

A 'tragic gift'?

How older workless men adjust to a life without work

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The (official) benefits of work:

'too many people are excluded from work and left behind on benefits for long periods. This is bad for their health and well-being, their risk of poverty and their independence and autonomy.... Work promotes choice, supports an inclusive society and increases community cohesion'.

(DWP, 2008)



Work as fundamental human need

- Jahoda's theory of 'latent deprivation' (1982)
- 'foundational' (Cole, 2007:1133)
- Unemployment takes away:
 - Shared experience
 - Structured experience of time
 - Collective purpose
 - Status and identity
 - Required regular activity
- Leisure as a 'tragic gift' (Jahoda *et al.*, 1972)



Challenges to Jahoda

1. *'fails to appreciate that paid employment is, for some people, isolating and unpleasant.'* (Ezzy, 1993:46)
2. *'Dependence on a normative assumption of the supra-economic importance of paid work [that implies] the absence of paid work from an adult male life **must** therefore be problematic.'* Cole (2008:1135)



Why research workless older men?

- Dramatic fall in employment rates

		Men	All Men (55-65)
Employment	1979	90.8	79.4
	1997	80.6	58.3
	Change	-10.2	-21
Unemployment	1979	4.3	3.8
	1997	6.2	4.6
	Change	1.9	0.9
Economic Inactivity	1979	4.9	16.8
	1997	13.3	37.1
	Change	8.4	20.3

Source:
Campbell, 1999



• 'Constrained choices' (Campbell, 1999:62)
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Significant barriers to work

- Labour market restructuring:
 - Quantity of work
 - Quality of work
 - Employer discrimination
 - New forms of work
- Older workers ill-equipped to compete:
 - Health problems (physical and mental)
 - Low level of skills
 - Domestic circumstances
 - Benefits trap
 - Confidence, motivation



The policy response

- Raise employment levels to 80% including:
 - 1 million older workers
 - 1 million off incapacity benefit
- ‘Make work pay’ agenda
- New Deal (Disabled People and Fifty Plus)
- Discrimination legislation
- Pathways to Work
- Employment and Support Allowance



The research

- Interviews with 35 older men
- Split between economically active/inactive
- Overspill estate in Greater Manchester
- Former manual workers
- Low level of skills
- Questions: employment history, process of detachment, labour market intentions and routines/activities in the absence of work



Detachment from work

- Permanently detached (18)
- Complex process of detachment
- Significant barriers to work
- Challenge to identity:
 - ‘family breadwinner’ (Crompton, 2006:3)
 - Undermines expectation of a lifetime of work (Alcock *et al.*, 2003)
- How are lives reconstructed in the absence of work?



Reconstructing lives

'Getting nowhere'	'Getting by'	'Getting on'
Poor adjustment to job loss	Fair adjustment to job loss	Good adjustment to job loss
Limited engagement	Partial engagement	Extensive engagement
Activities provide little satisfaction	Activities provide some fulfilment	Activities provide sense of vocation
Bored, frustrated	Satisfied (keeping busy)	Fulfilled



Getting nowhere (1)

- Seven men
- Younger
- Health problems (6)
- Difficult domestic circumstances
- Limited income
- Passive or solitary activities



Getting nowhere (2)

Me: *Since you've not been working, how do you fill your time?*

Farrow: *Oh boredom, total fucking boredom.*

(46, production worker)

Me: *So like the last five years, how do you sort of fill your time in the daytime and stuff?*

Jackson: *I don't [laughing blackly]. Simple as that. I don't...Of course I miss work, I've never been out of work in me life. I'm 46, I was 41 when I come out of work. I started work at 16, there's thirty years of it nearly.*

(46, printer)



Getting by (1)

- Five men
- Health problems (3)
- Younger
- Married (4)
- Limited income
- Caring, hobbies, volunteering or informal work



Getting by (2)

it stops you getting yourself in a vegetative state. You've got to get out the house otherwise you just sit there and I couldn't do that. I'd go round the twist so you've just gotta do things. That's the main thing, keeping yourself busy.

(46, taxi driver)

it's like when you retire, you've been [working] all your life..one day you've to got to stop and you get up that morning and say, what do I do, what do I do with myself? If you haven't got a hobby to fall back on ... you're not going to survive... You've got to keep yourself motivated.

(63, car mechanic).



Getting on (1)

- Six men
- Less severe health problems (4)
- Closer to retirement age
- All married
- Limited (3) or reasonable income (3)
- Activities include caring, voluntary work or broad combination of family, leisure and social activities



Getting on (2)

It's a scriptural thing you know. There's a verse in the bible that says If a man doesn't work he shouldn't eat, right, er but it depends how you look at it really. They don't realise, I suppose, that what I'm doing in a way is a job. They think that you've got to go and clock in somewhere and get paid for it, you know, they don't realise what, in way I'm sort of a butler and a chauffeur, you know, all the things that need doing, and a cleaner, and a childminder and everything.

(43, food production)



Getting on (3)

Price: *I get the enjoyment of doing it [and] other people have the enjoyment of what's turned out at the end of the day.*

Me: *What do you think you'd find hard about going back?*

Price: *Ermm I suppose not having the ability to stop work whenever I wanted .. You see, like here, if I've got a nice sunny day, I could come up at half past seven in the morning and I could work all the way through to three o'clock but to have somebody on me back, you know... at [the local meat packing factory], you're on a production line or something like that. You're either shifting one thing into another thing and then one thing into another place. I suppose I'd find it boring.*

(46, production worker)



Conclusions

- Diversity of response
- Age, domestic and financial situation mediate process of adjustment
- But there *is* a striking propensity to adapt
- Challenges view that exclusion from work is *invariably* negative
- Activities outside the labour market can provide meaning and deliver social benefits



Challenges to Jahoda

1. *'fails to appreciate that paid employment is, for some people, isolating and unpleasant.'* (Ezzy, 1993:46)
2. *'Dependence on a normative assumption of the supra-economic importance of paid work [that implies] the absence of paid work from an adult male life **must** therefore be problematic.'* Cole (2008:1135)



Implications

- Rethink assumptions about the dichotomies of being in and out of work
- Reconsider the emphasis on paid work as primary route of worklessness
- Concerns about the rise of 'poor work' (McDowell, 2003)
- Need to broaden the scope of activities supported through the benefits system
- Social and community activities as alternatives and not adjuncts to work



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- The older men in the inactive group had become permanently or semi-permanently detached from the labour market through an often complex interplay of health problems, redundancy, perceptions of the prospects of finding work again and the operation of the benefits system. This disengagement from the labour market, sometimes at a relatively young age, raised profound questions about what happens to men when their normative expectations of a lifetime of work are undermined by job loss in the context of economic restructuring



Why research older men?

- Large proportion claiming sickness and disability benefits



Introduction/rationale

- Looking at worklessness among older men
- Employment rate 2008
- Economic inactivity
 - Growth 1970s = 400,000 to 2.3million in 1998 (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1999) All men
 - Older workers (50-65) bore disproportionate share of growth in worklessness relative to prime age workers (25-50) (Campbell, 1999)
 - 1998 inactivity among older men aged 50-65 stood at 24.8% compared with 7% in 1970s (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1998)
 - Large proportion claiming sickness and disability benefits
 - Prevalent among low-skilled (men aged 50-57 have employment rate of 62.8% compared to 78.2% of all men (Campbell, 1999)
 - Propensity to be employed in declining industries (Approx one half over 45 formerly employed in industries where employment fell by more than 12% between 1990 and 1995 (Campbell)
 - Uneven geographic distribution – employment rate = 59% in north-east compared to 69.2% for Britain as a whole (Adams, 2005).
 - Involuntary?
 - Economic change Number of full-time male employee jobs fell by nearly 1.5m (13.2%) between 1981 and 1996 female part-time expanded by 1.4 million (38.5%) over same period (Turok and Edge, 1999)
 - For most older workless men labour market withdrawal is a desired form of early retirement but predicated on 'constrained choices and involuntary decisions' (Campbell)
 - Barriers = Health (55% cite long-term sickness as barriers to work compared to 29% retired (Barham, 2002: 301)
 - Ageism (Loretto and White, 2004)
 - Caring responsibilities (people in 50-64 age group most likely to be providing care with 17% of men in this age group fulfilling this function (ONS, 2005)
 - Lack of employment opportunities



Policy context (1)

- Our goals are to: (From NOWO: 23)
 - » • achieve an employment rate of 80 per cent of the working-age population – the highest of any major industrialised country;
 - » • reduce the number of incapacity benefits claimants by one million, help 300,000 more lone parents into work and see one million more older workers;
 - » • halve the number of children living in poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020; and
- provide equality for disabled people by 2025.
- Million older workers back in
- Million people off IB (2008)
- ‘Make work pay’
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Age Positive Campaign
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- New Deal Fifty Plus(2000) and New Deal for Disabled People (2001)
- Pathways/ESA
- Pathways to be extended to all clients under the age of 50 – for those over 50, who have been on benefit for a longer period and therefore face greater barriers to work, we will introduce a lighter touch approach. However we will continue to gather evidence on what is most effective for this age group, piloting a more intensive model in some districts.



Policy context (2)

- Growing conditionality
- Pathways
- ESA – introduced Oct 2008. Will replace IB, alongside a new medical test (Work Capability Assessment) – will assess entitlement to benefit based on what people can do, not what they cannot. (67)



Policy context (3)

- Exemptions from requirement to work
- Very sick
- Carers – Allowance
- Education – JSAwe will begin to introduce changes that mean that 16 hour study rule in JSA will no longer be a barrier to employment focused training Those in receipt of JSA for more than six months will be able to take part in full-time employment related training for up to eight weeks
- Volunteering (59) – ‘can have many advantages for unemployed people as well as the wider community. It can help them keep in touch with the labour market. It can offer opportunities to obtain skills and experience that can make moving into work easier’..Volunteering should not be seen as an alternative to a paid job’. Working –age people claiming benefits can do unlimited voluntary work so long as they continue to meet all the usual entitlement conditions,
- Carers are one of the primary groups on IS and are not currently subject to any work-focused activity, as we recognise the importance of their caring responsibilities (2008: 108) Carer’s strategy (see 6.5 on NOWO)



Previous research

- Worklessness associated with general disengagement from active participation (Scales and Scase, 2000)
- Unemployed and inactive workers have not tended to offset involuntary withdrawal from labour market with social and community activities (PIU, 2000)



Interest in the activities of the unemployed as 'compensations'

- Long tradition of research into activities of unemployed
- Dichotomy – work as natural function
- Negative impact of job loss-
- 'blunting monotony' (Jahoda et al, 1972)
- Without a job there is the slow death of all that makes a man ambitious, industrious and glad to be alive'. (Pilgrim Trust, 1938).

- Interest in leisure/social networks (Bakke, 1933; Jahoda et al, 1933/72):

- [Considering the] *lack of adjustment, the increased mental strain and worry, the decreased sense of his own worth, the feeling that the recovery of his position is to a large extent out of his own hands, the rapid deterioration of mind and spirit to say nothing of body under enforced idleness, it is seen that the use to which the leisure time is put is a matter of real importance.*(Bakke 1935)

- Continues into 1990s -In this respect, researchers were keen to note whether the tendency for 'social withdrawal' (Gallie et al, 1994a: 232) among the unemployed observed by researchers such as Bakke and Jahoda in the 1930s was still evident in the 1990s. From their own research, Gallie et al. (1994:245) found no discernible tendency amongst the unemployed to withdraw from social life, with overall levels of leisure activity similar to that of the employed, albeit in less costly pursuits
- This centred on the notion that leisure derives its value from its function as a corollary of paid employment. As Fineman (1987:241) wrote, '*Leisure has rested symbiotically with work. Destroy the job and leisure is set adrift*'. Such a quote hints at the social construction of leisure as an activity undertaken as an adjunct to rather than a substitute for work.
- In line with this concern to understand the importance of non-work activities, research also focused on the 'sociability' of the unemployed to ascertain whether unemployed individuals could '*find compensations for the loss of employment in their domestic and community life*' (Gallie et al., 1994a:250,232). In this respect, the evidence was largely inconclusive. Gallie et al's (1994a:252) survey work led them to conclude that there were lower levels of sociability among the unemployed than the employed, but that this level of sociability had not changed as a result of job loss. That is to say, these were individuals who were less inclined to socialise anyway.
- Jahoda latent functions – see Cole

- Critique of di



Critique of dichotomous view

- *dichotomous characterisation of work and unemployment [by which] Jahoda appears to romanticise employment and fails to appreciate that paid employment is, for some people, isolating and unpleasant' (Ezzy, 1993:46).*



Search for the dependent variable

- Whilst the interest in non-work activities is of obvious interest here, there are shortcomings to these approaches. Firstly, the implication is that worklessness is invariably less satisfying than work, hence the search for '*compensations*' (Gallie *et al.*, 1994a:232). It could be argued that this is not *necessarily* the case, and fails to consider the meanings attached to work (see Cole, 2007). Secondly, the psycho-social roots of much of this research tends to incline it towards the study of a discrete set of variables deemed likely to influence the experience of job loss. As already noted, this produces the ontological dilemma of what are the appropriate elements of non-working life that warrant study. Finally, these studies largely assumed that worklessness was temporary and were, therefore, concerned with the extent to which such activities served to mitigate the impact of job loss between two periods of employment.
- These shortcomings can be avoided, however, by reframing the question. By asking how well individuals respond to the permanent loss of work, it is possible to sidestep the issue of trying to determine what the constituent components of non-working life are. The focus on the capacity to adjust will invariably highlight a range of roles and activities that come into play after job loss, but avoids pre-determining precisely what these will be. Furthermore, the interest in the nature of lives reconstructed in the wake of loss does not assume that it is invariably a debilitating experience, for which non-work activities are inevitably compensatory in nature, rather than equally or more fulfilling than employment. Finally, in line with the focus on inactive men in this chapter, this research is explicitly concerned with the way older men reconstitute their lives in the wake of permanent detachment from the labour market. It does not rest on the premise that non-work activity is a temporary bridge until the next period of employment. These critiques notwithstanding, earlier waves of research on the 'experience of unemployment' remain salient in terms of their interest in the domestic, leisure and social activities of the unemployed following job loss. It is a concern which has largely been absent from social scientific research and, as Chapter 2 argued, warrants reinstating in studies of worklessness.



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- This concept of habitus subsequently played an integral role in understanding what happened to the older men when they became detached from work but continued to seek employment. Among this group of 17 'active' men, health and redundancy played a key role in labour market exit. It was also noted that the active pursuit of work, including jobsearch activity, did not map neatly onto benefit status with only a minority of the men seeking employment claiming Jobseekers Allowance. This once more highlighted the '*blurred distinction*' (Yeandle, 2003:4) between unemployment and inactivity that exists in the UK. In terms of perceptions of the labour market, it was suggested that the men interviewed were both aware of, and profoundly concerned by, the changes in the employment structure encapsulated in debates around '*poor work*' (McDowell, 2003), '*donkey work*' (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998:5) and '*hyphenated workers*' (Beynon *et al.*, 2002).
 - Although there were concerns expressed about the decline of manufacturing and the quantity of work available, more men seemed perturbed by the low pay on offer, particular in view of the way it undermined the male breadwinner ideal of supporting a family (Crompton, 2006:3, see also Yeandle, 2003a:162). Good pay was, of course, one of the compensations many interviewees had identified with employment in the past. Moreover, there was evidence that interviewees felt marginalised by the growth of temporary work and by the emergence of service sector work. In terms of the latter, both the performative demands of '*emotional labour*' (Hochschild, 2003) and the denial of the possibilities for the assertion of independence and autonomy in service roles seemed to challenge deep-seated notions of what constituted good work. Equally, many of the interviewees seemed unable to conceive of themselves retraining to gain the credentials necessary to work in white-collar environments. The notion of acquiring such skills appeared to disturb a deeply embodied sense of themselves as workers, given to physical tasks rather than 'pen pushing' in a desk job. In summary, there was a pervasive sense that these men regarded their skills, competencies and experiences as manual workers – the essence of their habitus – being rendered increasingly redundant in a restructured labour market.



Miss work

- Whilst these men cannot envisage a return to work in their current circumstances, this does not mean they have lost the desire to work. The inability to fulfil this need appears to generate feelings of intense discontent:
- Farrow: *I want to work, don't get me wrong. I can't be doing with sixty quid a week.*
- Me: *And would you say you miss it, not working?*
- Farrow: *Oh god, yeah. I'd go back tomorrow if I could...I used to work, do a few hours a day, twelve hour nights, seven days a week so the money used to be flowing in. Then you go onto a hundred and thirty pound a fortnight income support and it's like, [pulls disgusted face as though looking at money in hands] what's this? Big shock*
- (Farrow, 46, former security guard).
- Me: *And do you miss work?*
- Jackson: *Of course I miss work, I've never been out of work in me life. I'm 46, I was 41 when I come out of work. I started work at 16, there's thirty years of it nearly. Even when I couldn't hold jobs down, I was always in work* (Jackson, 46, former printer)

