contemporary adulthood

calenders, cartographies and constructions

edited by
judith burnett

Contemporary Adulthood

Also by Judith Burnett

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Contemporary Adulthood

Calendars, Cartographies and Constructions

Edited by

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Victoria Robinson is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield and author of *Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport: Male Identity and Rock Climbing* (Berg, 2008). She has also published *Mundane Heterosexualites: From Theory to Practices* with Jenny Hockey and Angela Meah (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*, which she co-edited with Diane Richardson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) is now in its third edition. She is series editor with Diane Richardson for the Palgrave Macmillan book series on gender and sexualities in the social sciences, and is currently writing *Masculinities in Transition: On Men's Identities across Public and Private Spheres* with Jenny Hockey (forthcoming).

The Problem of Contemporary Adulthood: Calendars Cartographies and Constructions

Judith Burnett

Adulthood is a social category of human development which is all too easy to take for granted. It is ubiquitous to the point where we no longer see it, and are inclined in the social sciences and the humanities to act as though it isn't there. As Crawford suggests in this volume, the category of adulthood masquerades as a central norm presented in discourse as inevitable and natural. As such it is an example of social process named by Barthes as exnomination (1973: 50). Nowadays we do openly talk of some of its major categories – childhood perhaps or youth or old age. Yet these categories are themselves invented, set up as either being a category of waiting for adulthood (Lesko 2001) or following it. The central norm of adulthood carries power of labour market and family relations, and drives both the cultures and actual material structures of dependency (Hockey and James 1993).

Increasingly we recognise the rich world of insight which opens when we open the door on childhood and old age; youth and middle age; gender and diversity. Yet the category of adulthood itself is prone to lack of research and undertheorising, and it is this crack in the modern concept of the lifecourse which this volume opens up.

Both the mass media and lines of academic inquiry and the interests of our communities and families suggest that there is a great social need and demand for, ways of thinking about and understanding the key demographic changes and identity transitions which mark our contemporary lifecourses and our inter-relationships. When exactly can we say that childhood begins and ends? Has childhood disappeared? When can we say that someone really is 'middle aged', or has become 'elderly'? What sense can we make of assisted motherhood which occurs at a different point in life than the historical norm? Does it matter if women, en masse, cease to have children as a matter of course? What

1

are the implications for the individual and society when healthy life beyond 90 becomes so common that Her Majesty the Queen of England no longer sends telegrams to people when they reach their centenary? The experiences and expectations of life have changed, and in turn, there has been an increased interest in the lifecourse itself, expressed as a growing social and market demand for new thinking and approaches towards adulthood.

Today, fields of study have begun to open out into a more dynamic view of the lifecourse, and this book uniquely intervenes in these debates by taking as its focal point the concept of adulthood itself. The aim of the book is to deconstruct and reassemble adulthood in the light of a series of insightful interventions made from a range of perspectives at the leading edges of thinking. The book showcases ways of seeing and thinking about the changing experience of adult life, foregrounding new phases of the lifecourse, and making visible new perspectives.

Both cohort and lifecourse studies, including longitudinal explorations have provided an holistic approach. For example, cohort studies which focus on life events and their outcomes for life chances. But the dislocation of life events from set phases or stages of life, associated with the onset of what Giddens and Beck have characterised as flexible and reflexive biographies, and the erosion and reconstitution of modern systems of stratification, have in turn presented new challenges and opportunities for cohort and lifecourse studies. Many cohort studies provide us with rich datasets and new ways of thinking, yet they also struggle with the passage of time and social change, and need to find ways of accommodating the innovations in living which appear during the lifetime of a given study.

The book argues that the lifecourse can be deconstructed and viewed anew, to reveal the sometimes visible, sometimes hidden meanings and assumptions from which prevalent social ideas about and images of adult life are constructed. These social ideas and images are a rich form of data, revealing the lifecourse paradigm as a calendar and map, a sort of clock by which our identities are kept or challenged, and our social locations defined or changed. The book unpicks the key social processes by which 'adulthood' is built, pulling out the systems and processes by which it, and thus a teenager or a twixter, an abled or a disabled, a middle-aged man or an elderly woman are constructed. These calendars, cartographies and constructions, are explored in a series of papers which look for the edges, the spaces in between and the unarticulated aspects of lifecourses, in interesting ways. The book explores the power relations which are made and challenged through the paradigms of

contemporary adulthood. The authors of the chapters ask fundamental questions: what is adulthood? What does it mean to be 'grown up'?

Calendars, cartographies and constructions

There is evidence that for centuries concepts of individual life abounded, and that time counting was expressed through metaphors such as night and day, or the passing of the seasons, as well as through specific discourses associated with major institutional and belief structures, such as religion and spirituality. The paradox of life, that we are born as individuals into the social stream which both pre-exists and outlives us, generates social difficulties in the management of entrances and exits, and creates the human need to find explanations for the otherwise inexplicable.

As the concept of personhood gradually began to emerge, so did concepts of life journeys as pilgrimage with destination. Such concepts were used by Shakespeare living on the edge of the slow turn to modernity, who expresses these ways. He articulated ideas of 'having a life' which have been enduring. Sonnet 73, written at the age of 45 (he died at 52), articulates these common metaphors of life, love and death:

Sonnet 73
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sing;
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest;
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed, whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by;
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

Shakespeare, [1609] Craig (1980)

But the next extract, even more famous than the earlier one, is a clear articulation of a prevalent metaphor, which is that lifecourse can be understood as passing through phases. Individual bodies change, and

so do the social status and preoccupation of the individuals who, in this guise, begin to turn into people (i.e. personages) with a life journey. The seven ages of man is found in the play *As You Like It*. It begins:

> All the world's a stage
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages.
>
> Shakespeare, [1623] Craig (1980)

The seven ages are the mewling and puking infant, the whining school-boy, the woeful lover, the bearded soldier, the plump justice, the lean and slipper'd sixth age and the second childishness of the last age, 'Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything,' (ibid.).

These two extracts can be argued to show several different dimensions of personhood which impact our thinking about the lifecourse today, where the seven ages of man articulate the categories of personages and masks of life. However, such a viewing of lifecourse in abstract universalises what in practice is historically specific and contingent to the differently manifested and located personages. The seven ages of man is a representation of a masculine lifecourse and is located in a bourgeois class location. The calendars of women's lives have been argued to be very different by feminist critiques. Claims by those such as Davies (2001: 137), that a 'linear conception of time is grounded in gendered power relations, and in a discourse of masculinity', are explored by Leccardi (1996) who suggests that women's experience of time is discontinuous and consists of knitting and reconciling fragments of different kinds of time activity. This has been argued by Hareven (1982) to be systematised into organised social systems of industrial time, which stands specifically in opposition to family time.

We can say that the modern concept of the lifespan, and having a life to live in an active sense, is a peculiarly modern and Western development (Ikels et al. 1992; Hockey and James 2003). The concept of acting upon life in order to maximise its opportunity is one that Beck (1992) considers to be one of the defining features of risk society. Both Giddens (1992) and Beck (1992) look at how detraditionalisation and the processes of reflexive modernisation have made individuals responsible for their own biographies in ways in which the more organised world of industrial society did not, since industrial society organised people into

roles, whereas risk society requires flexibility and the capacity for rapid change.

Giddens (1991) has argued that modern society has produced increased reflexivity which has assumed an hegemonic dimension, where having a life, getting a life and developing an active management of life as reflexive life projects has become an unavoidable central preoccupation and structuring system of contemporary life(courses). This is particularly so in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, where traditional systems of kinship which defined person-hood and relatedness are argued, by Giddens, to have become distended across time and space, and its hold to have waned.

Adam (1998) systemises a model of time as a structuring timescape, allowing us to think of time-within-time, generating time lags, accu-mulation, incoherence and so on. This contrasts with what Adam feels to be a largely hegemonic orientation to the time of the present and enables us to see the masks of the lifecourse as time-dependent. In con-temporary Western lifecourses where age has become the prism through which the human experience of time has become viewed (Hockey and James 2003), the masks have become socially constructed as the masks of ageing, and this raises the issue of how the *rites de passage* (Van Gennep 1960) of contemporary life are managed (if performed at all) that is, how we get from one stage to another and how we might iden-tify such stages (if they exist).

Exploration of the masks of the lifecourse in relation to one another have also revealed their contingent nature. Aries' (1959) explora-tion demonstrates the historically conditioned and culturally specific production of childhood. Pilcher and Wragg (1996) in their study of childhood when subject to the discourses of the New Right during the 1980s and 1990s in Britain, demonstrate the creation of childhood as vulnerable to 'a gallery of social demons: single mothers, absent fathers, muddle-headed social workers failing to detect abuse, drug pushers, pae-dophiles, "do-gooders" … "trendy" teachers, doctors prescribing con-traceptives … media executives purveying violent and sexually explicit material, and so on' (ibid.: 2).

It isn't only childhood which hasn't been particularly well inves-tigated, in fact Pilcher et al. (2003) argues that the experiences of adulthood is an under-researched area, and Hockey and James (2003) comment that 'perhaps we know only relatively little about the variety of age-based identities which individuals *actually* take on across the course of their lives; and even less about how these identities are, *in practice*, made sense of by individuals in relation to the wider social and

cultural norms of ageing' (2003: 5). This book opens questions about the calendars and maps in circulation, what is driving them and how they are being redrawn.

In Chapter 1, 'From Unnecessary Possibilities, to Necessary Impossibilities: Remarks on the Redefinition of Adulthood', Harry Blatterer argues that adulthood is both central and marginal in the social imaginary. It is central because as a social category it is the benchmark against which individuals' status is evaluated. Thus children are not yet full human beings, while deep old age returns the elderly to a quasi-childhood. In the social sciences this taken-for-granted quality of adulthood underpins the much-commented-upon fact that this 'life stage' remains under-theorised. Indeed, in the social sciences, just as in common sense, both the centrality and marginality of adulthood are discursively reproduced. Parallel to this phenomenon there is a mutually invigorating discourse about 'twenty and thirtysomethings' who are allegedly rejecting, or at least delaying, entry into full adulthood. 'Twixters', 'adultescents', 'kidults' are but some of the myriad labels that have increasingly attained currency in the media over the last decade, and that are supposed to mark the protagonists. Social scientific notions of 'prolonged adolescence', 'emerging adulthood' and 'early adulthood' provide expert legitimation for this perception. This chapter argues that both discourses – not least because of their mutually reinforcing dynamism – take an anachronistic model of adulthood as their evaluative benchmark, and proposes a reconceptualisation of adulthood that more accurately reflects social transformations in the present. The recognition-theoretical turn in social theory, exemplified by Axel Honneth's (1996) elaboration of 'social recognition', provides the conceptual underpinnings of this perspective; select excerpts from original interview material provide some empirical orientation. This perspective is self-consciously sociological in its endeavour to interpret social change as the intersection of social processes and subjective orientations and practices. As a study in social recognition this chapter seeks to elucidate the normative productivity of everyday practices and interactions.

In the next chapter, 'The Calendar of Life: The Context of Social Trends for Understanding Contemporary Adulthood', Judith Burnett argues that contemporary adulthood is changing, being characterised at one end by an extension to life expectancy. It is subject to major drivers of the second demographic transition, characterised in part by major gender change and the rise of what Lesthaeghe (1995) calls the perfectly contracting society. These changes have occurred within a wider context of an overall global economic shift which has led to a major

expansion of the world economy and the capacity to produce large surpluses. While their redistribution leads to significant and persistent inequalities, nonetheless, the condition of contemporary adulthood is lived out under economic conditions which fundamentally differ from previous historical periods. The characteristics of more affluent societies include a dramatic increase in literacy and aspirations which stretch as far as a higher and post compulsory education. Thus, contemporary experiences of the lifecourse are shaped by different concepts and orientation to time, opportunity and risk which mark cultural changes to the concept of life itself.

In Chapter 3, 'Buying In: On Adulthood and Homeownership Ideologies', Kate Crawford looks at a particular aspect of the dominant norm of adulthood: entering the housing market. The housing market has been one of the major drivers of economic and financial capitalism and readers will be aware that the current world recession has been led by the so-called credit crunch and the part which housing markets have played in that. The chapter explores how attaining full adulthood is marked, looking in particular at buying a home as a marker of being truly 'all grown up' in the contexts of the credit crunch, showing how naturalised constructions of citizenship and homeownership were an integral part of a wider package of norms which defined adulthood. The chapter focuses on the Australian housing market, picking up some of the tensions now emerging in neoliberal cultures where homeownership may no longer be available for significant numbers of aspirant adults.

Chapter 4 by Rachel Brookes, 'Young Graduates and Understandings of Adulthood', draws upon an ESRC-funded study of the place of learning, work and leisure in the lives of young graduates typically in their twentysomethings. The chapter argues that the twentysomething experience is itself highly differentiated and noted that its construction included the idea of postponement. Family formation and developing wider interests was postponed until the critical issue of work was resolved. Obtaining work, especially good work, was seen as the true marker of becoming a fully fledged adult.

Chapter 5, 'Thirtysomething and Contemporary Adulthood' by Judith Burnett explores the concept of thirtysomething as one of the markers of transitions within adulthood arguing that it has become a new social identity which speaks to a concept of youthfulness within the contexts of the self awareness of ageing. The chapter briefly explores where the idea of thirtysomething came from, and then moves on to demonstrate the idea in practice, drawing on empirical research into the late boomer population in Britain. Research showed both the specificity of the

experience to a particular age group who claimed this as a generational event, and more generally how the concept became established with a wider meaning, to refer to adults constructed as youthfully rather than properly or authentically middle aged. The chapter argues that the concept of generation (Mannheim 1952) has been overlooked in theorising experiences of the lifecourse, and can be usefully brought back into play to provide understandings of not only the constructions of thirtysomething but more general insight into identities of ageing.

The next chapter, 'Chronologising Adulthood/Configuring Masculinity', by Jenny Hockey, Victoria Robinson and Alex Hall draws on an ESCR project on masculinity in transition, carried out among estate agents, firefighters and hairdressers. The chapter shows the contingent nature of understandings and constructions of time in the categories 'youth' and 'adulthood', in particular focusing on the intersection of masculinity, femininity, occupational identity and social class. The research explores how young men in different occupations imagine, and indeed plan for, the calendars and maps through which they 'make' and mark the passage of time through a series of life events, including homeownership, marriage, fatherhood, level of income and position within company. In addition, the research found that male lifecourses might be planned and operationalised by their partners, including male partners in same-sex relationships.

Chapter 7, 'Surveys, Citizenship and the Sexual Lifecourse', by Mark Davis, looks at the role of sex survey in research into sexual lifecourses in their social construction and the generation of new knowledge about them. Sexuality is contingent over the lifecourse and is subject to changing social and historical contexts, theorised by Giddens (1992) as a form of self-management or organisation on the part of the individual. Taking large-scale, national and international surveys as examples, Davis explores how processes as diverse as political, normative, market and theories of methods impinge and shape the kind of knowledge which is produced and becomes defined as truthful in the Foucauldian sense.

In Chapter 8, 'Life Begins At …? Psychological Reflections on Mental Health and Adulthood', Joanne Brown explores the markers of adulthood, queering the pitch of the sociologists by asking what we can learn from a psychological deconstruction of the category of adulthood. Brown uses psychoanalytic psychology to explore the relationship between a central norm of adulthood as a particular state of mind. This is unpacked to mean, for example mature, rational and in control, as opposed to the reality of our less-than-adult selves and the fears and fantasies we may have about revealing this to anyone else. Brown shows

that mature adulthood is not a state which is above pain, instability, childlike feelings and insecurities and that a state of mental health and well-being might well feature all of those things and more besides in terms of the emotional, bodily, sexual, environmental and occupational disorder which predominates.

The next chapter by Rosemary McKechnie and Barbara Korner, 'Growing Up Through Activism: Adult Identities and the Maturing of Standpoints', takes as its subject activism (broadly defined as political engagement) and its relationship to adulthood. The chapter draws on a study of a sample of adults by in-depth interviews, seeking to understand what activism means within the embedded contexts of lifecourse, family and work. The research shows that normative questions about achieving good citizenship can present dilemmas and decisions which sit uneasily with conventional views of responsible adulthood requiring reflection on past and present experiences in order to navigate successfully.

This book shows the dynamic world of contemporary adulthood and how cultures, structures and social change operate to shape our experiences, and how in turn, actors are at work questioning the calendars which they were bequeathed, and casting new maps on their voyage into the future.

1
Generations, Modernity and the Problem of Contemporary Adulthood

Harry Blatterer

On the most abstract level, this chapter attempts to show that the problem of contemporary adulthood is quintessentially a modern problem. Whatever its prefixes, modernity spells among other things an increasing differentiation and pluralisation of practices, ideas, norms and values. These changes give rise to tensions, contradictions and paradoxes with which the modern experience is shot through. Zygmunt Bauman (1995: 145) articulates the existential apprehensions and longings that flow from these quintessentially modern conditions:

> The anxiety would be lessened, tensions allayed, the total situation made more comfortable, were the stunning profusion of possibilities somewhat reduced; were the world a bit more regular, its occurrences more repetitive, its parts better marked and separated; in other words – were the events of the world more predictable, and the utility or uselessness of things more immediately evident.

I have a strong suspicion that the particular strand of social scientific and lay discourse about adulthood with which I'm concerned in the present context is underpinned by an attempt to fix the unfixable, to determine and then prescribe the indeterminate and so to go against the grain of modernity. An excellent example is the discursive drift, which I call 'the delayed adulthood thesis'. The thesis charges succeeding generations with a deferral of adult independence and responsibilities. The champions of this thesis rely on a historically specific kind of adulthood as the evaluative benchmark for the practices of contemporary 'twenty and thirtysomethings'.[1] In so doing they ignore an important fact: when individuals act in a greater variety of contexts and milieux than previous generations, when these contexts and milieux are shaped more

obviously than before by mostly intangible global forces and when individuals thus act and think against a background of a seemingly infinite plethora of options, the way we *do* adulthood too is subject to pluralisation and to interminable change. In fact, herein lies a reason – perhaps even the main reason – why adulthood with its connotations of 'settling down' presents a problem for many members of the post-1970 generation. More specifically, adulthood has become a problem because it has normative, culturally ingrained associations with full personhood while at the same time connoting a kind of rigidity or even closure of life that seems out of step with the requirements of flexibility, mobility and openness that have such purchase today. Many social scientists, researchers and commentators appear to remain blind to these changes and instead cling on to an anachronistic vision of what it means to be a responsible adult. Hence my contribution is a polemic, albeit a polemic that unfolds mostly by clarification and suggestion. I set out to clarify the problem of adulthood in a generational context and to spell out some of the tensions specific to the perceptions and experiences of contemporary adulthood. I begin with remarks on the status of adulthood in the social sciences and on the interconnexions between expert and lay discourses. These discourses often ignore far-reaching social and cultural transformations that undermine the empirical validity of the standard, modern biography with its march through the sequentially ordered 'life stages': childhood, adulthood and old age. Here the crystallisation of adulthood as a consequence of developmental psychologists' constitution of the unruly, adolescent subject is of particular interest. I then go on to trace some of the more salient differences between the baby boomers' coming of age and that of their twenty and thirtysomething successors in the second section where I further address the fragmentation of the contemporary lifecourse and its implication for the redefinition of adulthood. This approach will help tease out normative tensions which, I suggest, mark contemporary adulthood. I elaborate the tensions that are from a recognition-theoretical perspective in the third section. My argument here is that simultaneous *systemic recognition* and *discursive misrecognition* of contemporary adults' practices have, on the societal level, led to a *recognition deficit* and thus misapprehension of new modalities of adulthood.

Adulthood, common sense and social sciences discourse

For all the work that has been done in recent decades in the social sciences on the institutional devolvement of the lifecourse, such as the

fragmentation of the 'normal biography' (e.g., Beck 1992; Kohli 1986) and the empirical and normative inadequacies of the 'ages and stages' and 'life cycle' approach (e.g., Pilcher 1995; Rosenfeld and Stark 1987), the image of adulthood as life's centre stage, flanked by dependent childhood and old age, is difficult to dislodge from the social imagination. There are deep cultural reasons for this. The biological maturation of the human body is culturally framed in representations and socially shored up in institutions so as to make sense of experience. Inevitably this has meant that the phenomenological linearity of ageing, which allows us to perceive the lived-through past and life yet-to-come from the vantage point of the present, is reproduced in the standard biography with its cyclical return to dependence and immaturity (see Figure 1.1).

The march through the institutions which this schema represents, in turn reinforces our perceptions of ageing; the social markers – education, work, family – that constitute part of its shared vocabulary makes life's trajectory meaningful to us. Work is central in this schema. Just as work emerges as the taken-for-granted sphere of action around which a human life revolves, so adulthood appears as that (working) stage of life for which childhood prepares, and from which old age departs. The vision of the standard biography is one of a march through the institutions of education, work and retirement, complemented by equally standardised familial arrangements. The biological schema is reproduced as children leave behind an 'empty nest', and enter adulthood themselves. Dependence on school and family is supplanted by the relative independence that an income and living arrangements of one's own afford the adult. Individuals' relationships to significant others and state institutions change accordingly. As old age progresses, social stigmatisation often renders the very old infantilised and immature,

	Childhood	Adulthood	Old age
Private sphere	Family of origin	Family of procreation	Empty nest
Public sphere	Education	**Work**	Retirement
Relationships	Dependence	Independence	Dependence
Competency	Immaturity	Maturity	Immaturity

Figure 1.1   Standard modern biography

regardless of actual competencies and abilities (Hockey and James 1993). In keeping with the once-prevalent model of the life cycle, old age returns individuals to the dependencies of childhood.

Myriad cultural representations of childhood, adulthood and old age serve to further crystallise the taken-for-granted image of life's orderly unfolding. To name just two examples: in Anglophone societies Shakespeare's famous verse from *As You Like It*, which has us 'Mewling and puking in the nurses arms' only to have us leave the stage less than gracefully in 'second childishness and mere oblivion / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything', is a cultural keystone in the formation of the social representation of ageing. Elsewhere and later, Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) was a prescient description of youthful anguish (*Sturm und Drang*) as it turned out. Because once Freud had laid the foundations and his American benefactor G. Stanley Hall (1904/1920) lent social scientific credence to a specific notion of the young person, adolescence became an unquestioned fact of life, a scientifically identifiable and soon highly marketable and politically useful slice in the continuum of human development. Simultaneously its other – adulthood – became more strongly delineated and more clearly demarcated.

Hence the question 'what is adulthood?' can be answered by juxtaposing it with ascribed adolescent characteristics. For on the level of individual attitudes, or so the story goes, adulthood is the destination of adolescent development. It replaces idealism with realism, rashness with prudence, lifestyle experimentation with career orientation, self-centredness with responsibility and commitment for self and others. In this vision sobriety suffuses all that the adult does. And because all that is spontaneous and irrational, tinged with passion, repudiates planning and cost-benefit calculation makes for uncertain social-scientific pronouncements, it stands to reason that 'the adult' constitutes the ideal actor-object of the social sciences. So, aside from studies directly concerned with infancy, childhood or adolescence, whenever 'the actor', 'the subject', 'the individual' or 'the person' are conjured, that figure is inevitably one who 'was never a child and seemingly came into the world an adult' (Elias 1978: 248).

While the adult is central in the social sciences, adulthood does not constitute a distinct area of social scientific research (although adult development is a specialty field in psychology). Rather, it's the unarticulated heuristic background to all manner of investigations. Especially in sociology adulthood figures primarily as the destination to 'youth transitions' where it is presumed to lie at journey's end, though it is by and large understood to be comprised of several destinations reached at

various times – sooner by some, later by others, depending on origins and opportunities (Pollock 2008). The fixation with 'transitions', mainly because it comes up against an increasing pluralisation and fragmentation of life trajectories (see below), provokes variations on the theme: some maintain that contemporary actors are likely to move back and forth between youth and adulthood in a 'yo-yo' fashion (Pais 2000); others slot in a new life phase (Arnett 2004) immediately preceding full adulthood or believe that an interminable 'youthhood' has come to replace many a young adulthood (Côté 2000). Now, it is unquestionable that transitions from school to work, from the parental home to a place of one's own, from singledom to coupledom and/or marriage are today subject to considerable fragmentation, stops, reversals and/or parallel trajectories (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Pilcher et al. 2003; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005; Walther 2006; Bradley and Devadason 2008; Pollock 2008). However, to align these social trends with episodic sojourns in 'youth' and 'adulthood', however conceived, is not only to posit a concreteness that these conceptions lack in lived experience, but it also attributes a normative good to adulthood inherently worth pursuing. The normative centrality of adulthood asserts itself.

In the constitution of knowledge about adulthood – its supposed onset, duration, qualities and social manifestations – social science and lay discourses take their cues from one another, they intertwine. This is most evident in the 'delayed adulthood thesis', a conceptual amalgam of pronouncements with a long history in social science whose gist turns on the assumption that succeeding generations take even longer to attain full adult status. For example, Peter Blos (1941) coined the term 'post-adolescence' to designate a stage of life inhabited by individuals who have outgrown adolescence, but have not yet reached adulthood. These are individuals who, according to Keniston (1970: 634), 'far from seeking the adult prerogative of their parents … vehemently demand a virtually indefinite prolongation of their nonadult state'. Erikson's (1968) 'prolonged adolescence' neatly encapsulates this idea; it describes lives led in a manner that is analogous with a particular image of adolescence: a time of irresponsibility where few decisions have to be made and the capacity to reconcile 'work and love' (Freud) has not yet been attained. Little appears to have changed. When social researchers and sociologists evaluate social trends such as delayed marriage and family formation, prolonged periods of education, later entry into the full-time labour market and protracted periods of cohabitation of parents and their twenty and thirtysomething children, they invariably equate these trends with a prolonged transition to and

delayed entry into full adulthood (e.g., Côté 2000; Furstenberg et al. 2003; Furstenberg 2004; Arnett 2004).

In this orthodox view we are time and again presented with what appears to be a supposed collective turn away from the desire for independence and the will to take responsibility for self and others, and on a massive generational scale at that.[2] This hand-wringing over successive generations' alleged inadequacies on the part of social scientists, journalists and commentators has over the past several years helped give rise to neologisms referring to the reputed delayers and refusers of adulthood: there are American 'twixters', Canadian 'boomerang kids', English 'KIPPERS' (Kids in Parents' Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings); French who suffer from *Tanguy syndrome*, German *Nesthocker*, Italian *mammone* and Japanese *Freeter* (van Dyk 2005: 45).[3] Print media headlines such as '"Adults" Fail the Age Test' (Protyniak 2004), 'Kids Who Refuse to Grow Up' (Riley 2003) and 'Forever Young Adultescents Won't Grow Up' (Fjeldstad 2004) provide further evidence that the delayed adulthood thesis is reproduced in both social scientific and popular discourses; either genre can easily find evidence in the other to shore up its assumptions. The aggregate outcome is a reproduction of not only the normative centrality of adulthood, but of a particular version of adulthood. I suggest that this 'standard adulthood' (Lee 2001) is anachronistic and no longer adequate to present social arrangements, and elaborate this claim below by way of a broadly generational analysis.

Generations and the devolution of the lifecourse

Karl Mannheim's (1968) essay on generations is at its core a critique of positivism. Consider his schematic rendering of the 'positivist' perspective:

> Everything is almost mathematically clear: everything is capable of analysis into its constituent elements, the constructive imagination of the thinker celebrates its triumph; by freely combining the available data, he has succeeded in grasping the ultimate, constant elements of human existence, and the secret of History lies almost fully revealed before us.
>
> (1968: 278)

By contrast, the qualitative approach, preferred by the 'romantic-historical school' invoked and revived by Dilthey, 'firmly eschew[ed] the clear daylight of mathematics, and introvert[ed] the whole, (1968: 276). The debate between 'positivists' and 'hermeneuticists' (in the broadest

social science terms) has a long history and was particularly robust from early to mid-twentieth century, with the interchange between Karl Popper and Theodor W. Adorno being the most prominent case (Adorno et al. 1976). That debate continues, albeit in less direct fashion, and it almost inevitably arises when the methodological usefulness of the concept 'generation' is at stake (see, for example, the debate between Wyn and Woodman (2006, 2007) and Roberts (2007)). Mostly, social scientists prefer to work with 'cohorts' as the limitations imposed by precisely stipulated time frames yield much coveted quantitative data (Laslett 2005). But the qualitative concept 'generation' has its own distinct virtues, and that precisely for its very imprecision: '[g]enerations lack specific boundaries … but offer the potential of being used as powerful explanations in and of themselves for distinctive patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors' (Alwin and McCammon 2003: 42; see Burnett (2003) for a comparative typology of cohort and generation). The following discussion on the post-war baby boomers and post-1970 twenty and thirtysomethings takes its cues from such an understanding of 'generation'.

The salient social and cultural characteristics of the post-war era in Western societies are well known and well documented and can be crudely sketched: an economic boom – which began in the United States, spread to other Anglophone societies and eventually bolstered Continental West and North European economies – precipitated a marriage and baby boom. The optimism that followed was held in check by anxieties spurred by the Cold War and burgeoning popular disillusionment with foreign policy machinations which came to a head with the gathering crisis that was the Vietnam War (Hobsbawm 1995; Mackay 1997; Marwick 1999). Rock'n'Roll had become a cultural emblem of a new generation's rebellion against the parent generation and all they stood for – the system, the establishment and anything that smacked of 'settling down'. Born from affluence, 'the teenager' furnished adolescence with a marketable veneer (Savage 2007). This was a giant leap towards the clear cultural and consumption-led delimitation and separation of adolescence/youth and adulthood which emerged from a convergence of social and cultural developments that deserves reiteration: social science provided a fast accumulating corpus of knowledge about adolescents; the market delivered the lifestyle accoutrements desired by the new teenage demographic while at the same time stimulating those desires; economic growth and a strong Keynesian public policy programme ensured young people's integration into an education system that itself was strongly integrated as a preparatory

step for the industrial (male) labour market sector and the (female) service sector and domestic private sphere.

It was during that time that 'standard adulthood' – the middle stage of the standard biography – settled as adulthood *par excellence* in the social imagination. And it did so, firstly, because of the advancing differentiation of adult and youth social and cultural spheres, and secondly, because a policy orientation towards full-time employment fostered the reproduction of (mostly) one-income, male breadwinner/female home-carer nuclear families. That period has been more conducive to the institutionalisation of a particular model of adulthood than any other period before or after. No period has provided more favourable conditions for this model to become lived experience for a majority; no period has shown a more faultless synthesis of the ideal of adulthood and its reality, of norms and practices. Sharply delineated structures of opportunity rested on culturally and socially reproduced normative foundations that were, for a time, rarely questioned. With full-time long-term work within reach for a majority, and with early marriage and family formation so common, what being 'grown up' meant was clear. The fulfilment of the 'classic markers of adulthood' – family, stable relationships, work and independent living – brought in its wake the social recognition necessary for adult status to become a meaningful achievement for baby boomer's in their early-to-mid twenties (Blatterer 2007a).

Since the 1970s once 'highly standardized life trajectories have been "shattered" by structural and cultural developments in all major social institutions' (Buchmann 1989: 186). This denotes quite a radical transformation of the temporal unfolding of the lifecourse with the implication that, while institutional arrangements (e.g., school, work, retirement) persist, biographies are no longer beholden to a linear trajectory. That is to say, biographies are individualised: '[T]he predictable succession of life stages with their traditional discontinuities and models of coordination for different spheres of life is being increasingly replaced and/or overlaid with a series of decisions that are subject to individual efforts at connection' (Wohlrab-Sahr 1992: 220, my translation). At the risk of oversimplification a few interconnected and highly condensed examples shall suffice to illustrate the devolution of the standard lifecourse these changes augur (Blatterer 2007a for a more detailed discussion).[4]

Intimacy

Though contested for lack of empirical evidence (Jamieson 1998; Gross 2005), Giddens's (1992) thesis of a shift from fixed, highly-gendered

and prescribed arrangements to more openness, negotiation and differentiation of forms of intimacy is surely indisputable if, that is, we take it as a coherent observation of a likely meltdown of older templates, competing realities on the level of everyday life notwithstanding (also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bauman 2003).

Work

The labour market of the 'new economy' favours those who are flexible, mobile and willing to change, and thus discriminates against those who want stability and linear, predictable work careers (Sennett 1998; Beck 2000; Bauman 2006). Shifts from full-time to part-time and temporary work underpin these trends throughout the OECD (Campbell and Burgess 2001; Vosko et al. 2009). Moreover, there is some evidence that the desire for stability framed in these terms has been waning for some time (du Bois-Reymond 1998; Blatterer 2007a; Bradley and Devadason 2008).

Biographical time

These changes affect the social construction and experience of time since it contains within it the potential to alter individuals' perception of their temporal progress (Rosa 2003). By extension, there is a greater potential for social asynchronicity as individuals are 'less likely to experience and/ or recognise their own trajectory as part of the "collective destiny" of the social group(s) to which they belong' (Buchmann 1989: 76). Under these conditions the simultaneity of plural, asynchronous and fragmented biographies becomes a normalised part of the 'continuum' of life.

Life planning

All the above have consequences for individual possibilities of long-term planning. The paradox here is that long-term planning, at a time when this was a real possibility for many baby boomers, was not imperative. By contrast, the unpredictability of the present requires continuous reflection concerning one's biography (e.g., Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). I conceptualise this historical shift as one from the *unnecessary possibility to the impossible necessity* of life planning. Let me illustrate with a vignette from a qualitative study (Blatterer 2007a). Asked about the differences between their generation and the generation of their parents, one of the respondents (male, 25) was perplexed at his parents' fairly conventional life trajectories even though they 'were unorthodox in the sense that they actively and consciously tried to break [the] mould'. What the respondent perhaps underestimates is that breaking the mould and conventionality were reconcilable for many baby boomers

because they still knew *what* mould they were breaking, *what* they were gaining or losing, embracing or rejecting, dropping into and out of in *what* social context – and they knew because the convergence of ideal and reality in standard adulthood made opportunities and 'the way things were done' abundantly clear.

This is no longer the case. While associations of parenthood, work, mortgages, marriage and divorce with adulthood remain, the 'when', 'how' and 'why' of these practices and attainments is no longer clear. A female respondent (25) from the same study put it succinctly; for her, adulthood 'sort of ends up a big mish-mash'. Such examples sometimes move social scientists to proclaim the end of adulthood as a social category, and instead to frame it in psychological terms (e.g., Arnett 1997; Côté 2000). I argue that such a perspective underestimates collective practices and their normative productivity. In other words, extending periods of education, eschewing heteronormative lifecourse decisions, delaying or repudiating marriage, having children later or not at all, cohabiting with parents, renting and travelling rather than owning and settling *et cetera*, while clearly not always simply a matter of individual choice, indicate that the challenge to the normative vision of adulthood is an outcome of collective practices in response to sociocultural change. In fact, these practices are productive of new, collective modalities of adulthood rather than symptoms of its psychologisation. Contemporary twenty and thirtysomethings are not eschewing, but redefining adulthood. That work of redefinition brings with it specific tensions, which I will explore in the following section.

Adulthood as recognition deficit

In the German philosophical tradition the term *Anerkennung* or 'recognition' is synonymous with validation, approval or respect. Honneth (1996) has married the Hegelian notion of recognition, whereby mutual validation of persons and institutions ensures social order and progress, with the social psychology of George Herbert Mead to show that our self-identifications and self-perceptions – our very humanity – depend on recognition by others (intimate others, state institutions, the law, workplace, etc.). In turn, the efficacy of that recognition depends on the subject's recognition of those others as valid and valued entities (e.g., those who don't respect laws are more likely to transgress them than those who do). Intersubjective recognition on all levels of social interaction is thus a prime modality of social integration, in classic sociology parlance. Following this conception, my theoretical elaboration

of the social redefinition of adulthood takes as its starting point the following proposition: in those societies where 'the adult' connotes the end product of social and psychological development, the concept represents the achievement of full participant status attained through an intersubjective process of social recognition.

Specific to the issue at hand I use the terminology 'adult recognition'. In Eisenstadt's (1971: 30) words, 'the achievement of full adult status' equals 'full membership in the social system'. That integration occurs through adult recognition which, like all processes of social recognition, is 'shaped by the particular manner in which … [it] is institutionalized within a society' (Honneth 2003: 138). If we take 'institutionalized' in its broadest terms as the active reproduction of changing yet shared patterns of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, we can ascertain certain criteria or norms that pertain to specific forms of recognition in specific historical periods. The classic markers of adulthood – family, stable relationships, work and independent living – can thus be conceived as criteria for the recognition of adult status. During the heyday of standard adulthood, parenthood and marriage were strongly normative criteria. Today, the differentiation and pluralisation of values and practices in diverse communities notwithstanding, these norms remain robust in the social imaginary. And it is precisely this continued robustness of certain criteria for adult recognition that lies at the heart of the problem of contemporary adulthood for the post-1970 generation, as I will now go on to explain.

When asked about the meaning of adulthood, respondents are likely to reiterate standard assumptions (Blatterer 2007a). One male (25) says it makes him think of 'all the terrible clichés of suburban nuclear family madness', while another (26) unwittingly elaborates that statement: 'Work, family, all the conventional things, a house'. But at the same time – and this is the crux – an awareness concerning what it means to be 'grown up' jars against social trends, against the practices of those twenty and thirtysomethings who *do* their adulthoods differently. The respondents are aware that this marks a generational shift. Several of them identified early marriage and family formation as something that was common for the previous generation. In addition, they were keenly aware that the decision to marry early and have children young did not just rest on individual desires isolated from social pressures, but was connected to strongly normative cultural values:

> Without a doubt they [the baby boomers] are probably a good ten
> years ahead in terms of when they … settled down, or whatever.
> I mean, they were too young in my opinion. My mum was probably

about 20 when she had my first brother. I mean I can't imagine that. And she used to say to me: 'That's your problem. When I was your age I had three kids'. But I think it was expected of them more so [than now]. There was more pressure on; it was the done thing as a rule. (Female, 32)

To make matters more complicated still, rather than having to marshal particular capacities and competencies at particular points in the life-course and not others, the pluralisation and differentiation of contemporary life trajectories requires a range of capacities and competencies to be marshalled simultaneously in a range of social environments. This has also precipitated a differentiation of the norms of adulthood specific to respective social environments. We can thus only at the risk of great oversimplification speak of adulthood as 'membership in the social system', the way Eisenstadt (1971), for instance, still could. A one-size-fits-all approach to the normative meaning of adulthood is therefore doomed to inadequacy. Nevertheless it is the dominant approach today and it impacts not only on the way the culture judges twenty and thirty-somethings' lives, but how as a consequence they may judge themselves; how they perceive their attainment or non-attainment of full adulthood/personhood. So, the respondent who stated that adulthood 'sort of ends up being a big mish-mash' is also evaluating her own position vis-à-vis another, older generation and once-clearer normative standards.

   Like so many of her contemporaries, my respondent receives conflicting messages from ill-defined institutions and environments (society, the culture, the media, the labour market) as well as concrete individuals (parents, teachers, peers) concerning her adult status. On the one hand, having come of age in an era in which openness to change, mobility and flexibility are normalised imperatives, the labour market rewards those who are willing and able to delay or forfeit non-work related responsibilities so as to commit more fully to the requirements of economic fluctuations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 6). From a recognition-theoretical perspective, such instances can be conceived of in terms of *systemic recognition*.[5] On the other hand, all those social scientific, media and lay pronouncements that insist on a generational deferral of adult responsibilities are instances of *discursive misrecognition*. I refer to this singular historical situation as *recognition deficit* (Blatterer 2007a) and suggest that it is the central marker of the post-1970 generation's adulthood. They are, in other words, damned if they do, and damned if they don't: they are disadvantaged by the labour market if they desire employment security and futures that can be envisaged beyond the intermediate

term, and they are less than full persons (in the eyes of some) if they fulfil the imperative of flexibility[6] and thus end up eschewing some of the standard tracks of adulthood they are asked to follow.

Conclusion

'Adult' and 'adulthood', far from being merely benign descriptors, contain semantics that are deeply differentiating. They attribute full status to some social actors, and withhold that full status from others such as children and the elderly (Hockey and James 1993; Qvortrup 1994). This is one obvious reason why the meanings and social practices of adulthood deserve analysis. Yet while this explains the importance of individuals' self-identification as 'adult', it only partly explains why contemporary adulthood has become a particularly problematic notion for the twenty and thirtysomething generation. In order to give a fuller account, I have tried to show that wider social transformations need to be considered. What seems clear now is that culturally normative prescriptions about appropriate 'adult' behaviours and attitudes have a tendency to lag behind what people actually do. What is crucial here is that this lag is a consequence of practices that *accord* with the social conditions of our times, practices that are strongly *integrative* at a time when flexibility has long supplanted stability as a necessary orientation to life. And so contemporary modalities of adulthood are marked by a paradox that I have dubbed *recognition deficit*. For while there is *systemic recognition* of flexible adult lives – primarily in the economy but also concerning cultural values around intimacy for example – there is *discursive misrecognition* of these very integrative practices on the part of social scientist, journalists and commentators because they decontextualise generational realities, and so continue to judge present social trends against old models of adulthood. It is not wonder, then, that twenty and thirtysomethings – branded often as Generation Y – are often represented as an historical oddity.

Following a perspective that sees struggles for recognition as drivers of social change, today's twenty and thirtysomethings are a generation that drives social change in the context discussed here. And so, the practices for which they are at times derided are productive of new norms – and new adulthoods. Over time these practices will weaken the normative efficacy of old standards. To be sure, none of this is particularly revolutionary. After all, it's the baby boomers that can (and do) take credit for standing up to all that was deemed 'grown up' during their coming of age. Rock'n'Roll, the 'counterculture', Vietnam War protests, Civil Rights

struggles and other well-known social manifestations of 'youth rebellion' have been made to speak volumes on that matter. That generation's adulthood was about cultural (and for a brief time political) differentiation from their progenitors. For the boomers' children, coming of age is first and foremost about negotiating the highly complex demands for recognition that pertain in contemporary modernity. Hence their (in the traditional sense) non-revolutionary collective practices can be understood as a 'struggle for recognition' in a very specific but perhaps no less powerful sense: they are everyday elicitations of usually milieu-specific validations of biographical narratives that, for all their fragmentation, show a generational pattern in the collective experiences of today's twenty and thirtysomethings. The very modern problem of contemporary adulthood is that struggle's crucible.

Notes

1. I use the terms 'twenty and thirtysomethings' and 'post-1970 generation' interchangeably throughout.
2. This view also ignores a voluminous social science literature on the value of children (VOC) for parents (e.g., Hoffman and Hoffman 1973; Nauck 2001), and so mistakenly casts what in fact are multivalent generational interdependencies for a one-way dependency of children on parents.
3. *Tanguy syndrome* is named after a popular French film protagonist; *freeter* is derived from the English 'free' and the German *Arbeiter* (worker/s), denoting young people who frequently change jobs and live at home (van Dyk 2005).
4. Owing to limited space I have omitted reference to housing affordability. For a discussion of the Australian context, see Allon (2008).
5. Legal bestowal of the full gamut of rights and obligations at 18 or 21, depending on legislature, is another example of the systemic recognition of adulthood.
6. Following discussions with Sveva Magaraggia and communications with Iain Campbell, I see good grounds today to rethink 'flexibility' as an ideological euphemism for (labour market) 'precarity' or 'precariousness', as the terms are variously used (also Vosko et al. 2009).

2
The Calendar of Life: The Context of Social Trends for Understanding Contemporary Adulthood

Judith Burnett

This volume explores the changing experience of contemporary adulthood, looking at its reconfiguration into new and fluid social identities and life phases on the one hand, and some of the key drivers and structuring influences such as education, gender and culture on the other. This chapter begins by exploring how concepts of time have informed models of the lifecourse rooted originally in concepts of the seasons, producing a calendar of life marked by phases and stages. But the concept of time itself has been shown to be malleable. It has changed to produce a much more mechanical system packed with ideologies and norms which, through modernity, rendered the lifecourse a disciplinary system. This modern model carried the ability to set times and deadlines, and proscribe the passing of appropriately lived seasons in the calendar of life.

However, such models do not stand still, and by referring to some of the key social and demographic trends, namely the second demographic transition and the development of an ageing society, we can also see how actual changes to the lifespan alongside cultural norms which govern it, in turn, shake the lifecourse model away from standard prescriptions. The contexts which frame and shape the experience of adulthood are also produced by the actors brought to life by the passage of social time. The chapter asks readers to reflect upon both the consequences for social change of the iterative experience of structure and agency on the one hand, and the extent and limits of that change on the other.

A calendar of life

Implicitly the idea of the lifecourse in lay terms can be viewed as a calendar of life, characterised by seasons of youth and maturity, linked to

the passage of time. Moving between phases has been managed by a combination of ideology, rituals and institutions. This was theorised in the first instance by anthropology rather than sociology, which has taken some time to catch up. Modern sociology gazed upon adulthood through the homogenising and ideological lens of modernity which constructed adulthood as a normative state, to be strived towards and captured forever in the social status (read social class) achieved by its person and lacking in interest beyond that. However, the anthropological models and their sociological adoptees led to a clearly articulated sense of a movement through social statuses facilitated by acts such as the *rites of passage* identified by Turner (1969). These provide for the social management of the different phases of life, which critically in the paradigms of modernity operate according to different orientations to time and space, and are thus subject to different uses of time. Thus the calendar of life carries norms and values about what acts are appropriate to which time, an example is the concept of 'being childish' or as Joanne Brown's chapter in this volume sets out, acting like young people when '[w]e should know better at our age'.

Running underneath such ideas like an underwater stream is in part the awareness of the passage of time and of its meaning to ourselves as individuals who essentially bear finite lives. The awareness of finitude has been argued to be an integral part of human experience and generates one of the central paradoxes of the human condition, which is that we live a finite period as part of an enduring social and historical stream which predates and outlives us. Creating the wealth of explanations for the otherwise inexplicable arrival of babies and their subsequent death either then or after a passage of time has been one of humankind's greatest challenges.

Explorations of time in human society suggest that there is considerable variation in orientation to time, and in the meanings attributed to it. Evans-Pritchard (1940), in his study of the Nuer for example, found that time wasn't viewed in a similar way as under the conditions of modernity in industrialised formations. For example, time was such that it couldn't be spent or saved, and couldn't be used to progress towards something in the future. In this sense, time doesn't pass in a linear fashion from points A to B, but is conceptualised as a more cyclical system. However, whether time can be so clearly modelled in different social contexts and regimes isn't necessarily so obvious. For example, Östor questions the value of such dichotomies 'as we shall see, all these kinds of time exist in both kinds of societies. The crucial question is what these times are all about in given contexts' (1993: 4).

Gell (1992) explores the considerable diversity in the concept and social organisation of time in human society. He shows how time is a structuring system arranged in layers of organisation, manifested for example in the simultaneous use of different calendars, including institutionalised and official versions which can run in parallel. (He takes as an example Bali with its variety of calendars marking out religious, secular, international, national, family, and (un)lucky times and thus multiple day names). Time therefore becomes codified according to different systems of counting which are endowed with qualities which spring from the culture which informs that counting. Thus, labour time, identified as a creation of the capital labour relationship (Marx and Engels 1976), is a marvellous example of how social values became manifested as economic value, and the passage of time became accounted in monetary terms. Even while the beat of time was mechanically created as an autonomous system of precision (Urry 1996), cultural meanings were stuck to it, such as Weber (1930) demonstrates in his discussion of the moral value of time manifested in the Protestant Work Ethic and the concept of idleness; central to the idea of idleness is that time is something which can be sinfully wasted. The power of such time systems is classically demonstrated by Thompson (1967) who argues that orientation to time became a key regulatory system of labour in the development of capitalism, through which process workers come to embody and internalise the dominant system of productive time.

The appearance of clock time with its uniform units and all pervasive quality (as it became implemented) can be seen as one of the great, if problematical, innovations in the counting of time. Even though clock time appears hegemonically universal and natural, it was an artefact of industrialism (Adam 1990), and, in common with all social systems it had to be implemented and managed. For example, not only the creation of factories but the creation of a railway system and the spread of timetables created a common or universal time which spread geographically over ever-widening zones, acting as both a counting system and as a setting system. Setting systems create times which elicit or conjure up certain behaviours and responses. This is different from systems which merely describe the amount of time which has passed. In effect, the creation of and widespread installation of clock time consolidated and developed a disciplinary system which replaced the local systems and organic, consensual ways of 'doing things when it felt like the right time' with a system which set the time at which or by which things should or will be done (see John Urry's (1999) excellent discussion of the spread of common time).

The industrialist concept of time was linear, in that time's arrow takes us forward (is simultaneous as a movement in or across space), and is based on tacit assumptions of progress or development. The time of industrial capital has been argued to have been in part a globalising, unifying project, at odds with lived experience and the actual calendars in use (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Gell 1992; Urry 1996; May and Thrift 2001). We should note that setting systems did exist prior to the Industrial Revolution and some have outlived it, for example, the organisation of religious observance both on a daily basis (such as prayer times) and over a lifetime (for example the time for childbirth). Hareven (1982) proposes the parallel existence of industrial and family time, the rubric of which locates women in lives which are marked by conflicting needs which arise under each system of time. This suggests that industrial time was both incompatible with other systems of time, and was setting time in gender specific ways which ultimately disadvantaged the female sex.

We can put clock time, and other time concepts, together with the lifetime of the lifecourse to see that cultures which, for example, nowadays allow us to mark major birthdays at each decade (Bytheway 2005) have borrowed from industrial time to produce their own concepts of a lifespan and lifetime which we should understand are historical and peculiar to our moment, and are thus characterised by splitting; the attribution of what is proper conduct at each point; and a potentially disciplinary system for organising the lifecourse.

Adulthood: Affluence and life chances

The changing character of contemporary adulthood can be set within the contexts of a changing economy which has experienced a period of rapid economic growth and a transition between world trading blocks to create a globalised and globalising economic trend. This capacity to produce and trade a surplus across wide geographical areas was a hallmark of the Industrial Revolution and its prefigurative trading and state structures. The twentieth century saw dramatic booms and busts as the world economy not only became integrated but developed high degrees of increasingly risky interdependency. This economic change was expressed in a variety of social structures including political units organised through alliances of shifting allegiance and control.

Table 2.1 gives a global perspective on the fortunes of the top 30 and bottom 30 states in terms of gross national income per capita and relative purchasing power. Here we see small, rich states in the top three

Table 2.1 Gross national income per capita, 2008 – top 30 and bottom 30 states (Purchasing Power Parity)

Ranking		Purchasing power parity (international dollars)	Ranking		Purchasing power parity (international dollars)
1	Luxembourg	64,320	210	Dem. Republic of the Congo	290
2	Norway	58,500	209	Liberia	300
3	Kuwait	52,610	208	Burundi	380
4	Macao, China	52,260	207	Guinea-Bissau	530
5	Brunei Darussalam	50,200	206	Eritrea	630
6	Singapore	47,940	205	Niger	680
7	United States	46,970	204	Central African Republic	730
8	Switzerland	46,460	203	Sierra Leone	750
9	Hong Kong, China	43,960	202	Mozambique	770
10	Netherlands	41,670	201	Togo	820
11	Sweden	38,180	200	Malawi	830
12	Austria	37,680	199	Ethiopia	870
13	Ireland	37,350	198	Rwanda	1010
14	Denmark	37,280	197	Madagascar	1040
15	Canada	36,220	196	Mali	1090
16	United Kingdom	36,130	195	Nepal	1120
17	Germany	35,940	194	Uganda	1140
18	Finland	35,660	192	Chad	1160
19	Japan	35,220	192	Burkina Faso	1160
20	Belgium	34,760	191	Comoros	1170
21	France	34,400	190	Haiti	1180
22	Australia	34,040	189	Guinea	1190
23	Spain	31,130	187	Zambia	1230
24	Italy	30,250	187	Tanzania	1230
25	Greece	28,470	186	The Gambia	1280
26	Republic of Korea	28,120	185	Myanmar	1290
27	Israel	27,450	184	Ghana	1430
28	Slovenia	26,910	183	Bangladesh	1440
29	Iceland	25,220	182	Benin	1460
30	New Zealand	25,090	181	Kenya	1580

Source: *World Development Indicators*, World Bank, 7 October 2009.

followed by the new arrangement of post-Cold War world superpowers. In this table, European Union states have been disaggregated, showing the relative strength of individual states, which continues today. The

table shows, above all else, the extent of the gap between the richest and poorest regions found in the global north-south divide.

Much of this book, and indeed contemporary social theory, is concerned with the social structures and realities of the richest regions of the world. Global theories show their interrelationship with poorer regions. However, the experiences of contemporary adulthood and the debates about the new lifecourse are in part located in relatively affluent areas and experienced by relatively affluent populations. Debates about the ageing population and the potentially dramatic implications of changing demographic pyramids for regimes based on welfare capitalism remain in part debates about wealthier states.

With affluence and the development of welfare capitalism in the West came a rise in availability to education and a global movement towards increased levels of literacy. These impact life chances, with a proven correlation between levels of literacy and education and life expectancy.

The last 30 years have seen a dynamic growth in demand for post-compulsory education and the development of higher education and international mobility. While higher education is still more likely to be accessed by the middle rather than working class, this has allowed a diversification of social groups including minority communities within H. E. institutions. A major transition has been the change in gender balance of participating classes and communities. The last 30 years have seen a rapid and widespread take-up of higher education among women. Table 2.2 provides a snapshot in one state, the UK, highlighting this trend.

Continuing education is not the exclusive preserve of the young or youthful, with the lifelong learning movement arguing for education as an entitlement which endures over a lifetime. Radical alternative models have also emerged, such as the University of the Third Age (U3A). U3A originated in France and became an international structure of courses put up by older citizens for other older citizens, based on the principle of shared collective learning.

Thus we see that there is a wider context of an increasingly affluent society and an upward trend in the rise of literacy and the pursuit of lifelong learning after compulsory education comes to its end. Within such macro contexts we see persistent inequalities, some of them clearly registered in a global structure of inequality, others more locally felt and manifested in stubborn structures of class based socio-economic disadvantage and deprivation. This not withstanding, we see that contemporary adulthood is subject to drivers of change which shape structures and reach deep into everyday life experience and expectations which include

Table 2.2 Participation in further and higher education by sex, 1970–2006 (UK, 000s)

Type of course and mode of study		1970/71	1980/81	1990/91	2006/7
Further education: Full-time	Males	116	154	219	515
	Females	95	196	261	531
Further education: Part-time	Males	891	697	768	1,027
	Females	630	624	986	1,567
All further education	Males	1007	851	987	1,542
	Females	725	820	1247	2,098
Higher education: Undergraduate – Full-time	Males	241	277	345	563
	Females	173	196	319	706
Higher education: Undergraduate – Part-time	Males	127	176	193	267
	Females	19	71	148	451
Higher education: Postgraduate – Full-time	Males	33	41	50	120
	Females	10	21	34	124
Higher education: Postgraduate – Part-time	Males	15	32	50	143
	Females	3	13	36	181
All higher education	Males	416	526	638	1094
	Females	205	301	537	1463

Source: 'Students in Further and Higher Education: By Type of Course and Sex', *Social Trends 39*, Table 3.9.

beliefs about a general expansion of the global economy, the expectation of a never-ending surplus and variations on the theme of immortality.

Adulthood: The second demographic transition

The much quoted comment by Thatcher[1] that there is no such thing as society, only individuals who are part of families, and it is to the family unit that individuals should first turn when encountering problems, sets the tone for the political environment in which the generation was to make its passage through young adulthood. Under such a rubric, the family was/is defined as private life, and therefore beyond the reach of the state. This statement might best be understood as an aspirational statement of a particular social interest rather than a description of

reality, since by 1979, the march of women from the home to the labour market had gained considerable momentum, and the welfare state had both accepted responsibility for female actors while simultaneously enforcing the sexual division of labour (Lewis 1992, 1993).

This process is positioned by Beck as a move which 'leads to an upheaval in the snail's pace of the conventional occupational, political and private order of things' (Beck 1994: 3), as an integral feature of reflexive modernisation which disembeds the traditions of industrial society. Through this process, Beck (1992) argues that women as social agents are released into the unravelling post-Fordist economy. The wider process of transformation is described by Giddens (1991) as one of detraditionalisation, brings in its wake a certain uncalculability (since all traditions fall available for re-examination and thus choice) and a renewed requirement for decisions. Whereas choices may be made by individuals, however, decisions deserve investigation, to see who makes them, how, and by what medium, from what basis of stratification in power (Giddens 1994).

The nesting of the nuclear family in industrial capitalism is well documented, and can be argued to have underpinned the class society. Thus the change in gender role can be considered an important constitutive process of the transformation of class relations. Becker (1981), for example, argues that the historical sexual division of labour encouraged conjugal marriage, but the rise of women's participation in the labour market and increased public visibility in other fields has, under conditions of advanced capitalism, led to a convergence at the level of gender roles, undercutting the logic of traditional family structure.

Changes in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, changes in child birth patterns, both quantitative (number of live births per woman) and qualitative (timing of births and expectations and attitudes towards such events), the size and composition of families, expressions of sexuality and the development of non-heterosexual partnerships have been variously evaluated, for example, as consisting of an implicitly homogenising drive in industrialised societies. This is perhaps part of a wider debate of convergence theory, (see for example Kerr 1983; Goldthorpe 1984) where demographic patterns themselves become prone to convergence, in the context of what was argued to be increasingly homogeneous social forms found in advanced capitalist societies. It is here that Beck and Giddens in particular can be considered to represent a renewed version of convergence theory, in proposing a thesis of individualisation which replaces the associational style of solidaristic social life of the Fordist age.

Much social theory at present points to an ideational or cultural 'cause' argued by Lesthaeghe (1995) to have produced a 'second demographic transition', the significance of which is claimed to be 'both substantially and formally fully comparable to the demographic transition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (1995: 58).

A problem arises with such a convergence theory since it doesn't accommodate cultural diversity between different parts of the EU in terms of family shifts (Coleman and Chandola 1999), and thus show important national and regional variation, reflecting particular configurations of class, race and gender dynamics.

Lesthaeghe (1995) asserts three phases to the second demographic revolution. Firstly 1955–70 characterised by the end of the baby boom, the increase in marriage and the beginning of postponement of first birth. It was into this context that the generation was born. The second phase 1970–85 was characterised by the decline in marriage and the rise of 'paperless' unions such as cohabitation, and it was in this phase that the generation entered its 'youth' transition. The third phase, from the mid-eighties to the present, has seen a divorce plateau, paperless unions following divorce and a recuperation effect where fertility has risen during the 30s life phase.

Lesthaeghe distinguishes between the first and second demographic revolution, arguing that central to the first was industrialization, while 'individual autonomy and female emancipation [were] more central to the second than the first' (1995: 18). The second demographic transition is contested by those such as Cliquet (1991), who point to the significance of the recuperation effect which is of such a scale that fertility rates are being pushed back up, and that a long-term irreversible decline is being shown to be, QED, not irreversible. Of such a matter, I merely comment that this would be in keeping with the conceptualisation of the transition as being in part driven by a particular *generational* transition. There is no particularly logical reason for expecting such trends to continue in a uniform or unilinear fashion.

Theories of family change also point to other factors beyond autonomy and technology in the search for the explanation of the establishment of norms and values around the concept of 'optimum' size and composition of families, and of 'ideal' conjugal relations, such as those produced by the claimed 'gender revolution'. Ryder and Westoff (1977) suggest that rather than thinking about transitions which are never ending, we can understand demography to have become in effect, newly stabilised by the availability of cheap and relatively effective contraception. This has produced a social form which is close to 'the

Table 2.3 Fertility rates, live births per 1000 women by age of mother at childbirth, England and Wales, 1971–2008

UK	Live births per 1000 women				
	1971	1981	1991	2001	2008
Under 20[a]	50.6	28.1	33.0	28.0	26.2
20–4	152.9	105.3	89.3	69.0	74.3
25–9	153.2	129.1	119.4	91.7	106.2
30–4	77.1	68.6	86.7	88.0	112.3
35–9	32.8	21.3	32.1	41.5	58.4
40 and over[b]	8.7	4.9	5.3	8.8	12.6
All ages[c]	83.5	61.3	63.6	54.7	63.5
Total births[d] (thousands)	783.2	634.5	699.2	594.6	708.7

a. Live births per 1000 women aged 15 to 19.
b. Live births per 1000 women aged 40 to 44.
c. Total live births per 1000 women aged 15 to 44.
d. Including 'not stated' in Scotland.
Source: *Population Trends 137*, Autumn 2009, Office for National Statistics, Table 3.1.

perfectly contracepting society' (as asserted by Lesthaeghe 1995), as demonstrated in Table 2.3.

Thus we can say that a particular component of the social framework of contemporary adulthood is that of increased control over reproduction, translating into the possibilities of family formation, non-family formation, the use of a range of methods including adoption and assisted reproduction and developing and experiencing more than one phase and kind of (non)family formation due to relationship formation and dissolution.

In turn, this dramatic, if not epoch defining, shift has generated intense cultural activity around norms, values and expectations. Take for example attitudes towards motherhood in relatively affluent and educated societies, where established norms have been relatively deeply disrupted. Letherby's (1999) exploration of attitudes to motherhood in the UK found that there were prevalent norms in operation which negatively or positively sanctioned it ruling on appropriateness of age and stipulating certain meanings, for example, of involuntary and voluntary infertility. Thus not being a mother at one point in the adult lifecourse may be much less problematic than not being a mother at a different point. Thus the norm of motherhood is not that it has become deviant to become a mother, but to have become a mother at a certain age. Furthermore, definitions of 'not' becoming a mother have become

socially contested. For example, Letherby (2003) comments on the definitional problem of 'infertility' and 'involuntary childlessness', demonstrating how these arise from different social processes (for example, she identifies the role of medical practitioners in gatekeeping resources for treatment to selected individuals who become defined as cases suitable for treatment for the condition of infertility).

Further issues arise, for example, in evaluating when childlessness starts or end. At what point is childlessness constructed as a problem to be treated, and by what process does the problem construction come to its close? This was explored by Throsby (2001) in her research of the decision to end IVF treatment. Throsby found that such a decision was often part of a longer process of moving towards either accepting or actively seeking a childfree life: 'the *recognition* of the end of treatment, whether voluntarily or involuntarily arrived at, does not necessarily coincide with the transition from identifying as child*less* to child*free* – that is, a life that has ceased to be defined by the lack of children' (ibid.: 2). In differentiating between these meanings, Throsby demonstrates a journey travelled between two quite different states of being.

These generations of women living in Lesthaeghe's (1995) (possibly) perfectly contracepting society have been released from the industrial model of traditional gender roles as inevitable destinations. Some sections of such generations view becoming or remaining childfree as a positive choice from the outset. This again, however, may be subject to a negative sanction, as found by Gillespie (2000), who while noting that 'infertility' is a significant and growing global phenomenon, can and does attract a process of Othering.

Contemporary adulthood: An ageing adulthood

The overall global trend towards a lengthening lifecourse and changing intergenerational relationships remains of intense interest not only for questions of the redistribution of wealth but for the cultural impact upon adulthood including our social constructions of ageing identities which we take on across the lifecourse. The extension of a youthful period from the early twenties to the thirties and now beyond is only possible in the context of a life expectancy much extended beyond the three score years and ten of the past, and with a burgeoning media and consumer markets selling into identities and lifestyles with billions of dollars attached. Much of the literature and research today in the field of ageing recognises the power of ageing as a dynamic, shaping social force. The concept of ageing societies as essentially dying societies

has been radically challenged, rather that ageing societies are sites of innovative social behaviour and the source of experimentation in social models and institutions. See for example Gilleard and Higgs (2001) and the collection of papers by Johnson (2005), which includes contributions by Elder and Bengsten, for sociological accounts; while American authors Rosenweig and Liu (2006) provide an example of a self-help manual which challenges more passive models of ageing.

One of the implications of the extension of the lifecourse is that a new generation has been added to the structure of families. This has occurred in tandem with the decline in fertility rates which has meant that some states including Germany and Japan are now below demographic replacement rate. The underlying demographic trend is that the demographic pyramid is now reversing with the older generations becoming more numerous in proportion to the younger. Historically, the pyramid had a large base of children and young people, with a relatively narrow funnel up through the lifecourse to the oldest members of society. Affluence and the increased chances of surviving infancy have led to a fattening of the funnel, but medical advances, the shape of baby boom births in the twentieth century, the decline in birth rates and increased life chances over the age of 50 are now conspiring to produce the very real possibility that the oldest two generations will gradually bulge to become dramatically more numerous than children and young people. This presents a series of challenges, including to the pension system, which has been one of the significant drivers of finance capitalism and demonstrates the value which ageing populations contribute as well as use (Vincent 1995; 2003).

However, the pension system is based on two assumptions; firstly that there are more people paying into the system than claiming from it; and secondly, that the pension fund investments will produce a surplus not a net loss. Much of the pension debate over the past ten years has focused on the former as an issue. The credit crunch recession appears to suggest that a dramatic change of thinking is required regarding the latter issue.

The concept of a retirement age arose through the development of industrialism and nationalism in the nineteenth century, originating in Bismarck's Germany in the form of the Old Age and Disability Bill in 1889. The bill covered various sectors of industry and established the principle that the state would contribute a portion of the entitlement. Retirement pensions were gradually established around Europe with the rise of welfare capitalism, becoming ubiquitous in the post-second-World War era. The common retirement ages of 60 (for women) and

65 (for men) became a symbol of the arrival of old age and associated with one of the landmark birthdays of the lifecourse (Bytheway 2005). In the UK, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations sets out a regulatory framework for guarding against age discrimination. However, the act allows for the retirement age of 65 to stand. This led to a wave of protest and test cases in which pensioners and workers campaigned to remove the age of retirement altogether (Byers 2009). At the time of writing, the Conservative Party are seeking to raise the retirement age to 66 in 2026, while the Labour Party are seeking to raise the retirement age to 66 in 2026, 67 in 2036 and 68 in 2046 (Wintour 2009).

In 2007 Germany raised retirement age from 65 to 67 and Finland to 68 (although retirement can commence between 63 and 68 by arrangement). Other states far and wide are exploring this; for example, Singapore is currently looking at raising the age of retirement from 62 to 67. However, downsizing and restructuring has led to waves of early retirements, while the current credit crunch sees a new wave of redundancy and reliance on pension enhancements much less generous than previously made. This coincides with a general shift towards pension scheme rules based on the best ten years of service (or other calculation) rather than the final salary. Thus the probability of remaining in active, relatively well remunerated and pensionable employment is declining, and older workers are at increased risk of poverty, relative and absolute, and casual employment to make ends meet.

These shifts in intergenerational relationships raise important issues about the future of social integration. Intergenerational conflict has been found to not have the basis in reality which it may initially have been assumed to have (see for example Arber and Attias-Donfut 2000; Bengston and Achenbaum 1993) but nonetheless is leading to innovations in social organisation and at the level of practice (see for example Featherstone and Hepworth 1995 for a discussion of identities; and Hockey and James 1993 drawing out the sliding and mutable relations of dependency across the lifecourse). This also shows the possibilities of lifecourse transitions within what traditionally was constructed as 'old age'. There is increasing evidence which shows that there are differences between the old and the very old including at the level of cultural diversity. This suggests that policies and practices which have been based on tacit assumptions that older people form a homogenous social group with homogenous social needs look increasingly dated, even if they were correct in the first place.

These changes work for both increased social cohesion and fragmentation by turn, and are interweaving with a complexity of social change

which includes other major drivers such as the changing position of women in households and family formation. This simultaneous shift in expectations and practices relating to marriage, cohabitation, the rising divorce rate and an increase in childbearing to single parents means that family structures have undergone a significant change over the twentieth century. This raises important questions not only relating to the dependency ratio of young to old but of who will care for ageing societies: the government? The ageing themselves? Younger people? Innovations in social life and expectations beckon; longstanding tacit assumptions about the experience of ageing are challenged (Bengston, Putney and Johnson 2005), new horizons beckon.[2]

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the changing experience of contemporary adulthood by setting lived experience within concepts of time thus allowing us to see how periodisation is a social construction affected by both cultural change and changes to real time of the lifecourse. The calendar of life has been the object of social attention for centuries, and changing concepts of time itself has influenced how we view our lifespan at the level of culture. Furthermore, major drivers of social change such as the second demographic transition have fuelled the melting of the lifecourse from models which were informed by tacit assumptions and the appropriateness of actions informed by concepts of the passage of lifetime to phasing to much more diverse and fragmented experiences.

The chapter shows how dynamic the process of the construction of the contemporary lifecourse really is. The living of life characterised by continuity and change produces social trends with long, deep impact not just on present time but the various futures which lie ahead. Vice versa, such social and cultural trends, mapped and available as they now are, in turn affect policymaking, the rules of institutions and the expectations and social knowledge of change swilling around in the cultural ether, in turn impacting individual and household expectations, norms and decision making. This iterative process is a highly interesting one for social scientists, historians, medics, policymakers and culture vultures everywhere: but it is even more interesting for readers in the future. For all of our sophisticated trend data and horizon scanning, no one really knows what will happen when the boomers really do try to retire en masse and the younger generation finds the bill on its doorstep; no one really knows what will happen if Europe and the US

do lose their dominance as youthful, educating and fast-moving socie-
ties from the Southern hemisphere forge ahead and China stabilises and
consolidates. The book and this chapter have spoken much of change,
yet continuity is there in the social data, stretching back through the
centuries. In conclusion, we do not know how the social trends of the
present will pan out, but we might reasonably expect that the human
awareness of finitude will get in the way.

Notes

1. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women's Own Magazine*,
   3 October 1987 said, 'I think we've been through a period where too many
   people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the
   government's job to cope with it. "I have a problem, I'll get a grant." "I'm
   homeless, the government must house me." They're casting their problem
   on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are indi-
   vidual men and women, and there are families. And no government can
   do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves
   first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our
   neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the
   obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first
   met an obligation'.
2. See The Web of Life: network in the desert for a glimpse of the sorts of things
   which pensioners are up to in the Arizona desert nowadays, http://www.
   web-of-life.de/wolsiteNew/book/network_in_the_desert.

3
Buying In: On Adulthood and Homeownership Ideologies

Kate Crawford

The way that adulthood is conceptualised as a life stage is strongly influenced by wider social and economic structures. In many Western societies, the status of full adulthood has been related to property, and in particular, landownership. In Australia, the UK and the US in particular, buying a home has become a popular marker of reaching adulthood. However, in the twenty-first century, and particularly after the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2008, questions are being raised about the naturalised associations between homeownership and adulthood. This chapter examines the relationship between adulthood, citizenship and property, and considers how other experiences of home, such as renting and living with extended families, have been problematised in media debates. I begin with the historical and cultural context for contemporary under-standings of adulthood, and the connection between adult suffrage and property ownership. Then I outline a case study of a dramatic shift in Australia's property system during the mid-twentieth century that entrenched homeownership as a symbol of adult status. Finally, I consider the ways in which adulthood is being reconceptualised as the neoliberal emphasis on individual homeownership faces dissent.

Adulthood and homeownership

How do we speak about adulthood, and what goes unsaid? In contrast to the volumes of research into childhood, youth and transitional peri-ods of the life cycle, there has been little by way of a critical discourse about adulthood (as Erik Eriksen's body of work showed adulthood is taken for granted but can be unpacked). It has become the stage of life most associated with agency, stability and authority, as well as permanent work, homeownership and family formation (Pilcher 1995).

But these associations are rarely questioned in any depth. Other dominant human categories – whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality – have similarly enjoyed extended periods of being treated as central human norms, and are only now receiving the rigorous research they merit. Their discursive power had been obscured in an all too similar a fashion, a process of masking what Roland Barthes called 'exnomination' (1973: 150).

As an exnominated category, adulthood is hidden in plain sight, remaining as a natural and unquestioned class within and sometimes across ethnic and transnational groups. The economic and social expectations bound to the idea of adulthood are, by their nature, exclusionary. But the associations of homeownership and permanent work with the experience of adulthood become increasingly problematic during periods of economic downturn, when the gap between the ideal and the reality are most keenly felt. By engaging more deeply with the concept of adulthood, we can observe that the current understandings of 'how adults behave' are very recent developments. Adulthood is so culturally, ethnically and historically variable and ultimately so porous a concept that any claims of it having a timeless, concrete character are unsustainable.

Nonetheless, the definition of adulthood has profound social effects: it determines who is recognised, who gets to speak, how we see ourselves and others. I have written elsewhere about adulthood as it appears in popular media debates, and how the markers of being adult have been remoulded by the economic frameworks of neoliberalism (Crawford 2006). In this chapter, the focus will be on one area in particular: the ideal of homeownership.

In her essay 'House and Home', Iris Marion Young describes how the modern conception of a home has become deeply connected with possessing and acquiring property.

> Economic and psychosocial processes collude in the twentieth century in particular to encourage the expression of a subject that fulfils its desire by commodity consumption. … House and home occupy central places in this consumer consciousness as the core of personal property and a specific commodity-based identity.
>
> (1997: 141)

Furthermore, house and home have a central position in the normative representation of the modern adult, in very specific ways. The ideal home is not just understood as a place of dwelling but as an owned property. As Young observes, this connects with a broader twentieth

century trend towards consumption and commodity-defined identity. Property ownership is coded as a quintessentially 'adult' behaviour, with the purchasing of a first home as a rite of passage into adult life.

The social importance given to home-owning in the popular conception of adulthood can be seen across a range of popular media. From newspaper features on how to get into the housing market to television auction shows and home renovation programmes, the desire to purchase a home and commit to its ongoing improvement for 'resale value' is represented as a universal adult desire. Reality programming on home buying and improvement has proliferated to become an international television genre, one that now includes dozens of programmes such as *Changing Rooms*, *DIY Rescue*, *Location Location*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Renovation Rescue*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Ground Force*, *Auction Squad*, *The Block* and *Hot Auctions*. The format of reality renovation shows seem drawn from the clichés of porn movies: the anticipation of the 'before' footage, the fast-paced montages of the frenzied physical activity of renovation and transformation and finally climaxing in the emotional close-up when a lucky homeowner bursts into tears upon seeing her backyard or living room transformed.

While the content of these shows may be rooted in the profane, the theme is sacred: self-realisation and life transformation through property. Identity, prosperity and adult independence are coextensive in these representations of homeownership. If, as Ian Buchanan has argued, reality TV shows are fundamentally about civil society itself (2004), then home improvement programmes indicate that contemporary civil society is deeply concerned about how adults engage with owning and renovating property.

Many social scientists have argued that homeownership is a core attribute of adulthood. For example, in *American Demographics*, Marcia Mogelonsky argues that 'adulthood has traditionally been defined by certain hallmarks such as getting married, having children, owning a home, or having a lucrative job'. Of these, it is a 'residential and financial state of self-sufficiency' that she claims is 'the true definition of adulthood' (1996: 28). This construction of adult identity through particular economic relationships to housing has a long history. Not only are adults presumed to naturally desire homeownership but this desire marks them as 'responsible', a quality seen as core to the state of adulthood (Côté 2000).

This connection between adulthood, individual responsibility and a mortgage was consolidated in parts of the industrialised West during the post-war period. But a crisis point was reached in 2008 with the collapse

of the sub-prime mortgage market. In the words of Alain Badiou, banks had been 'dangling miraculous credits' so that 'people devoid of the means to afford them were browbeaten into buying flashy houses':

> These people's IOUs were then sold on, mixing them, as one does with sophisticated drugs, with financial securities whose composition was rendered as scientific as it is opaque … in the end, everything stems from the fact that there exist millions of people whose wages, or absence thereof, means that they are absolutely unable to house themselves. The real essence of the financial crisis is a housing crisis.
>
> (2008)

But there is an even deeper set of reasons behind the disaster of sub-prime mortgages. People were ready to be convinced into taking loans beyond their means because of the strong naturalised association of successful, responsible adulthood with homeownership. However, the slow unfolding of foreclosures, human suffering and far-reaching debts has shown the emptiness at the heart of individual adult responsibility as it has been figured in neoliberalism (Crawford 2009). The financial meltdown is a loss of faith in the possibility of an ever-expanding market and the individual adult's role within it, where home equity can only go up and the market will act rationally. The crisis might have begun with houses, but it progressed down to the basic assumptions and values that led us here: in particular, the relationship between adulthood and homeownership.

With more adults now questioning the wisdom of buying property, or facing home repossession, questions need to be asked about the relationship of adults to homeownership: what is its history, how is it currently expressed and what other forms of relationship of adults to their home are being left out of these representations? This chapter will follow some of the historical and cultural context for contemporary understandings of adulthood, and the connection between adult suffrage and property ownership. In particular, I consider the case study of Australia during the dramatic political decisions of the mid-twentieth century that entrenched homeownership as a symbol of adult status. The first decade of the twenty-first century has underscored the strain of this association, and adulthood as it was once understood is being reconceptualised.

Home and away: Individualisation, ownership and suffrage

John Berger argues that home is not represented best by a physical structure,

but by a practice, or by a set of practices. Everyone has his own.
These practices, chosen and not imposed, offer in their repetition,
transient as they may be in themselves, more permanence, more
shelter than any lodging

(1984: 64)

Home, in this view, is found in actions, ways of being that are per-
formed and repeated. In their continued iteration, they take on a home-
like quality. But in addition to being a set of practices, home is also
a conceptual junction of social and spatial relations. There is a set of
relations contained within a home, and home also structures a relation-
ship to the outside. The concept of home evokes the complex ties that
bind: psychological, social, cultural and affective (Coolen et al. 2002).

In comparison, an analyst from the conservative think tank, the
Centre for Independent Studies commented in the *Australian* newspaper
that 'owning a house is like owning a share certificate – except, unlike
shares, it is not tied to any one company, the capital gain is not taxed
and you can live in it as well as profiting from it' (Lane 2004). In this
picture, a house is purely a form of frozen capital – an asset that offers a
future of tax-free gains as well as the fringe benefit of a roof over one's
head. Home is a convenient space opened up by a sensible investment
strategy.

This argument is popular and self-sustaining. Once a venture has
been made into the property market, it is in the interest of the investor
to encourage price inflation: more people buying houses means greater
market demand, and bigger returns on investment. Every new entrant
into the property market becomes an ardent advocate of the dream of
individual homeownership. Only certain sectors of society can afford
housing, and thus 'a home': this is the effect of 'modern home owner
societies' where the concept of home has been taken over, as one
researcher put it, 'to serve the interest of promoting home ownership'
(Ronald 2005). The pluralism contained in the idea of home as a set of
practices occurring in a range of spaces – be it owned, rented, shared
or public space – is lost to the dominant understanding of home being
something that is owned.

When homeownership is constructed as the 'responsible' choice
for adults, the option to choose not to get a mortgage is seen as
irresponsible. This is despite the fact that for the less affluent, enter-
ing a contract of purchase may necessitate dangerously high levels of
debt, a risk that would not otherwise be seen as a responsible choice.
In this view, adults who fail to participate in the market 'deserve'

their future of high-price rental accommodation as they have failed to make the required financial sacrifices to own. It is in this way that the economic and the spiritual ideals of owning a home are collapsed: home-owning becomes a virtue, while renting is seen as unprincipled and degraded.

There is also a strong connection between adult responsibility and what Marlis Buchmann calls 'societal individualisation' (1989: 21). As Buchmann describes, the modern emphasis on individuals as the basic unit of social organisation grew as political and economic structures gradually rationalised. The individual became the agent of economic self-interest, 'being capable of engaging in purposive action, of making suitable choices, and of being responsible for their actions' (ibid.: 23). This definition slowly became the image of the responsible adult, as Côté argues in reference to Buchmann, such that an adult

> has an obligation to be instrumentally self-directed in relation to the (capitalist) economic system. In short, economic individualism is the standard of 'rational' behaviour to which people are held.
>
> (2000: 33)

As property ownership has been associated with wealth generation in the late modern period, economically responsible adults are expected to protect their individual interests by participating in the housing market. It was in the interest of a rationalised state, one that did not intend to fund public housing or other forms of housing welfare, to emphasise ownership as the responsible adult choice. However, in an economy where home affordability is low and beyond the reach of those on below average incomes, a constructed relationship between individual homeownership and adulthood infantilises both the economically disadvantaged and the young (who are in a position of generational economic weakness).

The history of property is intimately bound with citizenship. For the Athenians, as codified in Aristotle's *Politics*, it was a central tenet of democracy that only adult males who were property owners could be citizens. The argument was that only those who own and control property should have a say in the making of laws that could affect that property and, more broadly, the city. In Aristotle's formulation:

> It is necessary that the freemen who compose the bulk of the people should have absolute power in some things; but as they are neither men of property nor act uniformly upon principles of virtue, it is not

safe to trust them with the first offices of the state, both on account of their iniquity and their ignorance.

(cited in Pattie et al. 2004: 6)

Only property owners were seen as responsible enough to be making decisions that would affect the state. If a man did not own property, he could not be completely trusted to participate in ways that would benefit other property owners. Aristotle saw non-property owners as both lacking in knowledge and moral virtue. These characteristics of morality, wisdom and responsibility thus have an historical connection with property ownership as they do with adulthood. In Athens, a full citizen was an adult who owned property, and the interconnections with these three factors – citizenship, adulthood and ownership – remain today.

In England, land first began to be regularly bought and sold in the thirteenth century, but it took until the late-eighteenth century for the communal and custom-based notions of property to be concretised into private ownership and the legal right to exclude all others (Frow 1997: 133–4). Over 500 years there was a transformation from the ancient feudal system to one of capitalist property rights – the commodification of communal land into what is legally termed 'real property' (Thompson 1993). In Australia's history, property ownership was a prerequisite for participation in the democratic processes of the early colonies. Further, property could, quite literally, buy votes in the first Sydney City Council elections, with wealthy landowners allocated up to four times the number of votes of other electors. After 1879 this was formalised in the Sydney Corporation Act, which gave ratepayers (not occupants) the right to vote in municipal elections (City Of Sydney: 2005). The more property one owned, the more votes could be cast.

The direct relationship between property ownership and political franchise continued right into the twentieth century. It wasn't until the Reform Act of 1918 that universal male suffrage was adopted in Britain, and the property qualification was finally relinquished (ibid.: 9). On the surface this reads like a happy ending: political rights were given on the basis of membership in a community (after a certain age), and not premised on the ownership of property. But in its wake are left subtle (as well as less than subtle) processes by which property determines how citizens, and adults, are figured. An obvious example is that it is very difficult to remain registered on the electoral roll without a permanent residential address, which disenfranchises the homeless.

There are also many diffuse ways in which homeownership is still emphasised as part of citizenship and social representation. Nikolas

Rose argues that purchasing and owning – in multifarious forms – are central to how modern liberal societies configure citizenship.

> Individuals are now to be linked into a society through acts of socially sanctioned consumption and responsible choice, through the shaping of a lifestyle according to grammars of living that are widely disseminated. … Advanced liberal forms of government thus rest, in new ways, upon the activation of the powers of the citizen. Citizenship is no longer primarily realised in a relation with the state … but in a variety of private, corporate and quasi-public practices from working to shopping.
>
> (1999: 166)

A citizen in this neoliberal mould is one who shops, who works, who makes 'responsible choices' for themselves and their family and who owns a home (or is striving towards that goal). As we've seen, this connection between homeownership and citizenship is not itself a 'new way' that citizens are configured. However, as a naturalised discourse, adulthood's associations with property ownership are rarely queried. In political and media debates, the common question is how to make home purchase affordable for more people, rather than asking why homeownership is the adult ideal. The unquestioned assumption that homeownership is the most desirable form of housing tenure not only ignores the many different kinds of housing choices that adults make over the course of a lifetime, but also undermines the political arguments to support diversifying housing options such as public housing and low cost accommodation.

The mythology of the moral homeowner

There are two stories held within the idealised picture of an adult living in an owner-occupied house: one is about independence, a life of one's own outside the family to which one was born, and one is about ownership. The two stories were not always told together as commonly as they are in some cultures in the early twenty-first century.

Independence from the family home is one of the major 'social milestones', and an important factor which lifecourse sociologists commonly consider in studies of the transition to adulthood (Buchmann 1989: 81). It is used to indicate individual autonomy, as do other role transitions such as entry into the labour force, marriage and parenthood (Arnett 1997, 2004). The assumption that maturity requires independent space

of some kind is rarely questioned in Australia, although many cultures do not make this connection and several independent adults within a family may share a home, or even a room (Rapport and Dawson, 1998). But throughout the industrialised West, adulthood and homeownership have now become enmeshed to such an extent that Samira Kawash described the connection as having the glow of legend.

> In what can only be called a contemporary mythology, home owner-ship is held up as the supreme achievement of American adulthood. This mythology is underpinned by an array of subsidies, preferences, and prejudices that are granted additional force by the intense cultural identification of happiness, normalcy, and success with the detached single family house.
>
> (Feldman 2004: 112)

There is also a longstanding moral association with owning a home, as though the mere possession of property confers to the owner solid and well-grounded virtues. For example, as French housing critic Emile Cheysson wrote in 1881:

> Home ownership completely changes a working man. … With a lit-tle house and garden he becomes a real family head, which means morality and providence, feeling that he has roots and authority over his own people. … Soon it is his house that 'possesses' him: it makes him a moral, settled, transformed man.
>
> (cited in Choko 1993: 8)

Homeownership, to Cheysson, conferred authority, status and morality – the rank of full adulthood. In contemporary British, American and Australian cultures there remain strong associations of moral virtue, financial success and individual fulfilment with owning a home, as has been shown by many researchers (Kemeny 1983; Paris 1993; Winter 1994; Badcock and Beer 2000; Ronald 2005). In fact, Australia's levels of investment in homeownership have historically been even higher than in the US, and it holds the title of the world's top accumulator of housing wealth during the twentieth century. This was due in large part to the post-war wealth of Australia, which drove the national percent-age of homeowners rapidly upwards: it climbed from 52.6 per cent in 1947 to 71 per cent in 1966, and stayed close to that mark for almost three decades (Badcock and Beer 2000: 1).

But this is not the 'natural' state of affairs that many in the media present it to be. As Jim Kemeny has documented, for the first half of the twentieth century, Australia's homeownership rate hovered around 52.4 per cent, and fell to around 45 per cent in metropolitan areas by the late 1940s (1983: 7). Several important political and cultural forces that came to bear on Australia's history serve as a useful case study in analysing the associations between adulthood, citizenship and property.

Manufacturing homeowners

At the start of the twenty-first century when homeownership is understood to promise so much, it is difficult to imagine that such a prevalent belief could have been manufactured. But there was a major shift in Australia's history that began after World War II when the balance was tipped in favour of homeownership, while support for renting was stripped away. Homeownership levels were low in the late 1940s, and the decline in new mortgages was so severe that analysts predicted only 35 per cent of Australians would be homeowners in the 1970s (Kemeny 1983). Then there was a remarkable reversal: against all long-term trends, the rate of homeownership leapt up over ten percentage points to 63 per cent in 1954. By 1961, it was 69.9 per cent. Kemeny explains in a major study *The Great Australian Nightmare*, '[t]here was nothing whatever "natural" about what happened. The turnabout was both sudden and complete, and was entirely the result of the Federal Government's housing policy'. In a mere 14 years, homeownership became the overwhelmingly dominant system of tenure for Australians.

This may appear to be an unalloyed good news story. But it came at a cost. The public housing system, which had been expanded enormously by the Chifley government for families who could not or chose not to buy, was the major casualty. Chifley's reign had focused on the importance of 'real tenure choice' and a variety of options, so that Australians could choose the kind of housing tenure that best suited their available means (Kemeny 1983: 10). This was diametrically opposed to the philosophy of the nascent Liberal Party, and when Robert Menzies won the 1949 election, it meant the end of the rise of public housing and the start of the sale of public property to private owners.

What is less widely known is that the plan to get more Australians to own property was tied to the fight against communism. The opposition to social housing programmes was fused with ardently anti-communist Cold War hysteria. In the speeches of the period, conservative politicians described homeownership as a 'bulwark against unrest and revolution'

and the best protection from the foreign threat (Kemeny 1983: 12). During the debate over a housing bill in the House of Representatives in 1952, one politician argued:

> Home ownership is also the basis of national social security. If we desire to rid the community of communism, and to safeguard the best interests of the nation, we must provide every opportunity to the people to acquire their own homes.
>
> (D. Costa 1952 cited in Kemeny 1983)

The quickest way to dampen social unrest and the threat of the Red Menace was to turn 'workers into little capitalists': get them into the property market *post haste*. It also framed homeownership as a responsible path towards financial security – in the best interests of the individual, and the nation. While the Menzies government was dismantling the public housing projects of its predecessors, it committed large amounts of public funds to shift more Australians into contracts of sale. In short, the foundations were laid to move as many adults as possible into debt, and eventual homeownership.

This is another example of how homeownership has functioned as an individualising process. As homeowners, Australians would care more for their own interests, choosing to focus their responsibilities on themselves and their families, rather than feeling responsible for the well-being of their broader community. For Menzies, this offered a way to individualise the population and emphasise self-interest in a capitalist framework. It also served to further the association of homeownership with 'responsible' adulthood, leaving those who fought for communal rights and communist ideals to be painted as naïve, irresponsible or dangerous.

However, there is now a shift away from homeownership ideologies, particularly among those who are under 35 years old (Baum and Wulff 2003: iii). Even before the global financial crisis of 2008–9, under 35-year-olds were those most affected by climbing house prices, and the increase in part-time rather than full-time work in the 1990s and early 2000s (Kupke and Marano 2002; Fincher and Saunders 2001). While economic pressures are a major factor in the decline in young adults buying houses in the UK and Australia, the statistics show that there is also a change in housing *preferences*. The overarching desire to own a home seems to be waning in the 25–34 age group, with some studies pointing to 'lifestyle explanations' or 'personal reasons' rather than financial ones. 'I'm not ready' became a more popular answer to the question, 'Why rent instead of buy' (Baum and Wulff 2003: 19).

Those who are resisting the pressure to own are engaging in different forms of 'being at home'. Some are living in the parental home longer, often well into their late 20s. For some, a high-priced property market allows them to think about other things, opt for other commitments and values. While the financial difficulties are real, there is also a desire to engage in other forms of housing tenure – not to be locked into the overwhelmingly dominant version of a 'housing career' (Paris 1993: 50). There are many adults who choose to rent in areas where they could not come close to affording a mortgage – a common situation in many inner city areas. Some form group partnerships to buy property in consortiums, possibly to subdivide larger houses or warehouses (Malkin 2005). In rural areas movements of collective farm ownership – also known as 'intentional communities' – have emerged where groups share land and even housing (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2006). Others choose more nomadic existences and are less invested in the idea of home as a single built environment, a mode which has an extensive history both for indigenous communities and early European rural populations (Rowse 1998). As Young argues, 'some people "live" more in their neighbourhood or on their block' rather than in their house, making their home 'in squares, on stoops in bars and coffee houses, going to their houses mostly to sleep' (1997: 142).

These are all different, adult ways to engage with the idea of home – some are based on ecologically sustainable lifestyles, others are based on different understandings of private space or the family, while others use collective approaches to ownership. But these are the forms of 'home making' that are not represented in the uncritical and conventional representations of adulthood. Adulthood and individual property ownership may have become conceptually conflated and naturalised, but an historical analysis of this dominant understanding reveals that it is not necessarily so – in the past or present.

Media debates

'Young adults are staying at home longer than ever, and it is only creating a generation of screwed up, immature twentysomethings', argues a columnist in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Pryor 2006). 'The parents who harbour these overgrown adolescents are not doing them any favours, depriving them of the skills and satisfactions of life as a grown-up'. The article argues that parents should be blamed for failing to eject their children before they reach their twenties, after which 'real' adulthood is at risk: 'The tendency to live at home too long is creating an army of infantile adults with little idea about the real world'.

This has become a popular argument. The failure to leave home early and enter into a rental or ownership agreement is seen as an inability to commit to the realities of adult life: intellectually and morally enfeebling. An article in the *Sunday Telegraph* titled 'Offspring Refuse to be Grown-Ups: Why More People are Staying at Home, Changing Careers, Putting Off Marriage and Delaying Babies' forwards the suggestion that the 'growing group of late-20 and early 30somethings who still live at home' should be called 'Generation Nest' (Corby 2005). This group is described as 'tangled in a paralysis of choice', 'not willing to commit', 'so afraid of making the wrong choices' and simply 'more selfish' (Bagnall 2003; Corby 2005; Pryor 2006).

Living with parents for too long has been branded as a major problem for contemporary adulthood, and it is a popular topic for media coverage. Some articles couch the issue in economic terms, emphasising the financial risk to parents: 'Parents increasingly are succumbing to the crippling cost of the growing "kidult" generation, who won't fly from the family nest' (Clark and Bevin 2005). But more usually the argument is framed in moral terms, describing living with parents as damaging to the formation of adult character and virtue (Rosendorff 2005). One newspaper compares living at home to being breastfed, as 'there are all kinds of nutritional and practical benefits to the practice, but kids reach an age where it is just plain weird and it needs to stop' (Pryor 2006).

There are many economic and social reasons why young people are leaving home at a later age than their parents. The factors include mounting tertiary education debts, high property prices in urban centres, increasingly casualised workforces and delayed marriage and child-raising. But these issues are rarely considered in articles that believe living with parents equates to a 'flight from adulthood'. Even when the economic picture is included, moral weakness still haunts the figure of the young adult. This occurs within a contradictory double-speak of property and adulthood. Living at home longer is often seen as the result of a desire for frivolities which supposedly distract from adult life choices: *iPods*, designer jeans, drugs, alcohol and mobile phones. Real adulthood is coded as a commitment to the large debts that go with homeownership and abstaining from earthly pleasures, brand names and overpriced cocktails. A moral rhetoric of renunciation is not far from the surface of these arguments.

What is lacking in popular media debates are positive associations to do with children living for longer periods with their parents. Rather than being hailed as examples of successful intergenerational relationships and resource sharing, they are presumed to be parasitic and

infantilising. Another assumption contained here is that staying at home longer is only a mature option if it is in order to save for a house deposit or an investment property. Long-term renters are similarly portrayed as irresponsible pleasure seekers, facing dire consequences if they don't buy homes soon. Homeownership here is the adult choice which offers lifelong security, an everlasting golden ticket to social status and economic prosperity.

Mainstream media accounts only occasionally contend with the possibility that individualistic homeownership may not be a self-justifying value. This is most commonly found in articles where interviewees describe their reasons for choosing other forms of housing tenure – a choice which is painted as unusual or alternative. An *Australian Financial Review* article titled 'Great Aussie Home Dream: Only Half Need Apply' begins with the claim that, 'The passion for home ownership, a ballast of Australian society for the past half century and a perennial hot-button election issue, is on its way out' (Macken 2001). The article notes the shift away from homeownership, but rather than interpreting it as economic foolishness or moral depravity, it is described in affective terms:

> We're less frightened now. Our post-war high ownership rates were born out of fear. For those who went through the depression and the war, home ownership offered crucial security. [We are] freed from the bricks and mortar mentality.
>
> (2001: 1)

This is a surprising acknowledgement of the negative emotions that can drive homeownership: fear about the future, social status and financial security. Fear and uncertainty are rarely mentioned in the affects that adults might experience as homeowners, which more usually dwell on excitement, joy and contentment. Other affective registers of ownership – including anger, distress and shame – only appear in times of economic hardship and rising interest rates, where owners are barely able to make their payments or are forced to sell. But these negative affects can be felt by homeowners in a wide range of circumstances, be it shame about the perceived inadequacies of a home or anger at being tied to a single place, or distress at long working hours required to afford a home, as Young recounts:

> The goal of a dream house sets workers working and keeps workers working, fearing job loss, working overtime. The consumer-driven

ethic of civic privatism tends to produce political quietism because people invest their commitment into their private life, which needs even greater income to fuel it. Ironically, all the adults now stay away from the house for most hours of the week in order to earn the money for the house in which they invest their sense of self.

(1997: 143)

Homeownership is portrayed here not as a mature, economically sound commitment to adulthood, but as fear-driven, anti-social and individualistic. Investing a sense of self – of adult identity – into a house one barely inhabits is seen as a misrecognition. Home as a private, contained shell that displays one's consumer power but requires 'living at work' reduces the political and ethical range of adult life. Young's argument demonstrates that homeownership can be immature and selfish, rather than the opposite. Further, the collapse of the sub-prime market indicated that buying a home can also be foolish and irresponsible. And yet homeownership continues to dominate understandings of normative adulthood, even as adults are questioning its merits.

Adulthood beyond ownership

Dick Hebdige, in a study of homelessness and tent cities, summarises the long association between full citizenship and ownership this way:

Full or 'proper' citizenship has always implied not just rootedness in place but property ownership. … The democratic injunction: 'Stand up and be counted' requires, after all, a place to stand up on. Later, the two fundamental bases of human ontology – language and habitat – became further (con)fused at the point where the state began demanding a 'fixed address' in exchange for citizenship rights.

(1993: 179)

Property ownership is foundational to the concept of the full adult citizen, the right to speak being reserved for those who have an 'investment' (financial and affective) in a place. As we have seen, the history of adult suffrage and property rights reflects the broader historical integration of citizenship and ownership, and it continues to live on in the forms of prejudice against renters, the panics about young adults living at home and 'adultescents' who spend money on consumer goods rather than mortgages. The overarching message is that maturity is expressed through owning a home, while those who delay or deny

themselves a part in the system are problematic, immoral or childish. This establishes a totalising identity of the adult citizen as a responsible real estate owner – a socially approved form of lavish consumption – with other forms of 'experiential' consumption (consumer electronics, travel, clothes, etc.) as indulgences to be resisted. This standard developmental narrative still maintains a remarkable hold in the popular media, regardless of the fact that homeownership in major cities (and many regional centres) is the preserve of the economically privileged.

Part of the reason this narrative has held such sway is that adulthood, as an exnominated discourse, has been protected from sustained critical engagement on the issue of how adults make homes. But while many adults may still choose to buy property, to interpret this as a quintessentially 'adult' experience is both politically and historically fraught. Australia's experience over the last 100 years provides a clear case study of how political interests shaped the construction of an ownership mythology as part of an ongoing historic association ownership, citizenship and adulthood. In the popularly accepted histories, only a certain form of adulthood, and a certain kind of home, is represented.

Rapport and Dawson argue that adult humans 'conceive of their lives in terms of a moving-between – between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, environments, as a dialectic between movement and fixity' (1998: 33). Here adult identity is based in movement – between physical and conceptual spaces – rather than fixity and permanence. In this view, 'it is in and through this continuity of movement that human beings continue to make themselves at home'. Certainly, the forms of mobility afforded by modernity mean that movement is a central theme in the lives of more privileged adults. As James Clifford writes, our homes are found in the 'to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication and labour migration. Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders and mobile job markets reduce distances and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world's places' (1997: 247).

Not only are we moving in the directions of work but work is moving into the space of home. Mobile phones, e-mail, instant messaging and laptops bring the working space into the home space, and vice versa. An adult's relationship to home is shot through with threads of work, woven together in space (be it in the 'home office' or the office that feels like home) and time (as we answer work e-mails after dinner, or instant message a partner from work). As David Morley has argued, traditional ideas of home 'have been destabilised, both by new patterns of physical mobility and migration and by new communication technologies

which routinely transgress the symbolic boundaries around … the private household' (2000: 3). At an extreme, home is both nowhere and everywhere, or as Angelika Bammer observes, 'home is neither here nor there … rather, it is a hybrid, it is both here and there – and amalgam, a pastiche, a performance' (1992: ix). The dominant Western experience of adulthood, where adults work in offices by day then return to their mortgaged or owned homes at night, is less likely to reflect the experiences of modern working subjects. Rather, the movements between home and work can happen in an instant, or in the opening of a new e-mail or answering the phone. But rather than a contagion of elements, of home being made 'impure' by work or the converse, they are modes that can coexist. Adults can 'be at home' in this multi-part performance of working and home life.

In contrast to the standard model of the individual's relationship to home, in which the lifecourse is depicted as a unilinear progression from familial dependence to temporary rental accommodation to full adult ownership, we could propose a significantly more fluid model. If making oneself at home is a process of movement, of change, then this can contribute to a reconceptualisation of adulthood as a process of becoming, rather than a fixed state of being. In this more dynamic conceptualisation, the relationship to 'home' is more inclusive than in the simple homeownership model. It destabilises the mythology that the adult experience of home would be a straight arrow moving in just one direction. Instead, the many different experiences of 'home' over a single lifecourse can be understood as typically adult: always in flux, moving in relation to partnerships, families and work commitments, as well as operating within broader national and international economic frameworks. By recognising adulthood as a polysemic category, we can begin to acknowledge the complex and fluid ways that adults find themselves at home in the world.

4
Young Graduates and Understandings of Adulthood

Rachel Brooks

Youth, it has been argued, is a period of 'always "becoming", waiting for the future to arrive' (Lesko, 2001, p. 131). In contrast, adulthood is often seen as a period of greater stability, when identities are formed and the focus is much more firmly on the present. However, drawing on an ESRC-funded study of the place of learning, work and leisure in the lives of young graduates, this chapter will argue that among many twentysomethings in contemporary society the period of 'adulthood' is perceived as highly differentiated. Indeed, many of the young graduates involved in the research subscribed to a view of early adulthood as a period where committed relationships and domestic concerns were consciously 'put on hold' in order to prioritise work and establish oneself in a competitive, globalised labour market. For these young adults, at least, work – and fulfilling work, more particularly – was seen as central to the identity of early adulthood. This was contrasted with a view of later adulthood in which one's home life (frequently defined in fairly conventional terms of 'settling down' with a partner and having children) and developing wider interests would come to be prioritised. The chapter will then go on to consider the extent to which this differentiated view of adulthood should be seen, primarily, as a discursive strategy to enable young adults to cope with the heavy demands of working life, or whether there is other empirical evidence to support the notion of an economically focussed early adulthood, which gives way to a more diverse set of concerns in later years. It concludes by arguing that, irrespective of the actual paths these young adults may take in the future, their attitudes towards adulthood are themselves of significance, and contribute to a broader deconstruction of the often-assumed homogeneity of this life stage.

Constructing youth and adulthood

The stability of adulthood?

In exploring early adulthood, it is instructive to consider how the term is understood both within academic literature and by young adults themselves. Typically, youth has been conceptualised as a time of transition – from education to employment, from the parental home into independent housing and from the 'family of origin' to the 'family of destination'. In this analysis, adulthood is the state which is reached once these transitions have been made, and when young people have moved from dependence to independence. Recent years have, however, witnessed significant rethinking of this model as a result of widely documented changes to the lives of young people. Firstly, in many countries of the world, the length of time taken to complete such transitions has increased considerably as a consequence of the expansion of post-compulsory education and training, and the stagnation of the youth labour market – both of which have resulted in later labour market entry. At the same time, the age of first marriage has also risen significantly. Scholars have argued that, taken together, such trends are evidence of a 'delayed adulthood'. For some, such as du Bois Reymond (1998), this is a largely positive development, offering young people an opportunity to experiment with different lifestyles. According to Furlong and Cartmel (1997):

> In some respects it can be argued that recent changes in domestic and housing transitions reflect an increase in the range of possibilities open to young people. The extension and desequencing of transitions has been seen by some as helping to create the space in which young people can experiment with different forms of living and establish a self-identity in a context where they are free from some of the constraints which shaped the experiences of the previous generation.
>
> (p. 51)

Others have taken a different view, suggesting that identity formation becomes more difficult the longer the period between physical maturation and attainment of adult status (Côté and Allahar, 1994).

Some researchers have, however, argued that in late modernity transitions to adulthood have undergone more profound change – not merely a delay. The European Group for Integrated Social Research (EGRIS) (2001), for example, contends that the shift from dependence

to independence, and from youth to adulthood, is non-linear and reversible, with many young adults 'yo-yo-ing' between the two states (see also Valentine, 2003), while Stokes and Wyn (2007) argue that many young people are 'engaged simultaneously in adult and youth practices, blurring the boundaries of youth, adult, student and worker' (p. 508). Moreover, Arnett (2004) has suggested that social scientists should now recognise a new and distinct life stage: that of 'emerging adulthood' between the early and late twenties, during which time young people engage in self-focused exploration, trying out different types of relationships and jobs (see also Zinneker, 1990). However, in these recent rethinkings of the nature of transitions, as well as the more traditional linear models, it remains the case that a turbulent youth is typically contrasted with what is assumed to be a more stable and homogeneous adulthood.

Within the youth studies literature there is also considerable debate about the way in which young people themselves understand the nature of adulthood. Maguire and colleagues (2001) have argued that many young people are now 'refusing' adulthood, rejecting aspects of the dominant versions of adulthood that are immediately available. Indeed, they suggest that 'some versions of what it is to be an adult in the 21st century, with accompanying stresses and strains, might just not look very attractive to young people' (p. 201). However, they acknowledge that this may assume a normalised version of this particular life stage, and that what young people may be doing, instead, is refiguring for themselves what is involved in adulthood. In developing this argument, they suggest that

> [o]lder dichotomies of dependence-independence might not be adequate to account for shifts in family structures and relationships. A rejection of a version of adult status which does not match with the development of mixed-life patterns or flexibility in the workplace, or of a version that looks boring, unattractive and irrelevant in contemporary society might not be a refusal of adulthood at all. Indeed, 'refusal' might not be an appropriate way in which to describe the ways in which young people are potentially sculpting/scripting a 'new' adulthood.
>
> (p. 209)

This is broadly in line with Wyn and Dwyer's (1999) contention that, in contemporary society, we may have to rethink some of our assumptions about conventional views of adulthood. Moreover, they argue that

a 'more critical examination of adulthood' (p. 17) is needed if we are to understand youth transitions more fully. Similar concerns have been rehearsed within childhood studies. Lee (2001), for example, argues that, in the past, the idea of a 'standard adulthood' helped to define childhood. Now, however, as a result of shifts in the economy and in intimate relationships, he suggests that there are much less stable patterns of adulthood; indeed, 'this assumption of finished stability no longer holds good in either adults' working lives or in their intimate relationships' (p. 19).

Nevertheless despite these calls for a rethinking of adulthood, it is a life stage that is often taken for granted and given relatively little consideration within the academic literature. Indeed, Pilcher (1995) argues that as a result of its 'ideological dominance' as the most important stage of the lifecourse, there has been little debate about, for example, the ways in which adulthood is achieved, how adults differ from one another, how being an adult changes over time, and how adult behaviour is culturally conditioned.

This overview of some recent literature has indicated that while there might be significant disagreement between scholars as to the nature of contemporary 'transitions' from youth to adulthood, implicit in most work is a contrast between youth as a period of change and instability and a more stable and homogeneous adulthood, when dependence has been achieved. This assumption will be subjected to critical scrutiny in later sections of this chapter, by drawing on recent empirical work with young adults.

Planning for the future

When considering young adults' views about the future, I suggest it is also relevant to consider the wider literature on their propensity to engage in planning for the medium- and/or long-term. Various empirical studies have highlighted the importance of structural factors on the extent to which young adults engage in 'projects of the self' or 'reflexive life planning' (Giddens, 1991). Du Bois Reymond (1998), for example, distinguishes between young people from more privileged backgrounds, who are able to follow what she calls 'choice biographies', and their peers who follow more traditional, 'standardised biographies'. The former group – whom she labels the 'trendsetters' – tend to engage in more reflexive life planning as a result of their belief that there is no longer a pre-ordained lifecourse (a perception which their less privileged peers are less likely to share). In Brannen and Nielsen's (2002) analysis of the propensity of young people (between the ages of 18 and 30) to plan

for the future, differences by structural location are also highlighted. However, they reach rather different conclusions from du Bois Reymond, arguing that those most likely to plan are young men intending to follow fairly conventional familial and work-related trajectories. They also suggest that an inclination to plan may differ with chronological age, with younger people more likely than their older peers to put emphasis on 'living for the present' – what Brannen and Nilsen describe as the model of 'deferment'. It has also been argued that occupational cultures have an influence on propensity to plan (Hockey, 2009).

Nevertheless a large-scale study of 268 young adults in the UK by Anderson et al. (2002, 2005) raises some questions about the generalisability of some of the smaller-scale studies cited above. They found that almost all of their respondents, irrespective of structural location, showed some inclination to engage in planning for the future. Similarly, and as we have argued in more detail elsewhere (Brooks and Everett, 2008c), among our sample we found a high prevalence of 'future planning'. Indeed, the vast majority of the young adults in our sample claimed that they had made plans for the medium- and/or long-term. Indeed, we argue that actively thinking about the future was an important activity in the lives of many of the young people involved in our research. Some claimed that they had always been 'planners', while others described how their propensity to plan had been brought on by a specific event (such as embarking on a work placement, while at school, or failing an exam at university). We would thus agree with Anderson et al. that

> [t]he young adults we studied do in general feel in control of their lives, and do have well articulated ambitions and plans to achieve them especially with regard to work and housing. Indeed, conditions of modern life almost force many to seek to plan to some degree in these areas.
>
> (2002, p. 1)

In later sections of this chapter, we argue that it was through anticipating the future and making plans for the years ahead (even if they seemed unlikely to map on to a probable reality) that our respondents were able to articulate their own views about the heterogeneity of adulthood.

Research methods

This chapter draws on an empirical study of 90 young adults, most of whom were in their late twenties at the time the research was conducted.

They were interviewed as part of an ESRC-funded project on 'Young Graduates and Lifelong Learning'. The research aimed to explore both the impact of higher education on subsequent attitudes to learning (see Brooks and Everett, 2008a; 2009) and also, of more relevance for the current discussion, the way in which young adults go about combining different aspects of their lives (Brooks and Everett, 2008b). In particular, we were keen to understand the different ways in which work, learning and leisure were prioritised by the individuals within our sample.

Between September 2005 and January 2006, in-depth interviews were conducted with young adults, most of whom had gained a first degree from a UK university about five years prior. The sample was comprised of 15 graduates from each of six different higher education institutions, chosen to represent the diversity of the UK higher education sector (and so included an Oxbridge college; a college of the University of London; a 'redbrick' university; a university founded in the 1960s; a 'new' university, awarded university status post-1992; and a college of higher education). To recruit graduates from these institutions, mailings were sent out through the relevant alumni offices and adverts were also placed on the 'Friends Reunited' website. Although the achieved sample was self-selected to a considerable extent, it was nevertheless, reasonably diverse. It comprised 58 women and 32 men, from a large number of different subject areas.

The interviews were wide ranging and followed a 'life history' format in which the respondents were encouraged to tell us about their 'learning careers' before they entered university, while at university and since they graduated. We asked about the ways in which they did (or did not) combine learning and/or education with other aspects of their lives, including work (paid and unpaid) and leisure activities, and we were also keen to explore any plans they had for the future (Brooks and Everett, 2008c). The interviews were largely unstructured, as we were keen that our respondents were able to tell their own stories in the way they wanted. However, we did prompt for certain themes at various points during the interviews. Once the transcripts of the individual interviews had been analysed, a sub-sample of graduates (10) was invited back to discuss, by means of two focus groups, some of the common themes which had emerged from the sample as a whole.

While we took steps to ensure that our sample was reasonably diverse – in terms of the subjects the young adults had studied at university, their individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity and social class) and the higher education institution they had attended – it cannot be claimed that our respondents are representative of all twentysomethings in the

UK today. Although not all our respondents came from privileged backgrounds by any means, our focus on *graduates* does inevitably limit the sample to those who have had relatively successful educational careers. It is thus likely that they will have had different labour market experiences from their peers not in the possession of a first degree. Nevertheless their views about adulthood are interesting in their own right and, as graduates are likely to comprise an increasing proportion of the UK workforce in the future, their attitudes to the relationships between learning, work and leisure are of particular import. Drawing on this dataset, the following section of this chapter explores the ways in which the sample discussed 'adulthood' (explicitly and implicitly) in the interviews. In doing so, it suggests that a significant proportion of our sample understood adulthood as clearly differentiated into distinct phases – characterised by the differing priority given to paid work.

A differentiated adulthood

In contrast to some of the assumptions within the youth studies literature which juxtapose a turbulent youth with a more stable and homogeneous adulthood, our data suggest that many young adults had a more complex view of the years ahead of them, and saw adulthood in rather more differentiated terms. This was most noticeable in their views about paid employment and, in particular, how they anticipated balancing this with other parts of their lives in the future. A common theme across the sample as a whole was a commitment to prioritising work (over leisure, further learning and relationships) in the present, but an expectation that this would change as they got older. Caz,[1] a personal assistant, was typical of many respondents in her assumption that long hours were required of new graduates to demonstrate their commitment to the job:

> You're working long hours anyway, certainly when you're, when you're a new graduate, you're terribly keen anyway so you're not working 9 till 5 because it just doesn't look good. Sends out all sorts of wrong messages.

Typically, many respondents seemed to believe that they would come to prioritise other parts of their lives in the future – and have more time to pursue leisure interests and/or focus on their family when they reached a later stage of adulthood. This is implicit in Scarlett's account of why she worked such long hours (as a project manager) and explicit in Cora's

explanation of why she was pursuing a (work-related) postgraduate qualification now, before she started a family:

> I just had this attitude that, you know, I'm young and I'm single and I didn't have to get home to like look after children or husbands or whatever so I might, so I need to work as hard as I can to make as much money as I can and … if they want me to work until midnight, then I can do that. (Scarlett, project manager)

> I'm so planned, you know, if I decide to have children, it won't be for another five years, but I don't want to be up to my eyes in textbooks you know when that happens. I'd rather not be studying. I don't want to leave it too late so I forget how to learn and also I don't want to be up to my eyes in textbooks when I want to be playing with my kids if I have them so it is sadly a strategic ploy to do it now and get it out of the way. (Cora, human resources manager)

Rosa, a research scientist, also thought that her priorities might change in the future:

ROSA: Work is quite important to me. I feel that perhaps not correctly I feel that it makes me, the work I do makes me a valuable member of society cos I'm saving the world and it's actually something that's really important to me … that's enough to get me out of bed in the morning. … I like feeling that I'm doing something that's worthwhile.

INTERVIEWER: So in that sense you're doing something worthwhile, the work can be a big thing in your life?

ROSA: Yes. Although, you know, in five years' time I may, you know, toss a coin and say 'What, what's more worthwhile, you know, saving the world or staying at home to look after my children?' But I'm not in that position yet.

INTERVIEWER: Does that feel like that'll be a difficult decision to make that kind of career break of …?

ROSA: I'd always, I'd always kind of pencilled it in.

There is some evidence that young women's beliefs and decisions about the future are often framed by their thoughts about starting a family and child-rearing. For example, Hockey (2009) argues that young men and women are frequently involved in negotiations about life planning, and yet often bring to such negotiations different conceptions of the

lifecourse. Indeed, drawing on empirical work with young male fire-fighters and estate agents and their female partners, she contends that

> gendered modes of thought are … being brought to bear upon life-course temporalities: young men experienced tension between the perceived benefits of both youthfulness and maturity, while young women sought to maximise financial security and safeguard their reproductive options.
>
> (p. 232)

However, in our sample, such beliefs were articulated by a number of young men, as well as young women. Carlton, a solicitor and insurance claims handler, was typical of this group in explaining how he believed that working hard now would enable him to 'relax a little bit' in the future, when he was likely to have new demands on his time:

> I would say, well, now it [work] is basically the predominant thing I actually have, taking about 80% of the week almost, then you're tired and you probably just want to sleep. The leisure side is very, very, very, very minimal … it's all now about trying to build a posi-tion; later on I can relax a little bit.
>
> Work and education are still going to be major points for at least the next couple of years. I think that, maybe when I start up, when, hopefully, I should have a family, I think that might change things quite a lot. Hopefully it will, anyway. But over the next couple of years, I do foresee that I would be working very hard … and the social scene will just have to unfortunately wait till later on when I have time, but I don't want to miss the opportunities that I have now, which I could regret later on.

Similarly, Ivan, a training and development executive, described how he believed that his priorities were starting to change and how this had prompted him to think more seriously about the salary he was earning, rather than the nature of the job itself:

> I love the company to bits. I'm very dedicated to them, but money [has become more important] now. Because I'm starting to realise as I get older, the cost of living. I would really like to get a mortgage. That's the time of my life I'm getting towards now. Getting my life. I'm now looking for a life, rather than just a career. I know I should start thinking about settling down, getting a family on the go.

Getting a house, especially. Get out of home. Spread my wings once again. But I can't afford that on my salary.

These quotations give some indication that the young people involved in this research had a *clearly differentiated* view of adulthood. They did not assume that their adult lives would be the same forever; indeed, they saw them as broken up into distinct phases, in which work, leisure and relationships would be combined in different ways. For the young adults quoted above, and for many others in the sample, early adulthood was seen as a period in which they (and others with whom they came into contact) expected paid work to be prioritised. However, they did not see this as lasting indefinitely. Indeed, most anticipated that as they got older paid work would come to assume a less dominant role in their lives as other concerns (such as a partner, children, a home and leisure interests) took precedence. Without a follow-up study, it is obviously impossible to determine whether their lives are following this anticipated pattern of differentiation. However, we can draw on other empirical work in this area, with other groups of adults, to explore whether there is any evidence of the kind of change that our respondents were expecting as they moved further into adulthood. This provides the focus of the following section.

Empirical evidence

As noted above, many of the respondents in our study believed that early adulthood would be significantly different from later adulthood and, in particular, that over time they would come to place less priority on work and more emphasis on other aspects of their lives such as relationships and leisure interests. It is worth emphasising, initially, that the work-focus evident among our young graduates may not be typical of young people in other countries of the world in the twenty-first century. For example, on the basis of their work with young adults in Australia, Dwyer and Wyn (2001) argue that

[o]ne of the effects of their prolonged entry into career paths has been that they have had more time than previous generations did to assess and balance their priorities concerning adult life. Ironically, their experience in the deregulated labour market has, if anything, served to reinforce the belief that the other areas of their lives are of at least equal importance.

(p. 188)

They go on to suggest that 'alternative avenues of personal interest' are of increasing importance to the young adults with whom they have worked and, as a result, we are likely to witness a shift towards more complex life patterns in which the priorities of previous generations are rethought. However, this analysis is not shared by all. Evidence from the US, for example, suggests that young adults preparing to enter the American labour market retain a very strong work-focus (Schneider and Stevenson, 1999). Within the UK, several studies of the priorities of young adults have also highlighted the importance of work and, indeed, the way in which other parts of life often have to be devoted to the wider project of making oneself 'fit' for employment. For example, in their research on graduate recruitment practices, Brown and Hesketh (2004) have shown how engaging in extra-curricular activities, securing relevant work experience and developing appropriate 'personal qualities' have become key to gaining a place on prestigious graduate training schemes.

In turning to the role of work in the lives of older adults, it is helpful to consider studies of the way in which paid work is combined with family responsibilities. Indeed, it was a key contention of many of our respondents that, if and when they formed a family in the future, they would place considerably less emphasis on paid work. As demonstrated above, this was articulated by a number of men in the sample, as well as the women. Some scholars have certainly argued that contemporary society has witnessed a significant shift in parenting roles, with men playing a greater role in both childcare and domestic work (Sullivan, 2000), while Dermott (2006) contends that 'behaviour that is not work-centred seems to be an increasingly important aspect of what fathers do' (p. 620). Moreover, although 'breadwinning' has traditionally been considered to be a cornerstone of male identity, Hatten et al. (2002) suggest that several new types of fathers have emerged over recent years, for whom breadwinning is only a marginal activity; more emphasis has come to be placed, instead, on close involvement with children. In her qualitative study of parenting relationships, Gatrell (2004) also demonstrates how some fathers in her sample had been prepared to cut their working hours and/or move from full- to part-time employment to enable them to assume a greater proportion of the childcare.

Nevertheless the vast majority of research in this area has focussed, instead, on the significant *continuities* in fathering practices, and the enduring dominance of paid work in the lives of many British fathers. It is Warin et al.'s (1999) contention that breadwinning is still man's main form of commitment to family life and, certainly, there is strong

evidence from a wide variety of sources that employed fathers work longer hours than non-fathers. For example, Matheson and Summerfield (2001) note that while a third of men with dependent children work in excess of 50 hours per week, under a quarter of men without children work comparable hours. In her analysis of the reasons for these trends, drawing on data from two large-scale surveys (the British Household Panel Survey and the National Child Development Study), Dermott (2006) suggests that fatherhood is not the *cause* of such patterns of employment, but neither does becoming a father seem to lead to any re-evaluation of the role of paid work or a reduction in hours to take on more caring responsibilities. Her qualitative work (Dermott, 2005) reaches a similar conclusion, finding scant evidence of men reducing their hours to better accommodate paid work and family life. Indeed, she argues that fathers' satisfaction with their work-life balance only reduces significantly when they work extremely long hours (over 60 per week).

The available evidence suggests that such trends may be particularly pronounced among those who share some of the characteristics of those involved in our research. Ferri et al. (2003) have argued that the 'new dad' (committed to the equitable sharing of domestic and child-care roles) is less likely to be found among the highly educated middle classes than among other socio-economic groups. Their analysis of the level of shared childcare for fathers born in 1970 highlighted a strong correlation with educational qualifications: 59 per cent of fathers with no qualifications shared childcare with their partners, compared with only 37 per cent of graduate fathers. This largely replicated patterns in earlier periods: similar differences were found among the cohort born in 1958, for example (Ferri and Smith, 1996). Patterns according to social class and occupation are almost identical to those by qualification: 60 per cent of fathers in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs reported that they played an equal part in childcare, compared with 39 per cent of fathers in professional and/or managerial jobs (Ferri et al., 2003). Moreover, Gershuny (2000) has emphasised the cultural acceptance of long hours among certain social groups, going as far as to suggest that, for some, higher status has come to be demonstrated by a lack of leisure time.

As has been intimated above, there are of course important gender differences at play. For example, while cohort studies suggest that marital status can have an impact on employment, men are more likely to be out of work if they have no current partner while, for women, the opposite is true: women living with a partner are less likely to have paid work than women who have never had a partner (Ferri et al., 2003).

Furthermore, while men's employment patterns appear not to be differentiated greatly by their parental status, women's engagement in paid work continues to be affected markedly by motherhood. Although there has been considerable growth in the proportion of mothers of young children who are in employment, women are still much more likely than men to shift from full- to part-time work or to give up work altogether in order to care for young children. For example, in the UK in 2008, 68 per cent of women of working age with dependent children were in work, compared with 73 per cent of those without such children. In contrast, men of working age with dependent children were more likely to be in employment than their peers without children (90 per cent compared to 74 per cent) (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

Discussion

This evidence suggests that if we assume that our respondents' future lives are likely to follow the patterns set by previous cohorts, then there seem to be reasonably strong grounds to expect stages of adulthood not to be as clearly differentiated as some of our young adults anticipated. While the available empirical data indicate that the young women, at least, may well come to place less emphasis on paid work as they form long-term partnerships and have children, the priorities of young men seem much less likely to show a similar degree of change. Indeed, as demonstrated above, despite claims about the 'changing nature of fatherhood' and the emergence of the 'new dad', paid work remains central to the lives of many men throughout adulthood. Moreover, hours of work often increase rather than decrease as men take on the role of father.

   Why, then, did many of our respondents feel so strongly that their lives *would* be different in the future? Firstly, this could be considered primarily a discursive strategy to make themselves feel better about the present, and more able to cope with the heavy demands of working life – by assuming that the future will be different, irrespective of whether or not this seems likely. Alternatively, we could interpret the young adults' narratives as part of a genuine commitment to changing the course of their lives in the future. Indeed, there is no reason to assume automatically that the lives of the young graduates involved in our research will follow the patterns set by previous cohorts. This type of interpretation would draw on recent studies that have suggested that the lives of some young people moving into adulthood at the beginning of the

twenty-first century are qualitatively different from earlier generations. For example, there is some evidence that the nature of the 'career' is changing for young professionals – with a longer initial period of trying to 'establish' oneself, and of trying a range of different part-time and/or temporary jobs to increase one's employability (Try, 2004; Brooks and Everett, 2009). It is possible that this may help to differentiate stages of adulthood in a manner that has not been observed in the past. Moreover, du Bois Reymond (1998) has suggested that the lives of many young adults across Europe (and particularly the highly educated) are increasingly characterised by new patterns of combining work, learning and leisure in ways that have not been seen before. Indeed, she claims that 'for today's generation of young people, these combining tendencies are a further step on the way to increasingly more complex concepts of life' (p. 67). However, further research is needed to ascertain the extent to which young people's hopes and plans for the future are realised as they move further into adulthood and whether we are, in fact, witnessing 'more complex concepts of life' among older adults.

Nevertheless, irrespective of whether or not our respondents' views do map on to a future reality, the narratives discussed in this chapter highlight some important convictions of twentysomethings in the UK today. Firstly, they indicate a strong belief in individual agency and the ability to mould the future in line with individual desires and preferences. While various scholars have shown how such beliefs are relatively common among adolescents (e.g., Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), the data presented in this chapter suggest that they also characterise early adulthood, even after young people have experienced some of the harsher realities of the labour market. The capacity of young adults to shape their futures in line with their plans remains unclear, but this does not undermine the strong sense of empowerment and agency that was articulated by many respondents (including those from relatively unprivileged backgrounds). Secondly, and of particular relevance to the wider arguments of this book, it is interesting in itself that young adults (indeed, twentysomethings who, to use Arnett's phraseology, may not yet have progressed beyond 'post-adolescence') see the state of adulthood not as one homogeneous block but as differentiated and offering a variety of experiences. Even if later life turns out not to be as different from early adulthood as these young people were expecting, their understandings of adulthood – based around notions of change, fluidity and difference – can help in the broader project of deconstructing what is often assumed to be the uniform and static nature of this particular life stage.

Acknowledgements

Note

1. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to preserve the anonymity of respondents.

5
Thirtysomething and Contemporary Adulthood

Judith Burnett

This chapter explores the concept of thirtysomething which constructs the marker of a transition within adulthood and has become a new social identity which expresses a concept of youthfulness within the context of ageing. The chapter begins with where the concept of thirtysomething came from, and then moves on to demonstrate the idea in practice, drawing on empirical research into the late boomer population in Britain. As explained in the Introduction, the research found both the specificity of the experience to a particular age group who claimed this as a generational event, and more generally how the concept became established with a wider meaning, to refer to adults constructed as youthfully rather than properly or authentically middle aged. The chapter argues that the concept of generation (Mannheim 1952) has been overlooked in theorising experiences of the lifecourse, and can be usefully brought back into play to understand not only the constructions of thirtysomething, but offer more general insights into identities of ageing.

Texts and contexts

In the 1990s I watched with growing interest as the theme of thirtysomething became popular and controversial. Some women claimed that it was just like them. Other women claimed that it really wasn't a bit like them, and (even, by the way) thought it was offensive. One of the most controversial and well-known shorthands for thirtysomething was *Bridget Jones' Diary*.

Bridget Jones' Diary started life as a column in the UK newspaper *The Independent* in 1995 and later moved to the *Telegraph*. It was an instant hit with an audience who sent fan mail thinking that the photo which accompanied the piece really was Bridget Jones, and that she really did

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exist (Whelehan 2002). The importance to this research is that in spite of her non-existence, Bridget Jones became shorthand for the thirtysomething demographic in the media and common discourse. Stereotypically (and thus exclusively) represented as White, middle class and professional, this model of womanhood (for the genre came to be represented as a woman (not man) of dilemma) lives in a world which has incorporated feminism (to some degree and in particular, somewhat contradictory, and not universal ways) and yet seems prone to both pre-feminist (sometimes dressed as nostalgic i.e. when men were men and mummy made cake) or post feminist doubts and behaviours which enraged a section of her female audience.

Held up by some as the archetypal thirtysomething woman's out-pourings, there was just one question on which all discussions hung: was it true? The trouble with such portrayals of what Whelehan calls 'Magazine Woman', is that she 'is and isn't part of all women's lives' (2000: 51). Thus while Fielding herself never claimed that Bridget Jones was meant to be sociologically representative, this did not stop the fan mail – or the letters of complaint (Whelehan 2002).

The name 'thirtysomething' may have originated in the American television series *Thirtysomething*. Produced between 1987–1991 and aired '[i]n the twilight of a decade in which the post-war generations came of age' (Heide 1995: 2), the programme was part of a new genre of media texts which followed the mass demographic of the first wave of Boomers as they came of age, acquired purchasing power and inflated the consumer culture of the West.

Its precursors were texts such as *Cagney and Lacey*, which portrayed women in active roles, in narratives which represent a mixture of escapism and realism. Heide (1995) argues that the shift in genre towards gritty realism came as a means of capturing the demographic of youth, which was threatening to splinter into the full diversity of adulthood and be lost to the market. This could be addressed by identifying niche markets to which products could be addressed. Shows such as *Thirtysomething* are argued to mark the shift from products marketed as being *about* the boomers to being products marketed *to* them. The *Thirtysomething* show was targeted at particular segments, which while affluent were not representative of the whole population, and can be understood in sociological terms as characterised by its de-traditionalising tendency (Heide 1995).

The basis of my research was that I wanted to grasp something of the social reality behind such a text, by finding out more about the social demographic to whom and of whom such texts spoke. Who was the Thirtysomething Woman? Where did she come from? Where does she go?

In sociological terms, we can locate the demographic of *Bridget Jones' Diary* as a cohort which emerged primarily in the post-industrial urban areas of the developed world. However, my findings were that actors who may once have been thought of, and/or may even have thought of themselves as 'thirtysomething', form a much larger cross-class and regional constituency, with multiple identities who share a construction of the lifecourse which has elongated and diversified. This allows for transitions between distinct phases and identities which, while tied to the rites of passage and social identities as found before, albeit mutable and diversified (for example, motherhood), are characterised by new attitudes to ageing. Thus, thirtysomething is in part an age-based social identity which arises in part through the demarcation of an otherwise long and amorphous middle age into different phases of life marked by internal transitions.

Sheehy (1996), while not challenging a linear, phased model *per se*, argues that the lifecourse has in effect been pushed back by ten years at every stage in both Britain and America. This has meant that a period which she interprets to be a provisional adulthood occurs between age 18 and 30. Beyond this, there is the First Adulthood, which is the Age of Mastery (45–65-years old) and Second Adulthood, which is the Age of Integrity (65–85-years old).

For Sheehy, the first half of the new lifecourse has now become broadly structured as:

- Tryout Twenties – a period of prolonged adolescence (which follows the initial foray into the adult world) – Pulling Up Roots
- Catch 30 – passage to the First Adulthood
- Turbulent Thirties – age 35 – Inventory taking
- Flourishing Forties – early midlife crisis – the 'Little death' of First Adulthood, true Middlescence

Such a schema still smacks of the universalism of lifecourse models, but steps towards cultural and historical sensitivity through her argument that this re-phasing is a generational event, and represents a shift driven in part by the so-called boomer population (the post-war generation) in the West. Sheehy's interest in her wider work is in the female lifecourse, and to some extent, the transition in boomer ageing and the emergence of new identity locations for women can be argued to have arisen as a result of gender change, and the liberation of women from domestic and relatively narrow life chances by a combination of factors such as affluence, welfare capitalism and changing cultural attitudes and norms. In sociological

terms, her work (1991, 1996) can be read as an exploration of the social reaction to the changing experiences of womanhood since the 1960s.

This reflects a shift within lifecourse studies over the years, towards linking the individual or cohort's lifecourses to their network, cohort and generation, so that the contingency of lifecourse experience and its historical specificity can be reviewed by locating the cohort within their historical context. Work by those veering towards a view of individual as embedded in social networks, such as Bertaux (1981) and Elias (1985), can show not only the inter-subjective experience but also the material conditions which shape the qualities of the inter-relationships, and their historical character. It is a small but important step to then locate lives in cohorts simultaneously moving through lifecourse events.

I ultimately concluded that the sociological concept of use to grasp the emergence in social life was that of generation. The concept of generation enabled me to grasp that which class, race and gender could not: an age-based identity greater than the one stop snapshot of the age today, that is, an identity and location over time and which is specific to its times. The concept of generation alone enables us to grasp thirtysomething as a generational event, seeing thirtysomething as, literally, a sign of the times.

In social theory, my initial explorations of the concept of generation led to either the sociology of the family or a short essay by Karl Mannheim (1952), with little in between. A notable exception was to be found in Anthropology. However, the anthropological concept of generation was largely kinship based and operationalised in situations where social life was organised differently from that of a generation at the end of the century. I returned to Mannheim's (1952) concept of generation in order to explore a particular kind of subjectivity and organisation, that of a community of time, where generations function as connectors in the continuous flow of time as narrative (Ricouer 1988).

The demographic of which concept thirtysomething speaks

The cohort which I explored can be broadly defined by its birth dates as the second peak of the post-war boomer population in Britain. I included in this generation those who came to settle in Britain during the cohort's lifetime.

Figure 5.1 shows the volume of births in England and Wales between 1901 and 2000. The British baby boom can be seen to start at the close of the Second World War, and to have two peaks, a first, sharp peak between 1950 and 1955, and a second, broader peak between 1960
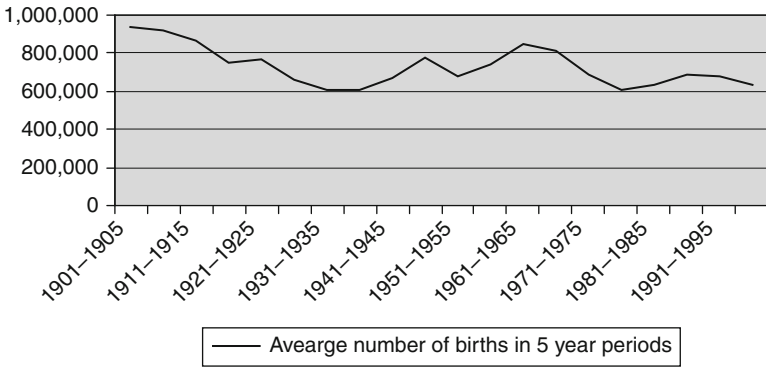
Figure 5.1   Births: England and Wales, 1901–2000
Source: Office of National Statistics, dataset PBH11 (www.statistics.gov.uk).

and 1970. My research was concerned largely with the second peak, born between 1960 and 1970. They were in their thirties at the time in which I conducted the empirical study in 2000, with the upper end approaching 40.

It is notable that the exact distribution of births across Europe and America while carrying a similar pattern of a post-war baby boom in general shows diversity between different states. In America, it is the *first* peak which is the most numerous and enduring. The name of the Boomers (not just in the US but elsewhere sometimes specifically with other names, for example the French tag, the 68ers). The age group I researched was too young to participate in such movements. Thus, since each youth cohort enters the social situation at different moments, their reference points differ. Thus, some of the concepts and experiences which are commonly assumed to be 'Boomer-ish' in fact increasingly don't apply the further away in time we travel forward through the subsequent births of the second peak.

In part, generation theory, with its insistence on the primacy of the formative experience of entering 'society' as youth, provides some explanation of this. The youthful moment is argued to produce a long-lasting impression, and is used for identity purposes throughout life; however, the literature is disagreed on whether the beliefs and values which are taken through life are long-lasting (Mannheim 1952; Edmunds and Turner, 2002a, 2002b).

The first boomer peak in America may have generated the initial category of thirtysomething, which in terms of the phenomenon to which

the name refers, can be considered the prototype category (Rosch and Lloyd 1978), that is, the first or founding category. I suggest that the prototype became culturally tagged primarily via the media with the popularisation of the television show *Thirtysomething* as well as its use in the press. The series was aired in Britain during the late 1980s but was rerun later. Social change opened out to produce a new generation of women who came of age under different social circumstances than their older sisters, entering a context characterised by the pre-existence of second wave feminism on the one hand and a prolonged economic boom and proliferation of welfare capitalism on the other.

In this sense, the category of thirtysomething opened up to become a mass experience during the 1990s and came to refer to a much wider cohort than merely the educated and middle class early boomers of the 1960s and 1970s to whom and of whom the original TV series, for example, spoke. Both this fact and the fact of its different intersection with time, place, history and the social, means that the experience which thirtysomething was to turn into on the ground, as a lived experience, may have important differences (as well as continuities), with that of the first peak. There are gaps as well as resonance with its representations in texts such as the TV show.

In defining the scope of the research, I became clear that I ideally wanted to research both women's and men's experiences. In getting focus groups together, I found that women were more available and accessible to the concept of coming along to a focus group, and I ended up with a gender imbalance. However, some men did participate. In general I have found that the changing sexual division of labour lies at the heart of thirtysomething, and in this sense consider that the data I obtained, while not representative of the generation *per se* (the participants can be thought to only represent themselves, ultimately), still provides important insights into a generational process. It is perhaps the shift in the women's gender role which prompted the subjectivity of thirtysomething. In Britain this became in part a feminised (and feminising) experience.

Researched realities: The historical specificity of thirtysomething

Turning to the research data, a prevalent idea in operation was that thirtysomething was relatively a new social experience. By this, the actors did not mean that no one had ever passed through their thirties before, or that the issues they faced and the experiences which they had had

were somehow entirely and exclusively unique to them. Rather, it was the combination of factors in their lives and their understanding of the social situation which they encountered, combined with their ability to draw upon their unique space of experience, which produced a perception of thirtysomething. Thus being thirtysomething was in part to occupy a social situation, a location in a temporal and spatial order as much as an identity *per se*.

This raises the issue of uniqueness and the sense of being in the throes of a new wave of social and personal experience; this social feeling being a classic indicator of generationalism (Wohl 1980). I asked the focus groups what they would expect to find in a book called 'Thirtysomething' if they came across it in a bookshop, which drew this response:

> I was just thinking that I would check when it was written, because obviously if it was written ten years ago, I would probably feel that it wasn't necessarily relevant to me because it would usually be about thirtysomethings *then*, so I don't know if it is something that dates quite quickly … it wouldn't be *specific* enough.
>
> (B564)

This raises the issue of the meanings of the mass nature of the experience, and the awareness of its prototype, which had arisen as the first wave of the Boomer generation made their passage through the social system (Heide 1995). The actor had assumed that the embryonic category of thirtysomething had changed.

At least two of the groups assumed that the term thirtysomething had came from the American TV show, its American origin was assumed to represent an American version which could be matched (but not replicated) in Britain, as this extract shows:

A   So, what is thirtysomething?
B   TV series
A   TV series … the American one?
B   I think it was American.
C   Yes, the British version was called 'Cold Feet', wasn't it-
D   Cold Feet, fantastic! I loved that.

> (T648-652)

In their discussions, Hall and du Gay (2000: 6) see identity as 'the point of suture … between discourses and practices – [which] interpellate … or

hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses … processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken"'. I suggest we see something of this process occurring with 'thirtysomething'.

Identities 'are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (ibid.). Thirtysomething can be considered an identity through which actors travel. Although Hall and du Gay (2000: 2) rightly point up such processes of subjectification as 'one of the least well-understood concepts', the significance of the media in the formation of previous generations such as the boomer sixties generation (see for example Edmunds and Turner 2002b; Hoffman 1980), reflects its power in co-producing an identity position for the group, one of the functions of which is that it becomes exclusive, with an 'outside'.

In this sense, the process of generational identity formation bears similarity to the formation of national identity and the role of mass communications and publishing which Anderson (1983) explored. We can borrow the concept of an imagined community to apply to this constituency, who see in the concept of thirtysomething an expression of a group experience, which as the first actor noted, is distinctive from that of the group 'ten years before'.

Mannheim in his discussion of generations constructs their power in terms of an ability to generate new knowledge and social understanding. Mannheim (1952) argues that generations develop a social life which is above and beyond the biological rhythm of social replacement. At its heart lay generational consciousness, which is at once collective, historical and socially aware of its location, that is, it is a critical consciousness. Mannheim argued that this arose from the difficulties that each new generation would experience as they encountered the ill-fitting traditions and patterns of behaviour of their age. In recognising these issues as social rather than personal issues, cohort agents would work up the materials of their lives to become reflexive, knowing actors acting upon structure with intention. Diversity, expressed through generational units, might occur, with some actors working for the status quo while others seeking to change it. However, what precisely a generation can be said to be, is defined in part by what it is not. In particular, a generation must be distinguished from concrete groups, movements, communities and so on which can only exist where 'members have concrete knowledge of each other' (ibid.), or other kinds of associations 'formed for a specific purpose … characterized by a deliberate act of foundation, written statutes, and a machinery for dissolving the organization' (Mannheim 1952: 289).

Thus a key explanation for the emergence of a generational awareness is in terms of the uniqueness of the social situation which the generation encounters, and the need to develop new scripts and behaviours in response. In the focus groups much effort was expended in considering how the situation had arisen which had led to the experience of becoming thirtysomething. Feminism, labour market transitions, ageing, changes in expectations around marriage, parenting, caring, access to education and training, the mass media, big companies, all of these and more besides were at times alighted upon as possible explanations, as well as individualised concepts of choice and responsibilities. A recurring reference point was the changing position of women, and thus the comparison between this generation and previous generations of women.

This comment tries to capture the generation at a nexus of social change occurring along more than one trajectory, in this actor's case, the inter-generational dispersion, the extension of the working week and the demands of the work-life balance for women are thought to compose the situation:

> I think it's much harder for our generation of women to find work because we don't have the same support structures. We don't have family living nearby necessarily, and probably our partners are having to work much longer hours and it's *much* more difficult to juggle career and family I think.
>
> (B472)

Such a comment is notable for the assumption that the change is gendered, and the comparison is therefore made to other generations of women, rather than all people, all generations. It was notable that the relationship to those imagined previous generations of women was a common theme in the focus groups. This was a common theme in the focus groups who counted time back and forth in terms of a journey of women, rather than of a journey of society or gender as a whole.

Thirtysomething horizons: The fronts of life

The focus groups showed me that thirtysomething terrain was rich with potentials featuring a configuration of choices and obligations; opportunities and constraint. Its potentials lead me to frame it as Ricouer's (1998) horizon of expectation. As such, it constitutes a plane which has not got infinite and general possibilities but specific possibilities which become visible through the operation of the space of experience in the

present. Ricouer notes that individuals and groups live in a fusion of horizons, which is the gap between 'the absolute knowledge that would abolish every horizon and the idea of a multitude of incommensurable horizons' (1998: 220). In other words, if we knew for sure what would happen as the result of each possible action, we would pursue only a certain horizon (the others would not be presented as choices). However, we can neither know this, nor choose all horizons since they are incommensurate and contradictory.

In Gidden's terms the reflexive project of the self becomes a site of biographical work: 'The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconfigured in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options' (1991: 5). For Beck this active and self-directed society was the result of individualised, reflexive modernisation: 'In the individualised society, the individual must … learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships, and so on' (1992: 135). Individuals thus take responsibility for their individual life. This sets up certain problems, such as what to do? When to do it?

Life in the thirties was understood to present an extra level of difficulty and complexity than for example, the same dilemmas encountered during the teens and twenties. This was due to the temporal pressure within the institution of the lifecourse. The data suggests that the awareness of finitude grows in the thirties, and time's limitations appear in consciousness. This positions thirtysomething as *the right time* to sort out things, as these two extracts from different focus groups show:

A   You have to start to think well, do it now, because in ten year's time I might not be able to do it or whatever.
B   Suddenly, the whole future it's not mapped out at all but it's the idea of having a concept of it and the fact that it's finite which wasn't here ten years ago. (T119–120)

I think when I get to forty I want to have achieved quite a bit really, I don't know how or what, but you know.

(R936)

The problem of thirtysomething is therefore to pick a way through a fusion of horizons. These have expanded for women but within

constraints. The focus group actors constructed this problem as one of choice within limits. A particular consequence is that of the individual's increasing need to reconcile conflicting demands and the need to make choices.

Certainly, the focus group actors were besieged by problems of choice, within limits:

> A I think thirtysomething for our generation is the huge amount of choice about virtually everything in life ... to have kids, to not have kids, to have a career, to not have a career, to get married, not get married.
>
> B As long as you're educated. So long as you're educated, you have choice.
>
> (T665–668)

Although making the 'right' decisions might be more possible due to the wisdom gained through the space of experience:

> I think perhaps you sort of have lots of problems in your teens and twenties, and so because you've got passed that stage and you've got your forties and fifties in front of you and so you have made your mistakes (not that you won't continue to make them), but you've made certain mistakes and you've probably got clear views of what you don't want the kids to be doing over the next twenty years, and you've got your experience of the last twenty years to give them, perhaps. You are sort of midway experience wise, then. You've got time to put a few things right, but you've done a lot.
>
> (B93)

Having made decisions of what is wanted, there just remains the problem of not being able to have it. The actors engaged in considerable activity in working out why such choices were difficult to realise both at the level of expectations and the reality of experience

> because being in a second pregnancy makes me feel there is a life just beginning and all these things ahead, and at the same time it makes me feel exhausted, and I think '... what the hell am I doing, I'm already middle aged! My body can't cope with it', so I feel that while all of those things feel a bit more established, yet when I think about them I think what am I going to do, and how am I going to be able to fit them around kids and all the rest of it ... just a sense

that I used to think that you could plan your life and now all the things that I've done have grown out of things in different ways, and it continues to be like that. So even those things when things go up and down, you … begin to realise that keep going, and bad things get better and good things can change and I'm slightly more dependable, that I've got the basics.

(A51)

The difficulties of reconciling 'choices' can be understood as a problem of reconciling the fronts of life, which I think we can consider by using Gidden's (1991) concept of lifestyle sectors. The number of (predictable) lifestyle sectors, housing, family formation, intimacy, sexuality, health, money and finance, work and career, education and so on, cited suggests that the fused horizon is large. Thus thirtysomething from this point of view is an organisational space, where the organisation is undertaken under conditions of pressure(s), both within the lifestyle sectors of action, and within the actors' struggles to create a continuous sense of self in the midst of personal change.

The concept of (ir)responsibility

Thirtysomething places the actor in relation to settlement and the (un)fixing of relationships. A major theme presented to me was that thirtysomething is a conduit for bringing the actor and/or releasing the actor from responsibilities. Thirtysomething as a life phase could be and frequently was contrasted to youth, which was constructed as having already been completed. While actors felt themselves to be possibly youthful, they distinguished themselves from being young *per se*, by the increased complexity of running the central planning office of their biography and their experiences of, and their attitudes towards, (ir)responsibilities.

For those who started their families in their late twenties or thirties, the perception of youth conforms with a more middle class model associated with a lack of responsibilities. For one of the men, the contrast between what he implicitly felt to be the halcyon days of his youth and his condition as part of a thirtysomething couple with children was marked, where responsibilities in the form of love had increased his vulnerability:

A   At twenty six I thought … call the phrase 'master of the universe'.
B   Yes, yes, I know.

A   I was invincible, I was invulnerable. I could do anything I wanted
     to!

(T88–T90)

Responsibility, and the increased risks it brings, was a defining feature
of life in the thirties:

A   It's because you've got more responsibilities, if you've got a
     mortgage, if you've got a family.
B   Commitments.
C   Yes.
D   Big word, that.
E   It is.
F   Um …
A   We've depressed ourselves now!
All [Laughter/yes]

(R988–994)

The seriousness of the situation (that is, the situation of having become
thirtysomething) is not to be underestimated, setting up tensions and
a wish for release:

A   Sometimes I want to get rid of dogs, cats.
B   Yes, yes, I know.
A   Just to be *me*.
B   I know, that's right.
A   I mean, it doesn't last very long … it comes over me in waves …
     I sort of think *oh God*! I just want to get rid of it *all*!

(T73–T79)

Here we can tie this category of the data to the previous one, since the
taking of choices and of decisions lead to particular kinds of demands
being made in the different lifestyle sectors, here it is represented as
decisions regarding responsibility:

You're talking about levels of responsibility … that's what it is … I'll
have *that* responsibility, or *that* responsibility, *that* responsibility, *that*
responsibility, or just one out of four or five, or.

(T65)

Such responsibilities however have not been acquired, like objects
or possessions, but rather grew out of life experience, their particular

configuration in this time and space producing a thirtysomething experience. The concept of a life which can grow responsibilities, a body which can grow wings, suggests latency or even predisposition which has been triggered by becoming thirtysomething.

However, a responsible thirtysomething which can be contrasted to an earlier form of self as (young-and-) free (and thus irresponsible) can also be recognised as only one specific trajectory. Others in their thirties and early forties, especially if they have had family responsibilities earlier, found thirtysomething a time of shedding responsibilities, extrication from exhausted relationships and the opening up of new opportunities. For these two actors, the first of whom grew up in the 1970s and whose parents divorced, and the second of whom had started a family at the age of 20, youthfulness is associated with lack of responsibilities and thus thirtysomething represents a new lease of (youthful) life:

> I mean, with my dad leaving home I used to have to work, and keep the house while my mum worked so I didn't do much … so it's like only been in the last years that I've started doing things … I feel younger *now* than I did at twenty one. (R971–980)

> Things are really easier, the children are getting older, and you've got more money: we've got more time to ourselves … (R1003) … so in a way your responsibilities have alleviated to a degree whereas somebody else at your age might be in a completely different situation. (R1017)

This idea of a second youth contrasts with popular media stereotypes that suggest that thirtysomething is a prolonged period of carefree irresponsibility. Here, the actor enjoys a second youth through her daughter:

> And it's nice for me, as well, like having an eighteen year old, she says 'come on Mum, let's go shopping'.
>
> (R1052)

Second youth is a powerful youthfulness, when the earlier youth as a time of existential difficulties (e.g., lack of confidence) and material difficulties meant a disempowered experience for some:

> It's [thirtysomething] a kind of transition, I'm not going to say a transition into maturity … I don't feel that I have to act mature any more … I actually feel like I can be more frivolous in some ways now

than when I was in my late twenties because I haven't got anything to prove any more. (B582)

[youth was] very pressurised, with expectations of other people, older people. Some people still treat me as a child, like parents or whatever. I've worked out that three days is the maximum that my parents will treat me as an equal and I'm expected to revert to child mode in their house. … it's the darker things that you can do without 'Oh, at *her* age!' – those sorts of things. (A30)

Perceptions such as these suggest that being (or even becoming) 'youthful' is part of being thirtysomething. However, this is a split experience, and contrary to the stereotypes (including those suggested by social models and theory), for different reasons women who had started a family well before their thirties shared the sense of youthfulness with women who had not.

The concept of responsibility was also frequently invoked in terms of the concept of one's self or one's own life, which presented spaces in which the thirtysomething could be criticised (implicitly) for being irresponsible if exercising 'wrong' or 'bad' choices in life. In general, much of the thirtysomething conversations highlighted the extent to which Gidden's (1991) transformation of intimacy has precisely been about the changing role of women, led by women themselves. Yet the data shows that detraditionalisation is not inevitable or occurs by stealth. There were plenty of signs of women's agency in actively resisting traditional roles:

Being a student, I actually say 'Sorry, but this year I am *not* writing out Christmas cards and I am *not* preparing the Christmas dinner, there *is* no Christmas!'

(B520)

While in this example, the return to full-time education prompts ambivalence, guilt and shame, while desiring the role:

[A]nd I'm feeling guilty towards my husband about not working and I'm married. Because I've been a real rubbish-you know, people expect you to be a nice little good *housewifey* and everything and I'm not like that at all … going on and [laughs] *studying* – I think he thought I'd do this degree and that would be it and I would settle down and have children.

(B295)

In this extract, a woman who first had a career and then took on a *caring* role for young children separates this from a *domestic* role, her husband, while 'not too bad' about such things, is expected to successfully distinguish between the two. This is clearly understood to be in contrast to the experience of her mother's generation:

> Certainly, I found it interesting having worked and then not worked, there's a certain expectation that I should – well actually, he's not too bad. [But] I *hate* the whole household thing, I hate *all* of it! … And I'm not good at it, and unlike my mother's generation that took great pride in it, I don't! I think its mindless, boring, awful! … But he does expect … he doesn't cook, he doesn't … you know. But he just has to live without those things getting done necessarily by me.
>
> (B531–536)

This theme, in comparison with a mother's generation, was also a recurring one, and most commonly became a generalised comment about changing gender roles, as here:

> Of [them] having these drinks with cherries in and clip on earrings and shoes that hurt, and you'd get home at half ten and just?
>
> (T450)

Here then, time's arrow stretches into the past of the long tail of history, in which the concept of generations enables us to identify space-as-time-as-distance. The gap between an earlier generation symbolised for the actor by the gap between herself and her mother's generation is the length of the road well trodden by the thirtysomething woman.

Conclusions

In the data explored in this chapter, I have found that thirtysomething may be constructed as a distinctive life phase which falls after the end of youth, and being young, but before becoming truly middle aged. Thirtysomething was understood to be a social situation which had changed in its experience for this generation compared to the one before. An important dimension to this was its gender drivers, and the tendency of focus group actors to count and map generations using womens experiences and even a concept of womens generations as a reference point, rather than all generations in general.

The life phase consisted of many lifestyle sectors (Giddens 1991). Reconciling the demands made by each of them simultaneously was experienced as difficult and poses choices and dilemmas to actors. There was a prevalent idea of choices which were limited, and an orientation to 'responsibility' which might be grown and shed. Whereas Giddens (1991) and Beck's (1992) theories are useful for considering the nature of reflexivity, nonetheless, the many fronted nature of the generational location leads to power struggles and collective action in terms of making sense of these developments, which are not recognised in their theses. The focus groups were engaged with arriving at explanations of their situation which they found in less individualised accounts than contemporary social theory might suggest. Rather, actors sought explanations in wider social change and attempted to work out how they fitted into an historical stream of social life which pre-existed them and would outlive them. Signs of a growing awareness of finitude were present.

Mannheim argues that generations become actualised 'when similarly "located" contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding' (1952: 307). Evidence of this can be found in what he terms as 'a tendency pointing towards certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling, and thought' (ibid.: 291). This emerges as their response to exposure 'to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic de-stabilization' (ibid.: 303). I suggest that the actors have actively participated in constructing a concept of their lifecourse and themselves as thirtysomething, and that this concept is in operation in their reflection and life management strategies.

The thirtysomething self functions to some extent as a planning office (Beck 1992). The attitudes and experiences of life had produced a strategy towards institutionalisation which I think can be considered partial and ambivalent. Institutions and the responsibilities which go with them (family formation, labour market participation etc.) were a matter of much reflection and concern, and there was a sense of the impermanence of at least some relations. The limit of Beck and to some extent Gidden's thesis of individualisation however, lies in the shared recognition of problems, which is much closer to an old-fashioned concept of collectivity in sociology, than the individualisation thesis might allow. However such collectivity can also be understood as based in the recognition of co-existence in the social stream and thus of the shared difficulties and opportunities which communities of time experience.

6
Chronologising Adulthood/ Configuring Masculinity

Jenny Hockey, Victoria Robinson and Alex Hall

This chapter explores the implications of particular temporalities for the contingent nature of the categories 'youth' and 'adulthood', showing the potential intersection of masculinity, femininity, occupational identity and social class at the site of contemporary lifecourse transitions.[1] Its focus is prospective time and the configurations of masculinity which young men in different occupations imagine and indeed plan for, the calendars and maps through which they 'make' and mark the passage of time. Rather than the structuring of an individual man's aims and objectives that result from workplace imperatives, the chapter details a potential meshing of professional and personal age-based transitions: for example, homeownership, marriage, fatherhood, level of income and position within company. In addition, we found that rather than a structured trajectory driven by male career goals, for young men in some occupations this prospective lifecourse chronology may be planned and operationalised by their female partners, particularly when they too share a commitment to personal career development. Rather than simply foregrounding familial considerations, then, men with female partners may find that these women are defining the broader range of chronologised achievements which both parties then orient themselves towards. That said, a couple's potentially *divergent* life-planning strategies can produce anxieties and tensions which may be difficult to reconcile.

The data we present here derive from an ESRC-funded project[2] on masculinity in transition, carried out among estate agents, firefighters and hairdressers. Men in the third category had a distinctive relationship with youthfulness since for them it represented a form of cultural capital. Moreover, the younger hairdressers we interviewed were not living as part of a heterosexual couple. Their data therefore offer a contrast

which points up the contingent nature of the categories 'youth' and 'adulthood', not only in terms of distinctive occupational identities but also the diversity of men's domestic lives.

Divergent lifecourse temporalities

What we argue, building on previous work (Hockey and James, 2003), is that different conceptions of the lifecourse are evident within the calendars or maps that young men draw upon. These reflect the competing interpretations of the ageing process offered by sociologists working in this area. Featherstone and Hepworth (1991), for example, referred to a 'post-modern life course', an emergent trend with the potential to overturn 'scheduled development' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989: 144). They called for 'a flexible, individualised, biographical approach which takes into account human diversity' (1991: 386), suggesting that during 'mid-life', a plateau phase of the lifecourse which has arguably replaced 'middle-age', individuals may seek to maximise and sustain the cultural capital of youthfulness. Their arguments are extended in work on the 'yo-yo-ization' (Elchardus and Smits, 2006) of the lifecourse, a concept which sees it transformed from 'a sequence of transitions and stages' to 'a series of positions that are simultaneously accessible and between which individuals can increasingly hop' (Elchardus and Smits, 2006: 304).

Counter arguments however, suggest that freedom and creativity in life plans bring increased individual responsibility, fragmentation and anxiety (Bauman, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 44). Other authors, such as Elchardus and Smits (2006), present quantitative data that suggest that a standardised lifecourse retains a place within contemporary society. Brannen and Nilsen (2002) also critique arguments for a postmodern heterogeneity of individualised 'planning projects' (Beck-Gernsheim, cited in Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 515). Their data reveal that reflexive strategies for negotiating the lifecourse, 'continue(s) to be shaped by structural influences' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 520), which means that '[i]mposing a dichotomy upon young people's lives in terms of either the "choice biography" or the "standard biography" is too simplistic' (2002: 531). In addition to the effects of relative (dis)advantage, our data show variation *within* particular individuals' orientations towards their futures. As we argue, 'multiple masculinities' can be discernible within as well as across particular men (Spector-Mersel, 2006). Young people, we suggest, are therefore likely to experience tensions *between*

standardised and de-standardised, or postmodern, approaches to planning their futures.

The study

The study from which our data are drawn compared the ways in which men performed, or 'did' masculinity at work and at home, focussing particularly on the transition between these two locations. In this way it shed light on the contingent nature of masculinity, as a practice which not only varied between men, for example in terms of different social class locations, but also changed as men moved between social contexts. We therefore treated identity as a process, something never finally settled; and used the term identification to indicate its status as a contingent, intersubjective practice that enables us to know who we are by recognising and responding to similarities and differences between ourselves and other people (Jenkins, 2004).

Our sample of 54 men was drawn from occupations traditionally associated with particular 'styles' of masculinity, and which have often been stereotyped as 'more or less masculine' (firefighting, estate agency and hairdressing). A comparative approach afforded a nuanced exploration of men's transitions between the public and traditionally more masculine world of employment, and domestic environments more likely to be associated with femininity. In addition, we addressed men's life-course transitions – leaving home, establishing a partnership and family, divorce and retirement – and therefore recruited young men starting out in life; men in mid-life and older men around retirement age. In that we were concerned with the embodiment of masculinity as a 'naturalised' social identity (see Hall, Hockey and Robinson, 2007), we set out to access aspects of 'being a man' that our male interviewees might have difficulty articulating themselves. Thus our study was designed to secure multiple perspectives on the way men 'do' masculinity, combining qualitative interviewing among 54 men, qualitative interviewing among 54 women who shared aspects of these men's home lives, mainly as partners, and observation in all three workplaces. In the majority of cases, women were interviewed separately from the men, a strategy which allowed individuals to speak in confidence about areas of difficulty or disagreement. In this way, we gained insight into couples' shared lives from two perspectives, exploring accounts of how they negotiated differences, managed domestic arrangements and constructed individual and joint life plans. Workplace observation enabled us to generate rapport

with men who we subsequently interviewed, our familiarity with their occupational environments enabling more detailed discussion during these exchanges. Analysis of interview data was then enhanced by more grounded knowledge of the issues and events they were describing.[3]

In this chapter, we pay particular attention to the ways in which social location shapes individuals' orientation towards the future – and here interviewees' references to numerical age have been important. Our interpretive focus thus reflects arguments that an influential mechanism through which the lifecourse may be regulated, or standardised, is chronologisation – the structuring of the lifecourse around numerical age. Historians such as Gillis (1996) and social gerontologists such as Vincent (1995), for example, describe chronologisation as a feature of modernity which can be linked with late nineteenth century welfarism and the introduction of benefits provided on the basis of numerical age. These arguments suggest that, despite evidence of scope for more fluid lifecourse transitions, numerical age can act powerfully to shape social identities – for example via the institutionalised provision of a pension, cheap travel and free medical prescriptions at the numerical age of 60 (also, Jenkins, 2004: 2–3). As Vincent argues,

> in industrial society in the last part of the twentieth century, age is becoming more important in relation to people's experience. It is becoming a criterion that more people use to interpret and understand their experience of society and to structure their own consciousness and action.

> (1995: 54)

In the data we present here, young men and women make references to numerical age when describing their prospective futures. For some men, clear age-based milestones marked the transition to successful adulthood, that is, to permanent employment, promotion, a 'nice home', commitment to a heterosexual relationship and parenthood. Alongside evidence of chronologisation, however, more individualised, gendered modes of thought were nonetheless being brought to bear upon lifecourse temporalities. Some men experienced tension between the perceived benefits of both youthfulness and maturity; some adhered to a youthful status, whether because their occupation helped sustain this identity, or because it required it; some female partners were concerned to maximise both financial security and their reproductive options. Planning for the future therefore emerged as a matter for negotiation,

if not conflict, whether between individual men and women, or within particular men.

'Footloose and fancy-free' or 'standing on your own two feet'

Faced with uncertainty in a contemporary, globalised labour market, young people lack the meta-narratives which framed the more predictable patterns of employment experienced by their parents during the second half of the twentieth century (Bradley and Hickman, 2004: 120–2; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Mythen, 2005: 132, 134, 143). This social and economic environment can generate an extended period of youth dependence (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 1), with 'traditional' markers of adulthood – sexual activity – becoming an active consumer, leaving home and gaining full-time permanent work (Roche et al., 2004: xiv) becoming 'desequenced'.

These arguments form the context within which we consider the categories of 'youth' and 'adult' mobilised by our interviewees. As Brannen and Nilsen (2002) argue, 'adulthood' is no longer an unproblematic concept; employment, for example, has ceased to offer a reliable and scheduled marker of the end of 'youth'. Alongside this change comes an expansion of women jobs in the service sector which, in Irving's (2007) view, conceals a complex and contradictory collection of advances and declines in gender equity. These, she argues, have stirred rather than shaken the idealised, post-war family model of male 'breadwinner' and female 'housewife'.

Our interviews with young men included questions about how they chose and settled into particular occupations. These were designed to find out how differences between oneself and others might be experienced at the start of a career, and whether men somehow accommodated to another masculinity as part of the process of identification (Jenkins, 2004). Interviewees' responses often drew on the concept of a 'youth' life stage characterised by being single, spending money on age-specific socialising, renting accommodation, being in training, travelling or having a 'rubbish job'. Moreover, they would compare their current lifestyles with those of friends and colleagues, or indeed with their own earlier experiences. Among the youngest cohort sampled by Brannen and Nilsen, 18–20-year-olds on vocational training courses or in higher education, a relatively uncertain future was viewed through the lens of an 'extended present orientation' (2002: 520). Our somewhat older participants looked *back* to a similarly present-oriented life stage.

Through descriptions of themselves and others, the profiles of 'adult-hood' to which they aspired became apparent. For example, John Smith a 26-year-old graduate firefighter reflects:

> [T]he whole living in the city with my mates … I did it at university. I did three years and I did it well.

Paul Lewis, a 28-year-old graduate estate agent echoed this perception. 'It was fantastic', he says (describing his 'youthful' life) 'yeah, mates round on a Friday and a Saturday and not having to worry about anything, making a total mess of the place and not getting told off' [laughs]. Field notes record him as: 'on the cusp of settling down prop-erly with his girlfriend … a bit ambivalent about the changes in his life … really enjoyed the youthful fun of his twenties … lots of "laddy" friends for football, pub-crawling and beer drinking … he is fond of the bachelor life'. Warren, a 28-year-old hairdresser, described his 'youth-ful' life in similar terms: 'at the time this city was my playground, it was a big city, you know I'd come from kind of country … it had got a lot more happening'. He chose a salon in 'an area in town where I went out a lot at night, so it had got that kind of glamorous side to it'. Nonetheless Warren was keen to further his career through training and had moved salons, thinking, 'I'm going to be propelled to, you know, new heights'. Unlike younger estate agents, however, Warren believed that *retaining* a fluid, youthful approach to his identity through dress was integral to meeting his career goals: 'I'm the kind of person I'll get up in the morning and if I want to be rock Warren, I'll be rock Warren, if I want to be serious smart Warren. Like today I got up and obviously wanted to be kind of like, Addams Family/funeral parlour worker and I think I've achieved that'.

Another estate agent, Joe White (24), however, defined his current age-based identity through comparison with his housemates who, in his view, were still living a 'footloose and fancy-free' life stage, an end-less present with no future. Had he not served five years in the army, Joe said that

> I probably just have a meaningless job and just being the same as my housemates now, just, just flitting through life really and working up credit card bills and not really caring about you know for the future, because they have they've got awful debts, they'd never be able to get a mortgage in a million years and that absolutely frightens the life out of me and I think I do not want to be like them at 30 years

old, still renting and not being able to stand on my own two feet, like they're single, have no woman in their life and I just don't want to be like that at all, you know, footloose and fancy free, I don't think, in my personal opinion, it's the way life has to be.

These data show young men reflecting on their previous age-based identities from the perspective of *ongoing* personal transitions; for example, from a junior to a more established member of staff; from 'boyfriend' to 'husband' and potentially, 'father'. It is from these mobile locations that being 'footloose and fancy-free' and 'standing on your own two feet' were differentiated. As the data show, not only chronologised distance but also observable differences resourced such distinctions. As Joe White said, 'I've got this conscious thought that I do need to grow up and it's good that I've got that'. Looking back, Richard (44), an older hairdresser from our mid-life cohort (aged between 37 and 50), said, 'when you're young you're out at night, you're partying, you're clubbing etc. As you're getting older, I mean, you've got responsibilities, you can't be trolleyed every night, because your business 'd go down the pan'.

However, while young estate agents and firefighters *perceived* a chronologised trajectory leading to the achievement of 'adulthood' by 30, *experientially* a gendered, contradictory and ambiguous distinction could blur 'youth' and 'adulthood'. These contradictions emerged within these men's views and between their own and those of their female partners. If firefighter John Smith's youth was comfortably located in his past, he remained concerned not to settle down too young: 'I'm just still scared', he said. Pondering promotion to Station Officer, he said he saw it as at least 35 years away. As detailed below, the prioritising of money over personal relationships and a failure to properly relax and enjoy oneself were counted among the costs of growing up. Unconstrained by female partners, however, young hairdressers were less equivocal about forgoing pleasures associated with 'youth': Jamie (28), for example, had also been in the army but now, as a hairdresser, had 'got slipped back into my laid back ways'. In his profession, he said, 'it's which image you're trying to portray rather than clean and neat, clean cut, office type worker, but more of a laid back stylish approach I suppose … I've had office work stuff before where I had to wear shirt and ties and I hated it'.

By contrast, Adam Black (23), an estate agent stated: 'My worst fear is waking up and I'm 30 and I'm in the same job, you know, middle management'. His current lack of financial commitments represented

an opportunity to 'look into things' which might advance his dream of being 'comfortable' in 10 or 15 years, something he jokingly represented as 'owning a Ferrari'. Like Adam, Joe White was concerned to 'get in there early and work your way up', comparing himself with youngsters who 'come out of school [and] expect to walk into a good job'. The imperative to exercise both careful choice and individual agency comes through strongly in these data. In Joe's view 'the guys who are not happy in their job at 25, 26 (ought) to change career (but) I think it's very daunting ... well, I've had to. It's frightening, absolutely frightening'. At 21, estate agent Kevin Johnson is already identifying what he calls the 'stepping stone' of becoming a valuer by the age of 24. Joe has also mapped out his route chronologically: 'in the next two years I want to see myself in some kind of managerial role and then from then on, I don't know, I'd like to say, I'd like to be a partner in ten years time but I don't want to set my goals too high but you've got to strive for something'. As noted, life planning and identification were enmeshed processes, the desirability of one's future trajectory being materialised through anecdotes which highlighted similarities and differences between oneself and other men. Joe, for example, aspired to the success of his brother-in-law, another estate agent, again measuring his achievements in relation to a chronologised lifecourse: 'just phenomenal of what he's achieved and he's only like 33, 34, he's just phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal ... he's got his own business and what he's got and what he's done for himself is just baffling, absolutely baffling how he's done it ... building his own empire basically'. These are therefore issues that young men address within the context of quite specific time frames. As noted above, however, their reflexive strategies combine with structural constraints (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002).

Occupational identities, social class and gender

As evidenced, our data show a sometimes uncomfortable meshing of individualising trends and a standardised lifecourse. Moreover, social class and occupationally based masculinity can be powerful influences upon shifts between different conceptualisations of time and the lifecourse. Thus while individualisation, which renders identity a 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1991), can complicate the relationship between predicted lifestyle and class, gender, ethnic and age-based identities, in Beck's view (cited in Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 3), the risks associated with this lifecourse strategy are *unevenly* distributed through society. Educational and employment opportunities, for example,

remain shaped by the 'durable yardsticks' of class, gender and ethnicity (Mythen, 2005: 138, 144).

   How life mapping strategies intersect with structural differences grounded in gender, social class and occupational status was, however, a question that our comparative perspective allowed us to address. In describing the tensions some young men were experiencing between the values associated with youthfulness and adulthood, we cited the influence of specific, class-based masculinities. The differences between them can be elaborated as follows.

Firefighting

In contrast with the other two occupations from which we drew our sample, firefighting remains a traditional, working-class 'job for life' (Baigent, 2001), a perspective reiterated by the firefighters who participated in our study. That said, the conditions of employment in the fire service are constantly shifting and it is increasingly common for men and women to leave to pursue other careers, or to join later in life. Nevertheless firefighting's once well-defined career path was still embraced by young men seeking the social and economic stability their fathers had achieved through industrial labour. Combining a 'secure future' with good pay and pension prospects and boisterous male sociability, firefighting was perceived by participants as a practical, honourable profession. The young graduate firefighters we interviewed particularly emphasised the work-life balance offered by the shift pattern, with several rest days after a 'tour' of nights. These enabled 'fiddle jobs', sport and leisure and future scope for childcare. A young man who had left a successful career in engineering saw the physical and mental benefits of firefighting as compensation for lost income: he was much happier with a fulfilling work-life balance.

Estate agency

In contrast with firefighting's emphasis on developing the practical and social skills needed to be a team player, estate agency promotes strong imagery of 'self-made' individualism and power. Personal dynamism, flair and perseverance are key to 'making it', with success measured financially, both in company targets and personal bonuses. In a competitive market, men (and women) pursue a career that offers not a traditional 'job for life', but the potential for huge financial rewards – and thereby security. Young men described relishing the challenges of a competitive environment: 'you know you want to be top of the valuers and you want to make sure you've got the best fees and you're getting

"Valuer of the Quarter" it's all about that, yeah definitely'. Another said:

> The qualities you have to be very proactive and very, what's the word I'm looking for? You have to have a lot of drive and then to come to work every day to succeed to do it.

As evidenced above, admired colleagues were those who had 'made it' young (through property development, for example) and, potentially, retired early. In an insecure job market, some young men viewed getting a 'suit job' as a better strategy than pursuing their fathers' manual trades.

Hairdressing

In contrast with firefighting and estate agency, hairdressing emerges as a profession which offers the glamorous sociability of youth culture. Young hairdressers enjoy the aesthetic aspects of their work, identifying as creative individuals and skilled technicians. Renting a chair allows them career flexibility and in some senses they lived in the extended present Brannen and Nilsen (2002) refer to. 'Youthfulness' represented cultural capital as well as the pleasure of a highly sociable work and associated leisure environment. They were nonetheless aware that 'youthfulness' was time-limited and that career flexibility could result in insecurity. At some stage, therefore, many envisaged pursuing the capital and contacts for opening their own salon – or perhaps leaving the profession. However, some young men expressed ambivalence about the responsibility of managing finance and staff, an unwelcome contrast with their current present-oriented lifestyle. Richard, a 44-year-old hairdresser from our mid-life cohort, was asked how he saw himself in five or ten years' time. 'I can't, I don't wanna go there', he replied.

Within masculinity's diverse manifestations, then, these data reflect contrasting possibilities – the 'hands-on', practical member of a secure hierarchy; the dynamic, 'self-made' individual and the artistic party-animal. As we go on to describe, very different temporalities and planning strategies are associated with each one. Importantly, for young estate agents and firefighters, these were often the outcome of a *couple's* sometimes competing constructions of the lifecourse.

Gender, time and the lifecourse

While estate agent Joe White found that 'it's hard to grow up', he also asserted that 'now I've got a lot more drive and determination. I was

so immature at college … just couldn't be arsed with anything, didn't take life seriously'. Being grown up, he said, means having 'nice things and … nice people around you'. Such aspirations did however carry risks: for example, overwork and the prioritising of money over family and friends. Other perceived 'pitfalls' were seductive status symbols, such as inappropriately 'flash' cars and houses, as well as insufficient time for family, never letting your hair down and delayed retirement.

By contrast with the uncertainties experienced by these young men, 'growing up' was less ambiguous for their female partners. Buying a house with a male partner, for example, was perceived as 'quite natural'. Amy Hardy (27), an art technician, said in reference to setting up home: 'I'd paid bills. I know that you need to get your money sorted and you need this and you need this'. 'I'd always like said I'll be married and got a house before I'm thirty', she went on, and 'I very rarely change my mind'. Yasmin Ford (21), also said 'When I want something I want it there and then. I can't wait'. Both Amy and 40-year-old Sarah Ward, also an estate agent, had told their male partners that: 'you need to stand on your own two feet. You're nearly thirty years old. You can't always go running back to your mum and dad'. Sarah, like Amy, described how 'I have stood on my own two feet from being seventeen'. Uncertainty about adulthood, for these young women, concerned their limited years of high fertility, a worry which had implications for both their own and their partners' career trajectories and a perceived need for financial independence. Child-bearing too could soon curtail career development and home-building, in their view. As Irving (2007) demonstrates, compared with other European countries, fewer British women withdraw from paid work upon the birth of children, and Smeaton (2006) shows that afterwards women are returning to work more quickly than in the past. Despite age, class and ethnic variation, a general trend for all women is the greater likelihood of economic activity relatively soon after childbirth (Irving, 2007).

What these data underscore, then, are the different ways in which women and men experience tension between their occupational and age-based identities. For young estate agents and firefighters, to grow up into (successfully employed) adults incurred the risk of losing their youthful identity as a fun-loving individual who is open to new possibilities. For their female partners, the adult status resulting from occupational achievement put 'motherhood', an alternative form of female adulthood, in jeopardy. As a result transitions between 'youth' and 'adulthood' could become 'planning projects' for firefighters and

estate agents with female partners, projects which were not, however, necessarily consensual processes.

Describing her relationship with estate agent, Paul Lewis, Sarah Ward asserted that his closeness to his natal family was inappropriate – he used to share a meal with them almost daily, despite having his own flat. Once living with Paul, Sarah took on a relatively directive role in response to what she saw as his previous 'molly coddling'. Paul, however, felt mixed about abandoning the bachelor days he had loved and said he was too 'selfish' to think of children. Nonetheless he 'couldn't think about her [Sarah] not being there now'.

During her interview, Sarah detailed his reservations: her initial move into his house had been as a 'tenant', 'financial reasons' being a shared ploy to minimise the romantic implications of cohabiting. Paul had been anxious to maintain his space, prioritising the renovation of the top of the house as his games room, so his friends could still visit to 'play darts'. Sarah was not to be included. The transition from single man going to work rumpled and boozy after a heavy night to a possible partner (in estate agency and romantic terms) seemed inevitable but fraught for Paul. Yet despite his sense of loss about his former lifestyle, Sarah poignantly described his recent e-mail which said that he felt their relationship now meant more to him than to her. For Paul, the unfamiliar dependence on Sarah seemed problematic, while Sarah patiently suffered playing second fiddle to his desires to maintain his old way of life.

For another estate agent, Jim Gray, and his partner Lorraine Coburn, an unexpected pregnancy had stimulated mixed emotions. Lorraine (31) referred to her previous marriage: 'you always think about how your life's going to pan out and I was kind of like right, okay, we're at the stage now where I want to start having children and we've bought this house and we ought to get married, it's just kind of a natural evolution of kind of your life so we did without actually I don't think giving it that much thought about what we were doing and whether or not it was the right thing to do'.

Now living with Jim, Lorraine described her pregnancy as a shock for them both. Jim seemed mixed about forthcoming fatherhood, saying it was not his choice and the timing was unfortunate as they had not finished renovating their house – there would be no 'chill time' before the baby, and money would be tight. He regretted that money saved to fulfil his cherished dream of buying a home cinema set now had to be spent on a pram – and found Lorraine's expectations of a high standard of living a problem. She liked nice things, he said, *and* wanted to stay at home with the baby, even though she was the higher earner.

Aware of his misgivings, Lorraine said: 'I thought well, I don't want to have children with somebody who desperately doesn't want children but he kind of said okay, we'll do it, we'll be alright so yeah'. She interpreted his continued reluctance as a cover for lack of confidence around children; a fear that the baby would not like him and he would not cope with being a father: 'there's part of him that I think he's kind of holding back with me so that he can't, I think I don't know with Jim if he admits to something, it's almost like a weakness, so I think he'd rather pretend that he's not that bothered and I think it's just how he is but I think, yeah, he'll be fine'.

Moving in with Lorraine had constituted a lifecourse transition for Jim who said he had 'grown up a hell of a lot' and no longer really enjoyed pubs and clubs, for example. Yet, adulthood, for him, meant being able to look after *himself* and having long-term goals, something he had done for many years. The encroaching responsibility for other people made him wary: 'I've only ever had myself to look after and still have to some degree, because Lorraine can look after herself'. His relationship with Lorraine then, was a partnership of *two self-sufficient individuals*, not so different from his previous life. The baby threatened to transform all that.

This gendered dynamic of women 'managing' men's problematic transition from 'youth' to 'adulthood', while themselves espousing a more standardised, chronologised perception of the lifecourse, manifests differently for Amy and firefighter, Jack Hoskins. As already noted, Amy had established herself independently of her parents and felt Jack's closeness with his family undermined both his autonomy and their relationship. Amy had made it clear that they would share domestic work equally, that her rules now took precedence over his mother's. Jack, by contrast, appeared to be drifting through the transition to adulthood and coupledom. Describing his proposal of marriage on a group outing to Paris, he says: 'It just felt right'. Of their wedding in Jamaica, he remarked: 'yeah it were … good laugh, it were chilled out … the day we got married I was still laid round pool at half past two and we got married at four'. Unlike more middle class estate agents for whom this transition involved forgoing youth, Jack compared himself favourably with single men of his own age. Some unmarried mates were having a weekend away and he said, 'if I were single I'd be going with them and I think I've got a nice house, two nice cars, got a nice bike, dog, wife … it's like I'm set … whereas they've got to do it … meet somebody … get a house … I still go out with them … and they're fine'. For Amy, however, the future is worrying since she wants a child by the

time she is thirty: 'I've got more friends that can't have … children or are struggling to have children and my mum tried for six years to have me and if I'm trying for six years, I don't want to be 36 when I'm and if there is a problem'. Exercised by this goal Amy is considering buying a £170 predictive fertility testing kit. Comparing himself with her, Jack says, 'I'd rather live each day, knowing that I've … lived it happily than planning out what do I do … just let it flow … I mean Amy, she has to write everything down, she's totally opposite, she has to know what she's doing and when she's doing it and where she's going'.

These data show the intersection of transitions between youth and adulthood and between a single and partnered life. Although Sarah, Lorraine and Amy were from different backgrounds, they evidence a broader pattern within our data from estate agents and firefighters where young women find ways of drawing male partners into a shared, standardised and chronologised lifecourse.

Discussion

This chapter has explored the extent to which there is evidence of 'destandardised' approaches to mapping the passage of a lifetime. Through data drawn from occupational cultures associated with styles of masculinity that tended to reflect class-based structural differences, we have identified a nuanced relationship between workplace-based masculinities and potential tension *between* 'de-standardised' and more regulated, chronologised lifecourse trajectories. Men's orientations towards both their pasts and their futures can be seen as negotiated and processual dimensions of ongoing practices of identification. Thus time is mapped interactively, whether vis-a-vis a heterosexual partner, or in relation to housemates and work colleagues. Interviews with the female partners of young estate agents and firefighters, for example, pointed up not only gender differences in the extent to which standardised or destructured models of the lifecourse were drawn upon, they also illuminated the negotiation of these options as aspects of the living out of heterosexuality. Heterosexual coupledom thus involves not only the changing social and economic environment of paid work but also the materialities of embodied reproductive capacity. Indeed it is precisely at the intersection between patterns of economic activity, consumption and fertility, that couples seek to plan shared lives, which nonetheless cleave to sometimes competing priorities and sets of values. The stand-ardised and the destructured lifecourse therefore emerge as not only particular ways of perceiving time, but also resources drawn upon by

young men and women seeking to reconcile shared and individualised agendas and priorities.

Importantly, the relationship between 'youth' and 'adulthood', and the transition between them, emerged as the area where differences grounded in occupationally based masculinities and gendered identities were most apparent. Thus estate agents, Paul and Jim, experienced contradictory desires for a more extended period of youthful independence alongside a concern with the adult goals of furthering their careers and maintaining stable partnerships. They can be compared with firefighters, exemplified by Jack, many of whom emulated the lifecourse patterns lived out by their fathers: taking on a respected job-for-life and settling down early. However, their work involved – indeed required – participation in boisterous male sociality and preparedness to tease and be teased, sometimes ferociously. The ascent to adulthood, for them, was perhaps a shallower incline. Firefighters talked openly of the watch atmosphere letting them 'behave like children'. The continual 'piss-taking' among watches[4] who got on well fostered a playful, irreverent and joking working environment that contrasted with, and emerged from, the serious work they had to undertake at accidents and fires. In turn, they can be compared with the young hairdressers within our sample who did not have well-established or traditional lives as part of a couple. In general they cultivated their youth as a form of cultural capital which enhanced their professional life, both socially and economically. Data from among older hairdressers showed that extending 'youth' well into mid-life was, however, ultimately self-limiting, the body's capacity to support this identity eventually terminating. This risked bringing either loss of earnings, or the demands of salon ownership or management.

The female partners of estate agents and firefighters, by contrast, appeared to be more 'conservative' in that theirs was a lifecourse perspective more firmly based on standardised, chronologised stages. However, as research on the European Union (Fagan and Burchell, 2002) shows, the trend towards individualisation within a risky job market appears linked with women's engagement in reconciliation strategies. These potentially allow them to combine paid work with domestic commitments. By contrast, the research showed men remaining concerned with income maximisation strategies concomitant with a breadwinner model.

All the men we interviewed described ambivalences towards the transition between 'youth' and 'adulthood'. While 'youth' might be associated with financial and emotional insecurity, 'adulthood'

contained potential penalties. For firefighters, being 'one of the lads' became problematic when juggled with taking on management roles and going for promotion; for hairdressers, body-based youthfulness was an important yet time-limited resource. Most starkly, however, for estate agents, 'adulthood' introduced a tension between personal autonomy epitomised in 'laddish' socialising and a desire for power, status and 'nice things'. Feeling impelled to exercise personal agency within standardised chronologies, young estate agents' concerns evidence the persistence of modernity's regulated lifecourse alongside late modernity's trend towards individualisation. What we argue, therefore, is that explaining young people's orientations towards the lifecourse, and the ways in which they position themselves within it, cannot necessarily be understood by simply taking the individual as the focus for analysis. Instead, the data we present show a need to recognise processes of interactive or collective map-making that are shaped by social class location, occupationally related masculinities, and, perhaps most directly, by the gendered tensions and negotiations which constitute heterosexual coupledom.

Notes

1. This chapter draws upon a presentation given at the seminar 'Youth, Gender and Images of the Future', Institute for Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, 23–4 November 2006; and a subsequent journal article (Hockey, J., Robinson, V. and Hall, A. (2009). 'The Life Course Anticipated: Gender and Chronologisation among Young People', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12 (2): 227–41).
2. We are grateful to the ESRC for their funding of the project *Masculinities in Transition: Identity, Home and Workplace* (RES-000-23-0441) between 2004 and 2007.
3. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this article to protect the anonymity of our interviewees.
4. The term 'watch' refers to a group of firefighters who are always on duty together at a particular fire station. The term derives from the Navy, and denotes the sense of being 'on watch'. Fire brigade watches are differentiated by colour, and the same watch will be on duty at the same time throughout a brigade. For example, a 'Blue Watch' firefighter will become familiar with the men and women of his watch, but also Blue Watch firefighters from other stations who are always on duty at the same time and who might attend incidents together.

7
Surveys, Citizenship and the Sexual Lifecourse

Mark Davis

Sexuality is understood to alter over the lifecourse of the individual. In addition, sexuality is seen to be subject to generational, cultural and historical context and, as some would have it, self-management (Giddens, 1992). One of the ways of researching such changing and changeable sexuality has been through the sex survey. Of these, random-sample population surveys are regarded by many to provide valid and reliable information about sexual behaviour and its age – and generation-related expressions. The assumption here is that scientifically constructed surveys can reveal sexuality – its features and scope intersecting with temporality – and therefore provide the basis for truth claims that can assist with such matters as sexual health and well-being. I want to adopt a different point of view in this chapter and suggest how sexuality comes into being through such surveys. With reference to several examples of large-scale, national and international surveys, I want to show how politics, morality, commerce and the provisions on survey science itself find expression in the knowledge produced by sex surveys. Therefore, and following a well-known Foucauldian line of argument, I want to explore how sex surveys themselves constitute the truths of sexuality in the sense that they help to name and quantify it and therefore exercise and extend the discursive power of the technology of sex. As we will see, a key dimension of this operation of power in the sex survey concerns the temporal variation of sexuality, across generations and within the lifecourse.

The question of sexuality forms a point of continuity between the survey and citizenship. For some analysts, sexuality is characterised by the self-searching associated with it. Sexuality is no longer a given of culture or nature and it is argued to be increasingly a matter of personal autonomy. Accordingly, sexuality is seen as a key dimension of reflexive

modernisation wherein a central question for the self is, 'how shall I be sexual?', to paraphrase Anthony Giddens (see for example, 1991). This reflexivity is apparent in historical changes and in the lifecourse, both of which have been revealed in sex surveys. Indeed, the idea that sexuality is reflexively produced and the method of the sex survey are interdependent. The sex survey relies on the idea of sexual reflexivity through its questions directed at individuals regarding their sexual behaviours. For example, researchers pose such questions as: when did you become sexually active? Do you have sex outside marriage? Do you think pre-marital sex is a good thing? Are you exclusively homosexual? And the list goes on. In this sense, the sex survey is one way in which questions of sexual citizenship get to be entered into discourse and addressed by respondents. By extension, the questions of citizenship so exercised suggest that the sex survey is an important method for regulating the sexual adult. Following the general theme of this volume, it will be my argument that the production of sexual citizenship in the sex survey coheres with assumptions regarding adulthood in contemporary society. The freedom to address questions of sexuality to oneself, and indeed in a survey, are imbricated with notions of such adulthood. Questions regarding sexuality are addressed to, and by, a self deemed in the institutions of medicine, public health, law, education and research ethics to name a few, to have the right to determination in matters of sexuality, but always in tension with expectations of good citizenship and its age-related implications. This sovereign sexual self, reflexive with good citizenship, is also the identity that figures in appeals to individuals to care for their sexual desires and practices in socially productive and healthy ways. As will become clear later, this subject is addressed in the promotion and sale of biomedical products that have sexual uses.

In this chapter therefore, I will consider the practice of asking questions about the sexual lifecourse, taking as examples some sex surveys. In keeping with the theme of this volume, I will focus on the ways in which the sex survey engages with some of the temporalities of adult sexual practice, in particular, sexual debut and ageing. In the sections to follow I first consider some of the well-known and recent attempts to survey sexualities, making note of how controversies concerning sexual citizenship have framed them. A focus for this discussion will be how sex surveys have helped define how we understand sexual debut, among other matters. In the last section, I consider examples of the sex survey that address the other temporal aspect of sexuality: the sexual health and well-being of the older adult and, relatedly, how Viagra and

other biomedical technologies are being put to the work of reversing sexual ageing and otherwise resisting the effects of time on the body. I will argue therefore that sex surveys are implicated in two problematisations of time and sexuality: sexual debut and therefore the demarcation of adult sexual citizenship; and turning willing consumers to products that appear to promise post-ageing sex.

The troubled cartographies of the sexual lifecourse

The importance of questions regarding sexuality reflects Foucault's writing on sexuality (1978). Foucault was interested in exploring what conditions determine questions about sexuality. For Foucault, sexualities are understood not in the answers that people give in surveys, in the clinic or on the analyst's couch, but in how and why it is that such questions get to be posed in the first place. This approach draws attention to the scientific, political and moral conditions that enable and inhibit the voicing of such questions and how they echo in social relations and subjectivity.

It is not inconsistent with this Foucauldian approach to observe that questions of sexuality, whether self-applied or arising in a survey, are subject to morality and politics. In *The World We Have Won*, Jeffrey Weeks charted the changes of sexuality over the twentieth century, noting 'the gradual loosening of constraint' in concert with the contestation of sexual identities and practices (2007). Likewise, Ken Plummer has conceptualised the complexities and nuances of sexuality in terms of intimate citizenship, referring to such issues as increased autonomy of women and men in sexual and intimate matters but also growing debate and controversy over the status of the family, gender relations, gay and lesbian rights, the impact of new reproductive technologies, body modification and other 'enhancements' to name a few (2003). However, both Weeks and Plummer make reference to cultural pessimism with regard to these sexual changes. This pessimism finds expression in the thought of both conservatives and radicals. Conservatives see sexual liberalisation as evidence of moral and social decay. Radicals see in such changes new forms of coercive power in the guise of notions of individual autonomy. This doubling in cultural pessimism complicates thinking about sexuality and makes it difficult to chart a simple trajectory of emancipation of the sexual subject. Sex surveys have also been flashpoints for furore regarding such matters as privacy, moral degeneracy, extra-marital sex and homosexuality and therefore have an ambiguous relationship with cultural pessimism regarding sexual subjectivity. In this section I want

to consider how politics and culture have influenced the mapping of sexuality, shaping the conduct of such research in terms of whether or not and how it is carried out and inside the surveys themselves.

Numerous surveys of sexual practice have been reported in the literature. Here I want to focus on sex surveys of a particular kind: large-scale, national surveys in English-speaking countries. This discussion owes much to Liz Stanley's account of the sex surveys of the twentieth century (1995). Stanley examined the little-known 'Little Kinsey' conducted in the late 1940s in UK and also other examples of sex surveys including the *Hite Reports* and the British *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* (herein the UK Survey). Drawing on Stanley, I will focus on the famous Kinsey Reports of the late 1940s and 1950s and more recent population surveys conducted in the UK, the US and Australia in the 1990s and 2000s. The reader will also find that in a later section I make reference to the post-millennium, global sex surveys used in the marketing of Viagra.

The Kinsey Reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1998 [1948]) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1998 [1953]) are in many respects important milestones in attempts to map the sexual practice of populations. Their significance however is less about the supposed facts they produced and more about the way they have sponsored scientific controversies, political ramifications and moral debates. As is well known, Kinsey and his colleagues interviewed men and women (5300 men and 5940 women, see: www.kinseyinstitute.org) in the US in the late 1930s to early 1950s. Respondents were asked to divulge many details of their sexual behaviour including when and how they became sexually active, pre- and extra-marital sex and sexual intercourse with people of the same sex. Among Kinsey's many findings was that significant proportions of both men and women had sexual intercourse outside marriage and sometimes with people of the same gender. Such practices transgressed moral constraint and, in some circumstances, laws. Of course, the reports were hotly debated in the US and elsewhere. The status of the Reports as the most systematic evidence of sexual practices of the period offered confirmation of what many had come to suspect was happening in the sex lives of Americans. As Miriam Reumann has shown in her analysis of the impact of the Kinsey Reports, they had importance because, among other effects, of what they implied about the moral carriage and masculinity of the American male and through him, the Nation itself (2005). The picture of the American male having extra-marital and/or homosexual sex undercut the foundations of male hegemony over the family and society, with

ramifications for government at large. Reumann referred to the Kinsey reports as 'distilled sex' (2005: 13), suggesting the detail in the data itself and its salacious depiction in the popular media of the time, and also, more importantly, how sex surveys are themselves implicated in the discursive organisation of sexual citizenship.

Kinsey and colleague's researches are prime examples of how the mapping of sexuality is troublesome, both for the researchers themselves and for society. According to Reumann, conservative commentators denounced Kinsey and pointed to the data as evidence of the decline of the moral status of the contemporary US. Such outcries connect with the cultural pessimism regarding sexuality noted by Weeks and Plummer, among others. Less strident and fewer in number according to Reumann (2005), so-called libertarians held up the Reports as important means of shattering oppressive myths about sexuality. Significantly, the information contained in the Reports created images of citizens given over to their libidos. Anxiety abounded that the self-pleasuring citizen would become impossible to govern. Possibly the most profound impact of Kinsey was to make it imperative that governments deal, in some way or other, with the idea of a sexually interested citizenry.

The furore over Kinsey blurred into questions over the scientific quality of his research. Some argued that Kinsey's research was not adequately systematic and in particular that his sample was based on volunteers and therefore he had no basis for making generalisations about the population at large and that, because his data were all self-reported, he had no way of verifying the validity of his measures of behaviour. Such accusations of bias had paradoxical effects. They helped to deconstruct the value of the findings and raise questions over their implications, but they also perpetuated the moral outrage attached to the research. This question of scientific quality has been important to the sex research that came after Kinsey. For example, Shere Hite faced similar accusations (Stanley, 1995). Based on the Foucauldian notion of power and sexuality discourse, it can be predicted that such troubles will face any research that makes truth claims with regard to contentious aspects of social life. Kinsey and, to some extent, Hite made it imperative on later surveys that they achieve standards of science that would avoid undermining assertions about their findings.

Indeed, the legacy of Kinsey can be traced into sex surveys conducted in the later twentieth century in different parts of the world. Examples include the 1990/1991 UK Survey (Wellings et al., 1994)[1] and its 2000 iteration (Mercer et al., 2004), the 1992 *National Health and Social Life Survey* (Michael et al., 1994),[2] the most recent iteration

of the *National Survey of Family Growth* from 2002/2003(New-Strategist-Publications, 2006)[3] and *Sex in Australia* from 2000/2001(Richters and Rissel, 2005).[4] All these surveys asked questions concerning sexual debut, number of partners over the lifecourse, gender of partners, sexual identity, risk behaviours such as intercourse without condoms, attitudes and beliefs in relation to such practices as pre- and extra-marital sex and homosexuality and knowledge of sexual health risks. Because age of the respondent was known, the surveys permitted generational comparisons that were suggestive of social and cultural changes in society.

All these surveys profited from Kinsey in several ways. Implicitly or explicitly they strived to overcome the methodological shortcomings of Kinsey and also to deflect as much as possible the ways in which his work was taken up as a moral and political concern. They did so by adopting the method of random sampling and otherwise ensuring the representative of their samples. Further, these *fin de siecle* sex surveys did not have to break the ground that Kinsey did. Kinsey made these surveys somewhat easier to do in the sense that the more sensational aspects of sexuality had been digested and incorporated into popular understandings of sexuality, such as extra-marital sex and homosexuality. These surveys also justified themselves as necessary due to public health considerations, and in particular, the HIV epidemic. The prospect of a sexually transmissible virus made it seem imperative to understand how citizens are sexual and with whom and whether or not what they do might lead to the transmission of HIV and other diseases.

However, despite profiting and distancing themselves from Kinsey's troubles and the adoption of a public health rationale, the contestation of sexual citizenship has impacted on these surveys in terms of their methods, the interpretation of their findings and for some, whether or not they were permitted to happen. For example, the UK Survey was to be funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council but was stopped by the UK Government after a media outcry concerning the use of tax-payers money on a sex survey (Wellings et al., 1994). The Wellcome Trust ultimately funded the research. A similar problem happened with the 1992 sex survey from the US (Michael et al., 1994). Senator Jesse Helms moved against the research so federal money was withdrawn. The 1992 survey was ultimately privately funded, but was severely compromised because the available funds were not sufficient to achieve a large enough sample to be able to quantify minority practices, such as for homosexuality.

Another problem with these sex surveys is the emphasis on behavioural descriptors (Stanley, 1995). Contemporary surveys are very specific in

terms of the questions they pose regarding particular sexual behaviours, partly in an effort to produce valid data and also to address health concerns such as the transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. This approach translates into a focus on genital sexual inter-course, and consequently does not countenance the meanings of sexual practices, or, as argued by Stanley, other forms of erotic interaction such as caressing. In addition, Stanley notes how modern surveys and in particular those of the epidemiological kind such as the UK Survey conflate heterosex with penetration (1995). How sexuality is operation-alised in these surveys may well distort our understanding of sex, or in Foucauldian terms, produce it in a particular form. In addition, this nar-row perspective on sexuality means that, on occasion, survey findings cannot be easily interpreted. For example, Australian researchers have noted that men tend to overestimate the number of sexual partners they have had in a particular period of time in accord with prevailing notions of masculine sexual prowess (Richters and Rissel, 2005). The Australian Survey findings have also been taken to reveal homophobia (Smith et al., 2003). Few Australians reported that they regarded them-selves as gay or bisexual: 2.5% for men; 2.2% for women. These results are similar to findings in the US where between 1 and 2% of men and women reported that they were exclusively sexually active with the same gender (Michael et al., 1994; New-Strategist-Publications, 2006). In the Australian Survey, between 3 and 6 times as many people reported that they had had same sex attraction and sexual experience in their life-time: 8.6% of men; 15.1% of women. A similar pattern is found in the US, where about 6% of men report that they have had intercourse with someone of the same gender, approximately three times the number of men who report themselves as exclusively homosexual (New-Strategist-Publications, 2006). The authors of the Australian research speculate that homophobia and other expectations around the sexual practice of men constrain identity, behaviour and responses to survey questions, suggesting rather strongly how truth claims are influenced and perhaps compromised by the norms of sexual citizenship which prevail.

But it is also apparent that researchers themselves are not absolutely clear about what their findings say about sexuality. For example, the UK Survey showed that 1% of men and 0.3% of women reported that they are mostly or exclusively sexually active with people of the same gender (Wellings et al., 1994). Stanley argued that the UK Survey underestimated homosex. The UK Survey's own findings do support this notion. The refusal rate for the UK Survey was over 25% and the rate of self-disclosed homosexual experience for both men and women

was slightly greater in the self-completion section of the questionnaire compared with face-to-face sections (Wellings et al., 1994). In addition, disclosed homosexual experience was greater in London compared with regional areas of the UK. Stanley speculated that negative social attitudes towards homosexuality constrained responses both in terms of opting out of the survey and in terms of declining to report homosex (1995). When the UK Survey was repeated in 2000 however, 2.8% of men reported sex with another man in the previous five years, a change that the researchers referred to as 'evidence of increasing prevalence of homosexual intercourse among the British male population' (Mercer et al., 2004: 1453). The authors speculated that the changes may have been a result of an increased willingness among homosexually active men to report their practice in surveys, but they also, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, argued for a real increase in homosexual practice reflected in increased rates of sexually transmitted infections. In another paper reporting on the differences between the UK Survey and its year 2000 iteration, the researchers note a relaxation in general population attitudes to homosexual behaviour, which they suggest reflects social changes but also improvements in survey methodology (Copas et al., 2002). These multiple and not wholly coherent perspectives somewhat undercut the scientific claims made on the part of sex surveys. But they do reveal sex surveys to be embedded in culture and in particular a mixture of the provisionalities surrounding survey methods and questions of constraint and freedom to do with sexual citizenship. These surveys want to be objective science and are often justified in such terms, but their implied realism may necessarily evade them. As Stanley argues, some of the less scientifically 'rigorous' sex surveys such as 'Little Kinsey' and the *Hite Reports*, because of the ways they reflected on the cultural contexts of sexual practice, provided useful, if scientifically flawed, depictions of sexuality.

Importantly for the adulthood theme of this volume, these surveys suggest generational change in sexual debut among heterosexual people, at least in English-speaking countries. For example, the UK Survey showed a decline in the age of first vaginal intercourse across the generations (Wellings et al., 1994). For women born before 1935, median age of first vaginal intercourse was 21 years, whereas for those born between 1966 and 1975, median age was 17. A similar pattern was observed for men. Australian research also shows this decline (Rissel et al., 2003). For men, the median age of first vaginal intercourse was 18 for those born before 1950 and 16 for those born after 1980. For women in these generations, median age of first vaginal sex was 19 and 16, respectively.

The authors conclude: 'Sex education should be given so that all young people have information about contraception and disease prevention before they begin their sexual careers' (Rissel et al, 2003: 131), underlining the notion of sexual debut as a preparation for adult sexuality. In the US, the first sexual intercourse is said to be had at around the age of 17. (New-Strategist-Publications, 2006). Research from Sweden also reveals that the age of sexual debut has declined between 1970 and 2000 (Beckman et al., 2008), raising questions whether these historical changes in the sexual lifecourse are restricted to English-speaking countries. However, to complicate matters further, research examining the results of sex surveys from around the world has concluded that age of sexual debut is not decreasing everywhere (Wellings et al., 2006). These findings are significant to the extent that they establish how English-speaking cultures give emphasis to sexual debut as a mark of transition into adulthood. Sexual debut is also pivotal to the contestation of sexual citizenship in the sense that generational changes raise questions of the loosening of constraint, which feeds into the pessimism of some observers of sexual citizenship in contemporary society.

The example of sexual debut also underlines the mutual reinforcement of sexual citizenship and the sex survey. Age at first sexual intercourse is thought to be so important to respondents that it is accurately remembered (Wellings et al., 1994). Subsequent events of sexual intercourse do not have the same status in the survey or, as it is said, in the minds of respondents. Because age of sexual debut has this reliable status, the same question can be addressed to people from different generations and therefore used to suggest historical changes. However, sexual debut in part gains its stable ontological status because it is important to sexual citizenship and especially because it marks the threshold of adult sexuality. Thus the question of sexual debut reveals the interdetermination of culture and science.

The status of sexual debut as a reliable marker of status change for sexual citizens also has the effect of casting a shadow over the rest of the sexual lifecourse. In sex surveys, the practices of sexually active adults are summarised in terms of the number of sexual partners, gender of partners, risk behaviour and so on. Temporal shifts in the context of adulthood appear to not have the same status as sexual debut. This emphasis may be a reflection of the public health orientation of the late twentieth century sex surveys and their concerns over such matters as teenage pregnancy and HIV transmission. This pattern of regulatory attention to sexual debut and the relative freedom of adult sexuality also accords with how sexual citizenship is governed in contemporary societies, for example, in laws regarding the age of consent.

Given previous remarks concerning the interdetermining nature of sexual citizenship and the sex survey, we can also argue that the sex survey helps constitute sexual adulthood as a relatively free and private domain for sexual interaction. But this does not appear to have always been the case. As Stanley and Reumann have argued in connection with 'Little Kinsey' and Kinsey, respectively, those researches did examine adult sexual mores in detail. We can speculate that the eruption of moral outrage regarding Kinsey, for example, can be attributed to the ways in which he dared to bring the sexual practice of the sovereign adult into the harsh light of day.

Global surveys and post-ageing sex

The sex survey is therefore one form of the production of knowledge regarding sexual citizenship, but one that (perhaps mistakenly) sets itself above others in its claims to represent what is happening in populations of interest. Such use of the survey can also be compared with other examples that also address the sexual lifecourse, but with different implications for how we understand sexuality. Pfizer has recently sponsored the *Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours* (herein Global Survey) (Laumann et al., 2006). Confusingly, Durex, the condom manufacturer, also runs an annual survey they call the *Global Sex Survey*, which is conducted via their website and apparently collects data in 41 countries (durex.com). However, Pfizer's Global Survey represents a new turning in the exploitation of the sex survey method, one that gives emphasis to the subjective experience of sexual practice and that addresses a consuming subject interested in the positive cultivation of sexual pleasure. Happily for Pfizer, who own and produce Viagra (viagra.com), such consumption is figured around the use of biomedical products to address sexual ageing and in particular, erectile dysfunction.

The Global Survey sampled 27,500 men and women aged 40–80 in 29 countries. The method reflected the accumulated expertise of sex survey science. It was designed and conducted by a consortium of academic and other researchers from different parts of the world. It adapted its method to the in-country situation. For example, random telephone interviews were used in Europe, Israel, North America, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. In Mexico, a mix of telephone and face-to-face interviewing was used because telephone ownership there was very low among lower income groups. Face-to-face interviews only were conducted in the Middle East, South Africa and Asia. The survey was administered in the language of the participant.

The central approach of the study was to better understand sexual satisfaction and its relationship with sexual practice. The research was couched in terms of seeking to better understand 'subjective sexual well-being [*sic*]' (Laumann et al., 2006: 146). The questions used in the survey are themselves illuminating and help underline a central theme of this chapter regarding the discursive power of the questions of sexuality. Sexual satisfaction was operationalised in this way: 'During the past 12 months, how physically pleasurable did you find your relationship with your partner to be?' and 'During the past 12 months, how emotionally satisfying did you find your relationship with your partner to be?' Participants were asked to rate these questions according to a five-point scale from 'not at all' to 'extremely satisfying'. Participants were asked: 'If you were to spend the rest of your life with your sexual function/sexual health the way it is today, how would you feel about this, rated from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. In addition, they were asked: How important a part of your overall life would you say that sex is?, and rated from 'not important at all' to 'extremely important'. Respondents were also asked questions that measured their 'happiness' in general, physical and mental health, relationship status, frequency of sexual intercourse, attitudes to sexuality activity including later in life.

The Global Survey therefore provides knowledge of the subjective aspects of the ageing of the sexual body and works to define markets for pharmaceutical products that can reverse such effects. This approach is an innovation in sexuality discourse fitted to the governance of the autonomous consumer. It is also a use of social science to produce knowledge regarding sexuality that draws on but departs from the examples discussed above.

Funded by Pfizer, the Global Survey suggests itself as an example of the commercialisation of sexuality. But as I have noted, several of the late twentieth century surveys had to be supported by private trusts. Stanley has noted how 'Little Kinsey' was conducted by a private research company with funds from the UK government (1995). So it would be a mistake to assume that this most recent turning in the history of the sex survey is one of simple commercialisation. Private capital has made the sex survey possible for some time and this is no less the case for the Global Survey. However, the Global Survey is notable because unlike its predecessors, it has not been linked with noticeable public scandal. How is it that the sex survey can go global in an unproblematic way when it used to be so difficult to do and excite so much moral furore? It may be that moral debates regarding the sex survey have been exhausted. Or it may be that the Global Survey has

features that neutralise such debates. Pfizer's involvement suggests that private funding does make it easier to conduct research regarding sexual practice. At the very least, if we consider that the survey was conducted in 29 countries, we are led to the argument that private capital has an impressive capacity to do things for knowledge concerning sexuality that the state cannot or will not.

The Global Survey is consistent with other surveys already discussed in that it uses the scientific methods established by them such as random sampling methods and an emphasis on behavioural descriptors. However, as I have noted the Global Survey is distinctive in that it pursues subjective experience in the lived sexual experience of the older adult. Resonating with Stanley's contrasting of 'Little Kinsey' with the UK Survey, the Global Survey turns away from simply measuring penetrative acts to focus on sexual subjectivity, that is physical and emotional satisfaction. In so doing it brings into being an understanding of sexuality that is often said to be a necessary antidote for overly reductive and medicalising approaches to sex research. The researchers have concluded that, compared with men, women, regardless of where in the world they live, are less satisfied with their sexual experience (Laumann et al., 2006). Dissatisfaction among men and women in general was most pronounced in countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan and Indonesia. Perhaps unsurprisingly, happiness was positively related to sexual well-being. These findings seem to conform to a feminist argument regarding the position that women find themselves in when they get married. As Stanley has noted, one of the striking results from 'Little Kinsey' and the *Hite Reports* was the picture these provided of the unhappiness of women in their sexual lives (1995). The Global Survey also suggests national, gender-related variations in sexual well-being, in so far as these measures are valid. Very little contextual data is available to help interpret these findings, other than to reflect on how different nations compare. We can only speculate about what these gender- and nation-related findings mean. What is striking, however, is the way in which the Global Survey seeks to describe aspects of sexual experience that hitherto have not been addressed in large-scale surveys.

However, this apparently innovative address to satisfaction is used to define its reverse, sexual dissatisfaction. Given that Pfizer sells a treatment for erectile dysfunction, we can see that the Global Survey, like some of those that have come before it, relies on, and helps to further, an understanding of sexuality as penetration. In addition, gender is operationalised in the survey only as a cofactor in measures of sexual well-being. Therefore, relational aspects of gender can only be a matter of

speculation. In addition, the survey operationalises culture in terms of the nation state. The effect is to decontextualise sexual practice and therefore sexual well-being. But through this disembedded notional sexual well-being, the Global Survey helps re-embed penetrative sexual intercourse as central. In this sense the Global Survey is true to its name and does indeed globalise. The sex survey appears to have entered an era of the 'floating question of sexual subjectivity' that can be circulated across nations and harnessed to late modern capitalist interests in defining markets for consumer products.

The relationship between sexual well-being, the sex survey and the marketing of Viagra can be seen clearly in the more recent *Pfizer Global Better Sex Survey* (the results of which have been summarised online at cornerstone-msc.net/GBSS1/gbss_survey.htm). According to the website: 'The GBSS was commissioned to quantify levels of sexual satisfaction whilst gaining a unique insight into the unmet sexual needs and aspirations of couples throughout the world'. The GBSS appears to use the same methods as the Global Survey and samples in most of the same countries. This survey was apparently conducted by a research company indicating a break with the academy. It makes an explicit link with erectile dysfunction and its association with sexual well-being. According to the website, 75% of both men and women have been able to enjoy 'better sex' following treatment for erectile dysfunction. Another website for consumers in Malaysia presents data from the GBSS and includes information in a side bar regarding erectile dysfunction and its treatment (menshealth.com.my/ed_11.htm). Viagra.com, the official Pfizer website, encourages consumers to self-diagnose and access treatments in the same manner (viagra.com). Such uses of the sex survey work to position biomedical products as capable of delivering sexual well-being for the sexually 'aspirational couple'.

But most importantly for this chapter, the Global Survey and its corporate variant, the GBSS, address the older adult. Like previous surveys and their focus on sexual debut in the lifecourse, the Global Survey and the GBSS are preoccupied with the sexual lifecourse, but in a different way. The idea that sexual satisfaction has physical and emotional elements, as I have noted, to some extent (knowingly or not) addresses critiques that sex surveys do not typically deal with such aspects of subjectivity. But as we have seen this apparent innovation helps to reinstate sexual penetration as the central practice of sexual well-being once we recognise how such surveys are connected with the promotion of treatments for sexual dysfunction. While previous surveys have established the decline in age of sexual debut across the generations, the Global

Survey and the GBSS work to measure the extent of sexual satisfaction related to penetration across the later lifecourse of sexual citizens, or in time. Further, the Global Survey and the GBSS imply that sexual satisfaction is open to reflexive management and in some cases the data are used to literally encourage consumers to restore their sexual well-being by using treatments. These surveys, through their connection with Viagra, perform an important operation on the sexual life of the older adult. By addressing questions of emotional and physical satisfaction to such citizens, the surveys help to exercise the prospect of moderating or reversing the effects of time.

It has been argued that the manipulation of time is one of the general features of some biomedical technologies and associated practices. Katz and Marshall have shown that attempts in medicine to establish the notion of functional age as distinct from chronological age opened up a new relationship between culture and nature, or in other terms, new ways of thinking and acting on oneself and the body (2004). According to Katz and Marshall, such separations of notions of ageing exist in contexts where the body and biomedical technologies have become important, such as in the case of Viagra and related products. Katz and Marshall show how notions of functional age are the surface effects of the cultural (re)organisation of embodied capacities and effects via biomedical technologies. By implication and as an extension of the reflexivity implied in sexual well-being, the focus in the Global Survey and the GBSS is less on what happens to one's sexuality over the lifecourse and more on how one manages one's sexual practice, in and through the biomedical interventions available. We can argue then that the Global Survey and the GBSS are implicated in a mutually reinforcing circuit of sexual well-being, reflexive autonomy and biomedical intervention for older adults. We can also consider the idea that one of the key uses of sex surveys of any kind is the way in which they address a mode of sexual citizenship in time. As I have suggested, through emphases on sexual debut in some surveys and a notional sexual satisfaction for the ageing adult in others, a penetrative version of sexual adulthood is described in terms of when it should commence and how to ensure its resilience.

Conclusion

It is common to reflect on how sexual mores have changed over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Based on the foregoing it is equally easy to recognise transitions in the exercise of

the sex survey. We have come from the controversy surrounding the findings in the Kinsey Reports to commonplace and worldwide surveys of sexual well-being with the results published on the Internet. We have seen sex survey science transition from Kinseyesque, painstaking curiosity to the perfunctory cultivation of consumer markets. Sexuality and how we know it have both changed. They are also interdetermining in the sense that sexual citizenship sets the limits on how sexuality comes to be a question in the first place and because the sex survey informs sexual citizenship.

In terms of the conditions by which the questions of the sex survey are formed, we can trace a line from the problem that a libidinous citizenry poses to governance into a notional sexual autonomy for the adult demarcated by sexual debut and sexual satisfaction. This reflexive, autonomous sexual and temporal subjectivity underpins sex survey methodology. It is also a conception of adulthood that gives emphasis to its inception and the production of satisfaction against time. Neglected in this system of science and citizenship are the other possibilities for the sexual adult.

We can recognise therefore that the late modern adult is bracketed by two survey-based articulations of sexual ageing: debut and decline. These two problematics of time and the sexual body comprise: when should I become sexually active? and how can I avoid ever having to give it up? Notwithstanding the implications of these questions for gender relations, we can recognise in the sex survey a general preoccupation with penetrative acts, either in terms of the problem of sexual debut or in terms of sexual well-being understood in terms of being able to achieve penetrative intercourse. In this view the sex survey is in effect a time machine for the sexual body that can help regulate the temporal arrangement of sexual penetration across the lifecourse, populations and nations.

Troubles for the sex survey suggest that, like any research, it has limited claims to make on the 'truth' of sexuality. But unlike research that can take its own limitations as an object of inquiry, the sex survey is implicated in the production of knowledge regarding sexuality that hides as much as it reveals. If there is anything to be gained from the sex survey, it is to reveal in its own genealogy, the cultural contestation of sexual citizenship and, as I have suggested, sexual adulthood.

Notes

1. The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles was initiated by researchers in the UK in the late 1980s. Data was collected in 1990–1 from

18,876 men and women aged 16–59, randomly selected from a national database of addresses. The method for this research was face-to-face interviews. The UK survey was repeated in 2000.

2. National Health and Social Life Survey from 1992 sampled 3432 people (small by population survey standards) recruited from randomly selected households. The participants were aged 18–59 and were interviewed face-to-face.

3. National Survey of Family Growth is a cross-section survey which commenced in 1973 and has been repeated on six occasions, most recently in 2002/2003. Participants were selected to represent the US population and the survey was administered face-to-face and via laptop. For the most recent iteration, n=12,571 interviews were conducted with 15–44-year-olds.

4. Sex in Australia comprised a random household survey yielding n=19,307 interviews with 16–59-year-olds in Australia. The data was collected via the telephone.

8

Life Begins At …? Psychological Reflections on Mental Health and Adulthood

Joanne Brown

We should know better at our age

Last year a friend of mine turned 40. He had a pub party and in time-honoured fashion this was followed up with after party drinks and dancing. We all got home too late, missed our buses and taxis and woke up slightly worse for wear, with that vague notion that we really ought to know better at our age. As we briefly caught up on the details of our now geographically distant lives, he remarked that certain aspects of my life were sorted out and settled, with an ironic and self-deprecating 'but look at me' gesture. I was married with a child, in a stable job and with a nice home. He also had a stable job, a girlfriend and his own home, but, at that time, he wasn't married and did not have children. His social position was perhaps presented as one of failed adulthood, particularly around the social markers of marriage and parenthood. I, by contrast, had made it into the category of normal adulthood, without knowing beyond these social markers if I could claim to be a legitimate grown-up.

'Oh you know me', I protested, 'I'm too restless to be settled' and proceeded to undo some of these markers of respectability as the night wore on. How did I do that? Forgetting the importance of impression management? Acting out some old wounds? Being a youthful grown-up? Being pained and unanchored? By drinking, dancing and being exuberant? And if I did do any, all or some of those things and revealed my less than competent, measured, independent, autonomous self afterwards, how might I feel and what kind of social ostracism or judgement might I fear?

The authors in this collection expose, in different ways, the way in which adulthood functions as a silently powerful category. It is, as

demonstrated, under-researched sociologically, but it is a major category by which we might judge the failures and successes of our life. The authors in this collection are mostly writing from a sociological perspective, but this chapter will provide a psychological deconstruction of the category of adulthood. Psychoanalytic psychology will be used in order to scrutinise the way in which adulthood is aligned with mental health, and in order to expose some of the fantasies and fears that we might have about revealing our less-than-adult selves. It might seem counterproductive to use psychoanalysis in order to deconstruct the internal and external control that our notion of adulthood exerts, because psychoanalysis is a discourse of mental health and mental health problems that can be accused of terrorising us with its expertise (Phillips, 1995) about emotional, sexual and psychological maturity. However, it is a useful psychology in the context of this book and chapter, because it does not posit mental health or maturity as a state untouched by pain, instability, childlike feelings and insecurities. Nor does it provide a sanitised picture of adulthood in which emotional, bodily, sexual, environmental and occupational order predominates. Nor does it provide a linear view of our experience of time in which we see clearly delineated phases of life, since the past inflects the present. As Eliot (1944) writes:

> Time present and time past,
> Are both perhaps present in future time
> And time future contained in time past.

Hence psychoanalysis can be used to critically deconstruct a rather static and one dimensional view of adulthood as something that one achieves, in linear fashion, by moving through discrete life stages and corresponding lifestyle choices. It can show that concepts of untroubled adulthood and its social markers are in need of critical questioning.

In this chapter I turn to psychoanalysis in order to ask four, interlinked, questions:

1. In psychoanalytic terms, what does psychic and emotional maturity look like?
2. Is there any simple correspondence between external markers of adulthood and internal, psychic and emotional states of maturity/immaturity or completion?
3. Do we achieve stable adulthood in linear fashion by moving from childhood to youth to our 'middle years' and on to old age?

4. Does the concept of adulthood contain fantasies of invulnerability, independence and rationality and accordingly exclude, marginalise and denigrate need, dependency and frailty – our more childlike selves?

In the context of mental health, it is crucially important to ask what it means to be an adult, because people suffering with mental health problems are at risk of being excluded from it if it implies the absence of psychic suffering. The second question above points to the fact that the social markers of adulthood might not say anything about our internal worlds of excitement, fantasy, tragedy and hope. While for some people certain social markers (jobs, marriage, parenting, etc.) may be real measures of achievement and contentment, for others they might be forms of mimicry, conformity, claustrophobia and defence. Consider, for example, the woman in her thirties who has two children, but feels that she has not achieved anything at all and cannot approach any social gathering with self-confidence or ease. Outwardly she is amiable, fun-loving and popular, but inwardly she is desperately self-conscious about what she perceives as her failings. Popular culture abounds with narratives about the disparity between our social masks or personae and our internal realities. The film 'Revolutionary Road', for example, dramatises the outward appearance of 'having made it' (marriage, two children, a comfortable suburban home) and the internal discomfort of settling down to somebody else's idea of what the lifecourse should look like. This is particularly acute for the female protagonist (played by Kate Winslet) who wants to leave her American suburban life and work in Paris, but finds herself pregnant for the third time and unable to convince her husband, who has just been promoted, to try out another life script.

The third question introduced above points to the fact that the model of the psyche posited by depth psychology is one in which we move between different states of mind throughout life (some more adult than others) which do not easily or necessarily map on to sociological notions of a lifecourse in which there are clearly delineated stages (young, middle, old, etc.) with corresponding sociocultural practices. Consider, for example, a fiftysomething professional woman (with a responsible job, marriage and children) who has been feeling relatively stable in the week, but has a deterioration of mood over the weekend, leaving her feeling diminished and alone. As the weekend passes, so too does her almost paralysing sense of being consumed by a hopelessness that she was not prepared for. By the middle of the next week, she is in a more hopeful, steady frame of mind, but would be wary of divulging

her periodic fears to her colleagues for fear that she would be pitied, kept at arm's length and diminished in their eyes. As Daphne Merkin (2009: 34) comments:

> It was one thing to be depressed in your 20s or 30s, when youth gave it a poignancy, a certain tattered charm; it was another thing entirely to be depressed in middle age, when you were supposed to have come to terms with life's failings, as well as your own.

Merkin is writing about her experience of clinical depression, which is of course, different from fluctuating mood states in a, more or less, emotionally stable context. But nevertheless her point and the point of the fictionalised anecdote above is that we might all, in different ways, be trying to pass for 'normal'. Freud wrote that he had 'disturbed the world's sleep' by deconstructing any fixed and impermeable division between sanity and insanity; this is why it is democratising and 'normalising' to read accounts from 'wounded healers' (Rippere and Williams, 1985) about their experience of mental suffering. In the above edited collection, for example, one consultant psychiatrist writes of his experience of depression and of being 'bitterly ashamed at not being a tower of strength and I feared detection more than anything. … The psychiatric hospital is intolerant of weakness in its staff. Compassion is for patients; for "them" not "us"' (ibid.: 15).

Hence the fourth question asks why childhood, adolescence and old age are seen as the poor and embarrassing relations of adulthood. Psychoanalysis, for example, would question a notion of stable adulthood untouched by doubt, contradiction, confusion, frailty, etc., thus suggesting that this is a fantasy, a misleading and possibly undermining category by which to judge one's unfolding lifecourse and character. That is, we can fear revealing a part of ourselves that might be childlike (unrestrained, dependent, emotional, confused, impulsive, spontaneous, imperious, etc.) and proceed as though this underworld of feeling and perception has to be concealed and left behind at the school gates. Thus our thirtysomething mother and fiftysomething professional, as well as the consultant psychiatrist, may feel compelled to keep their less than competent selves in the closet. As adults, we may feel as though we must not be seen to be infantilised by young or old age, but instead appear to be balanced and poised between these states of relative dependency and shame. It is no wonder then that any deferral of adulthood by twenty or thirtysomething generational cohorts will attract the pejorative reporting in the press that Blatterer (2007a) cites.

The transformation of intimacy and therapeutic culture

But let's start with the first and perhaps most troublesome question. What does a mature state of mind look like in depth psychology? And why turn to a therapeutic discourse in a largely sociological text?

The answer to the latter question is that contemporary, seminal sociological texts (see Giddens, 1992 – regularly cited in this collection) borrow some ideas from psychoanalysis in order to describe contemporary social and intimate formations (see Brown, 2006a, for a full discussion of this). For example, Giddens' account of the 'pure relationship', which is an ideal type of relationship to which we aspire (so he argues), is based on one's capacities for emotional labour and emotional intelligence (see respectively Hochschild, 1983; Goleman, 1996). Aligned with this, psychoanalysis is an insight therapy whose aim is to enlarge our capacity for self-knowledge and our ability to contain and think through what we feel, in the hope that this will facilitate less destructive, claustrophobic and habitual life patterns and choices.

Giddens' arguments about the reconfiguration of new social formations rest on the idea that processes of de-traditionalisation (which psychoanalysis both fuels and departs from in certain respects) expose people to the existential parameters of life and to the responsibility of choice, rather than habit, addiction and custom. This process does not mean we are structurally, economically or politically free, but that we are, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue, being given an oversupply of options (p. 7).

Moreover, de-traditionalisation processes are said to expose us to the 'full horror of contingency' (De Botton, 1993) and while some might look for different ways to stabilise their sense of identity and place, for others this 'glimpse of life's social manufacture and relativity' (Berger and Kellner, 1964: 3) brings a sense of freedom. Indeed existentialism (with which psychoanalysis and contemporary sociology share important thematic similarities) would argue that our choices should be made in the full glare of our mortal, contingent lives and not with our gaze averted from this 'ontological insecurity' (Fromm, 1942).

Indeed, in so-called postmodern (Lyotard, 1984) and poststructuralist (Derrida, 1967–72) times, all of our categories are potentially held up to ideological critique and scrutiny. Psychoanalysis has influenced this de-traditionalisation process by encouraging people to base their life choices on their emotional, psychic needs, as well as the dictates of social mores.

Indeed, in contemporary intimate relations there is, according to Giddens, a turn towards feeling/narrative and Richards (2007) has

also argued, from a psychosocial perspective, that there is a process of emotionalisation in public life occurring that has a specific therapeutic quality to it. In 2002, Richards and Brown characterised a therapeutic culture or sensibility as one in which we see emotional expressivity, thoughtful contemplation and compassion. There are debates as to whether a therapeutically inflected culture (in education, politics, popular culture or elsewhere) should be welcomed (see Lasch's, 1984, seminal 'culture of narcissism' thesis), but there is general agreement about the 'triumph of the therapeutic' (Rieff, 1967) in contemporary culture. Sociological and psychosocial theorists are also agreed that we are witnessing 'identity crises' (Frosh, 1991), thus substantiating Berman's (1983) rich description of modernity as one in which the modern voice 'resonates with self-discovery, self-mockery, with self-delusion and self-doubt' (p. 23). It is interesting to note that as Phillips (1995) says 'the student of psychoanalysis must be a friend of ambiguity', thus pointing to the unlikelihood that psychoanalysis will posit adulthood as a state beyond discovery, self-mockery, self-delusion and self-doubt.

I have argued elsewhere (Brown, 2006a) about how de-traditionalisation processes affect contemporary love relations. But what is relevant to this discussion is that psychoanalysis has contributed to the deconstruction of what it means to achieve settled adulthood. Thus in the context of mental health it can be used to normalise emotional suffering, vulnerability and madness since its central premise is that we are all capable of moving between very different states of mind.

Moreover, unlike sociology, psychoanalysis does offer an account of what some of the internal markers of responsible adulthood are. It is not the aim here to discuss the essentialism in certain schools of psychoanalysis versus a social constructionist sociology (see Brown, 2005). Clearly there are fundamental differences between an infinitely deconstructionist paradigm and a discourse of development that assumes that there are some developmental 'facts' of life that are absolute, whatever form their social manifestation might take (for example, attachment needs in infancy and throughout life).

Indeed, psychoanalysis constructs a notion of psychic maturity or mental health that can be deconstructed to reveal its own historical specificity and prejudice, but as already stated, the aim here is to look at how it can be used to expose some of the illusions that we might have about adulthood and emotional and psychic maturity.

In psychoanalysis, emotional maturity refers to internal states of, more or less, psychic 'truth' which means that the different parts of who we are, what we've done and experienced are held within us with

as much honesty about them as we can manage to bear. The notions of truth and honesty are captured by visual images in psychoanalysis (Oedipus and King Lear are both blinded when they can no longer bear what they feel) and thus responsible adulthood is one in which we are committed to enlarging our field of vision, starting with an increased knowledge of how we are living our own lives. One might replace the notion of adulthood with the idea of integration, that is, the disparate parts of us – of the facts of our lives, of our loves, losses, pain – are brought together for our scrutiny, enjoyment and discomfort. Thus we get to look at something of the whole picture of our psychological lives, while always acknowledging that old wounds, feelings, passions, hopes and desires are multiplying and moving within us and can disrupt this attempt at psychic ordering.

It is, of course, fraught with difficulties to construct ideas of responsible adulthood that will not constrain, limit and marginalise the many different ways in which we might choose to live our lives. Psychoanalytic ideas of responsible adulthood or, as explained, integration, will inevitably be constraining, as well as liberating for some, but the reason why they are introduced here is because they can help to undo some of the more illusory and damning ideas of an untroubled adulthood that we might have internalised.

The markers of internal integration coalesce around an acceptance of 'reality', herein defined as an understanding of how the past affects the present, an understanding of one's own anxieties, hidden feelings and defences and how one's ways of perceiving, experiencing, feeling and defending, are affecting one's view of the world and relations with others. The concomitant aim is one of developing more concern for the state of one's internal world (of dreams, fantasies, daydreams) and external relationships (where possible). But one cannot read off from this an external consequence. Couples who go for psychotherapy, for example, may be advised that what they are going to be helped to do is separate, not patch up a marriage in the name of socio-legal mores (Colman, 1993).

Psychological maturity: The reality ego

This does not mean that psychoanalysis is a relativist, constructionist enterprise that eschews all attempts at describing more or less psychically robust, altruistic and clear states of mind or ways of seeing. It is not possible to provide a detailed account of a psychoanalytic view of psychic development or psychic conflict, but it is possible to point to the dynamic nature of the psyche posited by Freud and to consider

how this might help us think about adulthood as a fantasised state of psychic mastery.

Bergmann (1987) highlights Freud's indebtedness to Plato's idea that the soul is divided into three parts, the temperate horse, the insolent horse and the charioteer. He argues that Freud was influenced by the idea that we are torn between different forces or states of mind (for example, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the rational and appetitive) and that his aim was to enlarge our capacities for rational contemplation and insight.

This is crucially important because 'man is wolf to man' in the psychoanalytic story of human history and, it is argued, we need to curb our capacities for destructiveness, impulsivity and disorder. Bettelheim (1983) similarly adds that Freud was influenced by Goethe, particularly the story of Faust, in which a 'battle for his soul between forces of light and the forces of darkness' (p. 64) takes place. These forces of darkness or appetite are seen to be sexually anarchic (Freud, 1905) and aggressive (Freud, 1920) and thus one of the aims of civilisation is to institutionalise limits to our desires and freedoms and bind members of a community together, thus attenuating hostility and lawlessness. There are, of course, many social practices that exist to do this (primarily family, education, work, law) and the category of responsible adulthood is one.

In psychoanalysis, responsible adulthood is secured by the development of a so-called reality ego or self (Freud, 1911). The reality ego/principle is seen as developmentally progressive because it represents a state of mind in which we can internalise, contain and process the reality of others, of our own nature and of life's suffering (caused by our relations with others, illness, ageing, natural disasters: Freud, 1930). The pleasure ego, on the other hand, represents a state of mind in which we live in order to avoid tension (brought on by the needs of others, the confrontation with mortality or with our own limitations). A move from the pleasure principle to the reality principle is one of the major milestones of childhood, when self-centredness and narcissism give way to a capacity for concern, selflessness and an acknowledgement of the needs of others. Hence, it can be bitingly reproachful when we berate an adult partner or friend for being immature, childish, needy and implore them to 'grow up'. And often when people go for psychotherapy or counselling, they are revealing their childlike selves and are being encouraged to grow and change, and this is not necessarily pleasurable.

However, many people (for quite understandable reasons) may map out their lives according to the pleasure principle (within the limits of their objective life choices) and live in order to avoid tension and maximise pleasure or comfort either in a rather quiet and sober

manner (avoiding change and new people and places) or in a more assertive manner in which one's needs dominate the boardroom, the lecture theatre, the reality TV show or indeed any other social setting.

According to psychoanalysis, a limit to narcissism and pleasure is a lifelong learning process that begins in childhood and is crucially important, because our relations with others, indeed our whole experience, are severely curtailed if one cannot tolerate the reality of oneself, of others and of our human condition. However, the pleasure ego is centred on the survival of the self, rather than with concern for others (see Klein's, 1940, major therapeutic concern) or self-insight and psychic truth (see Bion's, 1970, therapeutic aims).

The child is father to the man

It is important to bear in mind that although psychoanalysis is an insight therapy (hence its popularisation as a confessional form e.g., television, drama), psychoanalytic thinkers are critical of any exclusive rationalist conception of adulthood, in which we claim to have arrived at a point of self-knowledge, mastery and security, because of their attention to the irrational, to the past in the present and to anxiety and defences against it. Thus while we find normative notions of emotional maturity in psychotherapeutic discourses, the theory of mind they adopt simultaneously satirises any notion of adulthood untouched by childlike feelings, doubt and deviancy. Hence Phillips (1995) argues that we can distinguish between two kinds of Freud. These are an Enlightenment Freud and a post Freudian Freud – the former creating a clear mental map of the lifecourse and the latter aware that 'maps are always smaller then the ground beneath our feet'. That is, the psychoanalytic model of the mind is a calendar, cartography and construction exercising its own normative control, while also casting suspicion on this neat picture of time, place and identity.

It is for this reason that Phillips argues that we have to be careful of the terrors that expertise of any kind can exercise upon us, but in particular psychoanalysis with its notion of how we ought to love, play, think, relate and so on. Nevertheless the terms of psychoanalysis can contribute to our understanding of how to critically question any constraining notion of adulthood, and increase our tolerance of childlike feelings throughout the lifecourse. Indeed, one major aim of psychoanalysis is to look at how our first and major experience of being in a relationship (with our carers/parents) affects how we feel about ourselves now. Did we feel controlled and full of anger and how is that driving our life

choices now? Were we made to feel like a royal princess and how would that affect our life choices and ways of being now? Did we feel hated and repellent and, if so, how is that affecting our relationships now? Or did we feel secure in our lovability and safety, without having our every whim indulged and how would this affect our sense of who we are and what we have to offer to others now? We are asked to look at that which we might rather turn away from (the tragedy and/or beauty in our lives and the feelings that come to dominate us as a result – arrogance, competitiveness, pettiness, destructiveness, loneliness, creativity, etc.). We are asked to look into our blind spots, hidden areas and past relationships in order to increase our capacities to make life choices in the knowledge of what might have made us who we are, or feel what we feel, what our lives have been and what we want them to be.

Adulthood as psychological defence

It is not the aim of this chapter to provide a generic account of mature states of mind, but to use the terms of psychoanalysis in order to critically question the pejorative reporting of delayed adulthood, while also highlighting that psychoanalysis does have its own map to psychic maturity. The turn to psychoanalysis can also help us speculate about why the category of adulthood is a club to which many of us might prefer to belong, while fearing our less-than-adult selves will unwittingly be revealed.

   Some of the most terrifying mental states, it is argued in psychoanalysis, are those first encountered in childhood (dependency, deep love, the fear of losing love and approval and abandonment, humiliation, shame, not knowing, not understanding, etc.) and it is for this reason that the young mind is dominated by avoiding unbearable tension and focuses on the survival of its, as yet, own undeveloped self. However, we are all prone to re-experiencing states of disintegration or incompleteness and we are accordingly apprehensive about entering situations or relationships that might re-catalyse these vulnerable, isolating and exposing psychic states. To be included in the category of adulthood is perhaps to be given the seal of approval as someone who has mastered these more vulnerable emotional states (the person who appears to be 'together', 'sorted', etc.) and is therefore able to distance him/herself from the disturbing feelings that accompany states of not knowing or not feeling accomplished.

   Moreover feminist theorists argue that these states of not knowing, of subjugation and of neediness are cast as feminised states. It is the child's

task, in developmental terms, to leave these fused, over-emotional, dyadic relations with their mother/carers and join the public world of reason and science. Indeed according to Benjamin (1988), the principles of western rationality are based on masculine traits which represent a psychic repudiation of femininity. Anything which steps outside of fantasies of control, order, independence, sanity and mastery is seen as excessive 'feminine sentiment' and cast as outside of the terms of science and realism (see Elam, 1992 and Mitchell, 2003, on the denigration of romance). Thus the category of adulthood might also function as a term that repudiates and/or marginalises frailty, need and dependence. Our faulty selves become signs that we are not masters in our own houses and in our public personae, a fact which must (if at all possible) be hidden from view.

Conclusion: The past in the present, the beginning in the end, the never-ending search for completion

The authors in this collection (Blatterer, for example) ask whether new social formations offer a counter-discourse on history. I would argue that our 'rules of theorising' (Brown, 2006b) in academia also need to offer a counter-discourse on what constitutes knowing and being grown-up in academia. To be a grown-up academic, can I or dare I write self-reflexively about what it feels like to aspire to being a grown-up counsellor, or academic, or mother and wife? Can I do this in the service of insight and understanding, rather than in the service of a more banal self-indulgence? Although this chapter began with (the private, personal, feminised?) narrative, it is very difficult to step outside of the category of grown-up (masculinist?) theorising and conjoin poetry and science or art and reason in academia. In order to really deconstruct or challenge the category of adulthood in academia (and self-reflexively turn the spotlight on what, as academics, we conform to, mimic, reproduce, feel constrained and enabled by), we need to 'perform' or 'do' our theorising differently. That is, we should try to 'do' sociology or psychosocial studies with expressivity *and* analysis and engage much wider audiences than we currently do. Unlike the texts of popular culture, we are far more reticent about revealing ourselves and thus the 'signature dilemma' (Geertz, 1988: 154) – who is the person behind the writing – continues to pervade academic theorising.

9
Growing Up Through Activism: Adult Identities and the Maturing of Standpoints

Rosemary McKechnie and Barbara Körner

Introduction

This chapter explores the biographical significance of periods of activism in the lives of adults who have been involved in a variety of forms of political engagement across their lifetime. We will examine the complex and contradictory ways in which activism in the life of our participants relates to key aspects of adulthood. The narratives we report on complicate any straightforward notions of both adulthood and social action. Active involvement in social movements or community campaigns, it seems, is deeply enmeshed with questions about how to be a conscientious citizen and lead a worthwhile life, yet this can lead to choices that sit uneasily with conventional views of responsible adulthood. The experiences of adulthood described in these narratives are characterised by complex reflection and review of some key tensions between activist involvement and accepted aspects of adulthood such as work and parenthood.

The research we are reporting on here is based on 19 recent in-depth interviews. The interview questions focused on activism as a way of relating to the world, and invited personal reflection on experiences of being politically active. We came to the research as a sociologist with a Women's Studies background, and an anthropologist, both with personal backgrounds in activism. We were interested to explore activism not as an isolated phenomenon, but within the context of people's lives, and the lifecourse. Part of the interview process was the use of a time line where participants placed their recollection of external events on one side and personal life experiences on the other, superimposed by moments of activism. Activism hence is defined broadly here, and not limited to any particular campaigning issues, or type and degree of

activism. We have aimed to capture the changing meanings of activism within participants' lives. We were interested not only in how values, emotions and personal experiences shape political engagement but how life experience matures and tempers standpoints and gives rise to nuanced reflection on past action.

Participants came from a range of backgrounds within the UK. There were 11 women and eight men. The majority were in their forties or fifties at the time of interview, although other age groups from 18 to 78 are also represented. There is predominance of a 'classic' activist trajectory, with heightened political activity in people's twenties and thirties (which coincided with participation in alternative and protest movements of 1970s and 1980s). However, some of our interviewees are younger and have only begun to see themselves as actively involved recently, while others are older, and have begun their activism later in life, or maintained a strong activist commitment and practice through-out their entire life. The opportunity to reflect on life experience was valued by participants. The participants' own theories about their actions, their private narratives, show intense engagement and depth of critical thinking.

Biographical research produces narratives from memory that depict both external events and also develop a picture of the individual over time. As Harding (2006) points out, the biographical turn in social science has given rise to reflexive questioning and debate about the status of interview material because 'interviews are occasions for producing subjectivity through personal narratives in the present that work on and interpret the past with an eye on the future' (2006 8.2). She argues that researchers must remain sensitive to the ways that research aims, language and power relations direct the narratives of self that emerge from the interview collaboration. Certainly the account of subjectivity which emerges from such an interview is in some ways fragile, temporary and unique. Narrative conventions are not universal, and what constitutes a story or a history varies from context to context. Sermijn et al. (2008 636) argue that the stories that emerge from interviews can be concep-tualised in line with a postmodern idea of the self, multivoiced, discon-tinuous, fragmented, neither fixed or having one core, but a 'buzzing beehive' of variable, temporary, interacting components. Those we interviewed worked hard to articulate memories and find words to com-municate personal experiences. However untidy or contradictory, their accounts were often brilliantly successful in conveying the complexity of selves that have changed over time and yet also remained recognis-ably the same. It is this complexity of continuity through change that is

so hard for sociological conceptualisations of adulthood to encompass. We are interested in exploring a concept of adulthood that incorporates such simultaneous notions of continuity and change, and hence is strong and dynamic enough for illuminating the reflections on adult activist experiences we report on here.

Theorising reflexive, active adulthood

Sociological and anthropological theories of the lifecourse have countered biological concepts of the life cycle by showing that the symbolic meaning of the changes human beings go through between birth and death vary enormously over time and in different sociocultural contexts. As La Fontaine (1978) points out, age differentiation is as much a cultural transformation of a process of human physiology as sex differences are a transformation of the physiological processes of reproduction; both social principles are tied to perceptions of 'natural differences' that make them difficult to challenge. Most sociocultural concepts of age break the lifecourse into age stages, though some are more sensitive to the gradual physical changes that accompany aging (Bloch 1992). Early social models of aging in Western society tended to emphasise the complementarity of age stages and their basis in human nature (Cummings and Henry 1961). The apparently 'natural' differences between age stages have meant that age differences have been a relatively neglected area of sociological research (Bradley 1996). However, more recent research has struggled to make visible the way that social categories of the lifecourse constrain behaviour and allocate roles, highlighting the intrinsic hierarchy of age stage organisation.

The bulk of social research has tended to be by default about adults as the standard social actor, with the experience of other age groups either ignored or marginalised. The growing body of lifecourse research has tried to redress this deficit by exploring the diverse experiences of young and old, and has yielded important insights into childhood, adolescence, transitions into adulthood and the difficulties associated with aging. This has made visible the inequalities that are associated with ageism, and mapped how these interact with other forms of stratification in society.[1] However, the focus on periods of the lifecourse which have fallen outside 'normal' sociological research and the exploration of the meaning of lifecourse stages symbolically cast in opposition to adulthood (Hockey and James 1993) has meant that, paradoxically, while sociology is mainly concerned with adults, the meanings and experiences of adulthood have remained relatively under-theorised

(Pilcher et al. 2003). As Hopkins and Pain (2007) suggest for geography, social research tends to be 'adultist' or adult-centric in that it focuses on and fetishises the 'social-chronological margins' of childhood, youth and old age, while leaving adultness under-examined.

Contemporary sociological concerns with social change have led to a new focus on the transformation of normative expectations of adult roles: 'The lifecourse is said to be going through a period of destandardisation, both in terms of the prescribed order of its phases but also in terms of the linearity of its progress' (Brannen and Nilsen 2002 514). This approach has been stimulated by the theoretical work of Giddens (1991, 1992) which depicts a range of related changes – the disembedding of individuals from local and familial influence, the fragmentation of state institutions, the increasingly flexible organisation of workplace – combining to open up the lifecourse to individual choice and reflexive use of mediated and expert systems, or 'internally referential life-planning'. Giddens argues that the lifecourse is no longer rigidly defined by social structure or traditional expectations. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002 88) argue, 'more people than ever before are being forced to piece together their own biographies and fit in the components they need as best they can'. Blatterer (2007) makes explicit how this impacts on Western concepts of adulthood. As globalising processes change work, as gender roles are destabilised, as periods of education extend and become part of working life, as households diversify, as relationships and parenting become more flexibly organised, the social expectations that adulthood is synonymous with 'settling down' (Blatterer 2007) can no longer be taken for granted. The expectations of adulthood marked by work, marriage and parenthood, as an independent and responsible citizen, are no longer cast in stone. As Lee (2001 7) points out: 'A few decades ago there were very good reasons for thinking of adulthood as a state of personal stability and completion. … Childhood could be viewed as a journey to a clear and knowable destination'.

If adulthood is no longer a clear and knowable destination, it is still a destination in which most humans spend the greater part of their lives. Yet as Hockey and James point out, the nominal collective categories of age do not map easily onto individual experience: 'simply to work at the level of categorical identities is to fail to get to grips with the process of identification itself – that is the way that social and individual identities are inhabited and come into being' (2003 200–1). Arguments about the opening up of lifecourse stages to individual choice and reflexivity are tempered by emphasising the body's inevitable movement through

time. This means that growing older is not simply a 'pick and mix process' and that despite the destabilising aspects of contemporary society, self-understanding emerges from shared meaning, from the interplay between individual *embodied* agency and how the individual is positioned and viewed by others (Hockey and James 2003 202). Exploring the social contexts and constraints within which individuals make the choices that shape life trajectories and looking at how experience changes the quality of reflexivity is important. The reflecting self learns from experience.[2]

In a social context that lauds the bodily appearance of young adulthood (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991) it is easy to lose sight of the qualities of maturity that develop during adulthood. Conceptualisations of the reflexive self as not only unconstrained by social convention but by time, serve to 'flatten out' the forward trajectory of aging. While we accept there are increasingly diverse ways of *being* adult, important aspects of adulthood are nevertheless experienced in a linear way. While visible changes leave traces that mark that trajectory, the inner experience of growing older, is *cumulative*. As Melucci (1996 12) writes, whatever choices we may make, past experience informs our present and shapes our future, and it is impossible to separate individual aspects of identity and relational social aspects. In a person's life history, identity is a learning process which is consummated in the emergence of the autonomous subject:

> [A]dult identity can be described as the ability to produce new identities by integrating the past and the choices available in the present into the unity and the continuity of the individual life-history. Learning does not end with adolescence: as we pass through the various stages of life that follow it, we continue to question and reformulate our identities.
>
> (1996 30)

The tension between the social category of adulthood and the experience of being an adult is, we would argue, an important area on which to shine a light. The biographical research method used here allows access to personal reflection on individual experience, and this suggests that while the destabilisation of the lifecourse is a useful theoretical concept, people still experience their lifetime in terms of some kind of progression. Adulthood is dynamic, but not entirely 'cut loose' from fundamental anchorage in transformative moments of maturation. Nor can it be seen as simply individual, as both Blatterer (2007) and Hockey

and James (2003) emphasise, it is the continued interplay between individuals' efforts to make their own way, working, parenting and learning, within the social context they are part of that constrains, confers and identifies: life histories are both personal and social.

Activist involvement and questioning adulthood

The activist narratives we have collected are interesting in that activism results from and creates critical thinking about the social world. As such, the reflections of research participants on activist involvement over their lifecourse offers a particularly interesting lens through which to view the dynamics of maturing adulthood, including 'non-standard' ways of doing adulthood. Pilcher et al. (2003) point out that much recent research has focused on more malleable aspects of the lifecourse such as lifestyle and consumption while political aspects of adulthood such as citizenship and civic participation have been neglected (Savage et al. 2003). This is despite the role that 'life politics' and feminism in particular have played in challenging traditional adult roles (Giddens 2001).

Research on political activism in relation to social movements has tended to fall into two camps (Lentin 1999). The first of these focuses on quantitative models of action and evaluation of the effectiveness of particular campaigns (McCarthy and Zald 1977), the latter on the cultural challenge posed by movements, though much of this does still focus on movements, networks and moments of activism (Scott 1990; McKay 1990). Some theoretical work focusing on the cultural processes involved in the creation and maintenance of activist identities and relations over time, notably Touraine (1995) and Melucci (1989, 1995, 1996a, 1996b) is interesting here. Melucci sees a critical viewpoint developing from ways of engaging with the world at a personal level and also as part of networks which develop cultural challenges which 'break the limits of the system'. For Touraine, rather than reflexivity being a widely available resource, becoming an active subject capable of creatively acting to challenge the authority inscribed on structures and institutions (1995 243) and to protect one's own autonomy is a difficult continuous process. In order to become a 'subject' and sustain a 'will to act and to be recognized as an actor' (1995 207), what he calls 'deintegration', is a necessary reflexive analysis of the social world that distances individuals from the taken-for-granted roles that otherwise dominate modern lives. For both Touraine and Melucci the significance of social movements cannot be contained in any individual campaign or movement.

The social relations and the reservoir of critical thinking created are much more influential in both personal and wider sociocultural terms. Melucci emphasises the importance of the 'latency' of movements. This means that active subjects' lives are where critical engagement is negotiated in all social relations, and this very personal commitment creates the passion to change the world. As Touraine (1995 226f) notes, 'the emergence of the subject is closely bound up with relations with the other', far from being a narcissistic pursuit of self-knowledge 'the love relationship does away with social determinisms and gives the individual a desire to be an actor … it results in commitment too absolute to be merely social. … A militant commitment is of the same nature as a loving commitment'. More recent work which starts to develop discussion of political actors as emotional (Jasper 1998) and reflective beings (King 2006) necessarily emphasises the way politics is anchored in material, emotional and intimate aspects of life.

This conceptualisation of the reflexive actor has links with ideas which have developed from feminist movements and as part of feminist theorising on collective action,[3] consciousness raising, identity and the politics of knowledge production. Feminist and other 'liberation' movements since the 1970s have been singled out for their particularly radical contribution to cultural and identity politics or the potential to present a real challenge to established social arrangements (Habermas 1981). The self that emerges from feminist theorising on the connection between the 'personal' and the 'political' is one that is deeply relational and dialogic, as it is based on achieving collective understanding of systemic inequalities through talking and exchanging personal experiences on an equal level, modelled by the women's liberation movements' 'consciousness-raising groups' (Barrett 1987). Such personal exchanges are political and challenging, as they involve the potential for a changed perspective on self, life and society (Bartky 1990). This is particularly clear when social actors from different backgrounds and degrees of privilege come to meet and acknowledge their 'difference', for example with regard to class, age, 'race' and ethnicity (Lorde 1984). Griffiths (1995) emphasises the need for careful listening in the process of developing a critical sense of self and identity in respectful relation to others. This kind of activist reflexivity then involves careful attention to power relations and an awareness of how the social locations from which we speak impact on the interpretation of experience and the production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' (Körner 2002 130). This is also of course part of our epistemology here – both in the sense that we acknowledge our own location and the critical value-base which

informs our scholarship, and in terms of seeing the 'findings' we present as a social construct, woven out of multiple layers of subjective selection and interpretation by selves as participants, interviewers, narrators, listeners, researchers and academics 'writing it up'.

There is a case then for drawing more laterally on a range of sources. Examining longer-term developments of activism among American anti-Vietnam war campaigners in Canada, Hagan and Hansford-Bowles (2005) for example, suggest that the study of social movements and of the lifecourse have much to contribute to each other. Finding that persistence of activism was connected to experiences of helping others, and – for women specifically – continuity of movement contacts, they argue that it is useful to distinguish between 'life stage specific' processes that lead people to take action typically in early adulthood, and 'life course persistent' processes that are perhaps more complex and unpredictable in the way that they shape activist involvement. We are interested here to look a bit more closely at such persistent processes across the lifecourse and see what they can tell us about the ways in which activist commitment and maturing adulthood are linked.

Lifecourse themes in activist reflections

In the accounts about activist involvement that we have collected, adult narrators reflect back on younger and maturing selves in passionate engagement with the world. The narratives are rich with critical reflection on aspects of developing adulthood across the lifecourse – as for example in the voice of this participant:

> What I was aware of when I was attempting this timeline was actually what led up to the activism. I mean nothing happened up to the age of 34, and I now/ I'm 65 next week. So, you know half of my life you could say was [as] a complete non-activist, not even voting, so that was quite disturbing, shocking really. But it seemed as though things happened once within marriage and having children, I became aware of sort of political issues … there was the miner's strike … children from Northern Ireland coming to G for holidays, a mix of Catholic and Protestant children. … Somehow then I felt a real sense of personal responsibility … I became INVOLVED in the issue.
>
> (H)

Activism is positioned here in relation both to the 'political' (voting) and to the 'personal' (marriage and having children). But in any case,

this woman's reflection clearly constructs an identity of responsible adult from the age of 35. Activism here is far from the image of the 'rebel' who is outside and against society – to the contrary, an activist is someone who participates actively in society as a good citizen. Yet, this particular activist adulthood is seen to have been attained after the youthful moment – indicating in this case that perhaps the normative stages of adult development somehow got in the way of activist involvement or a more aware approach to the world. The moment described here is of course only part of the story, and in the same interview, conflicts around activism are examined critically in relation to marriage, parenthood and career development. This complicated relationship between adulthood and activism is also reflected in most of the other narratives, as the discussions of work and parenthood will show.

Activism and work

Two of the key 'benchmarks' of adulthood identified by Blatterer (2007) are 'productivity' and 'independence'. Blatterer builds on Bauman's (2000) arguments that the workplace, in what he calls 'liquid modernity', fosters values that in fact run counter to solid work identities. However, he argues that even in an increasingly uncertain world where individuals are involved in redefining these dimensions of adulthood, work and financial independence are still central to the social expectations that individuals' self-definition is shaped around. Many of our respondents' narratives show that the relationship between work and activism has been a complex one, and one that has not always been easy to resolve.

Research on the motivation of activists has posited a number of influences from class, educational and professional contexts. Bagguley (1992) discussed how liberal professional work was likely to foster the values which motivated people to become involved in activism. Chatterjee (1999) who carried out research of the familial contexts of activists, argued rather that civic values fostered within the family were more likely to shape career choices, that the same values that compelled individuals to become politically active were likely to make some career choices more palatable than others. For participant C for example, a motivation to work against injustice and 'to try and make life better for people' is behind her choice of profession – 'that IS why I went into social work. I've always seen it as a political job'. Going beyond this, however, laying her own identity and learning about racism on the line, she developed pioneering anti-racist politics and training both inside

and outside of her professional life. Another woman (Interviewee E) eventually brought her professionalism as a teacher, her long-term activism and experiences as parent and parent-educator together by joining a development NGO and becoming a children's peace educator. The personal and the political hence were frequently wrought together in profoundly meaningful ways by our interviewees.

Certainly there is evidence that the lifecourse stage of 'getting into work' may have been delayed or altered, for instance, to create work and professional trajectories 'against the grain' or outside of the norm. An extreme example was given by one activist (K) who gave up a first academic post because the work was considered too bourgeois by the Marxist group she belonged to. She did have many misgivings about this and it encapsulated the difficult and contradictory feelings she had, not only about how work and activism could be combined, but how class and feminist politics, and parenthood should be prioritised:

> [I]t was idiotic … I remember saying to them that I had had (the baby) and I said 'I'm unemployed now'. But really I was at home with a baby which isn't the same thing as being unemployed and they said comrade that's much better than … but they didn't get it at all, they didn't get that women shouldn't give up jobs.

Many discussed the difficulty of weighing up the priority of work against the time and energy required by activism. It was not uncommon for early activism to have had precluded a normative progression into career as the following two quotations illustrate. The first respondent is in her fifties now and working as an academic but has not had a standard career trajectory. The second quote is interesting in that it is from a younger woman, in her late twenties still uncertain how to take her working life forward, worried by the energy needed to make campaigns successful.

> [T]hat strong sense of calling … I thought of activism as a way of life. It continued into making the decision to come to England to do a PhD, continuing on the issue of non-violence and that lead me to … looking for new networks and campaigning issues as a main occupation for a time. (S)

> I'm actually quite employable if I was going to go into a graduate scheme or something, but I felt like, you know, choosing to wait for a job that I found acceptable … I mean it damages your self esteem and its very difficult to do it feels like you're against the world … and not valued by the world. And so it's a big … lots of people do things

that are … people who care you know, people who think that they care about world … do something that they find acceptable but that maybe isn't enough. You don't have enough people or enough resources working on the kind of issues that needs to be worked on … and it's such hard work and I don't think there are that many people prepared to do it. I guess I'm not really very optimistic but … I'm trying not to think about … the long term future of the world and what will make my life meaningful and good.

(O)

When asked if activism had ever clashed with his personal life, this respondent highlighted the way his own choices in work, shaped by his activism had disappointed the expectations of his family with serious repercussions.

Yes I think it has emmm I suspect if I'd been personally ambitious and actually used my skills especially at university, to get ahead sort of thing and gone on as a personnel manager … my marriage would never have broken up and I know that my family … on paper I am the best educated person in my family and they find it really bizarre that I haven't got a high-powered job and stuff like that and after I left university I worked with groups on legal aid.

(Q)

Just before this section he had, in describing the 'activism' he was involved in at the moment, begun his account by describing his 'work':

Yeah, what I quite like about the work I'm doing now is that … I've got three areas of work basically … which I concentrate on … I do some work on my estate and what I'm involved in there, besides being chair of the residents association I'm trying to set up a credit union … a people's bank sort of thing … emmm I'm also involved in a trade union campaign though I'm actually retired I'm still technically a member … and I'm quite active in a campaign on health and safety at work with the aim being against casualisation … and the main area I work in is the Bath activist network which is a loose alliance of greens, anarchists and animal rights people.

(Q)

We certainly do not mean to imply by using parentheses that this is not work, only to problematise the category distinction between the two.

Clearly for this man the fact that he is not in paid employment does not mean that the labour involved is devalued from his point of view, quite the reverse. This narrative not only shows that activism could delay or alter a standard career but also that it can prolong a working life. All four participants interviewed were of retirement age and were involved in a variety of voluntary, community justice and local political work.[4]

On the other hand, regular paid employment was also something that could make activist involvement problematic or risky. One man in his forties told of how an uncomfortable silence resulted from mentioning a peace action in the staff room. He reflects on how he had to be careful about showing himself as an activist while at work, and how this led to a general feeling of separateness from 'normal' adult society:

> But at the time I was also starting to be a teacher in '83, and that led to kind of a bit of a problem for me because at that time if I'd been arrested umm, as a supply teacher probably that would have been IT [laughs] you know, so I had to feel like I always played a kind of more of a supporting role in these things, so for example at Upper Heyford when R was sort of like 'blockading' … die-in, lying down in the road … I was like about five yards away playing music in the road, you know … I suppose I was having to play quite safe … sometimes I still feel really on the edge of society despite that, even though I am in this mainstream profession I've been in for years.
>
> (G)

Another participant (I) reflected on how his strong values and what he describes as his independent, creative and collaborative approach to working has often brought conflict and sometimes got him fired from positions. This never deterred him, and having a fundamentally forgiving approach, sometimes meant he was re-instated, as well.

While activists could feel 'on the edge' for different reasons, whether having a 'proper job' or not, many of the narratives however also convey a close integration of activist trajectories and professional career development. Activism often involved acquisition of skills, confidence and professional competence. Interviewee A's narrative, for example, is in some ways just as much about choice of career as about activism. Activist involvement at university shaped his choice of courses, developed his interests, and later gave him the possibility of experimenting and clarifying what he wanted to do with his life. Sometimes, involvement in campaigns or community schemes became paid employment, and activism eventually triggered his academic career. In many of the

narratives, there seems to be a reinforcing spiral of values, work and activism. Participant B, for example, regarded her engagement in feminist and peace campaigning as very important for her personal growth and development, and through peace and green movements, also got involved with co-counselling, later becoming a counsellor and community developer. She reflects on the integration of work and activist values:

> [B]ecoming conscious of inequality and class, that's something that's in the Community development work that I've done has been a very underpinning kind of ethos. So in all kinds of respects that's something I actively build into any work that I do. And that's partly in response to my own experiences as a woman, a lesbian, being me whatever. But it's also a kind of life position about what I'd like the world to be … a fairer kind of place.
>
> (B)

A reverse relation could also be seen in that skills and competence were not only gained from activist experience but frequently brought to activist engagement. Participant H for example, who we quoted earlier as seeing herself becoming active from age 35, brought her professional skills to campaigning to a degree that she was teased for producing 'designer demos'. At a later stage, she was 'overjoyed' to discover that she could use her architecture for the purposes of ecological activism. Another participant talks about how at a more mature stage in her career, with the privilege of an influential position, she can say 'yes' to things and translate values into concrete social action. She also indicates that this is not without internal struggles:

> [P]eople have been critical of [the refugee project] because it's NOT a campaigning model. … And sometimes, I think oh that's bad, we ought to. But what I'm interested in, I'm a social worker, I'm interested in people's lives TODAY. … I think you know, small subversive things that add up to something BIG, is how I want to make a difference.
>
> (D)

Struggling with professional and activist identities, consciousness and conscience then has led to meaningful achievements and degrees of integrity in the lifecourse persistent engagement of these adults. Maturing and acting in the world can be shown to be actually making a difference – in an 'unsung' kind of way.

Activism and parenting

Parenthood as another key moment of the lifecourse can also be seen in a significant relation with activist involvement. Parenting is changing in radical ways in contemporary society for a number of reasons. Beck (1992) argues that this is not just about growing labour-market participation by women but growing contradictions between reproduction and production, between the spheres of family and work that are often played out in tensions in private lives. The influence of feminism and the liberation of women from roles that confined their agency to the domestic context has profound effects as households diversify and as the roles of adult men and women are open to negotiation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001) – motherhood and fatherhood are changing. Most radically the choice to have children (Gillespie 2008; Letherby1999, 2003) and the question of how to combine parenting care and work (Innes and Scott 2003) have been opened up, creating personal dilemmas that indicate this is a crucial area where critical views and radical choices are dynamically changing social relations and traditional roles. Just as with work, caring responsibilities are a difficult area for many activists, particularly but not only women; the demands of activism create very real difficulties. While spaces for choice and diversity have certainly opened up, it seems that moralising pressures on adults in families to prove themselves as 'good parents' have continued. Such pressures emerge from a long history of social policy, social work and philanthropy imposing middle class gender standards of family on others to regulate working-class lives, and thereby strengthen the moral fibre of the 'nation', and they carry right through, in the UK, to recent government initiatives that focus on responsible parenthood as a (re-) moralising project. (Doolittle 2004; Williams 2005; Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2008).

When activism enters the equation, these issues get further complicated, as family values coincide or collide with the moral values that suffuse activist campaigns, shaping identities and developing expectations about degrees of commitment. These 'standards' will vary and may well be the subject of conflict and friction, but are potentially deeply problematic for some actors, either in the way they then transmit moral values outwards or submit themselves to judgement about how good or 'authentic' an activist they are, how deeply and responsibly they 'care' for the issue and generally how 'committed' they are.

It is not surprising that a fundamental tension comes across from many of the interviews between the commitment demanded of a

parenting adult, and the commitment to activist work. As this man in his late forties comments:

> If you looked at the priority being umm remaining an activist, then you would say that my family got in the way, but actually that is not how I feel about it at all. [laughs] Strictly the perspective of continuing as I was – but you change your life don't you, and things alter, maybe you think: well, actually I've done my bit, and there is another generation who haven't got all the responsibilities I've got, and who can maybe take some responsibility for attempting to change the world.
>
> (G)

This quotation evokes the image of a generational relay between parenthood and activism. Caring for the world then can be seen as being on par with caring for children, with both being markers of responsible adulthood – yet rarely, both being combined without complication. A substantial number of the interviewees are not parents; although some of these, particularly those that are defined as lesbian/ gay or bisexual, would have acted as 'co-parents' for children in some way, at least for a while. One participant (S) had given up her baby for adoption – while this was done entirely for personal reasons, the decision was still seen by others and herself as allowing her the time and energy to devote to campaigning and hence enabling her to continue as an activist. Not being a parent then in many cases meant having more 'free time' for activism, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> So I think it's the mind set first but then you know, there are enormous pressures that limit what people do, I mean one of them obviously is the time that people have, if you're working full time and you've got a lot of responsibilities in life then … you just don't have time to do these things and you can't expect people to. You know, I'm not a parent and never have been so that's freed me in many ways to do a lot of the things that I like. I can't imagine how I would live my life if I'd been looking after children [laughs] It's totally different.
>
> (M)

For those who were already parents or who became parents during periods of activism, like for Interviewee G above, parenthood definitely presented a complication in terms of activist involvement. In quite a

few cases, the main periods of heightened activity were either before having children, or after the children had grown up sufficiently. One woman comments on her time line in the following way:

> [T]here is a very steep rise around my late teens … and … high plateaus around my 20s, and then at the end of my 20s plummets, and continues at this very LOW level, with this downturn being motherhood. … But actually I think that it's not compatible – being an activist with having a child … certainly not compatible with MORE than one, not if you put the child's interest first.
>
> (E)

It is clear from the last comment that there are not only issues of time and energy involved when talking about parenting, activism and adulthood. The tensions here relate to much deeper issues, such as morality and internal questioning around both activist values and commitment to parenthood. When asked about personal and family relationships, one woman for example talks about how her children 'weren't happy at all' about her being such a prominent local campaigning figure. The children had to deal with teasing from schoolmates and commented, 'Why can't you be like other mothers'. This participant (H) reflects on some of the guilt she felt, and on how the break-up of her marriage led her to abandon peace campaigning for a while, as she had to assume greater responsibility for the children, including financial. The guilt expressed here and above must be seen within the context of the moralising construction of parenthood and particularly motherhood that we have mentioned earlier.[5]

Within some activist metaphorical constructions, a kind of 'global parenthood' can be seen, where caring for children and caring for the world merge into one. An example of this is again offered by participant H when she reflects on a moment of 'awakening' to global injustice:

> I was sitting, actually breastfeeding … and on the television were images of the Ethiopian famine. … I just had this incredible sense that these children who were dying were actually – they were MY children, you know … this seemed to happen in my late thirties. … I actually, you know, my mind was not pre-occupied with making money and running a business or anything like that. I was actually dealing with sort of much more basic things, you know, like caring for children. … So, I suppose I had more headspace to engage.
>
> (H)

The idea of taking responsibility for the world's children has been a widespread theme within some campaigning cultures, particularly within green and peace activism.[6] There is also resonance here with recent arguments about the emergence of post-national, global citizenship rights and responsibilities (Turner 2002; Urry 2000). But rather than adding to an idealistic, essentialist notion of 'caring for the world's children', this quotation illuminates aspects of adult responsibilities in more complex ways. With the hindsight of more recent experiences, H reflects on competing demands, and the need to have critical 'headspace' for active engagement with the world which in her case was available through motherhood.

Parenting and activism were then not only seen as complicating each other but also as mutually enhancing or complimentary. One participant reflects on how his more outward activism has developed into a more 'personal politics'.

> One of the things in my time line which I think about in this context is we were part of a cooperative crèche in this area, with our first child, and I went on the kind of management committee at one stage ... which I construe as a kind of activism, strongly around feminist politics and children's politics.
>
> (A)

Other participants reflect on how parenting as activists has involved passing on values to their children. While there is an echo here of that persistent worry about being judged a bad parent, participant E, for example, communicates parental-activist pride in her interview:

> So, I think the children I hope, I think they HAVE kind of absorbed my values, by osmosis mostly ... Ya – and I'm pleased about that. And I don't care if people think I've been indoctrinating them because I think that's what everybody does.

Despite the potential for moral pressures to mount up from two directions, through the standards of 'good parenthood' and the standards of 'good activism', it is clear that research participants found their own constructive ways of negotiating adult, active identities, whether they were actually parenting or not. The complex relationship between loving relationships and responsibilities and wider concerns that may encompass the global indicates how the emergence of 'global citizenship' (Szerszynski and Urry 2006) can be anchored in the everyday through personal reflection, negotiation and action.

Concluding reflections

Adulthood seems to be in many ways problematic for activists who are concerned to balance responsible adulthood in terms of career development and parenthood with an activist commitment. At the same time however, key moments of adult and activist development also seemed to coincide and complement each other in the process of working through some of the different aspects of these stages of adulthood. This brings us back to Touraine's (1995) argument that the emergence of the critical subject is closely bound with relations with others. The kinds of adulthood lived by the participants in our research was deeply affected by their participation in activism, but the reverse was also true. Melucci (1989; 1996a) emphasises how those who withdraw from visible action take critical reflections, knowledge, skills and radical views back into society through their work and social relationships. These interviews also indicate that life experience and negotiating the meanings of responsible adulthood brought maturity to activism. Burnett (2003, 2004) explores the way that theory about generation has influenced lifecourse research creating an underlying assumption that adolescence and young adulthood are particularly important periods of change when adult orientations are determined. Yet these interviews indicate that important changes take place throughout adulthood. This would be supported through perspectives on adult education and social change, where adulthood is seen as an enduring, dynamic process of transformative engagement with the social world.[7]

In many of the narratives, there is a sense of moving forward, developing subtler or more complex views. Asked about the significance of activism in his life, one participant said:

> More than anything else, it's how I managed to achieve a kind of self-realization, bearing in mind all those things that were holding me back, until the age of 20, when I was satisfying certain criteria, getting thru school, going to university, but in terms of self I had this crippling inferiority complex, absolutely crippling. … As soon as I got into the union – bang, GG is here, that's how I begin.
>
> (I)

For this interviewee, activist engagement was clearly instrumental in developing confident adulthood. He relayed many experiences of learning through action in different parts of the world – or 'emancipated' periods of his life – where awareness of injustices widened and

determination to work for change deepened. Similarly, other participants reflected on the transformation of younger selves; however, the developing activist identities reflected on are complex, and there are continuing lessons involved in the project of looking back on youthful idealism. Whittier (2003) found that women who maintained feminist activism over time described increasing tolerance as complementing their commitment. A woman in her early fifties reflects on how youthful certainty and dogmatism has over time given way to more complexity and a more tempered approach to other people, but how this is an ongoing process. Asked about how she relates to the new issues facing the world, she says:

> Ya, and [it's] also still about making changes within myself and questioning how I am with people and changing THAT and making it better, even in a just a small way and not being so judgemental of people and being more UNDERSTANDING to people and their views, trying to be – so, dealing with people in a different way … umm. Trying to, I mean it's a long lesson, as it were … certainly have been oppressive of other people when I've been so like: yes, you know this is the way we DO it … and maybe/ and now I'm CHANGING, and I AM growing up and that's alright as well, well it's a GOOD thing.
>
> (C)

What comes across in many of the narratives is a fundamental acceptance of both younger and more 'grown up' selves in all their complexity. A more mature standpoint is clearly valued, yet participants also speak of younger selves with affection, and with affirmation of continuity, of the same core of self-evolving, as in the following quotation:

> But whether or not I am involved in activism, it's still there in my head, so it kind of continues, it kind of integrated itself into my life. … It's been shaped by the way I am in the first place, from my upbringing, all this business about fairness and justice, and has kind of continued through there. … It's still been there when I'm at work, kind of almost being like undercover sometimes [laughter]. It's there because it's what I am. I'm not a terribly active activist, but it's still … there.
>
> (G)

Our research then has allowed us to look at activists as agents with a past, present and future. Participants draw on the past to face the future,

their experience, their maturity is both hard won and a key aspect of their orientation to the issues of the moment. This is not to say that they are necessarily given to thinking about themselves, in fact some were explicitly more focused on acting. Nevertheless their individual reflection on the world and on ways of acting to change the world is key to their narrative. It is interesting that such reflection is not often spoken about and that there seems to be little language to talk about this kind of change over time. Maturity does not seem to be valued, and is perhaps not valued in activism itself, where the new issues of the moment seem so different from the past, and where the focus is mainly on action itself. However, we suggest that these activist narratives indicate an accumulation of learning, skills and critical thinking at a deep, vital level. They are spoken by adults who have gone through change and engage with both their times and their own lifecourse development by working through the moral complexities of work, parenthood and activism.

Notes

1. It is impossible to give an overview here but key research includes insights on childhood (Prout, James), transition of adolescents into adulthood (Brannen and Nilson 2002; Thomson et al. 2002), and the difficulties associated with aging in Western societies (Vincent 1995, 2007). This research has also allowed the theorisation of social relations of reciprocity and conflict which tie together the age groups, familial and social generations (Turner and Edmunds 2002a; Irwin 1998; Pilcher 1995). It has also made visible the inequalities that are associated with ageism, that interact with other forms of stratification in society (Arber and Ginn 1995).
2. Bendle (2002) is critical of reflexive models of the self for this universalising, unchanging quality. Paradoxically the more open to individual manipulation the self becomes, the more difficult it is to conceptualise change as progressive. He points out that while Castells (1997) briefly mentions Erikson's stages of development in his description of identity, this is never developed.
3. It is no coincidence that Giddens and Touraine both highlight feminism as offering the most radical challenges to modern society.
4. These included one participant's high profile and more than full-time voluntary work in a community justice organisation; another's work giving courses on an adult learning programme, setting up a refugee support group and lastly one woman's participation in local transport and green issues to the point of standing as a local councillor.
5. There is a large body of feminist and sociological scholarship examining the moral pressure emanating from normative expectations of parenthood. Parenthood, but particularly motherhood occupies a morally loaded status, where women who are mothers structurally suffer from a deep-rooted, long-established societal blame and hence internalised burden of guilt for

any perceived non-perfect parenting. These issues are further complicated by gender and class relations, and by predominant middle-class standards of ideal parenthood (Rich 1977; May 2008).

6. This has also been a source of contention within women's peace politics and feminist theorising (Kaplan 1994; Körner 1997).

7. When considering adulthood as a dynamic process of maturing and growing, in critical exchange with the social world and its structures of injustice, the small body of literature on adult learning and activism, or more widely, literature on critical pedagogy has valuable insights to contribute. Adult education for social change focuses on adults as lifelong learners and on transformative learning for social action or active citizenship, particularly through the 'informal learning' that accompanies participation in social movements (Green 2008). Paulo Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is still hugely influential in this context as it posits a transformative model of reflection and action, and dialogic learning and consciousness raising. (Foley 2001) calls this 'emancipatory learning' – this involves the un-learning of dominant ways of seeing the world and critical understanding of power relations, with self-transformation part of this process, as well as development of self-confidence and skills needed for action. Mishler and Rose (2007) found that adulthood could be a time of profound political reorientation and learning in post-soviet Russia.

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