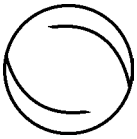

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The Temporality of Power and the Power of Temporality: Imaginary Future Selves in Professional Service Firms

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Abstract

This paper extends existing understandings of power, resistance and subjectivity in professional service organizations by developing an analysis of how these relate to temporality. Drawing in particular on Hoy's reading of the Foucauldian account of temporality, we conceive of disciplinary power regimes and resistance as inherently future-oriented, or, to use Ybema's term, postalgic. In moving beyond the extant research focus on self-disciplined and/or counter-resistant professional selves, we draw attention to the imaginary future self as an employee response to disciplinary power. In contrast to the future orientation of disciplinary power, this response envisages the future as a discontinuous break with the present which we examine as a form of resistant postalgia. Building on in-depth qualitative data gathered at two professional service firms, we explain how imaginary future selves can shed new light on the interplay of power, resistance and subjectivity.

Keywords

deferment, identity, postalgia, power, resistance, temporality

Introduction

It is a common experience for people at work to imagine that in the future they will escape and live a different kind of life. Indeed, it is not unlikely that this is as true for academics, including readers of this journal, as it is for anyone else. They "should" be thinking about publishing the next paper, applying for the next grant, getting the next promotion. What if, instead, they are imagining a way of life free of such demands? What do such imaginary futures mean, and what are their effects? In this paper we consider that question not, in fact, in terms of academic work but in the context of

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professional service firms, specifically management consultancies. We identify two distinctive modes of future-orientation within these workplaces. The first we refer to as "the temporality of power". Here, the future is conceived of in terms of ongoing improvement and success within organizations in ways potentially consistent with organizational power structures. The second, we refer to as "the power of temporality". Here, the future is conceived of in terms of a radical break with organizational notions of improvement and success in ways potentially resistant to organizational power structures. Each is associated with a different conception of identity in that each creates a different narrative of the self in time. The first conceives of identity as something to be endlessly worked upon, in an endless journey of "becoming"; the second conceives of a time when identity work is finished, not a journey but a destination.

That organizations and identities are connected in a multiplicity of ways is now an established part of our discipline (Kenny, Whittle, & Willmott, 2011). As organizations seemingly increasingly envisage organizational members' identities as a target of control, identity has become a contested terrain. Numerous studies (e.g., Alvesson, 2004; Grey, 1998; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Mueller, Carter, & Ross-Smith, 2011) have shown how professional services firms (PSFs) are a site of especially intensive "identity regulation" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Although the processes of identity regulation may be theorized in a variety of ways, the literature has been particularly shaped by the influence of Foucauldian conceptions of disciplinary power, showing how through techniques of normalization and surveillance, PSFs attempt to shape and discipline professional service workers' identities (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2005; Bergström, Hasselbladh, & Kärreman, 2009; Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998). Such research has emphasized how disciplinary power systems work through creating aspirational selves that potentially align their identity trajectory to the organization (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Grey, 1994; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). The exercise of power does not only lead to disciplined and docile selves but can engender ambiguity and cynical distancing (Mueller et al., 2011; Whittle, 2005). However, ironically, rather than being an effective form of resistance, such distancing and ambiguity can constitute what has been called a "counter-resistance" as individuals fail to construct alternative positive identities (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009; see also Collinson, 2003; Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

The present paper seeks to contribute to this body of research by focusing on the significance of temporality, defined as the experience and construction of time, for disciplinary power, subjectivity and resistance in PSFs. Whilst temporality has been implicit in some studies of PSFs (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Bergström et al., 2009; Grey, 1994), there has been little detailed empirical and/or theoretical discussion of the temporality of disciplinary power and identity. For example, Kenny et al.'s (2011) otherwise comprehensive overview of the literature on identity and organizations does not discuss temporality at all. Indeed, more generally, the relative neglect of the topic of temporality has been recently pointed out by Ybema (2010, p. 483): studies have "not systematically explor[ed] how 'temporal resources', i.e. the past, present and future, are utilized and deployed within organizational and managerial discourse to disrupt, transform, develop, discover, or restore a sense of collective self". But whilst Ybema (2010) is mostly concerned with organizational identity, we seek to bring temporality into focus in relation to disciplinary power, resistance and employee identity in PSFs.

Specifically, our first contribution lies in bringing in insights from David Hoy's (2004, 2009a, 2009b) recent discussions of Foucault's work to conceive of disciplinary power regimes as inherently future-oriented. In putting forward this reading, Hoy, long-established as one of the world's leading commentators on Foucault's work (see Hoy, 1986, 1988, 2004), provides a corrective to what was arguably a neglect of temporality in the dominant interpretation of disciplinary power within organization studies. On Hoy's reading, power is exercised as individuals' constructions of

future identities are targeted, placing them in a constant disciplinary state of becoming. The second contribution is then to develop how such a future orientation, expressive of what Ybema (2004, 2010) has termed "postalgia", can add explanation for the lack of effective resistance or, more precisely, the counter-resistance found in previous studies of PSFs. We suggest that counter-resistance comes about because although individuals may distance themselves from the present, they still envisage the future in the terms prescribed by disciplinary power regimes.

By contrast, we draw attention to "imaginary future selves" as a response to disciplinary power regimes, that is, a future imagined not in the terms prescribed by disciplinary power but breaking radically with those terms, typically in the form of dreams of escape from the corporate world in favour of a freer and more creative existence. Moreover, these dreams are of a settled and finished project so that whereas under disciplinary power the self is something always to be worked on and improved, the imaginary future self is in some way freed from this constant identity work and no further change is envisaged once the dream is realized. Imaginary futures selves seem to appropriate the future for the construction of resistant selves; thus they have the potential to subvert the future-oriented temporality of disciplinary power into a temporality for resistance. Yet such resistance is not unproblematic: its particular construction of the "future as fiction" (Adam, 2010) can risk the deferment rather than the enactment of the alternative and resistant self. We thus ask: how does the construction of an imaginary future self relate to the future-oriented temporality of disciplinary regimes of power? Does it constitute a form of resistance to the temporality of disciplinary power? These questions are addressed through an analysis of qualitative data gathered at two PSFs, more specifically two management consultancy firms.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the issues of power, resistance and subjectivity as they appear in Foucauldian organization studies in general and studies of PSFs in particular. We then provide an initial discussion of temporality as a prelude to introducing Hoy's account of the temporal nature of disciplinary power, and show how this account enables a re-reading of existing studies of disciplinary power and resistance in PSFs. From this, we then introduce the notion of imaginary future selves as a possible appropriation of temporality for the purpose of resistance. By this point, we will have established a platform to investigate this possibility empirically, and, after providing methodological details, use our study of two PSFs to do this. The presentation of the empirical material pursues two main themes. The first is to show the temporality of disciplinary power in the firms, and in particular its future-orientation or postalgia: the organizationally prescribed ways of envisaging the future. The second theme draws attention to the temporality of resistance, and in particular the way that some employees construct imaginary future selves which constitute a radical break with organizationally prescribed ways of envisaging the future and so engage in postalgic resistance. A concluding discussion reviews the contributions and complexities of using temporality to understand power, resistance and identity in PSFs.

Power, Resistance and Subjectivity

Power, resistance and subjectivity have become central concepts in studies of organizations, most especially those within the Foucauldian tradition. Research has examined how in organizations power is exercised through discourses and practices, such as those relating to corporate culture programmes, teamwork, monitoring or HRM systems, which target the very selves of organizational members (e.g., Casey, 1995; du Gay, 1996; Grey, 1994; Kamoche, Pang, & Wong, 2011; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Townley, 1993). Following Foucauldian theorizations, identity is conceptualized in terms of discursive articulations that are contingent, non-rational, contradictory and multiple, arising through

disciplinary power-knowledge interrelations (Ybema et al., 2009). In the process of "subjectification" power is seen to "categorize the individual, mark him [sic] by his own individuality, attach him to his own identity, impose a law of truth upon him which he must recognize and which others must recognize in him" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). Rather than viewing power as negative, repressive and executed in a top-down manner, following Foucault (1976/1998, 1977), power is inherently productive: "it produces reality […] the individual and knowledge" (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). Power is exercised in defining and fixing identity through the disciplinary techniques of "normalization", i.e., measurement, assessment and categorization, surveillance and confession. On the basis of these insights, organizations are regarded as disciplinary discursive spheres in which power crafts certain meanings, values and knowledge, thereby producing "disciplined" organizational selves (Rose, 1989; see also Knights & Willmott, 1989; Deetz, 1992; Clegg, 1990; Townley, 1993, 1995; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Webb, 2006).

Importantly, subjects are not regarded as oppressively determined by disciplinary power regimes but as capable of engaging in resistance. For Foucault (1976/1998), resistance relates to power in a dialectical fashion (see also Mumby, 2005). Discursively constructed and embedded in local power regimes, resistance is immanently part of any power network: "the strictly relational character of power relationships … depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network." (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 95). Given that resistance interrelates with power, it is conceptualized as equally micro-spatial and omnipresent (also see Foucault, 1977). A number of studies (e.g., Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1993; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Parker, 2000; Trethewey, 1997) have shown how organizational members "engage with, resist, accommodate, reproduce, and transform the interpretive possibilities and meaning systems that constitute daily organizational life" (Mumby, 2005, p. 22). This line of research emphasizes how subjects have agency to resist organizational disciplinary power regimes through articulating opposing identities (Bergström & Knights, 2006; Collinson, 2003; Mumby, 2005; see also Newton, 1998)—something that is in itself a contradictory and complex process (Collinson, 1992; Kondo, 1990; Thomas & Davies, 2005). However, studies have argued that such forms of micro-resistance may in fact be counterproductive: the anti-identity creates an illusion of autonomy which provides subjects the necessary space for participating even more fervently in the regulatory organizational practices (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2006; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009).

Professional service firms: From disciplinary power regimes to counter-resistance

Professional service firms (PSFs) have been central sites for studying disciplinary power regimes (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2001; Bergström et al., 2009; Brown & Lewis, 2011; Covaleski et al., 1998; Grey, 1994; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004, 2009; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Whittle, 2005). The reason for this is not hard to see. Given that professional service workers are granted relatively high levels of autonomy, cultural forms of control aiming at the production of self-disciplined professional workers are prevalent (Alvesson, 2004). One might say that identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) is built into the fabric of their operations. Thus PSFs display a variety of disciplinary techniques that attempt to align individual identities in accordance with the professional service culture (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2000; Bergström et al., 2009; Covaleski et al., 1998; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Mueller et al., 2011). The notion of professionalism is not so much concerned with a particular occupational group, body of knowledge or

expertise, but rather refers to a certain conduct of selfhood: that of "being a professional" (Fournier, 1999; Grey, 1998; Trethewey, 1999). PSFs place great emphasis on the socialization of their trainees (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005), whereby through various normalizing techniques "the corporatization of the self" (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004) takes place (Hodgson, 2004). Panoptic techniques are employed in the form of management by objectives and mentoring practices (Covaleski et al., 1998). With their monitoring, ranking and confessions, performance appraisals act as technologies of "discipline and punishment" (Bergström et al., 2009).

Grey's (1994) study of accountants demonstrated how self-disciplining arises as individuals regard the idea of career as a central means for realizing their project of the self. They approach organizational disciplinary techniques, such as ratings or job appraisals, as benevolent aids for career development and thus for self-realization. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), moreover, showed how the HRM system of a management consultancy firm exercises "aspirational control". It channels employees' career ambitions and ties them to the organization whereby disciplinary techniques of attribution, classification and ranking mechanisms are exercised—this link between aspirations, identity projects and disciplinary power has also been revealed by Thornborrow and Brown (2009), albeit in the context of the military rather than PSFs.

Research in this tradition has pointed out how PSF workers challenge and oppose these disciplinary power regimes (Bergström & Knights, 2006). They are shown to distance themselves from the professional discourses and practices through cynicism in search for psychic satisfaction and relief (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006). Similarly, Mueller et al. (2011) have recently demonstrated how, in contrast to Grey's (1994) findings, PSF workers regard disciplinary techniques, associated with networking, visibility and exposure, with ambivalence and cynicism rather than welcoming them as benevolent career aids. Importantly, Mueller et al. note that this does not constitute an effective form of resistance in terms of involving any overtly resistant acts. As mentioned, distancing, cynicism, ambivalence and so forth involve the construction of a divided or "dramaturgical" self (Collinson, 2003), which may ironically allow subjects to cope even better with the pressures placed upon them (see also Whittle, 2005). Kärreman and Alvesson (2009) have termed this "counter-resistance". They show how consultants discursively distance themselves from the corporate regimes yet still seek to display professional selves—something that counteracts and suffocates the possibility of effective resistance.

Thus, in brief and schematically, the story of the existing literature on disciplinary power in PSFs runs as follows: early studies emphasized the effectiveness of disciplinary power in constructing subjectivity; subsequent studies questioned this by pointing to resistance; later studies in turn questioned the efficacy of this resistance by drawing attention to its limitations and ambiguities. What, then, explains the apparent difficulties of resisting disciplinary power regimes in these kinds of contexts? In this paper, we suggest that one way to address this is through focusing on *temporality*. Specifically, the focus on temporality adds to our understanding of the workings of disciplinary power and the ways in which resistance to it may be ineffective or counter-productive.

Enter Temporality

Temporality and identity are inextricable; there is always a temporal dimension in how we understand, construct and experience ourselves. The phenomenological tradition, and Heidegger (1927/1996) in particular, has emphasized this. For Heidegger, the finitude of being, the unsurpassable future predicament of death, structures our entire being. The insights on temporality have influenced the narrative approach (Crites, 1971; Ricoeur, 1980) which has in turn been prominent

in studies of identity and organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Boje, 2001; Carlsen, 2006; Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004; Czarniawska, 1998; O'Connor, 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). From this perspective, our experience of time is inherently narrative; temporality "consists in the deep *unity* of past, present and future" (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 180) and this requires the narrative form (Crites, 1971, p. 301). Accordingly, our subjectivity becomes meaningful as a narrative, linking the past, present and future (McAdams, 1993).

Whilst these insights are enormously important for showing the significance of temporality, our focus differs in two ways: first, rather than viewing the narrative form as an inherent condition for identity construction, we look at how (narrative) identity constructions are a contingent product of the temporality of disciplinary power regimes. Thus, we stress how temporality is embedded in and interrelates with disciplinary power regimes (see also Mumby, 1987; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Halford & Leonard, 2005; Brown, 2006; Kuhn, 2006). Second and closely related, rather than assuming that the construction of meaningful identities requires temporal and hence narrative unity and coherence (e.g., Crites, 1971, p. 302), we study how they may involve discontinuity and change—something that Ybema (2010) has recently highlighted. The "imaginary future selves" we will explore as a form of resistance are meaningful for subjects precisely as they are discontinuous with the present (and past). With this in mind, we can now turn to a discussion of the temporality of power.

The temporality of power

Our ideas are particularly inspired by David Hoy's *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (2009a) and *The Temporality of Power* (2009b). Whilst there are many commentators on Foucault, both inside and outside organization studies, Hoy has for at least three decades been one of the world's leading scholars on Foucault and post-structuralism (e.g., Hoy, 1986, 1988, 2004). His recent writings are the first to provide a detailed philosophical discussion of temporality including, most importantly for us, its significance in Foucault's *oeuvre*. Foucault's writings on disciplinary power are largely seen as concerned with architecture (most famously the panopticon) or its metaphors (such as the "electronic panopticon") or, at least, this has been the dominant understanding of disciplinary power within the organizational literature. By contrast to this emphasis on the spatiality of discipline, Hoy argues that, for Foucault, temporality was central to the workings of power. Specifically, Foucault distinguishes the temporality of disciplinary power regimes from that of sovereignty: "whereas sovereignty depends on the idea of precedence, and is thus essentially connected to the past, discipline looks ahead and is the more oriented to the present and the future than the past" (Hoy, 2009b, p. 12).

In his lectures on *Psychiatric Power* Foucault explored how the regime of power changed in the 18th century towards continuously targeting "individual's time, life and body" (Foucault, 2008, p. 47). This differs from the power of sovereignty, which is exercised "discontinuously in ceremonies, rituals, and narratives that re-establish the tradition from time to time" (Hoy, 2009a, pp. 207–208):

> The disciplinary system does not need this discontinuous ritual, more or less cyclical game of ceremonies and marks in order to function. Disciplinary power is not discontinuous but involves a procedure of continuous control instead. In the disciplinary system, one is not available for someone's possible use, one is perpetually under someone's gaze, or, at any rate, in the situation of being observed. One is not then marked by action made once and for all, or by a situation from the start, but visible and always in the situation of being under constant observation. More precisely, we can say that there is no reference to act, an event, or an original right in the relationships of disciplinary power. (Foucault, 2008, p. 47)

For Foucault, the power of sovereignty is based on the past, namely on blood, divine right or birth and this is (re-)established in discontinuous events. It "looks backward to the principle that founds its authority" (Hoy, 2009b, p. 12). By contrast, the disciplinary regime of power is future-oriented; through exercise it works continuously, stressing the future becomingness of the subject:

> Disciplinary power refers instead to … [an] optimum state. It *looks forward to the future* … There is a genetic polarization, a *temporal gradient in discipline*, exactly the opposite of the reference to precedence that is necessarily involved in relationships of sovereignty. All discipline entails this kinds of genetic course by which, from a point … something must develop such that discipline will keep going by itself. What is it, then, that ensures the permanent functioning of discipline, this kind of genetic continuity typical of disciplinary power? It is obviously not the ritual or cyclical ceremony, but exercise; progressive, graduated exercise will mark out the *growth* and *improvement of discipline on a temporal scale.* (Foucault, 2008, p. 47; emphasis added)

This highlights how temporality importantly shapes the nature, relations and efficacy of power. The workings of disciplinary power are based on a kind of teleological future accent given the emphasis on "improvement". The present is then approached as a platform to prepare and work on oneself towards the improved future self. The becomingness of the subject, the vision of a better future self, constitutes an inherent feature of disciplinary power regimes that operate through continuous exercise.

The temporality of disciplinary power in professional service firms

It is this future-oriented temporality that is also apparent in professional service firms and, we suggest, can therefore add explanation to the workings of disciplinary power discussed by previous research. For instance, in Grey's (1994) study the disciplinary effects of career as a project of self result from the emphasis placed on potentiality and the "becoming" of the subject. In this way, work and career are imbued with positive meaning beyond the immediate, present experience—namely by reference to the future. The notions of "career" and "project" imply a trajectory, under which various aspects of life are subsumed. A certain potentiality surrounds every aspect of life, which therefore needs to be carefully managed and calibrated in the name of career. Thus, the disciplinary effects Grey observed relate to the idea of potentiality and trajectory towards an improved future state that underpin the notion of career.

The future temporality of disciplinary power can, moreover, extend our understanding of the link between aspirations, power and control (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Again, the term aspiration denotes the idea of an improved, better, higher or ideal future self as compared to that of the present. Disciplinary power regimes target these aspirations as they work "through tying the self with a particular career idea and prospect, linked to a prescribed identity project, thus forming a *trajectory*, including a sense of a projected self (associated with anticipated position)" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 720). Thus the future orientation of disciplinary power regimes, expressed in the idea of project, trajectory and prospect, is central; in the name of aspiration and improvement towards the future subjects are in a "continuous process of 'becoming'" (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009, p. 371), whereby their selves are regulated through the disciplinary techniques of rankings, assessments, and monitoring aimed at self-improvement (see also Casey, 1995).[1]

This future temporality of disciplinary power is most explicitly noted in Anderson-Gough et al.'s (2001) study of the socialization of accountants (but without placing it on a firm theoretical basis as we intend to do here). Here trainees' temporal visioning is regulated by organizational discourses and practices; their relation to the present is almost entirely mediated through the

aspirations of becoming "accountants of the future" (Anderson-Gough et al., 2001, p. 117). Resulting from this, sacrifices in the present are regarded as essential for, and largely understood through, their future prospect.

Thus the concept of temporality brings into focus how disciplinary power regimes work through a future accent, shaping organizational members' aspirations, outlooks and prospects. It explains how disciplinary power works continuously— that is "discipline will keep going by itself" (Foucault, 2008, p. 47)—whereas the future is something to be reached and thus never realized, the present is inherently constructed as the basis for preparing and improving oneself towards this future. Individuals are placed in a constant state of becoming, of "growth and improvement" (Foucault, 2008, p. 47), making them susceptible to disciplinary technologies in the present.

Focusing on the temporality of power can also contribute to our understanding of "counter-resistance" (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009) in PSFs as it highlights how organizational members are caught up in an orientation to the future: whilst they may distance themselves from the present and the regulatory practices involved (e.g., the need to network, work long hours, etc.), they still embrace the future outlook and the ideal and aspirations produced by the disciplinary power regimes. Indeed, Anderson-Gough et al. (2001, p. 106) note: "many questioned the relevance of much of their formal examination training and, rather, saw the examination process as the 'hurdle' to preparing a course of future actions". Mueller et al. (2011) also observe how despite the subjective distancing from networking, HR games and evaluations, professional service workers still engage in these practices as they desire to move up the career. Thus, they embrace the very future-orientedness of disciplinary power.

This is also apparent in Bergström et al.'s (2009) study of consultants who submit themselves to all the pressure and pains of their work as they maintain "the belief that submission would not go on forever and would provide opportunities in the future" (2009, p. 186). Even if planning to leave the company, their understanding of self is regulated by the idea of development, advancement and improvement (see also Sturdy & Wright, 2008)—again indicative of the significance of the future for the workings of disciplinary power. Similarly, Kärreman and Alvesson's (2009) consultants voice "pain, frustration and lack of discretion—a subtext of slavery to a particular regime or a specific mode of being" (2009, p. 1135), yet at the same time place "a strong emphasis on career, development and high performance" (2009, p. 1123). As a result, there is little in terms of an "articulation of a 'positive' subject or identity position that would inform carrying through an inclination to resist" (2009, p. 1135).

So, despite tensions expressed in the present, consultants still construct themselves through the future aspiration of growing and developing as professional service workers. Their resistance is ineffective or even counter-productive as they are caught up in the future temporality of disciplinary power: the present is approached through the future and seen as a moment to prepare oneself for the future or as one of sacrifice and pain that will pass by as it is just a stage on the way to a better future. Since the future is always yet to come and one is never yet there, individuals remain in the continuous disciplinary state of becoming. The future then constitutes a terrain that is already always "colonized" by organizational discourse, making it difficult for subjects to construct alternative "positive" articulations of selfhood.

In summary, then, in this section we have suggested that an attention to temporality enables a better understanding of disciplinary power and, in particular, enables a re-reading of existing studies of disciplinary power and resistance in PSFs. We now seek to add to these studies by exploring how organizational members can break with the temporality of disciplinary power. Specifically, we investigate individual constructions of imaginary future selves that are not in line with the future trajectory of the disciplinary power regimes in PSFs. In the next section we elaborate on this notion of imaginary future selves.

Breaking with the temporality of disciplinary power: Imaginary future selves?

Although the relation of temporality and resistance has not been of central focus in discussions of disciplinary power in PSFs, it has featured in some studies of organizational change. Such studies show how employees are prone to draw upon memories of the past during times of organizational change (see Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001; Gabriel, 1993; McCabe, 2004; Strangleman, 1999). During change management initiatives employees may construct recalcitrant identities by drawing on nostalgic constructions of the past. Here the past assumes political significance, as it is typically invested with images of community, harmony and solidarity, which are contrasted with the present. Whilst nostalgia expresses some form of resistance to organizational change, managerial change discourse is characterized by a positive orientation to the future. Ybema (2004, 2010) has argued that the converse of employees' nostalgia for the past is the managerial valorization of a golden future full of possibilities and promises. He terms this future accent of managerial thinking "postalgia" and demonstrates how it offers a particular narrative of organizational identity (Ybema, 2010, p. 486). In a mirror image of nostalgia, postalgia expresses a certain discontent with the present and a longing for, and promise of, something better:

> postalgia is a mixture of bleak pessimism with huge optimism, of dystopian anxieties over decline and disaster with utopian desires for advancement, growth and success. It conjures up images of desirable and undesirable future selves. (Ybema, 2010, p. 486)

Reviewing a wide range of management scholarship, Ybema notes that "the future is seen as the ultimate point of reference for any managerial action ... [since it desires] to stay one step ahead of competitors, politicians and policy makers" (2004, p. 832; see also Grint, 1994; Pitsis, Clegg, Marosszeky, & Rura-Polley, 2003; Carr & Hancock, 2006). In this sense, Ybema's insights can be seen to further confirm what, following Hoy, we have termed the temporality of power, that is, the ways in which managerial disciplinary power regimes work through a future orientation. Ybema's notion of postalgia brings into focus how the promise of a better future is coupled with anxieties of a gloomy, perhaps even disastrous future (if one does not submit oneself to the disciplinary power regimes). Thus, the temporality of power works through the idea not only of an improved future but also of avoiding a feared future.

From this perspective, postalgia is the terrain for the operation of managerial power, while nostalgia is that of a counter-managerial resistance. One problem with nostalgia as resistance, though, is that it tends to "ignore the problem of the future leading to a different sense of the present" (Hoy, 2009a, p. 139). The future is "given up" as a territory for alternative imagination and thus there is the risk that nostalgia "blocks the possibility of new questions coming into being" (2009a, p. 139). In contrast to this, we can envisage forms of resistance which are themselves "postalgic" in character: imagining an idealized different future rather than a lost past.

There are indications of this in *The Time Bind*, where Hochschild (1997) describes how employees of a Fortune 500 company, "Amerco", cope with the difficulties of balancing work and family commitments by engaging in fantasies of the future. In these future fantasies they see themselves being able to fulfil all the demands they face at their job and from their families in the present. This represents a form of deferment, which serves to "evade the full recognition of the time bind" (1997, p. 235). The imaginary future of Amerco's employees is never enacted in reality and represents nothing but "repeatedly postponed plans" (1997, p. 249). Hochschild thus concludes that they perpetuate rather than serve to change the present. Tracey and Trethewey (2005) develop Hochschild's discussion by arguing that such deferment enables individuals to engage in "real-izing" the organizational "preferred self". The construction of a perpetually deferred self is seen to embody the employees' attempts to "make real" or take on the "preferred self" within their organization, as

they can "spend most of [their] resources on crafting a preferred, present-day self at work" (2005, p. 176). In a similar way, in his classic study *Engineering Culture*, Kunda (1992) refers to organizational members "constructing images of the more distant future" (1992, p. 165). He notes how, in relation to the future, this takes the form of fantasies of a different job with more "meaningful work" or a life of "affluent leisure" (1992, p. 166).

One of the key ways in which these kinds of fantasies and dreams of the future represent a break with disciplinary power is that they envisage a suspension of working upon the self. In other words, they do not just envisage a different future but a different kind of future. The temporality of disciplinary power is to insist that the self is always a work in progress, constantly in the "process of becoming" but never "arriving". The power of temporality may be thought of as the power to "arrive". The dream, once realized, is sufficient and no further change is conceived of. Instead, the future is one of stasis in which work on the self, the constant quest for change and improvement may cease. No doubt this, too, is a postalgic idealization—in that it might never be realized—but, aspirationally, it offers a decisive shift from the self as a never-ending journey to the self as a destination point. In a sense, it does not matter, in terms of our analysis, whether this point is reached or not: its importance for us lies in the very fact of it *being* imagined since it is this imagination that represents a break with the forms of futurity prescribed by disciplinary power.

It is these kinds of imaginary future selves that we seek to investigate here as they entail the articulation of more "positive"—that is, meaningful and valued—future selves that are placed in contrast to the present and projected future selves of organizational disciplinary power regimes. The questions that arise from this are: how does the construction of an imaginary future self relate to the future-oriented temporality of disciplinary regimes of power? Specifically, does it constitute a form of resistance to the temporality of disciplinary power?

Methodology

To explore these questions, we present qualitative interview data gathered at two professional services firms, Consulting Express (CE) and Forward Consulting (FC).[2] During five months at CE and four months at FC, the first author of this article conducted the empirical study in 2007. Access to the companies was established through university contacts. The researcher entered the field with the broad aim of investigating organizational culture and the relation of work and non-work identities within the context of, broadly, critical and post-structuralist organizational theory. Towards the companies and the informants the research interest was framed in terms of "work–life balance issue" from an identity perspective. This seemed like a project description that would speak to the company's interests and meaning systems, and provide a good basis to interview people on work and non-work selves.

Data collection

The empirical study was exploratory in nature; the researcher did not approach the field with a specific focus and pre-defined set of questions. She was instead open to and in search of a variety of new insights. Documentary data, such as company websites, recruitment brochures, leaflets, books or emails were collected to gain insights on the firms' background, their public image and, importantly, on official company discourses and the kind of corporate persona espoused by the organizations. In familiarizing herself with these, the researcher learnt the companies' "lingo" and felt in a better position to establish rapport with the consultants.

Participant observation data were gathered. At CE she participated in an internal HR project that investigated the firm's various HR processes and aimed at developing a human capital strategy in the UK. This involved going to one of the London offices up to four times a week and working alongside the consultants. She attended a strategic meeting with the firm's HR executives and CEO and also participated in and tape-recorded 12 focus group workshops with consultants and HR staff. At FC the researcher collected participant observation data through attending after-work drinking sessions with a project team and client. She went to one of the FC London offices once a week, where she was given a meeting room to conduct interviews. The researcher informed all consultants she interacted with of her status as a researcher and her participation was solely for research purposes. Throughout the research process a research diary was filled with field notes regarding the "naturally occurring talk" (Silverman, 2006) and observations of the day.

A large part of empirical data was generated in interviews: at CE 15 and at FC 43 consultants were interviewed. At CE one member of the HR project provided the contacts to other consultants, ranging from analyst to manager level. Some of these she already knew from her participant observations. Importantly, these interviews were not part of the HR project and the researcher did not report any findings back to the firm. At FC the researcher interviewed a HR manager at the beginning of the study to familiarize herself with the firm's culture management practices and systems. Moreover, 42 interviews were conducted with consultants from the "human capital" team, ranging from analyst to director level. Some of them she also knew through her prior participant observations, e.g., after-work drinking functions. The interviews were framed as part of the team's internal HR initiatives. At the end the researcher reported some of her findings to the team's management. At CE the interviews were organized by one consultant who sent out emails asking people to volunteer participating in the study and one personal assistant who scheduled the times, dates and meeting rooms.

At the beginning of each interview at CE and FC the researcher informed the consultants about the broad research interest and future data use. She gave assurances of her independence and stressed the research ethics regarding data protection and confidentiality. At FC the researcher pointed out what and how she would report her findings to management, namely in an aggregated manner making individual responses unidentifiable.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours. They were tape-recorded, semi-structured, open-ended and roughly followed an ethnographic interview guide (see Spradley, 1979). The guide consisted of questions regarding attitudes towards work, organizational culture and conceptions of work versus non-work selves. It was used flexibly, allowing for the emergence of unforeseen insight and for the interview to become more an informal conversation (the latter serves to establish rapport and overcome impression management).

The quality of the interviews, the depth of the data gathered and rapport established varied. Whilst the researcher tried to reflexively position herself towards the informants, in some interviews "identity differences, cultural barriers" (Spradley, 1979, p. 46) and social distance might have prevailed. This might explain why interactions with younger consultants, with similar university backgrounds and, importantly, those the researcher already knew through her participant observations particularly elicited revealing data (such as that concerning imaginary future selves).

The different data sources allow for detailed insights into organizational life and individuals' relation to the organization in a complementary way: whilst the documentary data provided information about the firms' cultural scripts, language and meaning systems, the participant observation data gave first-hand access to the tacit, ingrained and unspoken organizational practices and ways of understanding. The interviews revealed how consultants talk about, construct, understand

and experience their identity, work and organization. In relation to our research interests, these different data allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the different techniques of the disciplinary power regimes at CE and FC. Important here was the researcher's involvement with HR matters, as these are significant sites of disciplinary power according to the existing literature.

However, in terms of this paper, it was the interview data that were the most insightful albeit that they were contextualized by the other forms of data. Clearly the dreams and fantasies of the future nurtured by individuals are not outwardly obvious and not susceptible to observation. Rather, they were revealed through the open and mostly informal nature of the interviews. In this sense, although the study overall was in part ethnographic, the issues we highlight here are necessarily based upon the self-accounts of those studied as disclosed to the researcher. Of course, as with all such studies, our analysis here is based upon an interpretation of those self-accounts. In particular, we brought to this interpretation a commitment to, and a particular understanding of, critical and post-structuralist approaches to organizational research in general, and to power, control and identity in PSFs in particular, rooted in our previous work in this area (e.g., Anderson-Gough et al., 2000, 2001, 2005; Costas, 2012; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Grey, 1994).

Data analysis

All data were transcribed, usually within the two weeks of data collection. In the first step the researcher read and re-read the data, whilst simultaneously reading studies on the various themes emerging from the data. The process of data analysis and emergence of themes was iterative. Initially the researcher analysed the data to understand the interactions between companies' incorporation and extension of the non-work realm and individuals' identities. Particularly strong was the theme of being "sucked in", as one informant put the sense of being increasingly defined by work and the resulting difficulty of constructing a viable alternative self. The researcher then re-read the data to specifically look for ways in which organizational members sought to maintain alternative selves to those at work. Here the theme of the future, escape and fantasies, that is imaginary future selves, surfaced. This seemed like an interesting theme: it had not been adequately addressed by previous research yet seems to significantly shape how those informants reporting them relate to their work and organization. Following this, the researcher systematically analysed her data with respect to the temporality of the disciplinary power regimes and that of individual identity projects, specifically those of imaginary future selves. At the same time the researcher discussed her emerging findings and interpretations with the second author.

The data were coded and thematically analysed using the computer qualitative data software *Atlas.ti* (e.g., in terms of the temporality of the different disciplinary power techniques and employee responses). In addition, the researcher analysed the cases of consultants reporting imaginary future selves in detail to be able to place these in the context of the interview and thus the individual's particular story. In this article we do not distinguish between the companies but rather analyse the data around themes and individuals. This makes sense because the companies are very similar in terms of their work activities, organizational structure, culture and the kinds of people recruited (see below).

In the following we first discuss the main themes arising out of the thematic data coding concerning the temporality of disciplinary power regimes. This provides the context for our subsequent analysis of imaginary futures selves. After presenting data from various consultants and their imaginary future selves, we focus on three individual cases of consultants. This allows us to develop an empirically richer and more detailed analysis of the constructions of imaginary future selves as a

form of resistance. These individual cases are by no means approached as representative of the firms investigated or other organizations. Their significance lies in constituting revealing cases for shedding new light on the so far under-researched dynamics of the temporality of power, subjectivity and resistance. We regard the interview data as momentary snapshots of individuals' identity projects. In line with our conceptualization of identity, we do not propose that these identity constructions are stable and unambiguous but rather are changing over time and in different contexts.

Introducing Forward Consulting and Consulting Express

Forward Consulting (FC) and Consulting Express (CE) are very similar to the PSFs empirically investigated by previous studies of power, resistance and subjectivity cited above to which this paper seeks to contribute. However, they may provide insights beyond their particular organizational context. Management consultancy firms are "key actors in the production, promotion and implementation of organizational discourses" (Whittle, 2005, p. 1303); they therefore constitute "an ideal case study site" (2005, p. 1303) for understanding dominant contemporary organizational dynamics (see also Furusten, 1999).

The two firms are amongst the biggest world-wide operating PSFs. They offer a wide-range of client services: from IT implementation, auditing to consultancy (our focus is solely on the latter). Whereas it is "notoriously difficult" (Sturdy, 2008, p. 49) to define management consultancy work, much research has argued that it is predominantly about providing rhetorical strategies and meaning to management (Clark, 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990; Kipping & Engwall, 2002; Kitay & Wright, 2007; Sturdy, 1997). Thus a major component of consultancy is "identity work" (Alvesson, 2004); managing client impressions and the rhetoric involved requires consultants to take on "a distinctive language code through which one describes oneself" (Alvesson, 1993, p. 1007). Displaying the "right" professional identity is therefore central in these firms, in common with PSFs in general.

At FC and CE the work is structured around projects. Project teams encompass employees from the same or different parts of the firms. The nature of the consultancy work varies, ranging from corporate strategy projects to implementation projects following more standardized methodologies. Project variation also relates to the client (from large international corporations and public organizations to smaller companies), the location (from foreign locations to small towns in the UK), length (from two months up to one and half years) and size of team (from two consultants to large teams of over 30 consultants). CE and FC consultants travel most of the week as they work at the client site.

Both companies have a clearly defined hierarchy: from analyst, consultant, senior consultant to manager, senior manager, principal and executive level. These hierarchy levels are seen to express consultants' experience and capability. They determine job responsibilities: whereas analysts and consultants largely conduct back-office work (including calculations, analysis, and preparations of presentations), senior consultants, managers and senior managers engage more directly with clients and lead the consulting teams. From senior management level onward, individuals are responsible for project acquisition.

The companies place a strong emphasis on rapid promotion and career development. They employ so-called "pace-based career models with an up or out culture" (HR executive, CE). Consultants "cannot stay in one position, but always have to move up to the next level" (HR manager, FC) every one or two years until they have reached the manager level. From then on progression is more difficult. If the consultants' performance is not sufficient for advancement, they have to leave the company. Staff turnover is high (e.g., on the analyst level more than 30%) given this career model and the high pressure/performance-oriented work environment. Most consultants

who leave the firms move to industry—these become important client contacts for FC and CE (see also Sturdy & Wright, 2008). There are also consultants who come from industry and enter as "experienced hires".

The workforce is relatively young (average age around 30 years old). This can be explained by the career model, staff turnover and the general fact that consultancy is often regarded as a starting point for "high-flying" careers. The companies enjoy a prestigious reputation within the business world and as employers. At the time of the study, they were growing and heavily recruiting. The general motivations for joining CE and FC are related to the opportunities of fast and rapid promotion, training and development opportunities, learning from ambitious and smart colleagues and the high salary package. The companies mostly recruit consultants from the top UK universities. In the recruitment process the companies do not necessarily look for certain skills (e.g., they recruit graduates with all sorts of degrees), but rather for a certain ambition—"drive"—towards becoming an elite professional worker. There is thus a future temporality shaping organizational members' subjectivities from the start—one which is reinforced through a circuit of disciplinary techniques. It is these that we now analyse in detail.

The Temporality of Disciplinary Power at FC and CE

At FC and CE the disciplinary power regimes particularly targeted the construction of a professional self. The discourse of professionalism encompassed various dimensions: from presenting the right "demeanour", being hard-working, greatly committed to client work to showing high levels of ambition and a "forward-thinking" outlook (see also Grey, 1998; Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). Organizational members were disciplined through the techniques of panoptic observation, examination, normalizing judgement and confessions. These worked through a continuous future accent as they emphasized the need for constant "improvement" towards a professional self at a higher "optimum state" (Foucault, 2008, p. 47). Thereby not only the aspiration of the future self but also the fear of failing to advance towards this self was created (see also Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Given this "postalgic" (Ybema, 2004) outlook the present was largely approached through the future, producing a range of disciplinary effects.

In particular the emphasis on advancing in one's career was a driver of the future temporality of disciplinary power (see also Grey, 1994; Mueller et al., 2011). This can be explained by the ways in which organizational members largely entered and approached FC and CE as platforms for career progression—something that the firms actively fostered in their recruitment campaigns. The importance placed on hierarchy, which acted as an indicator of improvement and growth, reinforced this future temporality (see also Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Hierarchy was inextricably coupled to the aforementioned "up or out" culture, which implied that one could never "stand still" but must be continuously moving forward:

> The whole point of being at FC is to progress… We … have a culture where it is not acceptable to stand still. So, you have to do the next promotion, you have to be driving to the next stage and aim to become a partner. (George, director, FC)

> Culturally, you enter a professional service organization and it is tied to progression that becomes contagious and you cannot, you just get caught up in it. You are going to progress and it is all just part of the organization… So, in our thinking and also just culturally everyone is expected to progress. (Marilyn, director, FC)

In this way, the construction of a future-oriented self based on the idea that "you always have to be improving" (Beverly, analyst, FC) was fostered. This led to a "contagious" cycle as this self always remained in the future (and hence never fully reached) so that one constantly had to work on progressing towards it. Indeed, for moving to the next level consultants already had to "perform" at the higher level as they were compared and compared themselves to those consultants hierarchically above them. Here performance did not relate to actual skill levels, but rather to the appropriate display of the professional self associated with the next level. Consultants were assessed and assessed themselves against this future self to detect and manage ways of improving themselves.

Such normalization through evaluation against an ideal self based in the future was reinforced through competitive ranking: how "you … perform against your peers is a significant factor in terms of whether you are promoted or not" (Caroline, HR executive, CE). Being "monitored against peers" (Caroline) led to competitive relationships; consultants constantly monitored their own improvement with reference not only to the future self but also to that of others:

> At FC … continually you have to be on your toes … you have to be pushing forward, driving forward. … If you want to get ahead … you have to put your efforts in. I think as a negative it operates on *guilt*, you are feeling that *you are never doing quite enough to get ahead* and it is *very competitive*, you are continuously comparing yourself with the other. (Kathryn, senior consultant, FC; emphasis added)

The "guilt" resulted from the ways in which the aspired professional self was never fully reached; it always remained in the future, creating the sense that consultants had to *continuously* work on their present self.

The future temporality of disciplinary power was, furthermore, enforced through the performance evaluations, which took place after each project by the project management and twice per year by the management of the entire consulting team (see also Bergström et al., 2009). Decisive for career advancement, performance evaluations were of utmost importance for the consultants. They underlay a strong future temporality; rather than simply constituting reports oriented towards the past by producing "a knowledge … determining whether or not something had occurred" (Foucault, 2008, p. 59), they were more about monitoring consultants' progress by assessing them against the professional self they were supposed to become *in the future* and providing clear guidelines for corrective measures if consultants were not on the "right track". This involved power effects through panoptic techniques as consultants continually felt under the gaze of the management team responsible for their evaluation—a gaze that was turned inwards, creating disciplined selves:

> You have to be very careful [referring to how one conducts oneself in front of management] and I think I was not careful enough. As a result I got some bad feedback in my laddering meeting. (Susan, senior consultant, CE)

The fear of bad evaluations by not fulfilling expectations was strong; it meant that one was no longer seen as being on the "laddering" towards the improved professional self so that one had to leave the company. This also shows the two sides of the "postalgic" nature of disciplinary power system: the future was constructed in terms of both the improved professional self and the feared failed self if one did not manage to progress (see Ybema, 2004, 2010).

At FC and CE the construction of selfhood through the future temporality of disciplinary power was also managed through consultants' mentor or "career counsellor". These were depicted as "a coach [who] tries to understand their development and tries to assess them in terms of thinking about the next job, the right training plan … reviewing with them the criteria for the next level" (Caroline, HR executive, CE). Thus, the disciplinary effects through "confessions" and "technologies of self"

such mentoring relationships involved (see also Townley, 1993; Covaleski et al., 1998) were strongly tied to producing a future-oriented self:

> My mentor gave me feedback yesterday. So we had a conversation about the kind of behaviours that I need to demonstrate to become a senior manager which is the next grade … So we talked about the path… His feedback was that it takes a while for people to believe what I am talking about because the first impact is not having too much gravitas… I would have to work on that. (Laura, manager, FC)

Overall, at FC and CE the future temporality of disciplinary power was manifest in the career discourse, hierarchy system, performance appraisals and mentoring relationships, shaping people's selves, behaviours and relations. Through various polymorphous techniques that worked through a future accent power was exercised by placing subjects in a constant state of becoming and improving. In this way, "a knowledge [was produced] that … was about whether an individual was behaving as he [sic] should … and whether he [sic] was *progressing* or not" (Foucault, 2008, p. 59; emphasis added). This created disciplined selves that were "highly insecure … constantly needing feedback … constantly having a higher and higher bar, the next promotion … the next this that" (Paula, senior consultant, FC).

Consultants responded to the future-oriented disciplinary power system in different ways. There were, indeed, individuals who seemed to largely construct themselves through this future-oriented professional self; they perceived working as a consultant (and the various techniques of power involved) as an important opportunity towards reaching a higher state of self (see also Grey, 1994; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). They thus embraced the "very forward-thinking" (Claudia, HR, FC) professional persona exhorted by organizational discourse and practice. But there were also consultants reporting ambivalence and frictions (see also Mueller et al., 2011): "sometimes you try to be so forward thinking that that affects the work–life balance, it can be quite like, work really hard, work long hours" (Jacky, analyst, FC). Furthermore, consultants experienced some of the "things one has to do to get ahead", such as "constantly going up to the managers, networking so that they place you on their future project role" as uncomfortable and insincere (John, consultant, CE). As "it is not [their] fantasy to be a consultant" (Laura, manager, FC), they did not wholeheartedly embrace the aspirational/future professional self exhorted by the companies. These consultants seemed to distance themselves from the present self through approaching it as a necessary stepping stone towards the future career outside of the consultancies:

> I chose to work here because it is obviously a big firm, a big name, a big brand and for my CV I wanted something that looked good when I move on… I wouldn't, I certainly wouldn't stay at CE for my career. I wouldn't want to spend my career in a silent office [referring to the requirement of working in a quiet manner at the client site], where I can't be myself. (Tim, analyst, CE)

Thus, just as we discussed earlier in our review of other studies of PSFs, many of the consultants in our study still constructed themselves in a future-oriented manner; they perceived the disciplinary power techniques as unpleasant, yet necessary for advancing towards the future self they aspired to (see also Anderson-Gough et al., 2001; Bergström et al., 2009). Hence these consultants aligned themselves with the disciplinary power regimes through an instrumental outlook; they were neither "docile" but also not resistant as the future self they constructed was not challenging the professional self. On the contrary, the latter was regarded as instrumental for becoming the future self—a temporality of subjectivity that explains the observation of "counter-resistance" (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009) in professional service firms. These consultants expressing an instrumental outlook lacked "an articulation of a 'positive' self'" (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009,

p. 1135) sparking resistance as their future self was still aligned with the present professional self. Their subjectivities complied to the future temporality of disciplinary power whereby disciplining the present professional self was constructed as necessary for improving towards an idealized future self. In other words, for these consultants the temporality in play was of an essentially continuous kind. As such their future orientation was consistent with, encouraged, and catered for by the disciplinary power regimes within the PSFs. Yet there were also consultants who expressed a different temporality of subjectivity: they constructed imaginary future selves that were placed in contrast to the present professional self.

Imaginary Future Selves – A Temporal Resistance?

Some imaginary future selves are revealing as they seem to break with the identity trajectory posed by the companies' disciplinary power system. Rather than aspiring to the professional future self at CE or FC or to a self outside of the companies whereby the present professional self is regarded as an essential stepping stone towards it, imaginary future selves are about dreams and fantasies that are in contradistinction to the present and future (professional) self. Thus they do not comply with the disciplinary power system and its emphasis on progress and improvement. On the contrary, these imaginary future selves express little faith in an improved future self by aligning oneself to the disciplinary power regime—such a future self seems to be feared or disdained. Imaginary future selves entail an alternative future construction, one which appears less "colonized" by the organizational power regimes. But do these imaginary future selves constitute a form of resistance?

We address this question by presenting data from various consultants first before discussing three cases in depth in order to gain an empirically richer picture of imaginary future selves. Such identity constructions were by no means prevalent amongst the consultants interviewed and we do not suggest that they were representative or even typical. Instead, we suggest that their importance is that they can shed new light on the dynamics of power, resistance and subjectivity. That said, revealing such imaginary future selves requires informants to provide access to their private backstage dreams and fantasies in contradiction to the disciplinary power regimes. As this is sensitive data, those consultants the researcher had a particularly good rapport with might have been more prone to provide these insights. Thus it may in fact be that the phenomenon was more widespread than the data suggest.

Three characteristics mark imaginary future selves: first, tensions experienced with respect to the present professional self; second, disbelief in or even fear of the future self envisaged by the disciplinary power regimes; and third, the construction of a future self that breaks with the identity trajectory at FC and CE and that no longer requires being worked on. The case of the consultant Rebecca (CE) exemplifies such an identity construction. She felt that she:

> "[did] not fit" into the professional service culture given "that it emphasizes constant professionalism … all this professional attitude, not speaking too loudly, always having to say "yes" … in the sense that if the client or manager wants something you get it done".

For this reason, Rebecca did not "see [herself] there in the future" and dreamed about doing something else: "who knows, maybe I [will] work in a gallery". The consultant Marc (CE) also distanced himself both from the present professional self and the future identity exhorted by the disciplinary power regimes. He stated that "[he didn't] get on with the people who are very consultanty [sic] and very much into CE". He opposed the consulting "system" and, in contrast to other consultants, is "not a … ladder-climber". Instead of aspiring to become a professional self

(and thus advance in the professional career), Marc expressed the "wish to make films": "I am interested in writing or making films in the future". He fantasized about a future self that was more independent, "creative and … intellectual"—one which seemed to break with the professional self. Similarly, the senior consultant Marilyn (FC) reported tensions and discomfort with respect to becoming a professional identity as it involved "networking, the politics … the need to be assertive and competitive with your peer group". All this "made [her] feel very uncomfortable". She therefore could not "really see [herself] here in the future … [and climbing up the ladder] would not be something [she] would want to do". Positioned against the aspired professional self at FC, she constructed an imaginary future self around "going into the non-for-profit sector … and doing worthwhile things".

These imaginary future selves can be understood as postalgic; they are constructed around the fantasy of a better future self, which resists the professional self of disciplinary power regimes. Thus, they display the articulation of an alternative and more "positive" articulation of selfhood necessary for resistance. Imaginary future selves place an accent on the future; that is, the present self is approached through the fantasy of the future. In this way, their temporal structuring is indeed similar to that of the disciplinary power regime. Yet the future construction differs as here it entails strong elements of dreams, idealization and hope. The content of these fantasies is notably "anti-corporate", invoking artistic and idealistic activities. Drawing on the sociologist of time, Barbara Adam (2010), we can term the future construction underpinning disciplinary power regimes as the "future as fortune", that is a kind of "present future" of human choice, rationality and planning whereby the present is used to anticipate the immediate future teleologically associated with "progress, innovation and growth" (2010, p. 3). By contrast, in the case of imaginary future selves, we can speak of the "future as fiction", that is a "future present" belonging to the "world of ideas", dreams and ideals unrelated and not "amenable to contemporary inquiry" (2010, p. 7). Later on we discuss how these two future approaches relate, but for now we want to develop how imaginary future selves constitute an ambiguous form of resistance by focusing on three individual cases.

The ambiguity of resistance through future temporality

The ambiguity of resistance and temporality in imaginary future selves is apparent in the case of the 24-year-old analyst Barbara. Before joining CE one and half years ago she graduated in French and Politics. It was not so much the motivation of becoming a consultant, but rather the lack of imagining good alternatives that made her apply to CE:

> I mean I could have gone anywhere, I don't actually know why. I just thought I can do it and I might as well do it. … Funny isn't it? You never know like I had this inspirational dream, consulting is the right thing for me [ironically].

From the start Barbara did not align herself with the professional self at CE; she did not embrace the fantasy of becoming a professional as targeted by the disciplinary power regimes. Instead she constructed herself in opposition to and did not behave in line with what she called the "überprofessional" self. Thus she resisted the power effects of the disciplinary techniques of performance appraisals and mentoring feedback:

> in all my feedback it says that "you have to be more professional, you know less loud, work on your demeanour". Things like that you don't really feel that you can be yourself at all… People don't feel like that can show any kind of emotion. They get überprofessional, too much the wrong way. … I do feel pressured [to become more professional] but I won't do it.

For Barbara, consultants adopted this "überprofessional" persona in order to rise to the top and "get a promotion". She observed how consultants take on the temporality of the disciplinary power regimes as the idea of the future promotion completely defines their present self; they therefore "follow that path" of striving to become a professional self:

> CE hires very clever and creative people. But then a lot of them just because they see the way to get a promotion quite easily that you do this and do that … they sort of lose themselves and they just become, they follow the structure too much and become institutionalized … It really annoys me that in a corporation you have such criteria to get a promotion … And when you have been here for too long, you just lose yourself in CE … That really annoys me … That really pisses me off.

It is this self-disciplining that she struggled with; she did not want to become just another "consultanty person". Yet she also struggled with the idea of leaving the firm:

> When you first start doing it you sort of lose … you are like "who am I, is that me? What am I doing?" All that worrying stuff like … At very different times during the year you feel or think "what am I doing? Why am I doing this? I hate work! I hate it. It is not me! Why have I put myself on that *track*? I got to get out". And then otherwise you are like "oh, it is not so bad. I am doing quite well". … You wait for the next project and then say "oh, I can't stay. It is a bad project, I am going to leave". Next project it is not so bad. So, I have felt at times that I want to leave (emphasis added).

When asked how she deals with the wish to leave, Barbara responded by referring to her imaginary future self of "living … in the countryside" where she no longer feels that "this isn't me":

Barbara:	I think then "that's that I am going to go and live on a farm". Sort of "that's it, I am going to make cheese. I am going to be so much happier making cheese and living a quiet farm on the countryside" … I would like to own an equestrian, horses. I am into horses. I would like to look after horses and have a farm.
Interviewer:	So that would be sometimes your dream?
Barbara:	Yeah, just to get out the rat race, especially, when you have a bad day and you think "this isn't me".

These remarks show how Barbara engaged in a fantasy about a different future self with strong dimensions of dream and hope. In providing a "positive" alternative articulation of selfhood, this imaginary future self constituted the basis for her resistance to the professional identity aspired to within the disciplinary power regime at CE. At the same time as her imaginary future self reveals hope and dreams of a better future, it expresses fears of a worse future, as the other side of this "postalgic" imaginary future self was the dreaded future self of the "überprofessional" consultant. In this way, her identity construction differed from that of the consultants above who instrumentally approached the present professional self as a necessary stepping stone for an improved future self outside the firms. In Barbara's case, there seems little in terms of progress and improvement by following the present "track". On the contrary, she felt that she had "got to get out", whereby she approached the future not as "fortune" but as "fiction" (Adam, 2010). Yet her "getting out" through constructing an imaginary future self shows how this can constitute an ambiguous form of resistance. Her self was geared towards the future, more precisely, a future of fiction to which she deferred all her dreams and desires unmet in the present. However, in this way the future became an imaginary refuge; like the aspired professional self, this imaginary future self was one to (be) come and not to be enacted in the present (this might explain her struggle over leaving the firm).

The 34-year-old manager Kirstin's (CE) remarks similarly point towards this ambiguous interplay of the temporality of subjectivity, resistance and power in the construction of an imaginary future self. Kirstin joined CE two years ago because she was made redundant in the previous company she worked for. She felt "forced to quickly find a job and CE gave [her] an offer". She entered the firm although it was "not [her] preferred option" as she "had heard that they work people every hard". Indeed, Kirstin found that the professional service culture often means that "individual needs are sacrificed". In the firm people were appraised for displaying a "soulless" hard-working professional persona—a self that she did not aspire to but in fact feared to become:

> So you work for 12 months [referring to the yearly evaluation report], you give so much to them, you work so hard and because of the way the performance management system is structured, you are competing against so many people in your peer group. You have got a place on the ladder. … Fine, you deliver, but we do it at the compromise of people's health and well-being. And I have seen examples where two of my staff members got ill.

Kirstin did not want to align herself with the disciplinary power regime, particularly the ways in which it geared people towards becoming a professional self. Such a trajectory made her "feel anxious, fearful and hurtful". One then constitutes "just a warm body that helps the firm to achieve results", whilst risking sickness. As with Barbara, there was no faith in "progress" towards an "optimum state" (Foucault, 2008) by becoming the professional self aspired within the firm. Instead the future of the professional self was a feared one as it was associated with sickness and deterioration. For this reason, Kirstin resisted embracing the trajectory of the professional self. She had often been "ready to resign" and was still thinking about it. At moments when she particularly felt tensions Kristin escaped into her dream of a different future self and life:

> I sometimes can be quite fed up with this work. And then I always have the idea that I might be doing something different in the future. Well, I would love to … be doing a little café somewhere … Maybe on a beach somewhere.

The imaginary future self based on the idea of "a little café … on a beach" clearly presents a fictional future, which is expressive of postalgia. It involves a hoped for future that is constructed against the feared future associated with the professional self. This imaginary future self allowed Kirstin to articulate an alternative "positive" self that could serve as the basis to resist the disciplinary power regime (which could ultimately be expressed in the act of resigning). Yet here resistance was, again, ambiguous. When Kirstin was asked whether she thought about this imaginary future self at times, she responded that it was "a fantasy to get through the day sometimes or through moments". The expression of "getting through" indicates how the imaginary future self entailed the deferment rather than enactment of her wishes in the present. Thus, at the same time as the imaginary future self provided a basis for resistance, the very future temporality of this identity construction also hampered her engagement in acts of resistance.

Similarly, the comments of the 32-year-old senior consultant Christine (FC) reveal an imaginary future self. She joined FC one and a half years ago because "on [her] CV [she] wanted a big name, FC was a big name". At first Christine seemed to instrumentally align herself with the professional self exhorted by the disciplinary power regime so as to quickly advance in her career. However, she then increasingly felt tensions with respect to the reward and appraisals system's disciplining of people into becoming professional selves. Christine noted a "struggle with FC [as she felt herself being] absorbed into a culture … [that] rewards people who keep their mouth shut, never admit a weakness and are all the time professional". Indeed, she remarked that "if someone had told me

that [i.e., how the professional culture worked], I don't think I would have joined". Thus, in a similar vein to Barbara and Kirstin, Christine did not align herself with the idea of becoming a professional self but in fact resisted this through constructing an imaginary future self:

> It is a hard job work. You work long hours, you have to have quite a thick skin, you have to give so much of yourself, you deal with clients and then have to be very professional. You know, do I want to do this for the rest of my life? I don't know if I want to do this. Actually, when I ask myself what I want, I think "I want to own a tea shop in the Lake District or something".

Hence the imaginary future self, constructed around the fantasy of "owning a tea shop in the Lake District", was placed in opposition to the present and future professional self aspired to at FC. Through this imaginary future self she resisted the disciplinary power regime which sought to align people's trajectory with the idea of becoming a professional. Such resistance was possible as the imaginary future self allowed Christine to construct an alternative future self, namely one where her "life is driven by her happiness and wishes" in the Lake District rather than by the aspiration of becoming a professional in the name of career. This imaginary future self provided her with a sense of "control over [her] life", as it reminded her:

> You have the power to change, you are not a victim and can step back … You have to realize that you are doing something, stop it and move away.

This highlights how Christine's imaginary future self powerfully shaped her experience and understanding of selfhood. It gave her a sense of agency and thus the ability to resist the disciplinary power system. Yet also in the case of Christine such resistance was ambiguous, as she particularly mobilized the imaginary future self in times of tension and friction. This carried the risk that this identity construction constituted more a way to cope with the present rather than the basis for enacting resistance and change.

Concluding Discussion

One way of thinking about the issues we have discussed in this paper is to envisage the kinds of responses that could be given to the common job interview question: where do you see yourself in 10 years' time? Such a question is an invitation to make explicit the temporal identity work of the candidate and, within an interview setting, the range of possible responses is heavily proscribed. The answer is likely to be in the form of articulating future career success either with the prospective employing firm or in the professional arena more widely. It would be manifestly unacceptable to give an answer along the lines of the imaginary futures we have been concerned with in this paper.

So what are we to make of these imaginary futures? Are they "just fantasies" of little or no meaning or interest except to the people themselves? Our suggestion in this paper is that they do have a significant meaning which contributes to existing understandings of the dynamics of disciplinary power, resistance and subjectivity in PSFs by bringing the topic of temporality into central focus. Drawing in particular on Hoy's recent re-reading of Foucault, the empirical analysis has revealed how at the two PSFs disciplinary power systems work through a future temporality, placing subjects in a constant state of becoming a professional self. Previous research has pointed out that management discourse and practice targets employees' aspirations, thereby tying their identity trajectory to the organization (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Grey, 1994; Thornborrow &

Brown, 2009). The present study extends this insight by shedding more light on how the exercise of disciplinary power works through the continuous future accent of postalgia.

This is particularly revealing because it helps to explain the lack of effective resistance noted by previous studies. Whilst professional service workers may cynically distance themselves from their professional selves (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Mueller et al., 2011; Whittle, 2005), they are largely seen to fail to articulate alternative selves that could spur resistance (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009). Through the focus on temporality our research adds an explanation for this "counter-resistance": although individuals may distance themselves from the present professional self, they internalize the future outlook of the disciplinary power system and therefore believe in the idea of improvement and progress. They thus instrumentally take on the professional self with its disciplinary effects as they regard it as a necessary step towards an improved future self. Their conception of the future remains sequestered by the disciplinary power which they seek to resist.

As well as explaining one of the reasons for counter-resistance, we have also shown how individuals can construct more "positive" articulations of selfhood that break with the identity trajectory of the disciplinary power regimes. They thereby have the potential to subvert the temporality of disciplinary power through appropriating the power of future temporality for resistance (of which more shortly).

Whilst our findings are situated in the context of PSFs, this need not mean that they may not be relevant elsewhere—indeed, as we suggested at the outset, they may well apply to those who work in universities. Yet this organizational context is significant given the strong forms of disciplinary power present in PSFs, which emphasize very forcibly temporality and identity regulation. As the empirical analysis has shown, imaginary future selves are explicitly constructed in opposition to the disciplined professional self. It could also be argued that imaginary future selves are more likely to be prevalent amongst young individuals, such as those in our study, as they feel less tied to a certain identity trajectory. Similarly, imaginary future selves might be more likely amongst individuals with higher "economic", "social" and "cultural capital" as they have greater "transformative power" (Bourdieu, 1984). However, it is not our intention to relate imaginary future selves to distinct conditions and factors[3] so much as to illustrate their potential. They lie in the "unmanaged" (Gabriel, 1995) organizational realm which has infinite possibilities for fantasy, dreams and imagination. Our aim is rather to shed light on the interplay of imaginary future selves, disciplinary power and resistance.

From the temporality of power to the power of temporality

Imaginary future selves can spur resistance to disciplinary power regimes to the extent that they serve to "re-colonize" the future. Following Foucauldian insights, disciplinary power regimes derive their efficacy through producing the construction of an improved future self (Hoy, 2009a, 2009b). It is the constant future accent that makes disciplinary power so "contagious", as one consultant cited above put it, and thus difficult to resist. It places subjects in a continuous disciplinary state of becoming as there is continuously an improved future self that one has to work towards. As the future is perpetually approached through the disciplinary organizational discourse, subjects lack alternative constructions of future selfhood that could effectively challenge that of the professional self. Imaginary future selves, that is constructions of selfhood involving the fantasy of living somewhere else, doing something else and being someone else, manage to break with this "genetic continuity" (Foucault, 2008). Here subjects construct the future self in ways that are not in line with and, indeed, challenge the templates of the future provided and encouraged by the disciplinary power regimes of the firms. But it is not just that a different future is envisaged: it is a different *way*

of envisaging the future. Within the temporality of power, subjectivity and identity are always in a constant process of "becoming". There is no end point in view, just a perpetual striving. By contrast, the imaginary future selves we have identified anticipate a state of "arrival" or stasis: if the dream were to be realized then that would be an end point beyond which no further progress is necessary. The never-ending process of identity work would be over, in radical contrast to the pervasive identity regulation woven into PSFs (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

There is thus a certain shift from the temporality of power to the power of temporality. The temporality of power uses apprehensions of the future as an adjunct of disciplinary power, whereas the power of temporality uses apprehensions of the future as a subversion of disciplinary power. In cases of imaginary future selves the future provides subjects with a powerful space for constructing their resistant selves This is particularly apparent in Christine's comments regarding the sense of the "power to change" she derives from her imaginary future self. Through appropriating the future for one's construction of selfhood rather than leaving it being defined by organizational discourse, subjects gain a sense of agency, power and control. In this sense, the very futurity of disciplinary power regimes is subverted as the future now constitutes the basis for articulating resistant selves.

This power of temporality accompanying imaginary future selves can be further explained by their postalgic nature. As Ybema (2010) has pointed out, postalgia is part of a "power struggle" (2010, p. 495) whereby the depiction of "a sparkling future identity" is a reflection of "present-day concerns" (2010, p. 497). Importantly, postalgic discourse serves to initiate change, as it involves the construction of "an ideal … self alongside the actual self that is unsatisfactory, setting up a temporal construct as a mean to motivate, negotiate and/or challenge identity change" (2010, p. 495). Our empirical analysis has shown how imaginary future selves are constructed in opposition to a feared future self, namely the professional self prescribed by disciplinary power. Following Ybema's insights, the postalgic nature of imaginary future selves can serve to spur identity change and thus resistance to the present disciplinary power regime.

The ways in which imaginary future selves involve hope for, and the imagination of, a different future self further underlines their political significance for resistance as compared to the much studied cynically distanced self (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Kärreman &Alvesson, 2009; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Mueller et al., 2011; Whittle, 2005). As Hoy (2004) has argued, whereas hope can lead to the opening of possibilities and seeing that "things could be different" (2004, p. 10), cynicism entails resignation, despair and "do-nothingness" (Hoy, 2009a, p. 143), closing possibilities for change and resistance: "cynicism … decreases the chances of change in the future. … [I]f the choice is between cynicism and hope … hope is likely to be the more productive attitude" (2004, p. 148). Indeed, to "give up hope entirely is to give in to despair" (Hoy, 2009a, p. 142). For this reason, hope is seen to have a certain "transcending quality" (Crapanzano, 2003, p. 9; see also Carlsen, 2006). Put differently, transcendence, change and resistance is impossible without some form of hope and the imagination of a different future involved. It is this transcending quality which is also apparent in the imaginary future selves; they reveal the possibility of a different self and life (e.g., a more creative, healthier and happier self in the countryside, on the beach, etc.) and in this way resist alignment with the organizational identity trajectory.

This response to the disciplinary power regimes in PSFs also differs from the nostalgic selves particularly identified in studies of change management (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Gabriel, 1993; McCabe, 2004; Strangleman, 1999; Ybema, 2010). The cases of imaginary future selves are more subtle and arguably significant for resistance; they do not get caught up in lamenting the past, thereby giving up on the future, and hence on the possibility for imagining new ways of being (see Hoy, 2009a, 2009b). In a sense, one could say that postalgic fantasies for all that they may be imaginary are nevertheless "realistic" in that they could conceivably come

true, whereas the return to the past entailed by nostalgia is, literally, impossible. That said, we do not wish to over-valorize the efficacy of resistance based upon an imaginary future. It contains its own ambiguities and limitations. Here it is again helpful to recognize that the future it constructs is what Barbara Adam calls the "future present" of "fiction" (Adam, 2010), which entails strong elements of dreams and idealization. This needs to be related to the future construct, namely the "present future" of "fortune" (Adam, 2010), in organizational discourse. Following Adam (2010), the future has become an increasingly "crowded space" (2010, p. 4) because it is constantly already inscribed into present calculations and anticipations, that is largely understood as a present future. As such present futures become prevalent, the "*future present* is considered to lack reality status … [constituting nothing but] an aspect of mind, belonging to the world of ideas, thus to the realm of the ideal rather than the real" (2010, p. 7). It is this "conjectural aspect" of the future present that we also find in the imaginary future selves.

Whilst the disciplinary power regimes occupy the present future, the imaginary future selves seem to escape to the future present. In this sense, for the resistant organizational members the only "real" escape becomes then an illusory future. This is problematic to the extent that such an illusory future is typically denied "reality status" (Adam, 2010) so that individuals might actually refrain from enacting their imaginary future self. In other words, rather than spurring change, transcendence and resistance, given the "future as fiction" involved, imaginary future selves might in fact risk constantly deferring the enactment of the alternative self to an illusionary future. This risk of deferment rather than enactment can be further related to the kind of hope for a better future self they express. At the same time as hope can have a "transcendental quality", "[o]ne can be so caught up in one's hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfilment" (Crapanzano, 2003, p. 18). Thus, an excessive hope for a better future can in fact "blind … [one] to possibilities in the present" (Hoy, 2009a, p. 141); the very belief in the hoped for imaginary future self in fact offsets the need to enact it in the present. Thus, as with cynicism and distancing, the resistance of an imaginary future may be another form of counter-resistance.

Our empirical analysis has pointed to such an ambiguous relation to resistance, as consultants constructed their imaginary future selves to "get through the day" and to find a space "to get out". Thus, the very moment of constructing the imaginary future self enabled them to cope with the tensions regarding the professional self as a certain gratification is found in the fantasy itself. As the illusory future of the imaginary self always remains one to come, subjects refrain from pursuing this self in the present. Thus, like the Amerco employees studied by Hochschild, imaginary future selves may lead to "repeatedly postponed plans" (1997, p. 249) rather than transcendence and resistance. Of course, the consultants we interviewed might have put these plans into action by now or may do so in the future, and a useful follow-up study would be to see whether this happens. Nevertheless, at least at the moment of the interview, they did not seem to have any concrete plans for, so to speak, stepping out of the cycle of deferment and imaginary future self.

Notwithstanding this ambiguity, the resistance entailed by imagining a future self that breaks decisively with the present should not be discounted as "mere" fantasy. It is a fantasy with a meaning. The importance of these imaginations resides in their very existence within the context of organizations that envisage the future in a particular, disciplinary, way. In the power struggle over postalgia (Ybema, 2010) imaginary future selves represent a distinctive challenge to the prescriptions of the future entailed by disciplinary power. What makes these selves interesting is a certain pathos and hope they express, which is at variance with, and a little less monochromatic than, the self-disciplined and/or counter-resistant professional self. In this sense, imaginary future selves may at least reveal first glimpses of how the temporality of disciplinary power can be subverted into a power of temporality for resistance. Equally, one should not over-state the case. It is notable that

although the imaginary futures they conjure entail a break with their current work, they do not break with work itself. All of the examples we identified are examples of a different kind of work, such as running a café or making films, so they are somewhat limited in their radicalism. Moreover, precisely because imaginary future selves are postalgic they remain future-orientated. That is to say, the temporality of power and the power of temporality share a common ground of dissatisfaction with the present: a more profound resistance might lie in an acceptance of the present and the present self, regardless of its deficiencies. A refusal to think in temporal terms at all would be more radical.

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Notes

1. The significance placed on aspirations and future ideals in organizational members' selves has also been noted in research on individuals' creation and adaption to possible selves (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000; Roberts, 2005). Yet this line of research does not relate this to questions of power and control and thus is not directly relevant for our study. Note also that the Thornborrow and Brown (2009) study is of a military organization not a PSF, but is included here since it addresses similar themes to the PSF research.
2. Both company names (as well as the names of all individuals cited in this article) are pseudonyms.
3. For instance, one could argue that in times of economic crisis people are less likely to construct such imaginary future selves as they lose hope in the possibility of a better future. However, at the same time, one might argue that it is precisely in times of crisis that individuals engage in imaginary future selves as a way to escape from present disappointments and anxieties to fantasies of a better future (see also Crapanzano, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this article to develop distinct factors and conditions for imaginary future selves. Our focus is instead on the ways in which they offer new insights on the dynamics of power and resistance in professional service firms.

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