Hopes for the Future: Parents' and Children's Narratives of Children's Future Employment Orientations

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Abstract

'What do you want to be when you grow up?' is a question often asked of children yet little is known about how children and their parents think about their future in terms of employment. This paper, based on qualitative longitudinal research with 14 families, explores children's and parents' narratives about children's employment futures, illuminating the values, social relations and structures through which such narratives are formed. The paper reflects on the extent to which children's present lives are future orientated and the ways this future orientation manifests itself in everyday life. The findings highlight the hopes expressed by parents and the nature of parental influence in shaping their children's futures. While children's futures were not developed as precise plans, there were many ways in which they were being 'planned'. Choices were expanded or narrowed and trajectories mapped out through parents' and children's hopes, dreams and assumptions for what the future would hold. This 'planning' was framed by the families' individualised biographies and their socio-economic position.

Keywords: *Children's Futures; Intensive Parenting; Employment*

Introduction

1.1 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' is a question often asked of children yet little is known about how children and their parents think about their future in terms of employment. In recent years increasing attention has been given to the sociological study of the future (Adam and Groves 2007). Previous neglect of this temporal modality is perhaps understandable given that the present, and indeed the past, are more accessible to social researchers; we can observe, experience and discuss people's lives as they are now and as they were, but the future seems something much less tangible, as by its very nature it is 'yet to be'. However, by exploring future narratives it is possible to illuminate the values, social relations and structures through which such narratives are formed (Ramos Torré 2007). Narratives around children's futures are particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, childhood is often perceived as a process of becoming, that is, as a future-oriented timeframe. While this has been critiqued as resulting in a lack of attention to and understanding of 'being', that is, of children's agency in shaping their lives, (James et al 1998) it is important not to ignore the significance of 'becoming' in relation to children's presents and futures (Uprichard 2008). 'Becoming' relates to the transformation as children move into adulthood and as such it is inherently connected to the future (Coleman 2008). However little is known about the significance of children's future employment orientations as part of the narratives of 'becoming'.

1.2 Second, the future orientation of childhood as a timeframe is reflected in political discourses and policies which emphasise parental responsibility and the management of risk in the production of a successful adult. Indeed children are at the heart of economic and social policies focussed on investing in the nation's future and parents are key players in the development of children as 'citizen-workers of the future' (Lister 2006). Recent debate has pointed to the shift in policy discourse around parenting from being a personal relationship to one that must be learnt and must be done correctly, given the belief that the implications of 'bad' parenting are experienced by the whole of society (Gillies 2010). As the state, in some respects, steps out of families' lives, parents experience an intensification of responsibility (Thomson et al 2011) for the child as they move through their life, but also for the adult that they become (Hoffman 2010). In doing so, research indicates that parents, particularly middle class parents, are

increasingly micro-managing their children's lives in order to avoid the risks inherent in reaching this successful outcome through a process of 'concerted cultivation', ensuring that their children have the resources, the social, academic and cultural capital, to have a 'good' future (Lareau 2003). Within this debate, the extent to which parents 'cultivate' their children's employment futures and the engagement of children in this process has not fully been addressed.

1.3 This article explores children's and parents' narratives of children's employment futures. It addresses how children's employment futures are conceptualised; whether parents and children are engaged in planning futures; how children's futures are negotiated; and whether age and socioeconomic structures are significant factors in shaping children's imagined futures. In the next section the project from which the data are drawn is outlined. Following this, a brief discussion of sociological work around the future and future employment orientations is presented. Finally, the findings are presented and discussed.

The Study

2.1 This paper presents findings from a qualitative longitudinal study, entitled 'Work and Family Lives: The Changing Experiences of 'Young' Families'^[1] which investigated processes of negotiation between parents and their primary-school-aged children in addressing issues raised by working parenthood; how such issues impact on everyday family practices; and how these change over time in response to changes in work and family circumstances, including those in children's lives. Fourteen families were recruited to take part in the 'Work and Family Lives' study. This consisted of 14 mothers, 8 fathers, and 16 children (aged between 7 and 11 at the inception of the research^[2]). Five were lone-mother households and 9 were heterosexual couple families. All parents were in paid employment (11 full-time, 9 part-time), apart from two retirees. Levels of total annual household income (before tax) ranged from £20,000 to over £60,000^[3].

2.2 A multiple perspectives approach was taken involving parents and children, in order to build a rich and complex picture of everyday family life (Harden et al 2010). The study entailed three waves of data collection: individual interviews with parents and children in Waves 1 and 3 with a family group interview^[4] conducted in Wave 2. The waves were carried out approximately 9 months apart.

2.3 Children's and parents' understandings about children's futures in work were explored in a number of ways. They were addressed directly through a number of questions to parents and children about their future in five years and, for the children, questions about when they would be in their 20s. Participants were also asked to comment on a three-part vignette, designed to explore values around work and education, relating to an argument between a mother and daughter about a late homework assignment. Beyond these explicit questions, comments about the future were often embedded in discussions around other topics within the interviews.

2.4 Analysis was conducted iteratively between interviews and between waves in order to inform ongoing analytical reflections and enhance subsequent data collection. Analysis was carried out both individually by the research fellow and through team discussions. It was then facilitated by NVivo where transcripts were systematically coded according to a range of broad emergent themes. Coding categories were subsequently analysed in more detail taking into account the impact of structural factors (e.g. class, age, gender) on the existence and manifestation of themes across the data. Given the small number of low income families, a comparative class analysis between families was necessarily limited. Despite these limitations, differences clearly emerged, some of which are discussed in this article.

Time, futures and employment

3.1 Adam discusses time as a social concept and argues that we can understand people's lives through a 'timescape' perspective - a temporal vista, bringing into focus a temporal view of the world (Adam 2004). She argues that time is complex and multidimensional and involves an understanding of how people conceive of and experience time (Adam 2004). By addressing narratives of time we can explore the interrelationship between people's understandings of time rooted in their own biographies, their relationships to peers and to generations above and below, and the ways in which they consider their lives to be shaped by wider social, economic and political events and processes.

3.2 Historically we can see broad cultural shifts in how futures are understood (Leccardi 1999), in particular the emergence of a modernist view of the 'open' future, as an imagined state that is distinctly separate from past and present, over which we have control (Adam and Groves 2007: 11). Yet with this openness comes a sense of uncertainty and risk. It has been argued that in facing risk and uncertainty we produce reflexive biographies that not only reshape the past and present but also plan expected futures (Beck 1992; Binkley 2009). In policy terms these ideas also reflect the individualism at the heart of neo-liberal discourses. Neoliberalism emphasises individual responsibility and self-management alongside a focus on managing risk and so creates a sense of a future that *should* be under control.

3.3 Adam (2008) questions the disconnection between past, present and future implied in the open future discourse. Conventional wisdom presents a linear relationship in which the past shapes the present, and both past and present shape the future. But this loses sight of fact that, as Adam says, actions and processes associated with futures are on-going. There is a dynamic interaction between the temporal modalities. What we do now and have done in the past is inherently linked to our futures and those of future generations. What we expect or hope from the future shapes our present actions and redefines our pasts. This challenges the idea of future as empty or open and positions it as constructed and negotiated through present and past. It also points to the generational dimension of the future; it is not interconnected with past and present but with the interrelated generations that inhabit those temporal

locations. As will be discussed, this is particularly significant when reflecting on parents and children's perspectives of the future.

Young people, employment and futures: uncertainty and planning

4.1 Exploring the relationship between the past, present and the future and the extent to which the future is actively constructed and negotiated, research has identified ways in which the present and future intersect in the context of employment and young people's lives. It has been argued that the concept of the open future no longer applies as the future becomes defined by anxiety and an absence of control rather than desire and planning (Leccardi 1999). Sennett has argued that it is our experiences in employment that are fundamental to creating a heightened sense of uncertainty and loss of control over the future, limiting the connections drawn between past, present and future (Sennett 1998). People are now 'gambling' with their life as the implications of decision making regarding employment pathways becomes increasingly difficult to determine.

4.2 Brannen and Nilsen (2002) assert that young adults no longer perceive time in a linear chronological fashion where the future is perceived as a continual progression from the present and past. They argue that pressure on time and an increased sense of busyness mean that present time is stretched into the 'extended present' (Nowotny 1994). This "not only stops people from imagining the future; it stops them from doing anything about it or creating changes in the future" (Brannen 2005: 117). Brannen and Nilsen argue that young people have difficulty engaging in the forms of 'life planning' associated with the individualisation of transitions to adulthood as a feature of late modernity (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Anderson et al (2002; 2005) offer a contrasting position to Brannen and Nilsen based on their survey research which indicated that young people were engaged in long term future planning. However, in their response, Brannen and Nilsen (2007) question the validity of Anderson et al's claims given that the evidence for young people's planning was derived from the conflation of a range of terms including 'forethought' and 'ambition'. Nilsen (1999) distinguishes between thinking about and planning the future through the terms 'plans, hopes and dreams'. Dreams are abstract goals not constrained by the present; hopes are vague goals that relate to an individual's present circumstances; and plans are goals that are defined in relation to time and space. So, the future does not disappear entirely but enters the realm of daydreams indicating the absence of control. Daydreams maintain a sense of desire at what the future may bring but free the individual from the risk of error that is inherent in planning and strategies of action. (Leccardi 1999).

4.3 Brannen and Nilsen also point to the continued significance of the structural constraints on the ways in which, and the extent to which people engage in thinking about the future though they warn against adopting a simplistic analytic position relating to either 'choice' or 'standardized' biographies (Brannen and Nilsen 2007). They argue that it is important to situate an understanding of young people's transitions in their perception and experience of time, shaped by wider structural factors including educational opportunities, gender, social class, ethnicity, constructions of youth, and parental influence (Brannen and Nilsen 2002).

4.4 While the research discussed above offers insights into the influences shaping young adults' future orientations, parental influence is something that has not been fully explored in this work. Most likely this is because of the focus on adult, albeit young adult perspectives. We argue that an exploration of these issues at an earlier stage in the lifecourse can contribute to an understanding not only of children's and parents' lives but can feed into the debates discussed above in relation to young adults.

Findings

Hopes and dreams

5.1 It was noted above that the relevance of understanding the future as a continual upwards progression appears to have declined. However for some parents in this study, this notion of the future as involving progression for their children, far from being rejected, epitomised their views of the relationship between generations past, present and future. This was expressed as the hope for their children to 'do better' than they had.

I would prefer her to be, slightly better off, so she wouldn't have to work two jobs for a start, make life easier for herself, nine till five sitting in an office, if she chooses that. (Jane Heath)

Well you always want better for your bairns. You always want your bairns to not have it as hard as what you've got it. (Alan Clarke)

5.2 One of Alan's sons Ryan, the only child in the sample who expressed this view, was very aware of his father's concerns

He says he'd rather I'd stick it in - same as my mum basically. He'd rather I stick it in and get a better job than he's ever got....Because they think I should be treated better than what they've been treated, because they'd rather me get more money to spend on my family, than they are doing right now. They'd rather get me to have a better educated brain. (Ryan Clarke, 10)

5.3 However, this sense of generational progression was not expressed by all families. It was the four lowest income families who spoke in these terms and among the other families there were very specific reasons relating to work patterns or concerns about health.

I want them to basically move on from where I am perhaps so they don't have to work overseas, that they can be with their families, in the hope that my sacrifices now will maybe lead them to a better life. (Owen Fisher)

I think we all try to make sure that our children do better than - I know I want my son to do better than I've done..... I worry that my genes have been given to him, which I can't do anything about. (Hugh Shaw)

5.4 This suggests that this sense of 'doing better' was most often associated with an improvement in socio-economic circumstances, grounded in parents' experiences in work and expressed as a hope that their children's futures would be different to their own. The absence of this concept among most of the more affluent families appeared to derive from a focus on stability and on maintaining present lifestyle and economic position as opposed to the upward movement expressed by the lower income families through the idea of progress and improvement. This contrasting understanding of the future as progression/maintenance suggests the significance of socio-economic position, embedded in parents' own past and present, in shaping parents' understanding of their children's future. Reflected in both positions are their hopes for their children's futures rooted in an understanding of children's futures as part of a family's trajectory as well as that of the individual child.

(Un)certainty: navigating the unknown

5.5 While parents and children acknowledged the uncertainty associated with the unknowable future in realising these hopes, they also stressed certain assumptions. Most fundamentally, there was an expectation expressed by both parents and children that children's futures would involve being in paid work. For many parents this work imperative was linked into their family biography.

Well, basically I've always worked, realistically, fae (from) she went to school, and she's always seen aunties, uncles, cousins. It's just in our nature to be working. (Jane Heath)

5.6 Most of the children explicitly referred to paid work as an expectation for their future. When asked to imagine their lives in their 20s they all mentioned being in work, sometimes using phrases such as 'obviously' with the idea of not working as 'really ridiculous'. When asked what they thought about their parents not working, the children often presented disaster scenarios relating to a life without work such as losing their home and having to live on the streets. For example, one boy spoke about the implications of his mother not working.

Well she needs to save up and without the money she gets from her work she can't pay for our food, or, or like the bills, or the house... and we couldn't keep the house, then we would have to live out in the streets or something (Jack Erskine, 8).

5.7 Work was therefore described by both parents and children as an assumed feature of children's futures and was central to parental hopes for generational progression or maintenance. However, both parents and children indicated that it was difficult to 'know' children's future occupations in any detail at this stage. Some of the children had 'absolutely no idea' (Aidan Rankin, 10) what they would like to do and others expressed a range of employment dreams based on their current interests, for example, being a footballer. The children were encouraged to 'dream', that is to imagine an employment future unbridled by reality. For example Maggie and Alan Clarke created an outdoor playhouse with one side focussed on construction and the other on cookery, reflecting their sons' current interests in potential areas of employment.

5.8 Nevertheless there were many ways in which parents had begun to shape these dreams, reflecting their own hopes for their children's futures. Emma Phillips described a conversation about work with her daughter Charlotte.

I said to Charlotte, 'What do you want to be then?' "I want to be unemployed". 'Pardon?' "I want to be unemployed". 'Why do you want to be unemployed?' "I would like to have a dog and we can't have a dog because you're at work and if you're unemployed, you get money for doing nothing and if I run out of money, you'd give me money wouldn't you?" 'So you think I'm going to go to work to earn money, to give to you, because you want to stay at home and look after the dog?' "Yes". I said 'You might be mistaken about that.'

5.9 It seemed that Charlotte's 'dream' of being unemployed was rooted in her present experience; her desire to own a dog and her current financial security in a dependent situation. However from her mother's perspective this was not a dream to be encouraged. Indeed this was perhaps a nightmare rather than a dream for parents given their emphasis on the centrality of paid work for their children's futures. Our fieldwork suggested, therefore that children were limited by their parents in the extent to which they were able to express their dreams of a future unconstrained by their parents' present and future concerns. This parental influence was also evident in the distinctions drawn between different forms of employment.

5.10 Both children and parents were asked how they would define a 'good' job and most related it to being well paid and specified what was *not* a good job.

Well, not a dustbin cleaner. Like, something that pays decently so you can, like, get a, like, an okay house, like, not one of these, like, flats and live in a flat all your life. Like actually get a proper house. And, like, so you have enough money to, say, if you want kids and you have a family, so you can look after your family. And, you know, just something that pays

decent. (Hannah Phillips, 11).

Like a job that'll leave enough money to have a family, and stuff like that. Not like a terrible job like a chimney sweep or something (Aidan Rankin, 11).

5.11 Parents and children also mentioned enjoyment as an important aspect of a 'good' job. Some parents described enjoyment in terms of a sense of fulfilment which, in turn, was connected to the nature of the work and was rooted in their own experiences. For Graham Reid, who owned an IT company, having control over what you do was important and he illustrated this with the example of what work should *not* be.

Manual labour, I mean it's that sort of just no control, turn up, this is what you do and you just do one thing and you do it for forty hours a week and then and you get a crap wage as well. (Graham Reid)

5.12 Though speaking from a very different background, as a storeroom worker for a supermarket, Alan Clarke made a very similar point.

A job with a bit of satisfaction. Not working for a supermarket chain, or companies like that. A bit more than shoving things in boxes or boxes into cages. That's just about what I've done all my life: manual jobs. Maybe 60 percent of the population do it so in a way it's not an embarrassment, but it doesn't help knowing that I've spent all my life and I'll spend the rest of my life earning money for other people and not seeing really all that much at the end of the day. (Alan Clarke)

5.13 Graham Reid presented an outline of a 'bad' job that was the antithesis of his own and to which he did not want his children to enter, and so reinforced his hope for generational maintenance; for his children to follow him into white collar work. Alan Clarke on the other hand outlined a 'bad' job as the kind of job he was currently employed in reiterating his hope for generational progression. Interestingly Ryan Clarke was the only child to define a 'good' job as involving anything other than pay or enjoyment and encapsulated his father's dislike of the work in this comment on work, status and identity.

Getting treated better and getting good enough pay for what you're doing....There's less people going about saying, 'you're stupid' and that. And you dinnae ken anything at all, and stuff like that. Treated like – 'well hi, Ryan 'how are you doing?' and stuff like that. (Ryan Clarke, 9)

5.14 Children's work futures were therefore expressed indirectly in social class terms. While comments from parents and children were often not specific to particular occupations, there was a clear sense that working class jobs were associated with 'bad' futures.

Planning: The right path

5.15 Just as paid work formed part of the assumed future for children, the way to achieve this was also expressed as an assumed trajectory. Hopes for children's employment futures were linked directly into children's present lives through the emphasis on doing well in school. While some families referred to conversations they had had about the importance of school qualifications, for example Julia Fisher

Jason will say 'I want this when I'm older, I want that', and I'll say 'then you need to study and get a really good job because that's the only way you're going to get money to do that' (Julia Fisher).

5.16 Other parents referred to it as a taken-for-granted, unspoken assumption – "it's always unsaid really that education is important" (Andrew Wilson). The children often described a link between educational success and a future in work, focussing on the implications of not doing well, including not being able to find work or working in 'bad' jobs. Calum described a scenario of a future without good qualifications.

I'm not saying this happens to everybody, but the majority of people who leave school at sixteen, you're not going to have the best of degrees, and you're probably going to end up working in McDonalds or in a shop, which doesn't really give good money, and it just won't be a very financially stable good life, you know what I mean?... 'cause you'll be rewarded later on in your life if you do work hard... You'll have a nice house, a nice car, it'll just be a happier life instead of living in, like... I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it, but living in, like, a council estate for the rest of your life, and not having the good stuff, just has to be the low ranking of everything. (Calum Ritchie, 11)

5.17 Our analysis suggests that the parents' accounts showed that they tended to focus more on the positive aspects of educational success in terms of the choices and opportunities that it brings, rather than on the negative implications of not doing well in school, as this example from Hugh Shaw highlights.

I try to emphasise to Robert, the harder you work the better qualifications you get and the more chances you'll get - the more opportunities you'll get.

5.18 Ensuring educational success related to some families' choice of high school and there were concerns expressed by parents and children about the outcomes associated with particular schools. Charlotte spoke of her father's warning associated with attendance at the local school

My dad says, "right you're going to this high school or you'll end up as a dustbin cleaner" (Charlotte Phillips, 10).

5.19 One family considered relocating into a different area because they did not want their son to go to the local high school. Marie Wilson accepted a job in a different part of the country and the family were planning to move but when her son was given a place locally in the school of their choice they decided to stay where they were and decline the job offer.

5.20 Similarly, the emphasis on education as the 'right' path was reflected in both parents and children's discussion of homework. Some parents referred to the importance of homework in maintaining or improving educational performance. Here Gillian Nicholson warned her son of the implications of not keeping up with his work:

You're doing so well, you'll get dropped down a reading group if you don't do your homework.

5.21 There were also concerns expressed by the children around not completing homework tasks or not working hard on them.

Because you're supposed to do your homework the day you get it, that's what we do, and if you don't then you've got less time to do it and it'll be less better. So you actually won't get better marks from your teacher, which won't be helpful at school. (Jack Erskine 10).

5.22 Nevertheless, within the context of the time pressures recounted by both parents and children, homework was also often described in terms of 'get it over and done with' (Andrew Wilson) or when there was no homework it was 'one less thing to worry about' (Rachel Erskine). Though most parents said that they checked or signed off their children's homework, the children were mostly completing their homework on their own while parents were busy with other household tasks. The children were very aware of the limits on their parents' time as this example from Hannah illustrates

I ask my mum when she's going to be finished one thing and how much time she's, like, got, and... so she can help me. So what I'd do is I'd do the thing I, like my homework, until she's ready to help me and, like, then I'd get her help (Hannah Phillips, 11)

5.23 While still referring to the importance of educational qualifications, a few of the parents questioned the automatic and inevitable trajectory into a 'good' employment future that educational success can bring in the current economic context.

In this day and age, I don't think it's necessarily that way, I mean, yes, if you work hard, you'll get the qualifications, but unfortunately these days, qualifications don't necessarily guarantee you a job of any kind. (Sally Shaw)

5.24 This highlights a degree of uncertainty reflected in parents' accounts that can in part be attributed to the current recession (Maclean et al 2010). However, from their discussion of non-academic trajectories into work it is clear that for most, education was still considered a more predictable pathway. Non-academic trajectories were described as more restricted route to take, involving the need to work harder for success and parents often drew on their own experiences in either academic or non-academic trajectories. Many parents referred to non-academic trajectories as more precarious with reference to 'luck' or 'chance' as leading to success. The idea of the future as being shaped by luck is in stark contrast to the expectation that doing well in school is a solid foundation for a successful employment future. Such views of children's futures were highlighted further by the responses given to a suggested alternative trajectory. Both parents and children were given a vignette to comment on describing a conversation between a mother and daughter about a forgotten homework assignment as part of which the daughter states that she does not need to do well at school because she can win the lottery or marry a millionaire. Almost all parents and children responded to this using terms such as 'unlikely', 'unrealistic' and 'the wrong way to go'. In this quote Lisa described the potential outcome as an explanation for why this is not only a less certain, but also a more dangerous pathway to the future.

But she doesn't know that, that she'll win the lottery. She thinks she might win the lottery, but she might be somebody that's on the street, that's got no money if she doesn't pay attention at school...She might marry a millionaire, but the guy, the millionaire might be horrible to her and be nasty, and maybe threaten her. So money doesn't like really bring happiness because he can maybe threaten her to kill her and stuff. (Lisa Heath, 11)

Future Oriented Values

5.25 Many of the parents referred to the responsibility they felt towards ensuring their child's present and future successes.

'You as a parent do have a responsibility to make sure your child is doing their best, fulfilling their own potential, but not in a way that's putting pressure on them'. (Marie Wilson)

5.26 However, parents also expressed concerns that while they considered themselves to be responsible for shaping their children's futures, their control over this was limited.

'What a parent's value puts on something is not what a child will because you can give

them a framework but they can come out with something that's going to be quite different'. (Fiona Christie)

And you try to make sure that your children don't make the same mistakes you do. Whether they do or not is a different matter. You can only - it's the old horse to water... (Hugh Shaw)

5.27 Parents seemed therefore to be torn between shouldering the responsibility for their child's future but acknowledging that ultimately it is 'down to them'. This led to an emphasis on the significance of instilling the right values in children and so setting them up to take the 'right' decisions; to follow the 'right' trajectory leading to a good future.

'It's actually a work ethic which I am actually trying to instil...you will only get something if you work for it'. (Gillian Nicholson)

5.28 In a similar vein, parents described the importance of 'doing their best'.

'As long as you reflect what you're truly capable of then whatever you get from that, whatever you gain from that, is what you deserve'. (Rachel Erskine)

5.29 These values were both present and future oriented; grounded in the importance of hard work in the present but envisaging future rewards as an anticipated outcome. As was noted above, children tended to voice this in terms of the problems that might arise if you did not work hard, such as not getting a job or the right kind of job, or ending up living on the streets. This sense of a future orientation was also reflected in the parents' description of the kind of adults they wanted their children to become, not just what they wanted them to be doing. Many of the parents referred to the need for children to become self-reliant adults through work and to be motivated and aspirational.

'I think the most important thing in life is to have goals and go for them even if you don't necessarily get there, just to get up and keep trying and not give up'. (Debra Grieve)

5.30 Such values and aspirations also related to parents' expressed concerns that children's potential may be wasted if they do not try hard; they may miss out on a future that could have been theirs if they had worked harder. So, while ultimately it is 'down to them', parents still expressed a responsibility to ensure that children were encouraged to 'do their best'. This sense of a lack of control by parents at times appeared to lead parents towards more extreme reactions towards trigger situations. In an attempt to drive home the values they wanted to instil in their children parents sometimes presented worst case scenarios. Calum described his parents' response to the suggestion that he might leave school at 16.

'If that's what I really did want to do, they wouldn't want to be part of me, in my life, because my mum said if I leave school at sixteen, I'm going to be out of the house, or I have to pay my mum and dad if I want to stay here, so pay for my part of the food, like a bed, so that's what they've...they've said that to me already'. (Calum Ritchie, 11)

Discussion

6.1 It has been argued that late modernity is characterised by a transformation in the way we perceive time with greater significance given to a future-orientation involving a higher level of reflexivity and life planning (Beck 1992; Beck Gernsheim 1996). From this perspective, we face the uncertainties and risks which shape our lives as reflexive individuals, aware of, and constantly monitoring our present actions with future outcomes in mind. However, from the parents' and children's future narratives we can see that they were not 'planning' the future, in the sense of setting out specific, contextualised or precise plans. Moreover, the busyness that is seen to prevent people from planning futures and traps them in the 'extended present' (Nowotny 1994) was evident in the families' accounts, particularly in relation to homework. Despite placing educational success at the heart of their trajectory towards a 'good' future, parents and children referred to the struggle to fit homework into their lives and it was often listed alongside other less significant domestic tasks as things that they needed to 'get done'.

6.2 Nevertheless, the study identified ways in which children and parents were reflexively engaged in minimising or avoiding perceived risks and in so doing, were navigating their way towards a 'chosen' future. Parents and children situated their future hopes in relation to the perceived risks associated with particular education-work trajectories, most notably the focus on success in education as the right path towards a good future; there was evidence of an instrumental approach towards education as a future oriented pathway expressed by parents and children. This reflects findings from surveys with 80% of parents stating that education was very important in helping children do well in life (Irwin and Elley 2011). Similarly, Bradley and Devadason (2008) found that young adults adopt an 'internalized flexibility', a key part of which is an acceptance of the value of education and training in adapting to living with insecurity in their employment futures.

6.3 The education-work trajectory was linked closely to certain values espoused by parents and children; adopting the values of hard work, setting goals and doing your best were considered to provide a solid foundation upon which a good future could be built. Such values and beliefs may be linked to wider cultural values shaped by welfare and education regimes (Devadason 2008). It is also important to situate the values expressed in parents and children's accounts, in the context of parenting, childhood and the family. Indeed, the prominence of the family as the key institution shaping children's lives was embedded in children's and parent's accounts. Children's futures were presented as shaped by both parental influence and the individual effort of the child with few references made explicitly to wider structural factors that may play a part in shaping futures. Rather, parents' reflexive engagement with their children's

futures were situated within individualised family narratives expressing a sense of shared family identity, for example, describing work as 'in our nature'. Children were expected to adopt values and practices that would ensure the reproduction of this identity.

6.4 The future can be considered to be a moral process, a key part of which was the transmission of significant values that were in part a reflection of how the parents felt that their children should behave, but also related to the notion of the child as future adult. There was evidence of the individualization of futures that reflects the wider neo liberal discourses shaping our understandings of family life and of parenting in particular (Lee et al 2010). The notion of parental responsibility lay at the heart of the future narratives we have described; parents considered themselves responsible for 'planning' the life of their child to ensure a successful outcome.

6.5 Yet the meaning of that successful outcome differed between the low income and more affluent families highlighting the influence of social class in shaping future narratives (Irwin and Elley 2011). This was most stark in the differential hope expressed by parents around generational progression or maintenance – change or continuity. The concept of generation is significant in the construction of children's futures as families wove together the biographical threads of past, present and future. Rather than referring to generations in a Mannheimian sense, generation is understood here primarily as a relational concept that illuminates the interconnections between parents and children (Alanen 2001) and between past, present and future (Adam and Groves 2007). The parents' narratives reflected classed practices aimed at ensuring intergenerational social reproduction (Jones et al 2004). For the more affluent parents this meant trying to ensure that their children followed in their footsteps, moving into white collar, professional jobs. While there was often mention made of encouraging children to fulfil their dreams, described by some as part of the process of concerted cultivation (Vincent and Ball 2007), our findings demonstrate that this individualized ethos is not always as open as it first appears. Though not explicitly stated, it was clear that a bad future was associated with the employment experiences of lower socio-economic groups and parents actively discourage their children from dreams that they perceive to be leading children in the 'wrong' direction.

6.6 This may reflect middle class anxieties around their children's downward social mobility but was also reflected in the views of the lower income families that their children 'do better' than they had. The lower income parents aspired to a generational change as part of which their children would benefit from the opportunities that they perceived that education could offer. While Irwin and Elley (2011) found that working class parents tended to be less confident about the education-work trajectory as securing a good future but this was not something found in this study, perhaps as a result of the small number of lower income families. This difference may also relate to the age of the children. It may be that when considering their children's employment, the future seems more open, more full of possibilities to which they can aspire, when the children are younger and it is only as they enter high school that that sense of opportunity and change is closed down. St Clair et al (2011) found that the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged areas were high but they also noted change between the age of 13 and 15 as their career goals became more realistic.

6.7 There was acknowledgement among parents that despite their efforts, the future remained uncertain and risk laden. While in part this related to their concerns about economic change in the context of the recession, it also raises the issue of whose future it is. Children's ownership of their future was acknowledged by parents with some reticence and they expressed concern about the implications of 'bad' choices for their children's future adult lives, but also as a potential reflection of their failure to meet their parental responsibilities. At this stage in children's lives it is clear that parents were still actively engaged in structuring children's present lives and in providing the blueprint for what children's futures would entail. Although there were times when the everyday practices that grounded future narratives were negotiated, for example in relation to disagreements around homework, the children showed little evidence of questioning parental involvement or presenting an alternative vision. The parents' and children's narratives were very similar and in many cases it was possible to see a family story being told, reflecting the power relations evident in the generational order (Alanen 2001). Parents acknowledged the fluidity of this situation in expressing their concerns that their control would diminish as the children grew older. However parental influence may remain significant. Jones et al (2004) noted young people's lack of power in asserting their own choices for post school trajectories.

Conclusion

7.1 By exploring future narratives we can see that children's employment futures were significant in families' lives not simply as a far off imagined time, but one which was firmly embedded in present everyday practices, values and past experiences. Parents were clearly influenced and to an extent, buying into the individualisation reflected in neoliberalism and were shouldering the responsibilities of decision making around their own employment, but also the future employment of their children. However, by exploring the everyday routines of families it is possible to see a tension between what parents think they *should* be doing and what they *are* doing. It is also clear that their lives are shaped by wider events such as the recession and by their social class position. It is only by looking at the interaction of biographical, intergenerational and historical time that we can begin to form a picture of how children's futures are formed and reformed in people's everyday lives.

Notes

¹The study was part of the ESRC Timescapes research initiative which involved a consortium of five UK universities and was made up of seven empirical projects which follow people over time, investigating the

ways in which their personal relationships and identities unfold over the life course.
<<http://www.timescapes@leeds.ac.uk>>.

²In presenting data from the children, the age of children reflects the stage in the project so may vary.

³We hoped to recruit a range of working families in terms of income, family and job type, however despite considerable investment of time and effort, we only recruited four 'lower income' families. The threshold of £30K was based on the UK average household income (DWP 2008).

⁴Family interviews were conducted with the aim of bringing the group dynamics into focus and to allow observation of the interplay of personalities and relationships.

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