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Wendy Drewery,
Education Studies Department,
University of Waikato,
Hamilton,
New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the psychological concept of identity development is constructed from ideals of maturity which support the political purposes of economic rationalism. This privileges vocational identity above other aspects, and in so doing marginalises the activities and purposes of large groups of adults.

A reconceptualisation of developmental subjectivity as inscribed in life projects is proposed. This concept places emphasis on directionality and subjective purposes in defining self and asserting agency. The reconceptualisation is illustrated with case studies of four women.

It is concluded that in the usual discourse of adult development and learning the agendas of these lives are invisible, and therefore not generally open for discussion as developmental processes.

This paper examines the relevance of paid work to identity development in adulthood. The weak thesis of this paper is that the psychological concept of identity development is constructed from ideals of maturity which are outdated in the current economic and global climate. I shall argue that by centralising vocational development as paid work in identity development, developmental psychologists support the political purposes of economic rationalism, and the continuing marginalisation of large groups of adults. The argument will be supported by four case studies which form part of a broader study undertaken for a higher degree, and not yet presented. I shall not have space to argue here the stronger thesis which arises from these considerations, namely, that the idea of identity itself needs to be reworked in the light of the ideological issues raised here. It also seems to me that the notion of development, particularly through adulthood, which has been under discussion for at least two decades (Baltes, 1987; Riegel, 1976; Dannefer and Perlmutter, 1990), is challenged by constructivism, and that there is a lot of theoretical work for psychologists to do. The next decade could be extremely exciting if we choose to take up these challenges.

The psychological concept of identity development

Accounts of identity development in developmental psychology usually refer to three major aspects: vocational, sexual, and ideological. Developmental psychologists such as Marcia (1980) and Kroger (1989), following Erikson (1963), continue to promote the idea that adolescence is a time when most young people are facing the crisis of identity formation most squarely. A secure identity is usually described by this literature as involving a "positive" solution to issues of sexual orientation, ideological values, and vocational direction. Piaget actually suggested that adolescence ends (and adulthood begins) when the young person takes on a work role. Given these emphases by developmental psychologists on the need to focus on vocational identity at adolescence, high rates of youth unemployment become cause for deep concern. The implication is that it is impossible to achieve a mature identity without a job. Attempts to refocus the requirement on "meaningful occupation" do not seem to answer, since unemployment is clearly socially defined as absence of paid work.

Historically, of course, the term vocation was appropriately used to refer to a "calling", which may or may not have had a monetary reward attached to it, though it often carried a clear status (for example, entry into the priesthood). In the social structures of late capitalism, however, the sense of a vocation is lost, and the accrual of status is linked inextricably to amassing money and possessions. In the current economic environment, job placement has become a primary concern of psychologists, as they argue, with urgency and a concern for social justice, the connection between unemployment and poor mental health (e.g. Warr,1983; Bethune and Ballard,1986). This is occurring in spite of the fact that research has constantly shown us that all else being equal, job satisfaction in terms of skills utilised, for example, is more important to the worker than the level of payment, findings which call into question some assumptions about financial motivation and its relationship to life satisfaction. Obviously the situation is more complex than I am painting it. The disappointing thing is that psychologists appear to be unable or unwilling to think critically about the discursive conditions which are producing this movement towards "jobs at any cost".

The discourse of liberal humanism

Gatens (1991) argues that within liberal philosophy, work can be defined as rational or intentional transformation of the natural environment by men. Gatens goes on to show how this account has the effect of defining the traditional (pre-) occupations of women such as childrearing, supporting a husband and caring for a home as non-work, because they are defined as "natural" and "instinctual". The separation of elemental passion and instinctual human nature, from work understood as "transformative rational activity", is a fundamental tenet of liberalism, which itself derives from the Enlightenment. According to liberal philosophy, it is through the triumph of "reason and mental strength over passion" that the progress of civilisation is brought about (Gatens, 1991).

Whilst the distinction between rationality and passion has been shown to support the marginalisation of the traditional work of women, it is clear that the distinction between

men's work and women's work will not account for the marginalisation of other unpaid work, such as crafts and voluntary work, or even work which has been traditionally "women's work", but may also be done by men. The relation between individual rights and ownership in liberal philosophy gives a clue to the relation between paid work and personal status. Under the liberal philosophy of the state, a person has status as an individual insofar as they own property. This status derives from the primary relation between individuals, namely, "relations of exchange between proprietors" (Macpherson, 1962). Freedom is a primary value within this framework. However, an individual "is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities" (Macpherson, 1962). An individual comes to have rights over his person and his capacities (to be free) inasmuch as he has possessions which can be exchanged. Rational action therefore is purposeful action, which can be defined in relation to whether or what the action will produce in terms which increase personal status, i.e. in terms of goods or possessions.

This philosophy of "possessive individualism" (Macpherson, 1962) is founded on a system of rights which can thus be shown to support a philosophy of economic rationalism. Within economic rationalism, the rational individual works for money which can be exchanged for goods and services. Rationality is thus defined in economic and political terms. The responsible person is one who works for these rational ends.

"Work" as rational activity

Such assumptions about what it is rational to do or work at leads to some bizarre reasoning by New Zealand Government agencies, concerning for example the rationality or otherwise of the decision to have children, as Middleton and others have pointed out (Middleton,1990; Else,1992; Hyman,1992). The implications for the diminution of the work of women have been well explored. As feminists have argued (Gatens,1991; Waring,1988), a liberal democracy depends upon these unpaid functions for its existence, at the very same time that it excludes them from consideration as achievements. What is less clear is the fact that by this definition the unemployed also have no way of demonstrating their responsible maturity, and thus unemployed young adults have no way of achieving responsible adulthood, and the worth of persons who do unpaid work is defined in such a way that they have no way of demonstrating mature citizenship.

Vocational identity, as it is understood in the developmental literature, is a construct which derives its meaning directly from the discourses of liberal democracy. The idea of identity used by most developmental theorists is thus saturated by understandings of individuality and rationality which depend upon the possibility of ownership, and a

model of human relationships as relations of trade or exchange. There is no room in this model for an account of rational, intentional activity which does not look for rational gain in these terms. Thus acts of care for example must always be viewed as non-altruistic, ultimately motivated by self-interest. This of course does not fit easily with relationships such as mothering, or nursing, and many forms of voluntary and community work. Neither is there a sense that there may be projects which are necessary and important to human society and which might be done primarily for that reason, rather than primarily for personal gain. In short, there seems to be little room in the economic rationalist model for a concept of work which is worth doing for its own sake. The notion of work worth doing in human and ethical rather than in economic terms is thus defined out of the realm of political concern.

By accepting these distinctions and assumptions uncritically, developmental psychology supports this political agenda. The humanistic emphasis on freedom of the individual supports claims that the (adult) individual is, or should be, responsible for their own actions. Such autonomy comes at a price, however. Taking this argument to its logical conclusion, it is possible to show, as New Right attacks on the welfare state demonstrate, that the underprivileged are the cause of their own misfortune as a result of their reluctance or their inability to take responsibility for their lives (Henriques, 1984:11). This "humanistic" perspective is inherently victim-blaming.

Work: A Redefinition

The notion of work as a form of acting on the world is not in dispute, neither, for the moment, is the definition of work as "transformative rational activity". Clearly, the sense of work as a form of intentional interaction with the world in these definitions is

an important one to maintain. What is in dispute is the use of "work" to mean "paid work", and the corresponding usage of paid work or paid occupation as a basic determinant of the psychological construction of personal identity. This usage arises, I suggest, directly as a result of the assumption that rational activity is completely defined within the discourse of liberal democracy and its more recent descendant, economic rationalism. Whilst it may certainly be rational to undertake paid work in some circumstances (and some forms of paid work may be more rational than others in this expanded sense), obviously paid work is not the only type of activity which might be viewed as rational. Stepping outside the discourse of economics, it is possible to discover many forms of activity which can nevertheless be shown to be rational, and which are intentionally transformative.

I would argue that the process of forming one's own life is one such transformative activity. From a constructivist perspective, the process of constructing one's identity is ongoing throughout life. The adult tends to take more direct responsibility for making their life cohere than the child, but all persons, whether adult or child, are affected by the circumstances within which their lives are cast. These ecological considerations have a major part in describing the parameters within which lives can be formed, and place sometimes severe restrictions on the kind of coherence which can be achieved. Within these constraints, the individual "works" to achieve a maximally coherent account of self - humans "work" for understanding of their relation to the world, and within this, they work to free themselves to act on the world. This work involves resistance and contestation of meanings. It also involves action which can be either proactive or reactive.

Case Studies

I shall suggest a broadened definition of work as project by reference to examples of projects described to me in interviews with four women who were approaching or at midlife. These women were chosen first for the fact that they had teenage children, and then for their differences from one another in their life structures, particularly with respect to their family structures and income sources, and for their willingness to think about their lives with me.

The objective of the interviews was to examine what the women themselves found "interesting" about their lives. Because it assumed that the life held something of interest, the question indicated an initial respect. As it turned out, the question invited the women to talk about what they themselves found important about their lives, and what they found to be problematic. In all cases the period of the interviews stretched over a period of a least six months to about two years. I used the first interview to get us acquainted, and most of the women used the initial interview to "bring me up to date" with their lives. Second and third interviews focussed on clarifying and following up issues which came up in previous transcripts, raised either by me or by the woman herself. Together we have worked on changing details to preserve confidentiality, whilst maintaining the basic meaning of each story. This process developed a reflective,

collaborative relationship in which we were working together - each clearly for different purposes - to study her life.

In talking about these things, the women showed that their pre-occupations also contained a sense of direction and a sense of purpose which would not necessarily have been in evidence if I had structured the interviews more closely. In all four cases, what gave the lives coherence was a sense of purpose or purposes which cut across the usual categories of work and family, in ways which show the need for a less dichotomous and more integrated approach to the study of lives.

In what follows I have selected examples which demonstrate the women's attitudes to "work" understood in the broadened sense described earlier. I have chosen to present long quotations where I believe this is necessary to preserve the "flavour" and context of each person. In this way the reader is better able to test his or her own interpretations against mine.

Emma

At the time of our first interview, Emma was thirtynine years old, with a husband and two children aged eleven and thirteen. Transformative activity, particularly in the form of community work, was a striking theme of her story. She describes how the need for

transformative activity within the community arose for her when she was living in a very rural place where change and modernisation were slow and difficult to achieve.

Emma: It was the transients who got tired of there not being a service, and the locals really left it up to the transients to do the active work. And I mean, when you look around at the other, at other rural communities the same thing happens. It tends to be the ones that come in and spend a few years in a place that do the active sort of change to a place... And I mean, the locals were honest enough to admit that a lot of those changes were good changes, but, um, they don't actually do that work themselves.
(Emma, 2475I2:29)

In contrast with the locals as she characterised them, she was not a woman who looked for stability in the sense of static life structures, for herself or her family.

Emma: So I guess a lot of what I was thinking was, you could spend another thirty years there, actively working towards what you thought were good changes, but you would never really be considered anything other than someone who was just there for a little while. So in some ways, I mean there were times when I envied the locals, you know, the strong family units that they had around each other, and that was all they needed, they didn't really want to know about other people and other ideas, they were quite happy, being who they were. You know, they had their farms that were passed on, and they owned the pub and they owned the land around, and I mean it was just very strong family units that they had. And I mean, some of them became quite good friends, but yeah, there was, I couldn't really see the long, me being there in the long term once Fiona (daughter) went to school, um, that maybe there were other things ...
(Emma, 2475I2:30)

In a later interview, I asked her about her commitment to change. Her answer could be construed as showing simply a restless spirit. I see also a generous one.

Me:... what about change, I mean, surely it's not just change for change's sake, so you..?

Emma: It's something about development. For me, once I've experienced something, and once I feel like I'm doing it well, it gets to a point where I'm not actually getting any more out of it, so I know that if I change something, or try something different, I might be actually able to extend that. Um, I don't actually need that, I don't need to keep doing something over and over again. There seems to be, I think I get to a point where I think, "I know this well now, I know that this is working well", I see other people that um could maybe use, do with the, they might need the skills and the experience that I've just had. (Emma, 201251:10)

And for her, this was a good reason to move on.

At the time of the second interview, she had just applied for and been offered a full time job with a quasi-governmental health agency. She was very excited about this, as

she perceived the job as offering her the opportunity to utilise, for money, the same skills she had honed in the partially paid, partially voluntary job in a community group in the city where she now lived.

Emma: There's something about process, something about - like I feel what, what's happening now about the job, is that whole sort of, um I mean, I find it hard to believe that I'm actually an Agency (named) person, with the Agency, and I think, oh, what does that mean? Um, but there's something there about that whole political, um, here I am in this position where I'm maybe at the interface of community and the Agency, if they're looking at new projects and things, yeah, there's this learning that can go on, hopefully, for the system. I've no problems about the community, I mean that's that whole thing of, maybe there's a chance to influence, and I mean I know it's no big thing, and it's risk-taking, and it could fail, and it .. but I believe that it's just that, it feels like I'm going into a different, I'm doing the same thing but on a different level, yeah...(Emma,2012S1:12)

Her approach to paid work is interesting because although the payment is obviously significant, her main excitement came from the anticipation of being able to continue to do the politically motivated community work with a broader base, and perhaps more credibility. Certainly she anticipated being able to influence the operation of the Agency in ways which she viewed as important from a community perspective.

In a later interview, she discussed her reasons for becoming a student, which to me seem to maintain the theme of transformative activity as a purpose in her life:

Emma: ... and just getting involved, I mean spending evenings with Reina and other women'd pop in that were doing papers, and they'd get talking about this particular essay that they were doing, I mean that was wonderful, that was the part that I thought, this would be the stimulating bit! This would be the bit that would extend, extend the thinking that much further, because of all those sorts of conversations. So I feel like I've been leading to that... (Emma, 2012S1:3)

A chance offering of one-off papers that year happened to coincide with her own needs in her job. Her amazement at this congruence demonstrates more about her approach to study: study was useful insofar as it contributed to her activism.

Emma: Oh, it just felt like it was too good to be true, and the timing just, yeah,... like here I am in this job ... , and this whole course is actually designed around the work that I'll be doing, um, it just seems amazing! I mean, a lot of the stuff, the papers I feel you're doing towards your degree, are not actually papers that particularly grab you, but you've got to do it to get so many level one, so many level twos etc. Whereas this paper just seems to be absolutely perfect for actually what I'm doing! So what could be better than that? (Laughter) (Emma, 2012S1:7)

Her puzzlement about the contrasting attitudes of other students highlights further her assumptions about the purposes of study. For example:

Emma: Umm, the difference? Um, one of the students lives near to me, and I know we talked a bit about stuff that was due, 'cause we were both doing that xxx paper, and um, all she wanted to do was to know what was expected of her. Like "What essay do I have to write?" um, write it, hand it in. There was nothing broader, or no lateral, "Where can this go?" "What can I learn about this?" Um, "Gee I hadn't thought of that before!" Whereas for me it was, yeah, it was broad, and it was, I kept going, trying to find another book, and thinking, oh yes, someone else has, it just kept sort of webbing, yeah. But for her it just had the, and if there was, she didn't feel like turning up for something, that didn't happen. Whereas I was really keen to, um, to be part of it all I guess. And there was the unexpected things, like extra people sort of coming in to lectures and things, that would give another slant again. I mean that was, some of that was sort of quite magical as well, yeah... (Emma,2012S1:25).

Emma clearly saw her (now paid) work as part of an overall project concerning the way the world could be. This was expressed in her surprise at the attitudes to their work of the people who had been there a long time.

Emma: That's the difference I see with other people who are working in the Agency, um, that have been working there for, like the admin people

etcetera etcetera. And if they've been there for ten years or whatever, it's, I don't think that they've got, they haven't got a perception of what the Agency is - they've got their own perception of what they're doing, very well, but it feels like they haven't got a, a picture... (Emma,2012S1:31)

She was clear about the strength of her ongoing commitment, but did not feel she worked alone for her goals. It was clear to me that she had been "headhunted" for her new job, and so I was sure she had built her own credibility in her previous work. As well as a sense of project and direction, she also had a strong sense of process, though I had to dig it out:

Emma: Right, right, and that whole area that I'm working in, I am committed to that whole thing of community, the, yeah, it's, it feels, I think wow, I'm actually working in an area that I didn't think was possible a few years ago. Didn't think that there was a, that such a job could exist, and yet, here it is.

Me: And you created that

Emma: Right, yeah, I can't, that's sort of hard to grab hold of, yeah, that I've had some - I mean when I look back I can see the path, but yeah, yeah,

Me: And when I read you in the, in your other tapes, I heard a sense of what a community is, right from way back, like you talked about the rural community as an identifiable sort of group of people who work in definite ways, you know?

Emma: Right, right

Me: You've understood that, sort of almost from the moment you

Emma: Right, right

Me: You've always sort of looked at groups of people and seen how they work

Emma: work, right

Me: by the looks of things (Emma, 2012S1:31)

Seeing how groups operate is only one side of her story. Another is her own ability to approach situations for the opportunities they afford. She reports attending a career development workshop where a woman described her career goals in detailed steps for the next ten years. Emma was amazed.

Emma: Like I don't see myself as um being that specific about, it's nearly like I think um, oh well, this is what I'm doing now, and that will lead to, there will be something there that will... and it always seems to be that there's something there that just takes me through, ... although I must be thinking about, um, where is this going, I don't sort of have any definite sort of um, and that, but part of that is about flexibility, and about um, not being rigid, it's about um, if I, in the past, and how I think about lots of things, well if I'm flexible about this, there will be other options, yeah, that something, there always has been other things that have been there, so, don't be too rigid in what, this is another opportunity, go for it, yes. Whereas if I was too rigid, I would never have seen the other things.. (Emma,2012S1:35)

I read these "opportunities" as not related solely, or even mainly, to her own career advancement, but to her greater goals of creating better communities. Clearly, Emma understood her path through life in dimensions which did not fit readily with a strictly linear, controlled approach to career planning.

Sonya

Paid work, or rather, its absence, was a major theme in Sonya's story, for by the second interview, almost all her family was unemployed.

When we first began our interviews, Sonya was fortyone, and worked as a night cleaner. She lived with her husband, who worked on the railways, a fifteen year old son who

was at school, a twentyone year old son who had a semi-skilled job and his friend, and from time to time her second daughter, who was seventeen, and her boyfriend. Her oldest child, a daughter, was married with one child. As she said, it was

Cheek by jowl! Coming and going! Didn't know if I was Arthur or Martha.

It turned out that the household was not only full of people, but it was also absorbing considerable stress. Perhaps it is not surprising therefore that the interviews sometimes seemed to function for her as a means of coming to terms with the extremely eventful life she was living at the time.

After our third meeting I counted up the major events which Sonya had told me about in the six month period. Her husband was made redundant and was having difficulty getting work. Sonya herself lost her night-cleaning job, when her employer lost his contract. Her eldest daughter was seeing a lawyer about divorce proceedings. Her youngest son was sent home from school and the school refused to accept him back. Her mother had a severe mental and physical illness, and was hospitalised once. (The health services called on Sonya to see to her after-care.) Her sister tried to commit suicide. (The hospital tried to get Sonya to take her home.) Her brother-in-law was mentally disturbed, and his daughter called on the family for support. Her niece brought her two children to stay temporarily. Her second daughter moved flats several times, moving back in, complete with boyfriend and girlfriend, when they were between flats. All three were mainly unemployed during this period.

As the central person on whom all these people depended, Sonya was an exceedingly busy woman - though after she lost her cleaning job, none of her busy-ness was paid work in the usual sense. Originally, her life revolved around the evening cleaning job, keeping the family going, and the social high point of her week, helping out as a volunteer in two different organisations for people with disabilities. She spent a great deal of time out and about the neighbourhood, talking to people at and in the shops, talking with her friends in their houses, and helping people. As time wore on, I saw a major change in her and her family life - she was increasingly preoccupied with the problems of being a beneficiary. In fact, she became so angry, and her sense of injustice was so intense, that this theme completely dominated our last interview.

There were changes in the busy family life. Between our first and last interviews, a period of about 18 months, all the children moved out. The emptiness of the house began to exacerbate other absences, creating other pressures:

Sonya: Yes, oh yeah, they don't stick around! It's just... so I was just thinking the other day, there's just nobody comes now, you know, the kids are not there, so they don't come, or whatever, just gone. We just don't seem to be doing anything. Nothing to do, and all day to do it in. It's just..

Me: And how would you like it to be?

Sonya: Well, it's just a matter of finding something to do, I sponse, that's it, it's just, sick of (my husband). He won't go anywhere, that's what makes me sick.....

Me: Would it be different if he could get work? Well, obviously it would, wouldn't it?

Sonya: Well, yeah. I mean, well, you're, well after all these years you've worked from what, eight till five, you know, and now you don't have to do those sort of things, because you've got no work to go or no-one coming home from work, nothing to do. You know, I mean, you don't have to have tea at five or six o'clock or whatever. Then there's only two of you, so you can't be bothered. Oh, that's the worst, you know? 'Cause you're so used to big families, then all of a sudden there's only two of you, and you don't, well I feel you don't need all this food, not, you know, when you cook a big hot meal... (28391.S1:9)

From being the hub of a busy family, Sonya was now facing a complete change of lifestyle. She saw no hope of her husband getting a job, even though he tried, often with distressing results.

Sonya: Oh yeah, after you've been on the dole for so long you go to see why you haven't got a job, why you're not working. I think, boy! They

rung him up the other day apparently, and said you know there's a job

interview for you to go to. So he goes to it, it was a handyman type thing, you know, and that, and he gets there and the guy says "Oh I gave it to my mate yesterday". But he hadn't told the Employment Service, had he? He hadn't reported, you know, boy, did they give him what for, and said you want to bring any more adverts in here, never mind.. (28391.S1:15)

The significance of their age has not escaped her, but the sense of injustice is strong, after following a working class work ethic for many years.

Me: So has he been for many jobs, or...

Sonya: No, not really, I mean, every one he's been he's just missed out because they reckon he's too old. They give it to a younger one you see, because you don't have to pay higher wages... that's why.. I mean, then they want someone, so they send them along, you know, to a job interview, and they want someone with experience, and you go along with 20 years experience, 30 years experience, but you don't get it, so where does the experience part come in? I mean that's just stupid! (28391.S1:16) ...

Sonya: I mean it's going to be the same with that poor man at Meremere, when it closes down, 34 years experience, 34 years! I mean, and he's what, must be 50 something or 40, and he's got no show of, of waltzing along... Now, where can you get a better work record than that? You know, you've slogged your guts out for nothing, all these years, absolutely, that's what it amounts to, you know! (28391.S1:17)

She was maintaining her involvement in the voluntary work on two days and one evening every week, but increasingly, she seemed to me to be putting energy into maintaining the benefit, which was by now the only income of the household. The insecurity of this income had been brought home to the family already, through their various infringements of the changing regulations.

Sonya: It's the most degrading thing to be on this dole. They can cut it off, and stop it when they feel like it. Then you've got to reapply and get it all back, and wait, but in the meantime you've got to live...

Me: Yeah, and you have to, everytime they ring, you have to jump...

Sonya: Yeah! And I mean, this week they'll give you a hundred dollars, and next week they'll give you fifty if you're lucky! (28391.S1:19)

It became very important to see that all the "red tape" was tied. She spoke of getting her husband to his eight-weekly interview:

Sonya: ... and you've got to report what is it every eight weeks otherwise your dole's cut off and oh, it's just getting so sickening. So I don't know what they're going to, I don't know what they're going to gain today, because there's no jobs anyway. I mean, they're just closing everything down all over the place, so what on earth are they going to gain today, and as he said, if he tells them that he went for one, and they say "Oh I gave it to my mate", you know, why bother going in the first place? (28391.S1:15)

Frustrated questions such as this last arose frequently in Sonya's thinking about the pointlessness of the lifestyle in which she felt increasingly powerless.

Sonya: ... They want to know why, this is what you have the meeting for, to see why you're not working, or why you've been unemployed for so long, but when you get, you go for a job interview and they say oh no, you're too old! So what are you s'posed to do? (28391.S1:16)

Once at the Social Welfare, things do not improve:

Sonya: Yesterday, Dave (husband) couldn't find his declaration form, and if that doesn't go in, well, you don't get any benefit, that's it. So we went in,

well, so, couldn't find a parking anywhere. We went round a couple of times. So Dave said, well you hop out and go and, I'll wait around. Well, I

took one look, I got there and they were about this far from coming out on the street, and they had one person behind the counter, and there's a whole counter the length of this room, one receptionist. Then they take your details and hang you up on the clothesline, like that. Then they'll come and pick number one, then they'll come and pick number sixty, and you sit there for two or three hours. You get to the counter, "Oh no we sent that out yesterday", or "It's all been fixed up today"... I can tell you, boy! I've done that before today! (28391.S1:28)

I agreed with her that the welfare system appeared to me to be based on the assumption that beneficiaries have little else to do with their time.

Just as Sonya was supporting her husband, she also supported her youngest son as he too became enculturated into what I came to think of as the beneficiary lifestyle. The burden of this fell on Sonya in particular.

Me: So what's Joe (son) doing today?

Sonya: Nothing. Lives at the shop, all day. They're s'posed to be going um I think at the end of April they have got a job kiwifruit picking again or something, but then you got all that hassle. You do that, but that's only seasonal, so then you gotta come back and reapply again, and then I have to end up, I went in, I sent a school leaving certificate, I got a photocopy (I wouldn't send the original one), sent it in. Next thing Joe gets a letter back to say there won't be any money in the bank because he hasn't produced his school leaving certificate. So I went in, and I took the, no, I took the original and another photocopy, and he said, the guy had the cheek to say, oh well, it must have got lost in the mail, these things do happen! And I was nearly ready to say, "I tell you what, mate, you get out of that bloody chair and I'll..!" No wonder they get abused! (28391.S1:27)

At this point, the reader may be asking why she did so much for this now sixteen year old son, who was clearly something of a problem. But recent changes to government legislation had brought pressure on parents to be responsible for maintaining their young adult children financially. In spite of, or perhaps because of this regulation, Sonya seemed powerless to do more than wrestle with the welfare agencies who were involved in his life.

Sonya: No, you see, he was doing that training scheme, for six weeks, only six weeks. Well that's finished, so he went to apply for the dole the other day because it's finished, they told him to. He gets a letter back the other day, he's been declined, because he's got to go back now, either get a job or go back on another training access to get the training benefit. Otherwise he gets not a cent for 26 weeks.

Me: So how does he get on to another training benefit?

Sonya: Well, you've just gotta ring up these places and find out if they've got a vacancy. (28391.S1:23)

No prizes for guessing who will do the ringing up!

Keeping the household going was becoming a complex preoccupation. It turned out that the many boarders had actually helped keep the house going, as I learned when I expressed some admiration for her taking in their niece and her children.

Sonya: Mmm, two kids, I mean. But I mean, you know, that was helping, you see. I mean people just don't believe it. I see today's pay, give up! I looked in the cupboard last night and I thought, boy these cupboards, they're empty, I mean, absolutely empty! 'Cause it costs you a hundred dollars a week for groceries, and that's all you get to live on! Hundred dollars a week! And you got to have, well, you don't have to have meat, but, you know, costs you a hundred dollars. I mean, well, we even probably with two people, three people, so what does it cost a family?

That's just your milk, bread, butter, cheese, you know, the tea, the coffee, or whatever you drink, the soap powder, your, your, okay you mightn't buy them each week, you know you might have to buy soap and soap powder and toilet roll. You're not, some things you have to buy every week the milk, the bread, the butter the cheese, um, because you can't even afford to buy in bulk now, you know. You used to get a, well, um, say a five pound block of cheese, or, um four pound of butter, or, you know, buy

in bulk because it was cheaper to buy more of than buy one! But you just can't now! And then, you can't afford to go anywhere, at all, it's just, I don't know! But the thing is it's going to get worse, before it will ever get better! I mean it's only going down hill more before it gets better, that's all it can do, I mean where can it go? And now with all these thousands, you know once upon a time a couple of you were put off work, but now hundreds of them are, they're just going in their hundreds, you know like say for instance they come to the Teachers College you know a hundred of you are going to go! But where are you going? (28391.S1:24)

The work which Sonya did daily was the exhausting and largely solo effort of trying to keep the house running and her family in reasonable spirits. Although her situation was rendered more complex by the interaction of the unemployment with expectable family life changes, her own preoccupations were of necessity largely structured by the demands of being a beneficiary. This was a far cry from what she had expected for their life at their age. No wonder she reflected in puzzlement:

Sonya: I was just thinking the other day, just everything just has sort of gone downhill now, rather than sort of you know, coming back up...(silence) (28391.S1:11)

Melissa

Melissa actually left work in order to achieve security - of her health, and of her home and child. She did not go about this in a conventional way. At the time of our interviews, she was fortyone years old, living alone with her twelve year old son.

Melissa: ... Mmm. And I was literally burned out, absolutely, and it was when I, that was when I started to have those physical menstrual problems. And I put a lot of that down to stress, and I thought, how do I alleviate the stress, and the only way I could was to leave my job, so I went and enquired about getting a benefit, and worked it out that I was actually going to be better off financially by being on the benefit than I was going to work. 'Cause I was just about to pick up the mortgage on this home, which was going to be set at um 12% because of my income. If I went on the benefit it was going to be 7%. Now the difference in that is enormous - it's hundreds of dollars. So I sat down and did all my figure work, and worked it out, how much you got on the benefit and what my mortgage would be at this rate, and how much we'd have left over. And I worked it out the same on my income, how much it would be with that rate of interest. And I was better off financially. And I thought right, that alleviates another stress. One I don't have to go to work, two I'm better off! And this is ridiculous! So the decision was easy! So I left work, and I realised I couldn't do nothing, I can't bear to do nothing, and that's why I enrolled for that course. (1812S1:13)

Not going to work was a new experience. At one interview, she was making jam. She contrasted her new lifestyle with her old one, which had been pervaded by working class values:

Melissa: I never did it before - I never learned to do these things because I've always worked all my life. And I worked nine to five. And at weekends I was too tired to think about anything, and only did what had to be done. I learned to knit when I was forty!

Me: Is that right! And that's a great thing is it?

Melissa: Well it was! It was a task I set myself, a little goal I achieved, mmm..

Me: That's what proper women do?

Melissa: No, no, I just decided that I wanted to know how to knit. I wanted to knit me umm, a jumper, I wanted a hand-knitted jumper, and so I just decided to do it, yeah.

Me: But you said, you never stayed home before, so you

Melissa: Oh, I worked, I couldn't stay home. Even if I wanted to, that wasn't an option for me, I had to work.

Me: And what did you say - "I'm not a robust person.."

Melissa: Oh yeah, I don't have a lot of stamina, so going to work from nine to five totally tired me, and I just didn't have any energy left over. The other thing that also tired me is sustaining relationships with men - extremely exhausting, I've decided. I think that's why I've got so much energy now. (1812S1:1)

The theme of "getting a home", understood in the broader sense of "home and security", stood out. In her early childhood, her mother was forced to put Melissa and her older sister into an orphanage. She seems to have done this in desperation, after trailing them from house to house while she worked as live-in housekeeper first to escape a violent husband and later when he died, simply to feed the family.

Melissa: Oh, and I guess it's all, I'd say it's always been there, even as a child. See, we never owned a home. My mum lived in rented homes, always with us, even when we were little, and I was always very aware as a child that we didn't own them! (165S1.1:6)

Living in this almost persecuted (as she tells it) all-female environment as a child had a lasting effect on her. Not only is she strongly feminist and very independent, but she is also firmly of a mind to give her son a sense of continuity and stability - and to give him something worth inheriting. At first she had looked to a husband to help provide the security she sought, but this proved a false hope.

Melissa: Mmm. The one thing, I don't think I could have done this, if I hadn't had a child to think about. 'Cause I didn't do it for me, so much, but I knew that I wanted to leave him something. Because I had started with nothing, 'cause Dad had died when I was very young, and Mum had never bought a home. And I had to start from absolute scratch. And I thought well, Alan's (her husband) never going to provide any of this - just a waste of time, waiting for it or expecting it 'cause, 'cause it's just not in him! So I thought well, I'm going to leave him (son) something! (165S1.1:5)

As well as the theme of home and security, there was in the story overall the sense that her life needed to "go somewhere". This sense of being somebody herself was part of the inheritance she planned for her child. In Bordieu's terms, she set out to build up "cultural capital" for herself, recognising the value of this also for her child.

Melissa: Well that was my decision, to leave work, then, yes, 'cause I could have stayed in that job, at very much a dead end. Except for the company growing, I would have grown with the company, and had more and more staff, been responsible for more and more staff - I just didn't want to be locked into that life, that line of work. And leaving work, I left work with totally no direction, but just knew I had to get out.. (2987.1:20)

She understood this in feminist terms also:

Melissa: I was at the height of where I could go in that firm in that job. The only other job above me was the manager, and there was no way they were going to make a woman manager, right? Never, ever will! (laughs) (1812S1:13)

Staying home got too much for her, and she applied for and got a job in the office of a tertiary institution. She saw this as "a foot in the door to work". However, feedback from a course she was taking encouraged her, and she soon realised that she would rather be a teacher than a clerk. This called for another courageous step. She left this job and went to University full time.

Melissa clearly saw her struggle over this period as a transformative struggle. She contrasted her own work as a student with that of other students she knew, middle-class women who had decided to go to university later in their lives, who already had the financial and cultural capital which made their university passage somehow easier, and in her view, less real. I would have used the terms "less immediate and urgent".

Me: So, how does that apply to your life, as compared with, say, others, who aren't being real or, are pretending? You know, how do you see this as being authentic you? How do you know that that's authentic you?

Melissa: Cause it's hard work! It has to be real! Umm. Because ...

(1812S1.2:25)

After two years, it was quite clear to me that she had brought about a personal transformation, as well as transforming the parameters of her life. I probed on this, because the last of our interviews was so different in tone from the first one.

Me: It's got your self esteem back to where you were when you were twenty? Your hope back to where it was?

Melissa: Yes.

Me: What else? Your sense of yourself

Melissa: sense of myself, yes

Me: as powerful person, able to things

Melissa: yep

Me: as going somewhere, and knowing that where you're going is where you want to go.

Melissa: Yes. (1812S1.2:29)

The struggle to transform her life, to put the cultural capital in place for herself and her child, have reached a kind of end point. As I write, Melissa has just completed her degree. Having also just applied for a job for which she seemed well qualified, and not even got to interview, it is clear to both of us that there is some way to go before the outcome of the transformative work she has done on her life is settled.

My sense of her story is that whilst the driving forces seem to be financial and emotional security, there is another strong proactive streak in her which is likely to develop more clearly. She told me she wanted to "change the world!"

Melissa: I mean, when I say I feel poor, and then I look around my home and I think, "Don't be ridiculous, you're not poor!" You know, when you look at how other people have to live, the real poverty. The kids would be affected because they literally don't have any shoes to put on, and the first up best dressed syndrome, you know? That's real poverty! As long as I'm keeping, and then other times I get angry, and I think well, as long as I'm keeping my head above water, and we've got food in the cupboard, and we're warm, and everything, why are you feeling so miserable?
Umm. (16S53.1:47)

Chris

Chris at fortyfive lived with her doctor husband, a daughter aged thirteen, and a son aged sixteen. She worked "very part time" in an office. She said "I really should do more", but could not find the time. At the time of our first interview, she was redoing

the soft furnishings in their house - making new curtains and cushions, and buying lamps. But she was no stay-at-home housewife.

Chris: I mean I've always done virtually what I wanted to anyway, within reason, and I'm not the sort of person that goes out and leaves the breakfast dishes undone anyway I'm afraid, I wish I was, but I'm not, life would be a lot...I'm fairly, I like my life to have some sort of order to it, otherwise I get, at the end of the day I get a bit cranky if I feel I'm chasing my tail, I like to sort of keep one step ahead, sometimes I don't, but, I like to sort of basically have some sort of order in my life, um, ...
(208S11:9)

Chris: I know people who never seem to really achieve anything, because they never quite get on top of things ...

Me: Whereas you have a sense of achievement, don't you?

Chris: I do, yeah, in quite a lot of things, I do. I mean there are a lot of things that you know you wish you could do better at, but I mean, I'm realistic there and know my limits.. (208S11:10)

At the first interview, she was very involved with her son's sport - he had reached

regional standard and required transport several times each week. By the time of our last interview a year later, he was able to drive himself. This left Chris free to participate in her own sport, which she played two days a week. It turned out that sport was one of the areas she was referring to when she voiced the satisfaction of achieving.

Chris: Yes. Yeah, our team's going really well. Actually I think we're top equal (...) at the moment (...), so, yes, it's going to be interesting, 'cause I think we might end up having to play off, at the end. If we win all the rest of our games, and they win all theirs, well,

M: So you're really good at this stuff?

Chris: Oh, I wouldn't say that! I'm probably pretty good for my grade, but (I Play C grade) but I'm not a top, you know, not an A grade or anything like that. But it's, um, I love it!

She loved her sport, but I would hazard a guess that she loves quilting more. (She told me to say she also loves a party!) Her passion for quilting began with a craft group she attended as a young mother, and seems to have gradually grown, so that now she is extremely skilled. During the period of our interviews she had work chosen for exhibition at a national level. I interpret it as a testament to the stability of her life, that in one of those exhibitions there was a quilt by a woman from that original craft group. She still works on quilting with other women twice a week.

Chris: Yes, we have just a small group. Well, it started off as reasonably big, but it's chopped and changed over the years, and we meet at each other's places, about four I think at the moment. (We) do whatever we're working on at the moment... (2479251:3)

I asked Chris to be in the study because she seemed so different from the feminist women I knew most closely. I had seen her at a community meeting, and I knew she did the kinds of committee work which Erikson gave as examples of generativity. And to be sure, it turned out she had been on a number of community and club committees. She was moving away from this at the time of our last interview, saying that she "felt she had done her dash".

But when I asked her to participate, nothing prepared me for what I would uncover. One of our sessions ended with us looking at the wall hangings round the house which she had made. I came away feeling as though I had looked in on a very dedicated life. I found the wall hangings beautiful beyond description, and the creativeness, modesty and patience of the artist made me feel very humble. I remember now the hanging which won her an award, and the story of the inspiration behind it, which was a private thing. Quilting is a craft handed down from groups of women to other groups

over centuries, probably in ways similar to those Chris described to me. In these interviews I glimpsed the tradition of the quilter - the patterns which come down from celtic times, among others. I was very aware of Chris's respect for, and knowledge of, those traditions.

On another occasion, I asked her about her current project. It was the beginning of the winter, and she told me how she was planning and conceptualising her new quilt, in terms which struck me as very like the way I was then planning and conceptualising my D.Phil. One day she showed me in some detail how she went about putting the plan into effect.

Chris: Um, well, I've been working on, what have I been working on? I'll show you what I've been working on! (Getting out her work.) I actually started it about two years ago and never got round to actually finishing it, and getting it put together... (Shaking it out) Don't know if you can see it. I decided it was time I got the thing put together, and to get it quilted, so I've been machine quilting it. It's a, all machine pieces, like then machine quilted. I haven't finished it yet, but I'm well on the way. There's quite a lot of work involved in it. I was just going to do straight lines on it, and then I thought no, it's too easy. I don't want just straight lines, I want to make it, it, it's... When I got it put together, I decided it looked like a sparkling ruby, or a gem or something. So that, I wanted to make the quilting, um, I wanted to make it sparkle, so here's, this is why I've quilted it like I have

Me: Like a jewel..

Chris: Yes

Me: That's what's happening there with those lines...

Chris: Yes. That's all the quilting and it's meant to be the sparkle coming out.. (2499251:5)

The artistic side was one thing, putting it into effect demanded knowledge of the craft, skill and patience.

Chris: Because this is the, (showing me) this is the unit, here, this pyramid, here, and so, all of these are units.. So there were loads and loads, you could put it, all sorts of different designs and patterns you could create. So I spent a lot of time, just messing around deciding where, which pattern I was actually going to choose in the end. And this is the one I finally came up with. (Showing me.) I could have had chevrons going through it, or what we call tumbling blocks, so I took a lot of photographs. In fact I took a lot of photographs and then found I didn't have any film in the camera! (laughter) Once you take it down - I did it on the board, and once you take it off the board, you can't, you've got no recollection of what you did, once you start doing several designs. This is why I take the photographs, 'cause then you can look at them and say, "Yes, I really like that one, I think I'll do that!" And then you'll know where to put it all back together again. So I had to start all over again.... (Mutual laughter) I have some fun and games! So, that's what I'm doing at the moment. (2479251:7)

This turned out to be only one of the quilts she was putting together at the time. Another was at an earlier stage, being pieced together on a board, with bits of paper and fabric and pins everywhere. She talked about designing it with coloured pencils, then moving to "working with the fabric", piecing it together, getting movement and maintaining the flow of the total concept which had begun to evolve. To me it seemed likely that this was another significant creation, and so I have suppressed identifying details.

Discussion

Because I have omitted an extended discussion of the hermeneutic method, in which I consider the difference in focus of this study from more objective approaches, I am

unsure how you have read these case studies. It would be easy I think to be sidetracked into looking at the changes over time as developmental processes. And it would be interesting to look at and compare the different kinds of paid work the women engaged in, and the influence of this within their life structures. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the subjective purposes and intentions of each woman separately. My purpose in this paper has been simply to reveal their sustained intentional activities in some detail, in order that we might study the interactions of these purposes with commonly held ideas about the centrality of paid work in adult lives. This approach is particularly important for consideration in research on decision-making, especially career planning. Whilst few would dispute that the work these women did was valuable, taking the usual developmental approach to vocational development would have completely missed these projects, which by their own admission, each woman finds absorbing in her own life. One of them remarked to me how good it was to be able to talk about these things, because she never seemed to get such opportunities. This was not a remark about needing someone to talk to, but about the usual invisibility of her projects.

These projects seemed to me to be the focal point, or cohering rubric, around which each woman forged her life. They were the basis of their decision-making in their personal and family lives, reflecting some very personal, overarching values. As such, I argue that the projects constitute the bases of the current identities of these women. They are "life projects" - "works" in a grand sense, for they relate directly to what these women would consider to be their "life work" (if they could be brought to entertain such a concept). But such projects are only visible to research when we allow ourselves as researchers to step outside the usual parameters, allowing subjects to direct our attention to what is valuable about and to them. In so doing, the objective value of their projects also becomes available for examination. This aspect was not lost on my subjects. By beginning with the subjective view, the research process made available to both researcher and participant the opportunity to consider the relationship to more objective values and the effectiveness of their projects.

The theme of paid work interweaves with these lives, but except perhaps in the case of

Sonya - which is interesting in itself - paid work was not a major preoccupation. It is clear to me that each of the women, again with the possible exception of Sonya, considered herself to be working on something. Emma, the community worker, was working on social change; Melissa was working on the transformation of possibilities in her personal and family life; Sonya was forced to work on keeping her family fed, on maintaining their income from the Unemployment Benefit, and on their (and her own) morale; Chris was working on her craft.

I found a strong theme of generativity in each life. Within each life, separate projects had more and less impact on larger, longer-lasting projects. For example, both Chris and Melissa did small jobs for the house (making curtains, for example), and this was part of an on-going larger project for each, to build (in Melissa's case) and maintain (in Chris's) the family home as a comfortable and warm place to be. It is interesting to note that few manuals on career development would cover the kinds of project I have exposed here. "Rational life planning" and "decision-making" are usually discussed in linear terms which do not give precedence to such overarching projects. And yet I believe that most people have such projects, and that their projects often interact with paid work, but are not totally inscribed by it, as in the present cases.

Each woman told me about these projects in answer to a question about what they find interesting about their own life. I took their willing participation as an indication that they would use the interviews as an unusual opportunity to reflect on the central purposes and direction of their lives. By doing this, they were able to evaluate their projects, and to clarify the bases of their future action. I see this research process within their life as an ongoing activity. In terms of my own research agenda and professional orientation, I believe this ongoing activity should be seen as moral development through adulthood.

Although my examples are taken from the lives of women, I am confident that I could find similar integrity in the lives of many, if not most people. This is obviously a claim which needs to be put to the test, but before this happens, work must be done on the theory of generativity or moral development through adulthood. It is clear to me as it was to Sartre (Charme, 1984) that life projects, understood in relation to life work in the expanded sense, are fundamental to, even constitute, the building of personal identity

throughout life.

We can thank Gilligan (1982) for bringing our attention to the generative aspects of moral development and decision-making in adulthood. But the time has come to turn our attention away from the gender differences which she highlighted, and to look at the moral projects of individual lives. This calls for a more careful consideration of the concept of generativity, building at last on Erikson's (1963; 1974) very good work on this theme, though hopefully not constrained by it. A person's worth should be judged for its value to human development, and not for its potential financial value. I hope I have shown what treasures are available if we do not allow the financial value of activity to direct our own research interests, as I believe is the case with most research on what is called "unemployment".

It has been relatively common for women to say that they are "only a housewife", or to think of themselves in similarly dismissive terms. With increased unemployment, we are beginning to see the same distress, or "lack of self-esteem", as it is usually construed, among increasing proportions of the population. I argue that the value assumptions underpinning a liberal ideal for maturity, and supported by developmental psychology, are responsible for the sense of such people, that they are "not proper people". My work is a small attempt, one of many feminist projects, to redress the imbalance which arises from an overly directed, patriarchally dominated approach to the study of adult development. It is a tribute to those who continue to support agenda for their lives which they know are of value, in spite of what they accept as the dominant discourse.

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