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The Formation of Young Workers: The Cultivation of the Self as a Subject of Value to the Contemporary Labour Force

This paper explores the practices through which young people cultivate themselves as subjects of value to the post-Fordist labour force. In this, the paper goes beyond an existing emphasis on young people's 'transitions' through employment, to a focus on the practices through which young people are formed as labouring subjects, and therefore on the relationship between youth subjectivities and post-Fordist labour force formation. Theoretically, the paper builds upon increasingly influential suggestions in studies of post-Fordism that the formation of post-Fordist workers now takes place through the conversion of the whole of a subject's life into the capacity for labour, including affective styles, modes of relationality, and characteristics usually not considered as productive dimensions of the self. In this context, the paper shows that whilst young people form themselves as workers through practices that are not specific to institutionalised definitions of education and labour, these practices – and the modes of selfhood they aim to cultivate – vary in ways that contribute to classed divisions within post-Fordist societies. In this, the study of the formation of young workers offers a critical insight into the way that the formation of subjectivities intertwines with the disciplinary requirements of post-Fordist labour in their classed manifestations.

Keywords: Youth; Work; Labour; Post-Fordism; Identity

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Introduction

This paper explores one of the key social imperatives emerging from post-Fordism – that is – the disciplinary requirement to cultivate the qualities of a productive worker in the realisation of the self, and thereby to craft the self as a subject of value to the contemporary labour force (Weeks, 2011). The shift to post-Fordism describes a 'new economy' (Adkins, 2005) characterised by the emergence of networked economic flows, flexible and contingent employment structures, and

the economic centrality of cognitive, immaterial and affective forms of production and labour. In this context, the formation of the post-Fordist self has become intertwined with the disciplinary requirements of work and labour in new ways. The requirement for the self to achieve cultural intelligibility through work has intensified precisely as the structural conditions of the labour market have become more precarious (McRobbie, 2016, p 162). The dimensions of the self that are recognised as productive are becoming increasingly expansive, with autonomist Marxists arguing that there is no aspect of contemporary subjectivity that is not somehow incorporated into the working self (Hardt and Negri, 2004). These social conditions suggest new ways in which labouring subjectivities are formed, and create questions about the practices through which post-Fordist subjects are positioned as workers.

In this context, this paper explores the practices through which young people work on the self in order to position themselves as labouring subjects, and shows how these practices contribute to the formation of divisions within the labour force connected with social class. The context for this focus is the positioning of the relationship between youth and work as a critical point of analysis and technical intervention into the dynamics of the post-Fordist economy. Post-Fordism has seen elevated levels of youth unemployment become a structural feature of contemporary societies, and interest in young people's 'transitions' into the labour force has intensified in recent years as a result (World Bank, 2007, p 67-186; Woodman and Wyn, 2015). Young people have been positioned at the forefront of the neoliberal incitement to form the 'self as enterprise' (McNay, 2009) or to craft the self as a valuable commodity in order to survive and thrive in the midst of labour market insecurity (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2014, p 5). This is also critical to the experience of social class, in which the neoliberal incitement to accumulate and perform value becomes a key means by which classed subjectivities are formed (Skeggs, 2011). It is in these conditions that the young working self is created, and with this focus the paper explores the practices through which young people craft themselves as subjects of value to the labour force.

The paper opens by interrogating the key conceptual frameworks animating both sociological and governmental interventions into the relationship between youth and work, arguing for a shift beyond perspectives focused on governing 'transitions' into employment and towards a focus on the personal practices or 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) that incorporate the life of the subject into the formation of the labour force. Drawing on empirical material collected in

regions of high youth unemployment, the empirical portion of the paper suggests that this process constitutes the cultivation of particular personal qualities, affective styles and modes of relationality. In the process, my analysis identifies differences in the kinds of productive and valorisable subjectivity cultivated by differently positioned young people, and theorises these as a means by which classed subject formation is taking place in the realm of work.

From Youth Transitions to the Cultivation of the Labouring Self

Young people's participation in the labour market is an issue of longstanding concern. The key means by which young people's relationship with work is currently understood is through the notion of 'transitions' – or biographical pathways – into and through employment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011). The key questions in this field have concerned the social organisation of biographies according to structural inequalities, and their manifestation in employment status and degrees of employment security (Furlong et al, 2017). This field has also analysed the emergence of personal reflexivity as a means for managing labour market precarity (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), and has demonstrated how biographical strategies articulate class inequalities (Farrugia, 2013a; 2013b). However, whilst this has highlighted the significance of youth as a population that is critical to processes of employment reorganisation, this research agenda has not examined the practices or 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) through which the working self is produced. In response, the shift I am pursuing in this paper is from a focus on the structuring of employment outcomes to a focus on the formation of labouring subjectivities.

This shift of focus is especially urgent now due to a range of interconnected processes that have intensified the need to produce the self in line with the requirements of work. Kathi Weeks has described the 'post-Fordist work ethic' in terms of the promise of personal development and self-realisation through labour, and has suggested that post-Fordism creates the requirement to 'become somebody' through labour in unprecedented ways (Weeks, 2011, p 8-9). The emergence of this ethic is intertwined with what Bolstanski and Chiapello (2005, p 419-483) have described as the success of the 'artistic critique' of industrial capitalism, in which neoliberal interventions into the labour market are positioned as facilitating self-expression and creative self-realisation at work. The production of contemporary labouring subjectivities takes place within what McNay (2009) and others (Kelly, 2013) have described as the 'self as enterprise'.

This describes the neoliberal incitement to produce the self as a project of entrepreneurial development, personal investment, according to a logic of competitive entrepreneurialism (Bröckling, 2015) in which labour becomes a ‘fulfilling mark of self’ (McRobbie, 2016, p 39) in the most general sense.

Whilst the notion of youth transitions tends to understand employment as a sphere of life distinct from leisure or other ‘non-productive’ aspects of social life, the practices that are enrolled into the production of the self as a worker are becoming increasingly expansive. McRobbie (2016) argues that enterprise culture has replaced the notion of ‘skill, expertise and qualification with the idea of a portfolio [including] a whole range of wildly different capacities’ (McRobbie, 2016, p 107). Notions such as personal drive, passion and the love of work are coming to the fore in new ways, forming part of the incitement to self-realisation through labour that is offered to young workers in the post-Fordist economy (Kelly and Harrison, 2009; McRobbie, 2016). The increasingly influential work of Hardt and Negri (2004) and Lazzarato (1996) locates the formation of labouring subjectivities beyond the possession of skills, instead encouraging analysis of the way that the affective and relational life of the subject is enrolled into their position as workers. This perspective encompasses embodied and relational styles that are not specific to work or training, and which make the relational and affective dimensions of the subject central to the formation of workers. Becoming a part of the labour force is therefore a process which enrolls and reshapes the basic affective experiences, personal qualities and relational capacities of a worker.

However, the classed dimensions of post-Fordist labour force formation have received less attention than shifts in the nature of labour in general, and the formation of post-Fordist workers takes place at a time when the modes of affectivity and relationality demanded by work are changing in ways that bear a complex relationship with established modes of classed subjectivity. For example, Gill and Pratt (2008) have argued that by focusing on life in the most general sense as a source of economic value, Hardt and Negri (2004) have ignored the significance of classed inequalities as a means by which life is converted into labour. Drawing on Bourdieu (1990), Skeggs (2004) describes the notion of the self-realising subject as characteristic of a middle class ‘habitus’, and therefore a form of elite subjectivity from which the working class are excluded (Skeggs, 2004). However, it is no longer necessarily possible to – in

Bourdieuian terms – make a virtue of the necessity of exclusion from this realisation of the post-Fordist self (Bourdieu, 1990). The low-wage service economy – which has become representative of contemporary working-class work – now demands diverse and highly cultivated forms of personal embodiment from workers (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009). The mobilisation of resilient, aspirational and ‘passionate’ subjectivities is now promoted as a requirement for labour market engagement amongst unemployed young people, whose intrinsic ‘passion’ is positioned as critical to their success in the contemporary work place (Kelly and Harrison, 2009). A discourse of ‘soft skills’ encourages the development of relational competencies and emotional expressiveness as critical attributes for all contemporary workers, although the way that the cultivation of these competencies reflect the formation of classed subjectivities is unclear.

In the context of new and increased demands for young people to form themselves as labouring subjects, this paper explores how young people are produced – and cultivate themselves – as subjects of value for the contemporary labour force. The concern here is not (or not only) with the success or failure of young people’s efforts to secure work, or with the consequences of unemployment and employment precarity on young people’s lives. Instead, this paper explores the practices of the self through which young people position themselves as workers whose labour offers value to employers, and with the social and relational context which facilitates these practices. My analysis includes all aspects of life that my research participants considered to contribute to the value of themselves as labouring subjects, both inside and outside of the institutional domains currently recognised as significant factors in shaping youth transitions. In this context, I suggest that the practices through which young people cultivate themselves as workers are focused on the production and relational performance of particular personal qualities and affective styles that – it is hoped – will be well received on the labour market. In general then, what I want to explore are the practices of subjectification that take place in the formation of young people as labouring subjects.

Methodology

The empirical material presented below is drawn from data collected during a fellowship funded by the Australian Research Council on the formation of young workers, including the practices and ethics through which young people engage with the labour market. Fieldwork took place in

two regions identified as “youth unemployment hotspots” in Australian social policy discourse (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014), with levels of youth unemployment at three times the national average. However, the sample goes beyond distinctions between employment and unemployment to include participants from a range of backgrounds and employment statuses in order to properly capture the diverse terrain of work that exists even in areas with relatively high youth unemployment. I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 74 young people aged between 17 and 29 (44 young women and 33 young men), including those still in education or training, those who were working, and those who had experienced unemployment. My sample includes young people who had experienced substantial periods of unemployment and marginalisation, those from working class backgrounds with a history of trades or clerical labour, and those from middle class or professional backgrounds with family histories of higher education and professional employment. All participants in this sample were ‘white’. Whilst the communities from which they came did include migrant populations and local indigenous communities, young people from these backgrounds did not volunteer to participate in the research, and this therefore constitutes a limitation of the study. Interviews discussed young people’s experiences of education and training, their motivations for pursuing particular kinds of education, training and employment, their plans and aspirations for work in the near and long term future, and the relationship between their working lives and their lives outside of work. All participant names are pseudonyms.

The analysis that follows is organised according to emergent patterns in ways that differently positioned participants form themselves as subjects of value to the labour force. The analysis focuses on the practices that participants mobilised, and the qualities they attempted to cultivate in themselves, in order to participate in the labour market and succeed at work. Through a process of inductive thematic analysis I have created three categories that resemble Weberian ideal types (Weber, 2017), representing particular constellations of ethics, practices and subject positions that emerged from the analysis. My analysis highlights what is distinctive about these ideal typical categorisations, as well as how they relate to one another in their content and internal logic.

The Cultivation of the Self as a Subject of Value to the Labour Force

Authentic: Passionate and Vibrant

My analysis begins with participants who described their labouring identities in terms of the cultivation and mobilisation of a passionate self, and who suggested that rather than any particular educational qualification or skill, it was their intrinsic passion that positioned them as labouring subjects. These participants are the purest representation of suggestions that the formation of labouring subjects now incorporates the whole of life such that distinctions between the inside and the outside of work have become unsustainable (Adkins, 2005). These participants were uniformly from middle class backgrounds, were university educated, and were working in or aspiring to professional employment. For them, work was taken for granted as a context in which their passionate commitment to labour would form a mode of 'authentic' self-realisation, and in which their own authentic selves would therefore be received as valuable at work. They described themselves as having an affective and relational style which made them valuable workers, and which resulted in opportunities for self-realisation through work. They described themselves as relationally competent, confident, outgoing, and with a personality that was well received by others. An example of this is provided by Robert who was 27 years old, university educated and working for a recruitment company:

I am who I am. I'm outgoing, I'm social. I find myself in those situations where other people necessarily won't, because of my personality. But it's confidence and maturity in that I know I'm appropriate. I know I'm genuine. I know I'm communicating a message of this is who I am. So I'm feeling confident in that. I'm confident in dealing with whoever...I believe if you're lucky enough to be a position of work that reflects your personality or you can reflect your personality through, then you should be proud of it.

This notion of authentic self-expression at work means that for these participants, the labouring self or the self at work was not distinct from the self elsewhere, and instead was united by a broader project of personal development and self-realisation driven by the mobilisation and actualisation of passionate investments in all areas of life. Passion here was understood as a kind of affective force that was unique to the individual rather than to the particular form of work being performed, and that united the various facets of life into a single project. During the interview from which the following is quoted, Meg (a 23 year old junior accountant) describes wanting to feel 'passionate and vibrant' about everything she does, and positions work as an

aspect of an approach to life which foregrounds the cultivation of vibrancy in herself and in her relations with others:

I don't really see work as a separate part of my life. I just want to have one whole life and I want to be able to do the things I want to do. But I absolutely know that I have to be passionate about everything I do, or I'm not going to do it...I can't be vibrant about things – like when I think about things that I'm not passionate about I feel dull...I think I can bring passion to almost anything...I think I'm really just a passionate person but there are definitely things that excite me more than other things.

Here, Meg describes work as an arena in which to cultivate her affective life in the broadest sense, and to realise herself as a vibrant and passionate subject. The aim of the cultivation of the self as a worker here is the cultivation of these 'vibrant' affects, or good feelings such as excitement or passion. Importantly, these affects are not only cultivated within herself, but deployed in her interactions with others, and form a key mode of relationality that she felt drove her interactions at work:

Personally my goals were just around being the most vibrant version of myself. You know, without getting specific, I was focussing on my energy levels and I guess being my best self and there were specific things I wanted to achieve under that...So I just want to be someone that people walk away from a conversation with me feeling good. Because you know the people that have low vibes or low energy and their draining as soon as you walk in the same room as them and I just want to be...Someone who has a positive effect on every area of my life.

With this narrative, Meg is typical of this portion of the sample in de-emphasising notions of skill or personal competence in the value of herself as a worker. In general, participants who described themselves in terms of the cultivation of passionate affects did not dwell on the need to be good at anything in particular. Instead, it was their personal energy and passion that they considered to be critical to the value of themselves as workers. For this reason, their description of the practices that contributed to their working identities went far beyond discussions of formal education or training. Instead, all areas of social life – including leisure pursuits and broader social relationships unconnected with work itself – were considered to contribute to the value of the working self. For instance, the following participant Adrian (a 23 year old working in

accounting and financial services) described a wide range of leisure pursuits, including his involvement in a local sporting team and his involvement in community organisations and charities. All of these practices were described in terms of personal development and the cultivation of a passionate self, and it was the mobilisation of this passion that Adrian considered to have driven his success in a recent job interview for a new role within an accounting firm:

I think it is my quest for personal development...That was a contributing factor to my success in this role. It was that you have so much energy, so much drive and so much ambition to develop yourself outside of your career, we think you are the person that is suited to this dynamic role...It was all of my other pursuits that has led to me being such a busy person that got it across the line. So definitely my personal journey is one that maintains my intrinsic energy levels I think and that continues to furnish my passion and continues to, I guess, re-evaluate my direction and re-evaluate my passion.

In this narrative, Adrian's broader community and leisure pursuits are mobilised to cultivate modes of affectivity and relationality that he considers critical to the value of himself as a worker. In the process, Adrian mobilises an expansive range of practices and social relationships, drawing his entire lifestyle into his positioning of himself in relation to the labour market. Critically, the narrative goes beyond the notion of social capital in a narrow sense, in which social connections provide opportunities for employment. Instead, Adrian suggests that his broader social pursuits position him as a passionate subject whose 'quest for personal development' contributes to his labour market success. For Meg, one of the key practices that contributes to her performance as a junior accountant is yoga, which she describes as a means by which she can put herself in a 'high performance mindset', overcome exhaustion, and therefore work most effectively:

High performance minds is I guess just about being your best self, producing your best work. And what yoga does is help you become mindful and present basically...helps you lower your brain frequency...I think that's really improved my confidence levels and my communication, you know, it's harder than it looks to be doing the yoga pose as an example and then explaining what to do and all that. And the mindset benefits as well. So everything I'm doing is contributing to me being a better advisor and performing better at work.

Meg offers advice on poses that can assist with energy levels, and describes situations in which she has performed well in meetings or conferences as a result of having performed a yoga routine that morning. Here, yoga becomes a technology of the self for the purpose of labour – an embodied practice designed to modulate Meg’s confidence and relational competence, and therefore contribute to the passionate, vibrant and high performing professional that Meg wishes to become.

These participants show how the cultivation and performance of value that is key to the contemporary middle-class self (Skeggs, 2004) takes place in the formation of labouring subjects. For these participants, social, affective and emotional styles cultivated across the entirety of their lives were mobilised in the cultivation of the self as a subject of value to work. The outcome is the development of a set of affective and relational styles: the kind of subject being worked upon here is driven, energetic, relationally competent, – a person whose passion unites their lives inside and outside of work and allows work to become a project of self-realisation in the widest sense. Passionate subjects are confident in their value and in their capacity to share this value with others. For passionate subjects, work is an arena in which these pre-existing qualities of the self will be received as valuable, and therefore is a realm of authentic self-expression and self-realisation. For this reason, there is no part of the passionate subject’s life that is not somehow brought into the formation of the labouring self: the ease with which these young people engaged with the labour market, and the expansiveness of the practices through which they cultivated their working self, also reflects a form of subjectivity that is in a substantial sense entirely subsumed by the disciplinary requirements of labour force participation.

Authentic: Qualified and Skilled

The cultivation and performance of an authentic self at work continues as a theme in the section that follows, although the practices through which this takes place and the definition of the valued working self differ in critical ways. In this section I describe participants for whom the formation of the self as a worker focused on cultivating a sense of skill and accomplishment which realised personal characteristics that were recognised through a reflection on the personal history of the self. These participants tended to come from family histories of trades or clerical labour, and either were or had in the past participated in post-compulsory technical education.

Their employment histories varied, with some experiencing periods of unemployment and many experiencing precarious work. Nevertheless, their narratives – and the modes of selfhood they described – coalesced into a set of practices operating according to a logic that was common regardless of the particular kind of training or form of labour that these participants had experienced. Here, work was an arena for the deployment of skills and competencies, and the forms of authentic self-presentation described by these participants relate to the mobilisation of specific personal characteristics that could be developed into task-specific skills. Clara – a 27 year old young woman who was unemployed at the time of the interview – articulates this well describing a recent job interview for a clerical role at a bank, which she describes in terms of authenticity, honesty, and the possession of task-specific skills:

What you see is what you get with me. I don't see the point in pretending to be something you're not, especially, when it comes to jobs. I'm not going to sit there and say I can do this, I can do that, and then I get into the job and I can't do any of it and they're sitting there going crap, what do we do now? There's no point. I was very honest with them, in the sense that I told them things that I couldn't do and things that I could do.

The emphasis on the cultivation of skills is one of the key differences between these participants and those described above for whom passion was the guiding force that facilitated labour force participation. However, these skills were nevertheless understood in terms of the realisation of the self. In this context, the cultivation of the self as a worker was described in terms of practices that realised those aspects of the self that could contribute a participant's competence in particular forms of employment. Hannah had attained a certificate in event management at a technical college, had performed volunteer work organising parking at music festivals during her study, and had recently obtained an entry level sales and events position at a bank. Hannah describes herself as a 'dominant' personality who is used to taking charge, and reflects on moments in her own biography that she feels reflect this trait:

Well yeah I mean you've got to be able to take charge and everything like that, I just always was the organiser like, for ages as long as I can remember, even with my family, I would take that off my mum because I would want to organise this and I kind of have a passion for it and am quite good at it, like being on time, getting everything ready and then I was like, I can actually do something with this.

Here, Hannah's experience of her volunteer work and her education is described through moments of reflexivity in which personal attributes are cultivated towards training for the labour force. Rather than a generic passionate investment in life in general, Hannah's positioning of herself as a worker draws on specific parts of the self that form the basis for competence in a particular domain of life and form of labour. The expression of authenticity in relation to work is in this sense restricted to what these participants feel they are 'good at', and how this might connect with the requirements and opportunities offered by work. It is on this basis that these participants engaged with education and training – that is – as a means by which to convert personal competencies into qualifications for particular kinds of work. From Hannah's perspective, her engagement with education is a process whereby longstanding personal competencies are made productive through their conversion into skills.

Unlike the middle-class participants discussed above, the formation of these authentic and qualified modes of labouring subjectivity does not draw in modes of affectivity and relationality from the broader life of the subject, and in this respect the projects of personal development pursued here are specific to work, rather than encompassing of all of social life. The leisure activities and broader social lives of these participants were not positioned as contributing to their position as labouring subjects. Aside from formal education, the practices described by participants as contributing to the cultivation of themselves as workers were focused primarily on volunteer activities that contributed to their work:

I done registration which is like registering people into an event which is like event work, I worked at [a music festival]...you know like registering the artists in, so I was back in artists area, I registered them in and made sure that they were like ready to go on stage, anything they wanted was kind of like they'd ask me, I'd get it. Yeah, it was such a great experience...I've done like volunteer work here and then heaps of conferences at [my technical college] [Hannah]

These activities were not described in terms of the development of the whole person, or in relation to the affective life of the subject. Instead, these participants were focused on the accumulation of skills and experience to list on a CV. This is exemplified well by Clara, who spent time volunteering at a local police station as a person assisting juveniles who had been

detained by police. She describes this volunteer work as contributing to her particular skills in the following way:

Customer service, clientele – anything really working one-on-one with clients. It's pretty much what I do at the police station when you break it down... We just monitor them in the police station and make sure they're being looked after and if they're not, we do something about it... It's experience, yes... It's tailoring programs to suit each client's needs, and that's where I thrive... Anything is experience, and the more experience you've got across the board, the better.

Overall, these participants represent an entirely different method of cultivating the labouring self to those described above. Whilst they maintain a focus on the realisation of the authentic self, the mode of subjectivity being realised here is restricted to the domain of work, and does not reference or draw upon the broader affective life of the subject. The subject of value being cultivated here is authentic, qualified and skilled. The project being pursued here concerns the reflexive identification of personal competencies and their connection with forms of labour that can be achieved through the accumulation of educational credentials and experience. The possibility for formation and realisation of an 'authentic' self through labour is premised on this feeling of competence, manifested in qualifications, skills, and labour market success. The productive dimensions of the self are located within this relationship, between personal competencies and the skills available for cultivation in education and labour market engagement. The overall aim here is not generic personal development, but labour market success, and the achievement of secure, enjoyable and financially rewarding work.

Credentialed and Socially Appropriate

In different ways, both constellations of practices described above focus on some notion of authenticity at work, even if the mode of labouring selfhood and the definition of value differ. In contrast, in this section I describe participants who related to work as an alien social environment requiring the performance of modes of selfhood that are learned as a set of foreign and unfamiliar rules. Their families were most likely to have a precarious labour market position themselves, including some whose parents continued to work multiple casual jobs or were supported by unemployment and disability benefits. For these participants, establishing a position in relation to the labour market required practices designed to cultivate qualities that

subjects of passion took for granted, such as confidence, relational competence and a demeanour that it was hoped would be pleasing to potential employers. Many of these participants had attended multiple job interviews without success and were unsure why they were unable to obtain an offer of employment. Others had secured precarious employment often through welfare agencies or labour hire firms that provided cleaning, maintenance or clerical staff. These participants spent much of the interview discussing searching for work and their experiences in managing job interviews, which were key contexts in which the working self was presented to others and recognised as either valued or valueless (Goffman, 1964). For Rebecca and Chloe (twin sisters interviewed together who were searching for work at the time of the interview), a hesitance in displaying the self in job interviews was intertwined with a longstanding working class suspicion of those who are too enthusiastic about displaying their own value to others:

Rebecca: I had one at [a large supermarket chain] and there was about 20 something people in there. You don't want to speak out and talk yourself up in front of other people, it's really uncomfortable...I prefer group [interviews] but then I don't speak up because I'm like someone else will talk or answer that question.

I: Do people speak up?

Rebecca: The weird ones...This chick in Big W like actually googled things about Big W like she had a notebook...

Chloe: I think she actually got the job though...just like when they ask you questions and you've got to speak up and I'm like well I don't want to be cocky and talk about myself in front of like 20 other people I've never met before...I'm like I don't want to be cocky and then they go well she's up herself when it's only like 30 minutes I have to be up myself and I'm really not.

These participants exemplify the increasingly disjunctive relationship between the modes of affectivity required of the post-Fordist labour force and longstanding modes of working-class identity, or a habitus which does not lend itself to self-expressive performances of one's own personal value (Skeggs, 2004). However, rather than taking this for granted or, in Bourdieusian terms, making a 'virtue' from their exclusion, these participants described a need to alter themselves in various ways in order to successfully become workers. When asked about what

drove success in the labour market, these participants suggested that employers were looking for a particular kind of ‘personality’, but that this was not something they necessarily possessed and would have to learn how to perform, often with difficulty. Julia’s narrative of applying for work in the hospitality industry describes an awareness that her personality is being assessed, but according to requirements of ‘the kind of people they want’ that remain obscure:

I feel like it's personality, but at the same time they want you to answer the questions right. It's hard to prepare, especially when you don't know what they want from you, because especially this one tomorrow the job description wasn't that detailed. So obviously I know what wait staff and bar staff is, but the actual expectation of what kind of people they want. And especially since it seems like a fancy kind of place...it's a bit hard for me personally to display my actual personality.

There is a sense here of not knowing the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990), and Julia’s unfamiliarity with the modes of interaction deemed ‘right’ by employers is narrated alongside a general anxiety about her ability to display her ‘actual personality’ – a display which she is unsure will be received well regardless. The following participant Vanessa described preparing extensively for a job interview as a supermarket cleaner. In particular, she sought advice from her partner’s sister who had worked for the same supermarket, and who suggested ways of dressing, speaking, and interacting which would make a good impression on employers:

You've got to dress very nicely and speak appropriately...so I made sure all my tattoos and everything were covered up and I dressed quite nicely. [My partner's] sister mentioned to me that they like hearing the word ‘efficient’ and stuff like that, so I tried to use it as much as possible. I had a resume ready to give to them like she suggested as well and a handshake before I left.

Rather than authentic self-expression, here Vanessa’s emphasis is on good manners, and on conforming to a set of interactive rules that she hopes will result in an ‘appropriate’ self-presentation that will be accepted by potential employers. Vanessa’s focus is not on ‘being real’ but on ‘getting it right’ by deploying relational styles and modes of personal presentation that are alien to her and are specific to the positioning of herself as a worker. There is no sense in these narratives that any intrinsic qualities of the self or broader projects of self-realisation will be seen as valuable to employers. Instead, like Vanessa, these participants experience the labour force as

an exterior realm governed by rules that remain opaque. The outcome is an experience of awkwardness, anxiety and a hesitance in the performance of the self.

It is in this context that young people employed practices designed to cultivate the qualities that they lacked, and thereby to position themselves as subjects of value to the labour market. The aim of these practices was the cultivation of confidence, relational competence, and socially appropriate manners – affective styles that they did not feel they necessarily possessed, but nevertheless wished to cultivate in order to gain employment and practice meaningful labour. One of the key means by which these qualities were cultivated was through the accumulation of credentials and certificates, offered by both education and training institutions as well as community organisations that had no direct connection with work. Amongst that portion of the sample that had experienced long or regular periods of unemployment, it was common for participants to have accumulated several different kinds of certificates, sometimes relating to very different occupations:

So I was really keen for the [service of alcohol certificate] and [service of gambling certificate] ...But I [also signed up for] a certificate in business...I'm glad I did, because it's actually come in really good, and I'm enjoying that...So yeah, [my social worker] lined me up with it, and it's an extra paper. And then yeah, I was doing a Cert III in Business as well as my RSA and ASG...I'm gathering you know... [Carl]

Often, credentials of this kind were accumulated without reference to a particular personal interest or competence, and without a sense as to how they would be deployed on the labour market. Instead, the accumulation of certifications often filled time during periods of unemployment, or provided a reason for optimism after a number of unsuccessful job interviews. Moreover, the accumulation of credentials was also a means by which participants could cultivate a feeling of confidence and an optimism about the future. Lisa is an exceptional example of this trend, enrolled in five certifications of various kinds whilst she looked for work. When questioned about the enormous number of educational and training certifications she is taking, she suggests that these are both to provide her with possible labour market opportunities, and

...at the same time give me self-confidence, like I stick to stuff and I know I can do it despite the hard times...Any time a certificate comes I'm over the moon. It's like yes I really worked for this.

Several times during the interview Lisa also returns to what she perceives as her inability to relate appropriately with potential employers, and to the critical importance of this for labour market success. As well as certifications offered by training organisations, Lisa also participated in training courses in leadership and public speaking, two offered by youth development organisations, and another by a local community development organisation common in Australian suburbs (“Rotary”). For Lisa, the aim of these courses was to help her communicate more effectively with others and to change her styles of face to face interaction:

When I did my [leadership training]...[I] do a lot of public speaking, how to move with purpose, how to...Use your hands - hands can be distracting as well and your eye gaze as well. I'm really bad at it. Also doing some job skills like being able to not stand too close to a person but far enough away.

Unlike the middle-class participants, the broader social and leisure pursuits of these young people could not be – or were not – successfully mobilised in the cultivation of themselves as workers. This is despite the substantial volunteer work that participants such as Hannah (quoted above) were involved in, which included work for a local car enthusiast organisation that her family had longstanding connections with, in which she organises regular events and has a substantial administrative role. Hannah does not describe this labour as a contributing to her working identity, despite the fact that this work more closely resembles paid employment than the sporting or charity activities foregrounded by middle class participants as key to the formation of a passionate labouring self. Robert (a 21 year old participant who had been unemployed for most of the time since he finished school) described a longstanding interest and competence in electronics, and had been able to repair items such as televisions, photocopiers and video game consoles since his early teens. Despite this, his efforts to gain a qualification in this area were foreclosed by a lack of financial resources, and he experienced unemployment for two years until eventually finding casual work at a factory bottling wine.

These participants relate to work not as a realm for self-expression or self-realisation, but as an environment that is foreign to the self. The interests, leisure practices, and relational styles that

make up the remainder of these young people's social lives are not mobilised in the cultivation a working identity. They are in this respect rendered unproductive in a way that is unlike those of the participants described above. Nevertheless, these participants do attempt to craft themselves as subjects of value to the labour force. These young people accumulate a range of certifications and qualifications in areas that are not necessarily described in relation to their interests or personal competencies, but rather in broader terms as the cultivation of a credentialed and confident labouring subject. They work on their own manners of speech, dress and face to face interaction, with some going as far as to undertake training offered by youth and community development organisations which allow the development of new methods of addressing others and presenting the self. The cultivation of the labouring self is therefore also the production of personal qualities, however from a position of marginalisation in which the relational and affective dimensions of the self are rendered unproductive in their relationship to the labour force.

Conclusion

In this paper I have theorised classed differences in the formation of post-Fordist workers through the elaboration of three ideal types: those who aspired to be 'passionate and vibrant', 'qualified and skilled', and 'credentialed and socially appropriate'. These ideal types reflect classed differences in the personal qualities and affective styles that were seen as contributing to the value of the working self, in the practices that young people mobilised to cultivate themselves as workers. For the first two types, work was approached through an ethic of authentic self-realisation, either of passionate investments in the whole of life or of personal characteristics that could be developed into work-specific competencies. For the last, work was understood as a foreign environment requiring conformity to rules that remained opaque and were a source of anxiety. These types also correspond to different ways in which the relational and affective life of the subject is mobilised in relation to work. For middle class participants, no aspect of the self was omitted from the cultivation of themselves as valued workers, and their success at work was seen as a development of passionate investments across the whole of life. For working class participants who had achieved 'qualified and skilled' subject positions, the working self was experienced as the development of work-specific competencies that facilitated labour market success but that did not extend the requirements of work beyond the skills

required on the job. For the most marginalised participants, the requirements of work extended into the entirety of their lives, demanding new styles of dress, interaction, and personal affectivity.

Analysing the cultivation of the self as a worker reveals new ways in which the imperative to form entrepreneurial and value-accruing subjectivities intertwines the creation of classed subjectivities with the logic of work and value in contemporary capitalism. In the cultivation of the young labouring subject, the affective experiences, relational styles, and personal ‘authenticity’ of the self become the basis for labour market engagement and for working. The practices through which this takes place, and the modes of selfhood that these practices are designed to realise, constitute new aspects of classed subjectivity both within the labour force and outside work, in which the life of the subject is rendered productive or unproductive through labour market engagement. In this way, the analysis of the working self suggests new theoretical agendas in the study of class, labour and youth, and shows how the dynamics of post-Fordist capitalism are manifested in the most personal and intimate dimensions of the contemporary self.

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