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Class and the Post-Fordist Work Ethic: Subjects of Passion and Subjects of Achievement in the Work Society

Forthcoming in The Sociological Review

Abstract

This paper explores how the 'post-Fordist work ethic' contributes to the formation of classed subjectivities. Drawing on the work of Kathi Weeks, the paper approaches the post-Fordist promise of self-realisation through work in terms of the individualised accrual of value that has become so central to the experience of class within the cultural politics of neoliberalism. Empirically, the paper draws on a program of research on the formation of young workers to describe two ideal typical manifestations of the post-Fordist work ethic, characterised as 'subjects of achievement' and 'subjects of passion', which reflect classed differences in the way that self-realisation through work is defined and experienced. In this way, the paper argues that the contemporary work ethic is inflected with forms of class distinction that pre-date the shift to post-Fordism, and that these distinctions within the post-Fordist work ethic are critical to classed modes of contemporary subjectification. This differentiation reflects the ideological history of work and class under capitalism as well as the promise of individualised self-realisation that is so critical to subject formation in the post-Fordist present.

Introduction

This paper explores how the 'post-Fordist work ethic' (Weeks, 2011) contributes to the formation of classed subjectivities through a case study of the relationship between young people and work. For Kathi Weeks (2011), the shift to post-Fordism includes a transformation in the ethical relationship between work and the self. Whilst Fordism maintained a clear distinction between the subject at work and the remainder of social life, Weeks (2011) describes post-Fordism as a 'work society' in which workers are encouraged to view labour as a process of self-realisation, and in which 'becoming a worker' has become an ethical condition for the experience of meaningful subjectivity in the most general sense. Angela McRobbie suggests that for young people, work has come to stand in for the social in general, approached as a 'fulfilling mark of self' (McRobbie, 2016, p 39) amidst the individualisation of collective social bonds. Amidst these shifts, new studies of social class have focused on the cultural politics of class and subjectivity, and have explored classed subjectivities in their psychic, affective and cultural dimensions (Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Reay, 2005; Lawler, 2005; Tyler, 2013). However, whilst analyses of the 'psychic landscape' of class (Reay, 2005) have demonstrated how subjectivities are formed within the cultural politics of class and neoliberalism, the role of work in the formation of the classed self has been overshadowed, and the role of class in shaping post-Fordist transformations in the relationship between work and the self has been relatively unexplored. By examining how young people respond to the incitement to self-realisation through labour, this paper explores how the post-Fordist work ethic contributes to the experience of class, and how class distinction shapes the contemporary work ethic.

The paper begins with a theoretical overview of work and the self in post-Fordism, in which the notion of class formation as individualised value accrual provides the basis for an interrogation of the post-Fordist work ethic in terms of the creation of classed subjects. Empirically, this article draws on a program of research on the formation of young people as workers to show that for contemporary youth, work is seen to offer a uniquely powerful and desirable mode of subjectification through the formation of the self as a subject of value to the labour force. In this context, this paper describes two manifestations of the post-Fordist work ethic, characterised as ‘subjects of achievement’ and ‘subjects of passion’ – ideal typical terms which described classed aspirations for self-realisation through work. Subjects of achievement tend to be from working-class backgrounds, and understand the working self in terms of the successful realisation of skills and competencies that lead to recognisable achievements, successes, and aspirations for social mobility. Subjects of passion tend to be from middle-class backgrounds, and understand the working self in terms of passionate investments that lead to personal development and personal growth without reference to specific material outcomes. Subjects of passion understand themselves as tapping into a unique and personal affective force that operates semi-autonomously in a way that is not goal directed, whereas subjects of achievement understand themselves as developing characteristics of the self into task-specific competencies. This distinction amounts to a classed differentiation in the modes of subjectification produced by the post-Fordist work ethic. With this analysis, the paper analyses labouring subject formation in terms of continuities and ruptures across Fordist and post-Fordist manifestations of the work ethic, with the post-Fordist work ethic reflecting the classed ideological history of capitalism as well as the promise of individualised self-realisation that is so critical to subjectivity in the post-Fordist present.

Class and the Self

New studies of social class have moved beyond studies of social stratification to theorise class in terms of the relationship between cultural politics and embodied experience (Skeggs, 2015). The contemporary study of class and the self explores the processes of subjectification that take place through the signification of subjects within hierarchies of cultural value. These hierarchies of value reflect and give meaning to material inequalities. While the key theoretical resource here has been the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), the work of authors such as Skeggs (1997; 2004) and Reay (2005) have significantly developed Bourdieu’s original work, demonstrating the complex and ambivalent consequences of being positioned as classed subjects within what Reay (2005) has described as the ‘psychic landscape’ of class. Classed experiences take place within a broader cultural politics described by authors such as Lawler (2005) and Tyler (2013; 2015) in which power relationships are enacted through definitions of worth and worthlessness within neoliberal notions of individual failure and success. These studies represent a critical development in the study of social class in that they situate the most personal dimensions of experience within the material inequalities and hierarchies of cultural value that shape contemporary subjectivities.

A key contribution of this literature is to interrogate the relationship between value and subjectivity in the making of class through a critique of the ‘value accruing subject’. In

particular, Skeggs (2005; 2011) has suggested that classed subjectivities are formed within a neoliberal incitement to understand the self as a reflexive, value-accruing individual, and to perform this value in the performance of the self. The requirement to individually accumulate value operates here as an 'ethical scenario' (Skeggs, 2005, p 973) for the formation and performance of the self, and class distinctions are manifested in the way that differently positioned subjects respond to and enact this requirement. Subject formation takes place through the cultivation of the self within hierarchies of worth that enact neoliberal definitions of economic and personal value, as well as positioning the successful accrual of value as a project of reflexive self-production. However, Skeggs also argues that the notion of individualised value-accrual is historically a middle-class mode of subjectivity that has been imposed on the working class by both neoliberal governmentality and sociological proponents of individualisation such as Beck (1992). For the working-class children and young people in the work of Reay (2005), a failure to succeed in education was considered tantamount to becoming 'nothing' – a finding which reinforces the power of individualised notions of value accrual in the making of the classed self.

Whilst the emergence of this approach to class has made it impossible to talk about class without talking about subjectivity, the way that this approach has developed has meant that work – historically one of the key sociological sites for the analysis of class (Sennett and Cobb, 1972) – has faded into the background. This is in part due to the legacy of Bourdieu (1984), whose understanding of class and symbolic value approaches work in terms of the way that employment status contributes towards stocks of cultural or symbolic capital and thereby towards a position within a broader field of social struggle. In this way, work is occluded as a site for subject formation in and of itself. This is despite the fact that the transformation of work is a critically important backdrop for the development of theories about class. Increased levels of employment insecurity governed through the neoliberal rhetoric of 'flexibility' and elevated levels of unemployment and underemployment have become structural features of the contemporary labour market, especially for young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). The nature of labour itself has also transformed, with the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy bringing cognitive, interactive and affective modes of labour and production to the fore (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009; McDowell, 2009). Post-Fordism therefore entails an intensification of the disciplinary requirement to realise the value-accruing self in order to manage uncertainty and social and economic change. In what follows I examine these transformations through Kathi Weeks' (2011) analysis of the post-Fordist work ethic.

Class and The Post-Fordist Work Ethic

As argued by Weeks (2011) capitalism is – above all – a 'work society'. In capitalist societies, work is the key mechanism by which social relationships and subjectivities are produced and governed in line with the economic and political apparatuses that regulate social life. Work is in this sense best approached in terms of its subjectification function – or the way in which it operates as a disciplinary requirement for subject formation. Weeks describes work as a

disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity...that individuals must not only work but become workers, is not necessary to the production of social wealth...Work is

the primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political and familial modes of cooperation...working is part of what is supposed to transform subjects into the independent individuals of the liberal imaginary, and for that reason, is treated as a basic obligation of citizenship. (Weeks, 2011, p 7-8)

Here, Weeks makes the critical point that the disciplinary requirements of work go beyond merely working, but extend to the process of *becoming a worker*, that is, to forming the self in line with the demands of productivity and valorisation that underpin labour. Work is in this sense a critical point at which the broader biopolitics of social life are enacted. It is at work that the liberal individual – a figure critiqued by Skeggs and others in its neoliberal manifestations – is most idealised, and the alignment of work with individualisation resonates in important ways with the notion of reflexive value accrual discussed in contemporary studies of social class.

In post-Fordism, transformations in the relationship between work and the self have intensified the disciplinary requirement to produce the self through labour. Weeks' theorisation of the post-Fordist work ethic incorporates the original formulations of Weber (2005), as well arguments from autonomist Marxists, who argue that the disciplinary requirements of labour are becoming increasingly expansive such that the distinction between the productive and unproductive dimensions of the self are becoming difficult to discern (Hardt and Negri, 2004). In this context, Weeks traces the emergence and mutation of the 'work ethic' as a critical feature of early capitalist, Fordist, and post-Fordist societies, and suggests that work has become increasingly intertwined with the self with each shift in the nature of capitalism. Beginning with Weber, Weeks argues that whilst the Protestant work ethic promised salvation in the next world as a reward for work, the Fordist or industrial era work ethic was focused on the promise of economic reward and social mobility. In this, the Fordist work ethic operated as a means for disciplining a recalcitrant working class into the requirements of industrial labour, offering material comfort and increases in social status. With the shift to post-Fordism, Weeks suggests that the work ethic has shifted from the offer of social mobility to the promise of self-realisation. Here, the post-Fordist work ethic promises personal fulfillment, self-expression and self-realisation as the reward for work. This amounts to an intensification of the subjectification function of work:

with each reconstitution of the work ethic, more is expected of work: from an epistemological reward in the deliverance of certainty, to a socioeconomic reward in the possibility of social mobility, to an ontological reward in the promise of meaning and self-actualization (Weeks, 2011, p 76)

The Fordist work ethic maintained a distinction between the subject at work and the subject outside of work, and offered material rewards outside of work in exchange for submission to industrial labour. Weeks suggests that in post-Fordism, all subjects are incited to approach work as a project of self-realisation, and to view the realisation of the self as the key task of work. Jessica Gerrard (2014) has also analysed the post-Fordist work ethic in terms of the emergence of broad pedagogical agendas such as 'lifelong learning' which are mandated in order to cultivate the competencies required to deploy the self in a flexible and productive manner at

work (Gerrard, 2014). The post-Fordist work ethic dissolves the distinction between work and the rest of social life, and positions work as the key site for the formation of the self.

However, while Weeks is clear that the Fordist work ethic represented an attempt to impose bourgeois morality and compliance with the disciplinary requirements of industrial labour on the working class, the distinction between the Fordist and post-Fordist work ethic has a more complicated classed history than this distinction allows. For example, Weber's original work on middle class professional labour as a 'vocation' (Weber, Owen and Strong, 2004) certainly positions the significance of work for the middle-class self beyond material reward and social mobility. The distinction between 'vocation' and submission to industrial discipline constitutes a clear classed differentiation produced by and intrinsic to the Fordist work ethic, and the notion of vocation foreshadows the contemporary emphasis on self-realisation that defines post-Fordism. In this sense, even the Fordist work ethic was never unified or homogeneous in its interaction with class, and understanding the post-Fordist work ethic requires new understandings of how the classed history of the work ethic interacts with the promise of self-realisation that is so critical to the neoliberal present. That is the task taken up in this paper. In what follows I examine how classed subjects understand work, and explore the classed differences in the way that the post-Fordist work ethic is mobilised in the production of the self. I argue that the post-Fordist work ethic represents a means by which subjects are incited to accrue value, and shows that work has become a key site for the individualised value accrual that is so critical to contemporary class formation. Moreover, I suggest that classed differences in the post-Fordist work ethic can be understood in terms of differences in the definition of what constitutes a subject of value to the labour force, and differences in the way that classed subjects define what counts as self-realisation through work. The project that produced my empirical data is discussed below.

Methodology

This project explored the formation of young people as workers. The focus on youth offers a unique insight into the process of 'becoming a worker' that is central to the post-Fordist work ethic. Preparation for the labour market – and the cultivation of an ethical predisposition for work – is critical to the way that youth is imagined and governed in post-Fordist societies internationally (Mizen, 2004), despite elevated levels of youth unemployment becoming a structural feature of post-Fordist economies (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Transformations in the labour force have been the basis for a lengthening of the biographical period that is normatively understood as 'youth' into the late 20s and early 30s, as the increasing precarity of the labour market makes the signifiers of cultural adulthood more difficult to achieve (Woodman and Wyn, 2015; Andres and Wyn, 2010). Moreover, young people are celebrated targets of neoliberal incitements to self-realisation through labour (McRobbie, 2016), and are the focal point of the work of Gill and Pratt (2008) who have critiqued studies of post-Fordism for their failure to properly account for class. In this sense, youth has become both a critical signifier for the ideal post-Fordist worker, as well as an increasingly lengthy biographical period in which young people are ethically mandated to become a subject of value to the labour force.

The remainder of this paper draws on a program of research that explored young subjectivities and work. The aim of this project was to understand the significance of work for contemporary young people, and the means by which experiences of youth are intertwined with labour. The project examined the practices and ethics through which young people form themselves as workers across a range of areas in life, including the rationales and ethics that drive their engagement with education, training, and the labour market, as well as their experiences of work. The sample included 74 young people aged between 17 and 29 (44 young women and 30 young men), and included those still in education or training, those who were working, and those who had experienced unemployment. The rationale for this age range reflects the consensus in the sociology of youth that biographical age has ceased to operate as a signifier for the distinction between youth and adulthood, with the experiences normally designated as youth (including the end of education and engagement with the labour force) becoming desynchronised and stretching out into the late twenties or early thirties (Woodman and Wyn, 2015; Blatterer, 2007). Participants were recruited via educational and training institutions, community organisations, professional organisations, and recruitment companies and companies contracted to offer welfare services. The study drew on qualitative interviews which discussed young people's experiences of work, preferences and aspirations for present and future work, motivations for engaging with particular kinds of education, training and employment, and the role of work in narratives about a past and future self. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two and a half hours, with an average time of around an hour. Ethics approval was obtained from the author's home institution.

The analysis that follows presents two ideal typical ways in which the post-Fordist work ethic was taken up and articulated by participants. Importantly, classed differences in the mobilisation of the post-Fordist work ethic emerged inductively through the data analysis, and class background did not operate as a taken for granted or a priori category prior to analysis. In this respect, I have approached this data in terms of the formation of social classes, rather than in terms of the articulation of pre-existing classed positions. Class is therefore understood as an ideal typical mode of subjectification that takes place through work, rather than assumed a priori on the basis of family background as is more usual in research about youth (eg Woodman and Wyn, 2015). However, in the inductive creation of these types, distinctions emerged between those participants with a familial history of higher education and professional employment, and those with a history of technical or no further education and working in trades or clerical occupations. My analyses is therefore based on ideal typical theoretical constructs that emerged inductively through an analysis of narrative in terms of class formation, but which also reflected the family background of participants.

Ethics of Self-Realisation in the Formation of the Self as a Worker

Describing the meaning of work, participants were anxious to the point of being horrified at the prospect of working in 'just a job' – that is, at approaching work in a purely instrumental way. Instead, work was idealised as offering a unique and uniquely desirable mode of subjectification, promising personal fulfillment and the realisation of the self as a subject of value in the most general sense. Moreover, the work ethic makes the realisation of the self into a biographical project that is maintained across experiences of education, training and employment. The

articulation of this ethic was remarkably consistent with age, articulated with similar assumptions by participants with similar social backgrounds but different ages and experiences of employment. Instead, it is class that contributes most to the character of the work ethic, and it is in the formation of classed subjects that the subjectification function of the work ethic can be found. With this in mind, my analysis begins with ‘subjects of achievement’, for whom self-realisation is understood in terms of the mobilisation of personal competencies for achievement and social mobility through work.

Subjects of Achievement

At the time the research was conducted, the following participant Laura¹ was nineteen years old, living with her receptionist mother and labourer father, and studying for a certificate in event management at a technical college as well as working in volunteer positions at music festivals and similar events. Laura aspired to be involved in planning weddings, and had applied for event management positions without success. Laura describes herself as a ‘controlling’ person who is good at organising others, and suggests that it is this personal characteristic that underpins her interest in events. Laura also understands event management as a ‘career’ industry, in which she has the opportunity for meaningful work and advancement. When asked about what motivated her to attend this technical college, Laura says that she has

[T]hat thought in the back of my head that I don't want to be nothing. I don't want to be miserable, get up and do whatever I have to do just to pay the rent. I want to actually enjoy my life and not have to take a holiday for my life, because it's just so boring and dull. I want to work and enjoy it and not just settle.

During the interview Laura contrasts herself with those who did not complete secondary education or who entered the labour market immediately upon finishing school, suggesting that this amounted to ‘doing whatever’ and settling for a purely instrumental approach to work. For Laura, ‘doing whatever’, or working only to sustain herself materially, is tantamount to being ‘nothing’, and resigning oneself a life of unhappiness from which one must periodically escape. In this sense, work is a means by which to become something rather than nothing, and thereby to escape the risk of nothingness and valuelessness also described by Reay (2005). Laura’s approach to work is aimed at realising her capacity for control and organisation that she considers an important aspect of herself overall. Laura also described herself as an ambitious person, and described ambition in terms of setting a series of concrete and achievable goals which allowed a feeling of accomplishment:

I'm a bit shy, but I'm very ambitious.

What does it mean to be ambitious?

I just always set goals for myself and am always striving for more. I like things that are accomplishable as well and I don't know, I just don't know really how to explain it, but I

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

just think I am ambitious, because I can see where I need to go further and if I'm not doing that, I can acknowledge it and then set goals to go further.

Like I just always look at other people and compare myself and I want to be able to...feel like I've accomplished something and not just been one of those people that have left school, done whatever, because they could get that and then that's done.

Positioning the value of the self in terms of achievement was common amongst young working-class participants, but absent from middle-class narratives. Laura's refusal to 'just settle' and her positioning of herself as ambitious also approaches work in terms of social mobility and the accrual of personal value through achievement. Laura's ambition takes the form of setting clear goals that centre on concrete achievements which offer the feeling that she has 'accomplished something'. Participants like Laura also frequently described the risk that they would fall into a life of menial work in 'whatever was going', and hence abandon the possibility of social mobility or distinction through labour. In response, Laura's ambition is a means by which to become a subject of value – someone who has achieved something significant and hence has avoided the threat of a what she sees as a menial and meaningless existence. Whilst he was working in a very different industry, Thomas articulated similar sentiments to Laura. Thomas had recently moved out of a job as a scaffolding labourer working with his father, and moved into a new job at a small real estate firm that he had secured by door-knocking local businesses with a resume. Thomas' primary work consisted of door-knocking throughout the suburbs asking whether residents were interesting in selling their home, and was tiring and sometimes demoralising. Nevertheless, Thomas spoke eloquently and at length about the significance of this movement for the role of work in his life, and of the goal-setting that this movement had motivated:

You'd go to work because it was just going to work. You turn up here because you know you've got a purpose and you know you're going to go somewhere if you just keep doing what you're doing...I've set a goal. I've set a goal at the minute. I've got a goal that I want to be a listing agent in 12 months.

This narrative is in sharp contrast to the middle-class participants to be discussed later in this paper, who were reluctant to articulate any clearly defined goals or milestones that they would like to accomplish in their working lives. Here, Thomas is typical of other working-class participants in defining his own progression in terms of clear milestones that realise concrete ambitions, or identifiable achievements that designate a clear personal progression. Even those whose main experiences of work were in precarious and poorly remunerated jobs that lacked any possibility for career progression positioned themselves as subjects of achievement in this way, and described themselves as driven by the desire to accumulate markers of success. Sarah had worked at a budget retail outlet as well as experiencing periods of unemployment, and at the time of the interview was studying at a technical college and receiving welfare benefits. Sarah also affirms a need for achievement and demonstrable success, but understands this within the flexible logic of post-Fordist employment, affirming the need for ambitions and achievements to adapt to change:

I always want to be able to say, "I have just finished another qualification," or, "I have just got a promotion," or something like that. I always want to be proud of myself for what I've done. I think there is no point getting to 25 and saying, "Alright, I have done studying now I'm going to work this job forever." That's for some people, but it's not for me.

I think that more than ever, the world is changing and if I get a job today that job is probably not going to exist in 20 years time. It will be a totally different world, so I think you have got to keep up with that and always like be open to trying something new and doing something new.

Again, it is important to foreshadow here that unlike Sarah and many other working-class young people, middle-class participants did not describe the desire to feel proud about having achieved qualifications, promotions, or other milestones. In the narrative just quoted, the desire for pride is part of an ethic of achievement intertwined with an embrace of flexibility. Like other participants, Sarah had a more or less uncritical attitude towards labour market uncertainty (despite having experienced unemployment herself), instead investing herself in the accumulation of personal achievements that transcended any particular job. It is these attitudes that underpin a new working-class post-Fordist work ethic that combines flexibility, social mobility and self-realisation through achievements at work.

This definition of self-realisation also mobilises a specific definition of what constitutes a subject of value to the labour force. In particular, the subject of achievement is defined by the realisation of personal *competences* that lead to achievement via hard work. Competence – ie, being ‘good at’ something on the basis of personal characteristics – is what defines a worker’s value to the labour force, and it is in the realisation of personal competencies that achievement is possible and self-realisation takes place. Hannah was working in sales and events at a bank after having received a technical diploma from the same college attended by Laura quoted above. Hannah describes herself as an ambitious person, and when asked what this means, intertwines competence, success and a sense that things are ‘flowing well’:

To do good in this job role you know I feel like even just making like a reputation for myself like letting people know that I do good at what I do and you know I try hard, yeah...I think there's like this will probably be like one of the first things in my life maybe just excelled at so well...even like volunteer work I've just gone bang, bang, bang and it just comes naturally and like, even like you know you feel like there's like signs when you're on the right track, like everything seems to be flowing well

Hannah is representative of a strong theme across many similarly positioned participants concerning the intertwining of competence and success in narratives about self-realisation at work. Success – in this case in her training, volunteer work in the events management industry and eventual success in the labour market – is experienced as an affirmation of ambition and the realisation of the competencies of the self. Success here is seen to reflect these competencies, which tie this personal narrative together with a sense of being on the ‘right track’. As Hannah says, self-realisation is a sense of being ‘good at what I do’. This emphasis on the realisation of

the self through being 'good at' something is definitive of subjects of achievement, and differentiates them from middle class subjects of passion discussed below.

Together, these narratives describe an investment in self-realisation through work, intermingling competence, achievement and social mobility into a specifically classed manifestation of the post-Fordist work ethic. In their emphasis on competence and social mobility, these narratives carry over elements of the Fordist work ethic, which promised material rewards and social position in exchange for commitment to work. However, in these narratives, this social mobility is seen to both reflect and contribute to the broader project of self-realisation. This self-realisation through work is seen as an ethical condition for the formation of meaningful subjectivity and broader life satisfaction, as well as necessary to labour market success. The realisation of personal competences – reflected in the feeling of success and of being on the 'right track' – is what holds the narrative of self-realisation together into the cultivation of the self as a worker, and offers an ethic by which to navigate the contingency of the labour market. In this respect, subjects of achievement have produced a new and unique manifestation of the work ethic that reflects the position of working class youth amidst the uncertainty of post-Fordist work.

Subjects of Passion

The work ethic articulated by middle-class participants differs in its imagining of the self-realising subject of value, and in its manifestations of successful self-realisation. The middle-class working self is articulated not in terms of achievements, competences, concrete goals, or material outcomes. Instead, the overwhelming theme running through middle-class narratives about work is 'passion'. Middle-class participants described their work as the realisation of passionate investments which operated not merely in relation to labour, but were expressed across the whole of a person's life. Passion here is a kind of affective state that is flexible across contexts, unique to the individual, and expressed in a way that dissolves the boundaries between subjectivities inside and outside of work. Like subjects of achievement, it was critical for middle-class subjects of passion that work was not 'just work'. However, for subjects of passion work was positioned as part of a way of living in which passionate investments inside and outside of work underpin a single, coherent and self-realisable subject. Alice was eighteen at the time of the interview and in the final year of secondary school. She intended to study nutrition at University following school, and emphasised the importance of a coherence of herself inside and outside of work:

You don't just go to work and you've got your work face and then come home and then you've got your home face. You're just the same person...Yeah. If it's going to be successful you have to be passionate about it.

Alice ties success (more on this below) to passion and to the maintenance of a coherent subjectivity inside and outside of work. The mobilisation of the self outside of work into the self as a subject of value to the labour force is definitive of the narratives of subjects of passion regardless of their particular educational qualifications or professional experience. Adrian, a twenty-four year old junior accountant whose parents were both in accounting and finance,

articulates this clearly. Adrian's narrative ties together passionate investments in his social life, recreational sport, and work into an overall passion for supporting others to 'achieve their potential':

So the passion that I carry throughout my social scene...and through to my career, is my underlying passion would be activating opportunities for others...I have maintained that in a sporting sense by adopting positions of leadership because I was then able to activate opportunities for okay, let's get a sponsorship grant to buy X equipment...Then I bring that into my professional scene as well by my current role of...client relationship management – activating opportunities for them to either increase sales or improve customer service. It is that passion for constantly helping others achieve their potential that gives me future drive.

Adrian's emphasis on 'activating opportunities for others' reflects a common thread running through the narratives of passion, which is the positioning of passionate labour as an altruistic force for good in the world. In this, subjects of passion position their own careers as significant in a way that goes beyond their own personal or professional lives, and contributes to the welfare of others and of society as a whole. It was not uncommon for subjects of passion to describe their work in this way, even when the professions they work in are not widely regarded as 'helping' professions (such as accounting). In this way, subjects of passion distance themselves from notions of accomplishment or material reward that were so key to the experience of self-realisation through achievement described in the previous section. Subjects of passion emphasised that they were not driven by material gain, and there was a reluctance to focus too closely on matters connected with remuneration, or even with promotions and titles. These issues were either ignored entirely or referenced in an oblique manner, as though they were irrelevant or marginal to work. In this, subjects of passion exhibit what Bourdieu (1984) has famously described as central to the middle-class self, for whom class distinction is achieved through 'distance from necessity', or a positioning of the self in relation to more 'elevated' pursuits than those connected with the material necessities of life. In this sense, eschewing talk of remuneration or promotion is a privilege of those who take for granted that they are nevertheless destined for material success. Instead, middle-class participants defined ambition and success entirely in terms of personal growth and self-actualisation. The following participant Peter was 26 years old and had recently secured a job in an engineering firm not long after finishing university, and describes success in terms of personal growth, although with a vague reference to remuneration that was quickly glossed over:

Any form of success would be just to be able to grow. I'm not too like – the amount isn't, whether it's all over the top and that, it doesn't faze me, but I just want to be able to grow.

So for you success is just growing yourself as a person?

Yeah...what I'm doing professionally...does apply personally as well...personally I do want to succeed, professionally as well. So they're not separate.

For Peter, personal growth is the key ethic for ambition and success, which is manifested not in concrete achievements but in further personal growth without a specific end point. In this, Peter is characteristic of the middle-class portion of the sample in general, who described success in terms of the never-ending pursuit of passionate investments. Moreover, whilst they did not describe being driven by a desire for achievement, subjects of passion were not shy about characterising themselves as ambitious. Ambition was not seen as inconsistent with passionate investment, and indeed passion was understood as the driving force for ambition, experienced in terms of personal growth throughout the whole of a person's life. In this sense, passion operates as its own self-evident justification, in which personal value is manifested in the ongoing realisation of passionate investments.

It is critical to note that passion was not specific to a particular skill, profession, or mode of labour. Instead, passion is best understood as a kind of affective force that originated in the working subject themselves and shaped their entire lives, although interacting in important ways with work. When middle class subjects of passion were working routine jobs (such as part-time work while studying at university), the role of work was still understood in terms of passionate investments, which were articulated as driving success across all of life. Mary, a university student, even described herself as passionate about her casual job working in fast food, and contrasted herself to co-workers who approached their work as 'just a job'. Mary emphasised that passion 'follows' a working subject throughout their life, and underpinned success across working contexts:

I always believe that even if it's something you don't like if you try really hard to succeed in that you'll succeed in other areas of your life. So that passion and that drive that you take in one job will follow with you through to another.

In this sense, passion is a flexible and individualised mode of self-realisation that carries a worker through the labour market regardless of the particular tasks performed. Notions of competence or achievement are positioned as marginal here – it is not merely about what a worker is good at or qualified for, but what they are passionate about, that is considered the critical factor in shaping both the experience and the outcomes of work. Whilst subjects of achievement are guided through the labour market on the basis of competences, it is passion that guides Mary through shifts in her position within the labour market.

Passionate investments also operate as an ethic through which middle-class participants made sense of success or failure in their working lives. When subjects of passion failed or were restricted in their ambitions, their response was to re-examine their own passion. Whilst passion comes from the subject, it can also be 'lost' (leading to failure) and must be found again. Adrian, also quoted above, describes his response to being rejected for a transfer within his firm by re-evaluating where his passions are taking him. Just prior to the interview Adrian has been successful in his application for an internal transfer, and attributes this to the discovery of his true passion:

At that point I thought my passion was communicating data in an informative manner....So that's what I thought my passion was at that point in time. I wasn't

successful at those roles...I realised that I was doing a lot outside of my accounting and finance role to give me energy...I was like what am I doing in all of these other roles that gives me energy? It came back to that opportunity piece - activating those opportunities and managing those relationships. I was like maybe that's where it is. That's when I started to research roles that were relationship management focused...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

Here, the lack of success is attributed to a lack of fit between self and aspiration, but understood not in terms of skill or competence, but in terms of passion. Passion here operates as a condition for success, as though aspirations that do not involve or facilitate passionate investments are necessarily destined to be thwarted even if at the time a subject believes that they have found their true passion. In this respect, passion is similar to fate or destiny – a kind of affective energy which will inevitably shape working life regardless of the degree to which it is properly harnessed for success. John, a 29 year old working in human resources, repeated the phrase “*passion spins the plot*” and suggested that in order to have a successful and happy working life a person should follow their passions and “*let destiny take over a little*”. Operating in terms of destiny, passion exerts an almost autonomous force from the subject onto the world, shaping both the working subject and the opportunities available to each person both inside and outside of work.

This middle-class manifestation of the post-Fordist work ethic re-positions the significance of work from a ‘vocation’ or ‘calling’ (as in the work of Weber) to the experience of passion as a kind of affective flow originating in the subject itself. The result is a classed manifestation of the post-Fordist work ethic in which passionate investments in labour – and the ongoing realisation of the passionate self – offers a mode of self-realisation, class distinction and value accrual through work. For subjects of passion, success is defined without a pre-determined end goal, instead experienced as the constant outpouring and satisfaction of passions that are understood as intrinsic to the self. These passions are experienced as almost autonomous forces, shaping the destiny of the working subject as well as offering satisfaction and selfhood through work. These passions also transgress boundaries between work and the rest of social life, and indeed, this transgression is critical to the ethic of passionate investment. In dissolving the boundary between work and the rest of the self, work is positioned as no longer ‘just work’ and is elevated to the status of a quasi-artistic, creative, autonomous and altruistic pursuit, driven by passions that are unique to the individual and that must be discovered again and again. In this discovery, the working subject gains the energy and affective capacity to engage with the labour market and to work. In this way, the work itself – including the particular duties, financial remuneration, and the like – fades into the background, and the realisation of the subject comes to the fore.

Conclusion

The post-Fordist work ethic is heterogeneous, inflected with classed differences that reflect the historical relationship between class and the disciplinary requirements of labour under capitalism. The ethic of self-realisation mobilised by subjects of achievement retains echoes of

the Fordist work ethic, in which work is the ethical basis for aspirations to social mobility. In post-Fordism, this emphasis on social mobility has become intertwined with the imperative towards the accrual of value as a means for the realisation of the self. Subjects of achievement have therefore produced a unique and previously unexamined manifestation of the work ethic, in which competence, achievement, and social mobility are intertwined in a specifically working-class model of self-realisation. In contrast, the narratives from subjects of passion may be read as a mode of classed distinction that takes place in the realisation of the passionate self through work. Again, this manifestation of the work ethic retains echoes of earlier modes of subjectification through work, particularly the notion of work as a 'vocation' that serves a higher purpose than material interest (Weber et al, 2004). Subjects of passion eschew talk of material reward or even of concrete achievement of any kind, and are not focused on being 'good at' anything in particular. However, rather than a vocation, subjects of passion are pursuing a project of self-realisation – a distinction which reflects the intensification of the disciplinary requirement to accrue individualised value to the self in post-Fordism. In this project of self-realisation, passion is both the origin and the taken for granted outcome of work, and the pursuit of passion makes the cultivation of the self into an end in itself. Taken together, these narratives show that the contemporary work ethic is itself inflected with forms of class distinction that pre-date the shift to post-Fordism, and contributes to the formation of classed subjects through the ethic of self-realisation that is so critical to the cultural conditions of the present.

The post-Fordist work ethic is a powerful site of contemporary subjectification. The work ethic is a means by which the disciplinary requirements of work are converted into the formation of subjects as value-accruing individuals. In other words, classed subjectivities are formed not merely in terms of the cultural politics of value, but in the way that young people are formed as subjects of value *to the labour force*. It is in the subjectification function of work that the logic of capital and the logic of the self are most intertwined, and studies of class, value and subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism would benefit from a renewed attention to work and labour as sites of class formation. Moreover, rather than the movement to an entirely distinct epoch in the history of capitalism, post-Fordism must be approached as an intrinsically classed process of social and economic change. These changes exhibit both transformations and continuities with the past that are manifested in the contemporary experience of class, and in the way that classed subjects respond to the incitement to become workers.

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