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The impact of elder care on female academics: troubling narratives of private ills

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Paper presented in the conference 'Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters', University of Huddersfield, 19 June 2014

Constructive comments on this draft paper would be most welcome, please send any feedback on it to h.colley@hud.ac.uk and v.burr@hud.ac.uk

Introduction

The norm of families supported by one male breadwinner, with women largely confined to unpaid work within the family, has for some decades been outdated, and most women now participate in paid employment. However, this has not swept away gender inequalities in the division of labour within the home: women also still undertake the majority of work within the household, especially routine housework and caring (Kan et al, 2011). As birth rates fall and the life expectancy of older generations increases, both governments and employers are requiring people to work longer in terms of years. The influence of neo-liberal performativity and productivity drives, intensified by the global economic crisis, also require people to work longer and/or more intensive hours. Moreover, this economic situation is leading to cutbacks in the welfare state, including increased devolvement of care for retired elders back to the family. The futures faced by middle-aged women therefore involve? a key paradox: just as they encounter the demand to work harder and later into their lives, they are also expected to take on more responsibility for the care of elderly parents (Kröger and Yeandle, 2013).

Feminist research and grass-roots women's rights movements, including within trades unions, have made considerable progress over recent decades in drawing policy attention to the pressures on working mothers; efforts reinforced by economic concerns to maximise workforce capacity by including women. In many countries this has won greater support from the state and/or employers for maternity leave, affordable childcare and flexible working practices to reconcile caring with paid employment (Burr and Colley, 2013). Yet awareness of the growing pressures of elder care have not been the subject of similar policy reforms, despite the fact that we know women are more likely than men to reduce their working hours, give up employment altogether, miss out on opportunities for training or promotion, and have reduced incomes because of caregiving. Similarly, as Kröger and Yeandle (2013) note, surprisingly little academic attention has thus far been paid to elder care and the gender inequalities associated with it. Insofar as related policies are being pursued, there seems to be a division between those arguing that the welfare state should be reinforced to provide elder care (ref), and those who believe that a marketised model is the way forward (ref).

This disparity between attention to motherhood and neglect of eldercare is reflected in research on women in the academy. Whilst there is literature which considers the impact of child-bearing and -rearing on women academics' work and careers (e.g. refs), we have so far been unable to locate any that discusses the impact of elder care. Although the latter is becoming somewhat more acknowledged in informal fora and the media, it tends to be simply added alongside childcare, without detailed insight into the everyday experiences of elder care for women academics. This

paper therefore addresses that gap in knowledge, by drawing on a pilot project with women working in one university in the north of England.

[Signpost rest of paper]

Narrative research: identity matters?

Because of our concern to understand in detail the impact of elder care on women's lives and work, we adopted a narrative approach. As Bathmaker (20xx: 3) puts it:

A significant and important feature of narrative and life history research is that they provide a means of getting closer to the experience of those whose lives and histories go unheard, unseen, undocumented - ordinary, marginalised and silenced lives.

Narrative research elicits personal stories, and in doing so, it elicits the messy complexities, contradictions and interrelationships of everyday life (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001). But people's personal stories often construct the problems they face as private issues. For narrative researchers, a fundamental methodological choice faces us about the extent to which we connect any *story* to *history* (cf. Goodson and Sikes, 2001); that is to say, whether we deploy what Wright Mills (1959) termed 'the sociological imagination' in order to view private ills as *public* issues.

Much narrative research has been concerned primarily with matters of identity, and with the belief that 'identity matters' in a world where (it is argued) traditional life trajectories no longer apply. This was influenced by the post-structural turn in social and educational research throughout the 1990s and 2000s, which de-emphasised questions of social structure and the historical and material contexts of women's lives, focusing instead on multiple and fluid identities (see for example Saint-Pierre, 1999; Stronach et al, xxxx; Quinn, xxxx). This approach generated an emphasis on individual agency and the rejection of perspectives such as Marxism and critical feminism as 'grand narratives'. Nevertheless, more recently, given the current crisis of capitalism and the shocking re-expansion of social and economic inequalities worldwide, there has been a growing interest in going beyond the binary of structural determinism and post-structuralism to take account of the nexus of identities, historical and material conditions, and power structures relating to class, gender, race and other forms of oppression and exploitation. One increasingly adopted approach is that of Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (IE) and her feminist sociology on which it is based (refs). This is concerned with social inequalities and injustice, and rejects established categories typically imposed in social research (even much critical social research), such as the downplaying of household and other caring work as 'non-productive'. The role of such research is therefore to integrate history into story, and bring a wider understanding of what Smith terms 'ruling relations' to individual meanings. Its goal is to use this analysis to assist disadvantaged groups to gain a more collective political perspective on social mechanisms that are at best only partially glimpsed in particular experiences and local settings. Identities and agency matter, but not as stand-alone categories.

[Link to next section]

Researching the impact of elder care on women academics

The pilot study we are reporting here initially arose out of our own personal experiences of long-term caring for an elderly relative while in full-time employment, and the considerable problems and challenges we ourselves have faced in doing so. We wanted to explore the narratives of other women in this situation, to gain more in-depth and fine-grained insights into their lived experiences. Our initial research questions were therefore as follows:

1. What problems and challenges do women face in combining their work and eldercare roles?
2. In what ways has their eldercare role impacted upon their working lives, and how does this change over time?
3. To what extent has their elder care role limited their availability for paid work, and do they anticipate future limitations?
4. What support is available from their employer and from local services, and how accessible do they find this?
5. What resources and practices might be put in place to lessen the impact of women's eldercare roles on their working lives?

In this paper, we are principally reporting findings in relation to research questions 1-4.

Very limited resources for the pilot project meant that we needed to consider focus group interviews as a time- and cost-efficient method; but these also had the advantage of allowing women who were participating in the focus groups to share their experiences and observe commonalities between them across issues that they may have been perceiving just as private, individual problems. As the site for the research, we chose a university in the north of England, and negotiated access via its senior managers. Large public services such as universities often offer favourable working conditions and employee support. So we anticipated that, for the purposes of the pilot study, this would help us to focus on generic issues that arose rather than specific obstacles presented by employers with fewer resources. We interviewed women in both academic and administrative posts in role-specific groups (we also tried, unsuccessfully, to interview women in auxiliary jobs as well). This enabled us to allow issues relevant to their particular work roles to be identified, and also to avoid potentially hierarchical relations between academics and administrators which might have inhibited either group of women from speaking out. Elsewhere (Burr and Colley, 2013) we have discussed the very strong resonances and common findings across all of the early data. For the purposes of this paper, however, we concentrate only on data from the focus group of four academics.

Participants were recruited via an email to faculties in which large numbers of women worked, and we interviewed all the volunteers. As the interviews could only realistically be conducted over lunchtimes, we ensured that food and refreshments were available, and we offered a £10 shopping voucher to thank the women for their time. All were given information sheets about the project and signed consent forms. The focus group interviews lasted for about 90 minutes each, and were audio-recorded. We invited the women to tell us about the challenges posed by combining work and elder care, and how their care roles had impacted upon their working lives. The women each began by outlining the circumstances of their care role and narrating its history and then went on to share specific experiences with us and each other. They were then transcribed, and we first

analysed the transcripts thematically, using *a priori* codes derived from the interview questions and from notes taken during the focus groups, including unanticipated themes. We then undertook a second process of data analysis, drawing on a critical feminist theoretical framework for understanding women's work.

A critical feminist framework for understanding women's work

Following Smith's principles of challenging dominant categories in social research and making visible the silenced aspects of women's experiences, the core category to be addressed here is that of 'work'. In a sense, our own initial research questions reflect dominant and masculinised constructions of 'work' as something different from 'eldercare', of 'working lives' as opposed to family life.

Feminist scholarship, however, has established that much of what women do within the home and family constitutes work: the unpaid but very real and necessary work of social reproduction without which capitalist society could not function (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Fortunati, 1995). On the one hand, this entails practical work such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, the sick and the elderly - tasks which are ideologically re-cast in people's consciousness not as work but as a private gift of loving care. On the other hand, those practical tasks are also entwined with 'emotion work' in complex ways. DeVault's institutional ethnography of 'feeding the family' (1991) shows that wives and mothers not only undertake a multitude of practical tasks to provide edible meals for their families. But these tasks are further complicated by the ways in which women organise them in order to provide their partners and children with pleasure and feelings of being cared for as they are fed, and to coordinate opportunities in and around mealtimes for them to interact and relate to each other in positive ways that build the family as a cohesive social unit. Furthermore, although ways of constructing family are of course linked to activities other than feeding, and may vary across social backgrounds and cultures, nonetheless similar processes of emotion work can be observed in all of them (DeVault, 1999). Haug (2010) offers a holistic framework in which to synthesise such understandings through a feminist analysis of lives according to four dimensions: social reproduction work, employed work, personal self-development and political participation. This 'takes as its point of departure the division of labour and the time dedicated to each' (Haug, 2010: 224). These, then, are the categories that we have brought to analysing and interpreting our data here.

[signposting to next sections]

Women academics caring for elders

Three of the academics in the focus group (Felicity, Michaela and Tracy) were working full-time as experienced senior lecturers on vocational degree programmes for the caring professions. The fourth (Stella) had a broader cross-university role in student learning as well as teaching and researching, and had recently reduced her hours to a four-day week because of her eldercare commitments. One issue that had had a major impact on the senior lecturers as we began the study was that, as in a number of universities, they were now obliged to gain a doctorate in order to remain in post. In all cases, they were providing care for their elders almost entirely single-handedly, although some could draw on help from other family members in moments of crisis.

Like all of our participants, these women gave powerful and vivid accounts of their experiences, and spoke about the many ways in which combining paid work with caring for an elderly relative had significantly impacted upon all aspects of their lives - employment, family and social life - as well as their own physical, social and psychological well-being.

We begin by considering the work of social reproduction that they did for others, before discussing their paid employment and personal development, then their own social reproduction and the issue of political participation.

Social reproduction work

The women outlined many of the tasks of routine and practical housework they undertook for their elders: shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, making beds, gardening and ensuring household bills were paid. We must bear in mind that these women were at the same time maintaining their own households, and some were also doing housework for grandparents or adult offspring and grandchildren. They therefore had double or triple loads of housework to manage.

Some of this practical household work for elders also entailed much larger and more complex tasks, such as organising for home adaptations to be installed, or dealing with visits from utility companies. These were particularly difficult to manage, as they usually required the women to be present during normal working hours, and their timetabled hours at the university were not very flexible. But their presence was essential, as elders were too frail, unconfident or even confused to cope with these situations on their own.

Tracy: I felt my mum changed about 10 years ago and became a little bit more child-like, in that she lost confidence in making decisions like changing her electrical supplier. [...] Even things such as picking up the phone, and then my mum will say, 'Well, I never understand what all these people say when I'm on the phone [...] so it's much better if you do it for me and then we'll get it right'. It's like she's lost that confidence to engage with outside agencies.

Felicity: I have to be there for that sort of thing [*fitting a home adaptation*] and I managed to persuade them - at a premium - to come on a Saturday to do the measuring up, and I said to them, 'When you're ready to fit this thing, you know, give me at least two weeks' notice, don't expect to ring up and say you want to do it tomorrow, because the answer is 'No I can't'. [...] You've got to give me lots of lead-up time so I can move things around on my timetable to give me the space to come out and be there.

Similarly, the women also needed to attend meetings with staff from medical and social services, again usually during normal working hours, in order to understand and monitor the care their elder was receiving and to advocate on their behalf. Often this work could be time-consuming and stressful, particularly when emergency care was difficult or impossible to access.

Michaela: My mother broke her collar bone, and they kept her in hospital. When they released her, they said 'You can have 24 hours of emergency care until you get something in place', and we did get that then. But they literally give you 24 hours until you get yourself sorted out.

Felicity: While [*my mother*] was in hospital, social services came to do an assessment as to whether she could go home on the Monday, and I said, 'Well, hang on a minute!' [...] I'm not prepared to [*accept this*]. So they agreed they'd do another assessment and I agreed to be there, and after that assessment they agreed she wasn't fit to go home. So that kind of gave me a bit of breathing space.

Such events, as well as the women's need to have occasional periods of respite away, led to further work for them researching and trying to organise external support services for elders - again, this was time-consuming and, they felt, often frustrating.

As with DeVault's (1991, 1999) mothers, this practical work was often imbricated with emotion work. The women were aware that many of the tasks they undertook could have been done by outsiders from social, voluntary or private services. But their elders resisted 'outsiders' coming into their homes, so that the women did the work themselves in order to try to spare them feelings of distress and maintain a semblance of independence for them.

Tracy: I visit [*my mother*] every day. She will not have any social care at all, she's very proud, I think. As we discussed before, you know, she won't have any social care, she won't pay for anybody to clean. [...] I've talked to her about having a cleaner, and I've also talked to her about carers' allowance. She won't, absolutely, she's so proud that there's absolutely no way that she would. [...] [*Imitating her mother speaking to her*] 'I don't want anybody in my house doing my cleaning, you can help me'.

Tracy, who had a previous background in nursing, even changed dressings on wounds for her mother to avoid a district nurse visiting: 'She would rather I do it than have other people coming in'. Felicity was anticipating her mother's reluctance to have outside help:

Felicity: I couldn't get them to do [*cleaning for*] my mum because physically, she has very limited mobility. So when I'm there, I can, with her walking frame, I can get her to stand up and move three or four feet, and then move the chair round so I can clean behind the chair. But that's because she's comfortable with me, and I'm not sure at the moment she'd let other people do that. So until she has more mobility, I still feel it has to be me rather than bringing somebody in.

Felicity eventually resorted to paying a cleaner to do her own house so that she had time to clean her mother's, because she 'just couldn't do it... there's a breaking point'. On the other hand, Michaela, who visits her mother at least once every day, had tried to encourage her to seek help from others, albeit unsuccessfully:

Michaela: I bought mum a mobile and I have put my number in it, and I've also put two other people's numbers in it that never get called, but never mind...

We can see from this that elders' demands on the women could lead to emotional strains at times:

Stella: I think, 'Oh God, what's going to be wrong with them today, and what are they going to be complaining about?', from 'There's nothing on the telly' to 'I don't know how to make this thing work' or 'I want a kettle like this, my kettle's broken and it's a corded one and I've had it since 1960 and I want another one just like that!' 'Well, they don't make them

anymore, mum, they're all slot-in things.' 'Well, if I can't have that one, I don't want [it].' So it's all that, it's always a problem-based relationship rather than a fun-based relationship, so it's hard, it is draining I suppose.

This leads us to consider more explicit forms of emotion work with elders. The women talked about adjusting to a new kind of relationship with ageing parents given their growing dependency. Often this involved coping with frustration and hurt at elders' attitudes towards them, especially relating to their employed work roles.

Stella: [My mother] will ring on the house phone and leave messages, and then ring again and say 'Where are you? Why haven't you got back to me?' And I ring her back, and say, 'Mum, I'm at work, I can't!' So then she rings me on my mobile number and leaves five messages saying: 'I've rung you on your mobile and you're still not answering!' I've been interviewing students since 10 o'clock, I'll get back to you when I can!

Michaela: It is quite difficult to deal with [my mother] as a person sometimes, because of her expectations of what I should be doing. She never really worked full-time, she always had a job, but it was never a full-time job, so she doesn't have an understanding of what it is like.

Felicity: My mum did say to me at one point, it was when she'd just come home [from hospital] and I was taking work and doing work at my mum's, and I was doing something and I must have been complaining about it, and she said, 'Oh, you should work part-time'. And I just looked at her, and I said, 'Mum, that isn't what you paid for all this education for me for!' Because my mum's never worked in her life, as soon as she had me, that was it, she gave up.

The women were also acutely aware of elders' loneliness, especially where they were living alone, and wanted to spend 'quality time' with them, talking or going out for pleasurable visits. But given the time-consuming nature of the practical support they had to give, they generally found it very difficult to devote sufficient time to these more exclusively social and emotional (and potentially more pleasurable) activities with elders.

They also felt that this lack of time was affecting their own households and other family members. Michaela, for example, spoke about how little time she now gets with her husband because of caring for her mother, and how that has affected their relationship; as well as feeling torn about her daughter's needs:

Michaela: My daughter has just had a baby six months ago. So I'm a grandparent for the first time, and because she's on maternity leave, there's been the occasion when my daughter has wanted me for something or some support for something, which has never really been an issue before, because she's quite independent generally. But I have found myself thinking, 'Which way do I go?', you know, 'How many times can I split myself in three?'

Michaela's final question here signals the aspect of social reproduction which seemed to be excluded most of all in their narratives: that of the women's own health and well-being. We shall return to this later, but for now we turn to their accounts of their employed work as academics, and how this interacts with their social reproduction work of elders and other family members.

Academic work and self-development

These women's paid work follows a typical pattern for female academics. They are strongly tied to teaching and learning work with students, and to associated administrative tasks. As they are delivering vocational degrees, the three senior lecturers also have to visit students on work placements. These are the elements of their work which they perceive as least flexible, but also which they repeatedly describe as imperative: it cannot quickly be dropped to deal with elders' needs. It is also very time-consuming in itself, often demanding long hours from early morning well into the evening, and some weekends as well:

Felicity: It's just the logistics of juggling what is more than a full time job. I mean I wouldn't even say mine is a full time job, it's a full time and a half job in some ways. So it just seems to be there's so much, there's never an end to it and I always take work home, or I'll be here till sort of six, seven and it's actually fitting everything in.

As Malcolm and Zukas (2009) have shown, official accounts of academic workloads are largely a bureaucratic fiction bearing no relation to the much longer hours that most academics have to devote to their jobs. This theme of 'juggling' an overload of academic work with the additional tasks of elder care was a constant and powerful theme throughout these narratives. As Tracy put it, 'I do feel I've got plates spinning all the time'.

What was also evident from their accounts was that something had to give, and for all four academics, it was the research element of their job that was left with little or no time once the imperatives of teaching-related work and of social reproduction work had been met. Research work - reading, writing, even fieldwork - was discussed as something which was not only flexible, but which also was not driven by the same immediate imperatives as teaching. Stella had been able to follow the research methods programme for her doctorate, a taught evening course, but only by using all of her holidays that year to complete her assignments for it. For Michaela, time working on her doctorate was seen as flexible - one of the few times when she could 'drop it and run' in a crisis. She talked about feeling guilty taking time to work on her research when her own family were getting less time from her, and she did not have sufficient time to just sit and chat with her mother:

Michaela: But I feel quite selfish taking the time to do my research because I have to find that from somewhere else and when you've got your plates full, it's quite difficult to think: 'Right, I've got to [work on my doctorate] and there's sixteen hours a week that we're supposed to commit to it. Unless I don't sleep, I can't find that, it's that simple really. And I do find that what I'm trying to do is find blocks of time rather than try and do sixteen hours a week, because that just blew my mind completely when I tried to do that. I literally was doing an hour here or two hours there and I was, you know, staying up at night and getting up very early in the morning, and it just didn't do me any good, and I got very anxious about it really.

Felicity already had a doctorate, but she did not apply to go to research conferences since her mother had become ill:

Felicity: For me it's more sort of, all the research I do, I'd love to have time to do, but it's not happening at the moment. And the conferences, because I've only been on one since [my

mother] was in hospital, and the logistics of getting people to go in and make sure that she has somebody to see her- I just thought, this is hard work, I'm exhausted before I've even gone and I'm going to come back to loads of stuff, and so it's going away from home now that I'm a bit wary of.

Whilst Michaela was obliged to gain a doctorate, and therefore very anxious about her future employment security, those who already held a doctorate or did not face the same obligation, there were still serious consequences for their careers.

Stella had reduced her hours in employment, and given up on her doctorate and other research she had been doing:

Stella: I was ambitious to be the next step up and have some managerial responsibility, but now I've sort of said I don't think I can, and I'd been striving for that for a number of years. I've had to sort of step back and think. [...] I wanted to do that [*doctorate*] for me, but I can't do that anymore, I can't go to conferences and I can't, I can't spare that, that time is just not there, so that's a big thing to - I'm 45 - to sort of say ok, that's it.

She explained how this seemed to have affected how others perceive her in the university:

Stella: I had to go to my boss and say, 'I need to go down to four days', and they've been absolutely brilliant, but I do think there's this feeling that, 'Oh, Stella's not quite committed career-wise any more', you know, you feel a bit sidelined. I mean, my boss isn't like that at all, but maybe it's me that's projecting that on him, but you do feel like the part-timers are sort of there, and the full-timers are the ones that they're going to concentrate on.

Felicity explained the impact it has had for her:

Felicity: I've come to the decision that I don't want to go any further [*in my academic career*], and I came to that decision quite a while ago. When I first came to do the job, I really did think that I would want to go further than that, but I've made that conscious decision that that would just be too much for me to be able to cope with, with everything else. So that decision was made a while ago, but I'm now comfortable with that. But at the time, there was that sense of loss, like you were saying, Stella. It's like as if you've lost something, and it's quite difficult sometimes to motivate yourself.

We were aware across all of the interviews conducted for the study about how exhausted women were coping with employment and a double or triple burden of social reproduction work. As Michaela put it, being obliged to do a doctorate was the final straw:

Michaela: Because I work full-time, and I have found that the full-time job, looking after mum, having a family and a little bit of life as well, I did seem to manage. But now I'm doing the research as well, it's killing me.

In a context, then, where almost all of the available time is occupied by employed work and social reproduction work for others, we were struck by all the women's narratives of having little or no time (and no one else) for their own social reproduction. They were coping with guilt, stress, exhaustion, frustration, uncertainty and anxiety, and at the same time doing emotion work to try

and avoid this impacting on their partners and other family members. Inevitably, this had serious consequences. All of them spoke of feeling in crisis: reaching 'breaking point', feeling 'my head will burst', being 'in a box I couldn't get out of', or suffering depression.

Felicity: Also [when my mother got ill] my social life came to a complete and instant stop, you know, which for me was really important. Because you know, for me, my social life is the thing that keeps me going, my exercise, my running, my friends, and that's kind of disappeared. And for me, I don't want to be one of these sad people who goes to work and goes home and goes to my mum's, you know, I do need a life outside of work and my mum, and I've no children to make me do that, and I'm a widow. My husband died, so again, there isn't that person at home saying, you know, 'Ease back, slow down'. So I feel that if I'm not careful, I'll just get sucked into kind of work, mum, sleep, work, mum, sleep, and I want more to life than that. So it's finding this balance at the moment without being guilty and without giving up my job because I do like my job as well.

Michaela: I've just really struggled, because I don't take time for myself very often, and that's how I manage my life, and I don't have an issue with that, I'm quite happy with that.

For two of the women, Michaela and Stella, the difficulty of finding any balance had led to mental ill-health:

Michaela: I first went to the doctor with depression, and obviously the GP had no idea what this was, and she said, 'But you look fine, you know, you're well dressed, you're well groomed, you've got nice make-up and you look fine'. Yeah, but that's not the point! We do look fine, we're coping, but there's a hell of a lot going on under the surface.

Stella had to reduce her hours and give up her doctorate in order to recover. Michaela was trying to maintain a coping strategy too:

Michaela: Every day, I make sure I have an hour to myself, either to go out for a walk with my husband or on my own, just to clear my head and sort my priorities out, and then I come back and cope, and that's my coping mechanism at the moment, is that hour of each day, at some point in the day, where I just take off and go for a walk and try and clear my head, really.

She was also considering reducing her hours.

The glaring omission in all of these narratives is Haug's fourth life-dimension, that of political participation. Nowhere have any of our research participants spoken of any possibility that there might be some way to protest collectively about their situation or seek political, social and economic change to remedy the difficulties they and their elders face. The gains which were won by previous women's movements, for their needs as mothers to be taken into account in welfare and in employment, do not even appear as a possibility for women involved in eldercare. This is also the case in the literature about this topic.

Some tentative conclusions

The narratives generated in our focus group interview with women academics provide rich data about how they struggle to combine paid work and social reproduction work, and the complexities of both practical and emotion work in supporting their elders. They also reveal how opportunities for self-care are difficult to find, and when taken, how they further restrict women academics' capacity to do research and progress their careers. It is easy to discern the glaring lacuna in their narratives around political participation, but little wonder that this does not appear on their agendas, given their burden of work and their exhaustion: to use their own metaphors, they are simply spinning too many plates, juggling too many balls. Yet it is precisely political participation that they most need if they are to stand a chance of improving their situation, as we can see from the successes of campaigns to improve support for working mothers.

One could have focused the analysis of this data on identities: as daughters, mothers, wives; as teachers and aspiring but thwarted researchers, with lowered career aspirations; as educated women baffled by the opaqueness of health and social welfare systems, but nonetheless determined to fight for their elders' interests within them. Perhaps Michaela's blunt statement, that she has no time for herself 'and I'm happy with that', most strongly expresses the contradictory nature of such gendered identities. This internalisation of stereotypically gendered roles and positions are tempered by middle class cultural capital in the sphere of social reproduction - but difficult to escape within the academic workplace itself. However, from this perspective, it is hard to envision how change might be brought about.

By using Haug's four categories of activity as an analytical framework, we have been able to make visible all the work that these women do, but also those particular activities they are unable to do, and the ways in which the current dismantling of the welfare state removes support from them and their elders. This at least makes possible an agenda for change that not only pursues improvements in policy and practice, but also hints at the potential for collective action by women themselves. An optimistic aspect of the research process has been the very positive feedback we have had from the women who participated in the focus groups. Meeting together to share their experiences seemed to have been a relief to them, and to give them a less isolated perspective of what they were going through. In this, there is a glimmer of the gains that a new women's movement might win.

Acknowledgement

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References can be obtained from Helen Colley at h.colley@hud.ac.uk