



## **Working Paper – Qualiti/WPS/009**

### **Moving Stories: Using Mobile Methods to Explore the Everyday Lives of Young People in Public Care**

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### **Abstract**

'Accounting for mobilities in the fullest sense challenges social science to change both the objects of its inquiries and the methodologies for research', suggested Sheller and Urry (2006, p208), when discussing the 'new mobilities paradigm' in the social sciences. Responding to this, we explore the ways in which mobile research methods can be utilised to create enabling research environments, encounters and exchanges, generating time and space for participants and researchers to co-generate and communicate meaningful understandings of everyday lives. The paper focuses on the use of mobile methods in the (Extra)ordinary Lives project, an ethnographic and participatory research study that explored the everyday lives and relationship cultures of a group of young people in public care.

## **Introduction: Using mobile methods to research everyday lives**

The paper focuses on the use of mobile methods in an ethnographic and participatory research project that explored the everyday lives of a group of young people in care. The paper draws upon an emergent field within the social sciences, mobilities research, that focuses attention on journeys themselves as important in place-making practices (see, Binnie *et al.* 2007; Sheller and Urry, 2006). The new mobilities paradigm in the social sciences has turned attention to the ways in which mobile research methods can be utilised to understand everyday experiences through embodied, multi-sensory research experiences, as researchers accompany participants on journeys through their everyday locales. Journeys themselves are focused upon as dynamic, place-making practices foregrounding movement, interactivity and the multi-sensory. Sheller and Urry (2006) utilise Laurier's (2002) term 'copresent immersion', to encapsulate the sense of 'being there' in the modes of movement with participants, walking or travelling together, recording these embodied journeys as made and experienced together. Such mobile research practices are not new to the social sciences. They are part of classic ethnographic research activities, 'hanging about' with research subjects, and Pink (2007) discusses the practice of walking with others as a well established technique in visual anthropology. Within the field of Children's Geographies much research has been informed by the work of Ward (1978) and Hart (1979), who both walked with young people through their everyday locales as a means of researching children's environments. However in current research, greater emphasis is placed on being reflexive about the use of such mobile methods, in terms of research relationships, contexts and engagements (see Kusenbach 2003; Anderson 2004; Featherstone 2004; Lee and Ingold 2006; Binnie *et al.* 2007; Hall, Lashua and Coffey 2008; Moles 2008; Pink 2008). The importance given to being critically reflexive about research practice has been shaped by ethics debates within critical ethnographic practices, feminist research, and in participatory approaches to research (see Renold *et al.* 2008).

### ***No place without self and no self without place*<sup>1</sup>**

Many of the recent studies that utilise mobile methods are informed by phenomenological approaches to place, and the writing of Casey in particular, that:

‘The relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence ... but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is *no place without self and no self without place.*’ (Casey 2001, p684) (original emphasis)

Casey conflates his term ‘place-world’ with Soja’s (1996) term ‘thirdspace’ to emphasise the importance of ‘a world that is not only perceived or conceived but also actively *lived* and receptively *experienced*’, enacted through the body by processes of ‘outgoing’ (bodily encountering places) and ‘incoming’ (traces of place being inscribed on the body) over time shaping the meaning of places and significances of them for people (Casey, 2001, p687-688, original emphasis). Thus Moles (2008) draws upon such thirdspace theorising in discussion of her utilisation of walking as mobile research method to generate understandings of place and the making of place through research practice. Anderson (2004, p254) refers to the ‘inherently socio-spatial character of human knowledge’ that informs his ‘talking whilst walking’ research method, and Kusenbach (2003) discusses the ‘go-along’ method whereby researchers join participants on their everyday journeys as a means to contribute a phenomenological understanding of the ways in which individuals engage with their everyday environments. Pink (2008), drawing on Casey (1996), discusses her use of mobile methods in terms of place-making practices that can generate understandings of the mutually constitutive nature of people and place, and the ways in she, as researcher, is ‘involved in the constitution of ethnographic places’. This is a performative process, through the practice of our fieldwork we (researchers and participants) mutually construct the field, not a fixed field but rather ‘the field as event’, transformed over time through our continued practice, always in a state of becoming (Coleman and Collins 2006, p12). Many of the recent studies that utilise mobile research methods are also informed by de Certeau’s (1984) work emphasising the immediacy and nowness of walking,

and as Thrift (2004) discusses, of driving and 'passenger', as multi-sensory, place-making practices. Mundane practices and everyday experiences are subject to scrutiny, turning attention to the embodied experiences of different travel modes, constructing journeys as 'dwelling-in-motion' and focusing on the multitudes of activities they comprise (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p214).

### ***The productivity of shared experiential journeys***

In our research we see value in the sharing of embodied, experiential journeys as a means through which to gain meaningful understandings about our participants' everyday lives. We also view them as beneficial in enabling young people to actively participate in the research, contributing to our participatory methodology. These placed and place-making interactions were 'rooted' in young people's everyday locales, with researchers and the young people making experiential research journeys together. Immediacy, movement and interactivity were foregrounded in these methods and in response to this fluidity, time and space could be carved out by the young people to share their stories and narratives. As each negotiated the route taken together, meaningful exchanges were set within the mundane, and could remain partial or not discussed until such time as the young person wished to share more: as such, the mobile encounter offered researchers and participants time and space to experience closeness and distance. The multi-sensory experiences of mobile research encounters were foregrounded in these journeys as experienced, and as recorded in our data records of them. This focused attention on these research encounters as embodied, 'being there' with participants in their everyday locales. It also centred attention on the capacities of the various recording technologies to 'capture' these experiences: the movement, sounds, smells, rhythm, emotion, feel and so forth of these encounters. These mobile research encounters were recorded in researchers' fieldnotes and the young people made audio and/or video recordings of the walks and audio recordings of some of the car journey interactions. In our analysis of these we draw attention to differences in multi-sensory research encounters as experienced, as recorded, and as represented (see also Emmison and Smith, 2000; Dicks, Soyinka & Coffey, 2006; Pink 2008).

Two different mobile methods employed in our research are critically examined here; 'guided' walks and car journey interactions. 'Guided' walks involved a young person walking with a researcher, leading the researcher through locales of significance to them that formed part of their local geographies. The car journey interactions were generated as researchers and participants travelled together to and from designated fieldwork sites, journeys that formed part of the regular routines set up to facilitate young people's access to the fortnightly project sessions. Though different in format the 'guided' walks and car journey interactions had similarities, each lent the research encounter a degree of flexibility and openness, and yet an immediacy and connection to young people's everyday experiences. They generated insights into the young peoples' everyday lives, snippets of information on their often complex family relationships, their home(s), neighbourhoods, and peer relations, set within the wider context of everyday talk of the near and present (e.g. from their school day or places, people and things passed en route). Significantly, conversations were held when walking or sitting side by side, meaning that direct eye contact could easily be avoided, contributing to a relaxed and enabling research context. These interactions on the move and conversations that took place within them were a 'collage of collaboration', journeying through everyday locales, encountering and negotiating, the people, places and things that comprised the route (Anderson 2004, p260). These were encounters interspersed with interruptions, of stuttering, paused, lost, repeated exchanges, within which the intimate was interspersed with the mundane. Space for narratives to be shared was opened up, closed down, diverted, and revisited in response to the negotiation of these shared experiential journeys.

### **The (Extra)ordinary Lives research project**

This paper is informed by our experiences of conducting ethnographic, participatory research with a group of young people in public care. The research focused on the everyday lives and relationship cultures of these young people and the possibilities and challenges of enabling their active participation in the research process, from design through to dissemination. The project was

informed by participatory methodologies in childhood studies, where children and young people themselves are positioned centrally within the research process, generating accounts of their lives (see Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Christensen, 2004). We employed this participatory approach in response to the social location of the young people involved. Young people in care are a group subject to much scrutiny, their lives regularly monitored and assessed with aspects of their private lives discussed at review meetings and care proceedings. We did not wish to intensify this scrutiny and thus set out to create a research context that we hoped would enable the young people involved to set the limits on their own involvement in the research project (see Holland, *et al.*, 2008; Renold *et al.* 2008).

A brief overview of the project is given here to provide context for the discussion that follows. A team of four researchers worked from October 2006 to July 2007 with eight young people utilising a range of mobile and participatory methods to co-generate multi-media accounts and representations of the lives of this group of young people in public care. The project aimed to create a highly flexible and creative research environment that would enable the young participants to shape research encounters, express themselves through multiple means of communication and exercise control over the representations they generated (and chose to share) of their lives. It also adopted an ethnographic approach to record and explore the possibilities and challenges of enabling the active participation of young people in the research process. The 'data' generated is thus comprised of multiple, overlapping and intertwined strands.

Contact with the young people was initially built around fortnightly group project sessions, held at a local family centre, where a range of activities were made available (e.g. film-making, photography, music-making, and craft based activities). A decision was taken early on in the project to limit participants to those young people who attended the initial sessions held over the first couple of months, as they had attended regularly and formed a tightly-knit social group. The intensive nature of the project meant that it was not possible to increase the number of young people attending any one session and unethical, we felt, to restrict the attendance of those already involved in the research project. The

coherence the group took on was unanticipated as there was a wide age range, from age 10 to 20, 6 girls and 2 boys, all white and Welsh. Their care arrangements varied. At the time of fieldwork, 3 were in kinship care, 4 in foster care and 1 was living independently, and some had experienced living in residential settings. Not all of the research encounters were based around these project group sessions and it is part of the out of session one-to-one contact that this paper centres on: the 'guide' walks and car journey interactions, exploring the affordances of these mobile methods in creating enabling research contexts and generating meaningful understandings of young people's everyday lives.

### **'Guided' walks in young people's everyday locales**

The 'guided' walks typically involved a young person walking with a researcher, leading them through locales of significance to them that formed part of their everyday, local geographies. The term 'guided' walk' is used to give the participant led aspect of the research encounter prominence, and also to reflect the mode of movement involved. However, the inverted commas around guided are used to problematise this neat construction of one walker simply guiding another. Although the intention was that when walking together the participant, rather than researcher, should take the lead on decisions regarding the choice of route taken (over ground and in narratives) and their negotiation of this, the taking of the walk together meant of course that the walk formed part of a co-generated research encounter, with inputs from each interlacing in its construction. These research encounters were 'rooted' in the everyday present, yet they opened avenues for memories and imagined futures to be aired and explored. A key advantage of incorporating 'guided' walks into the methods used was that it allowed the young people involved to convey their movement through, and site themselves in, their everyday environments. Those that undertook walks with a researcher ably communicated their intimate knowledge of their localities. Attention was drawn to favoured places, features, animals and things passed and to their social relations in their localities, meeting places, play spaces, friend's homes, local shops etc, illustrating the richness that walking

with participants can bring to understandings of everyday lives, providing insights into young people's active, emotional and imaginative engagements in their localities. When discussing visual anthropologists' use of walking with whilst filming their subjects, Pink (2007, p247) suggests that this creates a 'sense of closeness to their experience' immersing the filmmaker in the locales of their subjects, 'hearing the definitions of the places and persons that make up the route' creating a 'form of sociality between filmmaker and subject as they walk and pause, alongside or behind.' For us, it was this immersion into the young people's everyday local geographies that was a key function of the 'guided' walks, the journeys as experienced.

***Making a walk together: a passageway to perspectives***

Solnit, (2001, p5-6) suggests that the act of walking itself creates, through its pace, a passageway to perspectives, with thoughts generated in rhythm, tumbling forth:

'The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it.'

These observations resonated with our own experiences. To illustrate we draw on the following extract from one researcher's fieldnotes (Nicola) written after a 'guided' walk with one young participant, Jodie introducing our construction of the 'guided' walks as meaning generating journeys through the present locales, associations, rememberings and imaginings of our participants:

'The playing field was a really peaceful spot, and from here you could see that the area was quite high up and we could see far around. As we were walking around Jodie quite openly talked about the places she liked going in the area, the park, friend's houses, where she walked her dog, the swimming pool, the

chip shop. My lack of knowledge of the area and me mentioning this seems to add to this with Jodie pointing out places or telling me where places were in relation to where we were and where we would be heading to ... the conversation moved around, jumping from one subject to another, in response to things spotted as we walked along, moving from talking about the area to talking about her relations with her friends and family, about the clubs she went to, talked for quite a while about the rock club she goes to at school and her interest in music, to telling wee stories from the past, that something we'd seen or mentioned had sparked off, coming back again to talk about things she'd started talking about earlier but not finished off, very easy flow to the conversation.'

(Extract from Researcher's Fieldnotes 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007)

Jodie's 'guided' walk took place in and around the housing estate on the outskirts of the city where she lived. The researcher, Nicola, journeyed with Jodie along the multitude of paths and routes that Jodie knew in her local area, through natural areas and parks that she valued, stopping as Jodie filmed (using a small handheld camcorder) these places, special to her, and the birds in the trees, the pond and the mole hills. This research journey conveyed the centrality of animals in Jodie's life, her strong sense of place and locally based relations that her kinship placement had maintained. She and her siblings were now living in the local area with her grandparents. The 'guided' walk was key in the process of opening out for us the more tightly framed notions and concerns of 'placement' common in social work discourse, to give due attention to place as constitutive, integral to the making of self, as Casey (2001) discusses. Lee and Ingold place emphasis on walking with is a productive means to comprehend relationships between people and place, and that by focusing on the mobilities of others we can come to unravel the ways in which place itself is comprised of multiple interlacing routes. Lines of lives mapped out in the 'oft-repeated walks', the mundane, everyday journeys that through repetition 'produce a thicker association of the route with the walker' (Lee and Ingold, 2006, p77).

The 'guided' walks we undertook placed the young people's everyday locales at the centre of the research encounter, focusing attention on their everyday negotiation of their locales and providing a means through which to share their past memories, associations, and future imaginings that the journey brought to mind. In the following extract, a transcript created from the audio recording made of the 'guided' walk, Jodie shares a story about her dog, and how he came to be part of her family, the conversation rolling on from our noticing of two dogs that were being walked in the park by their owner. This captures just one incidence of a meaningful exchange set within the mundane, that the method affords. As the conversation unfolds it speaks to Jodie's, and her family's attachment to their dog, and to animals generally, and to her own and her family's thoughts on care and family. The open flow of the talk and lack of direct or probing questioning from the researcher allowed these details to emerge, yet remain only partially revealed, Jodie herself setting the boundaries of what she wished to share.

Jodie: I like those sort of dogs.  
Nicola: Aha, they're quite cute, aren't they?  
Jodie: I like small dogs.  
Nicola: They're quite funny when they run.  
Jodie: When we first had my dog, Charlie, um he was skinny and, 'cause like the last owner he had didn't look after him.  
Nicola: Oh, did he get, not treated very well?  
Jodie: Yeah, and my nan went down the pet shop, down the place where you get the dogs from. She walked in, she seen Charlie, she goes, she was with my auntie, she goes "Sharon, I want that dog by there." And my auntie, the first thing she said was, "Mum, I think you'd better go round and look, there'll be better dogs than him."  
Nicola: Aha  
Jodie: And then my nan says, goes "Oh yeah I know, but I want that one by there." So then they looked round and they come back to Charlie and my mum, my nan, ehm, she was like, she asked the man whether she could take him home, like the day she seen him,

and they said no, because they've got to keep him for like another week or so.

Nicola: Ah, to sort of

Jodie: Yeah, to see whether the owners come back.

Nicola: Ah. So they get a wee while to change their mind then do they after they put them in?

Jodie: Yeah. But my nan said, "Oh if the, if the owner ain't very nice with her, like treats her like dirt, then why should she have her back, or they have her back, because they don't deserve animals.

Nicola: Aha, because they weren't looking after it very well.

Jodie: But my nan loved it.

Nicola: But the owner didn't come back then so she got it?

Jodie: Pardon?

Nicola: The owners didn't come back then, so that was alright?

Jodie: Yeah. So she had the dog in the end.

Nicola: Aha

Jodie: And then like when we first had, when we had. Shall we go in here or?

Nicola: Yeah, we'll go up this way.

Jodie: When we had him, he was skinny, his colour of his fur changed

Nicola: Aha

Jodie: It was like all light and everything. But now it's gone darker, he's put on a bit of weight.

Nicola: Oh, he looks healthy now, yeah.

Jodie: Yeah, he's had a hair cut, because when we first had him, he, all this ears were like, because they're quite fluffy

Nicola: Aha

Jodie: It was all mangled and the skin was like

Nicola: Wasn't getting brushed properly and everything.

Jodie: My nan tried to brush it but like she couldn't get through it because of all the knots. So she had a cut, had it cut in the summer and now he's gone way better than he was.

Jodie generally preferred not to engage in much talk of an intimate or private nature during her involvement in the research, indeed she consented to take part in the research only after receiving reassurance that it was not a form of therapy in which she might feel forced to talk about her past experiences. Instead she concentrated much more on expressing what she wanted to share with us about her everyday life through the many photographs she took of her siblings, cousins, pets, toys, animals, conveying some of the relationships of importance to her, or through music making, drawing more on her creative interests to express herself. The 'guided' walk was one of the few occasions that she engaged in intimate talk. She rarely mentioned her mother or any details of her life when she lived with her mother, yet on the walk when talking about her knowledge and experiences of the local area, she made reference to this time, making connections through her focus on animals or places in the present, to remembered events involving pets she had whilst living with her mum. As in her recounting in the extract above of the day that Charlie the dog was spotted by her grandmother, taken into their family, cared for and nursed back to health, many of these stories she shared had a tragic undercurrent. The neglected dog that her grandmother saved, the dog she had whilst living with her mum that got stuck in the pond and had to be rescued, the hamsters that fought one day, injuring each other so badly that one died. It is perhaps revealing to note that at the start of the extract about Charlie the dog Jodie refers to the previous owner as male, not looking after the male dog Charlie, yet, part way through, changes the pronoun to her for the dog and refers to the previous owner as female before utilising the plural: 'if the owner ain't very nice with her, like treats her like dirt, then why should she have her back, or they have her back, because they don't deserve animals', giving insights to her own constructs of caring, and perhaps also making connections to her own personal experiences of care and neglect here. We can only surmise, given Jodie's reluctance to discuss directly with us these more private aspects of her life, and following our ethical framework, our respect for the young people's right to share with us only the details of their lives that they wished to share, preventing further exploration.

We were conscious of the heightened scrutiny that surrounded these young people's lives, children in care being frequently asked to comment upon their lives to a range of professionals and having intimate details of their lives discussed in various meetings. In our research practice we sought to counter what Skeggs (2004) refers to, in her account of *The Methods That Make Classed Selves*, as the 'forced telling' that the working classes, and women in particular, have historically been subject to. We did not seek other means of collating information about the young people's lives, such as through case histories, and focused solely on working with the young people to aid them in producing their own multi-media identity projects, conveying their own representations of their everyday lives, and respecting the boundaries they placed around this. We have discussed our ethical stance towards our research practice and the collaborative, participatory approach we adopted in this research at length elsewhere (see Renold *et al.* (2008); Holland *et al.* (2008) and Renold and Holland (2006)).

### ***Disrupting routes: dead ends, diversions and meanderings***

The 'guided' walks had an unstructured, flexible format, responding to the direction and interests of the young person as they walked with the researcher through settings familiar to them. Although the aim was for the young person to 'guide' and shape much of the structure of the journey, deciding on the route, the pace and the pauses, the reality of the journey, shared and experienced together, meant that the journey was at all times co-generated. The following extract, a transcript created from an audio recording from a 'guided' walk, where one young person, Megan, is out in her locality with Nicola (researcher), draws attention to disruptions to the idea of the walk as participant guided (over ground and in narratives). The researcher's perceptions of immediate risks, perhaps heightened by Megan's learning difficulties, increasingly impact on the research interactions and the researcher begins to impose constraints on the route taken as the walk continues and starts to direct talk to focus on what she perceives as immediate risks, cutting off routes into other conversations that Megan wishes to take. Though interestingly this extract also reveals some of the ways in which the walk offered up the opportunity for such power

differentials to be challenged. Megan, seeming to pick up on Nicola's anxiety, draws upon her knowledge of her local area to reassure Nicola that she knows well the route that she is taking and will get them home safely:

Nicola: And watch for the cars. Yeah, we'll just wait here until it's passed.  
Okay, we can cross over now. Do you want to cross now?

Megan: No, 'cause I'm walking down here.

Nicola: Ah, we're walking on this side.

Megan: Don't worry about that side! We'll get home alright, don't worry.

Nicola: Aha.

Megan: There's the river. It goes that way.

Nicola: So you're on this side then?

Megan: Yep. That's the, ehm, park.

Nicola: And you normally take the routes that aren't the path then?

Megan: Yeah. Me and my cousin, me and my cousin will either walk that way or if not we'll walk this way.

Nicola: Aha.

Megan: Any way. The only time my sister walks this way to her friend's house and if not to school. I told my mum that she's going out.  
Eh! Shoes look alright now!

The routes taken by Megan, often bypassed the laid out route of the formal path, as she walked along her own paths through her everyday locality, breaking and bending the rules that were laid out by others. In the audio recording of this extract parts of the talk are difficult to hear, almost drowned by the sounds of the passing cars, speeding by, as we walk along the grassy verge at the side of a busy road that runs around the housing estate. Listening carefully you can hear our feet squelching in the mud as we walk along the rain soaked grassy verge. In the researcher's voice you can hear her heightening anxiety and breathlessness, walking at quite a fast pace, uphill, along a muddy verge, following the route that Megan has chosen, that runs beside the busy road. The extract from Nicola's fieldnotes written up afterwards describes the risks perceived and recounts the dilemmas faced as she decided to share her

concerns with the young person and control the direction of both the route taken on the walk and the subject of conversation.

'As we walked around the area it became clear that Megan had her own routes for walking around the area that bypassed the paths laid out. After leaving the first park instead of following the path and crossing the main road using the underpass, she led me up the grassy bank, very wet and muddy after all the rain, and walked along the side of the main road. There was no pavement here just a grass verge and not much room to walk along easily at parts with the main road on one side and the verge formed into a steep grassy bank. I was a bit concerned about this and tried to keep between Megan and the road and after finding out that this was a route she often took raised the issue of road safety and that it could be a bit of a dangerous way to walk because of the traffic ... There were another couple of incidents as we walked home, a couple of routes that took us along a narrow verge by the busy main road that again I felt alarmed about her walking along, and raised again the road safety issue, telling her to watch the cars, and ended up suggesting other routes away from the traffic and onto the paths and asking why she didn't use the paths and underpasses. She said her nan tells her to use them and that she might get knocked down if she doesn't. I started repeating her nan's advice saying that would be good to follow. I'm not sure how much of this Megan was taking in though, or wanted to take in ... These interactions are difficult sometimes, hard to gauge at what point to intervene, commenting, guiding, controlling, focusing on own judgements of risks, conscious of my adult responsibilities to protect children I work with and how this leads to me controlling the encounters at times impacting on the child participant-adult researcher relationship.'

(Extract from Researcher's Fieldnotes 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007)

The mobile research encounters were interspersed with such disruptions, meaning that certain narratives were lost. As the extract shown pointed to, much of Megan's narratives about places being passed were lost, yet these disruptions led onto the sharing of other narratives. Talk turned to the routes Megan takes, to her awareness of risks and to safety messages she receives

from her family. The plethora of encounters, diversions and disruptions that comprised the experience of the walk, permitted such distracted rather than attentive listening. It allowed the conversations to jump around, incorporating the intimate and the mundane, the near and present, remembered and imagined, in the free flowing movement of the walk and talk allowing young people to share their narratives in a manner which resonated with the meanderings of everyday conversations.

***Engagements and disengagements: pacing the sharing of narratives***

Hall, Lashua and Coffey (2008, p1030) when discussing their use of mobile methods, whereby young people led researchers on 'walking tours' of their local neighbourhoods, reframed these encounters as soundwalks, the 'mobile exploration of (local) space and soundscapes', after coming to recognise the productive effect of movement and noise in shaping these research encounters:

'Noise (also movement) breaks up conversation, or rather punctuates it, gives it an everyday rhythm of stops and starts ... Interviews as, or nested within, soundwalks lose focus – to productive effect; they *range*, topically as well as topographically. This wandering returns conversation to the everyday, and noise augments this process ... supplying an aggregate, ambient bustle and hum in the midst of which one's own voice becomes ordinary again – just one sound among many.' (Hall, Lashua and Coffey (2008, p1034) (original emphasis).

Lee and Ingold (2006) reflect on walking with as a rich way of socialising, closeness created through shared bodily engagement with the environment, sensing all that is going on around as the route is taken in step. They contrast the experience of walking with that of other modes of travel, walking (as opposed to driving) having a pace that allows time to look around, to observe detail, to feel the surroundings, the ground, the weather, and so on. As in our research, the situatedness of these research encounters in the everyday locales of participants was key in creating a context in which they could talk freely about their everyday lives in a spontaneous way. These shared journeys lent the

research interactions an open and evolving format. Conversation gaps, which may have appeared particularly huge in the stillness of a more static, fixed location interview, were less noticeable, the conversation itself only one contribution to the mass of other elements that comprised the journey – the people, places and things passed and sounds, sights, smells, feel and so forth of these encounters. The rhythm of the walk offering potential for engagements and disengagements, walking in unison disrupted by quickening or slowing of pace, moving towards and away from each other. Walking with young people through their everyday locales triggered the sharing of narratives from the mundane to the intimate and significant, the rhythm of the journey creating a context through which young people could pace the sharing of their narratives. Motion and emplaced knowledge mediating normative generational power relations. For further discussion of power relations embedded in participatory research as dynamic and relational see Holland *et al.* (2008).

### **Car journey interactions: the productiveness of the routine**

Walking with young people through their everyday locales was not the only way in which mobile methods were utilised in this research project and we now turn attention to the second of the methods, the car journey interactions. The relevance of the car journey interactions to our research emerged as the project unfolded. It became clear that the journeys that formed part of the regular routines set up to facilitate young people's access to and participation in the research project were a significant research context in themselves. The car journeys differed from the 'guided' walks in terms of mode of movement used, the 'guiding' of the route, and in terms of their frequency.

Generally the shortest or most easily negotiable route was taken between pick up and drop off points. Knowledge of the routes to take between young people's homes or schools and the project session location developed over time with more set routes becoming established. Although young people shared their knowledge of their city with the researchers (some of whom were more familiar with the city than others – getting lost was a frequent occurrence for some

researchers) generally getting from arrival to destination point shaped the route taken. However, there was scope for diversions to be made, passing by places of importance to the young person, taking a route via a local park or a former home area, with young people sometimes capitalising on researchers lack of knowledge of the city to choose a preferred route. Whilst the 'guided' walks were generally undertaken only once, the car journeys were repeated fortnightly. Set routines were established over time with young people often being collected and dropped off by the same researcher for each of the sessions. The regularity of the routine meant that relations between certain young people and researchers were strengthened during this one-to-one contact time, each becoming increasingly familiar with the other. The regularity of the routine, over time, also created familiarity with the cars used for these journeys and with the routes taken.

### ***Car dwelling***

There is increasing interest in the embodied practices of driving and 'passenger-ing', the emotional, multi-sensory experiences of car dwelling, within the mobilities literature (see Thrift 2004; Sheller 2004; Laurier *et al.* 2008). For instance, Featherstone (2004, p9) drawing on Baudrillard (1996, p67) constructs the car as 'an abode', 'a closed realm of intimacy' but one that is 'endowed with a formal freedom of great intensity'. Bull (2003, p264-367) when discussing the soundscapes of the car, mainly from drivers' perspectives, discusses the opportunities that regular car travel affords for reflection, solitude, liberation and enjoyment, with music often playing a central role.

With regards to children's experiences of carspace, the car has been constructed as 'supervised, bounded space' (Barker 2003, p137) often symbolised as a 'protective capsule' through which the dangerous world is traversed (Sibley 1995, p136). Sibley suggests that car travel affords children a means through which to observe but not to interact or experience their environment in a direct way - a backseat mobile view of the world. The direct outdoor experience, pleasurable or otherwise is missing. Research on school journeys suggests that 'boredom' may characterise children's passengering

experiences, one study finding that many children expressed a desire for a more active and autonomous travel mode (Mitchell, Kearns and Collins (2006). Ross (2007; 2002) also emphasised the greater opportunities that independent negotiation of school journeys (walking, cycling or bus travel without adult accompaniment) offered children to engage in and with their localities in active and imaginative ways - socialising, playing, sensing. However, positive associations with car passengering were also reported with children placing importance on what they were able to see from the car and the potential that carspace offered as a time for reflection and relaxation. Barker (2003, p143) emphasised children's agency in decision-making processes, contributing to debates regarding car use and car space, with regards to for instance, music choice or seating arrangements, such negotiations illustrative of the 'micro-geographies of familial politics'.

Our study had a different context, the sharing of car space, by researcher and young person. As with the 'guided' walks, discussion here focuses on the productiveness of the shared car journey in creating enabling research contexts and in generating meaningful understandings about our participants' everyday lives. Usually there were only two people in the car, a researcher and young person, meaning that the oft coveted front passenger seat could be occupied by the young person. The importance placed by young people on sitting in the front was evident in the odd instances when there were more passengers, with various negotiations and squabbles held to settle the seating arrangements. Great pleasure was derived especially when common practice of adults in the front children in the back was revoked. Being in the front provides a more prominent position in the car, better access to the driver, the car controls and view of the surroundings. Laurier *et al.* (2008) in their observations of various forms of shared car journeys looked at the ways in which cars 'framed' interactions, 'audibly sealed' yet 'publicly visible', the motion of the car contrasted with relative immobility in the interior space, the rowed seating arrangements directing gaze forwards not toward each other, conversations punctuated by pauses and breaks, and other activities, listening to the radio, looking out of the window. They suggest this context aided interspersions of more serious or difficult conversations within the mundane of the routinised

journey – conversations that ‘might generate pauses, need pauses, and yet want those pauses not to become too uncomfortable.’ Likewise, Ferguson (2008) pointed to the potential of routinised car journeys to create a place of communication when commenting upon the car journey as a site of social work practice. Referring to instances when social workers travel with young people in public care for access visits, to new placements, or for meetings, he constructs the car journey itself as a valuable time for talk between practitioner and young person.

***Directing intimacies: moving between the mundane and the meaningful***

Looking at the productiveness of the method with regards to research interactions, communicated quite clearly is the potential for the generation of free flowing conversation. Talk of interest to our substantive research themes was set within the more everyday car talk of routes and directions, the mundane talk of driving and passengering, as the following extract demonstrates. This transcript from an audio extract of a car journey interaction takes place as Rosie and Sally (researcher) travel together on one of their regular journeys home from a fieldwork session.

Sally:	So you still see some of your dad’s family do you even though you don’t see your dad?
Rosie:	They lives across the road from him, from me.
Sally:	Oh really?
Rosie:	Not my mum.
Sally:	Yeah.
Rosie:	Her house, - You just go up there and turn and there is my house, yeah.
Sally:	Yeah.
Rosie:	The other day my sister
Sally:	Yeah
Rosie:	Are you going straight up?
Sally:	I have gone this way now, yeah.

Rosie: Yeah, my sister, has seen him, my dad up -  
Sally: Oh 'cause it's funny because we were just talking him last time and you were saying that you hadn't seen him for years.  
Rosie: I know! I haven't, but my sister has seen him, but I don't want to see him. No way will !!  
Sally: No. And how did your sister feel about it?  
Rosie: Well it's not her dad is it? We're  
Sally: Oh I see.  
Rosie: We're like half sisters  
Sally: I know you are.  
Rosie: But we think we're like, we're proper sisters  
Sally: Yeah  
Rosie: 'Cause we've got a different dad.  
Sally: Yeah  
Rosie: Yeah, we, we, um, we thinks we're real sisters. Though really we are.  
Sally: It is how you feel that matters. Isn't it?  
Rosie: Yeah, but we got like, - Go straight up here if you want. I know the way.  
Sally: Ok, show me a different way.

This extract, like many of the conversations Rosie and Sally shared as they travelled back and forth together, was interspersed with intimate talk about places passed and associations with events that took place there involving Rosie and her family. Rosie is in kinship care. She lives with her grandparents and has regular contact with her mother. Through these regular car journeys we gained insights into her everyday life at home and in her locality and issues of importance to her: the strong locally based ties to family and neighbourhood, her longing to live with her mum again, her two bedrooms, tensions in family relations between her mum and dad's side of the family, her close relationship with her half sister, fights she has with her brother, trips to the dentist, her favourite teddy, adults of significance to her (and other children) in her locality, such as the man who fixes bikes. These insights into Rosie's everyday life would not have been gleaned from more structured interviews – as with the

other younger participants involved in the study direct questioning with Rosie generated scant response. Questions were often ignored outright, the subject changed, or participants removed themselves physically from such direct engagements.

In the confines of the car, creating distance was achieved through various orientations of the body, looking or leaning out of the window, leaning forward to search for a CD to play or radio channel to listen to, looking down to play with a handheld game or mobile phone. We have discussed elsewhere young people's process of 'becoming participant' and the ways in which we learnt to pick up on the cues that signalled young people's disengagements from the research process (Renold *et al.* 2008; Hillman *et al.* 2008). The multitude of occurrences that the journey threw up and activities that could be focused upon offered the young people greater opportunity to decide when to engage in conversation and to direct the subject of this. Observations of people, places and things passed en route could inform talk, fiddling with the radio, CDs, the car windows, the temperature controls, and so on, gave the young people scope to direct and divert conversations. This lack of an intense focus on the talk itself, unlike the context of more structured interviews held in stillness, was key in enabling the young people to share their stories at their own pace. Distractedness, rather than attentiveness a productive element of these mobile research encounters.

### ***Motion, commotion and the multi sensory***

Cars are noisy. They are filled with sounds from places passed en route and with noises created in the car – turning on the radio, singing along. The mobile experience of the journey interrupts and disrupts, as the researcher negotiates the route, alternating focus between being an attentive driver and being an engaged listener, active in the conversation, and as people, places and things passed en route are commented upon. Like Hall, Lashua and Coffey (2008) we suggest that noise and movement, and we would argue the multitude of visual stimuli, and other sensory cues that comprise embodied shared journeys, are productive in creating enabling research contexts and engagements. Such embodied and mobile research interactions, immersed in the ordinary

commotion of the everyday were effective in aiding young people to manage the pacing, generation and sharing of accounts of their everyday lives and for researchers to gain meaningful understandings of these accounts.

To illustrate this further we now we turn to the enabling capacity of noise in relation to research engagements and disengagements. Bull (2003, p264-367; 2008) looking at 'car habitation' (mainly from the perspective of solo drivers) suggests that listening to music in the confined, privatised space of the car, with the volume turned up high enough to drown out the other soundscapes of the journey such as the car engine or noises from the surroundings, transforms the driving experience into a more liberating one. This association of car space with freedom was also evident in our study despite the different context, the sharing of car space, by researcher and young person. The following extract, a transcript from an audio recording taking place as Cerys and Emma (researcher) make one of their regular journeys to a fieldwork session demonstrates Cerys' utilisation of the car stereo, and the great degree of control she had of this during the car journeys, to allow her to create her own auditory sphere. Here, Cerys who has just been collected directly from school by Emma spends the first 5 minutes or so of the journey detailing a fight she had with another girl. The extract shown catches the end of this conversation, with Cerys drawing this narrative to a close.

Cerys: Well my old key worker Julie, who I'm really close to, works in her home, in Sadie's home, the girl who I had a fight with.

Emma: Oh really.

Cerys: And she was on duty that night and then Gary phoned up and said, "Sadie's just got beat up by Cerys." And she went, "Cerys who?" He went, "Little Cerys who used to live here." And she went, "Some things never change." And then she got home, - Sadie and Gary said that she's gonna get home, - and she said, she has a go at Julie over me. She was like, - then Julie said, "Well Cerys put you in your place guaranteed, 'cause Cerys' done, always been like that. And she would have battered hell out of you

so that's what you get for starting on the wrong girl and saying the wrong thing."

Emma: Oh really.

Cerys: She said, "Now hopefully you've learned your lesson 'cause if you don't she'll just do it again." Oh look they've got the same car, down there. All the way down there now. Loser. It was really funny, I was like that, yeah, OK, alright.

Emma: Is that the home that we drove by?

Cerys: I'm going ice-skating tomorrow.

Emma: Are you?

Cerys: Yeah.

Emma: Again.

Cerys: With my mum.

Emma: Cool. Oh your mum!

Cerys: Thanks for the pictures. Yeah. Mad in it.

Emma: Yeah. That's, that's something different in it?

Cerys: Tell you what I haven't had on

[Cerys turns radio on, then looks for a CD to play.]

Emma: I know it's all I've got at the moment. Oh. I meant to bring some more.

Cerys: Shut up. [Cerys says to the radio as she puts on an Amy Winehouse CD and sings along]

Cerys uses music, first trying the radio, then a CD, as a means to bring to an end some intimate talk. She draws herself away from the intimate talk first by drawing on what she can see, beginning to talk about what's going on around her, she changes subjects rapidly, ignores Emma's inputs, then turns on the radio, searches for a CD to play and finally starts to sing along. In doing so she makes difficult the possibility for further conversation. Many of the latter car journeys that Cerys and Emma made together became increasingly dominated by the music which Cerys selected to play, with certain tracks by artists such as Amy Winehouse and Lily Allen played repeatedly<sup>2</sup>. Cerys increasingly exerted control over when to play music, what music to play and at what volume – usually loud, which often resulted in a turning up/turning down battle for the

control of the volume with Emma, and often a replaying of tracks over and over again by Cerys if the music was talked over. Cerys' immersion in the music appeared pronounced at such times. Emma describes this change in the following extract taken from her fieldnotes:

'She gets into the car, and the first thing she does is tell me that she wants to play the music real loud like last time. Last session (as the digital recorder picked up!!) she tuned into KissFM (radio station) and blasted music with the windows down almost the whole way to the project. She enjoyed this so much, she said that she pleads with me to do it again. I say fine – but not for long this time (wanting on one hand to protect my ears, the speakers, the public and my head and on the other we have some really great chats in the car about school, home, etc.)'.

(Extract from Researcher's Fieldnotes 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007)

Arkette (2004, p160) argues that sound 'is never a neutral phenomenon. Each sound is imbued with its own lexical code: sound as sign, symbol, index; as ostensibly defining a personal territory in the case of the ghettoblaster or car stereo' and that these 'sound markers' can be used to reinforce identity. The flexibility and openness of the car journey interactions facilitated young people's expression of such identity markers and exploration of these musical identity markers by the researchers in conversations held with young people at the time, or revisited later.

As the extract from Emma's fieldnotes indicates, researchers did not overly impose boundaries on young people's activities in the car<sup>3</sup> - the young people decided on where to sit, usually choosing the front passenger seat, decided whether to record the journeys, to talk, to listen to the radio, play music, sing along, open the window, shout out to people on the street, and so on. The main constraints centred on what the researchers deemed to be excessive volume of the music (or of the young person themselves) and what impact this was having on the surroundings and people being passed by. It was clear that Cerys was capitalising upon her freedom to be 'hyper', a term she often used to describe

herself when she was being loud and animated and making her presence felt to those around. This contrasted with what we had learned of her quiet, more subdued demeanour that characterised her behaviour when at home (or in the car) with her foster parents. She thus separated herself from the researcher, through turning up of the volume, cutting off or making difficult any continued conversation. Emma's wish to turn down the volume, as she mentions, is partly in recognition that this valuable context for research engagements, conversations about Cerys' everyday life that routinely take place as part of these journeys are lost to the music. Cerys' noise generation, playing music loud or shouting out of the window, are means through which she can disengage herself from the research context, and during the journey make herself publicly audible as well as 'publicly visible' (Laurier *et al.* 2008).

Liam had a different strategy for disengaging from the more central substantive concerns of the project. He often brought talk of a more intimate nature about his everyday life to a close by focusing more on one of his interests, cars, by referring to other cars he observed on the road, as this extract from Nicola's fieldnotes recounts:

'As we drive along he [Liam] comments on loads of the cars that we pass, usually the sporty types like Subaru's – he counted 7 Carerras altogether on our journeys to and from the centre. He likes the ones that have been heavily customised too, but also talked about what kind of car he'd get when he could drive, and said that would be maybe a smaller Ford, [or] a Corsa. This kind of chat about cars fills much of the journey time, interspersed with me asking about what he'd been up to in the past couple of weeks. But he keeps coming back to cars again and again, as he spots another one to comment on as we drive along, but also I think to change the subject sometimes when I'm asking about things he's not interested in talking about.'

(Extract from Researcher's Fieldnotes 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007)

The capacity for such disengagements demonstrates the effectiveness of the mobile methods in supporting our participatory aims, of working collaboratively

with the young people to allow them to generate, in their own time, their own representations of their everyday lives. The mobile and multi-sensory journeys enabling young people to lever some control over the scope of their research engagements.

### ***'Capturing' mobile research experiences***

Moving on from our discussion of mobile methods as experienced and their potential to contribute to the creation of enabling research contexts and meaningful understandings of young people's everyday lives, it is pertinent also to focus attention more directly on the recordings of these research encounters themselves. The differing recording formats were of interest not only in terms of the affordances of the different media in 'capturing the field' but from our heightened interest in young people's use of these technologies, acknowledging that young people's engagement in the project, and use of these technologies, told us much about them, in addition to the representations they generated of their everyday lives using the different media.

A range of different recording means were used. The 'guided walks were generally filmed and/or audio recorded by the young people as part of the journey, and recorded by researchers subsequently in their fieldnotes. Unlike the 'guided' walks the car journeys were a routinised part of the research project meaning that the means of recording these was subject to change or establishing over time. For example, Cerys audio recorded most of the journeys she took with Emma (researcher) to and from the fortnightly project sessions, although as discussed, the nature of these interactions changed over time as Cerys became increasingly focused on playing music rather than talking during many of the latter journeys. Rosie usually audio recorded half the journey then replayed the recording for the remainder of the trip, listening. The two boys involved in the project did not want to audio record their regular journeys to the project and the only records we have of these journeys are in the researchers' fieldnotes<sup>4</sup>.

The different means of recording drew attention to what is captured, and to what is lost when representing research experiences in data records. For example, the video recordings of the 'guided' walks captured well the feel of the terrain being traversed, the footsteps on the ground, the route as negotiated, and the pauses and focusing of attention on places and features of interest to the young person, as the act of filming took precedence over the act of walking or talking. They often contained much shaky footage, the small hand-held camcorders hard to keep steady as the young person filmed whilst walking along or filmed close-up shots using the zoom facility. The video recordings conveyed the mobile experiences of the walks, rather than being polished, conventionally framed products and offered the opportunity to explore the changing focus, the meshing of motion, talk, and to more concentrated recording. The audio-recordings of the in-car interactions that were made capture the soundscapes (talk, singing, radio, car sounds, street sounds) of the journey. However, in the transcribing process much of this multi-sensory data is overlooked, our transcripts of these journeys centre attention on the conversations that were held, omitting reference to much of the soundscapes within which these conversations were set or to the visual material recorded. However as Hall, Lashua and Coffey (2008, p1037) remind us in eliminating these everyday soundscapes, we eliminate the sounds of the place and the potential of sound to inform qualitative inquiry (see also Bull and Back 2008). In our analysis we move between the original recordings and the transcripts of these and in our outputs and representations of this research we are exploring ways of integrating the different media. The various records that have been produced of these journeys, the video and audio recordings produced by the young people and our own fieldnotes, allow us to revisit these mobile methods in our analysis, and in doing so, generate insights into the affordances of the different recording technologies in representing this experience.

## **Conclusion**

The new mobilities paradigm in the social sciences problematises sedentarism, thinking that normalises the static, bounded and rigidly 'placed' as the

cornerstones of identity and experience. Attention is increasingly paid to the 'complex interrelation between travel and dwelling, home and not-home' (Sheller and Urry (2006, p211) in mobilities research and to appropriate methods for researching such experiences through the development of mobile research methods. This study incorporated mobile methods in research that focused upon the everyday lives of a group of young people in care. It sought to avoid the outcome-based, fixed portrayal of children in care as 'failed subjects' with poor educational, emotional, behavioural and health prospects (DfES 2006, Garrett 1999), instead creating a flexible and creative research environment that responded to the young people's cultures of communication to co-generate meaningful representations of their everyday lives.

This paper discussed the ways in which mobile research methods can be utilised to create enabling research environments, encounters and exchanges, generating time and space for participants and researchers to co-generate and communicate meaningful understandings of everyday lives. For us the use of mobile methods offered much value in generating rich accounts of the everyday lives of young people in care and supported our participatory approach, connecting well with the young people's own cultures of communication. We found that the interactions that took place on the move were dynamic, characterised by a more free flowing dialogue, moving from topic to topic, returning to previous topics, allowing unstrained gaps and pauses. The pressure to converse was removed somewhat from these research encounters, the experience of the journey in motion, throwing up diversions to such attentiveness to each other revealing the productivity of distraction. In line with our thinking, Lee and Ingold (2006, p67-68) refer to 'attunement' when purporting that 'walking does not, in and of itself, yield an experience of embodiment, nor is it necessarily a technique of participation' it is the act of *walking with* that is important in these respects that 'walking affords an experience of embodiment to the extent that it is grounded in the inherently sociable engagement between self and the environment'. We would agree that such 'attunement' is key to the utilisation of mobile methods in line with a participatory ethos. We have discussed at length elsewhere that such methods can be seen within a participatory paradigm as enabling young people to exert

some choice over their means and level of involvement in a research project by allowing opportunities to generate data on their own terms and to interrupt the flow of data generation as they wish (Holland *et al.*, 2008).

The two mobile research methods focused upon, 'guided' walks and car journey interactions, were each successful in generating insightful understandings of these young people's everyday lives. These methods centred on researchers and young people taking experiential journeys together through young people's everyday locales and utilised a variety of text-based and audio-visual recording means to record these embodied multi-sensory research encounters. The utilisation of mobile methods connected the researchers to the everyday lives of the young people participating in the study, as each negotiated the routes taken together, young people placed themselves in their everyday locales, interweaving their narratives of the mundane ordinariness of the everyday with the intimate details of their personal histories and future imaginings. These placed and place making research engagements respond to Casey's notions of the inter-relatedness of self and place and point to the benefits of utilising and reflecting upon such context specific research interactions in our research practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Casey (2001, p684)

<sup>2</sup> These two female artists had high profile careers at the time of fieldwork, both having chart success and intense media interest in their lives, the two often being compared and contrasted with each other. Their private lives were frequently conveyed as troubled in the media, with details of drug use, drunkenness and relationship problems widely reported.

<sup>3</sup> Basic safety was always ensured, such as the wearing of seatbelts and all children were old and tall enough for their sitting in the front passenger seat to be legal.

<sup>4</sup> One of the boys, Liam not want his conversations audio recorded, yet was happy for the researchers to record these conversations in their fieldnotes (see Holland *et al.* (2008)). Over time Ryan increasingly disengaged with the research focus of the project, yet was still fully engaged in the project's social activities. As per Ryan's directions we include details on his participation in the project but not on the details of his everyday life (see Renold *et al.* (2008)). The other young people involved in the project did not travel regularly with researchers to the project (two transported by family members and the two older participants often made their own travel arrangements) and as such they are present in only a few of the audio recordings made of car journey interactions.

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