

Identity, self, autobiography and career development:
search for a method

'The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and failure of individual men and women ... Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both ... No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey

...

C Wright Mills (1959/1977: 9)

Meanings of getting ahead at work (paid and unpaid) and interpretations of points within individual careers are set within structural and biological givens; a species being, an historical milieu, sets of institutional conditions and one's initial and ongoing place within them. Most theories and explanations of life development, from the cognitively oriented stage/age and the socialization and role transmission models, to the structuralist assumptions of people being agents of structures are contained within these limits. Linked to these givens however, is an ontological possibility that; "in both life and work ", we can and do, strive "to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (Foucault,1988). It is this aspect of development, concerned with the formation and transformation of self, which I will be concerned with in this paper. It is as much a problem of personal theories achieved in everyday life as it is an object of scientific modelling. But, because the latter view has prevailed in the recent literature, the essence of the topic as formulated by C. Wright Mills in the opening quote has altogether been equally and poorly informed by theorists from "right", and "left" persuasions. To draw again from a term used by Foucault (1988), the issue has been one of "political arithmetic", the gathering of statistics to demonstrate relations between structure and the power of collectives, to keep or alter their position with regard to the state. "Technologies of self", or how a person works on their own self development requires a different method.

Since Mills' thirty years old statement no coherent theory has arisen to link success and failure in life to history, structure and biography which can be said to be paradigmatic. Cognitively based psychological theories of development and cognitive sociologies of cultural reproduction both share a common limitation. They have difficulties in explaining individual variations in development and the conditions in which they might and might not occur. What is missing is an approach to method which can begin with variations in socialisation, perhaps as the norm rather than the exception. The bases for offering this argument for discussion are as follows:

1. In the life course of a person, social situations and sequences in lives occur that can not be either predicted or be explained structurally, particularly in terms of a person's belonging to a social class or an age cohort;
2. When the task of inquiry is about the limits of structural effect, then research has to begin with what is at stake in people's lives, and explain why it is that one particular self is not 'pushed around' by structure as much as other selves;
3. Experience itself has a structure which is built from an exploration of possibility and acting on chance.

The paper is divided into four sections arguing for -- (1) a beginning with self development rather than stage\age and cognitive related development. (2) the incorporation of conflict and contradiction, both private (inner) and public (social), as aspects of identity acquisition and change. (3) the use of the concept of the project (Sartre, 1968; Connell, 1987; Harre, 1983) for understanding the development of identity and, the concept of a moral career (Goffman, 1968; Harre, 1979) as a means for understanding movement through crucial situations and turning points in a life. and, (4) the use of assisted autobiography as a method for gaining narrative accounts of identity development. The bulk of the paper will be on this method.

Stage and age versus self-development

Some of the most significant pioneering studies of adult stages of development have come from Levinson et.al. (1978) in their study *The Season's of a Man's Life*. For Levinson et.al., the study of adult development is based on a 'biographical interview' method (Manganyi, 1979:45). The interview describes a relationship in which an interviewee collaborates with a researcher to uncover key points in an entire life sequence. Levinson et. al. then convert the individual life sequences into the 'seasons'; age specific stages of adult male development. The speech and the stories that people use to describe their lives and the events which make up their biography are read ultimately into an ontogenetical structure. As such, human life cycles have 'an underlying, universal pattern containing endless' cultural and individual variations, but always following the basic sequence which organically shapes the life course (Levinson et. al., 1978: 6-7) . The ontogenetic nature of the approach rests on a version of cognitive structuralism. The approach is most valuable in linking social, structure, developmental stage and personality change. In a manner similar to Erikson (1959) and Elder

(1980:86), age is accepted as the central variable which 'relates social structure and history in the individual biography'. Such approaches extend a stage theory, similar to Piaget's, into adult life. Age defines stages which are discreet, but not always as hierarchical as Piaget suggests (Levinson et. al. 1978).

The stages / seasons set limits for analysis, and are the criteria 'which "tell" the biographer where and how to begin and proceed until the story of an individual's life is told. Two crucial points need to be raised. First, there are no sound premises on which universality can be grounded. As Demos (1986:Chap 6) shows, there is every reason to believe that such genetic stages are more historical constructs. They cannot be shown to have occurred in previous generations. Second, by assuming that questioning should begin with a biological stage, it is assumed that whatever the person reveals about their life will be automatically read back into a genetic life stage. Ultimately then whatever theory the person interviewed has on their life becomes not only peripheral, but lost.

Hankiss (1981:203) differentiates ontogenetical, stage related development from ontological, or self-development. The ontological process provides a dimension for understanding how new versions of the self are transposed over previous versions as a person makes specific responses to the 'why' of their own development. Thus:
... everyone builds up his or her own theory about the history and the course of his or her own life by attempting to classify his or her particular successes and fortunes, gifts and choices, favourable and unfavourable elements of his or her fate according to a coherent, explanatory principle and to incorporate them within a historical unit ... (Hankiss, 1981:203)

For Hankiss, adult development is a process of transposition. It involves a logical creation and rearrangement of myths, stories or self-narrative. It is in such biographical accounts that a person directs their life course. From these characterisations of themselves in the past and future situations come the strategies and reasons for what they are doing in the present situation. As such the person's biography has to be read as theory and in a different fashion that is used in ontogenetical, stage related approaches to adult development.

The direction for the construction of a method then should be based, on and closely follow, person theories and the conditions in which they are developed and made part of one's biography. For the theory and the method to have some credence typical and atypical cases should be able to be catered for in the one analysis -- perhaps within the one person at different times and situations in their lives. For this to occur allowance has to be made for levels of analysis of identity and with a consideration of what Foucault (1977) terms the formation of the subject and more recently the "technologies of the self". That is, noncognitive and more affective aspects of development need to be highlighted (Goodnow, 1990). This point can be illustrated with one brief example from the recent literature.

Inner Conflict

Identity, it has been argued is an element of personal (ontological) development and cannot be read neatly, as is usually the case, back into either age/stage (genetic) or to cognitive development. What is required is a beginning point in which life experience is accepted as having a structure. That structure, is intimately tied to intergenerational experiences of work which informs a person's theory of themselves as a worker in relation with their parent's positions in the workplace. Identity, as an indicator of a person's growing theory of self can be seen as worked out in various turning points in a person's career through schooling, entry into the workplace and their trajectory through it. An essential aspect of identity formation is related to families and their relations to schooling and to their work and the work they envisage their children doing. Non-cognitive examples of experience of this process sometimes appear in the most unexpected places.

Valerie Walkerdine is a cognitive psychologist of some standing. In her recent book, *Schoolgirl Fictions* she reflects on her class origins and on the inner conflict she experiences in dealing with her mobility into the bourgeois world of established British universities. In the book she devotes a chapter to the film *Rocky* and analyses it to explain her own life to herself and to the conflict experienced by working class men and women who 'make it'.

The film brought me up against such memories of pain and struggle ... that it made me cry. I cried with grief for what was lost and for the terrifying desire to be somewhere and someone else: the struggle to 'make it'. No longer did I stand outside the pleasure of engagement with the film. I too wanted Rocky to win. Indeed, I was Rocky -- struggling, fighting, crying to get out. I am not saying that there is one message or reading here for all to pick up. On the contrary, the film engages me as a viewer at the level of fantasy because I can insert myself into, position myself with, the desires and pain woven into its images. Someone else might have identified with Rocky's passive and waiting wife. But Rocky's struggle to become bourgeois is what reminded me of the pain of my own. The position set up with the film then create certain possibilities, but it seems to be the convergence of fantasies and dream which

is significant in terms of engaging with a film.

... films like the Rocky series ... reveal an escape route, one which is all the more enticing given the realistic mode of presentation, despite the variant possibility of its realism. Such are popular films... because escape is what we are set up to want, whatever way we can get it. For the majority of women and men, the escape route open to me, that of the mind, of being clever, is closed.

Walkerdine, 1990: 175-6,

Walkerdine's account may not be representative of men and women who have taken her particular escape route. Raymond Williams (1983) a historian and sociologist from a generation before Walkerdine describes his moves from the working class, into the traditional British universities in a completely different manner. What Walkerdine does, as did Williams, was to recognise that development of a personal of a sense of self is closely linked work and family mobility in a sense that cannot be captured by theories of cognitive reproduction. The process should, as Williams (1981:141-42;; 145-47) explains, include and outline the tensions in a person contemplating differences in changes in their own self-conception and their assigned or expected social role. Relations between new self-concept and new social role apply not only in theatre but as he suggests, to a 'socially mixed and socially mobile ... urban society'. Thus 'inner conflict' is a continuing process around which:

... there is a new and strongly felt openness to the question of what the self might become as distinct from what in received terms it is and must be. Each of these developments is directly related to new valuations of individuality, and to new possibilities of self-development and practical changes and mobility.

(Williams, 1981:146. emphasis added).

Walkerdine's analysis of her own situation is theoretically similar to that which Williams describes above. It argues that, even in arguments of the reproduction of class and other structural relations (including biological development) some attempts at a transformation of them occurs within individual personalities. What is more, in the present economic era much of the inner conflict experienced over what one should and ought to be is tied up with work and the careers of parents and children between generations.

It is around these points raised in the quotes from Walkerdine, Williams and others (c/f the extensive writings of Studs Terkel) that the deficiencies in the theory can be located. Methods for understanding personal development must go beyond discussions on reproduction (of structures such as stages, classes and gender relations) to provide an historically concrete and realistic 'social psychology'. Most theories of development offer impoverished accounts of socialisation. They avoid 'conflict and contradiction in the forming of a person and within the person formed, emotional development, sexuality, unconscious motivation, and the crises and transformations of personality attendant thereon' (Connell, 1983; 1987).

At what level should research begin?

To be of use in developmental theory, a concept of identity must be held up against three levels of analysis. Those most used across social science disciplines aim to:

. represent a system in such a way that something is uncovered about all people (age stage and reproduction of class relations approaches;

. tell us about all people in relation to one property, (eg. their cognition, their class disposition);

. represent the lives of particular people (autobiography).

Analysis mostly stops after the first two and either doesn't get to the third or neglects personal development of identity. The reason is that; the basis of identity -- the way people create emotional links between each other and the daily conduct of emotional relationships follows a logic a different to that which guides the first two levels (Connell, 1987; Foucault, 1988) Foucault shows the difficulty of moving between analytical levels and that of devising a method.

Public and Private Discourse

Foucault (1977) refers to the 'problem of the subject' as being one where 'the identity of individuals and groups is at stake and, where order in its broadest form is taking place' (Rabinow, 1986:260). According to Rabinow, the objective of Foucault's work 'has been to create a history of the different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects'. Foucault's scheme contains three modes of objectification of the subject. 'Dividing practices' categorise, distribute and manipulate subjects to give both a social and a personal identity. As well, social science disciplines sort people into various categories which are used to understand the self scientifically. This is the mode of scientific classification. The last mode is 'subjectification', a focus on 'the way a human being turns him/herself into a

subject'. This mode differs significantly from the others in its exploration of 'those processes of self-formation in which the person is active ... (and) isolates those techniques through which the person initiates an active self-formation' (Rabinow, 1982:10). For Foucault this mode of self-formation is long and complicated. It takes place through a variety of 'operations on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their thoughts, on their own conduct'. The process of self-understanding is mediated through culturally significant figures. It is in this latter area that cognitive and socialisation models provide incomplete explanations.

Though Foucault's terminology is not employed, tying the problem of identity to self formation allows for an interdisciplinary approach. Here other works (c/f Vygotsky, Harre, Cole, Connell, Levinson and Sartre) can be drawn on for conceptual and methodological direction, in the understanding of life or self projects. This is one which allows for analysis at the private, public and social levels, and which allows for an understanding for movement through careers. Here a term from Goffman and Harre, the moral order, is introduced.

Identity as project within and through moral careers

Two concepts are considered as crucial. The project -- a chosen way of being or realising one's self -- and -- the moral career -- a life trajectory that incorporates events which affect one standing in a group, organisation institution or culture. A project is a complex personal theory derived from and unifying choices made about past, present and future realisations of one's self, in relation not only to others but also within one own self. The process of self or identity development as a project is ongoing. The project is made meaningful and 'looking back, the process can be decoded by a construction of the life history that relates later parts of the trajectory to the original, constitutive choices Connell, 1987: 211).

Many of these constitutive choices can be tied to movements through moral careers in which one's identity rests on the gaining the respect and risking the contempt of others. Examples range from, doing well in school in a family with high educational expectations to suppressing one's ability to do well if it contradicts a successful career in a peer culture to, standing for a political party in an election.

Together the project, and the moral career, can show movement through different moral orders and more importantly they can be used to understand how and why identity change becomes a project when people are trying to get ahead, move to different situations where there own identity is at variance with that expected in the new. These two concepts provide a view on change of identity, especially in adult development, that is missing in age\ stage approaches. The key turning points need not be related to "seasons" in the life -- though this can be one way of doing so.

Development as autobiography

One of the key points of the paper is that experience itself has a structure (Helling, 1976:43). As such, the structuring of an identity is expressed in descriptions of self and expressed both privately (inwardly) and publicly as narrative. Further, ordinary language 'enters into the constitution social activity in a different manner than those employed in social science' (Giddens, 1979:246).(11) This raises the problem of what part ordinary language should play in the presentation and analysis of research. One way of attacking this problem is to consider how everyday language helps organise an identity. For example, in the course of development, a person can undertake the organisation of memories and beliefs into a narrative in which he or she is the central character (Harre). The narrative can show the trajectory, and how emotion, etc is built into the key turning points in a person's life

The methodological point is how the narrative is best gathered and analysed. Here the approach of assisted biography is discussed. As well, examples of identity construction through narrative biographies and the writings of some social scientists exemplify the position taken in this and earlier sections.

To paraphrase Connell (1987: 196); an adequate account of personality formation must be able to understand such events of self/person formation as something more than random

exceptions or social deviance. This is only possible if the analysis of the "successful" case of "socialisation" is in terms that also allows us to understand the unsuccessful. In the next and final section, "assisted biography" is proposed as a beginning attempt of a method to serve the purposes of self-development outlined in the previous sections.

The Method of Assisted Biography

I am presently drawing on this method to produce biographical accounts of three people in their late forties who I first began interviews with in 1984. Jocelyn is an ex-primary school teacher whose parents were an engineer and a teacher. Brian is an insurance broker on the periphery of owning his own business. Tanya is a psychiatrist whose parents immigrated to Australia just after world war 2 when she was a child. Her father worked in a trade, her mother was a seamstress in a factory. All three people completed school in the one cohort at "Queensland High" in the early 1960's.

The method of 'assisted biography' I am suggesting was developed by De Waele (1971) and detailed in De Waele and Harre (1980). I originally used Sartre's (1967) 'progressive-regressive' method to examine projects in the forming of the lives to be considered. On closer examination, it was apparent that, as Sartre uses it, the method is better served by novelists than by sociologists. Somehow Sartre's insight of the project as a means of self-production needed to be made more assessable. Here a suggestion from Berger and Luckmann (1966/1971:220) was instrumental in the choice of Harre and De Waele's approach. They say:

... Sartre's own interest in the 'mediations' between the macroscopic sociohistorical processes and individual biography would be greatly served, once more through a consideration of Meadian social psychology ...

Meadian social psychology is central to Harre's (1979; 1983) works, as is his 'ethogenic' approach. Harre's approach provides the means for understanding how and why it is that people move from situation to situation by locating key episodes in a person's life and by obtaining reflexive, mainly respondent-centred, accounts of these episodes. Harre (1983) has also developed a social psychological model of the processes through which 'identity projects' are developed and recommends status change as an area of application. The assisted autobiographical method was selected for these reasons.

Collection of data for a biography, however, cannot be separated from the process of analysis. The three biographies could have been theorised when all interviewing was complete. Ultimately however, the interviews and the accounts of episodes are all for nothing if the researcher fails to understand 'the event, moment or experience that has given primary central meaning to a person's life. Failing to grasp this moment produces a life story document whose meaning remains elusive.

Procedures for obtaining an assisted autobiography

The intention of an assisted biography is to reveal an individual's conception of their own history by gaining descriptions of accounts of episodes of reference in that person's life course. An episode is a meaningful fragment of social life. In terms of the biographies in my study, an episode could be of a short term duration. For example: the day of the death of Jocelyn's mother, when she was thirteen years of age; Tanja's presentation of flowers to the Queen Mother, as a result of her winning a prestigious academic medal at the same age; Bryan's putting out a fire in a hanger containing fully armed combat planes when he was a twenty year old aircraft mechanic in the navy. An event can also be used to comprehend an extended time period. Examples here are Tanja's period of religious involvement from 1959

until 1972; Jocelyn's attempts to have children over fifteen years of marriage and Bryan's time in the navy. An account refers to the ways in which the central person places meaning on events by describing and talking about them. An account is the basis of a person's theory of action. Reflexive analysis of accounts helps to locate that person's operating motives.

Procedures and stages

De Waele and Harre (1979) use the assisted biography in a team situation. Nine researchers from different disciplines took separate 'slices' of the raw biography of a convicted murderer in order to gain accounts of the circumstances and motives leading up to a murder. The prisoner was paid a salary equivalent to that of the investigator and agreed to negotiate the meaning of each slice of his life with each investigator. There was a team leader/coordinator for each biography which took around twelve months to complete. De Waele and Harre (1979:196) suggest that the method could be adapted to suit a single researcher. The stages taken from their method are now outlined.

Stage one: naive autobiography

In many instances there is the expectation that the person being studied will write the autobiography document (cf. Plummer, 1983). No attempt was made to obtain a written document from the three central informants in this study. Instead, a first interview, and as many subsequent interviews as were required, were obtained to construct a 'naive autobiography' and to record it on audio tape. These tapes were translated using double-spacing and given to the respondent for comment and elaboration.

Two approaches can be used in eliciting a naive biography. The first 'time-oriented' approach divides the life into time slices, and focuses on each period in time. The second 'topic oriented' approach concentrates on three sets of topics. The first of these is related to 'microsociological' frames of reference, namely time perspective and the ecology of living conditions in various periods in the life cycle. The second topic concerns family norms and present situation. The third concentrates on aspects of the self and personality. De Waele and Harre (1979:210-224) provide an extensive 'biographical inventory' from which questions related to time orientation and theme can be drawn. The inventory was a useful guide in interviews but it was difficult to decide whether or not the respondent's style of recollection of past events best suited either one approach or the other. The topic oriented approach was most useful in the early stages of a biography. This was the period when there was an initial uncertainty about the best starting point for the biography. People typically began with:

'Should I start with Queensland High or my childhood?' I explained that we would try to find important events in their life and expand on them. No matter what the starting point, each person began describing time sequences and then moved fairly quickly to major themes in their lives dwelling on these, or following them through a complete episode.

For example, once Tanja got to the point of her interest in religion at Queensland High, she followed this theme. Religion was the main factor in her choice of a husband, in them jointly joining the Ecumenical group, in the birth of their two children, their time in New York, her training in family psychiatry and in her return to Melbourne without him. In contrast, her sibling rivalry with her sister was time-oriented and she could nominate the precise times that it affected both of them. Jocelyn however, found it extremely difficult to move past the bewilderment and lack of direction that accompanied her mother's death. Formulation of a naive biography became less stressful for her when we agreed to move systematically through her life from childhood to the present and to contemplate the future.

With Bryan, who I interviewed last, I used a combination of these approaches. That is, I left time for the themes to emerge and moved the interviews through specific time frames if this did not happen. Finally, it is apparent that each interview in itself is an event and is socially structured and psychologically negotiated.

When a respondent provides themes of their own volition then it is much easier to tease out and elicit accounts of the most meaningful situations of reference in their life course. As De Waele and Harre contend (1979), a reader must know these situations of reference and the person's operating motives in order to be able to analyse the biography. The extent to which the operating motives can be found depends on the relationships with the researcher, the interview context and the instructions the person gives themselves about how much they will divulge. Hence there is an ebb and flow in most interviews, periods of trust and mistrust, a realisation that one might have divulged much more than was intended.

In an interview, researcher and respondent constitute more than two identities. They focus on the research when the tape recorder is on. They discuss families, sport, university assignments and so on while a tape is being changed and while drinking coffee. Sometimes one identity gets in the way of the other. For example, Bryan's wife said 'You'll have to come and visit us as a real person when this is over'. I sometimes found myself thinking, 'This will look good on paper' when I was being told something of emotional importance in confidence. When this happened I often felt obliged to divulge things about myself and my operating motives. This relationship between a researcher, as confidante, and a person who trusts in them obviously influences how the biography is presented.

There are some key methodological points in the use of assisted biography carried out by one investigator, as opposed to the De Waele and Harre' team approach, that need to be summarised before proceeding. First, both respondent and investigator assume a range of identities in the changing context of a series of interviews. A year-long biography of one murderer assisted by nine experts will be of a different order to three shorter-term biographies with one investigator. A prison inmate receiving such attention and a wage will provide a different document to three people who gave up forty or so hours over a few months.

Perhaps the essential principles of three people's projects cannot be fully comprehended by a single investigator in this short space of time. Perhaps each biography should be up-dated over a number of years if the idea that the project is the basis for self-production is to be better understood. Harre makes the important point that new operating motives are devised internally as a project by choosing among a range of possibilities. Though rehearsed internally, they only become actual operating motives when they come into contact with the projects of others. The degree to which a project is realised then comes down to the degree to which a person can command acknowledgement for their competence in a public domain.

Tanja, for instance, would like to push forward in her career, 'to be the grand old lady of family psychiatry'. To do so, she would have to attract more attention to herself and surpass her husband in earnings and prestige. As yet she has drawn back whenever more success meant 'overshadowing' a sibling or someone close to her. In turn Jocelyn has continually and systematically had the texture of her projects taken apart. Her visions of herself as a prefect at high school and later as a mother were not realised. She continues to withdraw from public performances - 'I never do second drafts or correct spelling in my assignment papers;

I could have handed them in months ago,' and she completes first semester assignments two weeks into the second semester. There is a hope that things will be better: 'I'll wait until I finish my higher degree and then I'll start a new relationship'. Then will come an anguished realisation that 'I've been living this crazy life for twenty-eight years'. Jocelyn and Tanja's projects spiral them into completely different directions. Neither has decided to remain where they are at the moment and in this respect their biographies cannot be completed.

Stage two: focussed account interviews

The naive biography and the use of time and theme-oriented approaches helps establish the central episodes in the past, the present and to a certain extent, the future. The future orientation is a central element in the composition of a project and will not be dealt with here. In most of the focussed account interviews the intention was to turn the person's attention more fully to express what it was they and others had done in these episodes. It is these interviews that should lead to 'hypothetical reconstructions of the individual's cognitive resources' (De Waele and Harre, 1979:198). For this reason they suggest a systematic procedure of elicitation. As such an appropriate interviewing strategy should involve a series of successive focusing procedures on the written and spoken statements of the studied person and through them on the various social episodes referred to., ... (De Waele and Harre, 1979:198).

A focused interview should provide enough specific and detailed information to expand the range and depth of an episode both in terms of personal and emotional involvement and to gain some idea of social conditions in which it is situated. The focused account interview is not of a stimulus/response type such as for example, 'What did you mean when you said that?' Some parts of an interview may take this form, however. What is important is to, 'set a stage' as often as possible; that is, to have the person assume a role in which their participation is 'indispensable' for the success of the interview. The person should be given as many 'first moves' as the investigator if not more. The game-playing elements of such an interview should not be dismissed. Three stages are recommended for a focused account interview. Following De Waele and Harre (p202-205), these are as follows:

1. The first stage focuses on reflexive questions about the biographical inventory. As the questions from the inventory were used (as De Waele and Harre suggest for a single investigator) as an 'aid to memory', they did not have a significant influence in the data collection. For example, the suggested questions related to the questionnaires detailed in the inventory 'What was your reaction when you read the questions?'; 'Did you think some of the questions were catch questions?'

2. The second stage deals with 'direct questions' and is more helpful in locating operating motives and elements of a project. The second stage questions shown below are adapted from De Waele and Harre (1983:204-5) and are used in the following form:

(i) Questions aimed at collecting further information about a topic.

(ii) Ordering questions to allow the person to suggest alternative actions they could have taken at crucial points in their lives, or to make comparisons between themselves at different points in their lives and between themselves and significant others.

(iii) Questions about choices between different possibilities, to induce accounts about the way possibilities opened up and closed for themselves and others. Types of questions include those:

- (a) about how plans were formulated internally,
- (b) about ideal and real goals,
- (c) about what actions were reversed and points of no return,
- (d) about person-dependent and role-dependent actions.

(iv) Questions dealing with the conditions in which an event took place and the evidence for checking them. Types of questions include:

- (a) those calling for specific examples and frequencies,
- (b) questions about how others might have viewed these conditions,

(v) Questions of opinion, which propose alternatives and flaws in the person's

account.

3. For De Waele and Harre, stage three involves a new set of reflexive questions that focus on the previous stage of direct questions. Once again I bypassed this stage as a formal stage, preferring instead to gather such information incidentally at the conclusion of each interview. In its place I substituted a phase related to self-analysis. The third phase involves questions related to what Sartre (1960) and Denzin (1986) refer to as the essential aspect of the project as a mechanism for self-production. This is the process by which the turning points of a life are structured. For example, a person will move away from a conflict in their lives and then return to it. As such, a conflict develops between a yet unrealised potential and an object in the future that person tries to bring into realisation. This is what Sartre terms the project. The

questions used in this phase are adapted from Denzin (1986). Denzin, like Sartre, argues that a project has to be comprehended and that it should show the particular 'stamp or signature' they have placed on it.

This can only be done by revealing the meaning ordinary people give to their lives 'within the limits and freedom given to them' (Denzin, 1986:27-28). It was argued in this Chapter and the previous one that freedom to form projects arises because people see and act on possibilities within the constraints of structured conditions. The process of forming an identity is not tied causally to either the singular person or the structure, but, to the relations between the two. The intention in this stage is to assist the person to locate situations in their life that have been similar and to compare the ways they were resolved, partly-resolved or avoided.

With this phase, the formal biography is completed not as a record of happenings and responses to them but as:

... a record of interpretation of happenings, the planning of responses to them, the understandings of successes or failures in these matters ... a cognitive map both of how the individual now represents his life to himself and how he represents his resources by which he sees himself to have coped or failed to cope with the problems and crisis of that life as it unfolded ...

(De Waele and Harre, 1979:206)

For this to be achieved, the structure of the person's experience has to be recorded so that it can show the organising principles from which key situations in a life are given meaning in the present and the future. It is the organising of these situations to which an analysis of an autobiography has to be directed.

Analysis of the autobiographies

The three autobiographies were 'written up' separately from tape-recorded interview sessions. The task was to organise the material so that the person's theory of their own life course

could be read from key situations in their life. Since the emphasis in the theory is on social and psychological aspects of identity construction, I decided to keep as close as possible to the actual speech used by each person.² Again, because autobiography is said to be the important aspect in the process of identity transformation, and because it is part of a relatively autonomous analytical realm, each life was held apart and placed in a separate Chapter.

Some difficulties were found in presenting the lives as narrative autobiographies mainly because, to my knowledge, there are no available examples in social science writing.³ Indeed, one of the unresolved problems in this study concerns the problem of how life courses can be presented in the literature of social science. As McHoul (1988:215) notes, If, ... the genre of autobiography gains its access to truth via the category of experience and by appeal to empirical witness of a minimal kind, in short, by the invocation of an 'I', a first person; and if the genre of the research report is held to relate truth by means of the exact opposite, namely by effacement of the 'I' who speaks and its replacement by reference to an impersonal, neutral observer whose observational warrant is no longer the subjective ear or eye but the standardised equipment of the laboratory or the field sensor; then sociological writing has still not settled its placement on this rough grid ...

The style used in novels and professionally published autobiographies did not suit the methodologies I used. The main limitation was that recorded speech transformed into narrative script remains 'flat' in contrast to other texts in which a number of literary devices are employed. A major miscalculation on my part was a naive belief that the narratives would somehow emerge as reflecting the social dialogue of the interviews and the sometimes emotionally charged setting in which disclosures of some magnitude were made. While the narratives speak for each person, that is to tell 'the' story, it was more difficult to get them to speak as they do in the interview situation. The ideal I sought can, I think, only be achieved by people such as Sartre who was both novelist, playwright and philosopher, or in novels. The task was to ascertain the credence of each autobiography.

Validating the individual narratives

Here Polonoff (1987) offers a direction. He proposes that an autobiography is something that one person makes of their life by the construction of a version of the self. Polonoff (1987:52-53) proposes three criteria for judging self-narratives as a text, namely: internal and external coherence, livability and empirical adequacy. In terms of this study Polonoff's points can be taken in turn.

First a life story holds together in so far as each person agrees that the episodes recorded provide a coherent version of why they are as they are at this point in their personal lives and their careers. Second, the matter of whether or not each person can live in, or publicly legitimate the inner version they have of themselves, is more problematic. As can be gauged from reading the texts, in all cases there are tensions between their aspirations and present situation which they are still trying to work out. In all cases, however, there is also an

expectation that the tension may be worked through. In terms of Polonoff's third criteria, the self-narratives are empirically adequate in that they contain what he terms the set of 'primitive experiences', or the atomistic units of narration, without which the autobiography would be incomplete. For example, if the offer to Bryan of a cadetship in engineering was omitted from his narrative, then reasons for his life plans could not be found. The same is true for the time of Jocelyn's mother's death, and Tanja's winning of the Lilley Medal. The point being stressed is that each narrative contains an account, in their own language about what they think their life course has been. To be coherent, the narrative has to show how that person makes their identity clear to themselves, to others. It must also, be empirically adequate, that

is, the core situations within the life have to be identified and analysed from that person's perspective as well as from social theory.

Conclusion

The information from the method of assisted biography makes it possible to identify key situations in each person's life and to gain access to their life projects and personal theories. This method, which stresses relationships between speech and life themes, guided the way in which the narratives are presented. It also provides a means for establishing conceptual linkages between studies of power and their relationships to the development of self in a manner not assessable in cognitively oriented sociologies and psychologies.

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