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Re-reading Voice: Young Women, Anorexia and Performative Education

INTRODUCTION

> My Pressured Life: Big, trapped, "live the dream", exams, stress, work addict, get fit, exercise addict, I hate my figure, think, calorie counter, stand out, weight watchers, pushover, diet, beauty, changing, secrets, runway. (Amanda, poster)

This paper discusses some emerging ethical and epistemological issues of engaging with voice as a concept for exploring young women's experience of schooling. Our interest in the ethics of representation and voice stems from recent research with young women on the relationship between eating disorders and schooling.[1] The voice above, along with others interspersed throughout this paper, are those of young women with anorexia who have shared their experiences of school life with us. The research we report on in this paper utilised the concept of voice to make connections between young women's schooling experience within performative education cultures and the development of particular eating disorders.

More specifically, we explore the paradoxical position of how young women with anorexia are both complicit and resistant to cultures of performativity in school. We examine how this complex process of complicity and resistance in school is lived out through and within hybrid anorexic bodies. This process is particularly striking in the life stories we have collected from young women experiencing eating disorders who were participants in a wider project examining the relationship between schooling and the aetiology of eating disorders. On the one hand, disordered eating practices, self-starvation, and excessive exercising might be read as evidence of complicit, docile and disciplined bodies. However, as will be revealed below, these young women also engage with these practices in the extreme in an effort to subvert cultural discourses of performative education and health, by using their body as a "voice." They engage with bodily practice in the extreme as part of the process of constantly (re)constituting a self which both complies with, mediates and resists dominant discourses of the body and health culture in schools. In what follows below, we outline some of our ethical and epistemological journeys in theorising voice.

Much like other researchers, our original interest in the concept of voice was partly grounded in some democratic ideal to make public the voices of students who may not only be marginalised, but deeply damaged by processes of education. Indeed, the narratives we have collected provided a number of substantive insights into the contemporary conditions of schooling that connect with current discussions around performative culture and the health and well-being of teachers and pupils in schools.[2] It is necessary to elaborate on our reading of contemporary health policy and practice more fully to explain our intentions in offering "performative health" as an analytical device. Philosophically, of course, all school subjects are performative – in that they produce a subject who is "conditioned" to respond and act in a particular way. In this respect, physical education and health education may be no more or less performative than any other subjects. Our use of the term here, however, following the work by Stephen Ball,[3] has particular nuance and meaning. Performativity has been a matter of great interest in the literature examining the impact of changes in education brought about by marketisation reflecting Neo-liberal rationales.[4] These rationales have led to an excessive focus on individual and institutional performance (e.g., as measured through league tables, performance targets, examination grades, Oftsted[5] inspection reports etc.),[6] pushing young people towards ever higher and more demanding standards of performance.[7] This culture of performativity so induced by these measures has been described succinctly by Stephen Ball[8] in his terms:

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality", or "moments" of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement.

Such is the pervasiveness of performativity in social and educational policy, that we are now witnessing a similar logic in approaches to heath education and work related to the body within schools.[9] Indeed, "educational texts" are not the only "performative texts" which confront teachers and students and, according to Stephen Ball,[10] "increasingly deform practices in schools." Stemming from a moral panic connected with a so-called obesity epidemic, schools have been subjected to a barrage of initiatives and policies, steeped in performance outcomes and targets, in an effort to regulate young people's bodies, weight, physical activity patterns and diets. Since 1999, the National Healthy Schools Programme in England and Wales has encouraged schools to develop action plans, targets and audits in relation to a whole school approach to health. Under performative regimes, since 2005, Ofsted – the official educational inspectorate responsible for regulating and inspecting education – has also begun examining "health" within schools. Unlike other health promotion discourses, the new imperatives associated with this discourse tend not to treat health holistically. Instead, health is perceived as strongly associated with body size and appearance – thin or slender bodies being taken to represent external signs of self-control, virtue and being responsible citizens, rather than good health (these "virtues" are assumed to be the contingencies of "good health"). We thus find ourselves with the rather odd idea that health is relevant only

insofar as it can be measured and evidenced in institutions like schools, which have a putative capacity to ensure that students (and their guardians) achieve specific goals, such as weight loss, proper diet and exercise regimens.[11] Collectively, these initiatives have led to what we refer to elsewhere[12] as body pedagogies that are instrumental in governing students' bodies. "Body pedagogies" refer to any conscious activity taken by persons, organisations, or the state designed to enhance individuals' understandings of their own and others' corporeality. Occurring over multiple sites of practice, in and outside schools, they define the significance, value and potential of the body in time, place and space.[13]

We do not have space to outline all these policies or processes, nor give a detailed discussion of their merits or problematic features. However, for the purposes of our discussion on "voice," it is pertinent to note that these policies increasingly bear features of a performative culture and pedagogies that emphasise comparison, measurement, assessment and accountability while focusing attention on the manifest aspects of "corporeal perfection" (usually defined as "the slender ideal"). They are also pressing schools to engage in health issues rather simplistically, in terms of weight management, rather than encouraging a more complex holistic outlook on and attitude towards health.[14] More worryingly, pedagogies and initiatives of this kind provide a mechanism through which practices occur that are ethically questionable in terms of "social justice agendas."[15] This includes inspecting personal lunchboxes, health and physical activity report cards, requiring young people to report on everyday activities such as eating and physical activities, and measuring and weighing children as young as four years old. This logic of performativity[16] in schools is therefore no longer confined to academic subjects, but extends more explicitly onto and through young people's bodies via manifest aspects of corporeal perfection via what we have referred to as "body pedagogies."

Whilst the concept of student voice has been problematised elsewhere,[17] our particular research study provides an interesting anomaly which we anticipate will help to develop a more complex purchase on voice: all of the young women in our study are those students who had the recognised forms of physical, cultural and linguistic capital[18] to be well placed to express themselves within current educational structures. Thus, they are perhaps not categories of youth who would be immediately perceived as marginalised or disaffected, and without "voice" within current education structures. They were all high achievers academically, predominantly middle class, and successfully involved in a range of extracurricular activities. Despite this, all the participants made reference to being unable to "voice" their concerns about how features of schooling associated with the assessment of their bodies, identities and abilities had a negative impact on them. As will be revealed below, it would be all too easy for us to stumble over the debate as to whether these pupils do or don't have "voice," to express how they may be damaged or troubled by particular educational processes. It seemed from our findings that what was needed was a more nuanced understanding of "the role of power relations" within emerging performative pedagogies in "creating voice."[19] Arnot and Reay's[20] recent conceptualisation of the *sociology of pedagogical voice* has been instructive in this process, since it centres not "on voice per se, but rather on *pedagogic voice* and "engages with the power relations which create voices." This paper therefore speaks both to the notion of "pupil voice" within the sociology of education, but more broadly to the wider methodological discussions about how we as researchers make claims from voice research.

This is especially important when engaging with research which may be marshalled towards change, as is the case with those who are raising concerns about the impact of performative culture upon the health and well-being of teachers and pupils in schools.[21]

THE RESEARCH STUDY

The extracts in this paper are taken from research spanning five years, which has centred on the lives of some forty girls and young women all of whom have suffered from anorexia nervosa or bulimia. All were resident full-time at a centre located in England specialising in the treatment of such conditions, having been referred there either via a general practitioner, a child psychiatrist, or paediatrician, for a duration usually of two to four weeks; their costs met either by the NHS (National Health Service) or by private means (usually the family themselves). As participants in our research they were asked to record and reflect on their experiences of mainstream schooling and how it may (or may not) have had a bearing on the development of disordered eating. The young women are aged between 11 and 18 (all have been given pseudonyms), are white, of UK origin, and able-bodied. Reflecting a wider demography of eating disorders[22] they, like most others attending the centre, come from "middle class" families and have attended what might be described as high-status comprehensive, grammar, or private schools, from across the UK. The centre also catered for males but received very few, and at the time of study none were available for inclusion in the research. Operating rather like a boarding school, the centre provides compulsory full-time education for the residents while liaising with the young person's school of origin to ensure continuity of work and to reduce the anxieties of re-entry to mainstream education. Ethical clearance gained from Loughborough University recognised that we were dealing with "vulnerable young people" and, therefore, that the research had to proceed not only with the full support and cooperation of centre staff but also using research techniques that were, above all else, sensitive to the participants' health interests. Only after permission was granted from all parties concerned – the young people, parents and centre staff including the resident psychiatrist and director – did data collection commence. All fieldwork (some involving residential periods of stay at the centre) was conducted by a female member of the research team in the interest of building trust and rapport with the participants. A variety of techniques – for example, formal and informal interviews, diary keeping, focus groups, field notes, email correspondence, and mapping techniques – was used to register the participants' stories of how formal mainstream education figured in the development of their disordered behaviors and relationships with their own and others' bodies. The majority of participants relished the opportunity to speak of their previous school experience and was forthcoming with their views.

TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF EXPLORING "VOICE"

All of the young women in our research discussed at length the problematic features of schooling and its relationship with disordered eating, highlighting, to various extents, problematic experiences with competition between individuals for grades, achievement, status, sporting recognition, popularity, bullying, "cliques", groups, stereotyping, lack of individual recognition, pressures around weight management, performance and "slender ideals." Having

collected these narratives, however, we found ourselves reflecting critically upon the nature of their stories, and the "unheard" stories that spoke of the connections between their eating disorders and their schooling experiences. These were connections which they felt were not only silenced within schools, but also appear to be under-researched and seldom voiced in the public domain. It was specifically this observation within the data which made us reflect more explicitly on the ethics of our work and how we were to theorise voice. We were intrigued by the young women's disdain for, yet complicity with, the social conditions of schooling, and their consistent reference to being unable to express this within school contexts. Whilst these young women may have been referring to being unable to verbally express what they felt in schools, our conceptualisation of voice extends beyond what can and cannot be expressed, examining instead voice as a speaking position within the power structures of schooling. The stories these young women told us also prompted ethical discussions and decisions; for us, they were what Zylinska[23] refers to as a "call to response and responsibility" to make public their painful and evocative stories that most lucidly reveal how performative cultures come to be embodied, and allude to what we view as their negative consequences for the regulation of consciousness. Such stories are significant not only for what they might tell us about schooling but, as Saukko[24] reminds us, "taking voices seriously becomes particularly important when studying anorexic women because they have traditionally been silenced as disordered or incapable of reliably assessing their thoughts or actions." We were therefore in an ethically delicate situation of drawing upon these voices to highlight problematic discourses, whilst at the same time being cautious of not further stigmatising the "anorexic voice."

We kept returning to the questions: What were these voices? Why did they take a particular shape and form? Were these young women without voice? Was it our task simply to provide them with one (to report what they had to say)? All these questions prompted us to revisit and look afresh at what we understand as voice. If ethics, according to Zylinska,[25] are an ever-present feature of how we frame our research, then they have also to be considered with respect to how we interpret (and envisage) issues of voice, perhaps especially when they are clearly (in the eyes of some) damaged voices.

CONCEPTUALISING VOICE

The term "voice" has been defined in various ways from different methodological, theoretical and philosophical positions. For some time, voice has been conceptualised from a perspective of having self-determination to express particular experiences. Thus, taking seriously the voices of subjugated individuals who are often silenced or misunderstood has been a concern of various theoretical and methodological modes of inquiry. Arnot and Reay[26] identify that this approach is "located within critical sociological studies of youth identity, drawing upon the notion of often silenced voices of the marginalised, 'othered' or subordinated as a means of exposing oppressive power relations." Some studies exploring the experiences of marginalised or disaffected students in education take such an approach, as with Willis'[27] classic early work on the oppression of working class males. The concept of voice has been variously developed since then within a number of fields. Pupil and teacher voice has remained a focus of inquiry since the early phonologically informed approaches of the New Sociology of education. Elsewhere, there has been a long tradition of adopting a feminist standpoint, in

an effort to "give voice" to women's experiences that may have otherwise remained silenced by gendered discourses.[28] Whilst "giving voice" may assist in the production of counter or resistant narratives, there has been much debate about voice research within sociology and the sociology of education.[29] A developing literature has begun to highlight the problematic features of approaching student voice in this way, as captured by Fielding:

> Voice has too much about it that smacks of singularity, of presumed homogeneity, of deferential dependence on the unpredictable dispensations of those who deftly tune the acoustics of school to the frequencies of [a] benign status quo.[30]

Our theoretical reading of voice is concerned less with the sort of metaphorical meaning of agency and power, and the ability to have self-determination that has underpinned this approach to student voice. Instead, we take up the concept of voice as situated within the power relations of social contexts. We draw on the conceptual work of Arnot and Reay[31] who offer an instructive and perhaps more complex purchase on voice research in what they refer to as a *sociology of pedagogic voice*, which engages with the "power relations which create voices." They, like us, have drawn on Bernstein's[32] theories of pedagogy and symbolic control not only to explore the "relay of power relations through pedagogy," but also the "relations within" – "how power works through pedagogy shaping the forms (the grammar and syntax) of voice realizations." In their *sociology of pedagogic voice*, they write:

> Bernstein's distinction between voice and message plays a key role here in discriminating between: social and pedagogic identities; specialised voices based upon power relations and the realisation of those relations revealed in "talk"; and dominant and subordinated voices and the "yet to be voiced."

We have thus tried to explore the impact of performative discourses not only in terms of the relay of power relations through pedagogy, but also, in trying to make sense of the contradictory nature of these girls' voices, how they have struggled to find space to resist these messages through the "relations within pedagogy." More specifically, our theoretical analysis is concerned with the sort of speaking position these young women find. This has provided a mechanism for "engaging theoretically in the voices *created* by the pedagogies, rather than the voices needed to change pedagogy."[33]

VOICE WITHIN PERFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Upon consulting our participants about the nature of schooling, they talked at length about problematic features of performativity. We have drawn upon some of these narratives elsewhere to reveal how school cultures are dominated not just by performance codes,[34] but what we refer to as body *perfection* codes[35] and their modalities, "body pedagogies." The young women we interviewed made constant reference to their teachers' language and practices, which, endorsed by government health policy, transmitted what we refer to as "body perfection codes." These codes are structures of meaning defining what the body (in size, shape, predisposition and demeanour) is and ought to be; and how, for those who do not meet these ideals, there is treatment, repair and restoration. More specifically, these codes are connected to the wider culture of performativity in school, since health is reduced to that

which is managed, regulated, measured and compared against normative thresholds and standards. Health and young people's bodies thus become subject to a wider technology which employs judgements and measurements, such that their size, shape and weight serve as measures of their productivity and output in relation to how schools are measured in terms of improving young people's health. Lydia's[36] comments below capture the types of experiences many of these girls encountered, and the impact this had on her:

> She [the teacher] picked out this girl who was literally like this thick [pointing to a pole in the room] and she said, "now this looks like a girl who is the right weight." That really upset me because I just thought, I have to get [my weight] down quick – so yeah, that probably had a big effect on me.

These codes regulate the "voice" of education, and in turn are reflected in what these young people recalled during interview:

> We used to have to get weighed in the class and that was terrible […] It was to do with maths or something…and that was horrible…because then everybody knew your weight and then…a lot of the lads actually used to go on…and…you know…shouting out your weight in the class…things like that …that was terrible… really terrible. (Rebekah, interview)

> Vicky was actually weighed at her previous school…I think it was density or something […] I think it was in a physics lesson but…all the girls were aware of what they weighed and Vicky was aware that she weighed more than two of her other friends at that time…which was difficult to believe later… (Parent of Vicky, interview: 87)

Similarly, Lara wrote in a poster:

> I used to be overweight and I remember one time at school when the whole class got weighed and the teacher said "oh it's the big one" and I was the heaviest in the year! (Lara, poster)

Whilst body perfection codes appear to be a new feature of schooling, they adopt a similar logic to notions of performativity applied to academic work. Indeed, such is the pressure of performativity that these girls continue to aspire towards "excellence" even if at severe cost to their health:

> I was starved when I took my GCSEs. I wasn't eating and I wasn't drinking, I was sitting there and I couldn't concentrate. I was really dizzy.

> INT: Did your teachers know you were ill?

> Yeah, but it was important that I sat the GCSEs and got the grades. (Karen)

Despite the anxiety and pressure that these young people feel, they continue to strive towards excellence while remaining silent within the school contexts about their concerns. Rarely did these young women express any concerns within school as to how problematic these experiences were. Our evidence suggests that many of them felt that they lacked control in most of the exchanges and interactions described above. Yet they had much they wanted to say. They wanted to be seen, heard and valued for "who they were" and what they had to say yet, alarmingly, most felt unable to express their concerns in school or, indeed, with their families.

However, our analysis is not simply concerned with voice as the expression of what can and cannot be expressed during pedagogical interaction. Rather than focusing on student voice per se, as some literal expression of what can and cannot be said, we have begun to explore how these young women as "subjects are positioned through power relations and the social or academic classifications they sustain."[37] Specifically, we were interested in how these young women have to manage the contradiction that the neo-liberal subject seems to offer promise and opportunity as a legitimate voice for them as young middle-class women, yet does not translate easily into having a voice from which to express a subversive or dissenting discourse within performative education. Their commentaries are therefore a stark reminder of the need to "distinguish between the social identity shaped within the external fields, and those generated within the classificatory relations of schooling."[38]

It would be all to easy to explain this situation as a simple outcome of the social dynamics of schooling, where the classificatory relation (the strength of boundaries; see Bernstein[39]) between student and teacher establishes the voice or the legitimate subject position from which to speak. Indeed, it is the case that for many of these young women, the relationships between teacher and taught were almost invariably strongly classified and overly hierarchical. However, there is always the risk that this oversimplifies the idea that one either has or does not have voice within pedagogical relations, again reducing voice to some expression in interaction. Using a concept of voice as self-expression, it would be all too easy to invoke false dichotomies, in this case around whether or not these young women "had voice" within the schooling process, and also to generate unhelpful epistemological distinctions between "acting subject" and "acted upon subject" as some reflection of self-determination and agency. A cursory reading of this data might inadvertently lead us to conclude that these young people were simply powerless in these educational contexts, or their problems merely discursive reflections of pressures endemic in society and schools.

In order to avoid perpetuating these dualisms, we have attempted to explore the "relocation of voice in the context of the pedagogic encounter and to understand its complexity, diversity and significance."[40] We have explored the impact of body pedagogies not only in terms of the relay of power relations and codes through pedagogy, but also in trying to make sense of the contradictory nature of the voices of these young women we have investigated, and how they have struggled to find space to resist these messages because of the "relations within pedagogy." Following Bernstein, Arnot and Reay (2004), we have therefore sought to distinguish between voice and message. In Bernstein's terms:

> The positioning of the subject creates the "voice" of the subject but not the specific message. The "voice" sets the limits on what can be a legitimate message. To create a message beyond those limits is to change "voice". Such a change entails changing the degree of insulation, which initially was the condition for the specialty of the original "voice". [41]

There are three interconnected features of the production of pupil voice within these performative pedagogies that we wish to expand upon, which we suggest reveal more nuanced and complex relations of power in the production of pedagogic voice. Firstly, these are young women who as middle-class, academic high achievers ordinarily demonstrate that they recognise the rules of particular pedagogies, and thus in some ways acquire a legitimate pedagogical voice:

> There are pupils, however, who have acquired the pedagogic voice that teachers expect and respond to the process of consultation. Their voices are articulate, reflexive, focused and appear to be independently constructed. Their voice with its associated messages indicates that they have learnt both the recognition and realization rules not just of academic learning, but also the framing in which such learning is articulated.[42]

Secondly, and consequently, they found themselves in a position of having to "cope" to protect their fragile educational identities in circumstances that routinely provided opportunities for their evaluation and demise. Thirdly, however, they did not simply "read" or "recycle" these expectations uncritically, nor were they cultural dopes. To construct "voice" as some reflection of this, of being acted upon, would be to view body pedagogies in an overly deterministic way and to underplay the capacity of individuals to recontextualise and reinterpret information, albeit within discursive frames set by the policies, pedagogies and curriculum of schools. Indeed, within an interview setting, these young women were critical of both the limitations of weight-focused approaches to health and of the performative cultures which rendered them (and their bodies) little more than a statistic in the education process:

> Food tech is a big problem because my teachers are always passing the message that fat is bad and that we all need to cut down, which isn't true because we are teenagers and we are growing. This message needs to be turned around because it is not helpful for some people, that is all they need to convince them to stop eating. (Vicky, diary)

Vicky's comments proffered both a critique of body pedagogies and the need to contest them. She felt unable, however, to resist this message or challenge teachers about it. Similarly, Ellie commented that her headmaster "*didn't really seem to care about his students*," while Carrie commented that she felt students weren't "*treated as individuals*" within school but just stereotyped or categorised in relation to abilities. These young women therefore appeared to be cognisant of the "presence of dominant and dominating voices in the classroom."[43] However, as Bernstein notes, one may be aware of the recognition rules of particular pedagogies (for example, recognising their position with performative cultures), but may not possess the realisation rules from which to speak from a legitimate voice. The interesting thing about performative body pedagogies is that even these students, who "fit an idealised, usually middle-class template,"[44] may find the production of pedagogic voice in these contexts particularly limiting.

Our interest has turned towards the distinctiveness of voice within these pedagogic relations as a way of exploring, both epistemologically and ontologically, the tensions between these young women's identification of problematic discourse and the subject positions from which one might construct a dissenting voice. As students, they know that they will be recognised for displaying particular forms of physical, cultural and linguistic capital.[45] If they portray the correct (valued) embodied attributes and dispositions, they will be better placed to express themselves within current educational structures. They are all high achievers, excelling within both their studies and other school activities. Here is the paradox of voice within educational settings; according to Bernstein, "the voice limits the range of legitimate potential of the message."[46] These young women are perhaps better equipped to talk the language of

performativity, thus acquiring a legitimate voice from which to be heard within the culture of schools. However, this capital is achieved only via an investment in neo-liberal discourses. They all talk of taking responsibility to make particular futures possible or available through their actions and planning in the here and now. Failure to comply would be tantamount to losing both a social and pedagogical position.

Rather than challenge the very structures that would denounce their voice, these young women came to individualise and personify the pressures of performativity. In drawing upon Arnot and Reay's *sociology of pedagogic voice*,[47] one can see how in these cases, "pedagogies construct the voice/message which teachers and researchers hear." In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising, though rather problematic, that the search for perfection and performance becomes embodied in the lives and personalities of those young people subject to it, often supported and endorsed by the languages of counselling and psychology invoked to "explain them", which they quickly learn. Some who experience this sense of never being able to obtain what is asked of them in a performative culture gradually define themselves as "perfectionists" and see only themselves to blame when they fail. In Mia's view, "because we're all perfectionists, we're all very competitive, we all have the same personality. I think it's a type A in psychology." Commentaries like Mia's give some insight into how voice is produced through a complex interplay between wider social identities and the classificatory relations within the communicative contexts of performativity. As Arnot and Reay suggest, "the student voices heard in processes of consultation are not in fact independently constructed 'voices,' rather they are 'the messages' created by *particular pedagogical contexts*."[48]

As we've elsewhere reported,[49] these pupils are found in a position of having to "cope" to protect their fragile educational identities in circumstances that routinely provide opportunities for their evaluation and demise. Pupils who may begin by explaining their failure disparagingly with reference to their teachers are inured to going on more damagingly to complete the explanation with reference to their own ability or embodied selves; *"it is my choice to want to do well."* Many of them had literally embodied (and could "voice") the kind "of meritocratic principles that explain any failure to 'achieve' and to 'have' as *personal failure*."[50]

> It was the summer after I had got in [to her new school before coming to the clinic] and I was really worried about going, like getting tense about... like...everything has to be right cos *I'm, like, a control freak*...um and I think that's, I think that's how it started...well everything has to be perfect. (Vicky)

When positioned as "my choice," it becomes very difficult to take up a subjectivity that expresses dissent against prevailing cultural and pedagogical constraints; in essence, there is no voice from which to construct alternative or subversive messages. Instead, these young women come to individualise and embody the pressures and imperatives to excel. Indeed, their radical actions were often intended to subvert performative culture – shedding weight was a way of saying, "Now I have 'no body', I am in control; see me as a person, for who I really am."

Our task as researchers becomes increasingly complex at this point, since we found that these young women were defining themselves in ways that made us uncomfortable as researchers, and "we must recognise and acknowledge how hard it is to learn from voices we do not want to hear."[51] Although many of these young women were critical of cultures of healthism, and performativity in education, they nonetheless drew upon and reified these definitions

to make sense of themselves. In addition to this, they were individualising, pathologising and criticising themselves in ways that invoke evocative reactions for us as researchers. How are we to represent these stories without reifying the potentially damaging features of performativity? By utilising the concept of voice to "re-imagine and re-position students," could this "reinforce rather than disrupt existing social conditions and dominant attainment of power and participation?"[52] Saukko[53] captures these dilemmas succinctly, stating that in her research on eating disorders she was "torn between my feminist commitment to be true to the women's voices and my feminist commitment to criticize discourses that define us in problematic ways."[54] She asks:

> How can we be true to and respect the inner experiences of people and at the same time critically assess the cultural discourses that form the very stuff from which our experiences are made?

This is an ethical minefield when we consider that these young women are complicit with perfomative features of education, and in particular, of the body, in order to find a legitimate way to ironically contest it. In Kristeva's[55] terms, one might even consider that a process of abjection (see also, Davies, 2004) finds expression in these young women's bodies:

> We may call it a border: abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger.[56]

In this sense, there is a process of both "incorporation" and "expulsion," of both horror and pleasure. More specifically, through self-starvation and extreme thinness it seems that young women are able to find a legitimate voice ("incorporation") from which to challenge ("expulsion") some of the social conditions of the way their bodies are schooled. It paradoxically draws upon discourses of neo-liberalism whilst also finding a way to offer some form of resistance to them and thereby convey certain messages:

> As we have seen, within discourses of healthism, thinness becomes the marker of the good student, self-controlled citizen, the subject who is conforming to predetermined norms around the body. It is very much about the neo-liberal individual who is willing to work on themselves, demonstrate self-control etc.[57]

In this sense, the voice is constructed by these performative health pedagogies which via its moral principle bestow particular privileges on particular abilities, performances and bodies; a complex interplay between pedagogy and social subjectivities and the regulative principles of performativity. The body was thus utilised by these young women as a way of essentialising who they were, in an effort to stand out (and voice who they were) within a performative culture; they wanted to be seen, recognised and heard, but also as part of the process of realisation. As Hayley explains:

> I always used to look at my friends and think that I wanted to be as good, or as pretty, or as clever as them. So I decided that not eating was a way that I could maybe achieve that.

Their narratives intimated not just a "desire" to be heard within performative education. It also announced the "right" to be heard, albeit articulated with a degree of complicity in the notion of a neo-liberal "unitary" self – extreme weight loss emerges as an "identity," a "unitary self" which is strongly classified (boundaried) by themselves and others:

> It's like what I've found at school is that, well, as I've put on my poster, I was just *branded*, that was just who I was…because it made me feel special, it made me feel that I was more important than everybody else… Because you have the dominants, the leaders, the thinkers, I was just the anorexic, that was who I was…And when this other girl at the school became anorexic, I felt that I had been pushed out of my place and I was furious… (Lauren)

As Valerie Walkerdine[58] has argued, this has particular implications for girls of middle-class status, since the "qualities ascribed to femininity are understood as the central carriers of the new 'middle-class individuality,' building upon the long-established incitement to women to become producers of themselves as objects of the gaze." Faced with these conflicting tensions, the response by most of the young women in our study was to position their desire to be thin as opposing rather than conforming to social pressures, so as to construct a position of "rebel" through the self-directed individualism of liberal ideology.[59] In many ways, the narratives of these young women illustrate the "tense and often contradictory interactions between social voices and pedagogic voices, between dominant and dominated voice, and between voice and what Berstein calls *sub voices and yet to be voiced.*"[60]

The voice, representing the mode of recognition, has the power to constrain the message. As these young women search for alternative ways in which to construct message, in the hope it may transform "voice," it becomes "condemned to psychopathology because illness (depression and eating disorders) is the only way in which it can be spoken."[61]

> I want people to recognize my talents. I want to be successful because I'm talented, not because I am ill. (Lauren)

The consequence of all this is that the anxiety they feel within these performative cultures becomes a suppressed discourse. Even their anorexia is constructed as part of the "obligation to be free"[62] within the biographical project, "as if it were an outcome of individual choices." The thin body in these educational contexts is therefore both compliant and resistant; it challenges the logic of restitution, the authority of parents, teachers and even the medical profession, in the search for a sense of subjectivity that is seen, recognised and "independent." The capacity to challenge and change the voice is inherent in the message, according to Bernstein, as there are "potential contradictions and dilemmas in the order created by the principle of classification which serve as sources for the 'yet to be voiced', for alternative discourse."[63] Changing voice and effecting change in the all-consuming, ever-powerful, performative conditions of formal education are not, however, one and the same thing.

CONCLUSION

In our work we have explored what young women have to say about the social and epistemic conditions of learning. We, like others,[64] believe that much can be learned from a consideration of what constitutes student voice and its significance in mediating knowledge acquisition.[65] We also share Arnot and Reay's[66] view that "the concept of voice, whilst associated with democratic agendas of social inclusion and participation, is nevertheless deeply problematic, since from a Bernsteinian point of view, power is itself produced by the very power relations which it is meant to help transform." In this paper, we have attempted to refocus attention toward not just *what* students' voice, but to *how* they voice it. It raises questions not only about methodological issues of researching voice, but also, of spaces for students to find a legitimate voice from which to express concerns within educational settings. Where, for example, are the spaces for young people to recognise and resist the constitutive power of performative educational discourses that produce particular notions of self? As Guy Claxton reminds us, young people's stress is no longer a series of "private troubles," as C Wright Mills put it. It is a public issue. Mopping up distress with chemicals or counselling doesn't get to the heart of the matter.[67]

The accounts we have presented above allude to the ways in which certain school cultures grounded in notions of perfection and performance create a number of social and emotional anxieties, not only for those who may "fail" in such cultures, but for those who may be academically successful. Within such cultures, the quest to present a unitary self within an endless stream of options requires a great deal of "psychological work"[68] on the part of these young women. Even where "success" is achieved, they report a constant sense of anxiety, failure and of coping with this via psychopathological narratives of extreme body modification. Consequently, they use their bodies to signify (and voice) both acceptance and rejection of contemporary education cultures, to announce their distinction while simultaneously stating corporeally that they do not and can not "belong".Their embodied voices thus offer testimony to the claim that when discourse moves from one location to another, a transformation always takes place – there is space in which ideology (and the interests of pupils, teachers and others) can play.

Representing these voices, both in narrative and embodied form, raises a number of methodological and ethical dilemmas. Not least are those arising from the tensions created from the presentation of narratives where young women are critical of performative culture, yet also draw upon its discursive resources to make sense of themselves.[69] Representing the nuance and contradiction in such voices in such a way that teachers, policymakers, and health educators can hear and act upon them may be an important (and legitimate) goal for voice research.

The issue of voice is both sociologically and educationally significant, because it raises fundamental questions as to what knowledge/s and what alternative educational codes (and their attendant ethics and ontologies) are to be enacted in schools and other pedagogical contexts if students are to feel valued, and from where these are likely to emerge. This, at one level, is to ask questions of central government and policymakers, but at another also to reflect on the merits of existing "solutions" – for example, "curriculum supplements" in the form of

media literacy programmes addressing media representations of the body, slenderness and health. These are not, in our view, in any way a sufficient means of addressing the performative cultures of schools and wider society that clearly are so damaging to some students' health. Indeed, such measures may serve only to obfuscate or distract attention from consideration of the alternative codes that could find a place in education to generate social relations that are less damaging to all students' health.

1   See E Rich, "Anorexic (Dis)Connection," *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 28:3 (2006), 284-305; E Rich and J Evans, "'Fat Ethics' – the Obesity Discourse and Body Politics," *Social Theory and Health*, 3:4 (2005) 341-58; E Rich and J Evans, "Making Sense of Eating Disorders in Schools," Discourse: *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26:2 (2005), 247-62.

2   S Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage* (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2003).

3   Ibid.

4   D Hursh, "The Growth of High-stakes Testing in the US: Accountability, Markets and the Decline in Educational Equality," *British Education Research Journal*, 31:5 (2005), 605-22.

5   Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education and acts as the official body for inspecting schools in the UK.

6   J Perryman, "Panoptic Performativity and School Inspection Regimes: Disciplinary Mechanisms and Life under Special Measures," *Journal of Education Policy*, 21:2 (2006), 147-61.

7   H Lucey and D Reay, "Carrying the Beacon of Excellence: Social Class Differentiation and Anxiety at a Time of Transition," *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17:3 (2002), 321-36, at 321.

8   Ball, *Class Strategies*, 216.

9   See J Evans, E Rich and R Holroyd, "Disordered Eating and Disordered Schooling: What Schools do to Middle Class Girls," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25:2 (2004), 123-42.

10 S Ball, "Performativities and Fabrications in the Education Economy: Towards the Performative Society," in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education*, ed. S Ball (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 141-55, at 143.

11 See J Evans, E Rich, B Davies and R Allwood, *Fat Fabrications: Obesity Education and Eating Disorders* (London: Routledge, in press).

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 L Burrows and J Wright, "Prescribing Practices: Shaping Healthy Children in Schools," *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15:1 (2006), 83-98.

16 Ball, "Performativities and Fabrications."

17 M Arnot and D Reay, "A Sociology of Pedagogic Voice: Power, Inequality and Pupil Consultation," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28:3 (2007), 311-25.

18 See P Bourdieu, *The State Nobility* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

19 Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 312.

20 Ibid.

21 Ball, *Class Strategies*.

22 J Doyle and R A Bryant Waugh, "Epidemiology," in *Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. B Lask and R Bryant Waugh (Hove: Psychology Press; London: Taylor and Francis, 2000).

23   J Zylinska, *The Ethics Of Cultural Studies* (London: Continuum, 2005), 21.

24   P Saukko, "Between Voice and Discourse: Quilting Interviews on Anorexia," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6:3 (2000), 299-317.

25   Zylinska, *Ethics Of Cultural Studies*.

26   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 311.

27   P Willis, *Learning to Labour: Why Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Farnborough, England: Saxon House, 1977).

28   For example, *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Ribbens and R Edwards (Sage, London, 1997).

29   R Moore and J Muller, "The Discourse of 'Voice' and the Problem of Knowledge and Identity in the Sociology of Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20 (1999), 189-206.

30   M Fielding, "Beyond 'Voice': New Roles, Relations, and Contexts in Researching with Young People," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28:3 (2007), 301-10.

31   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 312.

32   See B Bernstein, *Class Codes and Control: Vol. 4. The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990); B Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research and Critique* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

33   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 312.

34   Bernstein, Pedagogy, *Symbolic Control and Identity*.

35   J Evans and B Davies, "The Embodiment of Consciousness: Bernstein, Health and Schooling," in *Body Knowledge and Control*, ed. J Evans, B Davies and J Wright (London: Routledge, 2004).

36   "Lydia" is a pseudonym, as are all other names used throughout the paper.

37   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 316.

38   Ibid.

39   Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*.

40   M Arnot and D Reay, "Power, Pedagogic Voices and Pupil Talk: The Implications for Pupil Consultation as Transformative Practice," in *Knowledge, Power and Educational Reform: Applying the Sociology of Basil Bernstein*, ed. R Moore, M Arnot, J Beck and H Daniels (London: Routledge, 2006), 75-94, at 77.

41   Bernstein, *Class Codes*, 28.

42   Arnot and Reay, 2005: 90.

43   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 320.

44   Fielding, "Beyond 'Voice'," 302.

45   See Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*.

46   Bernstein, *Class Codes*.

47   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 311.

48   Ibid., 317.

49   J Evans, E Rich, R Allwood, and B Davies, "Fat Fabrications," *The British Journal of Teaching Physical Education*, 36:4 (Winter 2005), 18-21.

50   H Lucey, J Melody and V Walkerdine, "Uneasy Hybrids: Psychosocial Aspects of Becoming Educationally Successful Working-class Young Women," *Gender and Education*, 15:3 (2003), 285-99, at 285.

51   A Cook-Sather, "Resisting the Impositional Potential of Student Voice Work: Lessons for Liberatory Educational Work from Poststructural Feminist Critiques of Critical Pedagogy," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28:3 (2007), 389-403.

52   Ibid., 389.

53   Saukko, "Between Voice and Discourse."

54   Ibid., 299.

55   Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9-10.

56   Ibid.

57   See E Rich, "Exploring Constructions of the Body, (Ill)health and Identity in Schools: The Case of Anorexia Nervosa" (2003) as at http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid3/Rich%20(2003)%20Final%20paper.pdf as last accessed on 20 October 2007.

58   V Walkerdine, "Reclassifying Upward Mobility: Femininity and the Neo Liberal Subject," *Gender and Education*, 15:3 (2003), 237-48.

59   See M Wetherall and S White, "Fear of Fat: Young Women Talk About Eating, Dieting and Body Image," unpub. MS (Open University Press, 1992); H. Malson, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Poststructuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa* (London: Routledge, 1998).

60   Arnot and Reay, "Sociology of Pedagogic Voice," 318.

61   Walkerdine, "Reclassifying Upward Mobility."

62   N Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, A Barry, T Osborne and N Rose, eds (London: UCL Press, 1996), ix.

63   Bernstein, *Class Codes*, 30.

64   Arnot and Reay, "Power, Pedagogic Voices."

65   Ibid., 75.

66   Ibid., 75.

67   G Claxton, "Building Learning Power: A New End for Education?," keynote address, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference (6-9 September 2006), 3.

68   Lucey et al., "Uneasy Hybrids."

69   See also Saukko, "Between Voice and Discourse."

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