), as investment in the child through time and resources becomes synonymous with good parenting. Whilst some fathers recognised that they could do more, they were able to justify their current behaviour by comparing themselves with previous generations; they were all more involved than their own fathers had been (as discussed in chapter four). Participants aligned the distant breadwinner model of fatherhood to earlier generations, emphasising that now they were expected to play an equal part in childcare or have a good reason why they could not, suggesting a moral dimension to the allocation of time.

I know for a fact that, you know if Emily's home and Louise is taking responsibility for her, unless I have something that I can explain why I'm working I need to be working. I'll be cleaning the kitchen or doing something because I feel guilty. Not that she, I don't think she necessarily makes me feel guilty but, I think she would if I did nothing, but you just feel the need to do something. So yeah I think there is that, there is an element of that. You've gotta justify your time. ... I tend to make work for myself; I'll sort of shuffle around, move things around you know, try and sort out some clothes, do some ironing, just 'cause it's better to be seen to be doing something than not. (Alun, 33, sample C, one year later)

In his account Alun suggested that as both he and his wife worked full-time, childcare tasks should be shared equally, indicating an underlying assumption of equality. The extent to which this was evident varied between participants but indicates a change from previous generations, linked to cultural change and the influence of feminism on conceptualisations of gender roles.

In early interviews, some participants were anxious about how a baby would fit in to their already full lives and still enable them to have sufficient time to fulfil other responsibilities. These accounts reflected the expectation that fatherhood would be time-

consuming, as spending time with the child was crucial for involved fatherhood and a good father identity. Whilst most men had made tentative plans for how they would deal with this, for some, like Richard, where pregnancies were unplanned, there were significant anxieties prior to the birth about how competing temporal demands could be reconciled (see page 161).

Richard recognised the importance of spending time with his child, suggesting that 'bad fathers don't spend time with their children', a view informed by his own childhood experiences of a relatively distant father. One way in which these demands could be tempered was by emphasising the value of quality rather than quantity time.

Um (3) now the answer my wife I think would like me to give is that I see this nice ideal model in which we all go out and do things together all the time. Um I probably don't see it quite like that myself really, simply because of the reality of all the other things that need to be done. I think in reality it's important to create time for the child, it's important to do things together but it's about quality rather than quantity. (Richard, 37, sample C, pre-birth)

For many of the men there was a distinction between quantity time and quality time; whilst they may not be able to spend large amounts of their time with the child, they tried to ensure the time they did spend was well-utilised and an opportunity to be totally focused on the child. Such an emphasis on quality time carries a strong ideological message about good parenting (Snyder, 2007), suggesting that children should be compensated for their parents spending time away from them at work (Kremer-Sadlick and Paugh, 2007). For Malcolm, who worked away from home for several days a week during the first few years of his child's life, this issue of spending quality time with his daughter was particularly important.

What time I do have I will make sure is quality time ... and it doesn't matter how much time you have with your children as long as you give it the quality time when you have it. I don't mean and obviously you have got to do your work and there are certain things that I could do at home at times, but I think no that can wait until tomorrow because I am doing this now.

(Malcolm, 32, sample A, post-birth)

The concept of quality time became increasingly important for the fathers who experienced a relationship separation and no longer resided with the child. Whilst restricted in the amount of time they could spend with the child, emphasis was placed on the quality of interaction in this period. This special time together when the focus could be on doing enjoyable activities was distinguished in the men's narratives from fathers who resided with their children where day-to-day interaction was more mundane. Those who were separated all had sons and emphasised the importance of spending time together to provide a masculine role model. For example, although Scott's partner had brought up two daughters alone, Scott's assertion that 'only men can understand with boys' was one of the main ways in which he explained the importance of his involvement in his son's life post-separation. He described the limited father and son time they spent together as mediating the overly-feminised environment his son was growing up in. In contrast, those men who were stepfathers described their relationship to fatherhood and time in the opposite way, positioning biological fathers as problematic because they saw the child infrequently; it was being there for day-to-day life that constituted a real father. For example, in relation to his stepson Kyle, Malcolm described how he is 'more there for him than his father is' and consequently the 'relationship is a lot better'. These discussions highlight the centrality of spending time with the child for constructions of good fatherhood across all the men's accounts, yet the participants' interpretations of the adequate amount and focus of this time varied considerably and was justified according to their present circumstances.

8.4 Family time

Aside from spending quality time on their own with the child, many men described family time as one of the most enjoyable aspects of their lives, yet something they had too little time for. Daly (1996b) suggests that family time is a central part of Western discourse, which ideologically represents the importance of good parenting and family togetherness as a foundation for stability. In the men's accounts, family time seemed to be focused around weekends when parents were generally free from work responsibilities and they could all enjoy shared activities. Whilst some men appeared to create family-oriented activities, others spoke of the child fitting in with their existing lifestyle so activities became family time by default. Interestingly, although the men may spend time with their partners and child in day-to-day activities this is not conceptualised as family time; it appears that to be defined as family time it must involve an activity that is not related to daily childcare responsibilities (Kremer-Sadlick and Paugh, 2007). In research into time scheduling, Southerton (2003) found that respondents organised 'hot spots' where lots of things would be happening at once, in order to create 'cold spots' where they could have some quality family time, which appeared to be a strategy invoked by some of the men.

You know life's, it's very hard to keep things going to be quite honest with you, with all the coming and going and travelling and now Elizabeth's doing it; you know we've had two occasions this year when we've basically handed over the kids and one gets home, the other one leaves. And that's tough, it's really really tough, it's tough on the kids but it's also very tough on us you know and it's, we can't allow that to be that tough. So our response is to say "look we are going to do that, we're going to allow that to happen, we'll manage it and allow it to happen from time to time but we have to compensate somehow" and the way we're going to compensate is just to have more family time. (Simon, 35, sample A, eight years later)

Simon indicates how the couple experience hot spots through intensive demands of work and parenting, which are experienced as 'really tough'. This is 'allowed' because they can compensate with a cold spot for family time with an extended family holiday. As Simon and his partner had regular overseas travel for work, their experience of creating hot and cold spots was somewhat different from most participants, who tended to focus more short-term with a weekly balance. For example, Ashley describes how he and his wife ensure Sundays are a cold spot for family time by creating hot spots of work and chores during the week.

Sunday is our only day we get together unless it's for holidays, which you know the kids have commented on a couple of times but they seem fairly chilled out about it ... Sunday's our day and we'll do something. I'll not do jobs in the garden I'll do them during the week if you know if it's light enough or on a Saturday afternoon. Saturdays I've started to take him to football um and Chloe goes shopping with Vicki when we go to watch, while we are at football um but we can't do that very often 'cause of work. I think we'd both like to do that more often but again we put Sundays by to go out, so we always make an effort on a Sunday whatever it is but apart from that we do okay. (Ashley, 29, sample A, eight years later)

Participants often experienced their current life phase as a period of temporal compression due to the competing demands of work, family and other responsibilities. This meant that scheduling moments of togetherness required a significant degree of coordination between the personal schedules of each family member and synchronisation with other practices (Southerton, 2004). Whilst planning quality time in advance gave rise to a greater sense of control (Snyder, 2007), it was often difficult to arrange, leading to perceptions of family time as scarce, which elevated its value (Daly, 1996b). When time could be spent as a family, it was important that this was made the most of, which led participants to lament the times where 'precious' or 'beautiful' moments were spoiled by family disagreements.

There's a real frustration associated with trying to be a happy little family but in fact this sort of moaning, whinging, complaining, crying type thing going on as well, you know and (2) the spoiling of beautiful moments is something that happens so often you know (amusement). And er, so again those are the things that I hadn't factored in to my previous vision of harmony and happiness and love and peace (laughs). (Simon, 35, sample A, eight years later)

The data suggest that family time has a high ideological value, with connotations of togetherness and cohesion. However the reality was quite different for many of the participants when children failed to cooperate with such plans. The importance of making the most of family time points to a protestant ethic of time; that time should not be wasted but utilised (Southerton, 2003), which is particularly salient during a period of temporal compression.

8.5 Gendered time

Although gendered understandings of time have been presented in the literature, arguments are often linked to essentialist conceptions of gender and detailed discussion is lacking. Whilst the argument that women and men use time differently because of their distinct life situations is powerful and has real grounding, the recognition that gender identities are potentially multiple, unstable and contingent means that the alleged boundary between masculine and feminine times needs to be addressed (Silva, 2002). The final section of this chapter therefore seeks to reignite and critically evaluate existing debate on gendered time in light of the project and PhD data.

Accounts of gendered temporality have often focused on how men and women live in different temporal spheres with a phenomenologically different experience of time (Daly, 1996b). For example Maines and Hardesty (1987) suggest that men operate in a linear

temporal world, projecting a future which has a practical endpoint and no perceived impediments. In contrast they see women operating in contingent temporal worlds, balancing family and work to form an adjusting sense of temporality at different periods in time. In this way a masculine linear temporality focused on achievement and progression is posited against feminine cyclical temporality related to biological clocks (Daly, 1996b). A linear trajectory would suggest that, given such a long-term future-orientation, awareness of death is a crucial component of masculine time-consciousness (Forman, 1989), yet Salmon (1985) suggests men find the prospect of their own death more unthinkable than women.

The goal-oriented instrumental planning of a linear masculine time is arguably seeking to control the future (Odih, 1999). This is described by Lyman and Scott (1970) as a humanist time track, which assumes one has power over one's own life course trajectory, in contrast to a fatalistic time track where this is out of one's control. A linear approach focused on achievement through a series of well-defined stages has been described as particularly relevant to white middle-class men (Felski, 2000) and was prevalent in our study amongst this group, who represented a large section of the sample. However there appears to be a lack of research evidence to substantiate this class dimension (Bergmann, 1992), as linearity was evident amongst men from other social groups within our sample, which may be indicative of the increasing pervasiveness of time regulation across society.

Numerous researchers have drawn conclusions about men's time as linear and women's as polychronic or relational, yet there is limited empirical support for this (Daly, 1996b). Others have problematised the distinction between female formlessness and male linearity, suggesting linearity and repetition permeate the lives of both men and women (Felski, 2000). Under an ideology that emphasises success, the future takes on greater

importance as it requires planning and accomplishment, which is not irrelevant to women. These conflicting explanations in the literature suggest that existing accounts of gendered temporality are unsatisfactory, pointing to a need for gendered time to be theorised in more sophisticated ways (Odih, 1999). Subsequently, attempts were made during data collection for the project to explore these issues with participants. This relied on men's accounts of their own and their partners' understandings of temporality and it is possible that women would have presented quite a different experience. However, it does provide useful insight into how men conceptualised time and what aspects they see as gendered.

Most participants suggested that they were more future-oriented than partners, who were described as tending to live in the moment. Several of the men related this to their role in the family's financial planning, often something they felt responsibility for as a man, and the way this required them to think long-term.

Um yeah always have to move onto the next thing, don't know if it's just a bloke thing or not but never content with just sitting still, there's always gotta be something going on ... Yeah I'm always thinking about the next thing ... Maybe it's the, you feel more responsibility as the man to try and (2) sort of make sure your life goes in the right direction when you're making all these big decisions. There's no reason why it should be my responsibility any more than my wife's but you do feel a bit more responsible.

(William, 29, sample C, one year later)

I kind of look after the finances in our family so I'm always budgeting for the next thing; Heather says she wants to move house and I'm "right if you want to move house we have to have a plan for doing it". I'm the one saving the money and looking forward in that respect. I think finance is the easiest way to look at it 'cause I'm always kind of saving for certain events or saving to make sure we've got enough money to back us up. I think, you know I'm more interested in things like life insurance and all, pretty much the boring things (amusement). But it kind of does show that that's more

forward looking and it's to do with making sure that your family are provided for in all circumstances is much more, taken on much more the man than the female, certainly that's my experience anyway. (Timothy, 28, sample C, one year later)

It was like her view is where's his nappy in five minutes time? It's not how are we gonna pay for his university when he's eighteen? (amusement). (Barry, 36, sample C, one year later)

She sort of, she's sort of focusing on getting the next set of nappies and I'm saying "yes but when she's eighteen what we wanna do is ..." So we do have a very (laughs) there's a very distinct way in which we see things; she's very much sort of immediate future whereas I'm long-term. (Alun, 33, sample C, one year later)

Other researchers have suggested that future-orientations are not gendered, as all individuals are chivvied into a constant preoccupation with what comes next (Greene, 2003). Greene and Wheatley (1992) found that a higher proportion of women than men anticipated future achievements and future relational events, suggesting a long-term orientation. However it may be that this focus is evident as women anticipate more challenges in achieving future goals (Maines and Hardesty, 1987). During the interview discussions, some participants drew on their perceptions of me as a career-oriented woman as an example that future-orientations are held by both men and women, although this continues to equate a future-orientation with a career focus and financial planning.

I suppose it's a man's point of view but you women look forward to things; you're a career woman in't you? You've got a career haven't you? Right that's forward looking isn't it? (Scott, 22, sample C, one year later)

The language of time which men often used in their accounts is linear, based on notions of progress, ageing and development (Daly, 1996b). They frequently described looking forward to the next stage in life, particularly in relation to their child's anticipated

developmental milestones. Daly (1996b) draws on gendered understandings of time, suggesting that men are future-oriented, more likely to be preoccupied with achievement and more likely to see the present as preparation for the future. Such future-orientation can mean the day-to-day is experienced as unsatisfying, as discussed in chapter four. Daly goes on to suggest that men are more likely to accept the uncertainties and ambiguities associated with a future-orientation. However, Maines and Hardesty (1987) describe the opposite; suggesting that men have a sense of the future as mapped and controlled, whilst women have a greater awareness of impending disruptions or discontinuities. Our project research exploring these issues suggests that many men do invest in linear strategies based on perceptions of biographical certainty and experience unexpected events as catastrophe or crisis (Shirani and Henwood, 2011b). This illustrates how the bifurcated approach outlined in the literature fails to capture the complexity of masculine temporal understanding, as men demonstrated diverse ways of understanding their futures.

Many men appeared resistant to expressing any detailed plans for the future in response to direct questions (as discussed in chapter four) yet the data presented in chapter five suggest that they often had specific ideas about how their lives would unfold over time. One way of exploring the pervasiveness of linear life trajectories was to consider the men's accounts of unexpected events. Järvinen (2004) suggests that as interactive selves, we assume that the future will be intelligent and ordered, as individual biographies are organised according to perceptions of biographical certainty based on the calculation of risk (Zinn, 2004; Reith, 2004). Although future planning and a linear temporal orientation may be unproblematic when lives unfold according to anticipated trajectories, unexpected events or 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1991) represent a disruption to the life course (Charmaz, 1997), requiring people to re-think future projects (Holland and

Thomson, 2009). The majority of men in the sample appeared to follow what Zinn (2004) describes as the traditionalization mode of biographical certainty, where future trajectories are assumed on the basis of traditional norms and deviations are not anticipated. Although the future is not guaranteed, individuals attempt to instil some measure of consistency and make assumptions about the future, which influences decisions and behaviour in the present (Maines and Hardesty, 1987).

As described in chapter five, unexpected events in the context of family formation, such as unplanned pregnancy or delayed conception, confronted men with their perceptions of biographical certainty and highlighted the uncontrollability of time. For these men, the futures they had imagined were no longer obtainable and therefore thinking in a linear way about the long-term future was avoided as time threatened personal identity (Earle and Leatherby, 2007). For example, those men in the sample who experienced delayed conception due to fertility difficulties illustrated a short-term focus, to avoid thinking about the possibility of not achieving their desired status of parenthood. By focusing on the present and short-term, individuals were able to protect a psychological space in which some sense of agency could survive (Marris, 1996) so some semblance of control over time and trajectories could be maintained. A change from a linear approach to a contingent focus on taking things day-by-day was evident in the accounts of men who had experienced an unexpected life course transition (not just in relation to the timing of pregnancy but also events such as relationship separation, serious health problems or the death of a relative) as they expressed a reluctance to think about the future. This often became a longstanding strategy as the unexpected event had highlighted the futility of planning according to linear trajectories. For example, Gary describes a continuing reluctance to think about the future several years after separating from the mother of his child.

I like thinking about the future in a wishy-washy sort of way, but in terms of specifics like I've just talked about I don't like thinking about it. Well whether it's building up for a fall or superstition or what I don't know. I like thinking of daft things that are happening in the future but not anything that sort of related specifically to me.

(Gary, 36, sample A, 8 years later)

This approach was in stark contrast to those whose lives had unfolded as anticipated. These men's perceptions of biographical certainty and control over time were bolstered when things worked out as planned, which led to continuing investment in linear future-orientations, often extending planning horizons to a focus on the more distant future.

What's weird now twenty years doesn't seem a long time

I: It doesn't, no?

No. I find that weird now that I'm thinking about (2) twenty years away really doesn't seem far now. (Kevin, 33, sample C, post-birth)

Kevin's long-term orientation suggests a linear approach to temporality, linked to clear ideas about the future. Although this was a view adopted by many men in the sample, others took a more informal approach to temporality where they did not attempt to plan futures but dealt with the flow of life events as they occurred. For example, when asked about the future, Seth responded:

I don't know it's sort of like the unknown, the great unknown really. It's quite nice seeing what'll happen. (Seth, 22, sample D, post-birth)

For Seth the unknown future represented exciting possibilities and he waited to see what would happen, rather than attempting to control the future. Such an approach made it easier to deal with unexpected events as there were no anticipated trajectories to be disrupted. This strategy follows what Zinn (2004) terms a contextualisation mode of

biographical certainty, where the unpredictable is an opportunity for new events and experiences, and the future remains contingent.

The variation in these accounts suggests that it is problematic to describe a unified masculine linear approach to temporality, as temporal understanding is varied and changes in relation to life course experiences. It appears more useful to invoke typologies (e.g. Zinn, 2004) or continua (e.g. Lyman and Scott, 1970) which cover a range of experiences and accept the dynamic nature of gendered temporal understanding. However, despite the differences between the men's understandings of temporality, many upheld the belief in a gender distinction which positioned women as focussed on the present and lacking the extended temporal horizon held by the men. This may relate to the fact that the majority of women held the primary responsibility for ensuring the child's immediate needs were met. Taking responsibility for future planning and financial organisation may be a straightforward way for men to be involved in investment in their child, particularly during the early stages when they often experience feelings of exclusion. Yet as the men did not have a cohesive understanding of temporality, it appears unlikely that women would have a unitary experience. Alternatively, a future-orientation may be a more general approach underpinned by neoliberal ideas about individual choice and rationality (Edwards *et al.*, 2009, Featherstone, 2010)

8.6 Reflections

This chapter has expanded the temporal focus of the thesis from issues of timing by considering other aspects of temporality which have a fundamental impact on the experience of contemporary fatherhood. Time has been described as apparently contradictory through being experienced as simultaneously fast and slow, which

highlights the way in which subjective time does not pass evenly, in contrast to socially constructed clock time. Time has also been considered as important in establishing what is perceived to be a good or moral parenthood. The implementation of routines implies control over time and a careful scheduling of required activities, whilst the early days of parenthood can prove unsettling by highlighting lack of control over time, giving rise to a sense of chaos and disorder.

Time is related to the construal of a moral parenthood through its allocation; by ensuring quality time with the child and an egalitarian division of labour with partners. The importance of spending time with the child was highlighted as a contemporary facet of fatherhood, distinguished from perceptions of historically distant fathers. However, some of the men appeared to see a certain amount of involvement as mandatory but anything beyond this as optional, despite the wishes of their partner and children. They were able to justify this stance by drawing on historical understandings and explaining that they were more involved than previous generations of fathers had been. This suggests that the men felt their own time to be discretionary, with the implication that their partner's was not, as overwhelmingly mothers were described as spending more quantity time with children, thus raising issues for discussion around the gendered experience of time. This chapter has attempted to move away from debates about a polarised masculine and feminine time to a focus on multiple and dynamic understandings of temporality which change in relation to lived experience. However, despite variation in their temporal experiences, it is interesting that the majority of men related gendered assumptions about temporality, particularly in relation to future-orientation.

Time as a resource was discussed mainly in terms of its lack, perhaps related to the current life stage of the men being one of temporal compression due to multiple demands of work and family life. This requires a careful balancing between the demands of employment and family, whilst any time outside of these arenas has to be accounted for and justified. Due to its scarcity, family time in particular held a high ideological value for the men in relation to 'togetherness', seen as crucial for good family functioning. Yet the reality of this experience often failed to live up to the ideal, which was a source of concern and disappointment. Lack of time with the child was problematic for many of the men as this compounded their sense of being a secondary parent. This was justified by their need to work and provide financially, which meant everything else had to be arranged around working hours, highlighting the continuing centrality of the provider role for conceptions of good fatherhood.

Although this chapter has expanded the focus of the thesis, it cannot consider all aspects of multifaceted and dynamic temporality which underpins everyday life. However by considering fatherhood through a temporal lens, the pervasiveness of time and its centrality to the experience of contemporary fatherhood is illustrated. This chapter therefore expands the existing literature on fatherhood and time, which remains predominantly focused around time use.

Chapter 9

Discussion

I think the house is going to have to go and get a bit dirtier
and the grass might have to grow a bit longer and we won't
have so much fresh food in the vegetable patch this year.

(Terry)



9.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to provide a detailed exploration of the timing of parenthood in men's lives, and the implications that timing decisions – or indeed non-decisions – hold for the lived experiences of fatherhood. Rooted in the subjective accounts of men over their transition to first-time fatherhood and beyond, the study has attempted to consider how individuals actively assign meaning and significance to their experiences. This final chapter draws together the central findings of the thesis in light of existing literature and theoretical debate, to demonstrate the contribution to existing knowledge and implications for future research. As the research questions have been considered in each of the preceding chapters, this final section draws on the overarching themes of the thesis, beginning with an overview of significant findings.

9.2 Individualised 'right time': negotiating constraints

Chapter five explored how 'right time' is established, outlining a number of pre-requisites that the majority of participants felt were important to have in place before embarking on parenthood: a stable relationship, secure job and income, and suitable housing; each of which must be established for an appropriate duration. In addition, it was seen as desirable to be a 'good age' combining the benefits of experience and energy, whilst fitting in with the limitations of the (female) biological clock. Ensuring all these elements were in place was seen as creating the 'optimal conditions' which would provide the 'best start' for the child (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Thus establishing this was necessary in order to be seen as a good or moral parent.

Much of the complexity men described about negotiating the right time for fatherhood centred on achieving economic stability through secure employment, as, despite

increasingly egalitarian views and a range of employment situations, the men overwhelmingly saw themselves as holding the primary responsibility for financial provision (Henwood *et al.* 2010). This centrality of financial provision to good fatherhood is underlined by current policy, which emphasises the economic contribution of men (Lewis, 2002). The continuing salience of 'breadwinning' and long-term financial provision, and the delay in being able to establish this through longer periods in education, appears to be one of the main reasons why men may postpone parenthood. As postponement increases during periods of economic difficulty (Rindfuss *et al.*, 1984), the current global recession may therefore prompt increasing delays.

Whilst the 'right' timing of the first child appears relatively restricted, timing of subsequent children is even more so as they have to be planned to fit in with the first. Participants overwhelmingly upheld a two child ideal – preferably one of each sex – as being socially responsible and manageable, therefore the decision to have a third child was experienced as more difficult to justify. Similarly, men who decided to have one child generally sought to justify this as due to circumstances rather than choice, suggesting an underlying perception of an only child as problematic (Mancillas, 2006; Bowcock, 2007). This holds particular implications for both older and younger fathers who are likely to experience the greatest constraints to having further children because of age-related circumstances and concerns.

Perhaps surprisingly, many sources of tension were iterated by both younger and older fathers; such as financial concerns, isolation from peers, and changing intergenerational boundaries. Although delayed and unplanned pregnancies occurred across the sample groups, age appeared to be a major factor in determining a transition as on-time or off, supporting the idea that age is a 'master category' (Thomson and Kehily, 2008) through

which normative notions of fatherhood are constituted. However, despite concerns about isolation, men in the off-time group suggested that being outside the standard trajectory did provide some benefits. For example, whilst lacking the comforting sense of collectivity described by those men making the transition to fatherhood at the same time as peers, those who were off-time felt more able to parent how they wanted without the interference, advice or judgement of other parents. In an intensive parenting culture based on engagement with expert bodies and practices (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Miller, 2005) and increasing rules in relation to parenthood, being outside the influence of these expectations could be liberating. The men often posited their own lack of concern about what other people thought against their partner's anxieties and advice-seeking behaviour (Shirani *et al.*, in press). Subsequently, this is one way in which making an off-time transition to parenthood may be easier for men than women.

The uniformity of the idealised trajectory as described in chapter five suggests the persistence of a standardised life course based on internalised norms or social clocks about age-appropriate behaviour. This trajectory and the influence of timing on lived experience is further evident in the accounts of those who made an off-time transition to parenthood and experienced various sanctions or challenges because of this, arguably contributing to a stigmatised identity (Friese *et al.* 2008). Although, as noted above, being outside the norm can prove liberating, more frequently the men's responses highlighted the underlying importance attached to collective experience, underlining the influence of linked lives in decisions of timing and sequencing (Heinz and Krüger, 2001). This contravenes the emphasis placed by individualisation theory on the dissolution of normal trajectories and their replacement with 'risky' DIY biographies as individuals become the legislators of their own lives. For example, many participants described their assumption that they would become a parent at some point (for women's responses see Lewis, 2006;

Simpson, 2010), therefore it was not seen as a choice of whether or not to have children but a question of 'fine tuning' the timing. However, this conclusion is drawn from a sample of people who have chosen to become parents within the pro-natalist context of the UK (Brown, 2004), therefore the standardised life course may not have the same influence for those who remain childless and are not constrained by reproductive time.

Critics of individualisation point out that by over-privileging individual autonomy, such explanations risk emptying human conduct of its social context (Bertaux, 1982; Smart and Shipman, 2004; Simpson, 2010), implying that individuals have free choice rather than choice amongst socially constructed options (although Scherger, 2009, and Woodman, 2009, have pointed out that choice and destandardisation have been over-emphasised in interpretations of Beck's theorisation). It appears then that norms and principles continue to act on the life course (Scherger, 2009) so that age remains a basic category for interpreting the appropriateness of behaviour. Individuals are able to exercise agency within these constraints in their timing choices, which leads to the positioning of age as a marker of a moral transition. Thus, *'rather than withering away, as the theorists of choice biography would have us believe, age remains an extraordinarily powerful concept.'* (Brannen, 2002:13).

Reconciling the necessary pre-requisite stages proved particularly challenging for some of the men. For example, those who met their partners later in life often had shorter couple relationships in order to fit in with biological 'right time'. Those who had not followed a standard trajectory and had returned to education later in life chose between delaying parenthood until they achieved financial stability in their chosen occupation and becoming a parent at a risky time in relation to their career. These men attempted to negotiate such asynchronies, although, for some, being unable to reconcile the necessary pre-requisite stages had repercussions later in life. The apparent irreconcilability of these

stages may well increase during the economic downturn as it becomes more difficult to establish economic stability, prompting increasing delays or anxieties about the timing of parenthood.

9.3 The future imperative and biographical certainty

Those who experienced an off-time transition described this as having significant repercussions for present lives and future trajectories, which had to be reconfigured in light of the pregnancy. Planning for the future is emphasised in both individualisation and life course theories as influential for biographical action and decision-making (Scherger, 2009). Conversely, failing to plan is seen as irrational, naïve and irresponsible (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) with the implication that risk can be avoided through judicious planning (Currie, 1988). These theories emphasise the importance of being able to plan long-term in order to ensure ontological security based on perceptions of biographical certainty (Giddens, 1991). Those who described the transition to parenthood as occurring on time found that this bolstered feelings of security and confidence so they continued to plan ahead, often further extending temporal horizons. In contrast, men who experienced an off-time transition tended to adopt a strategy of chronometricalisation to focus on the short-term, as the change to their anticipated life course had made thinking about the long-term future too threatening (Shirani and Henwood, 2011b). The deviation such off-time transitions create further highlights the normative trajectory men had expected to follow; each varying performance highlighting the underlying melody as standard (Townsend, 2002). Heinz and Krüger (2001) suggest that life course planning is only possible if social actors adopt cultural frames and institutional rules, which may make it difficult to plan once these have been deviated

from. This is supported in the men's data, as chronometricalisation appeared to become a long-term strategy once anticipated future trajectories had been interrupted.

Chapter eight reignited discussion of gendered temporality by focusing on the purportedly masculine linear orientation towards time. The data indicated that men often viewed themselves as more future-oriented than their partners, relating this back to their responsibility to ensure financial security for the family, which required careful planning. The class dimension described in existing research was not substantiated in the thesis data, as self-reported linear orientations towards time were evident across the sample, suggesting the pervasiveness of time regulation and planning norms. However, lived experiences were shown to influence temporal understanding, particularly future-orientation, thereby disrupting notions of a unitary masculine temporality. Lacking data from women makes it difficult to know whether future-orientation is particularly gendered, or a contemporary cultural experience. For example, current emphasis on intensive parenting through investment in the child could itself be seen as a future-oriented strategy, as parents do not reap the benefits in the present but expect some form of dividend 'down the road' (Daly, 2001). In this way, good parenting is seen to be measured in terms of child 'outcomes', with several fathers commenting that they will only know if they have been a good father when their child is a socially responsible adult. This focus on the future suggests a conceptualisation of the child as a project, an ethos deemed potentially problematic for failing to appreciate the child in the present (Halldén, 1991; Vincent and Ball, 2007). However, participants were clear that these two orientations were not mutually exclusive; they could enjoy their child's current stage with an eye to the future. As mothers are seen to be more influenced by intensive parenting (Dermott, 2008), this could also impact on women's future-orientation, which would benefit from further research exploration.

A cultural emphasis encouraging individuals to orient to the long-term may well increase anxiety around life-affecting decisions, such as the transition to parenthood, in light of the potential for 'faulty planning'. In this situation, making a choice to have a child, and thus indicating readiness to take on the related responsibilities, suggests such risks have been planned out, making it a moral transition. This is further highlighted in the way teenage parents apparently represent the problem of 'not planning', which is seen to have negative consequences for parent, child and wider society. Planning for the child's future is emphasised as important for responsible fathering, whilst not making plans is considered negligent. Yet, simultaneously, planning appears to have negative associations as being too directive or restrictive, therefore something many men did not want to 'admit' to. This rational management of risk through planning is arguably a masculine orientation, as discussed above, yet when asked directly the men clearly resisted overtly adopting this authoritarian masculine style in favour of a child-centred approach. The tension in contemporary parenting culture is that fathers are expected to plan and provide for their child in order to offer the best opportunities for development and success, yet making specific plans is seen as problematic in a culture which emphasises the importance of allowing the child to develop according to his or her own unique interests and potential. Although most men emphasised that they had no clear plans for their child, future planning was most frequently talked about in terms of financing the child through university, indicating a middle-class future-orientation linked to education (Ball, 2003). Planning for the future was an important way of managing risk; ensuring that the necessary supports – often financial – were in place to enable fulfilment of the desired life course trajectory, yet remains a difficult issue to discuss due to these associations of restrictiveness.

9.4 Temporal control and the moral parent

Chapter eight expanded the focus to consider different aspects of temporality, highlighting the ideological value of time and the implications this has for the ways in which participants order their lives. Family time was particularly salient for notions of togetherness and harmony, which rarely reflected the actual experience when young children were fighting with siblings. Participants felt time alone or as a couple could be seen as selfish; either in their own opinion or that of others, as this was taking away from family time and apparently contradicted the impetus to prioritise the child. The incompatibility of temporal demands was highlighted, with several men explaining how they were currently focused on family time and hoped to return to couple time once the children left home; particularly those who had had a relatively short relationship before the birth. These responses indicate a view of parenting as a time-consuming task incompatible with a life of one's own, although this is not to suggest that it cannot also be experienced as another form of self-fulfilment. The discordance between ideals and circumstances led some men to report feelings of guilt over time use, which contradicts the findings of Dermott (2008), who uses the lack of guilt reported by her participants to highlight contemporary fathering as intimate but not intensive. However, guilt feelings were evident across the sample groups as men were concerned they were not doing enough to take an equal share with their partners and ensure their continuing relevance to their children in later life. This appears indicative of a trend towards men's greater involvement in the work of childrearing (Sullivan, 2010). However, constraints of the labour market shape how caring responsibilities are practiced, which often result in asymmetrical arrangements (Jamieson, 1998; Miller, 2010). By emphasising an activity-based or quality time approach to fathering, this continues to burden mothers with other child-related chores (Miller, 2010). Yet these actions which affirm the man's commitment

to parenting may be important to sustaining a sense of mutual respect and a view of parenting as a shared project (Jamieson, 1998).

Having control over time was central to a moral parent identity. This was illustrated in chapter eight in relation to routines; highlighting how scheduling is linked to perceptions of success as a family (Daly, 2002), in contrast to the chaotic experience of those who did not impose a routine. The one exception appears to be childbirth, where being in control was felt to fundamentally undermine the experience. Controlling the timing of parenthood by making a choice to become a parent rather than falling into the 'parent trap' was also seen as crucial in being constructed as moral and responsible, as indicated by Kenny's account (discussed in chapter five). Consequently this potentially stigmatises those who make an off-time transition as amoral or irresponsible. This perception was evident in the accounts of young fathers, who felt that others perceived them to be bad fathers because of their age. However, they reconstructed a moral identity by doing things differently to other young fathers by being involved and taking responsibility for their child; emphasising these differences during the interview. In this way, presenting others as morally unworthy became an important device for participants telling a moral tale about themselves (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2000). This stigmatised identity reported by younger fathers and also associated with older mothers (Hadfield *et al.*, 2007) was less evident for older fathers, who were less likely to be viewed as irresponsible, although becoming a father at a particularly advanced age was deemed as selfish by some. Whilst planned postponement of parenting could be seen as an expression of agency (Elder, 1998), it can also be interpreted as continuing adherence to the norms of biographical action, as parents are seeking to have their child in 'optimal conditions' but this takes longer to achieve (Scherger, 2009). Although there were felt to be few negative perceptions of older fathers in wider society, the older men in the sample expressed

concern that their children would feel stigmatised later in life at having an 'elderly' father, and described their attempts to alleviate these concerns; by ensuring continuing physical fitness for example. Time and timing therefore are illustrated as being central to understandings of contemporary fathering and fatherhood identity.

9.5 Connecting masculinity and temporality

Like time, masculinity was something which often could not be asked about directly as this was too abstract or uncomfortable; however, a sense of masculinity played a central role in fatherhood identity. What became clear was the number of contradictory ways in which many participants described their own position as the most masculine. For example, expressing feelings and emotions was encouraged as a central aspect of involved fatherhood, yet many men described their role as mediating or regulating the rollercoaster of emotions expressed by their partners, positioning themselves in a dyadic relationship as the rational voice against their partner's emotionality. In contrast, men talked about having less control of feelings of aggression towards anyone who posed a threat to their child, and in this scenario they would have to be calmed by a more pragmatic partner. This contradictory picture of emotional expression highlights the competing discourses influencing contemporary understandings of good fatherhood; as emotionally involved with the child, as stoic supporter of partner, and as the family protector. Overwhelmingly men across all sample groups had adopted a model of involved fatherhood, recognising emotional involvement and expression as integral to a new and greater form of masculinity. There were, however, some caveats to this as a few men felt it would be more difficult to be emotionally involved with sons than with daughters for fear this would make sons 'soft'. This indicates some continuing adherence to traditional notions of masculinity which necessitate emotional control. Few men

discussed their feelings about fatherhood with their own fathers, suggesting this was something that the older generation of men were unlikely to feel comfortable talking about. Whilst the availability of grandparent childcare had a significant impact on couple relationships and the experience of fatherhood, expectations appeared to fall predominantly on grandmothers. Grandfathers were expected to show an interest in the child but did not appear subject to the same demands for care. Given the gender neutral parenting ideal many of the men espoused, it is striking that they appeared to hold traditional ideas about gender roles in relation to both their own parents and children.

Several men felt that the timing of fatherhood in their lives influenced their ability to embody an emotionally involved masculinity; with 'on-time' fathers suggesting they were best placed to do this in a socially supported father role, whilst 'off-time' men felt that being outside the norm meant they were less inhibited in their behaviour and emotional expression. Age and timing did have some implications for gender, as 'off-time' fathers were most likely to express a preference for the sex of their child, which they felt would be easier to reconcile with their sense of masculinity. For example, young fathers favoured boys so they could draw on shared masculinity and be perceived as a knowledgeable subject, in order to alleviate feelings of marginality. In contrast, older fathers suggested that boys' physical activity would be more challenging due to their own age-related physical decline and therefore favoured daughters. These essentialist gender assumptions were drawn on pre-birth and in the early months of the child's life, but were less prominent with the men interviewed eight years later. Previous research has indicated that advanced paternal age is more problematic for sons than daughters (Daniels and Weingarten, 1983), which would benefit from further substantiation through research with men as both they and their children age. On-time fathers were less likely to express a preference for the sex of their child than those who were off-time.

One explanation for this is that most expected to have further children, generally hoping for 'one of each'. Therefore the sex of the first child did not matter, but that of the second may be more important. Off-time fathers were less likely to anticipate having further children, which may be one reason why they expressed stronger preferences.

9.6 A Note on the Unexpected

The issue of ageing was raised in the accounts of many men, to an unanticipated extent. When discussing 'right time', numerous men reflected on the importance of being able to be physically active as a father throughout childhood and adolescence, with the inability to do this forming the main concern about delaying fatherhood. Chapter six explored some of these concerns, whilst chapter seven considered how men drew on their continuing fitness and activity eight years later to explain the timing of their transition to fatherhood as right. Retrospectively the men presented a much more negative picture of delayed fatherhood, with several men wanting to be younger at the point in having an eight year-old child in order to be more active with them. Across the samples men contrasted themselves with, or articulated fears about becoming, the 'wheezy older dad' who would be an embarrassment to their children. The extent to which the ability to be physically active with the child was seen as central to a good father identity, and thus impacted on temporal understanding and timing decisions, was unanticipated and therefore not directly asked about. Given the limited literature on masculinity and ageing, particularly in relation to fatherhood, this is an area which would benefit from future research attention.

Anthony represented something of an exception in the way he made an off-time transition but appeared not to experience the same repercussions reported by other

fathers. His was one of the biggest transformations; from someone adamant he did not want children to becoming one of the most enthusiastic and involved fathers of all. At age 31, Anthony appears to have been relatively insulated against the age-related challenges faced by younger and older fathers, attributing his 'rosy' trajectory to a combination of luck, perseverance and social support. Anthony's case suggests that off-time transitions may not always come with the long-term challenges reported by other fathers, although his experience supports the explanation that age may well have mediated these effects. Continuing research into the long-term implications of off-time transitions would serve to further substantiate these claims.

9.7 Methodological Reflections

Chapter four provided a detailed evaluation of the original approaches used in the research to elicit temporal data. Whilst the use of visual methodologies has been widely debated, the original approaches used and evaluated take forward discussion of their utility in extending participants' temporal horizons; considering past, present and future. The concentrated focus on visual techniques highlighted how images can be particularly valuable for eliciting data about past and current experiences. However, the type of image used – personal or public – is best employed in relation to participants' life stage. For example, prior to fatherhood cultural images were favoured as participants had no experience of being a father to draw on, whilst personal images were preferred post-birth for their emotional significance. The age of the child was also influential in how far participants were able, or willing, to reflect back; with fathers of very young children preferring to focus on contemporaneous experiences. Eliciting data about the future was more challenging, as participants were reluctant to discuss making detailed plans when asked directly, sometimes expressing explicit dislike for such questions as clichéd.

However, at other points during the interviews they clearly indicated detailed future plans for themselves and their child (as discussed above). This suggests that careful attention must be paid to the framing of temporal questions so as not to ask participants directly, but in order for insights to be gleaned obliquely through indirect responses (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Temporality is inherent in the QLL design as participants are returned to over time and previous accounts are discussed anew. Such a design is therefore arguably best placed to reflect the dynamic nature of participants' lives by capturing continuity and changes in their accounts (Thomson, 2007; Elliot *et al.*, 2008). Using the men's relationship to discourses of involvement over the child's life, previous publications have illustrated the added insights such an approach can offer (Shirani and Henwood, 2011a; Henwood and Shirani, *in press*). Findings suggest that longitudinal methodologies are particularly valuable for eliciting temporal data and capturing the dynamic nature of participants' lives as they change over time in relation to lived experience. The focus on retrospective assessments of timing decisions in chapter seven offered insights into the longer-term impacts of temporal decision-making, providing a different picture of delayed fatherhood to that given in early interviews pre- and post-birth, thus providing an original contribution to the existing literature on this topic.

This research is grounded in an interpretivist epistemological position which is attentive to the life worlds and voices of individuals (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001) and as such departs from a large proportion of existing research on fertility decision-making, which is predominantly quantitative. Existing research has also largely focussed on women and subsequently overlooked the different experiences of men. Detailed exploration of participants' accounts of their timing experiences as presented in the thesis highlights the

issues which influence decision-making and how these are negotiated, providing valuable insights for fertility research.

9.8 Knowing the limits

Whilst efforts were made to engage a diverse group of fathers, the challenges of recruiting and maintaining a sample of young working-class men resulted in a sample skewed towards middle-class professionals. Problems of attrition proved most prevalent amongst the youngest men and therefore qualitative longitudinal data are lacking amongst this group. Future research needs to consider how best to engage and most importantly sustain the participation of these men in order to be attentive to these unique experiences. Nonetheless, around one fifth of the total sample was aged 25 or under, thus the research does go some way to hearing the voices of this group. The greater number of middle-class participants also masks the heterogeneous experiences of this sample. For example, although many would now be defined as middle-class based on their occupations, just under half of the total sample described their working-class backgrounds; indicating a high degree of social mobility, which may have influenced their desire to participate. Others identified as working class but with middle class sensibilities and values. This disjunction highlights an underlying difficulty with categorising social class according to objective categories, as this may be an inaccurate representation of individuals' subjective class identity. However it is indicative of continuing class consciousness (Muir and Wetherell, 2010), which makes social class an important factor for understanding lived experience.

Those who described pregnancies as semi-planned represent an interesting group as the only men who reported a disagreement with their partners over timing. For these men,

pregnancies did not occur at the right time in their careers or relationships, which appeared to have significant repercussions. Although no discord was reported, the men who described persuading their partners to delay may have been seen as problematic from the women's perspective, given widespread concerns about the ticking female biological clock. The small number of men in the sample who described this timing situation however requires caution in interpretation of these findings. Future research exploring the impact for couples of a disagreement over timing would therefore be beneficial; however the desire to present a united front to the interviewer may prove a challenge in recruiting such participants.

9.9 Final Conclusions

Taking a qualitative approach to fertility decision-making has served to deepen understanding of the issues impacting on men's timing decisions and how these are negotiated. Although the thesis explores the transition to fatherhood across a wide age-range, this differentiation between trajectories does not equate to the dissolution of normative biographies, as not all pathways hold equal credence; indicated by the repercussions experienced by those who made an off-time transition. This is not to suggest a return to overly deterministic perspectives, but to acknowledge the importance of accounting for the social context in which people make their decisions and how individuals exercise agency within this. The persistence of a culturally approved trajectory becomes evident through individual assumptions about how their lives will unfold, rooted in perceptions of biographical certainty. In this way, individuals appear to construct linear trajectories based on the assumption that the unexpected will not happen to them, until such a challenge to certainty occurs. From this perspective, age continues

to be an important category by which the 'appropriateness' of behaviour is interpreted; both by individuals and society more widely.

The challenges of achieving 'optimal conditions' – particularly in the context of a global recession – means that people are increasingly required to delay parenthood. This will continue as such constraints further limit the coincidence of pre-requisite stages within the window of biological right time. As chapter seven indicates, the off-timing of transitions is likely to have different repercussions later in the life course, which is an area that would benefit from future research. However, as many parents report increasing standards and social judgements in relation to parenting, being outside the norm through an off-time transition can mean these men are somewhat removed from expectations of an intensive parenting culture, which can prove to be a liberating alternative.

The analysis has expanded the discussion of fathering and time from the focus on time-use to consider other aspects of temporality which are central to fathering experience; unpacking everyday understandings of time to give a sense of complex and multilayered temporality. The thesis has also highlighted the significance of participants' anticipated futures to the way in which they detail past and present experiences. This suggests the importance of accounting for participants' understandings of the future in any further research. Taking a temporal approach provides an original contribution to the literature on fatherhood and masculinity; particularly in relation to the increasing salience of ageing and embodiment over time.

By taking a temporal approach the thesis also offers a new contribution to theoretical debates on individualisation and the life course in relation to family trajectories, illustrating how within structural constraints participants make timing decisions based on

assumptions of biographical certainty and life course progression. In addition to providing valuable insights into men's fertility decision-making which have been lacking to-date, the thesis contributes to discussions of qualitative longitudinal and visual methodology, temporal theorising and intensive parenting culture. By accounting for multifaceted experiences of temporality, the study moves beyond existing accounts which situate fatherhood in relation to time use, demonstrating the centrality of temporality to the lived experience of fatherhood.

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It was, it went pretty much to clockwork really.
(Ashley)



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Appendices

Before you know its six months down the line,
you feel like you've been locked away, life's moved on without you
(William)



Appendix 1 – Description of Participants

Sample A – Men from East Anglia who became fathers in 2000. Interviewed up to three times 1999-2000. Interviewed for a fourth time in 2008.

Name	Age at birth	Relationship status at birth	Occupation	Timing
Adam	34	Cohabiting for 2 years with partner and her 2 teenage children. Separated soon after the birth	Self-employed therapist	Semi-planned
Anthony	31	Married for 2 months	Customer services assistant	Unplanned
Ashley	29	Married for 2 ½ years	Estate agent	Right time
Bruce	29	Cohabiting for 3 ½ years	Secondary school teacher	Right time
Carl	32	Married for 2 ½ years to	RAF technician	Unplanned
Eric	34	Married for 9 months to partner, also lives with partner's 10 year-old son	Environmental researcher	Semi-planned
Gary	28	Cohabiting for 2 years. Separated 2002	Software tester	Right time
Greg	24	Married for 5 years	Academic	Right time
Howard	35	Married for 8 years	Unemployed	Right time
Jason	32	Married for 4 years	Production manager	Mistimed - earlier than intended
Keith	31	Married for 18 months	Scientific researcher	Right time
Kenny	41	Married for 2 months	Unemployed/ Healthcare work	Right time
Malcolm	32	Cohabiting for 4 ½ years with partner and her 7 year-old son	Prison officer	Semi-planned
Ray	34	Married for 2 ½ years. Separated in 2008	Fireman	Mistimed – earlier than intended
Rick	35	Cohabiting for 1 year	Occupational therapist	Right time
Simon	35	Cohabiting for 10 years	Development consultant	Right time
Sebastian	26	Married 4 ½ years	Administrator	Right time
Terry	37	Married for 10 years	Marketing manager	Delayed for 10 years due to fertility difficulties. Conceived through IVF and a surrogate
Vincent	30	Married for 2 years	Optician	Delayed for 2 years due to fertility difficulties. Conceived through IVF

Sample B – Men from East Anglia who became fathers in 2000. Interviewed 1999-2000 up to three times. Could not be contacted in 2008.

Name	Age at birth	Relationship status at birth	Occupation	Timing
Bill	34	Married 7 years	Personnel officer	Right time
Bob	36	Married 10 years	Sales assistant (became stay-at-home dad)	Delayed for 1 year due to previous ectopic pregnancy
Brendan	30	Married 4 years	Probation officer	Right time
Charles	33	Married 5 ½ years	Solicitor	Right time
Christian	33	Married 8 years	Site agent for construction company	Right time
Craig	20	Cohabiting 2 years. Separated a few months after birth	Plasterer	Unplanned
Douglas	33	Married 2 years	Retail Manager	Delayed for two years due to fertility difficulties. IUI assisted conception
Frank	27	Married 3 ½ years	Sales rep	Right time
Jack	30	Cohabiting 1 month	Company manager	Right time
Pete	35	Married 3 years	Company manager	Unplanned
Trevor	32	Married 4 years	Administrator	Right time

Sample C – Interviewed in South Wales 2008/9 up to three times

Name	Age at birth	Relationship status at birth	Occupation	Timing
Aaron	15	In a relationship but living separately. Separated soon after birth	Student	Unplanned
Alun	33	Married 2 years	Academic	Semi-planned
Barry	36	Married 5 ½ years	Local Council Worker	Delayed for 4 years due to fertility difficulties. Conceived after surgical intervention
Bradley	25	Married 1 month	Local government worker	Mistimed - earlier than intended
Jeffrey	40	Married 1 year	Environmental scientist	Right time
Joe	31	Married 6 years	P.C.S.O	Delayed for 3 years due to fertility difficulties
Kevin	33	Married 2 years	Company director	Right time
Luiz	19	Cohabiting 1 month	Supermarket trolley collector	Unplanned
Marcus	31	Married for 2 years	Business development manager	Right time
Nathan	24	Cohabiting for 2 years	Furniture warehouse assistant	Unplanned
Neil	29	Married for 4 years	PhD student	Right time
Richard	37	Married 11 years	Academic	Unplanned
Scott	22	In a relationship but living separately. Separated soon after the birth	Unemployed	Semi-planned
Timothy	28	Married for 2 ½ years	Administrator	Right time
William	30	Married for 8 months	Business development manager	Right time

Sample D – Participants selected specifically for PhD, interviewed 2008/9

Name	Age at birth	Relationship status at birth	Occupation	Timing
Guy	47	Married 10 years to Rosa	Academic	Delayed for one year due to fertility difficulties. Conceived through IVF
Johnny	22	Cohabiting 3 months	Student	Unplanned
Owen	18	Single (never in a relationship with child's mother)	In work-based training programme	Unplanned
Phillip	47	Married 3 months to Esther	Consultant	Unplanned
Seth	22	Cohabiting 6 months	Student	Unplanned
Ryan	18	Cohabiting 3 months	Apprentice Builder	Unplanned
Lawrence	54	Married for 4 years	Academic	Delayed for 2 years due to fertility difficulties
Graham	41	Married for 10 years	Accountant	Right time

Appendix 2 – Description of visual sequence of images

These images were presented individually to participants in sample C during the first interview. Images cannot be reproduced due to copyright restrictions.

- **Image 1** – Black and white image of a family in the Victorian era. Father dressed in formal attire and standing in the centre of the picture. On one side is a young son, also dressed formally. On the other side is his wife, sitting down with a young child on her knee. All looking directly at the camera, not smiling.
- **Image 2** – Black and white image of a family in the 1940s/50s. Father is dressed formally with a briefcase, apparently leaving for work. Mother is holding a baby in the doorway, which father is kissing before he leaves. A young girl stands next to her father looking up at him but is not looked at by either parent.
- **Image 3** – Colour picture of a father and two children in the 1980s. Father, dressed in shirt and trousers is kneeling down, supporting young child on a toy horse, child is smiling. Young boy sitting on the other side of the child, holding on to the reins of the horse and sucking the fingers on one hand.
- **Image 4** – Colour close-up picture of a relatively young father and baby. White background and close up of their faces. Father is lifting baby to make eye to eye contact and smiling at her, she appears to be looking back and mimicking his open-mouthed expression.
- **Image 5** – Athena ‘man and baby’ image made famous during the 1980s and became the best-selling poster of all time. Profile of muscular topless man holding and looking intently and young baby. Presented simultaneously with **Image 6**; rugby player Ben Cohen reproducing the Athena poster in 2008 for a charity campaign. In his version both father and baby are smiling at one another
- **Image 7** – Image of David Beckham in 2000. Holding young son (both in matching football kits) on top of the Carling Cup trophy. Beckham is smiling. Crowd cheering and taking photographs in the background.
- **Image 8** – Image of the cast of Channel 4’s ‘Shameless’. The father is in the centre of the picture smoking and drinking with other members of the family clustered around him in various poses.

Appendix 3 – Description of contemporary images

These images were presented simultaneously to participants in sample C during the third interview. Images cannot be reproduced due to copyright restrictions.

- **Image 1** – Image of Brad Pitt dressed casually in flat cap, sunglasses and jeans walking through an airport. He is depicted carrying his young son (also dressed in a flat cap) in a papoose, holding the hand of one of his adopted daughters. His partner and further children are visible in the background.
- **Image 2** – Picture of Obama family standing against a stone wall. All are dressed in winter clothing, smiling and waving at the camera.
- **Image 3** – Front cover of Reader's Digest Special Issue 2009. Close up of survival expert Bear Grylls topless, holding his newborn son in his hands and looking intently at him, plain grey background.
- **Image 4** – Picture of 12 year old Alfie Patton and baby which appeared in many tabloid newspapers during February 2009. Image shows him lying next to newborn baby (who is wearing a babygrow with 'I love mummy and daddy' written on it) and holding her hand. At the time the image was circulated in the media he was thought to be the child's father, although by the time the interviews took place this had been proved not to be the case.
- **Image 5** – Image of Thomas Beatie, a transgender man who became pregnant and gave birth to a child in 2008. The image, widely circulated in the media at the time shows the profile of a topless Beatie with a beard, hand on his pregnant stomach.

