Social Responsibility and Paid Work in Contemporary American Life

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INTRODUCTION

Late-twentieth-century scholarly discourse, especially in the social sciences, has focused a great deal of attention on community or civic engagement, social responsibility, and moral commitment. Concern over these issues has been fueled by a perception—widely discussed by the mass media as well as among many circles of scholars—that the social fabric of modern society is fraying due to a decline in the allegiance of individuals to social and religious institutions, cultural traditions, their families and workplaces, political parties, voluntary neighborhood associations, and civic life itself.

Accordingly, social scientists and social critics have been asking a number of questions following from this perception, such as: What is left of community in our society? To whom, if anyone, do people feel responsible, other than to themselves? What is the nature and strength of the feelings of social responsibility that still exist in the modern world; what are the boundaries and limits of such feelings; and how do they play out in people's daily lives? In what ways do people today balance obligations toward others with more narrowly defined personal concerns?

Many contemporary social scientists and social critics (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Etzioni 1993; Gardner 1991; Mansbridge 1990; Wilson 1993; and Wuthnow 1991) have written about the urgent need to move beyond the prevailing worldview that is morally relativistic and that assumes the necessary preeminence of self-interest and individual preference in explanations of human behavior. They argue that without some shared standards for what is acceptable behavior, with only morally arbitrary preferences for guidance, a kind of moral void develops in which there is no basis for any enduring commitment beyond the self. In large part, the outcry on this issue is motivated by a concern about the unmitigated individualism of contemporary American culture and the negative implications of this individualism for the society. As John Gardner has said, "We shall have to rehabilitate the idea of commit-

ments beyond the self. This reverses a century of fruitless search for happiness in an ever more insatiable shattering of limits so that the self might soar free and unrestrained" (Gardner 1991, 10).

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his co-authors made the case that American individualism, which has been a central part of our national identity since the nation's inception, is no longer balanced, as it once was, by traditions that emphasize moral commitment and socially responsible citizenship. They document the prevalence of several forms of radical individualism in present-day Americans' lives and the wide split between people's public and private concerns. They point out that "this is a society in which the individual can only rarely understand himself and his activities as interrelated in morally meaningful ways with those of other, different Americans." Bellah and his associates argue that, in order to counter this dangerous trend, we must work to reformulate within the current context traditions that see the individual in relation to a larger whole and reconstitute communities that allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves with the aspirations of that larger whole and see our own efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good.

Although *Habits of the Heart* makes a convincing case for the dominance of radical individualism in American culture, the book also documents a range of positions on this issue, with some people exhibiting "second languages" of social commitment along with their first language of individualism. The authors contrast the perspective of radical individualism with other, more balanced and socially connected perspectives that could point the way toward a more humane, just, and cohesive society.

In order to explore one end of this range of social commitment, the first author of the present chapter, along with William Damon, conducted a study of people ("moral exemplars") who had devoted themselves very intensively to the common good for decades of their lives. In their report of this study (Colby and Damon 1992), the researchers describe a developmental process involving the transformation of goals through social influence, which represents the progressive deepening of the moral exemplars' commitment to others' welfare. The study also identifies a number of qualities that are common to the very diverse group of people who participated in the study. These include *certainty*, which refers to the exemplars' exceptional clarity about what they believe is right and about their own personal responsibility to act on those beliefs; *positivity*, which refers to the exemplars' positive approach to

life, enjoyment of their work, and optimism; and *unity of self and moral goals*, which refers to the central place of the exemplars' moral goals in their conceptions of their own identity and the integration of their personal and moral goals. This final characteristic is one that Bellah and his co-authors also note in the people who most clearly exhibited "second languages" of social connection and commitment: "Such 'natural citizens' of a community such as Suffolk experience little conflict between their self-interest and the community's public interest precisely because a long-term involvement in the community has led them to define their very identity in terms of it. Insofar as one defines oneself as a 'natural citizen' of the town, to harm the town would be to harm oneself" (Bellah et al. 1985, 175).

Despite the differing lenses that sociological and psychological analyses bring to any question, a number of common themes have emerged across these programs of research. Bellah et al. 1985, Colby and Damon 1992, and other related studies such as McAdams et al. 1997 and Wuthnow 1991 show how, even in a society marked by a great degree of individualism and materialism, many people manage to find communities that support their connections with others; and many people organize large portions of their lives around a sense of responsibility to such communities. Moreover, when this occurs, the individual's perspective on life is marked by strong feelings of certainty, positivity, and a belief in the unity of personal and moral goals. Of course, this does not occur for all people. Many participate only rarely in experiences that reflect a sense of community; and many do very little in their daily lives that suggests a strong sense of social responsibility. We need to know more about the social conditions that promote community and social responsibility as well as the personal qualities that support individuals' commitment to these essential pillars of social life.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AT MIDLIFE

The study reported here attempts to map out the various patterns of social responsibility exhibited in the lives of a representative group of middle-aged American women and men. By social responsibility, we mean action taken for the benefit of others or for the welfare of society more generally. We begin with the assumption that there are a number of ways of being socially responsible, that one must understand the individual's social responsibility within his or her context and opportunities, and that the broad boundaries of social responsibility can encom-

pass family, community, society more broadly, paid work, volunteer work, personal assistance, and financial contributions to individuals and institutions. The study describes how people understand social responsibility in various domains of their lives and investigates the relation of social responsibility to people's central life goals and their sense of meaning in their lives. In this chapter, we will discuss some preliminary findings about social responsibility in the domain of paid work.

This study draws from semistructured interviews with a MIDUS subsample of ninety-four people. Participants were selected from areas within a fifty-mile radius of five cities chosen to cover the major geographic regions of the United States: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Phoenix, and San Francisco.

The subsample differs from the full MIDUS sample in a few ways, but is representative of the larger group on the great majority of variables we have compared. Although the MIDUS sample was selected to cover the age range from twenty-five through seventy-four, we limited the subsample to a narrower age range (thirty-four through sixty-five) because the sample size was to be so much smaller and because we were especially interested in the midlife period. For this reason, we evaluated the representativeness of our subsample by comparing it against subjects aged thirty-four to sixty-five from an age-restricted MIDUS sample. The two samples differed in educational attainment, with our subsample being more highly educated. Forty-three percent of our subsample had a bachelor's degree or more, whereas only 21% of the MIDUS sample did. Only 30% of the subsample had twelve or fewer years of education, as compared with 55% of the MIDUS sample. This education difference was not intentional and may have been due to the selection effect of our requesting a lengthy personal interview. Members of our subsample were significantly higher in openness to experience and lower in perceived life constraints than members of the MIDUS sample were. These differences may have derived from the education difference, since both of these variables are related to education. As indicated in table 12.1, the subsample did not differ significantly from the full sample in gender, race, religious affiliation, religiosity, church attendance, proportion currently working, proportion working full time, household income, personal income, occupational prestige, physical health, life satisfaction, scores on the Loyola Generativity Scale, hours spent in volunteer work, hours spent helping family members or helping others outside the family, or MIDUS social responsibility scales.

TABLE 12.1 Comparison of Social Responsibility Study Respondents with MIDUS National Probability Sample

	Interview ($n = 94$)	MIDUS Sample ($N = 3485$)	Test Statistic[a]
Education (%)			
Twelve or fewer years	30	55	23.32*** (χ^2)
Some college	27	34	
Bachelor's degree or more	43	21	
Perceived constraints (1–7)	2.45	2.76	5.071* (F)
Personal mastery (1–7)	6.01	5.81	3.252+ (F)
Openness to experience (1–4)	3.14	3.03	4.312* (F)
Conscientiousness (1–4)	3.32	3.22	3.312+ (F)

Note: Only statistically significant comparisons are shown in the table. The following variables were tested for differences between the social responsibility study respondents and the national probability sample. Demographic variables: gender, age, race, education, religion, church attendance. Work variables: whether currently working, working full time, experiencing ongoing stress at work, occupational status (Duncan's Socioeconomic Index), how rewarding job is, perceived inequality at work. Financial variables: current financial status, how well-off growing up, personal income, household family obligation scale, family time scale, family financial help, work obligation scale, civic obligation scale, civic time scale, civic financial contributions, altruism scale. Health, mental health, and personality variables: physical health, generativity, perceived constraints, personal mastery, agency, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extroversion.

[a]F-tests were used to test differences between means; χ^2-tests were used to test for categorical differences. The test used is shown in parentheses.

+$p < .10$.   *$p < .05$.   **$p < .01$.   ***$p < .001$.

In lengthy, open-ended interviews (two to three hours each), we asked participants to talk about their life histories and what they do for their families, friends, and communities; about their paid work and volunteer work; their political engagement; and their financial contributions to charities and directly to other people. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

The Meaning of Paid Work

Although some authors (Armon 1993; Boyte and Kari 1996a, 1996b; Kohn 1977; Sullivan 1995) have written about work as the expression of people's values, including moral values, the more prevalent view of paid work at the present time is that work is primarily an economic endeavor, that Americans are overly focused on the pursuit of material goals, and that this search for material success is in opposition to community service, family life, spirituality, and self-realization. In *The Overworked American* (1991), for example, Juliet Schor writes about

the long hours many people work, the consumerism which is one driving force behind this overwork, and the destructive consequences of this pattern for families and communities.

In *Poor Richard's Principle* (1996), Robert Wuthnow presents a more nuanced and perhaps more accurate view of the moral and social significance of work. He argues that traditionally the American Dream has provided a moral framework, encouraging people to work hard and to expect rewards for their work but also centrally concerned with family, community, and religion. According to Wuthnow, this conception of the American Dream had begun to change by the end of the nineteenth century, so that "work and money [have become] more intimately linked with each other but farther removed from those conceptions of the human spirit that had once constrained them. . . . [Now] economistic thinking dominates discussions of work and money, while questions of moral commitment, character, and human values seem more difficult to relate to economic behavior" (Wuthnow 1996, 5). According to Wuthnow, the American Dream has lost its moral meaning, and we no longer have any moral basis for keeping our work commitments within bounds, curbing our wants, abiding by rigorous ethical standards at work, or taking more time for ourselves. Like many other contemporary authors, he points to the ill effects of overwork, including health problems, stress, and inadequate attention to family and community. But unlike most contemporary observers, he sees the problem in moral terms: "If we are to grasp the origins of our discontent with the material life, we must look beyond the current language of stress and overwork and seek to rediscover the moral ambivalence toward economic pursuits that lies deep within our own tradition" (Wuthnow 1996, 59).

Wuthnow recognizes that work is not devoid of values or entirely separate from the rest of our lives. His own data show that Americans are deeply committed to their work and find it meaningful and fulfilling. On the other hand, he makes the case that these moral values are seldom fully integrated into our thinking about our work commitments; rather they are compartmentalized as a "work self" separate from many of our other values. He concludes that we must rediscover the moral values that place positive limitations on our economic striving. He urges us to limit our work for the sake of higher dimensions of human existence, not just because we are too tired, stressed, or lacking in ambition.

We understand Wuthnow to be claiming that the imbalance between work and other important human pursuits is problematic in two ways: first, that people's work is not adequately integrated with their deepest values, especially their moral values; and second, that many important human values and goals are being sacrificed to the demands of work, driven largely by pressure from employers and the weakening of moral limits on the pursuit of professional and material success. Although Wuthnow acknowledges the moral aspects of work and the fact that people seek personal meaning and fulfillment through work, his proposed solution to the problematic imbalance between work and the rest of life focuses almost exclusively on a need to constrain work rather than a need to support, enhance, and develop the moral value of work. Thus, for the most part, he treats work as primarily an "economic commitment" which increasingly conflicts with other needs and therefore has to be kept within bounds. In this, he joins others who have called for Americans to reconsider the place of work in their lives.

Without wishing to dispute the validity or importance of Wuthnow's position, which is an original and compelling variant of the case for balance that others have made, we believe that a full solution to these problems involves increasing the meaningfulness of work as well as keeping work in the proper balance with the rest of life. We need to bring a moral framework not only to the justifications for limiting work, as Wuthnow argues, but also to the shaping of the work itself. This paper will, therefore, attend to the first of the two problems Wuthnow has laid out—the integration of moral meaning with paid work. In doing so, we will look at how people understand the personal meaning of their work and the relation of that meaning to their other values and goals.

Pride in Performance

In response to our questions about whether and how their work is personally meaningful to them, the great majority of study participants said that their work *is* meaningful (79% of the seventy participants for whom this item could be coded). They have many different ways of defining that meaning. In order to describe the terms in which study participants talked about the meaning of their work and related issues, we coded the interview material for a number of themes. These include a wide range of ideas such as the importance of work as contributing to the economic maintenance of one's family, the job as allowing one to

have a positive impact on the organization, work as self-expression, alienation from or criticism of the institutional setting of work, and references to burn-out.

A graduate student independently coded twenty cases in order to establish inter-rater reliability. Overall agreement on all codes within the interviews was 77%. Agreement across the sample on specific items ranged from 75% to 100%.

In discussing the personal meaning of their work, two-thirds of the sample said that the meaning of their work derives at least in part from their desire to do a good job, their pride in accomplishment, conscientiousness or dependability, and the like. A very typical response was, for example, "The biggest reward of working is the self-satisfaction of knowing that I did a good job, that I did the best that I could possibly do."

A woman with a very troubled background talks about her satisfaction with her job as a supermarket manager this way:

> I take a lot of pride in what I do. I'm more of a perfectionist, so I like things to run smoothly. I like to keep things organized. I enjoy what I do. I enjoy the challenge of being in charge. I don't like to be a follower; I'm more of a leader, and I'm comfortable in that situation . . . [b]ecause it gives me a feeling of accomplishment, a feeling of success. . . . I enjoy the pace. I think it's very, very stressful, and I think you have to be able to take a high level of stress to be in the retail business today. But it's very challenging work, and it does give you a feeling—especially when everything just sort of fits together and everybody works well together, and people respect you because you stand up for your principles—it gives you a feeling of accomplishment." (case 46488)

The fact that so many people talk about their own sense of accomplishment as a major factor in the personal meaning of their work is consistent with other studies (e.g., Wuthnow 1996), which also report that people often mention how important it is to them to do a good job, taking pride in quality work. Wuthnow sees this pride in performance as an element of work motivation that employers can use to bind workers to work that is not intrinsically meaningful. The participants in his study describe their performance not as a matter of achieving some goals they have set for themselves in life, but in narrowly spe-

cialized terms.[1] "Performance thus becomes an end in itself rather than being part of the quest for beauty, truth, or goodness" (Wuthnow 1996, 115).

Wuthnow's analysis is consistent with our own interview data in that many people who refer to their pride in doing a good job do not connect the issue of competence to (or indeed refer in any way to) any broader social or moral value of their work or any way in which their work contributes to the welfare of others. That is, a concern for excellence is often (though not always) an end in itself rather than a means to more socially or morally defined goals. But Wuthnow's account fails to recognize the deeper significance of the satisfaction derived from doing a job well. Developmental psychologists (e.g., Clausen 1993; White 1959) have identified competence motivation as a fundamental human striving and an engine of development from infancy onward.

Translating to the workplace this idea of a basic motivation toward competence, mastery, or a feeling of efficacy, we would argue that if people are going to invest themselves in their work over long periods of time and face the challenges entailed in learning new skills, they cannot rely solely on extrinsic rewards or even the ultimate goals of the work; they also need to care about doing a good job, about their own competence, efficacy, and striving for excellence.

Themes of Social Responsibility and Personal Reward

Aside from the issue of competence, the participants in our study cited many other ways in which their work is fulfilling and meaningful to them. Our primary interest is in assessing the extent to which people see their work as connected with their moral concerns, or their desire to contribute to the welfare of specific others or to the community or society. For this reason, we divided the things that people said gave meaning to their work into two categories: social responsibility themes and personal themes. Slightly more than *half* of the people in the study described the meaning of their work at least in part in terms of what the work contributes to particular others or to society. For the rest, the meaning has more to do with their own enjoyment, personal satisfaction, and self-expression without reference to its social value.

The seven social responsibility themes (table 12.2) concern the ways that one's paid work contributes to the welfare of organizations, the society more broadly, or other individuals. They include mention of the direct contributions the work makes to a community or society, efforts to improve conditions for others in the workplace, teaching and men-

TABLE 12.2 Social Responsibility Themes

Themes	Percentage of Participants
1. Work is important or meaningful because of what it contributes to society or the community; the mission/purpose of the work is important (in terms of contributing to society or the community).	35.1
2. Social responsibility is expressed not through the primary responsibilities of the job but through ancillary activities such as union work, efforts to promote justice in the workplace, activities that involve doing good for people at work, and the like.	7.4
3. Work is important/meaningful because it involves helping others, compassion for people.	27.7
4. Work is important/meaningful because of or satisfaction is gained from teaching or mentoring more junior employees, colleagues, students, and so on.	16.0
5. The job allows one to have a positive impact on the organization, make a difference to the organization, etc. Enjoyment of leadership role as a way to make a difference.	11.7
6. Work is important because it allows one to pass on the work ethic to one's own children or to be a role model for young people. Work allows one to pass on ambition to one's children, giving the message that you can do something if you try hard enough.	7.4
7. Work is important because it allows one to be a breadwinner, to provide for one's family.	4.3

toring, making a positive impact on the organization, serving as a role model, and providing economic support for one's family. The nine personal themes (table 12.3) concern various rewards of work, such as self-expression and creativity, personal growth, challenge, enjoyable relationships, or financial gain, which do not relate directly to the ways that work could contribute to others' welfare.

Tables 12.2 and 12.3 list the percentage of people in the sample who expressed each theme. As indicated in table 12.2, the most frequently mentioned social responsibility theme (35%) is theme 1, which refers to the contribution the individual's work makes to the community or society. The second most commonly cited social responsibility theme is theme 3: work is meaningful because it involves helping others, compassion for people. Frequently mentioned personal themes include references to work as fun or interesting, enjoyment of working with other people, personal growth through work, and appreciation from one's "clients."

TABLE 12.3 Personal Themes

Themes	Percentage of Participants
1. Satisfaction of appreciation from people served. Satisfaction of developing relationships with people served.	31.9
2. Personal growth through work—it changes you. Work shows you something positive about yourself. Part of identity to be reliable; work gives one a sense of purpose.	31.9
3. Satisfaction from solving problems at work, sorting out puzzles, etc. Challenge a positive thing about work.	24.5
4. Work as self-expression. Seeks or has creativity in work.	11.7
5. Job itself an education, learned a lot on the job, work as a learning experience. Had meaningful mentor-like experience—someone he/she really learned from.	16.0
6. Satisfaction from the fact that this job is respected, satisfaction from recognition and respect.	20.2
7. Enjoyment of work, job described as fun or interesting.	40.4
8. Enjoyment of being with people. Supportive supervisor and/or co-workers. Teamwork, importance of working well with others.	34.0
9. Work involves trying to achieve financial/material success.	10.6

Although people differed in the number of social responsibility and personal themes they used, we did not conceive of the number of themes used as an indicator of the salience or importance of social responsibility or personal satisfaction in their work. Some people focused on one theme in a very thoroughgoing way that seemed to infuse their attitude to their work with significant intensity. In other cases, individuals made brief reference to several themes yet appeared to be no more strongly oriented toward social responsibility in the way they approached their work than those who referred to one theme. Because of the subjective nature of this judgment, we did not try to assess the intensity of individuals' orientations to social responsibility in their work. For this reason, we have classified people as using *no* social responsibility themes or using *one or more.* Inter-rater reliability for this dichotomous classification is 95%. (This represents agreement on nineteen of the twenty reliability cases.) As indicated in table 12.4, 55% of the sample discussed the meaning of their work at least in part in terms of what the work contributes to others. All but one of these also used one or more personal themes. Eight people (8.5%) used neither social responsibility nor personal themes. The remaining 36% used personal themes but no social responsibility themes. That is, almost everyone who used

TABLE 12.4 Comparison of Interviewed Respondents with and without
Social Responsibility (SR) Themes

	With SR Themes (n = 52)	Without SR Themes (n = 42)	Test Statistic[a]
Gender (%)			5.81* (χ^2)
Male	67	33	
Female	42	58	
Race (%)			8.46* (χ^2)
White	50	50	
Black	100	0	
Other	83	17	
Type of work (%)			11.04** (χ^2)
Executive, administrative, managerial	72	28	
Technical, clerical, sales	33	67	
Household and protective services	58	42	
Manufacturing, construction, agriculture	40	60	
Nonprofit (%)	81	19	9.42** (χ^2)
Job is personally meaningful (%)	73	27	13.43*** (χ^2)
Job relates to self (%)	83	52	7.91** (χ^2)
Occupational status (SEI)	46.1	37.3	12.88*** (F)
How rewarding job is (1–4)	3.4	3.0	8.64** (F)
Perceived inequality at work (1–4)	2.9	3.3	8.34** (F)
Pride in job (1–4)	3.6	3.1	6.44** (F)
Number of hours worked per week	43.6	37.4	4.14* (F)
Net worth			5.50+ (χ^2)
Money still left over	63	37	
Still owe more	33	67	
Break even	25	75	
Rate overall life (0–10)	8.1	7.1	12.92*** (F)
Psychological well-being (1–7)	6.0	5.2	23.34*** (F)
Generativity (1–4)	3.0	2.5	17.93*** (F)
Perceived constraints (1–7)	2.2	2.8	6.65* (F)
Personal mastery (1–7)	6.2	5.8	3.24+ (F)
Openness to experience (1–4)	3.3	3.0	6.53* (F)

Note: Only statistically significant comparisons are shown in the table. The following variables were tested for differences between those who used and did not use social responsibility themes. Demographic variables: gender, age, race, education, religion, church attendance, religiosity, number of children. Social responsibility variables: amount contributed to others, family obligation scale, family time scale, family financial help, work obligation scale, civic obligation scale, civic time scale, civic financial contributions, percentage of household income to charitable contributions, altruism scale, and a combined scale of community social responsibility. Work variables: whether currently working, working full time, experiencing ongoing stress at work, type of work, profit or nonprofit organization, whether job is personally meaningful, whether job relates to self, occupational status (Duncan's Socioeconomic Index), how rewarding job is, perceived inequality at work, effects of job on mental health, pride in job, hours worked per week. Financial variables: current financial status, how well-off growing up, personal income, household income, how difficult to pay bills, net worth. Health, mental health, and personality variables: physical health, rating of overall life, control over life, life satisfaction, social well-being, psychological well-being, generativity, perceived constraints, personal mastery, agency, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extroversion.

[a]F-tests were used to test differences between means; χ^2-tests were used to test for categorical differences. The test used is shown in parentheses.

+p < .10.   *p < .05.   **p < .01.   ***p < .001.

social responsibility themes also used personal themes, but many of those who used personal themes did not use social responsibility themes.

The following examples illustrate the two different orientations toward work expressed by those who use social responsibility themes (often along with personal themes) and those who use only personal themes. Mr. Andrew Wiley, a college graduate, is commissioner of public works for a city government. He expresses social responsibility themes 1 and 5, as well as several personal themes, when he talks about the meaning that his work has for him. He says:

> I love my job. In my job, the most important conviction I have is that there is a trust that I have to uphold with the public, and I am committed to maintaining that trust and credibility with the public. I feel that the worst thing I could possibly do is damage that sense of trust or credibility. Without my credibility, I have nothing. . . .
>
> . . . I get to do things that make a difference in this community. I also get to do some projects that are environmental in nature. I'm working on a program to clean up the bathing water quality and the shellfish beds in Quincy Bay, which is important to me because I care about the environment. I was born here. This is my city, and I can see every day something that we did that made a difference, that made something better, and it's important to me to be able to see tangible results from what I do. (case 47408)

Jack Hedges, a man with some postsecondary education but no college degree, is the assistant director of a Boys and Girls Club. He is so dedicated to his work that he goes in on his free days if there is unfinished work to do. He talks about how much he loves working with young people and what he is trying to accomplish with them:

> Work is very important to me. If you work with children, you don't last with kids for twenty years and not love kids. . . . The way it works with me is every one of those kids that walk into my building, I consider one of my kids, and I will protect them. I will stick up for them, as long as they're in the right, and I will go out of my way to help them. . . . We have a facility that has a gym and a games room, an art room, a computer room, and things like that.

But kids don't just come down for the building. They come down for the people that work there. I've had instances where kids confided in me about things that have taken place in their lives that they wouldn't tell their parents or friends. I've had instances of neglect by parents. . . . When I first started, I felt that I should be able to reach every single kid. But that's why you have different staff people, because if they can't relate to one staff person, maybe they can relate to another.

When asked what is most important about his work, he replies:

Hopefully sending kids down the right path. What I get out of it is the personal satisfaction of watching them grow up into mature young adults. I have kids that come back to visit, and we reminisce, kids that come back and help out. And you end up over a period of time developing relationships with certain kids. There's an impact on their life, and they'll come down to me when they're adults to talk to me about it. The reward is teaching a kid a new skill or something. . . . If you show a kid how to do something, and just that gleam when they look at you like, "Oh, look what I did." And now they have that confidence so they can take it to the next step. (case 47477)

Jenny Bridges, also with some college but no degree, is a police officer at a tough housing project in Chicago. She talks about some of the things she has done for the residents of this extremely desolate area:

I extend myself quite a bit for people through my job. I spent three years trying to help this one girl and her kids. . . . I got her out of Cabrini [the housing project]. She was a witness in a murder case; I was there for her, took her shopping every week. . . . One thing I accept about life is you can't do for people and expect immediate or actual feedback from that person. Because if you want to project . . . who you are in goodness and acceptance of other people, you just do. Once you're on a positive level . . . putting forth positive energy . . . which I do . . . it does come back to me. Police do such fabulous things for people that you can't even imagine. . . . Nobody ever writes about it. People are hungry. . . . [T]hey want to be acknowledged . . . to ac-

knowledge they're alive. . . . Police do that for people. . . . We give people recognition. There's a lot of humanness in police work. (case 45006)

These and other cases that express social responsibility themes contrast with cases in which contributing to others is not evident in the way the respondents talk about their work. People who talk about their work in terms of personal themes without using social responsibility themes may be just as satisfied with their work and just as committed to it, but they think about its meaning in very different terms. Helen Preston, who has a college degree, talks about the satisfaction she gets from her work as a buyer for clothing stores this way:

It's afforded me things that I never dreamed of. I've been to Hong Kong and Italy, and all the mileage that I do for business, I get dividends on frequent flyer programs. So I fly for free to Greece or England or Florida on vacation. I've been to Montana, California, Colorado, New Orleans, all with the mileage that I've accumulated from the business travel. And then I go to New York every week on business. So it's been really exciting. I love what I do. It's not like work. I would do it for free if I was so altruistic. I love the challenge because we sit across from another person, and they may have ten thousand jeans that they want to sell. The challenge is for me to buy them as cheaply as possible so that I can offer them out at a great price to the customers, and the other person's challenge is to get me to pay as much as he can. So it's a lot of psychology, a lot of acting.

I always dreamed of having a job that I really loved so much that I didn't feel as if I was going to work in the morning. For 99% of the time, that's how it is. My career is everything to me. You hear conversations about how men identify themselves personally with who and what they are on the job, and if a guy loses his job, he almost loses his self-identity or his confidence, and I truly feel that way about this. I feel like this is who I am, what I do. (case 47407)

Nat Hilgard, who has a master's degree, talks about the satisfaction he gets from his work as a computer designer in terms of the challenge,

what he has learned from the work, the financial rewards, and the respect of his co-workers:

> I was always in a position to be at the leading edge of technology . . . [a]nd I always felt that I did exceptionally well in that particular discipline [i.e., computer design]. . . . The products that I designed and worked on oftentimes would wind up being a product that was sold worldwide, and that makes you feel pretty good, when you know you designed something way down in the bowels of a major system that's used by the biggest companies in the world, the U.S. government, and these research institutions. . . . Just starting with the idea that doing something and learning something is better than sitting around and doing nothing and drawing unemployment, and that has been my take on life. . . . The work was challenging. It was not a routine kind of thing because you were always designing something. You know, the technology changed so fast, and you had to change with it to keep up with it. It was always a challenge to invent the new mousetrap. There was always another way to do something better and faster. Oh, first and foremost, after . . . never having enough money to buy anything, I was financially, you know—my salary was a reward. Beyond that, the rewards of, say, respect from your peers was a reward of sorts. But I would think that *most of the rewards were things you could take to the bank* [emphasis added]. . . . I grew up in a life where you didn't have things. (case 46587)

Social Responsibility in Work and Related Measures

The fact that some but not all of the study participants talked about their work in terms of what it contributes to others raises a number of questions about why this is so. The first question is whether social responsibility in paid work as defined in terms of our themes is related to other measures of social responsibility in this or other domains. One obvious candidate is the Loyola Generativity Scale, which was included in the MIDUS survey instrument. This scale includes items such as "Others would say that you have made unique contributions to society," "You feel that other people need you," and "You like to teach things to people." Generativity (Erikson 1963) involves commitment to

the well-being of the next generation and activities that aim to contribute a positive legacy that will outlive the self. These concerns are very close to our conception of social responsibility. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the study participants who used social responsibility themes had a significantly higher mean score on the generativity scale than did participants who used only personal themes ($\chi^2 = 22.04$; $p < .0001$). (See table 12.4.) We believe that this strong empirical relationship reflects the fact that to a large extent the two indicators are measuring the same thing.

People who used at least one social responsibility theme also have significantly higher scores on the MIDUS civic obligation and altruism scales, combined into a measure of community social responsibility. The items on these scales include statements such as "How much obligation would you feel to . . . serve on a jury"; ". . . keep fully informed about national news and public issues"; ". . . testify in court"; ". . . vote"; and ". . . pay more for health care so that everyone had access to health care." (See table 3.1 for more information.) Both these scales and our social responsibility themes deal with the individual's concern for the common good and thus also appear to be measuring overlapping constructs. We interpret the findings on these scales and the generativity scale as providing validation for the social responsibility themes.

Somewhat surprisingly, at least at first blush, those who used at least one social responsibility theme did not score significantly higher on the MIDUS work obligation scale. The explanation for this becomes apparent when we examine the three items on this scale, which ask people to rate how much obligation they would feel to "do more than most people would on your kind of job"; "work hard even if you didn't like or respect your employer or supervisor"; and "cancel plans to visit friends if you were asked but not required to work overtime." Clearly, this scale defines social responsibility in work more in terms of what we would call conscientiousness than in terms of the extent to which their work contributes to the welfare of others.[2]

Also, perhaps somewhat surprisingly as well, the use of social responsibility themes was not related to the spirituality or religiosity scales that were included in the MIDUS battery. These scales include items such as "How important is religion in your life?" and "How important is it for you to send your children for religious or spiritual services or instruction?" Although others (Rossi, chapter 7, this volume; Wuthnow 1991) have found religious involvement to be related to volunteering and other forms of service, this relationship of religiosity and

social responsibility does not appear to carry over to the interpretations people give for the meaning their paid work has for them.

Except for its relationship with the generativity, civic obligation, and altruism scales, social responsibility in work appears to be quite separate from social responsibility in other domains. We do not consider social responsibility in the work area to be an indicator of a generalized tendency to be socially responsible across domains. For example, many of the individuals in our sample who did not use social responsibility themes in regard to their paid work talked at length about their volunteer work or the kinds of things they did routinely to help extended family and friends. This may be particularly true of people whose jobs are not easy to construe as making important social contributions. This is consistent with Newman's observation in chapter 5 that the low-income black and Latino families in her sample considered their jobs as parents, supervising their children and keeping them out of trouble, as their major contribution to society. So too, Rossi (chapter 3) reports that less well educated, lower paid MIDUS respondents do little volunteer work and contribute little money to charities but do more than better-educated adults in providing social-emotional support and hands-on caregiving to family and friends.

In line with the impressionistic sense from our interviews that social responsibility in paid work is not an indicator of overall social responsibility, people in our sample who mentioned one or more social responsibility themes in regard to paid work did not score significantly higher on the family obligation scale and scored lower, though not significantly lower, in number of hours spent helping family members. Nor did they volunteer significantly more hours in civic activities (see table 12.4). As we said in the introduction to this chapter, we began the study with the assumption that there a number of different ways of being socially responsible, and we did not expect that individuals' profiles would be flat across the different domains of life. Table 3.2 shows that internal to MIDUS as well, correlations between domains and dimensions are modest at best.

Social Responsibility in Relation to Demographic Variables

In trying to determine why some people see their work as contributing to others' welfare, we began by examining the demographic variables age, race, gender, and education, finding that race and gender show significant associations with social responsibility group, while age and education do not (see table 12.4). It is perhaps not surprising that

age is not related to social responsibility group, since we intentionally chose a sample within a restricted age range such that everyone in the sample was in the midlife period when the data were collected. We were more surprised that social responsibility is not significantly associated with education, since education has often been found to be related to various aspects of civic responsibility such as voting. In fact, the data do show a trend in this direction with higher proportions of individuals in each education group (no college, some college, bachelor's degree or more) using at least one social responsibility theme. The trend is not significant, however.

Race is significantly related to the use of social responsibility themes, with blacks most likely to use these themes (100% of the eight respondents), whites least likely (50% of the seventy-nine respondents), and "other" minorities in between (83% of the seven respondents). We must be cautious in interpreting these findings, given the small number of nonwhite participants in the sample. However, the findings are consistent with other reports that blacks tend to be less individualistic and more concerned about the welfare of the group than white Americans are.

Gender is also significantly related to the use of social responsibility themes, with more men than women using at least one social responsibility theme. This gender difference is accounted for by differences on two of the seven social responsibility themes: theme 1 (work is meaningful because of what it contributes to society, etc.) and theme 6 (work is important because it allows one to be a role model for young people, etc.). There were no significant gender differences in the use of any of the other five themes, in spite of the fact that some of them seem to fit gender stereotypes, for example, caring for others in the workplace, helping others and being compassionate toward them, and being the family breadwinner. Theme 6 was mentioned by only 7% of the sample, so it is difficult to know how meaningful the gender difference on this item is. Theme 1, on the other hand, is the most frequently cited social responsibility theme, so it is clearly the most important source of the overall gender difference in the social responsibility group. We believe that the most plausible interpretation of the apparent gender difference on this item is a confounding of gender with type of occupation. Professionals were the most likely to use social responsibility theme 1, as were individuals with higher scores on the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI). As in the society as a whole, the men in our sample were more likely to be professionals and men had higher SEI scores

than women did. In addition, perhaps due to the differences in their job status, men were more likely than women to say that their jobs were closely related to their sense of self.

Relation of Social Responsibility to Job Type

If we are to understand why some people talk about their work in terms of its social contributions and some do not, we must consider the possibility that it is the nature of the job that determines how people describe their work: Will nurses talk about helping people, public officials about what they contribute to society, and people in business about making money? In order to address this question on a general level, we coded participants' occupations according to the main categories of the 1980 Census of Population Classified Index of Industries and Occupations. We then grouped these into four categories of work: (1) executive, administrative, and managerial occupations; (2) technical support, administrative support (clerical), and sales occupations; (3) service and private household occupations; and (4) agricultural, manufacturing, and construction occupations.

As indicated in table 12.4, job category is significantly related to the use of social responsibility themes, with executive, administrative, and managerial (professional) workers most likely to use at least one social responsibility theme (72% of individuals in these occupations used at least one social responsibility theme). Service workers had the next highest proportion using at least one social responsibility theme (58%), followed by 40% of agricultural, manufacturing, and construction workers. Clerical and sales workers were least likely to use social responsibility themes (33%). Consistent with these categorical data, we also found that occupational status (as defined by the SEI) was significantly higher in the group that used at least one social responsibility theme (see table 12.4).

In addition to looking at the census categories, we also divided study participants according to whether they worked in nonprofit or for-profit settings. The profit/nonprofit dimension is also significant, with workers in the nonprofit sector being significantly more likely to talk about their work in terms of social responsibility themes (81% vs. 46%). It is noteworthy that all of the professional and service workers employed by nonprofits described their work in terms of what it contributes to others.

For most professions, contributing to society or helping others is an explicit part of the occupation's self-definition and professional ethic.

In his book *Work and Integrity*, William Sullivan points out that the very idea of professionalism historically has included a "broader, more socially responsible sense of calling" (Sullivan 1995, xvi). Sullivan makes the case, however, that few professions have lived up to this ideal and argues that "professional life can and needs to be restructured in ways that suffuse technical competence with civic awareness and purpose" (xix). Our data are at least modestly encouraging on this score, since *three-quarters* of the executive, administrative, and managerial workers bring at least some concern for social responsibility to their work. Thus, the moral and social concerns that characterize the professions' self-definitions do tend to show up in the way these people talk about the meaning of their work. This does not mean, of course, that even these individuals are as fully oriented toward "civic purpose" as they might be, and we must also note that 28% of the individuals in these occupations show no indication that such concerns are salient to the personal meaning of their work.

A similar argument can be made in regard to the profit/nonprofit dimension. Nonprofit organizations are by definition pursuing missions that benefit the community or society and are no doubt more likely than for-profit organizations to be suffused with ideologies that reflect these goals. It is, therefore, not surprising that employees of nonprofits are more likely to discuss the meaning of their work with reference to social responsibility.

Although the occupational differences in the proportion of people describing the meaning of their work in terms of the social responsibility themes are of considerable magnitude, it is also important to note that there is a great deal of overlap in the categories. Just as more than a *quarter* of professionals do *not* talk about their work in terms of what it contributes to others, so too, we see that a *third* of clerical and support workers do. We also see substantial overlap in regard to the profit/nonprofit dimension. We believe this indicates that any job can be experienced as contributing to others' welfare or not and that the nature of the job itself is not the sole determinant of whether or not this occurs.

If we organize actual job titles into two lists, the jobs of the participants who do and do not use any social responsibility themes, we can see the same pattern—that people in some kinds of jobs are extremely likely to use social responsibility themes, but that most jobs can be construed in terms of either set of themes. The one general occupational category with enough cases to be meaningful that appears only on the

social responsibility list is health care (physician, physician's assistant, nurse, veterinarian, pharmacist, nursing home aide, home healthcare aide). In these healthcare occupations it seems that the themes of helping others or serving the public are so intimately tied to the nature of the job and the normative way of talking about it that just about everyone in these fields will talk about their work at least to some degree in these terms.

A radiologist talks about the importance that his work holds for him this way:

> The reason it's important is because I make a difference. . . . I am involved directly with helping to save the lives of other people. There's nothing more important on the planet. Policemen, firemen, people who do this kind of job . . . really you cannot reward them enough . . . teachers . . . these are just a few of the many jobs in this country—in the world—that make a difference. And I think I have one of them. I enjoy going to work because I interrelate with people. And the challenge is that I usually interrelate with people who are under duress. So the challenge is . . . how do I make them, for a brief minute, forget that they're in here for diagnostic purposes? (case 45315)

This kind of satisfaction is expressed not only by those at the upper end of the occupational prestige scale, but also by nonprofessionals such as Cathy Matin, a patient services representative. Cathy works for about twenty doctors, checking in patients, answering basic questions for them, rescheduling appointments, scheduling referral appointments with specialists, and the like. In talking about the meaning of her work, she says:

> I feel I'm helping these people, even though when they come in they may be angry and screaming, but they're sick, but I'm performing a service for people. . . . I deal with people that have cancer, they have AIDS, they are going through the scare of operations. . . . There are so many people out there that are saying, "I need, I need, I need." . . . But I'm seeing less and less people out there [who are helping them]—and I know they're out there and I know there's a lot of them, but you just don't hear about them. There needs to be just as many people that can help the

people that say "I need." We're all put here for a reason, and I guess that one part of me being here is to go out and be among people and do whatever I can do [to] make things easier for them. . . . People need to get back to where they're caring for others as well as themselves. . . . I just feel that I need to be out there. It's my way; I guess it's my one contribution to whatever it is we're supposed to be contributing to." (case 46576)

Almost all of the teachers and former teachers in the sample were similarly likely to cite concerns for others or the common good in talking about the meaning their work has for them. Other categories, such as firefighter or police officer, appear to share the same tendency to be described in these terms, but there were so few cases of each of these occupations that generalizing about them does not seem warranted. Likewise, those in some jobs, such as bookkeeping, cited only personal themes, but there were too few cases of each to draw any firm conclusions from this, especially since none of the study participants in the clerical and support category worked in a nonprofit setting.

As we would expect from the overlap in the occupational category analyses, most kinds of jobs could be described either in terms of social responsibility or in terms of personal themes only. Sometimes the opportunities to contribute to the welfare of others through one's work involve activities outside one's immediate job description, as in the case of this laborer in a soda can factory. The job itself provides little satisfaction, but Jim Richards has found a number of ways to contribute to things he believes in that do create meaning for him at work. Asked about the meaning of his work, Jim says: "It's not a particularly rewarding, you know, job. It's a, you know, make four million cans a day, day in and day out. It's not rewarding for me personally, no" (case 46321).

Jim's interview is coded as expressing social responsibility theme 2 because of several other activities he participates in at work. He is the elected financial officer for the Steel Workers Union, having run for office because he thought the union was wasting the money of the members: "They kind of got me mad, the spending . . . when they take money out of your check, hey, where's it going? What are they doing? So I took an active part and got elected." Jim is also in charge of employee participation at work. People come to him with special projects, and he pushes them through, or if "one of the guys dies at work, and

his widow gets short-changed from the company, I go after the company and make sure they get what they're owed." He also started a recycling program at the plant:

> Before I got there, they would throw everything into a landfill, and I started a program for them and recycled all their wood and paper products, and then got—I got an award from the city and the company for the football fields of landfill I saved or whatever—and the trees and that sort of thing. And then Earth Day I designed a can and brought in a hundred first graders from my son's school and had a tour of the plant and gave them a big Earth Day celebration. Showed them how to recycle various things in their home. You know, so those parts, you know, that I have done personally to derive some satisfaction out of the job. Some of the personal projects that I help people with at work are rewarding. (case 46321)

Similarly, Murray Santini, who runs a carpet cleaning franchise, finds ways to serve others through his work:

> In my business I have a policy. I have a group, they're sort of the inner circle, and they're about thirty-five people now. These are people who are financially having problems. Eddie called me at 7:30 this morning after I got home at 3:30, and Gina, Gina's husband has been injured two or three times, she needs work done at her house. I will probably do $150 worth of work for a lunch and twenty bucks. And I do that for about thirty-five people. There's no way she's gonna get the work done. No way. And I'm never gonna make any money doing this, but, Gina, she's OK. Then I have a group of elderly people that, because I have the kind of equipment I have, if they ever have a basement flood or they ever have a catastrophe, I'll take care of it. Now, if they have three thousand dollars' worth of insurance and a five-hundred-dollar deductible, I waive the deductible. I'll do six, eight, ten thousand dollars worth of work for three thousand dollars just to make sure they're OK. These were people who were in the area, who were around my children when they grew up. They were always nice to my children, so, they don't have to worry. So, I will

go in and clean all their carpet, clean all their curtains. I will take care of them for nothing. Then there are some people who just are the unluckiest people in the world. And I have three. And they make me feel pretty lucky. Even though I don't have very much, they are worse—whoa, they are really bad. I did for one lady over a period of three years I did about five thousand dollars worth of work for nothing. And she was in deep doo-doo; she still is. She's sixty-three years old and she's trying, she's going off onto a new venture. If it works, she'll have retirement money, but if it doesn't . . . I've never met anyone that had this much bad luck. . . . I know they know how to manipulate me, I know that, and I am such a sucker for it. And I know that if I didn't do it, no one would do it and they would probably be in worse shape, so I do it. (case 46936)

These examples illustrate some of the ways that people can find meaning in a diverse array of jobs through the contributions they make to other people and to the society.

The Case of Teachers

Although it is possible to approach any occupation with a positive sense of what that work contributes to others and the world, some occupations are especially likely to be experienced this way. In addition to health care, teaching is another profession that seems naturally to call forth a concern for contributing to others' welfare. Teaching can be a quintessentially generative profession, and we have already noted the close conceptual and empirical relationship between generativity and social responsibility (see also MacDermid et al. 1998).

Although not all teachers are highly generative, teaching is closely linked with generativity, and several items on the Loyola Generativity Scale refer to it directly (e.g., "I try to pass along knowledge I have gained from experience"; "I enjoy teaching things to others"). In a study of people who exhibit high generativity, McAdams and associates (1997) began by selecting teachers who had been recognized for excellence and volunteers who had made significant contributions to their communities. When McAdams and his colleagues compared these highly generative individuals to a group lower in generativity, they found that the highly generative adults were more likely to reconstruct the past and anticipate the future as variations on a prototypical

commitment story, which includes, among other things, a stable commitment to prosocial goals and what the authors call "redemption sequences," which are affective sequences in the narratives in which bad scenes (those involving sadness, fear, shame, anger, and so on) are transformed into good outcomes. McAdams and associates describe a number of parallels between the moral exemplars described in *Some Do Care* and the highly generative people in their study, including the similarity of these optimistic redemption stories to what we have called "positivity" and the similarity of the generative individuals' "steadfast commitment" to what we have called "moral certainty."

McAdams and associates do not consider theirs to be a study of the teaching profession per se and are careful to point out that not all teachers, not even all successful teachers, are high in generativity. Theirs was a sample selected to be high in generativity. The positivity and steadfastness of these highly successful and generative teachers contrast with the high levels of distress, depressive symptomatology, and attrition from the profession reported by some studies of more representative groups of teachers. A number of studies (Hammen and deMayo 1982; Schonfeld 1992; and Finlay-Jones 1986) indicate that veteran teachers had much higher levels of distress and depression and lower levels of job satisfaction than norms from community samples or national samples of American workers. In a longitudinal study which assessed seniors at teacher training institutions and followed them in their first years as teachers, assessing both their pre-teaching symptomatology and their job conditions, Schonfeld (1992) found that teachers who worked in the most adverse school environments showed far more depressive symptoms than those who worked in the better schools, although there were no pre-employment differences in depression between these groups. It seems clear that adverse school conditions, especially chronic rather than episodic stresses, have detrimental effects on mental health, and more benign work environments are related to increased mental health. The effect of school conditions on symptoms is quite sizable when other risk factors are controlled. Although it is not possible to tell from these studies, in light of McAdams's study and our own work on moral exemplars, we wonder whether teachers who are especially generative and who find ways to maintain their strong desire to nurture their students' growth fare better under difficult circumstances than less fully committed individuals do.

Our sample of ninety-four participants included twelve teachers or

former teachers. Of these twelve, three who were teachers very briefly and then went on to do other things used exclusively personal themes in talking about their work. The remaining nine people all used at least one social responsibility theme. For some of these, the social responsibility themes were very central to their discussions of their work and constituted a central focus of meaning for their lives. A teacher who later became a principal said, "A close friend convinced me that I could really make a difference with kids and teachers and make an impact on education, that I could lead a high school to be a place where kids are welcomed and dealt with fairly and allow them to reach their potential as human beings. My family often came second, I have to admit" (case 46823).

Another teacher, Dan Rustin, talks about his work as having saved him from a life of drug and alcohol abuse. He is now drug-free and teaches at an alternative public school for kids who have been expelled from other schools. He also runs an after-school program for high school students who are trying to make up credits they lack so they can graduate.

> The work is very important personally. . . . I feel like I'm doing something not everybody can do, so I have the challenge of that. I've got the kind of job, and the type of kids that I work with, that people will look at me, "God, I don't know how you do it, how do you do it." Everybody asks, "How can you deal with those kids?" So I have, I get a lot a respect from my peers. . . . I'm working with the kids that are most at risk in the district.
>
> I feel very strongly that a lot of it has to do with my background in recovering from alcohol and drug addiction . . . [to] be able to separate behavior from a kid. Because a kid punches a teacher in the mouth doesn't make the kid a bad kid. He just did something bad, you know, he made a bad decision. . . . I'm forever believing in these kids, and forever trusting them. . . . I want to help them at least take care of some of their academic requirements, and then if they ever get straightened around, there's got to be some exhilaration straightening out their life. I like that . . . the rush of helping a kid. . . . I'm contributing in our society. . . . I'm helping people that society doesn't want to help. They're tired of them, . . . they're tired of the crime they're

doing, they're tired of the gangs, they're tired of the drugs that they're selling, and the drugs that they're using. We're talking about human lives, and I've done it for long enough, so that I've had people, you know, kids come back and they say, if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Rustin, I would have died. . . . [I]t's a powerful influence . . . on a young person's life. (case 46373)

Quality of Life

As indicated in table 12.4, the people who used social responsibility themes in describing their work rated their lives as better overall than those who used only personal themes, reported significantly higher psychological well-being, said their jobs were more rewarding, and experienced a lower degree of life constraints. This is consistent with McAdams and associates' finding that highly generative individuals show an optimistic pattern in their life narratives (which they call redemption sequences) and our finding (Colby and Damon 1992) that people who are deeply committed to the common good have a strikingly positive approach to life. Of course, we cannot draw causal conclusions based on these data, but the impression is strong that those who see their work as contributing in important ways to others have a greater sense of meaning or purpose in life, and this leads to greater satisfaction with their work and their life more generally. As Boyte and Kari have written, "Infusing work with public dimensions—recognizing the larger potential meaning and impact of what one does as a teacher or nurses' aide, as a county extension agent or computer programmer, or as a college professor—can turn an unsatisfying 'job' into much more significant 'work.' The old story of the two bricklayers who were asked what they were doing conveys this sense. One said, 'Building a wall.' The other said, 'Building a cathedral' " (Boyte and Kari 1996a, B3). Unlike life satisfaction, physical health and satisfaction with one's financial situation were not related to the use of social responsibility themes.

Personal Rewards of Work

In addition to providing opportunities to contribute to others' welfare, people's work can also serve their personal goals of sociability, personal development, creativity, challenge, learning, and the respect and recognition of others. When Wuthnow and others talk of the need to limit work commitments, they place these personal values, as well

as the moral values of concern for others, in opposition to paid work, conceived primarily as an economic pursuit. Wuthnow recognizes that many people, especially Americans, say that they work for self-fulfillment, but he also says that "economic commitments seem increasingly to get in the way of other needs that cry out from the depth of our souls: the need to cultivate intimate relationships with our families, the desire to be part of a caring community, the quest for spirituality and truth, and, perhaps most of all, the longing to know ourselves better and to grow as persons" (Wuthnow 1996, 7).

Although we do not at all wish to claim that the work domain can fully meet all of the human needs to which Wuthnow and others are calling attention, many people *do* successfully pursue these goals within the realm of work. The personal themes that participants in our study cite as significant aspects of their work experience represent many of these goals or needs. Almost everyone in our sample talked about one or more of these issues as central to the meaning of their work, whether they also referred to the social responsibility themes or not.

It is noteworthy that only 15% of the participants talked about trying to achieve financial or material success through their work, although many more acknowledged that they needed to work in order to support themselves. Many study participants said that they were willing to trade career achievement and financial success for more time with their families or for less stressful, less demanding jobs. It was quite common for respondents to refer to having passed up opportunities for promotion because of a wish to avoid taking on too much responsibility. In the group as a whole (a relatively well-educated group), we were struck by how few people seemed "driven" or very ambitious. In fact, we wondered whether more willingness to take on greater challenges and more responsible positions might not be a good thing for some of the people in the study. It was not unusual for people to talk of their regrets about not having pushed a bit harder to achieve more in their careers. As Wuthnow has reported, our interviews also indicate that people are likely to refer to their desire to minimize stress and overwork as reasons to limit their professional commitments rather than making the case on moral grounds. On the other hand, family obligations were also cited fairly frequently as a reason for limiting work commitments. This is the one way in which a moral obligation was used to justify limiting one's ambitions in the work area.

The various kinds of satisfaction in work that we have classified as personal themes represent important human goals or values that peo-

ple pursue in many domains of life. Paid work can both contribute to and conflict with the pursuit of these goals. Fully satisfying work will no doubt include many of these, along with opportunities to contribute to others' welfare. In addition, some people may contribute to the world in very important ways by pursuing some of the goals we have called personal themes rather than through direct intentions to benefit society. Many great artists, for example, would describe their work in terms of creativity and self-expression rather than in terms of contributing to the world. Likewise, many well-intentioned people, pursuing what they believe to be socially responsible goals through their work, may unintentionally do more harm than good. Overall, however, intentions do matter. In the long run, if most people approach their work *only* in terms of the personal satisfaction they can derive from it rather than what good it does for others and the world, we will see a deepening of the isolation, individualism, and self-absorption that have so concerned the social commentators we quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

In *Habits of the Heart,* Robert Bellah and his co-authors talk about two main ways that the individualism of contemporary American life is typically expressed. They call these *utilitarian individualism* and *expressive individualism.* By *utilitarian individualism* they mean "a form of individualism that takes as given certain basic human appetites and fears and sees human life as an effort by individuals to maximize their self-interest relative to these given ends. . . . Utilitarian individualism has an affinity to a basically economic understanding of human existence" (Bellah et al. 1985, 336). According to Bellah and associates, *expressive individualism* "holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized . . . [and] enables the individual to think of commitments—from marriage and work to political and religious involvement—as enhancements of the sense of individual well-being rather than as moral imperatives. . . . The expressive culture, now deeply allied with the utilitarian, reveals its difference from earlier patterns by its readiness to treat normative commitments as so many alternative strategies of self-fulfillment" (Bellah et al. 1985, 47–48, 334, 330).

A close look at the list of personal themes reveals that many of these themes could be construed as manifestations of instrumental or expressive individualism, particularly in the absence of social responsibility themes. Brenda Jackson, a social worker who expresses a number

of personal themes but no social responsibility themes, describes the meaning of her work this way:

> [Is the work you do important to you personally?] Maybe not as important as it used to be, because I've realized that in the professions that I've had it's been more service-oriented, and I—and if anyone would ever say to me, "Thank you for helping me," or "You're helping those people," I hate the word help. I don't want to think like Ms. Goodie Two Shoes coming along. So maybe first when I started out it might have been to get approval, and helping—maybe it was to help people, but now I feel like, now I just like people. I like people and I just find it like an adventure every day. I like my job now, but I may not stay in it. I don't know what I'll do. I may just do something totally opposite (laughs). Not help people! (case 46885)

This interview material illustrates what Bellah and his co-authors have called expressive individualism. The justification Brenda makes for her work is not expressed in terms of what it contributes to others, but in terms of the personal satisfaction it affords her. Her account is somewhat difficult to follow, probably because her own thinking on these issues is confused, but she seems to hint at authenticity as a more important criterion for life choices than moral concern. In the end this orientation leaves her without a strong sense of commitment or direction in her work. In other parts of her interview, Brenda also exhibits the kind of "therapeutic orientation" and moral relativism that Bellah and associates describe as integral to expressive individualism. When asked whether she has ever felt a conflict between what she wants to do and what she sees as morally right, she responds: "See, my problem is I had Gestalt training, and we throw 'should' out the window, so everything has to be 'want.'" Brenda has contributed to society by raising two sons as a single parent and helping to care for her ailing parents as well as through the help that she gives her clients on an individual level. Even so, the orientation of expressive individualism that frames her thinking is limited, failing to provide a basis for thoughtful civic engagement or guidance on difficult moral questions. Thus, it is not surprising that she says elsewhere in the interview that she knows and cares nothing at all about politics. As Bellah and his co-authors have argued, a well-functioning democracy requires social bonds and commitments

to institutions and the common good that go beyond a concern with self-expression, personal growth, authenticity, and autonomy.

Conflicts between Work and Personal Goals

As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the most notable features of the highly dedicated people that we wrote about in *Some Do Care* was the relationship between their personal goals and their moral goals, which were so fully integrated that the people found their most intense personal satisfaction in helping others. Thus, they rarely experienced conflicts between what they wanted to do and what they felt it was right to do, and they talked at length about the great joy they experienced in their work. In line with this, in our sample, those who describe their jobs in terms of social responsibility themes have a higher mean score on job satisfaction on the MIDUS rating than those who talk only about the personal themes. However, we did not often see the kind of inner harmony and thoroughgoing positivity in the present study that we saw in the moral exemplars study.

Despite their higher reported job satisfaction, many people who used social responsibility themes also talked about internal conflict, distress about their work, frustrations they faced, and their feelings of being burned out. This was true for the individuals who used only personal themes as well. At least at this level of commitment, seeing one's job as contributing to others does not lead to *greater* frustrations, but neither does it fully protect people from distress and burn-out. Even those who spoke eloquently about how much they felt they were able to contribute through their work also talked about the negative side as well. They spoke not only or even primarily of overwork, but of the barriers to accomplishing their goals due to the characteristics of their clients/constituents or the organizations for which they work. Many felt they had no chance of changing the conditions in their workplace.

Earlier we quoted Jenny Bridges, a police officer who spoke about what she had been able to do for the residents of an extremely low-income neighborhood in Chicago. She talks of believing deeply in what she is doing and the satisfaction that she gets from her work, but she also talks about frustrations with the people she is trying to help, the police department bureaucracy itself, the draining nature of the work she does, and the resulting burn-out she feels.

> [One of the girls I was helping] was a witness in a murder case, I was there for her, took her shopping every week. . . .

> [But] when people like that become dependent on you, . . . they don't even make an effort anymore. I tried to make that moral voyage onto that territory and it didn't do any good. . . . Some people you can't save. [This kind of work] drains you. . . . What I don't feel good about is that I . . . schedule too much, I am too short of time for myself. . . . You're not completely in control of your life. . . . [The police department is] like your mother and your father. . . .[T]hey control . . . change or adjust your hours. . . . I sacrifice . . . the ability to be with friends or be with my family. . . . [I]t controls my life completely.

> The hardest part is dealing with the department. . . . The police department itself, and the superiors . . . the bosses. . . . I just accept. . . . My uncle told me . . . keep your mouth shut and do what they tell you to do, . . . so I . . . keep my mouth shut and do what they tell me to do.

> I did a lot of good police work. And now I'm burnt out and I don't want to do anything. . . . [But] I'd like to be a gang officer as long as I can. . . . I want to . . . work until I can retire.

Asked if she would continue to work if she won the lottery, she says that she "would probably not work. I'd build a gazebo, get a Jacuzzi" (case 45006).

Others in this sample express feelings similar to those of Jenny Bridges. For example, the radiologist who talked about how meaningful his work is, whom we quoted earlier, goes on to say that he hopes to change fields or retire early. When asked how his work relates to his sense of who he is, he responds:

> It's a big part of my life. . . . It gives me a sense of self-worth. . . . I do feel I make a difference. I don't just go to work and collect a paycheck. I make a big difference. . . . There are very few down times, if any. . . . [I think to myself,] "Gee, I guess I could have had my arm amputated today,". . . and all of a sudden things come right back into perspective. . . . It keeps me in touch . . . whenever I've started to feel a little bit disappointed about something, I immediately snap back. . . . I can just look at my job. . . . I'm very fortunate that I can tap any source to keep the negative from coming in. . . . So there's no question about

it: it's a major part of developing both my character and my fiber, my being.

Given this attitude, it is rather surprising, though not unusual in our sample, to hear him say the following when asked about his goals:

My goals would have to be not to continue very much longer at this rate. I have to chop way back, and eventually, if I don't deviate from the field, retire from it. If I don't retire from the field, I'm going to have to deviate from it, actually, I suppose. Burn-out. It's just too long. . . . I don't want to get to a point where, like so many other guys just going through the motions and taking their checks and going home. I don't ever want to reach that point. Because I am fulfilled by what I do. . . . I think I should be doing other things. It's time . . . not very much longer. (case 45315)

These two examples are quite typical of many people in this sample who seem to care very much about their work and what it allows them to contribute to others but who also experience conflicts between their work and their personal life goals. Many say that they may turn away from the work in the long run or would do so if their finances would permit it. It is not clear whether the prevalence of this feeling is due to increasingly problematic and stressful working conditions or to an almost inevitable ennui that many people experience after long service in the same job and workplace.

This attitude contrasts dramatically with the moral exemplars we wrote about in *Some Do Care,* who said that nothing could stop them from continuing the work to which they had dedicated their lives. For example, Charleszetta Waddles is a black woman with an eighth-grade education who has for decades run a mission in inner-city Detroit, offering food, clothing, and other services to the poor. When asked about her plans for the future, she says, "You can go away twenty years and come back, and if I'm living you know you're going to find me doing the same thing. . . . I didn't promise that I would do it contingent upon what kind of building, what kind of clothes I could wear, what kind of money I had; just as long as I can find something I can do, I'll do it. So no matter where I'm going, people can at least know to pinpoint me in what category I'm in. Without even asking anybody, 'I know wherever she is, if she's alive and well, she's a missionary'" (Colby and Damon

1992, 218). We attribute this wholehearted persistence to the fact that for these exceptionally dedicated people their moral commitments and goals are at the center of their sense of who they are, and to the fact that their moral and personal goals are so well integrated that they rarely conflict. This is a qualitatively different kind of commitment than we see in the current sample, even among most of those who construe their work in terms of what it contributes to others.

References to the stresses and difficulties of their work and to feeling burned out were also common among the teachers in our sample, even though almost all of them talked about the social significance of their work and its personal meaning for them. All of the teachers and former teachers except two, one of whom taught at the college level, talked about having become discouraged or burned out by disciplinary problems, lack of cooperation from parents, and lack of support from the school administration. (We have excluded two former teachers for whom there was little information about their previous jobs.) Jay Bronson echoed the sentiments of many others when he said:

When you have good days, you drive home and you say, "You know, this is awesome." When you know that the lesson that day struck home, when you've made the kids laugh and you know you've made a connection. Those are good days. But I have reached that stage in my career where I have to be brutally honest and say that I'm a little fried. I consider myself to be a very dedicated teacher, a very good teacher. But the kids we deal with now are a whole lot different than the kids that I started teaching twenty-five years ago. Society has changed, the kids have changed, families have changed, and it's a daily struggle in some cases. Is it important to me? Yeah . . . it is. It's important to me mostly in that I have become a real pessimist about the future of mankind, because I see year in and year out, I see the families getting more screwed up. And on one hand, that's a challenge. I mean, it's a massive challenge, but what we do is important to me. I think that every teacher out there, every good teacher, every hard-working teacher, ought to be canonized and elevated to sainthood, because we are, as far as I'm concerned, we are on the front lines, and we're losing the battle, I'm afraid.

[What do you get out of your work?] Ulcers. [What is

hard about your job as a teacher?] [That] . . . education is not important to [the kids]. Education is not important to parents. [It's hard when teachers in schools] . . . become the whipping boy for [parents]. . . . Kids that come from homes that are so screwed up: substance abuse and sexual abuse . . . single parents. . . . We run the gamut of kids that it's lucky they're in school at all. And when they're in school, sometimes what is going on in their lives prevent them from learning. Some of the kids just . . . don't want to be there. We have budget cuts. It's . . . a real thankless job. We very much liken what we do . . . to . . . post-traumatic stress syndrome or battle fatigue . . . where you just go in and butt your head against the wall day after day. . . . [Y]ou get out of the car in the morning, and it's war.

Bronson says he is pessimistic about "the future of mankind" but also says:

. . . [P]art of it is that never-ending faith . . . that you're going to have a better day than you had yesterday. At the end of the [school] year . . . I hope to be able to say that I have reached as many kids as possible. I want to be able to say I've done the very best job that I can. And I think I can say that. I'm a better teacher now at age forty-seven . . . than I was when I was twenty-five. And in a lot of different ways, I certainly know more than I did then, but . . . I'm a mellower person than I was then, and I just think I'm more . . . dedicated to the job than I was a long time ago. (case 46692)

This mix of dedication, sense of purpose, frustration, and anguish represents in stark form both the positive and negative potentials of work that engages seriously with some of society's challenges and seeks to find personal meaning through social responsibility. The teaching field is one of many professions with tremendous potential for satisfaction from the contributions that it makes to individuals and to the society more generally. But it is also subject to great stresses and frustrations from multiple sources. In recent years, some approaches to school reform have attempted to address the issues these teachers raise by finding ways for parents, teachers, and school administrations to work together toward common goals. It may be that the experiences of

school reformers can provide lessons not only for the improvement of education but also for other occupations in which people need more support for their efforts to be socially responsible in their work. Ultimately, the ideal goal would be to provide the scaffolding required to move at least some people to the level of internal harmony and stamina that allows them to gain joy from working even in very difficult circumstances, as we saw in the "moral exemplars" we studied.

CONCLUSION

Work can and should be a domain of life in which people can be caring, socially responsible, experience personal growth, and develop a sense of community. Work should not be seen as mutually exclusive with these goals, a zero-sum game. Of course, work has to be kept within reasonable time limits and cannot be the only means to these ends. But the reality of contemporary life is that people do spend a lot of time working and will no doubt continue to do so. As Alice Rossi writes in chapter 3, "Most people in most societies today, as in the past, contribute to their communities and nations through their primary ties to children, parents, siblings, and friends, and through the work they do to earn their way in life." If social responsibility consists entirely of volunteer work, community involvement, and political participation, time limits will prevent most people from being socially responsible except to a very modest extent. These domains are surely very important areas in which people contribute to others and to their communities, but paid work can also contribute to others and the society rather than being a barrier to a socially responsible life. Boyte and Kari (1996a) argue that in recent decades work has lost much of its civic overtone and that with changes in the meaning of work came transformations in notions of citizenship. As this happened, the concept of engaged citizenship became equated with volunteerism, what one did "after work." In their view, we have lost the sense that our common work builds the nation, and we need to return to this perspective. "We come to understand that this land *is* our land, when we see that we help to build it" (Boyte and Kari 1996a, B3).

Although we agree with Boyte and Kari (1996a, 1996b), Bellah and his co-authors (1985), and Sullivan (1995) that the potential for individuals' work to serve the public good is far from realized, we also see many people struggling to incorporate this perspective into their work. Now we need to find ways to build on and sustain people's desire to find meaning in their work, to experience competence, to contribute

something important to society, to express compassion and care for others, and to experience a sense of community and common purpose. At this point, many workplaces present barriers to this, and many jobs include debilitating stresses for which people need support, as we have seen in the cases of the police officer, the doctor, and the teachers. We need to find ways to clear away those barriers and provide the necessary support so that people's moral engagement with their work can grow rather than burn out. If we do this, paid work can more fully realize its potential as an enduring "commitment beyond the self" rather than be a force for increasing social fragmentation and narrow self-interest.

NOTES

1. Wuthnow conducted two hundred in-depth interviews with respondents from central city, suburban, and ex-urban areas in or around New York, Philadelphia, Trenton, Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, and Atlanta. The sample included about equal numbers of men and women and younger and older people. African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics were included in numbers approximately equal to the proportions in the U.S. population. One hundred fifty of the participants were working men and women, twenty-five were unemployed, and twenty-five were recent immigrants.

2. In chapter 11, Rossi interprets this scale as measuring the felt obligation to work, to do well in one's job, and to work hard even under unpleasant circumstances, an interpretation that is consistent with our concept of conscientiousness. Rossi reports that among both men and women, and at both high and low levels of educational attainment, her oldest respondents show higher levels of obligation to work than young adults do. According to Rossi, young adults may be confronting new circumstances that dampen the degree of work obligation from that which their parents felt at comparable ages. We cannot assess age differences on this dimension in our sample, since we sampled a narrower age range than the MIDUS sample did, but we speculate that the frequency of the references to conscientiousness in regard to work might be due in part to the fact that all of the participants in our study were at least thirty-five years old.

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