

## Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics

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This article draws attention to the relationship between neoliberalism and psychology. Features of this relationship can be seen with reference to recent studies linking psychology to neoliberalism through the constitution of a kind of subjectivity susceptible to neoliberal governmentality. Three examples are presented that reveal the ways in which psychologists are implicated in the neoliberal agenda: psychologists' conception and treatment of social anxiety disorder, positive psychology, and educational psychology. It is hoped that presenting and discussing these cases broadens the context of consideration in which psychological ethics might be examined and more richly informed. It is concluded that only by interrogating neoliberalism, psychologists' relationship to it, how it affects what persons are and might become, and whether it is good for human well-being can we understand the ethics of psychological disciplinary and professional practices in the context of a neoliberal political order and if we are living up to our social responsibility.

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I want to raise a question: *What is an ethics of psychology when interpreted in the context of a neoliberal political order?* In what follows, my intention is not to answer the question, but rather to broaden the context of consideration. What I suggest need be included are contemporary sociopolitical and economic matters highly consequential for human individual and collective conduct but that appear to have been ignored in discussions of psychological ethical principles and practices. I will begin by describing neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has proliferated rapidly throughout the globe (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Yet it is hard to find someone who admits to being a neoliberal. Neoliberalism has managed to make itself invisible by becoming common sense. I then turn to its effects seen in the kinds of persons we are becoming—

effects that, in Sennett's (1998) words, corrode character and the loyalty and commitment by which it is accomplished. Following, I will reveal something of psychology's complicity in promoting these effects.

Interwoven through these strands of my discussion are two implications. First, psychologists need to be ideologically aware if they are to comprehend their disciplinary and professional practices ethically. Second, equipped with such awareness, it is plain that psychologists are contributing to an ideological climate in which persons are not obliged to consider, let alone take responsibility for, the welfare of others. To allege this contravenes Principle B of the American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2010), Principle IV of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association, 2008), and Principle 3 of the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (British Psychological Society, 2009), all of which pertain to psychologists' responsibility to society, is to belittle the point.

### Introduction to Neoliberalism

"Neoliberalism" marks the overthrow of Keynesian welfare state economics by the Chi-

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cago School of political economy in the closing decades of the 20th century (Harvey, 2005; Palley, 2005). Its key features are a radically free market in which competition is maximized, free trade achieved through economic deregulation, privatization of public assets, vastly diminished state responsibility over areas of social welfare, the corporatization of human services, and monetary and social policies congenial to corporations and disregardful of the consequences: poverty, rapid depletion of resources, irreparable damage to the biosphere, destruction of cultures, and erosion of liberal democratic institutions (Brown, 2003). However, the reach of neoliberalism is even more extensive. Neoliberalism is reformulating personhood, psychological life, moral and ethical responsibility, and what it means to have selfhood and identity. Neoliberalism is now, and should be, of great concern. Although there was but a sprinkling of social science publications referencing neoliberalism in the 1980s, there has been a profusion of interest over the past decade (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). Nevertheless, although there is great attention to neoliberalism among scholars in disciplines such as sociology and economics, there is comparatively little discussion of neoliberalism and its consequences among psychologists.

The “neoliberal turn” was revealed by Michel Foucault in a series of lectures given over the 1978–1979 term as Chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France, a position he held from 1970 to 1984. Each of his lectures during this period is available in print. The course of 1978–1979, misleadingly entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2008), is remarkable. It is remarkable because of its surpassing prescience; misleading because the central subject is not biopolitics, but rather, neoliberalism. Part of the mandate of the Collège de France is that lectures follow in step with the progress of research the professor is conducting that year. Half way through the term, Foucault switched his attention to political philosophy.

Foucault discovered a connection between neoliberal styles of government and subjectivity. By government or “governmentality,” his invented term, Foucault meant broadly, features and functions of sociopolitical institutions that shape and regulate the attitudes and conduct of individuals. Governmentality links political power to subjectivity. Foucault drew attention to the governmentality at work in neoliberal political structures

emerging in the 1970s and firmly in place by the 1980s in the United States and United Kingdom. He saw “enterprise” as a form and function of governmentality that was becoming generalized beyond neoliberal sociopolitical institutions to all corners of human action and experience, including the shaping of individual life.

In neoliberalism, the technologies of the market work as mechanisms through which persons are constituted as free, enterprising individuals who govern themselves and, consequently, require only limited direct control by the state. The idea of enterprise pertains not only to an emphasis on economic enterprise over other forms of institutional organization, but also, on personal attributes aligned with enterprise culture, such as initiative, self-reliance, self-mastery, and risk taking. According to Foucault, the language of enterprise articulates a new relation between the economic well being of the state and individual fulfillment. This relation consists in the premises that the economy is optimized through the entrepreneurial activity of autonomous individuals and that human wellbeing is furthered if individuals are free to direct their lives as entrepreneurs.

It is important to distinguish neoliberalism from classical liberalism. In classical liberalism, people owned themselves as though they were property and could sell their capacities for labor in the market. By contrast, in neoliberalism, people own themselves as if they are entrepreneurs of a business. They conceive of themselves as a set of assets—skills and attributes—to be managed, maintained, developed, and treated as ventures in which to invest. As enterprising subjects, we think of ourselves as individuals who establish and add value to ourselves through personal investment (in education or insurance), who administer ourselves as an economic interest with vocabularies of management and performativity (satisfaction, worth, productivity, initiative, effectiveness, skills, goals, risk, networking, and so forth), who invest in our aspirations by adopting expert advice (of psychotherapists, personal trainers, dieticians, life coaches, financial planners, genetic counselors), and who maximize and express our autonomy through choice (mostly in consumerism). However, the major distinction between classical and neoliberalism is that in neoliberalism, individuals not only are obliged to be engaged in economic activity, they are expected to create it.

In neoliberalism, governing occurs by providing individuals with choices and holding them accountable for the choices they make. However, many of the life choices with which individuals are now faced are the result of reduced government services that, in effect, transfers risk from the state to individuals. Risk and uncertainty are nothing new. But, in the climate of neoliberal economics, there is less and less separating those who pursue risk intentionally for profit, from the rest of us for whom it is being woven ideologically into the fabric of everyday life, whether it is matters of personal health, the care and education of our children, the increasing unpredictability of employment, or dignity in old age. Along with increased risk, the current emphasis on choice, autonomy, and self-reliance insinuates failure as self-failure, for which one is expected to bear sole responsibility. There is diminishing appreciation that individuals' predicaments are a product of more than simply their individual choice, and include access to opportunities, how opportunities are made available, the capacity to take advantage of opportunities offered, and a host of factors regarding personal histories and the exigencies of lives.

Another feature of choice in neoliberal governmentality is that despite endless proliferation of matters over which choice can be exercised and options available, many of our choices are preconfigured to preclude more fundamental choices. For example, there is an enormous variety of credit cards from which one may choose. However, possessing a credit card is not subject to choice if one wishes to purchase an airline ticket, make hotel reservations, or rent a car. In neoliberal societies, choosing not to possess a credit card, own a bank account, use computer technology, compete for employment, or choosing "not to choose," imposes severe limitations.

The idea of choice is connected intimately to our understanding of ourselves as free, autonomous actors, capable of choosing rationally and responsibly in ways that will bring about our self-chosen ends. We have become enraptured by the idea that more choice means more individual freedom and anything that enhances individualism is good. These days, it is hard to see how our choices are determined by anything other than our own self-initiated desires and deliberations. However, we always are embedded in practices that are mutually constitutive and so much a part of the warp and woof of daily life as to render them

imperceptible. The extent to which enterprising subjects understand themselves as free in this way is seen as inherent in human nature, normal, natural, vital, even virtuous, and common sense and the apparatus of neoliberal governmentality remain concealed.

Foucault argued that neoliberal governmentality harnesses individual choice and freedom as a form of power. It operates, not through coercion, but rather, inconspicuously through social practices that create a field of action within which persons are reconfigured through an economized conception of enterprise and by acting on them through their capacity for agency and self-determination. But neoliberalism is not just something outside of us. In fact, it is dramatically diminishing and, in some cases, erasing traditionally strong boundaries between private and personal versus public and social. As Hamann (2009) observes, this shift is evident in increasing corporate and government surveillance (e.g., monitoring of electronic communications) and the commodification and purveying of detailed personal information for commercial and administrative ends. The shift also can be seen in how activities of production and consumption, once carried out in public spaces have now infiltrated the home, a space previously reserved for leisure and housework. Telecommuting, telemarketing, and Internet shopping are found increasingly in homes. As Hamann states:

Nearly ubiquitous technologies such as the telephone, home computers with worldwide web access, pagers, mobile phones, GPS and other wireless devices have rendered private space and personal time accessible to the demands of business and, increasingly, the interests of government. To put it simply, it is no longer true, as Marx once claimed, that the worker "is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home." (p. 39)

### The Corrosion of Character

The language and practices of neoliberalism are revising how, as self-interpreting beings, we see ourselves and others, inevitably transforming what we are. I want to turn to the claim that neoliberalism is corroding character. Before the late 20th century, a job furnished not only security, but also an identity and an orientation to living. The original meaning of the word, "career," was a carriage road and, as it came to be applied to vocations, a clear way ahead—a prepared path. This no longer is the case. Career

counseling clients are now told to expect 11 job changes over their working lives (Sennett, 1998). The neoliberal context of employment is perpetually transitional. It demands and exploits a workforce that is global, disembedded, mobile, and flexible. In many sectors, lifelong vocations are being replaced by job portfolios composed of short-term projects and contracts.

Sennett (1998) argues that this shift can be traced to a change in the tactics of big money from owning companies to trading in them. The result was not only how companies were seen and managed, but also how workers were seen and managed. The strategies of short term investment and companies becoming more flexible, capable of retooling quickly to take advantage of ongoing and rapid changes in consumer demand, were translated and imposed on the labor force. In the new regime—what Sennett calls “flexible capitalism”—workers are “asked to behave nimbly, to be open to change on short notice, [and] to take risks continually” (p. 9). They are expected to be good at “multiskilling” (which often amounts to responsibility for what were three employees’ jobs prior to downsizing) and to embrace flextime (which frequently translates as working more than 40 hours per week and being constantly at the employer’s beck and call), reengineering, de-layering, teamwork, constant performance appraisals (enabled by information technology that instantaneously collects data on employees activities), and ongoing change in working conditions. Proponents claim that the new emphasis on flexibility provides workers greater freedom with which to fashion their lives and more opportunities for personal fulfillment. But, as Sennett deciphers, the new regime simply replaces old controls with new ones.

According to Sennett (1998), the social and psychological costs of these changes are profound. We now live in a contracting society. Traditional values are undermined as we rely increasingly on the authority of legalistic contracts and less on trust, promises, and long-term covenants, such as those that once existed between employers and employees. In a context of work built on short-term contracts, flexibility, and mobility, it becomes difficult to preserve the value and viability of long-term commitments and relationships. A society of individuals frequently switching jobs, relocating, and preoccupied with personal risk and self-interest,

is conducive neither to stable families nor cohesive communities.

Sennett (1998) postulates that over most of history there has been little confusion about the meaning of character. Character refers to “the enduring personal characteristics we value in ourselves and for which we want to be valued by others” (p. 10). Character is social and long term. It finds expression in loyalty and mutual commitment, and in the sustained pursuit of goals over time. But, as Sennett asks,

How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? How can long-term goals be pursued in an economy devoted to the short-term? How can mutual loyalties and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned? (p. 10)

Sennett’s questions have profound psychological implications. Character unfolds through the coherence of our lived experience of time and space. But, as Sennett (1998) observes, a hazard of flexible capitalism is experience that drifts in time, from place to place, job to job, and contract to contract. In lives composed of fragments, episodes, instrumental values, and where career is no longer a meaningful concept, how does one make and maintain the long-term commitments required of people to form their characters into sustained narratives? Life narratives are not merely registers of events. They bestow temporal logic and coherence—ordering the progress of life in time, furnishing hindsight, foresight, and insight, rendering explanations for why things happen, and providing for the integrity of self and identity (Freeman, 2010).

Orbach (2001) contends that the life narratives of neoliberal selves are fragmented and more resemble a checklist of capacities than a coherent life story. Such checklists, Orbach believes, are not psychologically nourishing and are inadequate for a deeply meaningful experience of self and identity. Orbach also suggests that the convenient corporate solution to the neoliberal fragmenting of time, loss of place, and overwhelming sense of personal insignificance is branding. The buying and wearing of brands has become our way to belong, find our place, and lend coherence to our identities. Our personal commitments, identifications, and orientations are defined not through discovering and defending communal values and civic vir-



tues, but instead, by sporting Nike, drinking Starbucks, buying iPhones, and driving BMWs.

However, the practice of branding is no longer limited to commodities. Personal branding has been promoted widely since Tom Peters', 1997 article, "The Brand Called You," appeared in *Fast Company* magazine. Peters encourages us to think of ourselves "every bit as much of a brand as Nike, Coke, Pepsi, or the Body Shop" (section 2, para. 3). Peters asserts that everyone has the facility to make themselves stand out and attract opportunities. But to do so, he counsels, we must envision ourselves as "CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc." and to recognize that "our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You" (section 1, para. 4). Successful personal branding, Peters expounds, demands relentless devotion to developing your value as a brand: "to act selfishly—to grow yourself, to promote yourself, to get the market to reward yourself" (section 5, para. 4).

In contrast to Sennett (1998); Peters (1997) sees the project-based world as the ideal work milieu, especially for growing one's personal brand, and he disputes that loyalty and commitment are in decline. Instead, Peters remonstrates, the "mindless loyalty" workers once gave to companies is being replaced by a "deeper sense of loyalty" to one's projects and oneself (section 5, para. 3). One might ask, however, in what such depth consists. Personal branding supplants character, recasting in entrepreneurial terms the values by which we define, characterize, and orient ourselves.

Psychologists' extensive participation in branding and advertising provides ample illustration of collusion with neoliberal governmentality. However, I wish to focus on three other examples that evince psychologists' complicity in the neoliberal agenda: social anxiety, positive psychology, and educational psychology.

### Neoliberalism and Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is now the third most common psychological disorder after depression and alcoholism, affecting more than 13% of the population (Horwitz, 2002) and deemed "a public health danger . . . heading toward epidemic proportions" (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2008, shyness and technology section, para. 5). The rapid rise in social anxiety disorder is striking given it did not become a diagnostic category

until 1987 and its precursor, social phobia, was uncommon, found in less than 3% of the population (Aho, 2010). Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013) accounts for the rapid growth and prevalence of social anxiety as a psychological disorder, its relationship to what we previously called shyness, how enterprise culture shaped a space of possibility in which social anxiety became an object of expert psychological knowledge and intervention, and the ways psychology and other institutions are contributing to its spread.

Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013) identifies two important sources that brought heightened attention to social anxiety. One is the specific role played by SmithKline Beecham, makers of the pharmaceutical Paxil, the preferred treatment. A timely removal of advertising restrictions permitted the company to market the drug directly to consumers. What is more significant, is that the company's multibillion dollar marketing campaign was highly effective in linking the disorder to all manner of interpersonal and job-related problems in a way that refashioned all social discomfort as "dis-ease." According to SmithKline Beecham, the campaign was warranted because "patients with social anxiety disorder often share the common public misperception that what they experience is severe shyness" (Lane, 2007, p. 122). In the words of the product director of Paxil, Barry Brand, "Every marketer's dream . . . is to find an unidentified or unknown market and develop it. That's what we were able to do with social anxiety disorder" (Goetzl, 2000, para. 3).

The second source of attention, on which the first depended, is an enterprise culture that places a premium on social prowess, confidence, exuberance, and initiative—characteristics needed for effective networking and self-presentation that, in turn, are believed necessary for success in a competitive marketplace. Given such a setting, it is easy to see how shyness and social discomfort can be made to stand out as problematic. As Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013) observes, on the one hand, the importance of networking, self-presentation, and belief in the ever-present potential of opportunities and required vigilance in maintaining the kind of personal image that attracts them, demands relentless self-monitoring. But, on the other hand, such anxious self-surveillance signals maladjustment. In Hickinbottom-Brawn's words: "in

the workplace of enterprise culture, anxious self-surveillance is both pathological and prescribed” (p. 740). Social anxiety as both vice and virtue is part of what contributes to its prevalence.

According to Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013), a diagnosis of social anxiety disorder may help those afflicted with an explanation for why they are experiencing suffering and difficulty. However, by pathologizing and medicalizing shyness, and locating the source of the problem within individuals, psychologists operate behind a veil of science and value neutrality. Ideological complicity is rarely addressed. Hickinbottom-Brawn discusses how cognitive-behavioral therapy, the second most common form of treatment and which typically is administered by psychologists, is conducted without due attention to its sociopolitical implications. Although cognitive-behavioral therapy is said to be grounded in collaboration and democratic values, the therapeutic context is structured such that the therapist is the authoritative expert who conducts sessions with rigorous supervision, instructing clients how to interpret their experiences while teaching them techniques of self-control (Proctor, 2008). The aim of therapy is the “transfer of control” by which clients are gradually directed to manage themselves. However, it is recommended that therapists act “paternally” and client compliance is considered the single most important factor for therapeutic efficacy. Compliance is hardly collaboration.

The assumptions perpetrated by psychologists are that social anxiety is a pathological disorder internal to individuals, individuals bear sole responsibility for their condition, and expert treatment is required for ameliorating the disorder. Such expert treatment consists in methods of self-surveillance and self-management—methods, Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013) alleges, that encourage conformity to neoliberal ideals and may in fact exacerbate rather than alleviate clients’ difficulties. Never are the predicaments, contradictions, and risks wrought by the institutions of neoliberalism in which individuals are compelled to participate and made to live out their everyday lives, considered. In this light, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that psychologists are perpetuating the disorder, even if unwittingly. This criticism can be ex-

tended to much contemporary psychotherapy (cf. Cushman, 1995).

As remarked by Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013), social anxiety may be a highly individual and private experience. However, it does not follow that the origins or causes of such experience are located within individuals. Hickinbottom-Brawn submits that the conception of social anxiety as an individual disorder deters us from looking at the broader sociopolitical context in which it is manifest, “where previous ideals of citizenship and commitment to others have been supplanted by a vision of social relations as a matter of interaction between economic units for the purpose of personal fulfillment and attainment of instrumental ends” (p. 746). Hickinbottom-Brawn asserts that in their conceptualization and treatment of social anxiety, psychologists thus promote an instrumental orientation to social and personal life, contribute to naturalizing and normalizing neoliberalism, and maintain the neoliberal status quo.

### Neoliberalism and Positive Psychology

Whatever other ideologies may have been implicit in psychotherapies popular during the 1970s and 1980s, they were aligned with the emerging neoliberal agenda (Rose, 1999). Looking across Rogers’ client-centered therapy, Perls’ Gestalt therapy, Berne’s transactional analysis, Janov’s primal therapy, Ellis’ rational emotive therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, Erhard Seminars Training (EST), and T-groups, among others, what is consistent are moral injunctions to work on the self to attain greater autonomy, to accept responsibility for one’s choices and circumstances, to strive to realize one’s potential, and to increase one’s quality of life.

Such precepts still are common among current psychotherapies. But what is new is that they have become incorporated as aspects of a broad psychological initiative that reenvisions and promotes happiness in ways consistent with neoliberal governmentality. The pursuit of individual happiness has been defended as a sociopolitical right and moral good at least since Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1693, and it remains a right and orientation to the good life in contemporary neoliberal states. However, it is being given a distinctively entrepreneurial twist.

In *Happiness as Enterprise: An Essay on Neoliberal Life*, Binkley (2013) marshals arguments and evidence to show how happiness is being recast by neoliberalism as an entrepreneurial project. In Binkley's analysis, the notion of "happiness as enterprise" (p. 3) translates the neoliberal approach to organizational structures and functions in terms of individual well-being. In other words, the road to personal fulfillment is paved with the same stones as those leading to success for businesses and other institutions, namely, becoming more independent and self-sufficient, enterprising, competitive, flexible, adaptable, risk-seeking, less reliant on government support, and oriented toward pursuing self-interest in a society reconceived in the image of a market.

In what Binkley (2013) dubs "the new discourse on happiness," individuals not only are encouraged to cultivate their attributes, assets, potentials, and purposes for the sake of their personal success, but also to exploit happiness itself as an attribute, asset, potential, and purpose that can be harnessed in aid of such success. In this way, happiness becomes both goal and means. It is an effect of success, yet also a resource for further success, occasioned by life interpreted as an endless array of emerging opportunities and resources, including one's own emotional states, to be engaged, deployed, and even risked toward the overarching goal of making oneself as competitive and effective as possible. Happiness, as ends and means, is the property of an autonomous agent who regards the world not as defined by social norms and responsibilities to which one must adjust, but rather, as a store of resources to be used in the service of self-optimization. The new discourse on happiness reflects a fundamental transformation in how we see life and our relation to it, from the social and mutual to the entrepreneurial and opportunistic. As Binkley describes,

the new discourse on happiness, is not a state of being nor a relation sustained responsibly with others, but a life resource whose potential resides at the disposal of a sovereign, enterprising, self-interested actor. Through the lens of this new discourse, life is viewed as a dynamic field of potentials and opportunities, and happiness is presented both as a goal and a "monetary instrument," realized through a strategic program of emotional well-being. In other words, the new discourse on happiness proposes a certain transformation in one's relation to the world and to oneself: as one incorporates the new program into one's outlook, one

abandons the world of static states and stable ontologies for one of dynamic possibilities, risks and open horizons. (p. 1)

Following Foucault, Binkley asserts that key to implementing the technique of neoliberal governmentality is the invention of forms of discourse that can be used by individuals to examine their conduct, assess their attitudes and potentials, and shape their subjectivities through language that ascribes and emphasizes capacities to exercise their self-responsible freedom and autonomy. However, what also is an important feature of this discourse, Binkley observes, is that we are told to rid ourselves of inherited interdependencies resulting from excessive welfareist social policies of a previous governmentality. These policies, it is alleged, cause complaisance, if not docility, and stifle our natural impulses for autonomy, initiative, opportunistic pursuit, and entrepreneurship. In the new discourse on happiness, we are enjoined to extricate ourselves from a legacy of interdependencies and the misbegotten beliefs that perpetuate them: the importance of mutual commitments, social cohesion, and collective responsibility, preoccupation with the judgments of others, and an overdependence on habits acquired by conforming to conventional patterns of social interaction and communal life.

According to Binkley (2013), much of what is propelling the new discourse on happiness is the positive psychology movement. Binkley details how positive psychologists have taken a vital role in shaping this new understanding of happiness and purveying it to the public. The positive psychology movement originated in the 1990s, under the leadership of Martin Seligman, a former president of the American Psychological Association. Positive psychologists distinguish themselves from their predecessors by emphasizing sources of health, optimal performance, and human flourishing, rather than what traditionally has been psychologists' preoccupation with disease and disorder (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Central to the mission of positive psychology is to mobilize the theory, methods, precision, and rigor that psychological science has devoted to the study of dysfunction and pathology, and redirect it to psychological states and processes responsible for accomplishment, fulfillment, and happiness. In this regard, positive psychologists distance them-

selves from other self-help advocates by proclaiming a solid scientific basis to their approach. Positive psychology, as defined in its manifesto is: “the scientific study of optimal human functioning” (Sheldon, Frederickson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, & Haidt, 2000).

Over the past decade, positive psychology has spawned a plethora of studies and articles, many occurring in prominent psychological journals (e.g., *American Psychologist*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Psychological Bulletin*) as well as specialized outlets (e.g., *The Journal of Happiness Studies*), a spate of academic and popular books (e.g., Linley, Harrington, & Garcea, 2013; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Seligman, 2000; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011), magazine features (e.g., *Time* magazine’s 2005 cover story), an array of technical manuals, and myriad Internet articles, blogs, and dedicated sites. There are associations and conferences dedicated to positive psychology, university programs including those at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, and two Templeton Prizes. Positive psychology is a multibillion dollar field of research commanding enormous attention both within and outside of psychology. The reach of its influence extends far beyond counseling and psychotherapy to education, economic analyses, business, management, marketing, sports coaching, law enforcement, corrections, and military training.

According to Binkley (2013), positive psychology owes to the humanistic tradition initiated by those such as Rogers and Maslow in affirming internal forces and potentials residing within individuals that enable them to conquer negative self-assessments and emotions, and define and pursue their own visions of self-realization and fulfillment. In this vein, positive psychologists conceptualize happiness as a personal potential that is cultivated by producing and managing thoughts that bring about positive emotions. However, positive psychology also borrows from cognitive psychology in the assumption that feelings follow thoughts, and thoughts can be used purposefully and willfully to command emotional states. A fundamental premise of positive psychology is that by orienting one’s thinking positively toward one’s circumstances, negative patterns of thought and feeling can be circumvented or replaced.

However, positive psychology not only aims to promote happiness in our experience and enactment of the everyday, but moreover, at the achievement of our full potential for happiness as individuals, what Seligman (2000) refers to as “authentic happiness.” Authentic happiness results from recognizing and activating unique potentials that come in the form of an individual’s specific profile of core virtues and character strengths—universally positive human characteristics—that Seligman claims are found in common across the world’s major spiritual and philosophic traditions. Practicing one’s virtues and character strengths builds positive self-regard, seen as key to acquiring happiness.

In the light of positive psychology, Binkley (2013) discerns, happiness is a product of individual effort. Only through your own actions can you make yourself happy. The valence of emotions directly reflects optimistic and pessimistic thoughts. Thoughts are within one’s control and purposefully can be manipulated to effect desired emotional states. Consequently, not only are individuals capable of changing their emotions, but also, they ultimately are responsible for their emotional experience. According to positive psychologists, when we accept responsibility for how we feel and learn to wield our thoughts in the service of bettering our lives, positive emotions and happiness result. It is this exercise of agency forged by a sense of self-responsible freedom that is the substance of happiness. By the same token, we are to blame for our unhappiness. If we are unhappy, it is because we have failed to accept responsibility for our circumstances and take action. Abdicating responsibility for our state of being and inaction derive from succumbing to pessimism bred from docility, resignation, dependency, and believing falsely that our futures are determined by traumas and other psychological injuries sustained in our pasts.

Positive psychology is radically transforming the nature of therapy and the goals of intervention. As Binkley (2013) discusses, psychotherapies styled on deep exploration of past relationships and reflection on the suffering incurred are being displaced by life coaching, which not only eschews reflective examination of individuals’ histories, but also, the very assumption that clients need healing. The task of the life coach is assisting clients in building visions of their future happiness, setting self-



enterprising life goals, strategizing about available means, and motivating them to act in ways to achieve their purposes. Using a mixture of techniques adopted from counseling, business consulting, and the human potential movement, coaching is eclectic, pragmatic, forward-looking, results oriented, and aimed at efficient and productive living. It typically consists of short-term, focused consultations that address highly circumscribed personal issues and challenges most often related to career and business concerns. Such concerns most often can be traced to the highly competitive climate of life in a neoliberal global economy. However, in the paradigm of coaching, such concerns become private individual shortcomings to be remedied by strengthening individuals' psychological resources.

Coaching is exempt from conventional licensing and professional requirements, which according to Binkley (2013) is a freedom won largely by being set in opposition to the dominant model of psychological expertise. Coaches not only have little interest in their clients' pasts, and are present, future, and action oriented, but also, their expertise and authority is formulated very differently from mainstream psychotherapists. Coaching is nonhierarchical, anti-institutional, and shows a preference for credentials earned from practical experience over academic degrees. The coach–client relationship is characterized as informal and collegial, with sessions frequently conducted by teleconferencing. Coaches work as “lifestyle technicians,” often employing technical means by which clients' progress is monitored, measured, charted, and compared against benchmarks of efficiency and productivity. Tracing the well-established link between coaching and positive psychology, Binkley reveals how positive psychology lends coaching scientific legitimacy, while positive psychology benefits from coaching through increased dissemination of its psychological platform.

However, what is perhaps most disconcerting in Binkley's (2013) analysis is the way in which positive psychology and coaching are reformulating our understanding of relationships in the context of enterprise culture. The idea that happiness emerges from the depth of our moral concerns and commitments, and the intertwining of our emotional lives with others in the

bonds of long-term intimate relationships, is being eroded. In its place, positive psychology and relationship coaching offer a highly instrumental orientation to relationships whereby they become opportunities or life strategies that require fixed goals and, importantly, preservation of one's independence and autonomy. Binkley submits that under the influence of positive psychology and coaching, relationships are reduced to means-ends calculations, and pursued solely for self-interest and emotional self-optimization. Acts of love, friendship, benevolence, and generosity are valued to the extent they increase individuals' social capital. Even our most intimate relationships are interpreted as assets and liabilities, and in the competitive social market where flexibility and mobility are prized, are best engaged as short-term contracts. Flexible capitalism demands a high degree of mobility and a willingness to exit relationships that are no longer profitable. The context of neoliberalism seems to dissolve the capacity to respect and cherish others, especially with the kind of loyalty and commitment that Sennett (1998) insists is disappearing from the list of human virtues.

What becomes clear from Binkley's account is that the new discourse on happiness delivered by positive psychology strongly reflects and sustains neoliberalism and enterprise culture. As Binkley summarizes:

[It] facilitates the conversion of a logic of economic policy into one of personal, emotional and corporeal practice. The vitality, optimism, and “positive emotion” that happiness inspires in us is none other than the refraction of enterprise as enshrined in neoliberal discourse, brought to bear against the vestiges of social government that we carry within ourselves. The disposition to opportunistically pursue the happy life is a reflection of neoliberalism's invocation to self-interested, competitive conduct. (p. 163)

### Neoliberalism and Educational Psychology

In *The Education of Selves: How Psychology Transformed Students*, Martin and McLellan (2013) illuminate how, over the latter half of the 20th century, psychological expertise served in shifting the goals of education from traditional functions of preparing citizens to concern with the psychological needs of individual learners. By the late 1970s, educational psychologists had declared that by enhancing self-esteem, self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy,

students could acquire the psychological capabilities required to become enterprising, lifelong learners. According to Martin and McLellan, the psychologized image of the successful student has three key features. First, students act and experience in ways that are expressive of their presumed uniquely individual psychological interiors. Second, they are strategically enterprising in pursuit of self-defined goals. Third, these features of self-expression and self-enterprise are entitlements; that is, basic rights students can presume and demand from teachers, school administrators, and peers. Through the lens of educational psychology, the expressive, enterprising, and entitled student is a unique individual who is active, self-disciplined, self-directed, and self-assured; who bears responsibility for her learning; and who is equipped with executive skills and strategic tools for goal-setting, progress monitoring, performance evaluation, and problem solving. Martin and McLellan assert that these characteristics align with a very specific form of self-governance, one especially well suited to the governmentality required of neoliberalism and enterprise culture.

In detailing the historical influence of educational psychologists on views of learners and curricula, Martin and McLellan (2013) show how the idea of expressive, enterprising selves became linked to the terminology, technologies of assessment and intervention, and authority of psychological expertise. Under psychology's influence, children increasingly became understood as autonomous individual learners who needed to be taught to recognize, value, express, and direct their efforts toward developing, their unique perspectives and abilities. This was promoted by educational psychologists under the banners of self-esteem and self-concept, whereas the terminology of self-regulation and self-efficacy were used to conceptualize and elevate the self's hypothesized capacities as a rational and strategic manager able to monitor, strategize, reinforce, and motivate itself in pursuit of its own self-interests. According to Martin and McLellan (2013), the voluminous literature of psychological theorizing and research on these dimensions of the self converge in a conception of the successful enterprising student who is, "in psychological terms, self-motivated, self-regulated, and self-adapting" (p. 174). Enterprising students are individuals who

come to possess specialized executive skills and strategies adapted instrumentally for optimal performance in academic and life tasks. Perhaps most centrally, enterprising students develop a view of lifelong learning as an essential tool for remaining competitive in the perpetually changing world of flexible capitalism.

What is now explicitly referred to as "enterprise education" or "21st century learning," and has been incorporated extensively in many Canadian and American school policies and practices, relies on a psychologized conception of the learner of the sort Martin and McLellan (2013) describe. Across the various programs in support of these initiatives is a target set of core competencies: "critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, adaptability, lifelong learning, teamwork and collaboration, initiative, self-direction, an entrepreneurial spirit, communication skills, literacy, and use of technology" (p. 173). In support of this aim, curricula encourage and provide opportunities to practice risk-taking, team building, confidence, and reflection.

Strongly aligned with these initiatives, The British Columbia Ministry of Education states that the kinds of people it seeks to produce

[possess] management and organizational skills, show initiative, responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, self-esteem and confidence, believe actions and choices affect what happens in life, make effort to reach personal potential by pursuing what [they] enjoy doing, market [their] skills and abilities in the same way as [they] would a business. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008, *Career Planning 10*, p. 9)

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador advertises, "the emphasis of Enterprise Education at the elementary level is on refining personal development skills and enterprise management skills" (G.N.L.D.E., 2010a, p. 48). In aid of developing these skills, students are provided opportunities to acquire enterprising skills in both individual and group learning activities. "Some activities focus on developing a positive self image. Others are problem-solving which require students to be enterprising and self-sufficient" (G.N.L.D.E., 2010b, p. 1) along with risk-taking, team-building, and skills associated with review and reflection. Likewise, in Nova Scotia,

During the elementary school years, entrepreneurship education emphasizes the development of personal qualities, characteristics, attitudes, and skills and pro-

vides diverse opportunities for students to explore and experiment with entrepreneurship and enterprise. Learners are encouraged to initiate and develop their own solutions to problems and to see possibilities for entrepreneurship and enterprise in their communities. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003, p. H-1)

What these curricular goals and their implementation demonstrate is that when psychological expertise is brought to bear in the setting of educational values, aims, and practices, it becomes influential in the constitution of students as particular kinds of persons.

As Martin and McLellan (2013) recognize, the challenge of neoliberal governmentality is to determine ways in which individuals who value their freedom can be taught to exercise it in a manner consistent with certain sociopolitical arrangements. Neoliberal governmentality does not operate through the domination and oppression of citizens, but rather, by making their subjectivity a target of influence. To this end, educational psychology has been an ally of neoliberalism. By promoting particular kinds of selfhood and techniques by which they are developed and attained, educational psychologists have intervened in the operations and purposes of schools to help produce forms of subjectivity suitable to neoliberal governmentality. Fundamental to these kinds of selfhood is the belief that we are self-contained, autonomous beings who are masters of our abilities, efforts, goals, choices, and accomplishments, and capable of functioning largely independent of social and cultural surrounds. By designing and instituting educational practices and interventions that teach us to manage ourselves and act in ways befitting the neoliberal conception of ourselves as autonomous enterprising actors, educational psychologists are partners in preserving the neoliberal status quo.

Martin and McLellan (2013) assert that a consequence of the kinds of selfhood promoted by educational psychology is that they deter us from recognizing and acknowledging our social, cultural, and historical constitution. This is problematic, Martin and McLellan point out, because it is only by virtue of our participation with others within ways of life saturated with moral and ethical values and standards that we judge ourselves and our actions as justly deserving of praise or blame. Thus, Martin and McLellan remind us, psychological advice to esteem, express, or regulate ourselves in aid of accom-

plishing our purposes only is intelligible because we comprehend ourselves as persons against a background of social and cultural criteria and conventions by which our actions are sanctioned or censured. Further, as long as we are focused on ourselves, our desires, ends, and pursuits are detached from collective concerns, and the sociopolitical status quo goes largely unexamined and unquestioned. We are diverted from taking up collective social and political concerns and democratic practices as citizens engaged with others.

Moreover, Martin and McLellan (2013) tell us, in the absence of a strong orientation to our sociocultural and political contexts and those with whom we inhabit them, the kinds of selves advocated by educational psychology possess little educational substance or value. As Martin and McLellan make clear, any adequate vision of democratic education needs to entail the formation of persons who can engage the complexities of contemporary life with a well informed and critical appreciation of the social and cultural practices of knowing and understanding bequeathed us by history and the ways we depend on and are situated within them. A major objective of schooling in democratic societies is assisting students to place their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes in a larger horizon and in contrast to perspectives and ways of life that are different and even quite remote from their own. Vital to democratic education is the genuine effort to comprehend one's place in the world and human history, and to learn to appreciate and value the very best of what humankind has produced in its endeavors. It is in these ways that education equips us for both individual and collective empowerment and enhancement in ways that build constructively on the successes and failures of the past and present. Martin and McLellan argue that a narrow focus on one's inner psychological life and overly simplified, facile strategies for managing it are thin gruel for the educational nourishment of citizens capable of engaging intelligently and sensitively with others in matters of sociocultural and political significance.

Martin and McLellan (2013) conclude that the expressive, enterprising, and entitled learner advanced by educational psychology, and incorporated by many American, Canadian, and European school policies and practices, is ill suited to the purposes of education. Whereas educa-

tional psychology is focused on enhancing the interior experience, self-governing capacities, self-concern, and self-serving instrumental expression of individuals, education has the broader mandate of preparing citizens capable not only of developing themselves, but also, of contributing to their communities for the collective good. Martin and McLellan worry that educational aims concerned with the values of committed citizenship, civic virtue, and the greater collective good have been supplanted by the mission of educational psychologists to help learners acquire skills, abilities, and dispositions that make them adaptive workers equipped psychologically to meet the ever-changing demands of neoliberal flexible capitalism.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Neoliberalism began as a set of monetary and fiscal policies in response to the economic turmoil of the 1970s. Multinational corporations, whose profits were threatened by soaring inflation and the growing power of labor in developed nations, together with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, abetted a seismic shift in governmental policy from "interventionism" to the "liberalization" of trade, financial transactions, business, and industry (Newton, 2004). Neoliberal economic policies have had dramatic global consequences. However, neoliberalism is no longer just a set of economic policies. It has disseminated and imposed market values at every corner of human life. At the hub of these values are entrepreneurialism and market rationality. By institutionalizing these values, neoliberalism has had not only normative consequences, but also, ontological ones, extending to the very psychological constitution of persons.

Societies require people to do and be certain kinds of things and are structured socio-politically to produce persons, selves, and contexts that elicit and regulate actions of these kinds. Neoliberal governmentality requires individuals who are responsible for themselves and reflexively manage their skills, abilities, and relationships such that they can be deployed as marketable assets. Neoliberalism succeeds in producing such individuals and the prescribed economic activ-

ity through the extension of market conditions to every aspect of human endeavor. Market rationality configures human life as enterprise. Individuals are made responsible to provide for their own needs, aspirations, and happiness. To do so under market conditions, they are encouraged to conceive of themselves as autonomous entrepreneurial actors who must steer themselves strategically through a competitive field of opportunities, alliances, and obstacles. As evidence of the ubiquity of market rationality applied to everyday life, witness how it is blatantly displayed as the common plot of a hoard of reality TV shows proliferating globally (Couldry, 2008).

In the examples I have discussed, the features and effects of neoliberal governmentality are being sustained and perpetuated by many psychological theories and practices. A common thread across these features and effects is what Brown terms "self-care." According to Brown (2003), by making individuals fully responsible for themselves and accentuating capacities for this "self-care," neoliberalism conflates economic and moral behavior, reconceiving morality in terms of rational deliberation over profitability, costs, risks, and consequences. Moral agency takes an economic form. In neoliberalism, the moral agent is the entrepreneurial subject. Moreover, under the guise of a morality of self-care, neoliberalism takes self-reliance and self-responsibility to extremes. The enterprising individual shoulders full responsibility for his or her circumstances regardless of the ways in which his or her choices are constrained (e.g., lack or obsolescence of skills, limited access to education or medical care, poverty, low wages, high levels of unemployment). Brown contends that by attributing individuals' predicaments to a "mismanaged life," social and economic powers become depoliticized, concealed behind the common sense of entrepreneurial individualism.

Brown (2003) notes another effect of the neoliberal emphasis on self-care is that political citizenship and civic virtue are greatly diminished. As Brown explains, the neoliberal individual, as an autonomous self-concerned strategist locked in competition with others, is preoccupied with choosing for him- or herself. He or she has little impetus to engage cooperatively with others to organize or revise the options over which choice can be exercised, especially for the collective good. The hyper-



self-sufficiency of neoliberalism denies and prevents social relatedness. Brown (2003) surmises that the consummate neoliberal public could hardly be said to exist as a public: "The body politic ceases to be a body, but is, rather, a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers" (para. 15). In neoliberalism, the state does not organize and control the market. Rather, it is the converse. Market rationality is the regulative principle that organizes the state. Brown goes on to argue that as a consequence, traditional democratic institutions are being dismembered as the values of enterprise, self-sufficiency, cost-benefit efficiency, and productivity ascend over the power of the state. These and other features and effects of neoliberalism I have discussed bear profound implications for the interpretation of psychological ethics.

In this article, I have drawn attention to neoliberalism and some of the ways psychology is implicated in the neoliberal agenda. My aim has been to broaden the context of consideration in which psychological ethics might be examined and more richly informed. A vital function of governmentality is not only to produce and regulate forms of subjectivity, but also to legitimize the status quo regarding ordinary life and what is deemed "natural" about it. Perhaps the most powerful penetration of governmentality is to be found in what passes for common sense. This is why neoliberalism is so pervasive and, at the same time, so difficult to detect.

In the examples I have discussed, there is ample evidence that many psychologists are operating in ways that sustain and promote the globally dominant neoliberal agenda. In some ways, this should not be surprising. Psychology is wedded to the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of its times (Danziger, 1997). However, as some have long noted (e.g., Prilleltensky, 1994; Prilleltensky & Walsh-Bowers, 1993), psychologists have been unwilling to admit their complicity with specific sociopolitical arrangements, for to do so would undermine a credibility forged on value neutrality presumed to be ensured by scientific objectivity and moral indifference to its subject matter. Consequently, as the historical record attests, in the main, psychologists have served primarily as "architects of adjustment" in preserving the status quo and not as agents of sociopolitical change (Walsh-Bowers, 2007).

However, if psychologists are to act ethically, we cannot continue "hiding behind a veneer of scientism" (Prilleltensky, 1994, p. 967). We are compelled not only to admit that psychology is ideologically laden, but also to ask ourselves whether we are acting ethically in preserving the neoliberal status quo. This entails interrogating neoliberalism, our relationship to it, how it affects what persons are and might become, and whether it is good for human well-being. It is only by such examination that we might comprehend the ethics of our disciplinary and professional practices in the context of a neoliberal political order and whether we are living up to our social responsibility. I hope to have offered a step in this direction.

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