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“I’m passionate, Lord Sugar:” Young Entrepreneurs, Critical Judgment, and Emotional Labor in *Young*

Apprentice

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If you have an undying passion for something, why not make money from it?

Liam, young entrepreneur¹

This chapter is about the performance of passion for corporate success on popular television. It draws on the politics of “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983) and work-related processes of “self-realization” (Rose 1999 [1989]) to critically consider the competitive television show *Young Apprentice* (BBC1 2010–). In particular, we explore how *Young Apprentice* (formerly *Junior Apprentice*) stages a spectacle of judgment and censorious assessment of young people and their performance of leadership, zeal, and work commitment. Young people feature heavily in work-related British popular factual TV, appearing as applicants for business investment, entry-level jobbers, interns, and “unemployable” subjects in need of a life makeover. Shows such as *Young Apprentice*, *Who Knows Best: Getting A Job* (C4 2010), *Up for Hire* (BBC3 2011), *Working Girls* (BBC3 2011), and *Hotel GB* (C4 2012) are just a few examples of recent British programming that directs young people to perform as motivated, entrepreneurial, passionate, reliable, team-aware, and proactive workers. In this chapter we will explore

how these performances meet current expectations of workplace culture and how workers are judged according to criteria that tie the individual into the agenda of the skills economy of the early 2000s.

In order to critique such representations of workplace culture, we will draw on sociological analyses of contemporary neoliberalism and theories of the production of the self. The focus is on how *Young Apprentice* monitors, evaluates, and negatively judges poor corporate business performance and endorses the *right kinds* of performances for the would-be entrepreneur. The *Young Apprentice* is modelled on *The Apprentice*, a formatted reality TV game show. The original American version (NBC 2004–) features celebrity corporate business magnate Donald Trump as instructor and benefactor who rewards the winner with a senior position in his business empire. The subsequent British version (BBC 2005–) similarly presents Lord Alan Sugar as an iconic business leader who personifies the good sense of venture capitalism and entrepreneurial initiative. Both versions of *The Apprentice* foreground the “natural jeopardy” of the corporate business world (Boyle and Kelly 2012, 40) and, as Elizabeth Frank argues, adopt a “survivalist, Darwinian ideal that drives all social interactions” (, n.d., 2). In keeping with this survivalist mentality, *The Apprentice* adopts an overtly disciplinarian tone in which the viewer is offered the pleasure of regularly staged scenes of humiliation as Trump or Sugar, respectively, berates the struggling candidates for their poor business skills and attitude. The British *Young Apprentice* also adopts a disciplinary stance, albeit moderated by an educational ethos. It also continues its predecessors’ celebration, indeed glamorization, of big business and entrepreneurial skill. But we argue that it also bears a specifically educational inflection that harmonizes with broader educational agendas in

the early 2000s that, in the UK, tie learning to entrepreneurialism. We aim to show, through our analysis of Series 3 (2012), how, in the wake of the 2008 recession and rising unemployment, there is a greater expectation that young workers are “passionate” and emotionally committed to their labor, to their employer, and to the production of capital. We argue, too, that those failing to meet these expectations of motivated commitment will be judged harshly, not only by others but also by themselves. Indeed, the message is that such critical self-judgment is a prerequisite of the motivated junior capitalist. The emphasis in *Young Apprentice* is on acquiring the right skills and demeanor to succeed in a challenging environment of increased youth unemployment. The would-be entrepreneur must continually self-assess their “can-do” attitude and emotional commitment to ensure that it harmonizes with the interests of business and the late capitalist work-market.

This chapter begins by signposting some of the key ideological coordinates of a period that has been defined by many as operating under the economic practices and political philosophy of neoliberalism. Central to this is the current articulation of the relationship between the worker and remunerative work. We briefly review the relationship between neoliberalism and economic change in order to situate the discussion that follows within a historical and theoretical framework. The focus then turns to what we take to be two important dimensions of the current idealized image of the experience of work: self-realization and emotional labor. We chart these by addressing some of the key messages to, and expectations placed on, the young worker as a potentially entrepreneurial subject. The aim is to signal the ways in which current and future workers are invited to participate in corporate cultures, to evidence their commitment, and to be judged on this basis as (in)effective and (un)productive.

The greater part of the chapter focuses more narrowly on the how young people are being educated to participate in neoliberal culture and to embrace the enthusiastic performance of work. Popular TV often endorses an image of the positive young person whose ethic of self-help, confidence, and passion will overcome broader social inequities and an uneven employment market. We concentrate on *Young Apprentice* in order to unpack the ways in which young people are being schooled to develop and realize their potential as entrepreneurs, innovators, and business leaders. In doing so we wish to indicate how certain qualities are prioritized, tested, and then judged, but also to highlight the ways in which candidates judge themselves and their competitors and how they accept judgment as the necessary condition of their future success.

Judgment informs all aspects of interaction between the candidates in *Young Apprentice*, and underpinning this is an intensely competitive work environment where short-term contracts and “neo-capitalist management strategies” mean that performance is judged against externally imposed, frequently shifting targets (Deuchar 2007, 5). Hence, we will argue that contestants embody the prioritization of a competitive, individualist drive, often to the exclusion of other ethical principles of fairness, thoughtfulness, mentoring, collaboration for collective goals, and consideration of co-workers. Self-esteem and self-interest are presented as essential characteristics tied to profit-making. To measure up as winners, young apprentices are expected to promote the self at every opportunity, internalize the need to be judged constantly, and, indeed, judge both themselves and others. This is what being “passionate” is all about. The passion for judgment requires the repression of empathy.

Neoliberalism, enterprise, and individualization

We start from the conviction that neoliberalism is hegemonic – a common-sense way of interpreting, developing, and imagining the future of the social and economic fields. It is both a perceptual framework and a set of marketized practices through which social relations and economic, institutional, and commercial activities are understood and developed (Harvey 2005, 2). These practices include the implementation of fiscally driven policies aimed at rolling back the state and minimizing regulation to make space for entrepreneurs and finance traders to create capital more freely. It is neoliberal economics that has arguably led to the emergence of a “precariat class” of individuals for whom stability, security, and life-long work in a single organization are unlikely to occur, and are certainly far from guaranteed (Standing 2011).

The prospect of small business enterprise, and especially self-employment, becomes more appealing in this environment, where employment (and especially youth employment) is far from secure and where deregulation goes hand-in-hand with the rise in internet-based businesses and online marketing and the expansion of the IT and cultural industries. Blanchflower and Oswald (2009, 198), for example, explain how one obvious solution to growing and deeply embedded youth unemployment in Europe would seem to lie in fostering entrepreneurial initiatives among the young. If there are insufficient jobs to go around, then perhaps young people could be encouraged to create their own? They also observe that people, whether they are in waged work or not, often imagine that self-employment must offer a better quality of life as well as a better, more satisfying work-based experience (Blanchflower and Oswald 2009). So, the second incentive to turn entrepreneur lies in the imagined pleasure gained from a sense of autonomy and personal control over one’s working life.

Young people are naturally regarded as emblems of the future, and, as we shall see, this view is reinforced in *Young Apprentice*. Hence, they are often positioned as being in the vanguard of neoliberalism, not just as workers who are potentially better suited and more adaptive to the kinds of social and technological changes that have taken place over the past three decades, but as social characters who typify optimism, futurity, and unabashed social advancement. Indeed, the association of young people with entrepreneurial energy and verve stretches right back to the 1980s and the early years of New Right free-market rhetoric. In his analysis of the expansion of youth media, for example, Bill Osgerby (2004) recalls the growing cross-fertilization between 1980s New Right discourses championing the entrepreneurial spirit and the development of commercialized youth cultures and lifestyles. His evidence included polls and market research which claimed to reveal a “new consumption and success ethic” among young people which was underpinned by the “sustained economic growth of the enterprise culture” (Osgerby 2004, 26). He also highlights the ways in which the terrain of contemporary youth media, lifestyle, and consumption appeared, at first sight at least, to offer fertile ground for the development of creative freedoms and opportunities for young people to launch grass-roots, small-scale start-up companies such as record labels and websites (39).

The fostering of young people’s business initiatives has attracted considerable and consistently favorable media coverage, often based on the assumption that entrepreneurial ambitions are unequivocally good. So, too, business-related entertainment programming has helped promote the benefits of the entrepreneurial mind-set. According to the *Financial Times* (*FT*), television programs such as *The Apprentice* have run

alongside a huge expansion of schooling and training of youngsters to become future entrepreneurs. It noted with approval that some business leaders, such as multimillionaire *Dragon's Den* (BBC2 2005–) investor Peter Jones, strongly advocate enterprise training in primary (elementary) schools. Jones is quoted as saying: “Until you have entrepreneurship education from seven to 17, you will not have people leaving school and starting a business” (Bounds 2012). The *FT* outlines the extensive mobilization of enterprise projects, courses, and initiatives in British schools and colleges across the social spectrum, including at Eton (an elite fee-paying institution), northern schools networks, and further education colleges. Jones’s own school program, entitled “Tycoon in Schools,” forms part of the wider Peter Jones Foundation’s

campaign to put enterprise at the heart of the education system ... [I]t seeks to encourage people to make it in Britain and to live their dream. It does this through inspiring excellence through a network of enterprise academies where passion, self-belief and “go-getting” attitudes are nurtured.<xen>²</xen>

The message of the Foundation is that “you can make it in the UK, that there is a British dream for real people.” As such, it implicitly references the much-vaunted notion of the American Dream of social mobility through personal endeavor.<xen>³</xen> This also gestures towards the wider political endorsement of enterprise as the motor of Britain’s future success, as evidenced by the British government’s support of “Tycoon in Schools” as part of its “Start Up Britain” initiative.<xen>⁴</xen>

Young entrepreneurship is promoted as an economic necessity and part of the wider push to reboot the nation’s economy. But neoliberalism is not simply an economic

theory underlying economic practices. It is also a political principle founded on the conviction that a market-related function should be “the privileged reference-point for how *governments* – indeed all modes of social organization – must operate” (Couldry 2010, 23; emphasis in the original). In other words, neoliberalism is a social as well as an economic model. So, for example, hand-in-hand with these systemic changes in the organization of paid work, the economic market, and the promotion of enterprise, there has also been a reorganization of models of responsibility and blame for work and for worklessness across all social fields. The implication is that, if economic success is driven by go-getting attitudes, passion, and self-belief, then perhaps the individual’s wider social success is too. But, the critics of neoliberalism ask, how is the message that “You can make it in the UK” to be read by those who, despite their best efforts, are not making it? How will they be judged? Individuals must look to themselves as the source of their own failure or success, whether situated in the context of education, employment, or even health and well-being. Success is increasingly characterized as not only achievable for those who work effectively, but also as only achievable through the deployment of one’s personal, private resources (including, perhaps, both finance and social capital; see Halpern 2005). According to this model, the individual is the only, or at least the primary, source of their own success, and their performance will be judged accordingly.

This overspill of neoliberal principles, or what we might call the neoliberalization of everyday life, has been described as a process of “individualization.” Put briefly, this operates through widespread institutionalized structures that insist that individuals have little option but to act as though they always have a range of real choices at their disposal.

Here, the judgment of the individual as one who adopts the right persona and opts for the right life choices is foremost. Such general markers of success and self-motivation have informed the late-twentieth-century neoliberal market. This market, which infuses forms of self and social judgment, rests on a set of popular (often therapeutic–lifestyle) tenets maintaining that individuals are well equipped and personally empowered to make these right choices at the right time (Salecl 2010). In their influential discussion of the social consequences of the institutional processes of individualization of choice, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001, 22–23) argue that individual self-fulfillment and personal achievement have become the driving imperative of the present era, and the self-made subject has become its leading character. In the advanced capitalist social and political fields, the prevalent and brutal message is: “Your own life – your own failure” (24; see also Harvey 2005, 76). Hence, in the corporate motivation industry every failure must be reconceptualized and embraced by the right-thinking individual as an opportunity (Ehrenreich 2009, 97–122). We shall see how this ethos works in *Young Apprentices*, in which each candidate, to secure his or her continuance in the show, necessarily confirms that they have taken criticism on board, that they acknowledge the processes of external and internal judgment as integral to their growth as an entrepreneur, and that the processes of (primarily negative) judgment have made them stronger and better equipped to succeed in the tough “real” world of business competition.

The promise of work: Self-realization and emotional labor

The judgment of what is a worthy work–life balance is crucial to young adults in the twenty-first century. It informs their sense of futurity and of self-worth, as well as how they may be valued externally. As Blanchflower and Oswald (2009) have indicated in

their research into the popular appeal of entrepreneurship, there is a perception that self-employed labor is more rewarding, both in terms of the work experience and with regard to the broader quality of life. There is also a wider understanding expressed by those respondents cited in their research that any work should be satisfying as well as financially rewarding. The balance or tension between work as a financial necessity and work as a personally rewarding experience has long been explored and tested by political philosophers, social critics, motivational trainers, and business studies scholars. As Gini and Sullivan (1987, 653; see also Baum 1982) explain in their own research on work processes and the person, work is the axis of self-making, and there is a conviction that “to work is an act of freedom, self-assertion, self-fulfillment and self-realization.” While it is admirable that social reformers and business leaders should strive to organize work so that workers feel emotionally and socially, as well as financially, rewarded, others have expressed reservations about the current figuring of paid work as a primary mode of self-realization. Most notable among these has been Nicholas Rose (1999, 60, 88, 103–119), who argues that the historical shift away from work as a moral duty to work as a mode of self-fulfillment has helped form new ways of connecting changing political objectives and business profitability to the psyche of the worker. This is effected in ways designed to benefit the political and late capitalist system rather than the individual. For Rose (1999, 103–104), whose treatise first appeared in the late 1980s, the new image of the productive self is that of the individual “choosing self” whose own sense of personal achievement and the attainment of enhanced “quality of life” must inevitably be acquired through work.

The sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983, 2003) also interrogated the psychological dimensions of changing workplace practices. Here, choice and judgment of commitment to work meshed in the very fabric of internal emotional as well as interpersonal life and its daily enactment for self and others. Her influential thesis *The Managed Heart* explored the new management of emotional life in corporate culture from a humanist and feminist perspective. Her interest was in the active “emotional labor” of working lives. She defined this as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has an *exchange value*” (Hochschild 1983, 7; her emphasis). In the early 1980s, the decline of unskilled labor and the growth of the service sector led her to speculate that the demands made primarily on the middle-class worker for the exchange of emotion and adeptness at “feeling rules” was likely to spread across the whole class system (Hochschild 1983, 160). Hochschild’s ground-breaking work on what she referred to as the “commercialization of human feeling” addressed the widespread expansion of this emotional labor, particularly in the spreading service sectors.

Over the past three decades Hochschild and others have continued to argue that this shift in notions of work performance and emotional work has indeed become embedded in the work culture of advanced or late capitalism. So, too, others, too numerous to cite, have drawn on Hochschild’s theorization of emotional labor to focus on certain dimensions of its commercialization. In media and cultural studies scholarship, both the TV performer and the performance of work on television have been critiqued with reference to this theoretical model (e.g., Aslama and Pantti 2006; Couldry 2008; Bonsu *et al.* 2010; Nunn and Biressi 2010; Couldry and Littler 2011). These critiques

have arisen, in part, through a growing acknowledgement of the importance of the emotional dimension of work and its relation to neoliberalism, and also of the costs at stake for the worker-subject when emotions such as passion are demanded as part of the effective performance of labor.

Young Apprentice: Profiling future success

Young Apprentice is a British popular factual entertainment show in which a group of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds compete to win a business start-up prize of £25,000 from business magnate Lord Sugar. Following auditions, the submissions of CVs and personal statements the chosen candidates are split into two teams. In each episode the teams are given a business-themed task designed to test their skills in requisitioning, sales, negotiation, leadership, teamwork, creativity, and budgeting. The teams are monitored by Lord Sugar's two advisors (Karren Brady and Nick Hewer), who help him to evaluate their performances and who contribute to the verbal evaluation of success and failure. A process of elimination takes place after each task as teams report back to the (studio set) "boardroom," the results are revealed and individual performances are dissected. As will be shown, the process invites an intricate series of critical judgments. Team members comment on the performance of their team leader and vice versa. Sugar, together with his advisors, levels trenchant criticism at the candidates. The losing team is interrogated further. Then, in a final showdown, the leader of the losing team and two others chosen by the leader return to the boardroom, where they are subjected to a further detailed examination. The discussions can turn acrimonious as each candidate tries to deflect blame towards the others and candidates are invited to tell Lord Sugar why they should not be eliminated from the process. Finally, Sugar dismisses one of the three (or

sometimes even two) with the catchphrase, “You’re fired!” and that candidate is eliminated from the competition.

The UK *Apprentice* (along with the investment pitching show *Dragon’s Den*) was notable for attracting a wider demographic than was usual for business-related television (Boyle and Kelly 2012, 42–43). Both shows attracted a young audience, despite the fact that they were screened on the relatively niche BBC2 channel, which is primarily targeted at an adult lower- to upper-middle-class socio-economic grouping. Drawing on industry commentaries, Boyle and Kelly (2012, 43) suggest that the appeal of these programs to young people seemed to arise from a variety of factors, including the depiction of the drama, glamour, and risk of the business environment and of aspiration and financial success as “cool” (see also McGuigan 2008) and the multimedia platforms through which program content could be accessed. It seemed commercially sensible, then, to devise a spin-off format specifically featuring younger would-be entrepreneurs. The BBC’s *Young Apprentice* website makes the most of this multimedia appeal. It offers “best moment” clips from the show, post-firing interviews, candidates’ personal presentations to camera, a photo gallery, Twitter feeds, and mini voting polls where viewers can express their views about whether the right candidate was evicted. Candidates’ profile pages include their (edited) audition videos, which emphasize ambition, passion, and determination. These would-be apprentices do not convey a humble desire to learn but, instead, suggest already confident, ready-made worker-subjects whose experience and skills would position them naturally as leaders rather than followers. These (abridged) video presentations from Series 3 are typical of the genre:

I'd be quite good at most tasks I'm obviously passionate about what I do and anything that I do I will always ... I'll always be the best at it. I think it is important to be ruthless in any business if you don't you'll get left behind [T]he only weakness would be that I'd be too, too cutthroat in my attitude towards the other members of the team. If I want something done it will be done. I don't accept no for an answer. (Patrick McDowell, age 16)

It would be the biggest mistake you could make to underestimate me ... believe me I have the heart of a lioness who will take apart anybody who tries to mess with her I'm unique I'm a unique selling point as a person I have what it takes to win this competition [I]n 10 years' time I believe I will be running a very successful business empire. I will not take a break, I will not sleep until I become number one. (Maria Doran, age 17)

[P]eople's skills is [*sic*] so important. I can sometimes be domineering I'll make certain my view is heard I'm incredibly passionate about business I do really want to live my dreams rather than just think about them. I don't see that there's any end to what I can achieve. (Max Grodecki, age 16)

Our analysis of the auditions has identified four key characteristics which are typical of the mediated successful entrepreneurial profile and which are reiterated during the show's various set pieces: positive thinking, passion, competitiveness, and a selective deployment of biography or life-story. First, we suggest that the auditions display a commitment to "positive thinking," which masks off any uncertainty, refuses the mundane and the ordinary, denies personal flaws or inadequacies, and ignores the

possibility of failure. All the young contestants deliver, almost by rote, the same mantra of positive action, thought, and behavior as the key to success and as the marker of their unique self-determination. These iterations of positivity may be read partly as the predictable performance of the contestant schooled in the conventions of reality television's competitive formats; formats which demand that each applicant stands out as special and that self-belief is unwavering. But, rather than reading these simply as performances of epic egoism or breath-taking and perhaps naïve immaturity, we suggest that they are, in fact, the proper performances of young people well schooled in the contemporary notions of the self-actualized worker as described by commentators above. Whereas youngsters were once schooled to labor in the service of what Rose (1999, 103) has called the "old economic ethics" of hard work as a "moral, personal, and social good," now their obligations are couched in the language of individualism. There is no longer a barrier between the economic, the psychological, and the social, as "working hard produces psychological rewards and psychological rewards produce hard work" (119).

Second, the emotion of "passion" is frequently referenced as a prerequisite of the ideal young apprentice. As the show's homepage states, "From all corners of the UK, each of the aspiring moguls have been selected for their academic flair and burning passion for business." Unsurprisingly, then, all applicants are enjoined to declare their passion, an emotion which can be verbalized but is incredibly difficult to perform to camera, even though performance is key to its identification. In their own discussion of *The Apprentice*, Couldry and Littler (2011, 270) describe "passion" as a performative expression of an excessive commitment to an employer, to the job, or to the

industry. They suggest that the endorsement of passion as a positive attribute is accompanied by a suppression of other values that might run counter to neoliberalism. Shows such as the *Young Apprentice* allow little or perhaps no space for challenges to the notion that personal success and personal wealth are synonymous and that the passport to these things is passion as well as skill.

The third characteristic of the putatively successful entrepreneur as set out in the auditions is a forthright, take-no-prisoners competitiveness. These auditions present young people in a hurry. We live in what Renate Salecl describes as an era of “impatient capital,” in which the “constant desire for rapid returns” informs not only “corporations and financial services” but individuals, who are likewise encouraged to “maximise their returns,” “to make a life-plan of goals, make long-term investments, be flexible, restructure our life’s enterprises and take the risks necessary in order to increase profits” (2010, 22–23). In *Young Apprentice* impatience is a virtue and arrogance is an asset. Contestants must claim an iron will and an ability to control and manage others. Thus, throughout the audition-takes and in the series as a whole there are unspoken but powerful laws of self-prohibition and cruel self-judgment in operation. Subsequently, when candidates learn that they have lost set tasks they quickly move from self-blame to the deflection of blame – attributing failure to their opponents’ poor decision-making, overweening competitiveness, misjudged self-promotion, and so on. Despite the importance of teamwork to the successful completion of tasks, the biographical self in this show thrives through competition rather than any lasting idea of team, group, or collective identity. A group is there to be controlled, a team is there merely as a backdrop from which to emerge, against which to mark oneself out as leader and as an exceptional

individual. As apprentice Andrew Tindall declares on his *Young Apprentice* online profile: “It’s not a team game; it’s working together but for me to win.”

Apprentices, then, must refuse to acknowledge even the possibility of personal weakness, and wanting to be liked is considered a trait of the vulnerable. Indeed, even when candidates (usually female) claim to be amiable, people-friendly, and empathetic, these attributes are presented as a means to an end; merely the more effective strategic path to successful project management than simple brute will. Ashleigh Porter-Exley maintains, for example:

I believe that if you know that someone’s got a weakness and they show that weakness ... and they fail a task, it is just as much your fault for not spotting that weakness and working on that weakness together I know what I want and I’m determined to get where I want to be.

In the quotations above, cutthroat interaction, domineering behavior, ruthlessness, and refusal to stay quiet or to rest until success has been achieved are all presented as hallmarks of real ambition and, importantly, are also the characteristics by which other competitors are judged as strong or weak rivals. As contestant David Odhiambo declares, “I’m a natural leader ... [M]en are like dogs ... you have to show them who their boss is, then they follow.” His grandiose assertion is one of the most repeated declarations featured in Series 3, appearing in the audition video, in trailers, and highlighted by Lord Sugar in the boardroom. While there is a hint of mockery in the show’s repetition of this and other equally over-blown statements by these novices, nonetheless it is clear that the

imagined successful leader is one who overcomes material obstacles and does not waste time or energy in contemplation, introspection, or self-restraint.

The fourth related characteristic of these auditions as a successful entrepreneur profile is that of the “elective biography.” As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001, 24) argue, the current imperative is to “live a life of one’s own”; a life in which one’s story is not yoked to, or determined by, external social forces but, rather, is free to pursue an individualistic and active narrative arc. The auditions begin the work of building an individual myth of exceptional promise for each candidate. These apprentices rarely refer to external factors or objective conditions which may affect or hinder their life plans. Whereas in real life the so-called “inheritance effect” reveals that young entrepreneurs more often emerge from families where business is already a way of life and financing can come from the family (Blanchflower and Oswald 2009, 195), in *Young Apprentice* one’s social starting point is presented as being irrelevant to the life-chances of the candidates. According to the BBC, “The aspiring moguls span a broad range of backgrounds, from council [social housing] estates to private schools. They include a fashion designer, a trainee accountant, an events promoter, young publisher of the year, an aspiring lawyer and a farmer’s daughter.” The sense is that the opportunity is open to all, regardless of social origins. All candidates describe their imagined future success as inevitable.

Despite the confidence exhibited in these auditions and the business experience already claimed by most of the “budding teenage tycoons,” for those who make it onto the show the lesson imparted is that they will need to grow up fast. In their first meeting, Lord Sugar advises: “it’s been never harder than now for young people like you to try and

find yourself a job [T]here are lots of companies going to the wall, there's even countries on the verge of bankruptcy." Here the candidates are established as the economic saviors of the future, providing they put childish things behind them. Sugar declares: "I believe that it is young entrepreneurs like you that will bring the prosperity back." In what becomes a standard strategy throughout the series, he positions the enterprise tests of the program as competitions that directly model the uncompromising world of work. His conventional performance as a candid, bluff entrepreneur from the school of hard knocks is contrasted with playground politics: "Now here's a little warning. I don't like teacher's pets and I don't like school bullies. This is about the real world I'm not making you sit any exams. The only grade you will get here is F for fired."

As in *The Apprentice*, Lord Sugar is presented as the figure to which to aspire, especially so since he is himself a model of "rags to riches" social mobility from his youth. Frequently Sugar's own self-told myth of youthful enterprise is the inspiration for the set tasks and established as the benchmark of success. He tells instructive stories of sourcing rags to sell on for profit and of pitching business ideas from an early age. The entrepreneurial self conveyed is of a man unafraid of risk, grabbing an opportunity, "learning quick and hard from mistakes." Sugar is coach, mentor, taskmaster, and critical judge. In *Young Apprentice* an older model of the self-made man has been attached to newer versions of the life-makeover expert who promises participants self-realization and success if they follow the rules. However, unlike the makeover experts featured in other formats, Sugar does not draw on *therapeutic* models of self-help. Instead, he is an exemplar of the externalized entrepreneurial self: revealing no inner truth, no

examination of conscience, no consideration of stress, self-esteem, personal dilemma.

The apprentices are instructed to shape their self-conduct and attune their business behavior to fit this vigorous and outward-facing model of entrepreneurial self-hood.

“The boardroom has made us stronger”: The dynamics of critical judgment

In the first episode of Series 3 teams are formed and named (Odyssey and Platinum). Each week a project manager (PM) is appointed to lead each team in the set task. Central to the task-based action are work practices requiring that emotional labor be translated into commercial activity. Each task demands that the apprentices engage with potential customers and marketeers via focus groups, in large shopping centers, at market stalls, play groups, and so on. The task – selling a product, persuading retailers or buyers to order a product, pitching an idea – demands a level of performed commitment and a clear ability to charm, persuade, and respond engagingly to questions and manage moments of embarrassment or disappointment. At all stages the apprentices are directed to modify their behavior via feedback from Sugar and from business experts. They are asked to be leader-like but not forceful, to display strength of purpose but not overweening arrogance, to pitch with confidence but not aggression, with good humor but not brashness. The apprentices have already exhibited a kind of passionate performance in their to-camera gung-ho auditions, but to demonstrate their progress they must now also learn how to modify this enthusiasm and act with good judgment. For example, in Episode 2, when Patrick McDowell takes over from team members who have successfully pitched their recipe book to buyers and then falters over his words, he is berated in the boardroom. Sugar attacks his behavior as a poor show and as evidence of a

personal flaw: “This is not a kind of talent show that everyone’s got to do something. This is business. And when you are not good at something you shouldn’t put yourself forward.” Sugar also berates his downbeat “Monday morning” attitude, while Brady advises that he should instead display “enthusiasm, humor, facts.” As Hochschild (1983, 186) muses, perhaps it does take a capitalist to promote an incentive system in which the management of feeling and the display of good humor in the face of adversity and criticism forges a link between emotional labor and corporate profit.

Critical judgment as the instrument of self-improvement is also fully accepted by the candidates. For example, in Episode 6, the apprentices attest the value of *self*-judgment as they weigh up their potential to win. Critical self-judgment is viewed by the young entrepreneurs as a key strategy for fostering the right attitude. When apprentice Steven Cole dissects his team leader’s style during their fractious strategy meeting, he declares: “Don’t look at it as criticism. Look at it as constructive. Something that we can make something from.” Following the tasks, teams reconvene in the boardroom to discover who has made the greater profit and to be judged on their performances. Once the profits have been disclosed, the losing PM selects two colleagues to rejoin him or her in the boardroom to battle it out to stay in the game. In a typical exchange, David Odhiambo (in team Odyssey) suggests that, while McDowell was a good team leader, he was certainly flawed. This is countered by McDowell in typical fashion: “The thing is, David, I was dealing with a team that didn’t have any experience in the field.” Winning team Platinum is rewarded with a motivational and aspirational treat; losing team Odyssey is exiled to a cheap café to conduct a performance post-mortem (one of several which take place towards the end of each episode). Self-judgment and the judgment of

peers and advisors is central here and in the later final boardroom scenes as blame and praise are deployed to hold the apprentices to account.

I don't think I did a perfect job I think I did a good one. (Max Grodecki)

Without me I don't think the team would have had anything to sell. (Patrick McDowell)

Max ... we concluded that you are useless at selling. (Lord Sugar)

In these scenes civility can break down, accusations of hypocrisy abound, and the exposure of personal weaknesses is encouraged as Lord Sugar interrogates the losers. All are scrutinized by the experts and the camera for lapses in conviction, manipulation of the truth, prevarication, and the evasion of responsibility. Generally candidates are required to perform robust confidence rather than to disclose weakness or personal error. Only when youth and inexperience are highlighted by Sugar himself do candidates offer these up more humbly as reasons why they should be mentored and their talents nurtured and why they should, therefore, be given one more chance to shine.

The set tasks – selecting and selling old clothes as desirable vintage items, designing a hair product or a recipe book, and so on – are organized as game show tasks in which individuals can showcase their skills while ostensibly working as a team.

However, while the result of each task is reduced to the measurable outcome of financial gain – the most profit guarantees the winning team – each person is ultimately judged by Lord Sugar and his experts on their individual merits. The boardroom, then, becomes an arena for ritual humiliation in which winners and losers are subjected to critical judgment. The contradictions of self-government are crystallized here. Each team is asked to assess their leader's and their own strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and failures. Although Lord Sugar judges the team's success on its ability to sell, pitch a

product, and pull in punters, ultimately the judgment assesses the congruence between individual character-types and the needs of enterprise. Inconsistencies and exaggerated claims made in the elective biographies of their original CVs are exposed for all the apprentices to hear. Character and correct emotional performance are brought to the fore. For instance, Andrew Tindall (a catering entrepreneur) performs as a chirpy, resilient team player. In the boardroom, the minutiae of his emotional expression are directly highlighted when Sugar queries whether his faint smile, while appearing to praise a fellow apprentice, is actually a strategy deployed to undermine him. Max Grodecki, positioned as an academic young man, is judged by Hewer and Brady to be too self-effacing in the clothes-selling task. He is branded as “a bit of a thinker” instead of a “doer” and fired as a result. Sugar likewise judges online fashion designer Maria Doran for her ill-judged, overly forceful behavior towards others. Ultimately, however, she is saved because Sugar admires her “fiery” personality. While the apprentices may, in fact, feel disillusionment, resentment, weariness, or anxiety about their time on *Young Apprentice*, the programs allow no space for the expression of this. The apprentices have to display receptiveness even in response to the humiliation of the boardroom. As apprentice Odhiambo reflects back on his survival in Episode 1: “The boardroom has made us stronger.”

In their post-show interviews candidates offer a slightly more nuanced reflection of their experience than that made by Odhiambo above, often presenting a less aggressively competitive side.⁷ Candidates continue to reiterate the need for tough determination to succeed at business. But also, occasionally, they reflect on the ways they could interrelate more effectively with others. Navdeep Bual claimed, for

example, that she learnt that constructive criticism can be interpreted by its target as negative and that she should be “more emotionally aware” of her co-workers. Alice Smith suggested that her own confident front concealed the insecurities that all teenagers share, and improved self-esteem might have helped her “deal with the competition better.” She adds: “Before the filming started I told myself that getting on the show was prize enough, I didn’t mind where I came, as long as I came out of it with my head held high and a relatively nice person.” The environment of the game and the boardroom itself was described by several apprentices as “surreal.” The emotional dynamics of aggressive competition and bonding were “weird.” As Smith recalled, “It is such a weird environment where on one hand you are having some *Hunger Games* hate for each other because we’re all in contention, but because we’re spending every minute with each other you ultimately become like siblings. Some you love, some you lovingly tolerate.” Asked whether he deserved to be fired, Sean Spooner maintained that his perceived weakness at leading other strong-minded apprentices could also be understood as his determination that he “didn’t want to fall under the typical *Apprentice* stereotype of someone who is close-minded and doesn’t listen to other people; that’s not who I am.” We can understand such responses by turning to Hochschild (1983, 188–189), who considered the human costs of the management and performance of feeling as a commodity. She suggests that emotional numbness and stress can partly be countered by a kind of healthy self-estrangement in which the individual extracts themselves from their work role and tries to differentiate their authentic self from their “phony” workplace persona.

There is an evident practice of “people-processing” at the heart of such TV formats, in which increasingly packaged performances of larger-than-life contestants will

inevitably be picked over by the judgment of camera, cast, and audience. Alongside this, of course, the *Young Apprentice* plays out various other strategies of (self-)evaluation, assertion of superiority, fantasies of success, and deflection of personal failure. While highly individualized career pathways are laid bare in this show, the young people are also exposed to criticism from their peers, corporate judges, and audience. The show also offers opportunities for pleasurable judgment to viewers, who are positioned as superior arbiters of the “youthful” hubris, immaturity, and overweening ambition of the candidates. The pay-off for watching the show lies partly in the moments when the over-egged claims of the candidates are laid bare through their failure to execute even the simplest of business tasks. Viewers are frequently treated to carefully edited shots of their humiliation at the hands of customers, potential clients, or the Sugar team. The failure of the majority of the candidates is as important to the dramaturgy as success, because, after all, only one candidate can win.

But there is something more complex on offer here than mere delight at the spectacle of humiliated contestants. The *Young Apprentice* allows an ambivalent relationship to the processes of judgment at work, which includes other positionalities, such as sympathetic recognition. As we have shown, the show upholds, in hyperbolic and, indeed, perhaps playful fashion, the virtues of a meritocratic immersion in the corporate contest. But at the same time it exposes the manufactured selves that the young candidates must perforce develop: the commodity-personas needed to make successful transactions in the entrepreneurial world and the hard (emotional) labor involved. The pleasure on offer to viewers is arguably derived from both a relation of distance and recognition; distance from the brash candidates, discomfort at the moments when the

mechanisms of critical judgment are too crudely played out, and also a kind of ironical recognition of a neoliberal work environment writ large. After all, many viewers themselves may be undergoing work-based critical judgment. They, too, may be striving to meet personal targets and goals, to engage successfully with clients or customers or users, and to embrace with passion the ethos of daily performance (and with a smile too!) in order to remain gainfully employed in the current economic downturn. Hence, the shadow of critical judgment falls on everyone living within the reach of neoliberalism, and popular factual television articulates this beautifully.

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<en-group type="endnotes">

<en><label>1</label> At

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00k9c3r/features/bigquestion>. Accessed November 14, 2012</en>

<en><label>2</label> <http://www.tycooninschools.com/about/>. Accessed December 11, 2012</en>

<en><label>3</label> See also our discussion of social mobility, education, and the TV series *Jamie’s Dream School*: Biressi and Nunn 2013, 69–93.</en>

<en><label>4</label> Details of “start-up Britain” can be found at <http://www.startupbritain.co/>. Accessed January 9, 2012.</en>

<en><label>5</label> 2012 series 3 candidate profiles at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00y8pgf/profiles/candidates></en>

<en><label>6</label> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b016kgww/features/about></en>

<en><label>7</label> See the “You’re Fired” interviews on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00y8pgf/profiles/candidates>. Accessed 1.9.2012.</en>

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