

The Mass Observation Project

Winter 2009 Directive

Part 1: Mid-life transitions

This Directive is intended for everyone whatever your age or gender. We'd like your own direct experiences, and then your accounts and observations of mid-life transitions in the wider context. Your stories, commentaries and illustrations are a valuable contribution to our knowledge about this issue.

There are two versions below: one for men and one for women. We have kept them within the same directive so you can see the different questions and of course if you wish to comment on the both sections, please do.

For women:

Mid-life transition – what is it? What does it mean to you?

Do you think there is an issue with mid-life transition and do you think, for women, it's the same as the menopause?

How do you/did you find your information about menopause?

What do those of you not yet experiencing the menopause understand about it and how do you think you might deal with it?

How does the experience of a woman's menopause affect those around her? Please tell us about your own experience. Please also write about the women you know who have experienced the menopause. How does it affect people round them?

Do you think there is such a thing as a male menopause?

For men:

Mid-life transition –what is it, what does it mean to you?

Please tell us your views on women's mid-life transition - the menopause. What do you know about it; do you think it matters?

Are there other kinds of mid life transitions?

Do you have/have you had mid life crises? Do the popular stereotypes of men having mid life crises match real life experience?

As usual, please start each part of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Part 2: Books and you

Please start both Part 2 of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number and a brief biography (see page 1).

This part of the directive has two angles: the first is to find out about your reading, especially your fiction reading and any public discussions you have been involved in that concern books.

The second is to explore whether you think fiction is better at capturing what it means to be at a particular stage of life than the media and official reports.

Your own everyday reading patterns

Do you read books? If so, what kinds of books do you like?

If you generally don't enjoy reading books, please say so. *Then move on to the section below on how your age group is represented in the media.*

If you read novels, what kinds of novels do you read? Please list some titles/authors you have read recently.

Do you think novels, and books in general (eg. biographies, memoirs) give a better account of the events and characters they describe compared to newspapers, government reports or television programmes and so on? Give some examples if you think this is the case.

Talking about books.....

Do you talk about books with other people? If so, when and in what circumstances? Does it make any difference to your feelings about a book if you have discussed it with others?

Have you participated in any of the following:

- a book group
- an internet discussion of books
- a literary festival
- a public reading

Please describe your involvement and what you felt you gained from the experience. Did the experience reinforce your perceptions or challenge them?

Book groups

If you belong to a book group we are interested in how it works and what you get out of it.

When and how often do you meet? Where do you meet? What happens?

What books do you read and who chooses them? Do you have a group leader?

Does what people say surprise you? Do group meetings change your view of the books?

How your age group is represented

Have representations in books of your own age group seemed true to you? More true than, say, media or government policy representations? Is this the case with other age groups too?

Do you think films and television dramas capture your age group better?

Can you think of any representations of your age group in the media or government policy that seem to show stereotypes (or not - as the case might be). Please feel free to

include as many examples as you like. We are thinking of the way the words “teenager”, “youth”, “pensioner” are used.

Have you read anything recently that has changed your perception of your particular age group? Or other age groups? Give examples. Did they change the way you feel about yourself?

Has public discussion in any of the forms listed in the section above, or indeed simply informally with friends or family, changed the way you feel about your or other people’s age groups?

Do you feel that Government policy could be changed if these more complex notions of age groups replaced the existing stereotypes? Can you give an example?

Are there any other comments or thoughts you would like to add?

Part 3:

You in November 2010 - predicting the future!

Picture yourself in one year’s time – towards the end of 2010. Where do you think you will be? What will you be doing? What do you already know will have changed for you?

What might change for you and those around you? Are you planning any changes now? How much control do you feel you have about your future?

The sorts of things might include leaving school or college, starting or leaving a job, retiring, health changes, moving house, household and family changes or refurbishments, travel, holidays, changes in income, or bigger transitions like births, weddings, divorces, even, possibly, deaths.

Can you speculate about your wider community – changes at work or school/college or in your neighbourhood. How will they be in a year’s time do you think?

What about the political and economic scene in this country and in the world. What do you predict? And how do you feel about what you foresee? Your hopes and fears please!

Please post your response to:

**The Mass Observation Archive, FREEPOST BR 2112, The Library, University of Sussex,
Brighton BN1 1ZX**

Or by email to: moa@sussex.ac.uk