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How to cite:

Wetherell, Margaret (2009). Negotiating liveable lives: intelligibility and identity in contemporary Britain. In: Wetherell, Margaret ed. Identity in the 21st Century: New Trends in Changing Times. Identity Studies in the Social Sciences. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–21.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=335557>

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Introduction

Negotiating Liveable Lives: Intelligibility and Identity in Contemporary Britain

Margaret Wetherell

Who can we be in the 21st century? The essays in this book explore this question.

Focusing on trends in Britain, the authors examine the current patterning of identities based on class and community, gender and generation, 'race', faith and ethnicity, and derived from popular culture. We look at how people locate themselves now, how they make sense of their biographies and trajectories, and tell their stories. The chapters examine the forms of 'we' and wider social categorisations available as resources for identity work, and the various kinds of trouble which seem to emerge, as people struggle to align themselves with, or resist, contemporary prescriptions.

These are interesting times for the study of identity. It has been suggested, for example, that stable identities based on familiar social class hierarchies have been replaced with multiple, fragmented and more uncertain identity projects based on 'life-style' and consumer choices. But is that the case - are traditional commitments, family and work-place loyalties breaking down in the ways commentators diagnose? Are 'liquid' senses of self, and volatile and dynamic forms of identity politics, becoming more salient? Upsurges of intense solidarities based on religious, ethnic and national identities are also seen as characteristic of contemporary life. But current times are described, too, as a period of even greater mobility and 'mixing' than previously where ethnic diversity has become banal and common-place. In social and psychological theory, the term identity is itself the locus of controversy – what is its value and currency? It seems to suggest illusory fixity, it seems to separate the social

from the personal, and its range is surely too large and its definition ambiguous; yet the empirical territory ‘identity’ marks out is too important to dismiss or neglect.

Our credentials for attempting to address these issues and give a robust sense of identity trends in changing times, rest on five years of collective research through an Economic and Social Research Council Programme (see www.identities.org.uk). This book and its companion volume, *Identity Practices: From Identities to Social Action*, also published by Palgrave/Macmillan, summarise the findings and conclusions from extensive, systematic and empirically rich investigations. The 25 projects which made up the Identities and Social Action Programme worked with over 12,000 participants across the UK using quantitative surveys, in-depth qualitative interviews, focus groups, ethnography, oral history, textual analysis and studies of natural interaction (see Appendix A for a list of the 12 research projects informing this collection).

Each chapter presents a snapshot of a particular sample, site or context for identity making. These accounts from Sheffield and South Wales, from London and Norwich, from ethnically diverse metropolitan contexts and homogeneous, provincial communities, from young offenders and first-time mothers - are more than the sum of the parts. They allow thought about directions of social change, along with critical reflection on the validity of some of the meta-narratives guiding current policy, and found in social theory and in political life. The research in this volume does not exhaust the play of identity by any means. No one collection could be complete and there are many obvious absences. But this set of snapshots focused around class, community, ethnicity, gender and generation is intended to provoke thought about some core aspects of contemporary identities, their nature, shape and form, the

possibilities and resources for people's identity stories, the limits on these, and about the puzzle of identity itself.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One examines class and community and engages with grand social theories of change, especially the claims of the individualisation theorists (e.g. Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991), and claims about the new technologies for work on the self found in these globalised and neo-liberal times (e.g. Bauman, 2001; 2005; Rose, 1989; 1997; 1999). Part Two focuses on ethnicity and migration and considers the complex multicultures (Gilroy, 2005; 2006) emerging in metropolitan contexts and the claims of new ethnicities theorists (Hall, 1992), as well as examining white majority communities. Part Three takes up intimate identities based on gender and generation and presented in popular culture. The chapters in this Part return from a different direction to debates about the individualising tendencies in contemporary life. This introduction will pre-review each of these Parts and will try to summarise the main points across the chapters. First, however, I want to identify some of the over-arching themes which inform the book as a whole.

Threads

The ESRC programme which inspired this collection was profoundly interdisciplinary including, for example, sociologists, psychologists, geographers, anthropologists, social policy and education researchers, media and business studies researchers, criminologists and sociolinguists. Of course, there were deep theoretical and methodological disagreements but a surprising level of shared focus. Most of us

agreed that in some sense studying identity involved studying the conditions and practices of 'social intelligibility'. Not all of us had read Judith Butler (1990; 2004; 2006), would concur that she was a suitable interlocutor, or would turn automatically first to her philosophy, but her work does perhaps express this shared interest best. This became an interest, too, in how people in very different circumstances and with very different trajectories manage to negotiate 'liveable' as opposed to 'unliveable' lives.

When we talk about identity, we are describing, in part, communicative practices. F. Scott Fitzgerald is reputed to have said, for example, that identity is a "series of successful gestures" (Leith, 2009). In many ways, this is a facile comment but it does draw attention to the ways in which identity involves a 'gathering together', a communicative embodiment, encapsulation and stylisation. This gathering together is a 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959) designed for an audience, even if that audience is only there in imagination or fantasy, or consists of a self observing itself. Identity, in other words, is about becoming intelligible to oneself and to others. And being intelligible, as Butler (2004) argues, involves engaging with current forms of social recognition. It also requires repetition over time – one gesture alone would be insufficient to count as characteristic – as Fitzgerald states, a series is required.

There is a lot at stake in the intelligibility practices of identity, as Butler points out. What counts as a successful series of gestures is ambiguous, and indeed success can be a mixed blessing. Being recognised as a particular kind of 'someone' can entail engaging with normative expectations of identity which demean, oppress and blight, resulting in what Butler (2006) describes as literally 'unliveable' situations and

precarious lives. The chapters try to outline the 'conditions of intelligibility' characteristic of these times. They discuss how people construct (and fail to construct) liveable paths from the social, cultural and material resources available to them. There are stories here which are 'for identities' and stories which are 'against identities', narratives of perceived 'identity theft', of conviviality, dismay, collective disgust and celebration.

A second thread which unites the book is our collective recognition of the complexity of identity and a commitment to following that complexity, mostly as it knots together and unravels in ordinary rather than spectacular life. The years from 2004 to 2008 were turbulent ones with some vivid identity displays provoking huge amounts of commentary and evaluation in the media and elsewhere. These were the years of the Iraq War, the bombings on London tube trains, the emerging salience of faith, and the election of Barack Obama. These and other events often rightly demand simple and strategic responses and the request to researchers from policy-makers similarly tends to be for one page answers. But, in contrast, what emerges most strongly in the research collected here is the ways in which lived experience in the UK can not be reduced in line with conventional images, for example, of divided, homogeneous, and culturally coherent communities. The research highlights the intersectional nature of identity, the entangled affiliations people articulate across identity categories, the diversity of standpoints in response to ethnicised and other classifications, as well as the importance of understanding the variable geography of these things. Above all, as the chapters in Part Two particularly demonstrate, the dramatic and the pressure to find the simple can be radically misleading.

Finally, the chapters in this collection push forward theory in identity studies. In both theory and in empirical investigations explicit and implicit distinctions are often made between social identity and personal identity. These are assigned to different disciplines, have their own traditions of scholarship and their own investigative histories. The study of social identities focuses on what is given by group memberships, participation in social movements and acquired through belonging to large social categories, while investigations of personal identity lead to studies of biographical narratives, emotional investments and the kinds of repetitions that most interest psychology and psychoanalysis. The chapters in this collection show how arbitrary these distinctions are. The authors certainly reveal different forms of social relations - from more intimate and interpersonal to more collective – but also that intelligibility practices interweave personal biography and collective practices. Following this thread, the chapters develop new ways of thinking about and investigating identity as both contingent and yet organised, open and predictable. Butler again expresses this standpoint well in her notion of performativity as a “practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (2004: 1). The chapters indicate, too, how the study of memory, affect and the relational needs to pervade all identity studies and picks up the new interest in these topics in identity research (c.f. Blackman et al., 2008).

Class and Community

The first Part of the book consists of four chapters examining current configurations of identity, social class and community. It is on this ground that arguments about changing risk environments, individualisation effects and the new ‘liquidity’ of

identity bite hardest and these chapters help evaluate these claims. The individualisation thesis (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Giddens, 1991) is a set of arguments about the nature of social and technological changes combined with a claim about the effects of these on identity, people's psychology, their social relations with each other and their everyday practices. It is suggested that neo-liberal labour markets, the increased casualisation of work, changing patterns of family life and new pressures for reflexivity have disrupted traditional communities, identifications and affiliations. Individuals are becoming disembedded from older, communal ways of life, and must now develop their own life worlds unanchored by tradition, constructing identities that are more negotiable, looser, reflexive and autonomous. People's senses of self are thought to be more provisional as a consequence, less firmly rooted in the ethics of duty, responsibility and self-sacrifice, dominated instead by 'the religion of me'. Life as a result is said to have become more risky and uncertain, although exposure to this risk remains highly unevenly distributed.

Individualisation is said to undermine perceptions of common fate, mutual dependence, trust and long-term commitments, along with robust associations between class consciousness, sense of identity and collective action. Indeed individualisation is thought to undermine any form of social relation which is at odds with market-oriented exchange. Individual choice instead is thought to become the cornerstone in these new worlds and the ability to display skilful choices and high levels of agency becomes the marker of a successful person. Current economic conditions, it is argued, demand work on the self to develop an identity that can be

more mobile, more enterprising, flexible and responsive to competition with others, in situations ‘without guarantees’.

What did our empirical work in this area find? It is notoriously difficult to draw firm conclusions about individualisation effects. As Brannen and Nielsen (2005) note, the concepts and claims derived from the individualisation thesis are sweeping, crude and imprecise. They rely on numerous questionable assumptions about historical patterns. All manner of translations seem to be required to move from a pattern embedded in a particular local context with its own local determinants to a claim about the broader identity trend. Part One opens, however, with a chapter which does attempt to assess the broad descriptive and explanatory power of individualisation claims.

Anthony Heath, John Curtice and Gabriella Elgenius conducted the first longitudinal comparative study of individualisation predictions about social class identity, examining people’s affiliations across the period from the 1960s to 2005. Systematic and rigorous longitudinal work is one of the few methods attempting to deliver a useful and valid empirical verdict. As they describe in their chapter, Heath et al. found a mixed pattern. On the one hand, identity changes were broadly in the direction that the individualisation thesis predicts but not nearly of the magnitude suggested. Change was, in fact, ‘glacial’, apparently dependent on immediate, strategic (and perhaps contingent) changes in the political landscape with little strong support for the claim that people are now ‘forced’ to choose their own identities unanchored by tradition, community and family history. Their chapter is full of fascinating detailed findings. Here I note just a couple. First, they found, that the actual incidence of people identifying with any particular social class has remained

pretty much constant since the 1960s, although people are more likely to describe themselves as middle-class now. Second, and more in line with individualisation predictions, traditional 'identity packages' seem to be less important than they once were in the sense that a reliable and predictable relationship between factors such as senses of class belonging, voting preferences and political attitudes is disappearing. To the extent that social class remains a powerful normative frame of reference, it is likely then to operate in very different ways.

Quantitative survey analysis establishes the general picture. The second chapter in Part One then moves us on to different ground and reports on the experience of negotiating class positions and community from the inside. Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor present an intensive qualitative case-study of the oral histories produced by a mother and daughter (Lily and Lorna) describing their struggles and the challenges of life on a stigmatised and deprived estate in Norwich. Here what is most salient is the continued and unrelenting power of class positioning as a salient frame for self-understanding and the complex and contradictory forms of recognition, allegiance, loyalty and shame entailed. In this context Judith Butler's (2004) exploration of liveable and unliveable lives, noted earlier, becomes highly applicable and the ways in which some dominant forms of intelligibility can imperil the development of a viable identity. If, as individualisation theorists suggest, individuals are increasingly floating free of traditional communities, affiliations and identifications, then Rogaly and Taylor's chapter is a reminder of the compromises, pain, losses and gains that might be involved in such a process. Their chapter raises questions about just who can be an individualised subject, when and in what cross-generational chronologies.

Chapter Three from Valerie Walkerdine continues this emphasis and begins to investigate the causes of uneven responses to individualising pressures. Her chapter develops the theoretical thread mentioned above which runs through this book - the importance of taking account of the affective practices mediating responses to understand variations. Walkerdine describes a research project analysing a classic, litmus test, situation for the individualisation thesis. Again, the findings from this research disconfirm expectations. Walkerdine's focus is on one community, SteelTown, in South Wales which has lost its main employer and where the employment options available to redundant workers exemplify the feature of new kinds of jobs within neo-liberalism. It turns out, however, that the workers in SteelTown, unlike the similar workers Walkerdine and her colleagues studied in Sydney, Australia do not buy individualised scripts. The workers in Sydney did very visibly recast themselves in terms of discourses of entrepreneurial self-management. (An account of the Australian data can be found in Walkerdine and Bansel, in press.) But in SteelTown, some time after the closure, people continue to be deeply connected to their community and continue to act collectively. A number find success in the new work regimes available but with little evidence that they have fundamentally altered their identity narratives or re-modelled themselves to do so. Walkerdine concludes that the difference lies in the nature of the traditional working class community in South Wales. The dominant affective practices, and what she calls the 'community of affect' created by residents, prove resilient, motivating and sustaining and thus the community continues as a powerful point of reference.

Any reader who has casually flicked through the pages of this book up to this point and read, for example, Shelia's account of the trials around the Christmas lights in

SteelTown in Chapter Three or Lily and Lorna's narratives in Chapter Two might begin to wonder whether anyone anywhere in the UK could ever be described in individualised terms. Critics of the individualisation thesis such as Skeggs (2004) and Savage (2000) have argued that one of the main problems with individualisation theories are their universalising. Very particular kinds of identity work – which are in fact quite specific – are overly generalised as a global new identity trend. Skeggs argues that the entrepreneurial, mobile and self-managing characters diagnosed by individualisation theorists represent in fact a highly classed identity. Middle-class academic theorists, she maintains, are guilty of reading the general from their own particular subjectivities.

Chapter Four confirms this suspicion. Finally the voices, methods of self-accounting and ways of configuring the world seen as characteristic of individualised times begin to appear. The last chapter in Part One from David James, Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, Fiona Jamieson, Phoebe Beedell, Sumi Hollingworth and Katya Williams reports on research investigating the identity work of the white urban middle-class. James et al. focus on a particular and quite unusual class fraction – white middle-class parents who against the usual practices of those in their social class position have chosen socially diverse comprehensive schools with average or below average examination results for their children. Those interviewed regard this as a risky strategy and their motivations, as the chapter illustrates, are a complex mix of social justice concerns and lie in family educational histories. The chapter presents a fascinating account of this group's identity stories, and what is particularly interesting is how their identity work exemplifies middle-class habitus and its forms of capital and maintains these as they disrupt it.

The material in Part One confirms both the particularity of individualised identity discourses and their uneven take-up. In common with others working on individualisation in neighbourhood, class and community contexts (e.g. Butler with Robson, 2003; Crow et al., 2002; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Savage, 2000; Savage et al., 2005; Skeggs, 2004; Webb, 2004), the research reported in Part One finds that individualisation turns out to be a ‘now you see it, now you don’t’ phenomenon. The ‘identity story’ over time is clearly much more complicated than a transition to ‘new autonomous individuals’ from ‘individuals embedded in old style solidary social relations’. We do not see, for example, the kind of demise of social class and community as an organising point for identity in the way predicted. We are seeing that interpellation by individualised ways for making sense of oneself is patchy varying geographically, mediated by local affective practices, by context and by initial class position.

Individualisation predictions about class and community need substantial qualification. But this is only part of the story of identity in changing times. Reading the qualitative material, I am struck by how ‘psychologised’ people’s narratives and accounts appear. They display, in other words, the very broad ‘psychological make-over’ and ‘compulsory individuality’ effects described by Nikolas Rose (1989; 1997) and others (Cronin, 2000; Strathern, 1992). Arguably, ‘interesting individuality’ is now a mandatory part of ‘doing a good interview’. We will return to this issue of the more general contemporary requirements for ‘telling the self’ in Part Three.

Ethnicities and Encounters

Part One focuses on class, community and identity and claims about new, emerging conditions of intelligibility for making sense of oneself and others. Part Two turns to contemporary intelligibility practices around race and ethnicity, examining these in intersection with identities articulated through gender, nationality, social class, age, faith, geographical locations and migration status. The chapters report research findings from three current crucial staging posts for ethnicised and racialised identities – post-colonial London, white English working class and middle-class estates and refugee settlement in Sheffield and, also, from two institutions (the prison and the urban metropolitan classroom) where ‘mixing’ is mandatory.

If one looks at contemporary political discourse then race and ethnic identities and their intelligibility become simple matters. In one of his last speeches before he left office the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example, sketched out a basic vision. This speech, given in December, 2006, and entitled ‘a duty to integrate’, describes a relatively straightforward social world of ‘divided communities’, ‘inter-cultural dialogue’, the ‘tolerant majority’, ‘extremists’ and ‘law-abiding, moderate ethnic minorities’, along with the need for ‘living harmoniously together across racial and religious divides’, ‘defining common values’ and ‘peaceful co-existence’. As I have argued elsewhere (Wetherell, 2008), the contemporary hegemonic view in British politics and policy interprets ethnic relations through a particular and perhaps now outdated sociological lens. It is assumed that society divides neatly into homogeneous cultures, communities and groups with clearly marked external boundaries, where these communities are distinguished by a large number of shared and essential

characteristics and clearly marked cultural traditions. Ethnic groups are assumed to act like a set of mini states or uni-minority cultures against the backdrop of the majority uni-culture. Relations between groups are conceptualised, therefore, as rather like relations between nation-states where crossing from one community to another might involve major acts of translation. The culture which characterises these divided communities similarly tends to be understood in static terms defined by outward symbols such as rituals, festivals, distinctive emblems and religious observances rather than in terms of more ordinary, unmarked, daily activities. Equally, identity and identification tend to be presented as relatively straightforward processes. Group and large-scale social categories confer unambiguous identities; ethnic identity is generally singular and these singular identities, reliably predict behaviour, attitudes and values.

As Stuart Hall (2001) has argued, reflecting on his experience as a member for the Runnymede Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (Parekh, 2000), there are indeed still places, moments or contexts in the UK which are culturally homogeneous in the way generally assumed but, increasingly, this is only part of the story. Hall suggests there remain places, moments and contexts which are relatively unchanging, where group culture can be summarised and meaningfully defined in terms of race and ethnic differences and where what remains most evident to people is the traditions they share and their strong group identities based on common life circumstances. As a whole, however, Britain is moving away from this pattern. Recent theory (e.g. Gilroy, 2006) diagnoses the UK as a set of complex and vibrant multi-cultures in contrast, for instance, to the much more segregated situation in the States. In particular, the lives of young people on No 10's doorstep in large

metropolitan cities such as London are thought now to be distinguished by “an unruly, untidy and convivial mode of interaction where differences have to be negotiated” (Gilroy, 2005: 438). Gilroy argues that the differences which divide young people are no longer automatically those of ethnicity, culture or race but often involve issues of life-style, music choices, consumption patterns, values and politics.

The chapters in Part Two directly investigate these claims and the current ordering of identity around ethnicity, faith and race. These empirical investigations traverse the paradox that social categories and the classifications of ethnicity and race are both exceptionally powerful ways of making sense and often entirely slippery in the actual identity scenarios and situation of everyday life. Group-based modes of understanding community and identity still have purchase (see Modood, 2007, for a defence of this point of view), and certainly there is substantial evidence of the persistence of inequality and racism (e.g. see Heath and Cheung’s, 2006, report on work-based discrimination), yet in ordinary life, as we shall see, the identity situation is also open, fluid, ‘hybridised’ and extremely complicated.

The first chapter in Part Two from Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton analyses a riveting, relatively long, piece of peer interaction recorded in an urban comprehensive school using radio microphones. Harris and Rampton’s argument based on data of this kind is both methodological and substantive. They found that the patterns they observed in the highly diverse urban comprehensive schools they have studied confirmed Gilroy’s analysis. Race and ethnicity featured for the most part as subsidiary issues, conforming to the ‘unruly convivial mode’ Gilroy identifies. There was a great deal of unselfconscious ‘rubbing along’. Harris and Rampton also argue, however, that there

is a danger that this ‘success’, in terms of the way the political debate is usually framed, will be invisible to policy not least because traditional methodologies such as interviews tend to over-emphasise essentialised and more categorical accounts as people struggle to be intelligible, find the story to tell and ‘achieve’ identity. They outline the advantages of linguistic ethnography as a method for revealing the ‘jostling, allusive, multi-voiced’ flavour of actual mixing and the positioning of self and others in ordinary life.

Chapter 6 then reports on the ethnography of a second institution – a prison for young offenders (HMYOI Rochester) – which equally throws together young people from very diverse ethnic backgrounds. Rod Earle and Coretta Phillips argue that here, too, conviviality, culture-swapping and mixing are an important part of young prisoners’ attempts to manage proximity and build a kind of liveable life in what they describe as the austere, semi-permanent and semi-public spaces of the prison. Earle and Phillips argue that racialised antagonism was not entirely absent and social relations were slightly wary, but racism was not a central organising identity discourse. For the white prisoners it became a private and equivocal resource. One important finding among many in this subtle and careful account is the centrality of locality and territoriality in the young men’s identities, expressed through what the authors call post-code pride. The young men displayed the kind of ‘neighbourhood nationalism’ others have detected in young working class men’s cultures (e.g. Back, 1996). Earle and Phillips discuss the functions of this as resistance, and as status claims, and the complex ways it intersects with local organisations of ethnicities and friendship groups.

Earle and Phillips describe how young white prisoners mostly disavowed ethnicity or understandings of themselves as a 'social group with a culture' on a par with other 'culture rich' groups. The authors, following Nayak (2003) describe how white prisoners articulate an 'ethnicity that is not one'. What, then, in more detail is happening to whiteness and white identities in these new times? The next chapter in Part Two addresses this issue. Simon Clarke, Stephen Garner and Rosie Gilmour chose to work with precisely those groups which Blair seemed to have in mind when organising the rhetorical shape of his 2006 speech – the majority 'we', unfamiliar with diversity on a daily basis, supposedly anxious and restless. As Clarke et al. note, the vast majority of UK nationals live in electoral wards with fewer than 5% black and ethnic minority residents. Clarke et al. find that the people they worked with living in white working class and middle class estates in Bristol and Plymouth consistently express the same kinds of information deficits and confusions about migration and asylum seeking. At odds with the image of the white working class as the 'owner' of racism in Britain, the content of people's concerns did not vary by class although middle-class respondents described these in more abstracted and less immediate terms. What is particularly important in this work is the impression of the 'fragility' of white English identity which emerges. The talk among the sample is of identity injustice and identity theft, the predominant emotion is one of being beleaguered and in this context respondents find it difficult to construct an imagined, sustaining, inclusive, national English community which could be unambivalently endorsed and celebrated.

Chapter 8, the fourth chapter in Part Two, extends the analysis through an examination of the young Somali community in Sheffield. Gill Valentine and

Deborah Sporton describe the complex negotiations of these recent migrants around several possible identity categories and narratives – ‘Somali’, ‘British’, ‘Black’, ‘Muslim’. Valentine and Sporton focus in particular on the identity work of young Somali in disavowing being ‘British’ and ‘Black’. Yet, this disavowal does not mean that alternative categorisations such as ‘Somali’ can be easily embraced. Awareness of emerging differences from those Somali who live in Somaliland, and often extremely complicated histories of mobility, make ‘countries’ an ambivalent point of identification. In these contexts, being Muslim often provides an only and main source of continuity and emotional investment.

Valentine and Sporton’s chapter precisely shows the importance of intelligibility, avowal and disavowal for identity and adds trans-nationalism as a further dimension of identity work in contemporary Britain. This theme is taken up, too, in the final chapter in Part Two from Rosie Cox, Sue Jackson, Meena Khatwa and Dina Kiwan. The authors describe the process of constructing belonging among South Asian and white women living in post-colonial London. Again, this negotiation turns out to be about liveability in Judith Butler’s (2004) sense – how can a viable life emerge, how do women want to be recognised and what forms of recognition are affirming and which debilitating? The authors describe a fascinating series of negotiations through multiculturalist discourses and how ‘London’ itself becomes an actor in the performativities of the women observed and interviewed. This is London understood multiply as a series of concrete spaces, as an imagined place, and as a historical and material site. Cox et al. reveal plural layerings of belonging and the ways in which women carve out ‘homelands’ as they negotiate these spaces.

Popular Culture and Relationality

Part Three of the book turns from the negotiation of ethnicised and racialised identities to popular culture and to a more explicit focus on gender and generation. This Part contains three chapters which in different ways describe subjectively and emotionally intense engagements with popular cultural and narrative resources and thus with the intelligibility conditions for 'telling' identities. The chapters examine the identity work involved in the transition to first-time motherhood, young people's drinking groups and the identities found on reality television and their reception by female viewers. They chart not just the ways in which people engage with cultural narratives and material objects such as advertisements, new kinds of alcoholic drinks, televisions, programmes and notions of ideal motherhood but some of the new relational cultures currently emerging and the identity slots these allow. Part Three returns to the general territory of the individualisation claims reviewed above, and particular arguments within that tradition for the 'transformation of intimacy' (e.g. Giddens, 1993) and for new shapes to biographies. In addition, these last chapters continue to carry forward the theoretical agenda of the book. Along with earlier chapters, they illustrate the creative blurring which is occurring in recent research as investigations of subjectivity and personal identity intertwine with investigations of group-based identities, material and cultural resources and social locations. Their methodologies, including some highly innovative modes of investigation, focused on memory, narrative, affect, symbolic value, embodiment, textual production and relationality demonstrate how social intelligibility and personal intelligibility interweave.

As we saw, individualisation theory and writings about social trends and identity change include some relatively specific claims about the demise of social class and traditional communities but also some broader attempts to identify changing relational practices and the flavour of family life, relationships and friendships, identity narratives, and self and other evaluations. These are in part changes in what Skeggs and Wood describe in their chapter as the 'moral economy' or the kinds of symbolic value placed on particular ways of being in the world. They are also changes, too, to the social organisation of intimate family lives, friendships and social relationships. Giddens (1993), for example, described what he saw as the rise of the 'pure relationship' or relationships for their own sake, so that romantic and sexual partnerships, for instance, become justified through the intrinsic pleasures they offer, becoming an aspiration in themselves rather than in terms of their strategic, traditional or practical value.

Carol Smart (2007) reviewing these debates wisely concludes that such grand theories and claims of identity change serve a useful purpose even if their initial 'excessive popularity' has by now given way to qualification, caveat and stale over-familiarity. She notes that individualisation claims about changing relationship patterns (especially in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work) remain irritatingly non-specific. As she describes (p. 18), individualisation theories create a special moment in history which can then be compared with the present in a way that highlights maximum difference while neglecting existing, careful family historical research showing the much more complicated progression and patterning of change. The chapters in Part Three concur with the general critical assessment of individualisation claims offered by scholars of family life and relationships (e.g. Jamieson, 1998; 1999; Roseneil and

Budgeon, 2004; Williams, 2004), and with the class specificity of individualisation described in the Part One of the book, but they also show that there are new identity phenomena to explain and considerable evidence for ‘compulsory individuality’ and the requirement to be an ‘extraordinary subject’.

Chapter 10 opens Part Three with the transition to first-time motherhood and discusses two case studies of women presenting very different ‘conception stories’. This chapter from Rachel Thomson, Mary-Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield and Sue Sharpe examines how the emergent identity of ‘mother’ takes shape and the kind of ‘memorial’ work involved in developing accounts which may be less or more coherent, selecting, including and excluding from the flux of events. Thomson et al. describe how women’s accounts of this key biographical moment indicate the social and economic resources organising the telling, the differential narrative capitals women possess as well as the current forms of social intelligibility for gender. One main contrast is between the accounts of older middle-class mothers in their wider sample which do often illustrate the kind of careful biographical planning individualisation theorists suggest and the more ‘chaotic’ accounts of younger, less well-resourced, mothers.

The next chapter from Christine Griffin, Andrew Bengry-Howell, Chris Hackley, Willm Mistral and Isabelle Szmigin explores young people’s drinking practices and collective identifications. It describes how young people’s drinking activities have become hedged around by the moralistic identity categories (e.g. ‘binge-drinker’) found in health education discourses and in disparaging, common sense accounts of ‘youth today’. In the face of these, young people have evolved drinking cultures

which, as Griffin et al. describe, are based on ‘determined drunkenness’, ‘the controlled loss of control’ and ‘calculated hedonism’. Yet, the independence which comes from being ‘against official identities’, and from rejecting outsider accounts, is itself a key form of identity address and interpellation used by other powerful identity-ascribing institutions such as the alcohol industry. Alcohol advertisements offer subject positions of rebellion and independence as well as scripts around the pleasures and excitements of belonging to social groups of drinkers.

Like the previous chapter, the authors note a mixed pattern in relation to individualisation. There is evidence for it in the increasing prevalence of consumption and life-style as a marker of identity and in the key role friendship groups play for these young people compared to the former centrality of family. Yet, the picture Griffin et al. paint of young drinkers’ collective identifications is very far removed from Beck and Beck Gernsheim’s (2002: 46) assumption that people are “now forced to live their own life”. Collective identities mutate all the time and forms of solidarity are certainly different these days. Belonging may be only patchily experienced (as it probably always was); but, overall, the young people Griffin et al studied show high levels of social solidarity and mutual support. Their identity performances, and associated self-fashioning through consumption patterns, produce and are achieved through intense group bonding. Similarly, even the poorly resourced first-time mothers Thomson et al. investigated hardly seem unanchored. As Thomson et al. conclude, a life which appears difficult in comparison to carefully planned middle-class trajectories is not automatically unliveable or indeed without its own subtle and sustaining forms of validation and recognition. Again, then, this is clear evidence that the key empirical question is not whether individualisation has occurred as a universal

social phenomenon but who can draw on individualised accounts of identity. When and in what contexts do individualised narratives work, seem appropriate, valuable and normatively encouraged?

The final chapter in Part Three from Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood reports on an innovative study of the identity scenarios found in reality television and the affect, evaluation and judgements they incite in groups of women viewing these programmes. Reality television has become a dominant genre and includes programmes that feature first person accounts from ordinary members of the public of biographical events, and participation in games of self-transformation, make-over and involvement in 'journeys' of self-exploration. Skeggs and Wood argue convincingly that the identity and ethical scenarios constructed in these programmes do substantiate the hypothesised shift in public life to what Lauren Berlant (2000) calls 'intimate citizenship'. Citizens are required to perform 'extraordinary subjectivity' and, in general, the identity performances show the kind of self-authorising and 'religion of me' features diagnosed in contemporary social theory.

Skeggs and Wood, however, question the novelty of this shift, seeing parallels with earlier requirements for self-revealing, reflexive, 'respectability narratives' from working class claimants for poor relief. As ever, what is crucial is who is encouraged to perform, who gets to watch and judge, and what general values get applied as they judge. Skeggs and Wood describe the classed nature of reality television – working class participants predominate, they are set up to perform in ways that will fascinate and horrify and which encourage strong affective reactions in audiences. The new self-reflexivity described by theorists is thus not universally performed and

universally equivalently valued. It is made manifest and, then, regulated in very different ways. For middle-class audiences, evaluating participants in reality television can be a moment of asserting what Skeggs and Wood call, following Savage (2003), the 'particular-universal' aspirations of their class through affective contempt towards the participants and insistence on more 'seemly' ways of self-display. Skeggs and Wood provide an absorbing account of an emerging relational and identity circuit in popular culture as 'the many watch the many' on reality television, pulled into responses to carefully constituted ethical scenarios and thus into self-surveillance, judgement and various normative roundabouts.

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