Fit for everything: Health and the ideology of authenticity

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abstract

This paper builds on a burgeoning body of work suggesting that contemporary work politics are increasingly based on an ideology of 'just be yourself', where employees are invited to express, rather than suppress, who they are. It elaborates the thesis that some versions of health promotion can be understood as part of this ideology. After demonstrating this complex and at times counterintuitive relation, the paper critically examines the way in which health and authenticity appear as moral demands within the workplace. Turning to psychoanalysis, two critical issues are being raised. First, the injunction to be oneself ironically results in alienation and frustration. Second, in the absence of paternal authority figures, new more ferocious superego figures will emerge.

There is something unquestionably good about feeling good. When the body is not screaming from pain and when the head is not seized by ill-spirited daemons we can concentrate on what seems most meaningful to us, whether this is to spend time with family and friends or indulge in pleasurable activities like yoga, French cooking or sex.

From this point of view, there are certainly good reasons for celebrating the advances in health care and other forms of therapeutic practices; not only do they keep us happier on a subjective level (insofar as they unburden us of mental and physical suffering), but they also entail benefits on a wider socioeconomic level (insofar as they decrease costs associated with nursing the sick and increase productivity by keeping able-bodied people at work).

In spite of this, there is a growing body of scholarly investigations that challenges the benevolence of public health and health promotion programmes. One such criticism is voiced by conservative neo-liberals who, following in the footsteps of Ayn Rand, argue that all forms of state intervention, health regulations included, are undesirable in that they impinge on the individual's right to freedom (e.g. Davies, 1991). Another line of criticism comes from the left and concerns the uneven distribution of health services, which further increases the disparity between the underprivileged and the rich (Crawford, 1977; Wikler, 1978). Yet another form of criticism, which largely extends Foucault's thesis of bio-power and governmentality, aims to understand the discourse of health as an insidious form of domination. This position involves situating health in a historical and socio-political context of population control, linking the medicalization of

health to regimes that see the body as a site of power, subjectification and contestation (e.g. Lupton, 1995).

It is on this last form of criticism that this paper will focus. It has proved an increasingly useful approach to the subject and has been discussed in organization studies and other critical investigations of workplace politics. Some of this research argues that health promotion is not neutral and for the benefit of all, but instead a way to further control the subject by promoting new forms of work ethics and ushering in managerialist ideals (Zoller, 2003; McGillivray, 2005; Kelly et al., 2007). Such analyses can be seen as part of a larger endeavour to critically examine the ways in which organizations attempt to colonize the body and produce particular forms of behaviour in order to enhance productivity (Hassard et al., 2000).

The aim of this paper is to extend these thoughts by making two consecutive arguments. The first is that pro-health imperatives, at least as they are articulated in more 'progressive' workplaces, draw on a discourse of authenticity – which is to say that the rhetoric of carefully looking after one's own health (both mental and physical) is part of a wider aim of looking after and actively crafting oneself; indeed, to be true to oneself. I will demonstrate how the relation between authenticity, health and self is a complex one – at times even counterintuitive. At face value, health and authenticity appear as an odd couple. Whereas health-ideals mainly aim to normalize the subject, authenticity aims to differentiate it. However, as health promotion has become more and more concerned with visible aspects of the body (building muscles, losing weight, etc.), it can perhaps also be seen as a means to express one's own, personal identity. And it should be noted that a discourse of authenticity is not unrestrainedly concerned with differentiation, but can also involve processes of normalization. As Fleming (2009) has noted, we are allowed to express our own selves and be transgressive, but only up to a certain point. Moreover, the transgressive elements are often limited to an aesthetic level, where the visible aspects of difference are all that are permitted.

In the course of this paper we will take a closer look at this complex interrelation. We will pay particular focus on visibility and moralization in order to disentangle the relation between self, health and authenticity. One way to make sense of this claim is to see how both authenticity and health constitute vital aspects of what some have called bio-morality (Zupančič, 2008; Žižek, 2008). Here, being authentic and healthy are indicative of virtue and morality: they indicate that one is not only true and sincere to one's soul, or personality, but also to one's body. The rise of spirituality and other new-age practices in the workplace have similarly modified the image of the body as something intertwined with the soul and thus morality. As such, authenticity (as perfecting one's personality) and health (as perfecting one's body) can be seen as interconnected.

The second argument, which flows from the first, is that when the injunction to be oneself melts together with the imperative to better health we arrive at a novel form of control, which creates a painful and alienating tension at the heart of the subject. Indeed, this is one of the critical remarks I wish to explore in more detail: that regulatory and patronising forms of control, such as promoting healthy eating habits, are now being packaged in a vocabulary of authenticity, through which it immediately

becomes legitimized as benevolent and in the interest of the individual. The demand presents itself not as externally designed and imposed, but as a call from within. One way of illustrating this is to look at how many corporations engage in educational practices with the aim of making employees more healthy, while at the same time encouraging employees to express a subversive edge and to be themselves – for example through game playing and other practices indicating a youthful spirit. What lies at the heart of this imperative, I will argue, is a contradictory call to both be oneself (through various forms of individualistic expressions) and someone else (by living up to externally imposed health ideals).

To further situate this contradictory command I will turn to a set of key texts in psychoanalysis, including some by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, which focus on the crippling ambiguity of moral imperatives. This furnishes us with a vocabulary to explain the difficulty with being oneself, which from the standpoint of psychoanalysis is seen as not just impossible but also as giving rise to new, more ferocious, superego figures (Žižek, 1999). Bringing our attention to these darker features of authenticity gives us further insights into contemporary work politics, which, though increasingly drawing on an existential vocabulary of freedom and emancipation, have nevertheless created new forms of what Fleming and Sturdy (2009) call neo-normative control.

In this paper I wish to extend these thoughts by arguing that health promotion at work can also be seen as part of the larger colonization of the self through the rhetoric of self-expression. When health is no longer seen as a paternalistic imperative imposed from the outside, but instead as a vital aspect of expressing one's own authenticity, then how are we able to call such initiatives into question? It is in response to this question that I believe psychoanalysis has something important to offer. It shows us that in the absence of a paternalistic super-ego, which openly embodies the Law, the subject has to internalize an unconscious sense of guilt which, by extension, leads to an even stronger form of super-ego, the one we have to bear on our own shoulders and fully internalize. What makes the work of Lacan particularly useful here is how it demonstrates the complex relation between external and internal demands. When external demands wither away, we tend to create them anew in an attempt to alleviate a sense of anxiety or to overcome guilt.

To make these arguments the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, recent research will be discussed that demonstrates the complex relation between subjectivity and power in the workplace. More specifically, these investigations deal with health promotion as a technology of discipline, where healthy attitudes are forged among employees, engendering what Kelly et al. (2007) call the 'corporate athlete'. Having briefly shown how the relation between the promotion of the healthy body and forms of control have been described in the study of organizations, I then move on to make the claim that the question of health is increasingly becoming part of a wider discourse of authenticity. This claim will hopefully become plausible with the help of a number of examples, all pointing to the close relation between health and authenticity. Drawing on psychoanalysis, I round off the paper by presenting a series of critical remarks against a discourse of authenticity.

Colonizing the body: Health promotion

An important trend in critical studies of work has been to identify the way in which bodies are regulated and controlled in and around organizations (Hassard et al., 2000). Based on the assumption that the body has become an increasing interest of the corporation, these studies have sought to unpack the complex question of how different kinds of subjects are produced in relation to power, that is, how forms of management control produce different forms of selves, whether they are cyborgs, sexualized women or the hard-working entrepreneur (*ibid*.). When we begin to examine the role of the body from an organizational point of view, we are taken away from the bureaucratic workplace, in which work is primarily governed and secured by different forms of technocratic and rational techniques, into an ideological workplace in which a commitment to work is primarily secured through less overt forms of control (Jermier, 1998). Or to be more precise, while technocratic forms of control are still in place, they are now being extended and further reinforced by way of normative (and not exclusively bureaucratic) techniques of management (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). The body is here colonized through what has been termed normative control (Etzioni, 1964), whereby employees internalize externally designed and imposed identities, which become the basis for a shared group identity.

The relation between body and organization has been critically analysed from a variety of perspectives. However, what will concern us here is only one such aspect, namely how different forms of health promotion programmes (as well as other less organized forms of promoting good health) operate as control mechanisms in the workplace. This involves the ambition of convincing the employee of the alleged benefits of good health (Kelly et al., 2007), but also the ambition of making this conviction appear as if it comes from the inside, as from the subject itself, and not from an external agency with intrusive and paternal overtones (McGillivray, 2005).

In order to put the question of health promotion in a critical light many have drawn on the work of Michel Foucault, particularly on the notions of 'care of the self', 'governmentality' and 'biopower'. In his later work, particularly in the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990; 1992; 1998) is concerned with the manner in which one shapes oneself as an ethical subject. Invoking the classic demand for ethical conduct, and the Greek ethos of making oneself, Foucault describes how the modern self is constantly involved in a number of techniques and methods, all of which aim to produce a specific (ethical) subjectivity. However, the care of the self as a practice of ethics and freedom is closely linked to power and should therefore be conceived together, or in opposition, to governmentality – which denotes the collected and organized practices aiming to craft a docile and normalized subject.

Drawing on Foucault's notion of biopower, Zoller (2003) claims that work health promotion (WHP) can be seen to operate on two levels. First, it operates on an individual level, where the self becomes conscious and subsequently internalizes a set of normative judgments of the body (about what is normal and abnormal, healthy or unhealthy). Second, this judgment is diffused through social and political institutions, including corporations, where health promotion becomes legitimized as a social practice. Drawing on Foucault's notion of biopower, as well as the sociological critique

of medicalization, Zoller claims that WHP ultimately aims to embody managerialist values, which by extension seek to create a more productive worker. The accent is placed on the individual and his or her endeavour to improve themselves. Thus, failing to live up to the demand of health becomes first and foremost a failure at the level of morality because it allegedly proves that the self lacks self-control (see also Crawford, 1980). Moreover, building on a case study from a Japanese automobile manufacturing plant in the Midwest and the building of an Associate Recreation Center (ARC), Zoller demonstrates how health was framed as a question concerning a desirable life-style attained through the hard work of self-discipline. That way, focus was diverted away from the risks associated with work (which was physically demanding) and instead placed on what was seen as sinful enjoyments, which might have a negative impact on longevity:

> ARC programs depicted health in disciplinary terms as the achievement of longevity through conformity to rules, abstinence, and self-control. The risks articulated at the ARC involved traditional, Protestant conceptions of sin, so that pleasure (particularly alcohol and fatty foods) was the enemy to be battled by Associates. (Zoller, 2003: 185)

The injunction to have a healthier life-style was by many of the respondents seen as beneficiary. They showed an open appreciation for the programmes and some participants began repeating the words of the instructors. As for instance when Zoller asked one respondent about what might threaten good health, she received the following response: 'Being overweight, taking in too much sugar, I mean there's a lot of things that could really hurt you. Smoking, drugs, I stay away from both of them' (ibid.: 192). Others went even further in internalizing the pro-health ideals, like for example the respondent John, who claimed to be exercising at the ARC, 'Just for my own self, like working out I have a lot more confidence now' (ibid.: 194).

Underscoring the claim that organizations actively use health promotion in order to craft working selves, McGillivray (2005) draws our attention to how people not only accept discursive rules but also resist them. To make this claim she turns to Foucault's concept of governmentality and the argument that the subject is not passively subjected to power, but comes into life in and through power, both positively and negatively. As she argues, 'to focus upon governmentality and the subject is of particular relevance to this discussion of organizational wellness as it offers space for a reflexive subject rather than the disciplined, dominated one emerging from his earlier work' (ibid.: 126). This means that wherever we find power, we also find agency and even non-acceptance since 'the presence of contestation, conflict and resistance is constant' (ibid.: 127). In response to ideals of organizational wellness, McGillivray claims that there are at least four avenues: assimilation, docility, rejection or resistance.

Similarly, Thanem (2009) has studied how the managerial discourse of health promotion has been diffused also beyond the organizational domain. Linking what he calls neo-liberal managerialism (a discourse centred on empowerment and the employees' alleged ability to decide over their working lives) with Foucault's notion of governmentality, Thanem demonstrates how managerial values turn individuals into 'health consumers'. In this regard, he also extends recent accounts suggesting that management discourse has begun to colonize other spheres of life, normally associated with non-work (Hancock and Tyler, 2004).

What connects these studies is that they all point to the close connection between health promotion, self-empowerment and control. They do so by showing the ways in which bodies are colonized and disciplined by a series of power techniques, one more imaginative than the other. What interests me here, which has only tacitly been noticed in the context of organizations, is how the question of health is closely connected to, and often legitimized through, morality (Brewis and Grey, 2008). To lose weight, stop smoking and start exercising (often the primary focus of workplace health promotion programmes) are not just making you healthier, it is argued, but also more moral – by, for example, being able to play with your kids (without becoming exhausted), be more productive at work (no more smoke breaks) and to live longer (which always seems to be a moral achievement). That is, diligently practicing and internalizing externally designed techniques is a way to prove oneself moral. Although not an explicit concern for organization studies, this link has been closely examined in other disciplines in social and political science. As Brandt and Rozin (1997) have pointed out in a socio-political context:

> Rather than seeing health or disease as random and inevitable, societies have throughout history developed complex and sophisticated explanations for the causes and prevalence of disease. Embedded in these explanatory frames are deeply held, if often unstated, sensibilities about right and wrong, good and bad, responsibility and danger. (ibid.: 1)

If we accept that health today is inseparable from morality, that feeling good is somewhat tantamount to being good, how then could one even begin to resist the imperative of health? When power is embedded in the template for the good life, what kind of resistance might we expect? Eating obscene amounts of deep-fried pizza and drinking gallons of soda would seem futile. To deliberately harm oneself does not appear to make much sense either. Indeed, to resist what seems to be inherently good for you, or what might even be seen as a way to express who you really are, is no doubt a difficult venture. Why would anyone wish to do such a thing? To put it rhetorically: why would one want to resist oneself? As we will see in the next section, this is ever more difficult if we add the idea of authenticity to the mix. Authenticity is bound up with positive connotations and has historically been considered an incontestable and inherently desirable ideal.

Authenticity

Like health, authenticity is intimately bound up with the conception of the good life. What counts as the good life, however, changes with time and greatly varies across cultures. Albeit signifying something ultimately desirable, authenticity is a diverse and contested term that has a complex and conflicting conceptual history. In ancient Greece authenticity was primarily linked to the aesthetic and ethical project of making oneself a man of virtuous conduct (Guignon, 2004). Although authenticity was an earthly practice, denoting the strenuous struggle to remain true to a supreme good, it was nevertheless bound up with the Gods since, as Aristotle famously put it, 'life belongs to the gods'. Thus, aiming to be authentic was tantamount to establishing a sincere and truthful relation to something higher than oneself, and to be worthy in the eyes of that higher power. It required engaged (intellectual) work and was obtainable only to those

who could successfully transform themselves into mature and responsible citizens of the *polis* – indeed a hard thing to do.

Now, while we could note various meanings in Christianity and the Renaissance, it is not until the Enlightenment that we begin to discern a modern conception of authenticity. This notion pits the authentic and autonomous self against an inauthentic society, which is assumed to restrain, deform and corrupt the self (Potter, 2010). Contrary to the ancient conception of authenticity, based on establishing a truthful relation to a community (and ultimately the gods), the modern self is assumed to contain an authentic and inner core, independent of the outside world. It is an uncensored self that boldly reveals his true self, without concealing anything. A key figure here is the French 18th century enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Guignon, 2004; Lindholm, 2008). Famously, Rousseau presents in his *Confessions* (the most famous of his three autobiographies) a warts-and-all self-portrait, describing among other things how he perceived himself as a coward that enjoyed being spanked – confessions which at the time (long before the advent of reality television) were outrageous. People's shifting and judgmental opinions were of little concern to Rousseau. The truth of oneself is to be sought within and not in the outside world. External influences are mainly oppressive and compel us to assume fake personas. The further removed from society, the more authentic – hence also Rousseau's admiration for the noble savage (Lindholm, 2008).

Against this background, authenticity and health appear as each other's opposites. Pro-health initiatives are typically shaped on a governmental level and directed toward a larger population. Even within the workplace, these kinds of initiatives tend to follow a top-down approach: created by managers as part of a larger effort to make the workforce more productive and targeted toward the individual employee. Meanwhile, authenticity concerns the individual's opposition to regulative orders issued from above (Potter, 2010). This is a key point. Society's suppression and corruption of the individual is a central assumption inherent in the modern conception of authenticity. The classic figure here is the 19th century philosopher and transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who left civilization for a life in wilderness and so escaped what he perceived as the artificial demands of society. Indeed, the struggle between the authentic self and the inauthentic 'masses' is also a key theme in 20th century philosophy. Classically, Heidegger (1962) separates the authentic self from the inauthentic self, where the former takes up an authentic Being-toward-death, and where the latter cowardly follows in the footsteps of *das Man* – shying away from the critical question of finitude and existence. In his later work, most notably in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), we can observe an intensified critique against disenchantment and the nihilism of social modernity, which to Heidegger posed a great threat to the self and his quest for authentic being.

To demonstrate how modernity produces a longing for authenticity, Charles Taylor (1991) sets out what he calls the 'three malaises of modernity'. The first is a loss of meaning that comes with the focus on individualism. The world has become disenchanted and people can no longer place themselves in relation to a larger order. The second is that the social world has become increasingly guided by 'instrumental reason', privileging economic and technological forms of calculation. The third malaise

– which Taylor sees as a direct outcome of the two former – is a loss of political freedom. In a world defined by individualism and instrumental reason, where people have little interest in participating in larger political causes and rather spend their days ego-googling, we lose control over the political situation.

If we accept the argument that modernity has produced a longing for authenticity, we still need to ask how this longing is manifested. With no attempt to be exhaustive, I will propose two broad categories of authenticity – 'external authenticity' and 'internal authenticity' – both of which constitute a response to the alleged 'artificiality of the modern world'. The first type is concerned with establishing an authentic relation to the world, or what Emerson has called an 'original relation to the universe' (as quoted in Geldard, 2001: 15). Noting that modernity creates an inauthentic experience, one withdraws from the world, either theoretically (into oneself) or practically (buying a boat and sailing away). The second type is more concerned with visibility and self-expression, and rests on the assumption that the self contains a unique and idiosyncratic core. This type of authenticity is often endorsed in self-help literature. The starting point for these texts is, again, the assumption that the demands from contemporary society compel us to assume fake roles and personas. To survive in the intense and rapid environment, one has to stop listening to others and search for the answer within. A representative account is found in the work of Phil McGraw, better known as Dr. Phil, who suggests the following:

> The authentic self is the *you* that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you that is not defined by your job, or your function, or your role. It is the composite of all your unique gifts, skills, abilities, interests, talents, insights, and wisdom. It is all your strengths and values that are uniquely yours and need expression, versus what you have been programmed to believe that you are 'supposed to be and do'. It is the you that flourished, unself-consciously, in those times in your life when you felt happiest and most fulfilled. (McGraw, as quoted in Guignon, 2004: 2)

Contrary to external authenticity, which concerns a withdrawal from the social world, internal authenticity 'needs expression'. That is, one's uniqueness should not be hidden in the closet, but proudly put on display. All aspects of selfhood that feel authentic and testify to your idiosyncratic personality should be exhibited to the world.

Recent studies in organization studies have pointed to the emergence of a new managerial vocabulary based on the advice found in self-help literature and how-to manuals. Today, employees are offered numerous recipes for how to cope with stress; how to become more effective; how to establish a work-life balance; and 'how to become yourself' (Garsten and Grey, 1997). Although some organizational scholars have focused on how aspects of external authenticity are promoted in the workplace – particularly through the rise of spiritual practices at work, such as mindfulness or yoga – more attention has been placed on internal authenticity, where self-expression, non-conformity and difference are key (Ross, 2004).

In his analysis of recent permutations in workplace politics, Fleming (2009) raises a series of important questions regarding a new discourse of being yourself. For instance, does the vocabulary of authenticity, freedom and emancipation mark an end of managerial control? Is the employee of the post-modern firm finally free to express who he or she really is? And does this newly acquired freedom to ventilate anti-work

sentiments mark a new era for the employee, one in which selfhood is no longer suppressed? To these questions, Fleming responds *no*. Today new forms of control have arrived, so-called neo-normative forms of regulation, which are even more sly and beguiling. They address the self 'the way it is' or at least seems to be, thus obliterating the line between 'professional' and 'personal'. Whereas the workplace was once associated with the suppression of the self it has now become the place in which the subject is not just allowed, but encouraged, to express herself. The motto is that 'you come as you are': you don't have to be ashamed of revealing your eccentric side. On the contrary, the more awkward you are, the better. However, there are also limits to what can be tolerated by the 'liberal workplace'. As when one employee brought space-cookies to the workplace he got fired, though he thought he was simply following the edict of the 'just be yourself' mentality (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). But the 'just be yourself' ideology is strained also in a more general way. Surely, the radical who is not complicit in the wider ideology of the organization (that is, working long hours to produce profitable products and services) is not welcome. In this respect, the expressionistic culture of 'just be yourself' must 'rest upon a structural political economy of the firm for it to be congruent with the accumulation process' (Fleming, 2009: 89).

Authenticity and health: How to become yourself by looking after yourself

We have now noted how both authenticity and health can be used as techniques for exercising power in the context of work. But it is still unclear how these two terms are related and how they target the employee. The first thing to note is that health along with more general understandings of biological life has undergone a discursive transformation in recent years. As Rose (2007) has argued, medical jurisdiction today concerns much more than just illnesses and diseases; among other things, it also involves the 'government of "risk", and the maintenance and optimization of the healthy body' (ibid.: 10). At the same time, there have been numerous attempts to empower the recipients of medical care, turning them into health consumers (see also Thanem, 2009). The availability of medical information is one such example, which has potentially turned us all into our own doctors. We can now evaluate our symptoms through surfing the internet or browsing the health section of a glossy magazine. This is not to suggest that expert medical discourse has lost its power. Indeed, medical science has perhaps a stronger social and political impact today than ever before. What it points to rather is how the scientific notion of the body has become widely employed in non-scientific discourses, concerned with for example consumption, lifestyle and self-expression. Here, aspects of medical science are translated into vivid images of the desirable and undesirable self and as such are bound up with moral discourses. Smoking is no longer associated with the image of Clark Gable in a dinner suit. Rather, it evokes an emasculated man with a pale face, yellow teeth and mottled skin who, in breathing through his narrowed airways, emits an annoying squeaking sound. Similarly, the well-nourished figure is by no means a sign of cultivated hedonism, as it might have been at the beginning of the last century, but rather a sign of stupidity, laziness and a weak will (Metzl and Kirkland, 2010). Although rooted in incontestable scientific claims (few would seriously make the case that obesity and smoking is particularly good for your

health), it is questionable if these emotionally laden images can be entirely explained by science. As Brewis and Grey argue in their analysis of smoking in the workplace and beyond:

> [T]he medical knowledge that 'smoking is bad for you' has to be understood as slipping into the moral proposition that 'smoking is bad'. This then has effects at the level of individuals because the stigmatization of smoking slips into the notion that 'smokers are bad'. At the very least, the consequence is to render smokers abnormal and marginal. (Brewis and Grey, 2008: 984)

This moralization of health has been widely documented in the social sciences (Brandt and Rozin, 1997; Bunton and Petersen, 1997; Lupton, 1995). Aside from noting how health issues tend to be couched in a moralistic language of good and bad, these accounts also point out that health promotion is often complicit in the engineering of particular lifestyles and kinds of people. As such, health promotion is to a large degree targeted towards the individual subject thus rendering it, as Brewis and Grey note, abnormal and marginal unless he or she follows the direct and indirect commands of health promotion. What has only been tacitly implied by these studies, however, is how health has become more concerned with immediate visibility and expressions of the self. As noted by for example Zoller (2003), health promotion often concerns visible aspects of the biological body, such as smoking and obesity. We will come back to these issues in the final section of this paper, but we should observe already here that health promotion, as it operates within the domain of work, is closely linked to the visual appearance or *image* of the good, happy employee.

Another example of how the medical discourse has been complemented by non-scientific discourses is the increasing predominance of spirituality and Eastern thinking (see for example Žižek, 2008). Most significantly, this influence has engendered a 'holistic' conception of the body, whereby the body is inextricably intertwined with the mind, sometimes referred to as 'bodymind' (Benson, 1975). Life-style magazines and self-help books often subscribe to this understanding of personhood; and, again, these outlets rarely hesitate to give prescriptions as to how we can improve ourselves by for example losing weight, stopping smoking, getting an erection and learning how to sleep. What we see here is the diffusion of medical expertise, together with a transformation from biological health to moral well-being. As such, health is no longer restricted to a medical discourse but has been supplemented by a discourse of more general 'well-being', involving moral directives, in which everyone is his or her own expert.

In the meantime, we can notice how authenticity is assumed to be positively related to psychological well-being, both in academic literature and self-help counselling. Neff and Suizzo for instance studied 314 romantic relationships and found that 'a lack of authenticity negatively impacted psychological health' (Neff and Suizzo, 2006: 441). Goldman and Kernis (2002) reached a similar conclusion, namely that the experience of authenticity (measured according to the so-called Authenticity Inventory) has a positive correlation with self-esteem, life satisfaction and a sense of well-being. On a website offering 'expert guidance and tools for self awareness, authentic living, holistic personal growth and well-being', we find the following suggestion:

> Authenticity is now considered as the most crucial and fundamental aspect of well-being and
> healthy functioning according to mainstream counseling psychology. Authenticity is not just a
> precursor to well-being but the very essence of health and well being. Psychopathology (mental
> illness) can be seen as a departure from authenticity. (Symram, 2010)

The key point here is that both authenticity and health are employed in a wider ideology
of wellbeing (Baudrillard, 1998) or biomorality (Zupančič, 2008), or what Christopher
Lasch calls a 'therapeutic sensibility', where people hunger 'for the feeling, the
momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health and psychic security' (1979: 7). In
short, authenticity and health are not just indicative of our internal integrity, but also our
moral rectitude. But how does this play out in the workplace? To address this question I
would first like to specify the kind of subject or personhood that is the target of this
intersection between the healthy, the authentic and the moral.

While indeed all sorts of people are now affected by health promotions, it seems as if
the subject in question – that is, he or she who is encouraged to improve his health
through better eating habits etc. – is not necessarily the typical worker with serious
back-pain, high-blood pressure and aching muscles. Rather, we find the corpulent office
worker suffering from failing motivation and an existential experience of
meaninglessness. Interesting in this respect is that health promotion programmes
focusing their attention on desirable life-style choices might be employed to cover over
other health related aspects, such as the physical dangers following from demanding
labour or unsafe work-environments. Studying health promotion at an automobile
manufacturing plant, Zoller (2003) found that even though the workers in question were
carrying out physically demanding work, a prime focus were subjective lifestyle
questions such as eating habits, alcohol and smoking. This diverted attention away from
the actual work (which involved direct risks). Instead the question of health became a
question concerning morality, lifestyle, visibility and subjective wellbeing, shot through
by a Protestant vocabulary of secular sin.

Feeling good and being good are here fused. By working hard on improving one's
health one simultaneously enters a moral universe. As noted by Kelly et al. (2007) in
their study of an IT firm: those actively engaged in practices of health improvement
were also identifying with a series of other desirable signifiers, such as the
'*professional, entrepreneurial, resilient, effective, athletic*' (ibid.: 282, emphasis in
original).

Given the focus on wellbeing, morality and other much sought after descriptions of
personhood ('athletic', 'entrepreneurial', 'professional'), we might assume that the
subject in question is not the emasculated worker suffering from physically
overwhelming labour. Of course, this kind of work is still pertinent and might also be
subject to health promotion discourses. But the regimes of 'biomorality' that we are
interested in do tend to be more attentive to the bored and unmotivated white-collar (or
no-collar) worker, in style and attitude reminiscent of a socially apathetic teenager who
has become flabby from eating too much junk food and spending too much time playing
video games.

The description above is perhaps exaggerated. It could be used to describe someone like
Homer Simpson as well as the numerous computer nerds, spending most of their time in

front of the computer and living on a strict diet of Jolt Cola, potato chips and pan pizza. For sure, it is interesting that this stereotypical image of the computer nerd has been slightly revised by a company like Google. Realizing that the typical computer nerd caricatured above would have much to offer the company, but wishing their unhealthy habits would disappear, Google decided to hire Charlie Ayers – a cook that before joining Google had served the classic rock band Grateful Dead. There were many reasons why Google hired Ayers, but one of the outspoken aims was to improve employees' eating habits and keep them close to work, which would increase their productivity. As Ayers explains:

> It was a perk with a purpose. It would keep people near one another and their desks; prevent them from developing poor eating habits that would diminish productivity; eliminate the time they would otherwise spend going out to lunch and worrying over plans; and create a sense of togetherness. (Vise and Malseed, 2005: 194)

However, Ayers' role was not merely to make employees more productive through healthy eating habits. Equally important was to give workers the feeling that they were not at work, but in a kind of no-work space where play, fun and care could abound. Ayers explains that an important motive 'was to create the illusion you were not at work but on some type of cruise and resort' (ibid.: 197).

Few corporations are more immediately associated with 'the good'. Google's informal corporate motto is 'Don't be evil' (ibid.) and on their website dedicated to Google's internal culture we read, 'You can make money without doing evil'. Recently, after the cyber-attacks on its computer systems, allegedly orchestrated and carried out by hackers working for the Chinese government, Google has taken this one step further, now characterizing themselves as a major political power standing firm against repressive Chinese censorship (*New York Times*, 2010). (We should remember that as this is being written, Google continues to provide the Chinese people with a censored version of their search engine).

In addition to these interventions Google has also become famous for providing their employees with the good life. Stories of how employees spend their days engaging in extra-work activities like playing fussball, singing karaoke, skateboarding or even driving scooters inside the Googleplex have been discussed elsewhere (Cederström and Grassman, 2008). Hiring Charlie Ayers, it might be argued, combines a feeling of fun and leisure, at the same time making sure that the employees eat healthy and 'do no evil'. One way of analysing this is to suggest that healthy eating has become a precondition for achieving the 'just be yourself' corporate ideal. Google is an example where wellbeing, authenticity and health are intersected with the aim of engendering a more productive employee. This is done by promoting what we have called internal authenticity, which implies exhibiting glowing aspects of personhood of which health awareness appears to be a crucial one.

Discussion: Visibility and morality

We have already explored the complex interplay between health promotion and the injunction 'to be yourself', as expressed in an ideology of authenticity. From a

Foucauldian point of view, health promotion has been explored as part of a process of normalization and the regulation of bodies and subjects. The subject defines and redefines himself in relation to desirable templates for being promoted by organizations, societies, institutions, etc. Authenticity, on the other hand, appears to follow a logic of differentiation, whereby the authentic individual is distinguished by his ability to break away from established norms and behaviours, instead acting independently from externally sanctioned guidelines for the good life, what Heidegger termed *das Man*. For sure, there are tensions between these two categories – insofar as one relies on normalization and the other differentiation – we should also note that each category contains its own opposite. Recalling the nature of the work health promotion programmes discussed above, where the accent was placed on desirable life-styles, we can see how health is now primarily concerned with the visible body. That is to say, rather than focusing on the hidden dangers potentially inherent in the job itself, the focus is now placed on the individual and his ability to assume a desirable, health identity. As such, we can observe how the adoption of health promotion is not exclusively couched in a vocabulary of normalization, but also one of differentiation. To illustrate this we have to look no further than life-style magazines, in which we routinely find instructions for better health (losing weight through efficient forms of diet and exercise, for example) placed side by side with injunctions to nurture our own, authentic selves. But we can also see this tendency in the anti-managerial language employed at Google, with a mixture of prescribed eating habits and promotions of authentic expressions of selfhood.

In the discourse of authenticity we can note a similar tension between normalization and differentiation. The non-conformist, with his seemingly deviant and quirky behaviour, is accepted only insofar as his skills and entrepreneurial behaviour can be included in the process of capital accumulation and render profits for the firm. Moreover, the authentic expression of the individual is often limited to the visible sphere. As noted by for instance Heath and Potter (2004), counter-cultural aesthetics have now become part of mainstream capitalist consumerism. Fleming (2009), albeit from a slightly different angle, makes a similar remark, arguing that the counter-cultural movement has gone from being presented as a threat to capitalism and the hegemony of the corporation to a vital aspect of the modern organization, where the life and creativity of immaterial labour are appropriated by the corporation and employed as strategic resources.

At least two aspects of our analysis appear relevant here. The first concerns visibility and the fact that both health promotion and the injunction to 'become yourself' rely on the visible image of the body, the aesthetic expression of selfhood and the adoption of desirable lifestyles. The second concerns control and the way in which health and authenticity are both employed for controlling and regulating identities in the workplace. If the former leans towards normative control (and the process by which individuals internalize prescribed values, norms and behaviours), then the latter can be more aptly characterized as what Fleming and Sturdy (2009) call neo-normative control (where the accent is placed on diversity rather than uniformity). To further unpack these two themes I will now turn to psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Lacan, which offers a fruitful analysis of the tensions between visibility and control.

Visibility and alienation

If we accept the hypothesis that both authenticity and health aim to increase the visibility of the employee in the corporation, we might ask what the subjective effects of this process might be given that it is so-often couched in positive terms in the mainstream literature. As have previously been pointed out from a Lacanian viewpoint, visibility in the workplace is both alluring and dangerous (Roberts, 2005). It is alluring because it gives a jubilant sense of recognition and satisfaction. Being seen and recognized by other people is often characterized as an important deep-seated human need, and the nature and expression of this need spans a wide body of social and political scholarship (see for example Honneth, 1995). For instance, losing weight as a result of joining a work health promotion programme might produce encouraging and recognizing responses from others. It might well give rise to an ecstatic experience of being part of, and accepted by, the organizational norm. But visibility is also dangerous because it makes the subject more vulnerable to others. As Roberts (2005) explains, when an employee identifies with what first appears as a desirable self image, she soon becomes struck by a palpable sense of alienation and frustration. This experience stems from the fact that any self-image is ultimately cut off from the self; which, as Copjec puts it, 'places the subject in an external relationship to itself' (1994: 30). The key point is that the external image, as long as we remain attracted to its splendour, readily lends us to forces outside of power control. It becomes a moment of power.

This is also the key argument of Lacan's early text on the mirror stage, in which he describes the transforming experience of the subject, from jubilation to alienation, which takes place in imaginary identification (Lacan, 2006). Lacan's example concerns the development of a child, typically between the age of 6 and 18 months who, upon catching sight of her own reflection, becomes for the first time able to delineate his own person from that of others. But again, the initial experience of autonomy is soon transformed into alienation. Why? Lacan's response is that the ideal image that comes out of the reflection is one that is presented to the subject only as a gestalt, as an exteriority (ibid.: 76). In other words, the image is located beyond the reach of the subject. Hence, the subject cannot become his own image as the mirror stage opens up a terrifying gulf, what Lacan would later call the 'lethal gap of the mirror stage' (ibid.: 476).

Lacan's analysis of the specular ego and imaginary identification is relevant to the increasing concern with visibility noted earlier and, by extension, the expression of a desirable self-image via the discourse of health. His analysis challenges the assumption that recognition is ultimately desirable and brings our attention to the unintended effects engendered by these 'ego-enhancing techniques' (which, I would argue, is a fair label for both health promotion strategies and the injunction to 'be yourself' at work). In the context of corporations, in which a 'just be yourself' attitude reigns, the subject is not just exposed in a more encompassing manner, as for example Fleming (2009) has suggested; it also leads to an increased focus on ideals, such as bodily fitness, social success, prosperity, etc., where the authentic self is constantly urged to exhibit a radical edge (Žižek, 1999: 368). Drawing on Lacan's critique of leading ego-psychologists and particularly this group's far-reaching aspirations to engineer greater happiness and self-potency on the part of the patient, we might say that visibility in the context of work is

not so much creating new avenues for establishing authentic relations to ourselves, but forms of self-deception, misrecognition, narcissism, frustration and alienation. As Žižek (1989) points out, identifying with a specular image leads to an identification based on pure imitation, as when 'young people identify with popular heroes, pop singers, film stars, sportsmen' (ibid.: 117). This form of imaginary identification is paradoxical insofar as it on the one hand takes its cue from the ego, and on the other proceeds on the basis of imitation, that is, by way of usurping the identity and image of someone else.

Is not this paradox perfectly illustrated by self-help literature? Here we typically find advice along the lines of 'be yourself' or 'become your own master' alongside the opposite advice that we should imitate the rich and happy life of others (Cederström and Grassman, 2010). We can now begin to see how, from a Lacanian viewpoint, health promotion and the injunction to 'be yourself' intersect. Given that the demand for autonomy comes up against itself, it inadvertently results in new forms of imaginary identification (Žižek, 1989). Another way of putting this is to say that to achieve authenticity we should not look inside ourselves, as Dr. Phil prescribes, but merely *pretend* as if we are authentic (by copying the lifestyles that are deemed authentic by others). The result is that authenticity is obtainable only as pure exteriority. It comes to the subject in the form of what Lacan calls Gestalt, that is, as an external ideal image of which we are not part.

Control and the ferocious superego

Apart from pointing to the dangers involved in visibility and the identification with a specular image, Lacan also offers a productive analysis of control, particularly through his close reading and far-reaching extension of Freud's original theory of the superego. This theoretical construct is particularly useful for our analysis in that it provides insight into the dimensions of control in the absence of paternal authority. For instance, it shows how control appears even in situations where the paternal figure of authority seems to be absent. This is a key theme in psychoanalysis. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud pointed to this 'return of control' by explaining how parricide (the murder of the primordial father) did not put an end to authority, but rather gave rise to new forms of control, in which the replaced 'invisible' figure of authority, represented by the totem, becomes 'stronger than the living one had been' (Freud, 1950: 166). When Lacan, in *Seminar VII*, brings the murder of the father under discussion, he comments:

> All the mystery is in that act. It is designed to hide something, namely, that not only does the murder of the father not open the path to *jouissance* that the presence of the father was supposed to prohibit, but it, in fact, strengthens the prohibition. The whole problem is there; that's where, in fact as well as in theory, the fault lies. Although the obstacle is removed as a result of the murder, *jouissance* is still prohibited; not only that, but the prohibition is reinforced. (Lacan, 1992: 176)

Jouissance, or excessive enjoyment, is not unleashed by the act of parricide. The disintegration of one authority quickly leads to the re-emergence of new ones. As Lacan noted in opposition to Dostoevsky: when God is dead everything does not become permitted; instead everything becomes prohibited (ibid.). Is this not the case also in the so-called postmodern corporation like Google? While some enthusiastic commentators would like to see such corporations as ushering in a new kind of liberating atmosphere, characterized by tolerance and freedom of expression, others have been less positive.

Žižek, for instance, claims that the employee is ironically subjected to a stronger superego figure. As he explains:

> They are under the injunction to be what they are, to follow their innermost idiosyncrasies, allowed to ignore social norms of dress and behaviours (they obey only some elementary rules of polite tolerance of each other's idiosyncrasies), they thus seem to realize a kind of proto-Socialist utopia of overcoming the opposition between alienated business, where you earn money, and the private hobby-activity that you pursue for pleasure at weekends. In a way, their job is their hobby, which is why they spend long hours at weekends in their workplace behind the computer screen. When one is paid for indulging in one's hobby, the result is that one is exposed to a superego pressure incomparably stronger than that of the good old 'Protestant work ethic'. (Žižek, 1999: 368)

Why is this superego stronger than the one found in more traditional work settings? Žižek's claim is that it involves, in his words, 'a kind of *direct "superegoization" of the imaginary Ideal*' (ibid.: 368). This means, firstly, that the liberty to 'be yourself' is transformed into the imperative to 'be yourself'. That is, the images associated with an authentic expression of self-hood become mandatory to wear, like a school-uniform. The second point is that the imperative takes on a more deceitful shape when the imperative comes from within rather than from an external agency. In this sense we lose our distance to the superego, because the very image of yourself, or rather the image of who you aspire to become, *is* the superego. Important to note in this regard is that the imperative to 'be yourself', like all other imperatives issuing from the superego, is impossible to fulfil. As Freud was careful to note, the superego is never content and may even be sadistic because it demands us not just to follow but also to deviate from the demand. Freud makes this clear in 'The Ego and the Id', where he writes that the superego's 'relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You ought to be like this" (like your father). It also comprises the prohibition: "You *may not be* like this" (like your father) – that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative' (1923: 34). The superego is erratic. It sets out models for how to behave and at the same time prohibits the ego from adopting these models. This ambiguity is further stressed in the work of Lacan in which we find the surprising line: 'Nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir)* except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance – Enjoy!' (Lacan, 1998: 3). So on the one hand the superego is the agent of prohibition; and on the other hand it forces us to enjoy. Only one thing is permanent about this agency, namely that it will remain insatiable. The more we follow the imperatives of the superego, the more disappointed it becomes, and the more ensnared we become since failure to be one with our ideal-image is a crucial feature of its function.

Recognizing the incoherent and unachievable demands of the superego is at the heart of psychoanalysis. It reveals how control is not reduced to prohibition, but also appears in the injunction to transgress. But when we follow the 'superegoic injunction to enjoy', we are not bound to experience a greater sense of enjoyment since commanded enjoyment by no means engenders more enjoyment. As McGowan notes in his book on the subject, 'the problem with the society of commanded enjoyment – what constitutes its danger for us – is not the enjoyment that it unleashes, but the barrier that it proves to enjoyment' (2004: 192). Rather than resulting in an orgy of excessive behaviour, the disintegration of the superego leads to new forms of obedience and 'this obedience

predominates precisely because it successfully disguises itself as its opposite – as rebellion, radicality, and difference' (ibid.).

We can now begin to see how authenticity and health promotion form part of a wider discourse of bio-morality. The self implied in this discourse is one that carries the responsibility on her own shoulders. Moreover, drawing on psychoanalysis, we might argue that she is more directly exposed to the superego injunction to be authentic and healthy insofar as the superego has become part of the ego's own self-image.

Conclusion

Let us now summarize the argument. The driving claim of this paper has been that health promotion programmes might be conceived of as part of an emerging discourse of authenticity. Further, I have claimed that this results in new forms of control, described by Fleming and Sturdy (2009) as neo-normative control, which seeks to foster and manipulate diversity rather than uniformity. In order to lend some weight to this line of argument I have demonstrated how the accent on both authenticity and health signals a move towards visibility and moralization in the workplace, or what we might call the 'moralization of visibility'. The perfect body together with a unique sense of expression is what is ultimately sought in the 'just be yourself' ideology. Radically deviant behaviour, on the other hand, is not.

The key theme under investigation has been the complex interplay between health initiatives and the quest for authenticity. To disentangle this relation I have pointed to the differences between authenticity (based on a logic of differentiation) and health initiatives (based on a logic of normalization). But I have also pointed to overlaps between these ideals. Apart from both containing contradictory relations to normalization and differentiation, they are both closely connected to visibility and a discourse of moralization. As such, we might suggest that health and authenticity, particularly when packaged together, constitute a vital part of what has previously been described as biomorality, in which, as Zupančič notes, we find the following axiom: 'a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person' (Zupančič, 2008: 5).

Highlighting the hegemonic force of this discourse of authenticity, as I have attempted to do in the paper, also leads to the more central question about the relation between life and work. Today the humane workplace has effectively blurred the distinction between life and the corporation (Ross, 2004). More and more corporations seek to attract creative workers, innovative thinking and entrepreneurial behaviour by infusing labour with aspects traditionally found outside work (Fleming, 2009). The idea is that work should not appear as boring and instrumental, but as an ongoing activity of fun, self-expression and creativity (which is perhaps why some corporations today look more like nurseries than traditional offices). Parallel to this, we can also observe how more stereotypical forms of managerialism have begun to seep into everyday life (Hancock and Tyler, 2004). Books like *Me, Inc.* (Ventrella, 2007) now offers advice on how to execute our life plans with the same care, organization and determination as corporations realize their business plans. Others have gone even further, suggesting that

we should model our love relations on the corporation, keeping track on emotional assets and debts (see Salecl, 2010). This paper should be read as a critical reflection of this socio-cultural transformation at work and beyond. Hopefully it can contribute to the emerging body of scholarship challenging the benevolence of this development.

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