

# Disciplining psychology education – a Foucauldian discourse analysis

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*This paper explores: a) the impact of psychology education governance on our understanding of subjectivity and b) how this functions for neoliberal capitalist structures. The ways-of-knowing, power relations and perceptions of subjectivity are approached through texts selected from official documents governing the curriculum, and qualitative interviews with psychology students, including postgraduates with teaching responsibilities. Discourse is analysed using Foucauldian theory. The key findings are that a positivist psychology curriculum a) is largely market driven, b) is a way-of-knowing that subjugates and objectifies the subject c) works to substantiate individualist discourses and that, finally, d) despite claims of neutrality, constructs a subject that works to meet neoliberal capitalist objectives.*

**Keywords:** Critical Psychology, Education, Pedagogy, Ideology, Capitalism, Foucault.

## Background

THE DISCIPLINE of psychology, constructed in part through university curricula, is undeniably influential, producing and shaping our understanding of the human subject, increasingly on a global platform (Vos, 2012). However, the social, political and historical discourses on which the psychology curriculum is founded are largely ignored from UK psychology (Prilleltensky, 1994; Martin, 2003). The curriculum is dominated by the positivist discourse, the focus of investigations increasingly lies with ‘internal factors’ as opposed to ‘external factors’. This focus on the ‘internal’ reifies abstract notions as material objects which has consequences in terms of agency, subjectivity and ethics (Rose, 1996; Parker, 2007; Billig, 2009).

The specific area of exploration here is the link between psychology pedagogical discourse and capitalist ideology i.e. the relationship between discourses produced and reproduced in the pedagogy of psychology and the commodification of knowledges and subjects that can then function as labour power in the market place.

As Students of Psychology we stand to become ‘experts’ and will become entangled in power-knowledge relations and formations

surrounding the positioning of the human subject. The number of psychology students in the UK more than doubled between 1999 and 2009, standing at roughly 77,500 (www.hesa.ac.uk), this highlights the changing structure/function of the university. There is an increasing number of psychology graduates who will enter careers that influence and govern daily life in areas such as human resources, business and marketing and social policy. It is often the case that these professions use psychological knowledge to manipulate and control individuals in order to meet the demands of capitalist ideology. For example, marketing refers to the use of psychological techniques and tools to manipulate individuals into consuming goods, many of which they do not need.

Neoliberalism, emerging in the 19th Century shifted responsibility from the state onto ‘rational’ and ‘responsible’ individuals (Foucault, 2008:12). The shift of authority from the political to the expert arose out of a claim to knowledge (Rose, 1996). Furthermore, Foucault argued that,

‘...rather than govern by dictating rights and responsibilities, neoliberalism proceeds by harnessing desires for independence and creativity to the interests of

business, reconfiguring workers as entrepreneurs of their own skills and abilities, and reconfiguring the social relations of capitalism to emphasize competition, not between workers and capitalists, but between workers themselves.’ (Cromby & Willis, 2013)

Liberalism also marked a shift in power from the state to the expert, with claims that psychology is an apparatus that is obsessed with surveillance and control (Banister et al., 1994:104). The creation of experts in neoliberal societies leads to certain ways of subjectifying individuals and allocating them hierarchical social positions. The emergence of liberalism is therefore a key turning point in the way in which individuals and ‘the social’ are governed, both by themselves and by external systems of control (Cotoi, 2011).

Undergraduate education exposes psychology students to biased and discriminating psychological understandings, and these are perhaps most evident in the rising popularity and persistent reification of positivism and empiricism in psychological praxis.

Ultimately, this work argues for a critical exploration of the psychology curriculum, allowing for the recognition of political, moral and historical components of discourse, an active encouragement of the critical questioning of conformity promoting, individualising and pathologising notions of the subject, and to actively place social change as the primary agenda in the pedagogy of psychology (Darlestone-Jones, 2015; Freire, 1970).

### **Theoretical approach**

Critical theory and perspectives aim to address the oppression of particular discourses and the subjectification implicit in the production of particular ‘truths’ (Parker, 2002; Hook, 2007; Rose, 1998). Therefore, this approach provides a useful framework for opening up a multiplicity of perspectives in an increasingly polarised discipline.

Foucauldian perspectives, although diverse, agree to the claim that our thoughts have no shape without language, they are constructed through language, and thus language is the proper object of psychology (Hook, 2007). Discourse analysis that treats language in this way therefore, works as a powerful means of enabling forms of critique and resistance and identifying the mechanisms through which power works (Parker, 1994). The adoption of Foucault’s notion of discourse is useful in this investigation as it provides the idea that discourse constructs knowledge and thus governs, through the production of categories of knowledge and assemblages of texts, what it is possible to talk about and what is not (the taken for granted rules of inclusion and exclusion). As such, discourse re/produces both power and knowledge simultaneously (Hall et al., 1992).

‘...because you cannot think outside of discursive rules they are strongly linked to the exercise of power.’ (Hook, 2007)

For Foucault, language generates meanings that change over time and work to constitute different roles for human subjects, i.e. language is a force that shapes consciousness. In this way we can see that there is a particular concept of human subjectivity assumed by Foucault, that contradicts the concept of subjectivity assumed by mainstream positivist psychology as autonomous, entirely individual and self-aware (as in ‘cognitivism’ described above). The concept of subjectivity I use here is based upon Foucault’s concept of subjectification.

Subjectification describes the construction of the individual subject, as the subject here is ‘multiple and dynamic, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these – the condition of being a subject’ (Henriques et al., 1984; 3).

‘The crucial point is that subjectivity is the point of contact between self and power.’ (Ball, 2016:1131)

My subject-position in this paper entails views of four main psychological discourses. Firstly, of positivist cognitive science and psychological diagnostics and therapies as discursive mechanisms. Secondly, of the 'knowing' psychologist; the psychologist in a position of a subject who is able to 'read minds', a 'subject who knows' (Ball, 1990:81). Thirdly, of individualising, responsibilising, and, pathologising expertise; psychologists construct diagnoses in terms of (correctable) structural biological abnormalities as opposed to political social oppressions. Fourthly, of the psychologist and the mind, the Cartesian cogito, this assumes the mind as an autonomous entity under the full control and self-awareness of the individual.

The aim here is to understand the mechanisms by which power/resistance operates by identifying key 'objects' of the discourse. Identifying conflict within the text will allow a potential resistance and problematisation of the taken for granted within the discipline of psychology to explore how it works to create both meaning and subject-positions (Hook, 2001; Banister, 1994).

'The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; violence which has always exercised itself obscurely can be unmasked, so that we can fight fear.' (Foucault, 1974: 171 – Cited in Ball, 1990: 15)

## The texts and analysis

### 1) *Regulatory discourse:*

This section explores text from the authoritative bodies that control the production and consumption of knowledge in undergraduate psychology programmes in the UK.

Firstly, two national bodies, one being the British Psychological Society (The BPS) and the other, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), contribute to the requirements of the undergraduate psychology degree. Therefore, texts produced by these bodies offer insights behind both the structuring

and delivery of the psychology curriculum. It is these bodies which both direct and restrict how psychology as a discipline is defined, and thus, influencing how people understand themselves and those around them (Rose, 1989; 1996).

An interesting report published in 2010 by The Psychology Network entitled, *The future of undergraduate psychology in the United Kingdom* (Trapp et al., 2010), was the product of a meeting where members of the aforementioned bodies met to discuss the future of undergraduate psychology in the UK. The work of Bray (2010) was provided as a key reading for the participants. Bray (2010) outlines the future directions of the American psychology and explicitly emphasises the need for the discipline to posit itself firmly as a science, that is, the adoption of the positivist approach to study. This, he suggests, will strengthen the case for the prescriptive authority of psychologists, thus allowing them to become players in the extensive and growing market of psychopharmacology. He further asserts that,

'The failure to posit psychology as a science will "significantly damage" its standing in the marketplace.' (Bray, 2010: 357)

The main themes emerging in these reports include; market demand, the value of the scientific method, and psychological literacy (Trapp et al., 2010).

The following statements illustrate how the psychology curriculum and the discipline of psychology in general, is embedded within and a part of political and economic discourses.

'Many of the issues facing psychology as an undergraduate subject which are discussed below are related to these severe financial challenges to HE more generally. These challenges will be particularly felt by non-STEM subjects since English government funding for the teaching of humanities and social sciences is set to

be severely reduced or indeed removed.’ (Trapp et al., 2010:7)

‘Whilst all agree that psychology is an empirically and scientifically grounded subject, there would seem to be value in broadening our definition of “science” (and particularly the definition which is used by the public and policy makers) to beyond that of the traditional natural sciences, and of stressing the added value of psychology as a subject for study that offers “STEM plus” skills for students and graduates (e.g. as including numeracy, empirical research skills, ethical awareness, literacy, historical awareness and inter-disciplinary team-work). The fact that we do not live in a period/culture where the definition of science is agreed upon, known or widely understood can perhaps be seen as an opportunity rather than a problem ...’. (Trapp et al., 2010:8)

The report by Trapp et al. (2010) immediately places the psychology degree as a product to be consumed in a competitive market, which therefore changes the relationship between the student and the university.

‘We, the university academic, may be seeing students as customers rather than as partner in their academic journey’ (Trapp et al., 2010:23)

‘The introduction of the National Student Survey and its growing acceptance and awareness by future students (and their sponsors) has had a significant impact on the behaviour of potential students and university staff. Often seen as a potential marketing tool the focus has shifted, subtly for some, more dramatically for others, from a focus on the “needs” of students to a focus on their “likes” and “wants”.’ (Trapp et al., 2010: 23)

As Darlestone-Jones (2015:41) wonderfully summarised, the morals that used to

protect human existence within university psychology departments has been replaced with power struggles and bottom lines justified by arguments driven by technicalities.

‘The marketing of higher education as a must have commodity to society has resulted in the sector creating a demand and then servicing it with one eye geared to the job market and the other firmly on the stock market, this is demonstrated by the embedding of neo-liberal ideology around market forces.’ (Aronowitz, 2010 cited in Darlestone-Jones, 2015: 40)

The ‘International Benchmarking Review of UK Psychology’ (QAA, 2010) illustrates the sources of research income for psychology departments in the UK, showing that more than 50 per cent of the income is distributed between just 10 of 101 institutions. This unequal distribution is a cause for concern and suggests that some psychological perspectives and understandings may be ‘falling between the gaps’ in the funding process.

Bray helpfully lists ‘Growth Areas in Psychological Science’ which helps to identify which perspectives may be dominant in the terms of funding, the list included, among others; ‘Psychological Science as a core STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Discipline’, Behavioural Economics, Behavioural aspects of genetic research, Cognitive neuroscience and Computational modelling (Bray, 2010:363).

This favouring of certain perspectives by influential bodies and institutions is again brought to light through an open letter from psychologist Michael Billig, a well-established figure in the field of social and discursive psychology. His letter addressed the QAA regarding their ‘International Benchmarking Review of UK Psychology’ (QAA, 2010). Billig points out that the review failed to acknowledge the work of critical and discursive psychologists and their contributions to the field of social psychology glob-

ally, many of which hold positions in the top five most cited and published works. Instead, the review explicitly attributed the success of UK social psychology to that of ‘mainstream experimental and quantitative work’ (QAA, 2010:15). This, Billig continues, shows the review to be both ‘inadequate’ and ‘inaccurate’. This omission of critical perspectives in a widely read review shows how ‘authorities’ use their power to posit and disseminate one knowledge as truth and repress those that may challenge it.

This repression of critical perspectives and boasting of quantitative and experimental ones is clearly linked to the calls of both the APA and the BPS to work towards positioning psychology as a scientific discipline worthy of STEM status, with a primary motivation of a stronger position in the market place, i.e. to make psychology more profitable.

The two following extracts from the Trapp report, representing the objectives of the BPS, emphasises the value of positivist and scientific methodologies in the ‘development of the discipline’.

‘Methodological advances, in psychology and/or cognate disciplines, are making an important contribution to the development of the discipline. One of these is access to and expertise in neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI, PET, ERP/EEG and TMS. These have increased our understanding of many aspects of social cognition, cognition, child development and psychopathology, particularly when this research is grounded in theories and findings from experimental psychology, neuropsychology and neuropsychiatry.’ (Trapp et al., 2010:13)

‘There is very general agreement throughout the report that psychology is a science, although Chapter 2 makes the point that there is no agreed definition of what the term science means.’ (Trapp et al, 2010: 46)

However, despite these objectives and claims of scientific validity, there is a wealth of work being produced that challenges such statements, suggesting that ‘evidence-based’ therapies and psychological ‘knowledges’ are largely unfounded and therefore problematic. Budd & Hughes (2009) offer a critique of the evidence provided for such ‘therapies’ suggesting there is no real scientific or empirical evidence to suggest the efficacy of one technique or therapy over another. They highlight many problematic assumptions made when working from this approach such as the issue of treating diagnosis as an independent variable.

## 2) *The interviews*

My other texts are the transcripts provided by four semi-structured interviews. Three of the participants are PhD students of psychology following their initial undergraduate degree in psychology, the fourth completed her undergraduate psychology degree in 2016. All four participants graduated from different institutions. All participants have therefore been exposed to the undergraduate psychology curriculum in the UK. The interview process complied with BPS ethical guidelines. The analysis focuses on knowledge, (positivism) and the market (neoliberalism) as the key focus of the study as the problematic dimensions discriminating knowledge and supporting power mechanisms.

### *a) What is psychology? – Psychological knowledge and subjectivity*

‘Psychology constitutes its object in the process of knowing it’ (Rose, 1999:5)

A preliminary finding was the referent of behaviour as the object of study in psychology, this immediately places restrictions on what ‘psychology’ is, see Table 1.

Table 1

(Transcript 1, Lines 96-97)	(As a result of studying psychology) '... I feel that I am able to understand people's behaviour more, not say I am more patient though...'
(Transcript 1, Lines 122-126)	'There is an emphasis on studying behaviour systematically, so trying to see things in a non-common-sensical way... now; I am able to sort of dissect the reasons why people may behave that way.'
(Transcript 4, Lines 23-24)	'There's a lot of self-reflection that comes with learning about human behaviour...'
(Transcript 1, Line 167)	'Ultimately we are trying to understand people's behaviour.'

This 'formation' of discourse presents the subject (and object) of the psychology undergraduate programme as 'behaviour', this immediately reduces the scope of possible understandings and explorations of the human subject, constraining subjectivity to behavioural outcomes. This, therefore, excludes all that is outside of this, i.e. any aspects of being that are metaphysical. This could also be interpreted in the response (provided below) of one interviewees when asked if their early experiences of studying psychology met their expectations. The following interview extracts imply that psychoanalytic approaches to psychology are still prevalent in public conceptions of psychology yet rejected to some extent in academia. These excerpts further illustrate how the formation of discourse and utterance of statements works to legitimise one way of exploring the human subject over another.

This devaluing of psychoanalytic perspectives, presented here as no longer part of what is considered psychology, further supports the legitimisation of discourses of positivism as the

dominant 'regime of truth'. This again can be tied to the idea of observation and surveillance which resonates with ideas presented in Foucault's work, *Madness & Civilisation*.

Behaviour, when presented as the object of study in psychology, has ramifications for the value assigned to, and understanding of, those experiences, emotions and thoughts, which are unobservable and therefore subjugated. This helps to expose how 'technologies of the self' and 'governmentality' come into play. Here we can see the emergence of the 'knowing psychologist', who has worked on themselves through their own 'freedom, choice and agency'. They have exerted both self-discipline and self-surveillance to attain economic value in the labour market. This is achieved through the authority they have acquired through the attainment of expertise that has been legitimised through techniques of government i.e. the degree itself.

'This restructuring of the economy and the labour market constitutes a programmatic ambition of neoliberal government for the subject to self-actualize through

Table 2

Transcript 3, Lines 11-12	'I also thought it might be about people lying of sofas telling us about dreams. I was very naïve and didn't appreciate the subject for what it was.'
Transcript 3, Lines 17-18	'My expectations were not met at all, which was a very good thing as I didn't want people to tell me about their dreams!'

their own labour’ (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2009; 497)

Through the observation that is embedded in psychological praxis, subjects are forced to work upon themselves, in terms of self-restraint and self-surveillance and so on, and it is the techniques of government, i.e. psychological testing and knowledge, that imposes the social personality. In this social, political and historical setting therefore, the subject’s freedom is thus engaged in order to display socially desirable ways of behaving, that is, to become productive and ‘tolerable’ in relation to the labour market and capitalist ideals. As suggested by Rose, the power of the expert (psychology graduate) is based on ‘their claim to social authority upon their capacity to understand the psychological aspects of the persona and to act upon them.’ (Rose, 1996: 3) ‘The origins of happiness study’ provides an explicit example of this (Clarke et al., 2017).

The following interview extracts help to show how the subjects of psychology are positioned as those who do not conform to societal norms and thus require both ‘patience’ and ‘tolerance’ from the ‘knowing psychologist’. This creates clear hierarchical subject-positions, the ‘expert’ as superior, able to pass judgement, the subject as inferior and intolerable.

**b) Positivism as a ‘logic of knowing’**

The positivist approach is challenged and contradicted, showing space for resistance and the emergence of alternative understandings. The interviewees discourse reflects a conflict between two opposing approaches to research, as presented in undergraduate psychology education, pointing toward the domination of positivist knowledge over alternative ways of ‘knowing’.

Interviewee discourse provided below also shows a tension here, in one instance they support and legitimise the knowledges produced through positivist and empirical

**Table 3**

Transcript 1, Lines 57-59	‘I would always pick one subject I liked and then for the next elective I would pick something I thought would be beneficial to me but not necessarily my area.’
Transcript 3, Lines 2-3	‘I can actively “measure” my thoughts when I think about it, and know when I need to stop overthinking, or be more rational, and can work on making myself better understood to others.’
Transcript 3, Lines 23-24	(Who decides on the curriculum?) The BPS all of the compulsory content though. This serves the student (as it teaches them what they need to gain an accredited degree), and increases their employability.’
Transcript 1, Line 67	‘I would try to do the different things so that it would look nice on my c.v’
Transcript 1, Line 195-196	‘...but the thing is if everybody can understand it what’s the point of us doing four years of psychology trying to understand it.’
Transcript 4, Line 92	‘Holding a degree in itself empowers me to start creating a career for myself.’
Transcript 3, Line 10	(psychology) ‘It has given me a career, a passion.’

**Table 4**

Transcript 4, Lines 18-19	'.. (Psychology) has helped to teach me to be more understanding towards people that I may find difficult... there's a reason for everyone's behaviours and personalities.'
Transcript 3, Lines 26 – 28	'When I learnt about the cognitive process of attention, my understanding of my sister changed completely, and I felt I knew her better for it.' 'I find it really interesting to see what people not coming from psychology find it really fascinating that people behave in such a way.'
Transcript 3, Lines 31-32	'I just feel that I understand people and their thought-processes better for studying psychology.'
Transcript 3, Line 35	(Studying psychology) 'Has made me a more understanding and patient person.'
Transcript 1 Lines 113-114	'I can understand it but it doesn't make me more tolerant to that behaviour if you like.'

logic, the 'truth' of this way of knowing is seen to be legitimised by technological advancement and pre-existing diagnostic systems, despite this apparent regime of truth, attempts to challenge this as the 'proper way' of knowing and constructing the subject also appear in the discourse, showing again, where there is power, there is resistance.

**c) *The curriculum contested***

This conflict between the epistemological grounding and utilisation of psychological knowledge leads to a questioning of why, despite such resistance and contradiction, the 'scientific method' is promoted by psychological authorities such as the BPS. Problematisations appear in the discourse of the

interviewees suggesting that knowledge based on generalisations, tools of standardisation and pathologisation are limited in their application. This leads to the questioning of who stands to benefit from this 'regime of truth', and how does it work to create hierarchical, societal subject-positions.

This discourse suggests a disparity between the logic of the knowledge produced and the ways in which its recipients expect it to function. Quantitative understandings of the human subject, as previously discussed, work as a technique of government in which a 'standard' or 'norm' is created which the individual can then work toward. It is necessary now to ask who stands to benefit from the quantification of

**Table 5**

Transcript 1, Lines 146-149	'I think we're trying too hard to make it look like a science when really it isn't, in the sense that it's not way to study it... erm... obviously, we need to... with technology advancement you've got more evidence to show that people's brains are more fundamentally different.'
Transcript 1, Lines 133-135	'...for example, the BPS, they have got guidelines as to how proper research should be carried out, and I think that is good in the sense, that obviously you don't want somebody to just be going around diagnosing people without any guidelines and so on, but I do think that it also places a restriction on the way that we understand people.'

Table 6

Transcript 1, Lines 171-172	'If you don't understand that single person, you cannot use that one size fit all treatment type to treat a person or to help a person, so I do think that you know there are values to both approaches.'
Transcript 2, Lines 114-117	'when we hear stuff like becoming a critical thinker, it's very limited actually, to me it doesn't mean very much, a mess, there is a real shift beyond the boundaries of what critical thinking really means in the current structure, a scientific structure with a lack of reflexivity.'
Transcript 2, Lines 46-49	'Most of the material is based on quantitative evaluations then how do you apply these quantitative understandings on the spot. So, I think actually that there are other disciplines that prepare you better to deal with issues that may entail mental health.'

the human subject and what does this mean in terms of subjectivity. The political and ideological discourses help to illuminate why this positivist way of 'knowing' has become dominant in the psychology curriculum, the growth neoliberal and capitalist ideals in the UK are supported by this quantification and pathologised notion of the subject promoting individualistic as opposed to collectivist subjectivities.

**d) Market demand and the construction of knowledge**

This helps to illustrate a potential lack of reflexivity within psychological practice and education when considering the economic and political drivers of the curriculum. This is also a key theme in the work of Prilleltensky, suggesting that undergraduate psychology programmes fail to teach skills that are 'necessary to scrutinize the ideological repercussions of a particular form of theorizing.' (Prilleltensky, 1994:4).

Louis Althusser's ideas are also useful here in that he suggests that supposedly 'neutral' institutions are the perfect ideological

apparatus, if something presented as neutral then restraints are placed on the conditions of possibility to question its ideological position. 'Ideology never says: "I am ideological"' (Althusser, 1998: 118). In this way, science educators can begin to engage neoliberal ideology especially when they, or others, claim to speak from outside of ideology.' (Karczmarczyk, 2013).

The implication of ideology in the discourse has led to questions about who may stand to benefit from 'knowing' in this way and how may this way of 'knowing' function to preserve capitalist and neoliberal ideologies and what are the implications of this for the formation of the psychology curriculum and thus, the construction of the subject.

Here, conflict arises in the beliefs about the extent to which the curriculum should be governed by 'wants' rather than 'needs' leading to a questioning of the integrity of the discipline in that it is not being 'maintained'.

Table 7

Transcript 2 Lines 8-10	(psychology) 'It is a discipline that follows the current trend, it doesn't have a real identity but instead tries to fill in the gaps and present itself as 'anything under the sun'.... so long as there is a market for it'
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## Summary

This paper aims to illuminate the problematic relationship between psychological knowledge and subjectivity and how there appears to be dominant discourses that are not explicitly or compulsorily explored in terms of their wider moral, ethical and political implications.

Overall, the interpretation of discourse here suggests that, in the undergraduate psychology curriculum, positivism appears as a regime of truth, and thus a certain subjectivity is constructed as unified and autonomous and therefore, responsible. This necessarily leads to an absence of consideration of the social, cultural and historical aspects of subject construction. This promotes individualistic tendencies that are further substantiated by capitalist and neoliberal principles such as capital accumulation, freedom and choice.

This conclusion is supported by the work of Twenge (2013) who explores ‘Generation Me’ in relation to Higher Education. The implications of the current social, political and economic environment have seen the emergence of a generation constructed through this individualist way of being. This way of ‘knowing’ and ‘subjectifying’ then negates the idea that we (psychology graduates), both as ‘subject who know’, are actively constructing the subject through the production of knowledges. The reification of a ‘self’ or subject which exists *a priori*, makes the possibility of meaningful reflexivity of

research activities limited within undergraduate psychology education. This makes the curriculum problematic due to the lack of consideration of ideological implications and ethical consideration of who is set to suffer from such a production of truth (Bazzul, 2012). Furthermore, if the subject is really an ‘object’, as assumed under universal and bio-medical explanations of psychology, alongside cognitive and behavioural approaches, then, techniques of governmentality, as outlined by Foucault and Rose, are put to work. These techniques and strategies allow individuals to work upon themselves in order to attain economic value, in an increasingly competitive and profit seeking labour market. This, through the analysis, can be seen to emerge as the defining characteristic of subjectivity in society today.

Capitalism is inextricably linked to social inequality, individualism and worsening mental health, therefore, any ‘truth’ or ‘knowledge’ presented in undergraduate psychology education that serves to preserve the current ideological status quo and pathological subjectification must be questioned if psychology as a discipline is to work as a meaningful tool in the promotion of social equality and justice.

The key findings of this paper are, a) the psychology curriculum is largely market driven, b) positivism as a logic of knowing is dominant in the presentation of the psychology curriculum c) psychological knowledge works to substantiate the individ-

Table 8

Transcript 1, Lines 298-300	‘... I think we as lecturers are bounded by what students enjoy... so it always boils down to, for example, the National Student Survey, what do they enjoy, if they don't enjoy this, should you consider removing it?’
Transcript 1, Lines 306-310	‘.psychology is regarded as a simple course so that you can pass, so that you can get a form of qualification and I think that that is defeating the purpose of education...’
Transcript 1, Lines 269-270	‘I would say that 70% of people who study psychology then would not go on to do things that are relevant to psychology... well it's less competition for people who actually want to do psychology... but it's quite sad I think’

ualist discourses which are prevalent in capitalist and neoliberal societies and finally, d) points a–c are problematic as the psychology curriculum actively constructs a subject through claims of objectivity and political neutrality; despite numerous example of ways in which the knowledge is used to modify and control subject in order to meet economic and political objectives.

We should, therefore, take a more ambiguous attitude to institutionalised norms for the psychology curriculum which emphasise positivism and market value. We should ask what is being lost in the process and not only who benefits but who suffers as well. Resistant discourses suggest that the voices of students and lecturers may become stronger, paradoxically, in the increasingly consumer driven workplace of the university. The preliminary and interpretative nature of this project limited the scope of analysis and led me to identify certain signifiers in the discourse over others. Future studies of this nature may explore further the notion

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of ‘generation me’ and the implications of this in the negation or oppression of social and collective subjectivities. The inclusion of more critical educational research and theory would have further helped to situate this discourse, and the subjectivities created through pedagogy, which could help to point towards ways in which higher education in general can be reconsidered in a way that creates safe spaces for resistant voices and to give a voice to those who have become subjugated. Recognising the need for those who exert authority to become socially responsible through consideration of the wider implications of the implicit assumptions made through adopting a particular way of ‘knowing’.

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