Article:
Deacon, A. and Williams, F. (2004) Introduction : themed section on care, values and the future of welfare. Social Policy and Society, 3 (4). pp. 385-390. ISSN 1475-3073

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746404002015

Social Policy & Society 3:4, 385–390 Printed in the United Kingdom
 DOI:10.1017/S1474746404002015

Introduction
Themed Section on Care, Values and the Future of Welfare

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Introduction

The papers in the themed section emerge from the work of the ESRC Research Group on Care, Values and the Future of Welfare (CAVA), based at the University of Leeds. CAVA was funded from 1999 to undertake a five-year programme of research into changes in parenting and partnering in Britain and their implications for future social policies. At the heart of CAVA's research is an investigation into the values that people attach to their parenting and partnering activities. We are interested in 'what matters' to people in their family lives and personal relationships, especially as they undergo change. This question lay at the centre of our core empirical projects, all of which were based on in-depth qualitative research. (An account of our methodology may be found in the Appendix to this Introduction). The projects focused on different aspects of change: motherhood, care and employment; kin relationships after divorce; care and commitments in transnational families; practices of care and intimacy amongst those who live without a co-resident partner; and collective values of care and support in self-help groups, voluntary organisations and trade unions. Each of these projects is represented in the following collection.

Care and values

'Care' and 'values' are central concepts in our work. We contextualised the practices of informal care and commitments within and beyond familial and conventional partner relationships to include non co-resident partnerships, friendships and the care and support given and received in self-help and small voluntary groups. In relation to values, we sought to understand what mattered to people when faced with new situations or dilemmas. We wanted to understand how they decided what was and what was not the 'proper thing to do'. 'Who should look after the baby if I decide to go back to work?' 'Should I encourage my son to have an arranged marriage as I did?' 'Should I move in with my new partner and her children?' We also asked people who they turned to for support when they live alone, and asked members of self-help groups about the values of care that matter to them. Understanding how people manage such situations enabled us to build up tableaux of everyday practical ethics of care and commitment. In this way we have developed understandings of the values associated with care and commitments in family lives and personal relationships which are grounded in the practices of everyday living. Looking at groups and organisations enabled us to add to this the values of care that are articulated collectively and publicly.

Each of the first five papers presented here develops an empirically based understanding of care and values. Simon Duncan and Sarah Irwin provide an analysis of values

emerging from decision making around combining child care and employment through processes of 'socially negotiated moral understandings and relational commitments'. In these child care is understood not simply as a means to take up paid work, but first and foremost in terms of children's emotional security, their developmental needs and, for some, concerns about discrimination. These are balanced against the mothers' own practical needs and perceptions of what is the proper thing to do. The outcomes of these complex balancing acts are further shaped by different social and local contexts. In other words, mothers' decisions were not economically determined, and nor were they free choices or simply impelled by individualised quests for self-actualisation.

Carol Smart's paper focuses on the relationship between the changing moral codes inscribed in divorce law and policy reforms and changing ethics 'on the ground'. Expectations of shared parenting after divorce require people to work through new ways of relating to each other after divorce, and this is creating new forms of accommodation between ex-spouses, new partners and step-parents, grandparents and in-laws. She points to an emerging new 'social code' in post-divorce relationships focused upon attentiveness to the needs of the ex-partner and, where relationships have been close, to ex-grandparents. This is a code that children also adhere to as they negotiate new separate relationships with their parents. For them, the process is eased if they too are accorded attentiveness to their emotional and social needs. It is through the accumulations and ripple effects of these everyday enactments of care and commitment, she argues, that the contours of family lives are changing.

Sasha Roseneil's paper casts a 'queer' gaze on our understanding of care. She argues that work on care is underpinned by the limits of heteronormativity, focusing, as much of it does, on heterosexual family lives centred on the couple or parenting relationship. Indeed the archetypical relationship of care is often assumed to be the mother–child dyad. But if we look beyond this we are able to see how much friendship matters, as is evidenced by her empirical research on people living outside of the conventional co-resident couple relationship. The ethic of friendship not only expands our ideas as to what an ethic of care might mean, it also challenges policy makers and employers to acknowledge the importance of friends in policies to support people's care commitments and needs for support.

Transnational migration provides a different context for understanding care and commitment, and it places significant challenges on how people sustain kin relationships over time and place. Jennifer Mason's paper excavates the meaning of the visit to Pakistan for people of Pakistani origin who are now living and/or were born in Britain. She shows how the visit has become a vital part of kin-keeping and support, and helping shape the meaning of belonging. This is in spite of the relative lack of knowledge of Punjabi by the younger generation, the growing costs of international travel, the growth of easier forms of communication, and the difficulties of taking time out from employment and education.

Fiona Williams moves the frame of care beyond families and friends to self-help groups and small local voluntary organisations. In considering how far these groups challenge policy assumptions about care and support, she found that many of the values which emerge as important in the research on family and friendships are reinforced here. People involved in these groups valued support based on reciprocity, trust, mutual respect, informality and being non-judgmental. Current policies which emphasise achievement for children in terms of education and employment mean that parents whose children did not, or could not, conform felt particularly stigmatised.

Implications for theory and policy

Taken together, these papers develop an understanding of the relational and social dynamics of moral agency. That is to say, when people act they do so not simply with reference to themselves but in and through their relationships and commitments to others. Their agency is shaped by normative perceptions of 'the proper thing to do' as well as the social group they belong to and the locality in which they live. Agency is the theme of Alan Deacon's review article. In this he compares three different interpretations of agency in terms of what impels people, and what personal, cultural and material resources furnish their capacity to act. He illustrates how the contrasting policy proposals, recently put forward by leading academic commentators, draw upon and articulate very different understandings of what it is that is important about human agency.

The embedded and connected nature of agency that is developed in the papers in this themed section is at odds with assumptions of economic rationality which underpin many government policies, and especially the New Deals. What these papers show is the ways in which people's moral and personal commitments – their 'moral rationalities' as Duncan terms it – play a key part in shaping people's actions and decisions. As such, this notion of 'embedded' individuals also challenges some of the premises of individualisation theory (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002) as well as some of the pessimistic analyses that changes in family life mark a moral decline in society or reflect a growth of acquisitive individualism (Etzioni, 1993; Sacks, 1997; Wilson, 2003). Overall, CAVA's empirical research on changes in parenting and partnering shows that the pictures of self-actualising pioneers or selfish individuals fail to capture the moral texture of family lives and personal relationships in Britain today (see Williams, 2004). Instead, our research found people to be 'energetic' moral actors, embedded in webs of valued personal relationships, working to sustain the commitments that matter to them. We found that the choices people make are morally informed responses to changes in their circumstances, rather than simple expressions of individual choice or lifestyle. When faced with dilemmas, people draw on repertoires of values about care and commitment in order to work out what, in practice, would be the 'proper thing to do'. This involves complex negotiations and accommodations which are worked out in and through their relationships with others, but also influenced by the opportunities and constraints provided by who and what they are and where they live. There is far *less* evidence of overweening self-centeredness than there are stories of the variety of fine tunings people perform in order to balance a sense of self with the needs of others.

Moral reasoning based on *care* informed the way people attempted to balance their own sense of self with the needs of others. What it means to be a good mother, father, grandparent, partner, ex-partner, lover, son, daughter or friend is crucial to the way people negotiate the proper thing to do. In working through their dilemmas, certain practical ethics for adults and children emerged out of our research. These are the ethics which enable resilience, which facilitate commitment and lie at the heart of people's interdependency. They include being attentive to others' situation, accommodating one's own needs to those of others, adaptability to others' changing identities, and being non-judgmental and open to reparation. Children also valued fairness, respect, care, communication and trust in coping with changes in their family lives. Together these constitute a form of compassionate realism which enabled people to find ways of coping with changes in their family lives and personal relationships.

A central inference of CAVA's findings is that policies need to respect and recognise the diversity of the commitments that people have. This diversity should not be seen simply as evidence of moral decline, social instability or a lack of mutual regard. It follows that the policy response should not just be to issue reminders of kinship obligations or exhortations to seek paid work. Instead it should be to provide the practical support that people need to fulfil their commitments to each other and the wider community. Above all, policies should provide the time, space and financial security they need to enable them to balance their responsibilities to work and to care. As Williams has argued elsewhere, the case for such policies can be framed and articulated most powerfully as a political ethic of care (2001, 2004). She suggests that our research on values provides the basis for new thinking about care as an analytical, political and ethical concept. It provides a vision for thinking about the future, and especially for thinking about policy issues such as work/life balance, divorce law, or the schooling of children. Many of the important reforms introduced recently have placed paid work, educational opportunities, and the ending of child poverty as central to citizenship. Important as these are, they do not encompass the aspirations which people have around time and the quality of their relationships. It is true, of course, that not everyone has such aspirations or behaves in a morally informed and responsible manner on every occasion. Policies that recognise this fact, however, are not necessarily incompatible with such an ethic of care (Deacon, 2004, forthcoming).

Angela Phillips argues in her paper that if these issues are to be debated fully, then academics must disseminate their findings and their ideas beyond the confines of academic life. This in turn means that they must be prepared to engage with the mass media. She draws upon her experience of working with the CAVA group as an ESRC-funded Media Fellow to analyse the differing cultures of the professional journalist and the academic, and to illustrate the ways in which research findings can be inserted into the flow of news.

We hope readers will find these papers a stimulating contribution to the understanding of care and values in contemporary Britain.

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Appendix: A note on methodology

The project samples were developed on the basis of a mapping exercise on the geography of family formations in the UK, which was conducted by Duncan and Smith (2002). This analysis used the 1991 British Census including the Sample of Anonymised Records, and the ONS Population and Vital Statistics.[1] It showed that the variations in family formation which occur across the UK are also represented within Yorkshire and Lancashire. Duncan and Smith's work also enabled us to draw our samples from different localities, not simply on the basis of conventional socio-economic variations but because they represented variations in family formations. In the light of this, six localities were chosen from which to draw our samples:

- **Craven**: a relatively prosperous district in the Yorkshire Dales centred around the commuting, retirement and market towns of Skipton and Settle. The 'traditional male breadwinner' family is strongly represented and there are high rates of births within marriage.
- **Barnsley**: an economically deprived town. The collapse of coalmining has also undermined the capacity for male breadwinning although the traditional household divisions of labour persist. There are high rates of births to cohabiting couples.
- **Burnley**: a working class town that has experienced economic restructuring, but which also has a history of female employment in the cotton industry. This is an 'adult worker' area with mothers more likely to be in full-time, paid employment. There are high rates of births to cohabiting parents and of divorce, separation and lone parenthood.
- 'Transnational' **Bradford**: a working-class and ethnically diverse inner-city area. This has a higher than average proportion of residents who are international migrants, and who speak English as second language, together with second- and third-generation families of East European and Pakistani origin. There is a high proportion of 'traditional' breadwinner families but, at the same time, a high proportion of unconventional households.
- 'Alternative' **Leeds**: an inner-city zone polarised between gentrifying areas of students and young professionals and ethnically diverse, working-class areas. There are high rates of alternative and unconventional households, side by side with high levels of traditional breadwinner families.
- **Hebden Bridge:** in Calderdale District Council. A former mill town now gentrified by middle-class professionals and 'new age' residents. This is an 'adult worker' area and has high rates of births to cohabitants and a high proportion of gay and lesbian households.

Following ethnographic work, each project drew their sample from these contrasting localities, as appropriate to the subject matter. Overall, 396 individuals were interviewed as follows:

1. **Mothers, care and employment**: 40 interviews with working-class and middle-class White and African-Caribbean partnered mothers, 12 interviews with male partners

and three focus groups in Barnsley, Burnley and Leeds. A further 60 parallel interviews distinguished by class, ethnicity and sexuality were available from other work in Hebden Bridge and South London.

2. **Families after divorce**: 58 individuals representing 41 family clusters, including divorced parents and a member of the kin group such as a grandparent, sibling or child, from Craven, Bradford and Leeds. Different faith/cultural backgrounds included Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu.
3. **Transnational kinship**: 69 individuals representing 17 family clusters with different generations within these clusters. Drawn from three 'migrant' communities: Pakistani in Bradford and Indian and Irish in Leeds. Interviews conducted in English and mother tongue.
4. **Friendship and non-conventional partnerships**: interviews with 53 individuals in Leeds, Barnsley and Hebden Bridge, including gay and straight, living alone and sharing (with non-partners), White and African-Caribbean.
5. **Collective voices**: following a mapping exercise and pilot interviews, a sample of 24 national voluntary organisations and pressure groups and 11 trade unions was generated. A sample of 20 grass-roots self-help groups was similarly drawn from the localities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 55 key informants in the organisations.
6. **Values, care and commitments amongst parents of primary school children**: a survey of 102 parents in seven schools in contrasting school catchment areas within Leeds. Interviews conducted by HI Europe Research Consultancy.

The data from all but the last project were transcribed and entered into NVIVO (a qualitative analysis software package) and then coded and analysed. Interviews for the first four projects and the last were anonymised. 'Collective voices' interviewees were sent their transcripts with the option of signalling anything which they would not want to be publicly attributed to them.

Note

1 Duncan and Smith completed a follow-up analysis of the 2001 Census in 2004. Part of this analysis is reported in Williams, 2004.