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Neoliberal technologies of subject formation: A case study of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme

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Abstract

The hegemony of neoliberalism as an economic and governmental rationality on a global scale is well documented. How it has come to be that way and how its relevance is upheld is a complex theoretical and historical-empirical question. This article contributes to the discussion by examining the ways in which neoliberal discourse enters into the production of subjectivity and comes to operate at the level of desire. While subject formation takes place in multiple and contradictory ways and within and across a multiplicity of social sites, the article focuses on the popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme as a technology of neoliberal subjectification. The article analyses how neoliberal discourse manifests itself in the Award's promotional material and programme and, drawing on qualitative semi-structured interviews, how the Award scheme is taken up by students in a prestigious Australian private girls' school.

Keywords: neoliberalism, subject formation, technologies of the self, Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme

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> Money spent on politics has very little effect on the actions of the average grown person. Most people are far too busy with their own affairs to get involved with the dreary subject of politics. It is of course necessary to have a political machinery but if we are going to increase the number of people who are going to vote intelligently, we must start putting the right ideas in front of them at an early age (Sir Anthony Fischer, founder of Institute of Economic Affairs, aka 'the Hayek think-tank', 1956, cited in Hill, 1998:72)

Introduction

While undertaking her longitudinal fieldwork in a prestigious private secondary girls' school in urban Australia (O'Flynn 2004), the second author noticed how both teachers and students regularly made reference to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and how it was unilaterally constituted as a 'good thing'. The scheme was also mentioned in the school's promotional materials and on their website and there too presented as an exceedingly worthwhile activity for the students to do. The taken-for-granted worthwhile-ness of the Award scheme is in itself intriguing. What is it about it that is so 'good' and 'worthwhile'? Why do teachers recommend it and students undertake it? Thinking with Foucault, however, a more important question becomes: what does it *do*?

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme was founded in the early 1950s by expatriate German outdoor educationalist Kurt Hahn, who is well known for his commitment to education for 'character building' (apart from the Award scheme he also fathered the Outward Bound programme). As the Award scheme developed from an early local variation, he insisted that Prince Philip put his name to the scheme and persuaded John Hunt, the leader of the first successful Everest expedition, to be its first Director (Flavin, 1996). This feat is cited as evidence for the claim that Hahn was quite a 'mover and shaker' himself (www.infed.org/thinkers/et-hahn.htm). The Award scheme began in the United

Kingdom in 1956 "to encourage and motivate young people over the age of 14 years to become involved in a balanced program of voluntary self development activities" (quote from the Award scheme's website). It now operates in over 60 countries across the Commonwealth, and in Australia alone the program currently has over 6700 new participants commencing the Award each year. Given this number of participants it seems that the Award scheme, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2006, continues to be seen as a 'good thing to do'.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is predominantly administered through accredited and accrediting schools, although various scouts' organisations and other outdoor education initiatives are involved as well. In this way schools, both public and private, provide institutional endorsement and a platform for participation. In this paper we suggest that educational programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme are not innocent or value-neutral apparatuses. Rather, they serve as vehicles of particular regimes of truth about what constitutes a good life and a good person. And our particular reading of the Award scheme will centre on the idea that it is a vehicle of neoliberal regimes of truth about the desirable citizen-subject.

How is the hegemony of neoliberalism upheld?

The hegemony of neoliberalism as an economic and governmental rationality of western nation states is well documented in the literature (Peck & Tickell, 2002). How neoliberalism achieved this status and how its relevance is upheld is of course a very complex theoretical and historical-empirical question. Here we wish to contribute to the discussion by examining the ways in which neoliberal discourse enters into the production of subjectivity and comes to operate at the level of desire. We want to investigate how neoliberal rationalities and desires come to colonise the flesh and govern affect; and how they become naturalised and invisible. The assertion is that in order to effectively resist or subvert neoliberal discourses it is of paramount importance to understand how they come to 'govern the soul' (Rose, 1990). How do neoliberal discourses become part of the repertoires through which we enact and assess our lives - what feels 'good', what feels 'right'? How do we understand ourselves, and importantly, how and where do we *learn* how to understand ourselves and assess our relative successes and failures as human beings? What regimes of truth are made available to us in the institutional contexts in which we come to be intelligible to ourselves and others as persons? In our attempt to begin to answer these questions we follow a Foucauldian (1980) approach and consider the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme as a 'mechanism of power', as

a vehicle of particular power-knowledge relations, and, specifically, as an entry into understanding neoliberal discourses in processes of subjectification. We will treat the Award scheme as an example or case, and scrutinise its workings and embedded rationalities regarding moral and desirable citizen-subjectivity. We will look at how it is currently taken up by students, and what selves and self-understandings it enables (and hence disables). As Flyvbjerg (2006) asserts, case studies remain a necessary and powerful method of inquiry in the social sciences, and through 'the force of example' they can generate insight about social phenomena beyond themselves.

As mentioned we will argue that educational programmes such as the Award scheme have come to play a part in the construction of neoliberal selves and desires. While the Award scheme was conceived in an era that one could argue precedes the advent of hegemonic neoliberalism, the focus here lies on its current self-representation and how it is currently taken up and constituted by its awardees. As we will elaborate later, programmes such as the Award scheme, which may not have been designed to serve a particular project, can nevertheless come to converge with this project as it is taken up.

Following Apple (2003), we insist that the work done within educational programmes, rather than being epiphenomenal, are pivotal to global processes of neoliberalisation (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Harvey, 2005). Broadly, our exploration and argument is located in the field of research which attempts to understand how schools or other educational contexts are implicated in subject formation (e.g. Davies, et al., 2001; Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004; McLeod, 2000; Wexler, 1992). In this view, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, as an educational programme, is seen to operate in a field of multiple discourses; and although never solely constitutive or determined, it comes with certain predispositions – for particular discursive rationalities and subject positions. In other words, we consider the Award scheme an 'invitation to subjectivity'. We wish to trace the predispositions and foreground the subjectivity being invited, by considering the scheme as a 'technology of the self'. Technologies of the self, Foucault explains (1994:177), are those technologies, those practices

> that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power.

Through various technologies of the self, subjects come to exercise power upon themselves. As Cruikshank's (1996) analysis of self-esteem books shows us ("there is nothing personal about self-esteem", p. 231), technologies of self-development are technologies of citizenship, as they provide tools through which we can evaluate, act upon and police ourselves "so that the police, guards and the doctors do not have to" (1996:234). The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, we suggest, is an available tool of self-governance, which "binds subjects to a subjection which is more profound because it appears to emanate from our autonomous quest for ourselves, it appears as a matter of our freedom" (Rose, 1990:256).

The contours of neoliberal subjectivity

When canvassing the contours of neoliberal discourse an array of dimensions can be depicted. It is a multifaceted beast (Jessop, 2002). Here we follow Wendy Brown's (2003) perspective on neoliberalism and focus on its flow-on effects in terms of desirable, rewardable, citizen-subjectivity.

Brown warns us not to focus on neoliberalism as purely an economic policy with inadvertent political and social consequences, but asks us to take it seriously as a *political* rationality which organises these policies (see also Beeson and Firth, 1998). Neoliberalism never was a purely economic project, it was always ideological, moral (Schoolman, 1987). Neoliberalism emerging as a governmentality is "a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social" (Brown, 2003\). The new organisation of the social consists of extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social actions:

> not only is the human being configured exhaustively as homo oeconomicus, all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of market rationality. While this entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality (Brown, 2003).

Several authors argue that the defining characteristic of neoliberalism as a style of government, the feature which differentiates it from early liberalism of the Anglo-Scottish kind, is precisely the extension of enterprise culture: that *all* forms of conduct take – or should take – an 'enterprise form' (Brown, 2003; Rose, 1999; Burchell, 1996). As Apple puts it: "Neo-liberalism creates policies and practices that embody the enterprising and constantly strategizing entrepreneur out of the possessive individualism it establishes as the ideal citizen" (2003:3). In a neoliberal framework activities such as education are subjected to narrow personal cost-benefit calculations i.e. will this place *me* more advantageously in the market place? Other and contradictory rationalities regarding education, although still available, are sidelined or subordinated and at times ridiculed as nostalgia (Davies and Petersen, 2005).

A particularly interesting aspect of neoliberalism is that it is what Brown (2003) calls the 'constructivist' aspect. In other words, new public management neoliberals such as Buchanan, and to a lesser extent Hayek, do not presume the market's ontological givenness but take it for granted that it needs 'development', 'institutionalisation' and 'dissemination' (Smart, 2003). Markets have to be created and sustained; the old *laissez faire* mentality will not suffice. According to Burchell (1996) this means that neoliberals, if not creating them themselves, will actively support projects and programmes which contribute to continuation of the market rationality, for the ideological sake of it. Brown (2003) writes: "Neoliberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to [a neoliberal] calculus, rather it develops institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision". Such programmes could very well include those that help form and develop subjectivities who are not only 'ready' for the market, but who desire appropriately, who desire to 'be free' and 'have choices' (at whatever cost), who strive to be successful entrepreneurial individuals and who feel that anything else is a moral compromise.

Brown suggests that there is work to be done mapping the convergence and tensions between a non-partisan neoliberal governmentality on the one hand and specific agendas and tactics of specific neoliberal agents on the other, such as the Regan-Bush neo-conservatives, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), who actively partake in strategic dissemination of neoliberal rationalities and (social and educational) policies. Hill (1998) urges us not to forget that organisations, such as IEA, were always acutely aware of the importance of deliberate social engineering, that is, of winning the hearts and minds of ordinary people, so that

they would vote 'intelligently' (see opening quote from Fischer). Hill claims that "the task of Hayek's apostles was that of gradually changing the outlook implicit in the average person's everyday experience" (1998:73), or in other words, replacing one common sense with another common sense. In this light one could speculate whether educational programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, or the more recent Students in Free Enterprise (http://www.sife.org/), have been strategically developed and promoted by particular stakeholders, or whether they 'merely' – and very productively – converge with non-partisan neoliberal governmental hegemony. As Smart reminds us:

> Hegemony contributes to or constitutes a form of social cohesion not through force or coercion, not necessarily through consent, but most effectively by way of practices, techniques and methods which infiltrate mind and bodies, cultural practices which cultivate behaviours and beliefs, tastes and desires, and needs as seemingly naturally occurring qualities, and properties embodied in the psychic and physical reality (or 'truth') of the human subject (Smart, 1986 cited in Hill, 1998:80)

Regardless of whether institutional practices, common sense or embodied desires have been designed and strategically promoted to further a neoliberal project, discourses of the entrepreneurial self are readily available in contemporary processes of subjectification. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme enters into a network of neoliberal discursive practices and offers an opportunity to learn what it means to be a successful and worthwhile person and how that is done.

The Award scheme and its invitation to neoliberal subjectivity – self-presentation

We now turn to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme website. Because the Award scheme is extra-institutional – schools may help organise it, but the Award scheme can be undertaken independently – the website is a central place for promotion and for providing detailed information. The analytical focus will be turned to the Award scheme's Australian website, which provides links to the different states and territories. Given the context in which the second author collected her data, we examine the New South Wales site (www.dukeofednsw.au.com). A browse through a number of other Award sites shows that there is not much difference in the way the scheme is presented.

Like most of the websites presenting the Award scheme, the New South Wales site opens with a photo mural of happy young people of different ethnicity. The message: this is a happy place for all young people. Colours are bright and font types creative. The structure of the scheme is such that the individual young person undertakes extra-curricular activities (within four categories: service, expeditions, skills, and physical recreation) at three levels, and progresses from Bronze to Silver to Gold awards. With Burchell (1996:27) we could conceptualise this underlying structure as a 'quasi-economic model of action'; the neoliberal model of action *par excellence*. Certain actions are rewarded in the form of symbolic payment and external recognition (award (badge and certificate)). If we click on the link 'What it's all about' we are taken to a site where it says:

> The Award Programme is about challenge. It's also about providing the opportunity to accept a challenge. The Programme encourages the participant to set a personal goal and achieve it. Along the way, they learn about themselves and about qualities like responsibility, trust and the ability to plan and organise themselves.
>
> There is no competition between participants. The only people with whom they compete are themselves. Self-motivation is fundamental to the Award. There are no set standards to achieve. The criterion for gaining an Award is individual improvement based on each participant's starting point and potential.
>
> Participation in the Programme is entirely voluntary. Participants choose their own activities within the four areas and set their own goals. Each challenge requires a special dedication, both physical and mental, and while the structure of the Award provides specialist help in different skills, individual participants must make their own way to the best of their ability. Success in the Award Programme comes through a conscious decision to accept and take up the challenges.
>
> There is no such thing as failure in the Award Programme. Even if an Award is not attained, just being involved brings new friends, new knowledge and new adventures which are, above all, enjoyable.
>
> Anyone between the ages of 14 and 25 can take part in the Award. The only entry qualifications are the determination to improve oneself and the desire to have fun.

As we can see the Award scheme is designed for the individual young person. It is about setting personal goals and achieving them without needing to negotiate, or being derailed or held back by, other people's 'starting points'. As Brown (2003) writes,

Neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions.

Indeed, the Award scheme develops this capacity for 'self-care'; it is all about the individual's own needs and ambitions. As Olssen and Peters (2005:324) note the core dimensions of neoliberal new public management theories are flexibility, but also clearly defined objectives and a results orientation. The Award scheme provides a platform for learning this way of life: you define your goal and through self-motivation you achieve it. In this way you will learn how not to waste your time going down dead ends or dilly-dallying around aimlessly. You learn that activities you choose to undertake are undertaken for a reason: because it will get you somewhere – not any old somewhere but to an identified point in the progressive improvement of your self.

Interestingly, 'service' is a category of activity that the young person has to undertake. 'Service' includes a long list of activities that the participant can choose from: aged care, helping homeless people, reading for the blind, wildlife surveys and Sunday school teaching. One could argue that this negates the assertion that the Award scheme is about individualism, self-interestedness and 'self-care'[2]. Similarly with the categories of 'expedition' and 'physical recreation', the young person is encouraged to undertake teams-based activities. However, ultimately these community-oriented activities are a means to an end. The objective remains the individual's personal development and achievement of the award. So, while neoliberal subjects may engage in social activities and civil deeds – and feel good about it – these acts are also constituted and embodied in particular ways within neoliberal rationality. With reference to the ultimate neoliberal state Hayek sums it up when he writes: "That we assist in the realization of other people's aims without sharing them or even knowing them, and solely in order to achieve our own aims, is the source of strength of the Great Society" (Hayek 1976:110, cited in Smart, 2003:95). In other words, care for the other is not a requirement for 'service', only self-care is.

As we saw the website emphasises the notion of 'challenge': it is what the Award scheme is all about, "providing the opportunity to accept a challenge". Opportunities and challenges and challenging opportunities encapsulate entrepreneurial rhetoric. 'Accepting a challenge' is a very particular rhetorical construction; it denotes action, agency, a positive disposition to trials posed

upon you, with the binary other being someone who chooses the position of victim or whinger. Furthermore, according to the web-site in the course of accepting the challenge and achieving your goals there are other 'pay-offs'. You will learn about yourself, come to a better 'understanding' of yourself and develop the skill to assess your strengths and weaknesses. In this a particular kind of self-gaze is invoked; an objectification of the self and an understanding of the self as something that can be known, rather than something that *becomes* something through being discursified into existence in particular ways. Getting to 'know one-self' is constituted as an unquestioned good. Secondly, once the self becomes known it becomes possible, just like with other objects, to rationally 'assess it' and weigh up its strong and weak points. Through knowing the self in that way it subsequently becomes possible to deliberately improve the self and increase its market desirability. If we can identify where we need 'development' – at the age of 14 or 15 – we can, again, ensure that we will not waste any valuable time on misadventures. It will be possible to categorise tasks and activities in terms of whether they add to our inherent or already acquired strengths, transform our weaknesses into strengths, or waste our time. In this process we will become 'organised' and 'learn to plan', which will increase our chances for productive continuing self-governance, indeed for 'life-long learning' into the art of managed and planned subjectivity. We will be ready for the workplace performance appraisal.

As the website outlines, one of the taken-for-granted-as-good qualities that the young person will develop is 'a sense of responsibility'. While this may include being responsible to the people you engage with along the way, it also involves learning that you are responsible for your own success (and, correspondingly but not stated, your own failure). Succeeding in the Award scheme is based on self-motivation, and if you fail, you have only yourself and your lack of motivation to blame. In other words, nothing stands between you and success but your motivation (no 'excuses'). The promise of learning responsibility links up with those enduring discourses which equate youth with irresponsibility and poor decision-making skills (Lesko, 2001) and would therefore perhaps appeal to worried parents. The Award scheme constitutes a promise to keep the notoriously and allegedly irrational and reckless teenager on the 'straight and narrow', sublimating uncontrollable libidinal forces into 'productive' ventures[3]. These deficit discourses around youth converge with the notion of responsibility in other ways. As Donzelot has shown (1991 cited in Burchell, 1996) the making of neoliberal citizens has involved 'procedures of responsibilisation' which involved 'offering' individuals active involvement in action and decision-making traditionally located elsewhere (e.g. with teachers, parents, employers and other authorities) for the price of taking active responsibility

for these activities and decisions, for carrying them out, and for their outcomes. This kind of involvement then can be referred to by both those responsible and their managers to justify the need to (over)commit, (over)work and so on. As Brown (2003) argues neoliberal regimes shift the regulatory competence of the state to 'responsible', 'rational' individuals with the aim of encouraging individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form.

One could be led to believe that in the world of capitalist market-thinking – with its social-Darwinist images of products and selves competing and out-competing each other on the battlefield of supply and demand – that learning how to compete with others (*and* out-compete them) would be central. However, the Award scheme emphasises that there is no competition amongst participants. The only person with whom one competes is oneself. Therefore, rather than being driven by a motivation to win *over* others, the motivation should be to win over oneself – in the form of reaching personal goals. In other words, one must over-come oneself (perhaps the self who would rather sit around and not be results-oriented). It appears to us that the notion of participating in something to win *over* others is constituted as somehow less tasteful and open rivalry a rather more ignominious form of competition – a notion which, in a somewhat twisted way, reinforces the individualist and individualising aspect of the Award scheme. The voluntary 'competition with oneself' is the only fuel needed for the fully entrepreneurial subject. Beginning not from some externally set standards but from your own starting point, and being self-motivated rather than relying on external motivation, will ensure that enough will never be enough; that good will never be good enough. There will always be another goal to achieve (the Gold Award is not really the end; it is just the beginning of your life of endless self-improvement). The constantly aspiring neoliberal subject will not be content in just beating others, the entrepreneurial self-improving venture will never cease. This unforgiving discursive practice is of course continuous with the protestant ethics of the spirit of capitalism described by Max Weber (1992/1930). The 'internalisation' of the external moral authority and gaze marks a dramatic change in the mode of (self)governance. The achievement of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme – as with, for example, new public management strategies in the workplace such as performance management – is that it promotes the same unrelenting ethics, with God lost in the equation. When the secularised subject itself wants more and wants better – in order to feel good, righteous and desirable – neoliberal capitalism flourishes.

In the end (and as we suspected), participating in the Award scheme does become about out-competing other people. If we click on the link 'Why do it?' this list comes up.

- It's great fun!
- For challenge and adventure
- Because you're an individual
- You can learn new skills and interests
- To make some more friends
- You'll increase your self confidence
- It looks great on your CV
- So you can meet new people
- You get a prestigious and highly valued International Award

Amongst these rationalities 'fun' makes the top of the list. Keeping up being a constantly enterprising and strategising subject would pose difficult if it (only) felt like hard slog. Successful subjectification in neoliberal regimes would necessarily require the quest for self-improvement and other entrepreneurial activities to be tied with pleasure and happiness. The constative form 'It's great fun!' contains a moral imperative (thou must have fun!) and a potential pathologisation of those who fail to have fun whilst undertaking the scheme. Moreover – and returning to the question of competition – we see two references made to the rationality that achieving the Award will give you 'an edge'; it will 'look great on your CV' ('naturally', in a neoliberal context, we have already begun such a thing at the age of 14) and you will 'get a prestigious and highly valued International Award'. In other words, undertaking the Award will enhance your positional advantage in the international market place; as a product you will be more attractive than, that is, out-compete those who failed to add this to their portfolio.

So, as the Award presents itself as value neutral there are many lessons to be learned as a young person. As we have argued the invitation to subjectivity consists of becoming a self-governing individualistic, strategising, entrepreneurial subject. You learn what ought to drive you, you learn what success is, and you learn how to 'know' your self. However, as the Award scheme can only ever be an 'invitation', we now turn to some of its participants to listen to their negotiations of the invitation, and to see what they learned. We consider the take-up of the scheme and its self technologies by a group of young women from a prestigious Australia private girls' school involved in the second author's PhD study[4].

Current take-ups of the Award scheme – students' narratives

One of the predominant reasons talked about by the young women for commencing the Award was indeed the certificate. They were acutely aware that their participation in the scheme would result in a piece of paper that would 'look good on their resume'. For example Rachel said: "A lot of businesses accept it as, like, they see it as good leadership skills, initiative and stuff. It was also lots of fun". Melinda concurred: "Initially I was sort of thinking, oh let's do this because you can put it on your resume and it looks good. And then, like, once you experience what it is, you say 'this is way better than that' and you say 'now I know why it's gotta be on your resume'". Interestingly, however, it seems that it was not legitimate to exclusively justify one's participation in terms of the certificate. The young women assured that their participation was about *more* than the certificate - often simultaneously citing that it is also a fun thing to do. Possibly this is what Brown (2003) means when she asserts that despite neoliberalism hegemonic status it still often cloaks itself in other discourses – discourses that simultaneously negate and reinforce the calculating and strategising gaze.

Meanwhile, the relentless entrepreneurial neoliberal rationalities to 'be more', to 'be self-motivated', and to be constantly bettering the self were most certainly taken up by the young women in their talk about their participation in the scheme and about their lives in general (see also O'Flynn and Petersen, 2007). The imperatives were operative in the ways in which the young women judged, assessed and came to 'know' their lives. In particular, one of the most striking features of the young women's talk about their lives was the strong presence of the imperative to live a 'productive' life – with one young woman stating "It's better to be busy, because it shows that if you are busy and you have a balanced life, then in terms of study you perform better." The young women seemed quite versed in articulating the 'importance' of monitoring one's time, and in participating in 'productive' endeavours to better or improve themselves – with the Award scheme being an example hereof. As exemplified in Faye's talk below about why she participates in physical activity, the moral imperative of living a productive life appears prominent:

> Faye: When you usually go and do more physical fitness, it's more aimed at a self-goal in the end. What you feel is more self-achievement in terms of, like, you've gained more physically; you've actually dragged yourself out to go to the gym to do something by yourself. Whereas, I think for the hikes, because it's a whole day thing, I end up feeling like I've actually done something useful with my day. Like I haven't gone and watched TV for the whole day, or something. So I think it makes me feel better in that way, in that I'm actually getting out somewhere and doing something instead of staying at home, or something like that.

It appears that pleasure is associated with self-discipline and with living out one's duty to participate in activities that are purposeful and useful, even if one must drag oneself to it. In contrast, a life that is not 'busy' is constructed as unsuccessful, incomplete, and unfulfilled. 'Sedentary' activities, such

as watching television, are thus not 'useful' activities; they are activities which are seen as 'wasting time' and not part of a 'productive' and 'good' life.

As well as knowing one's time/life in terms of productivity, the young women were well practised in knowing themselves in terms of being a work-in-progress to be bettered and improved. In this sense the neoliberal rationality 'to know thyself' as a product to be constantly updated, developed and added to, provided the young women with a dominant frame to know and engage with the self. They had become practised in taking up the rationality of bettering one's value in the market place through the notion of 'skill-adding' and 'skill-building' - a practice of the self exemplified in Faye's talk below, and a strong feature of the students' meaning-making. In the quote, Faye talks specifically about her involvement in the Award scheme. Her favourite part of the scheme was the hikes. The hikes were fun, she said, and challenging, and provided the opportunity for her to see new things. She also stressed that the hikes also meant developing certain skills:

> Faye: you develop skills like common sense in a lot of different situations. Being able to judge what you are capable of and what everyone else is capable of and also taking responsibility for yourself. I mean you become a lot more independent, I think, and learn to make your own decisions and more ready to just go out there and maybe take a risk or just go out there and do something more on intuition.

What is reverberated here is the entrepreneurial self that is independent, takes risks and goes on gut instinct. In Faye's account this is a desirable mode of being, something to aspire to. Similarly Kim, a young woman who went on to complete her Gold Award, was someone who regarded herself as someone who had 'boundaries to be pushed' and who liked 'testing her mental side'. She said:

> Kim: I just think I can be better than I am at the moment. I think I could do so much better. I'm just one of those people that pushes myself further and further and I think that's good. You know, I think I could do more community service. I think I should go back to the [name] Foundation and help out; whether I do or not I don't know, but I just think I could do so much better at everything. Yeah, it's just a self-improvement thing. I don't know, I mean, it's not an obsessive thing, it's not something like I should be doing this, I should be doing that; it's more a, I should improve myself for others kind of thing, … But yeah, there's no ideal me but of course there's always improvements I want to make and they never come all at the

same time. So that's why there isn't probably an ideal me because I'd stress myself out too much that I didn't reach my goals. But little things, like something would trigger and I'm like, "yes, I want to be able to do that". So "go and do it" or "I want to be better at that", you know … So yeah, but I'm never, I mean I'm always happy with myself, don't get me wrong, I'm fine, you know … I'm absolutely happy but I just think I could be better at things so I do strive to get better and better. It's not an academic thing or a sporting thing, it's just within myself. So yeah, there you go.

Interestingly, where Kim arguably represents an exemplary subject of neoliberal discourse (self motivated, committed, driven), Tomiko speaks herself into existence in quite a different way. About participating in the Award scheme she says,

> Tomiko: I go and do community service which I've been doing since January. It's my community service for Duke of Edinburgh - which I'm still doing. But I think I should keep on going and mum is like, "you should keep it up". So I'm doing that and that's basically what I do, yeah, and sometimes, occasionally on the weekend, like on the weekend, I really want to be with friends or do something, but weekends are usually the time I catch up on all the (violin) practice or all the work that I haven't done during the week. So weekends don't seem like weekends. I'm not really doing much, because when I think of people like my friends who are going out and I'm sure they're going really well in their work as well, I think – "I should organise myself so that I can do both, like have both, go out and study". But it's really hard, because when I come back from community service and uni I feel exhausted. So when I come home I don't feel like doing another four hours study or something. I just crash in front of the TV and that's it.

Tomiko is not, in her understanding, self-motivated or committed, and she does not manage her time appropriately. She has come to assess herself in terms of neoliberal imperatives of self-government, entrepreneurialism and steadfast self-motivation. She consistently positions herself as not getting it right. The neoliberal commandment 'thou ought to be driven, busy and committed' is drawn on by Tomiko to assess her life – with a strong sense of guilt and self dissatisfaction as result. Tomiko's story supports Walkerdine's (2003) assertion that neoliberal discourse sets people up to fail, in the sense that it produces a constantly 'failing subject'. Tomiko has come to see herself as someone who desires and lives inappropriately and unproductively, as a less than moral being.

Conclusion

We have argued that the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, although repeatedly constituted as a 'good' and 'wholesome' activity by schools, teachers and students (and, we expect, parents), may come with an array of discourses that work to uphold neoliberal hegemony[5]. As a seductive and powerful technology of the self the Award scheme invites participants to desire and assess worthwhileness along entrepreneurial lines: to gaze upon themselves as malleable, flexible, always-improvable portfolios and learn to assess themselves as successful or failures accordingly. The Award scheme cites and reiterates the neoliberal values of individualism, voluntarism and choice, and we saw how some young women had taken them up as their own. The references that they make to who they are and what they desire to be, and to what feels 'good' and 'right' (and 'bad'), which have come about through subjectification within and across a number of contexts, suggest that their hearts and minds indeed have been shaped by neoliberal discourse. Un-doing that kind of subjectification, coming to desire otherwise, would be difficult, especially if other modes of desire, counter-discourses, are silenced and relegated as nostalgia or as 'unnatural'. We began this paper with the assertion that in order to effectively resist or subvert neoliberal discourses it is of great significance to understand how they operate at the micro-physical level of desire. Problematising taken-for-granted-as-good educational programmes currently on offer is an important part of that work.

Notes

1 Of course it could be very interesting to trace the ways in which the Award scheme historically has promoted itself but here we merely focus on the current official websites.
2 Note here that the participant can *choose* which community service to undertake; like with philanthropy, which neoliberals celebrate and depend upon, the do-gooder is bound by personal choice alone - rather than to a state sponsored collective commitment to sustained social welfare.
3 A more full reading of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme as a 'disciplining' technology of youth would of course be possible. In such an analysis the desired citizen of the Award scheme would be the prudent, rational autonomous subject – a subject which compliments the neoliberal subject.
4 The interview data drawn on in this section of the paper has been sourced from a large study on the place and meaning of health and physical activity in the lives of young women (O'Flynn, 2004). Fourteen young women were recruited from two very different schools – a prestigious, independent, girls' school; and a Department, co-educational High School. Two Personal Development, Heath and Physical Education teachers, from both schools, were also interviewed.
5 Interestingly, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme enters into market discourses in other ways. As individuals schools are increasingly required to function as independently managed quasi-enterprises in competition with other schools the Award scheme is paraded in the promotion of themselves as a more attractive choice; attracting students of 'the right kind' (Burchell, 1996:28).

Biographies

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