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Just Work: Narratives of Employment in the 21st Century, by Grant Michelson and Shaun Ryan. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 190 pp., ISBN: 978 1 137 35015 2

Studs Turkel's celebrated study of the working lives of American workers, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day And How They Feel About What They Do*, was published in 1974. Since then, Western labour markets, although reflecting continuities, have experienced change; the move away from heavy industries toward a service orientation being one such development. Michelson and Ryan contend that work is taken for granted, and insufficiently analysed. Hence in their new book they attempt to rectify this omission and in so doing, provide contemporary lustre to Turkel's study. They set out to, 'celebrate the significance of and continue in the tradition of "Working" and provide insight into the significance of paid work as experienced by those who participate in it'. The contemporary Australian labour market provides the context for their research. The methodological framework employed, listening to workers, is that utilised by Turkel in 1974.

The book contains narratives of thirty individuals in paid employment. Participants were 'carefully' (p4) selected using the Australian Bureau of Statistics, purposive and arbitrary sampling to represent (not statistically) the nature of the contemporary Australian labour market. Interviews were themed, semi structured, recorded and constructed.

The structure of the book follows the schema of Turkel's *Working*. Individual narratives are framed by occupational themes. These are: Growing, Making and Delivering Stuff; Selling and Serving; Helping People; Protecting People; Informing and Entertaining. Narratives are preceded by discussion of the changing nature of work in advanced economies. A short final chapter provides an exploration of key issues that emerge from the narratives through a number of analytical themes.

The authors proclaim to not only celebrate the importance of Turkel's work but by locating interviews within the changing context of work and reflection on the future, they go further, demonstrating 'new insights that are broadly characteristic of a globally connected world' (p3). Focus of analysis follows a number of avenues: what do people want from work and why; creativity; justice at work; how is work controlled?

They assert that they have no a priori position in categorising work as either good or bad (a critique often made of Turkel's studies). The heart of their project is to, 'privilege the subjective experiences of workers as related by them' (p2). A central thesis of the book does, though, the authors insist, rest on an explicit belief that just and fair treatment at and of work are 'highly desirable qualities' (168).

The conceptual and analytical heart of the book is contained in the first and final chapters. The first, establishes the context in which the narratives have relevance. It provides a comprehensive yet impressively concise journey through the literature on the nature and significance of work, and change therein. The final chapter is structured through themes

established in the first chapter and that emanate from the individual narratives. These are: what does work mean; attitudes emotions and aesthetics; relations with others co-workers managers; autonomy and control; coping at work; identity; justice and fairness.

The authors identify a number of key research outcomes. Since 1974, change has been reflected in increased internationalisation, time and cost pressures, work intensification and increased customer influence. No group of work has remained unchanged. Employment in a single job or with a single organisation is uncommon. Recurring themes across occupations are the desire for meaning beyond pay and a sense of pride in doing a good job. Related to this is the desire to affirm a positive identity through work. Such identity is, however, fluid and changes with the job. Nine of the 30 individuals interviewed were trade union members. In the context of union decline, this the authors find surprising.

The book is generally effective in its ambition and possesses a number of clear strengths. It is well structured, presented and written. Individual narratives are lucid and provide thought-provoking insights into work in the 21st century. The candour of respondents is, in places, quite arresting: the bus driver explaining strategy for toilet stops (p19); the sales associate who deals with bad days by 'smoking a lot of marijuana' (p72); disquieting aspects of attentiveness in care homes (p87); the physical, mental and emotional exhaustion of hospital doctors (p104).

Compared to *Working*, this is a slim volume, containing a small sample of narratives. Although the sample chosen is convincing, the temptation to overgeneralise from it is not always resisted. Although the authors have made a clear attempt to go beyond the scarcity of generalisation and conclusion of Turkel's work, there is occasionally the sense of overabundant how but not enough why. It would have been useful to have a methodological appendix containing a little more explanation of sample selection and particularly on how the narratives as presented were crafted.

In conclusion, the quality of research withstands scrutiny. The authors explain that their book is work in progress; the narrative stories are not finished. They also suggest that perhaps the most important conclusion from their research is not how work will or will not change but how the feelings and responses of those in paid work are subject to less change: a valuable insight.

As Turkel observed and this book reminds us, for the majority, work is still too small for our spirits. Yet, despite the best efforts of late capitalism, people remain remarkably resilient, positive and possess extraordinary dreams. The overarching rationale for this book, listening to and reporting the subjective experiences of workers, also underlines the relevance and power of qualitative methodology and for certain insights into the world of work, its inescapable, epistemological logic.

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