

Enacting (post)psychological standards in social work: From regimes of visibility to user-driven standards and affective subjectification

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Abstract

This article contributes to the general theme of standards and subjectivity by developing a governmental strategy for analyzing how different traditions in psychology are used to produce different standards for subjectification and different ontologies in social work practices. The empirical material is taken from a drug treatment center for young people, where professionals have a critical, reflexive awareness about how standards derived from 20th-century psychology subjectify and organize practices. The article analyzes how professionals in these practices draw on postmodern and critical traditions in psychology—in particular narrative, systemic, and solution-focused therapy—in order to develop alternative “post-psychological,” “user-driven,” and “affective” standards. These standards expand the field of intervention by modulating on users’, relatives’, and professionals’ gazes and affective ways of relating. The article articulates an affirmative critique of how post-psy standards can be used reflexively by professionals in social work practices to empower users and enact a “post-psychological” ontology of becoming.

Keywords

drug treatment, governmentality, social work, standards, youth

This article contributes to the general theme on standards and subjectivity by analyzing how different traditions in psychology are used to produce different standards for subjectification and enact different ontologies in social work and drug treatment practices (Mol, 2002). Drug treatment, deviance, and social work are classical areas for studying a culturally mediated production of subjectivity (Donzelot, 1979; Foucault, 1977;

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Valverde, 1998). At the same time, both a diverse history and current developments make Danish drug treatment a particularly interesting empirical field for studying the co-construction of subjects and standards.

Before the mid-1960s, drug treatment in Denmark primarily targeted older individuals and their problematic use of opioids. This was handled by clinical practitioners as a psychiatric condition. But in the mid-1960s and onwards there was a cultural shift whereby more and younger persons started using new types of drugs as part of the youth and counter culture. As a result more young people were referred to the treatment system with drug-related problems. To understand and manage this, professionals in the emerging social sector were drawing on a plethora of sociological, psychological, pedagogical, and medical theories and techniques. In this way young people and their use of (illegal) substances became a precarious, controversial, and disputed topic both among professionals and in public discourses (Winsløw, 1984). Danish drug treatment can, from the 1960s up to the present, thus be characterized as a very heterogeneous field, with a multiplicity of discourses, concepts, institutions, experts, technologies, procedures, and standards (Houborg, 2006; Winsløw, 1984).

Currently, a broad tendency can be identified that is developing treatment practices on the basis of traditional psychological theories, using revised humanistic (Revstedt, 1994) or cognitive approaches (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Another tradition—from which the empirical material in this article is taken—is developing treatments on the basis of postmodern psychological theories and therapeutic traditions (e.g., Anderson, 2008; De Shazer, 1985; White, 2007). In order to analyze how, and with what consequences, different traditions in psychology are used to subjectify in drug treatment practices, I will draw on Governmentality studies and the concept of standards. A basic function of a standard is that it provides order by regulating certain aspects of the world (Busch, 2011), thereby enabling things and people to work together (Bowker & Star, 1999; Busch, 2011; Timmermans & Berg, 2003). Standards can span from immanent, implicit, flexible standards developed in local practices across to imposed standards that are highly stabilized through external references (Nissen, 2016).

A main focus within Governmentality studies is how subjects are produced and governed in institutional practices (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1977; Hacking, 2007; Rose, 1990, 1998). In this tradition the work of Nikolas Rose (1990, 1998), especially, can be said to investigate how (discursive, technical, statistical, normative) standards from 19th- and 20th-century psychology have been dispersed in various institutions and practices and contribute to processes of subjectification (Foucault, 1977; Rose, 1990). The use of such standards from psychology has been extensively criticized both theoretically (Brown & Stenner, 2009; Rose, 1998) and for contributing to marginalizing and stigmatizing certain subjects (Davies, 1990/2000; Davies & Hunt, 1994).

Such criticisms have, in combination with the broader linguistic turn, served as fuel for an accelerated development and dissemination of alternative psychological theories, techniques, and standards across sectors and disciplines, for instance in education (Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016; Juelskjær, Staunæs, & Ratner, 2013) and management (Raffnsøe, 2013). Juelskjær and Staunæs (2016) suggest “post-psychological” or “post-psy” as a common term for these heterogeneous theories, techniques, and practices, that have been a part of psychology all along¹ but are being accentuated and developed

further in theories (e.g., Gergen, 1999) and therapeutic traditions (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; De Shazer, 2005; White, 2007) that have taken a linguistic—and later material and affective—turn.

One aspect of post-psy is a critical reflexivity about how (standards from) psychology are normative, intertwined with power, and produce subjectivity. This means that post-psy incorporates and transforms certain elements of psychology into a new kind of psychology that sees subjects as relational, distributed, multiple, and contextual (Juelskjær et al., 2013; Staunæs & Juelskjær, 2014). The present article will use empirical material from our fieldwork in two municipal drug treatment institutions to engage in a detailed analysis of *how* post-psychology is used to produce standards in contemporary social work. As I will present in the analysis, a main argument is that the use of post-psychology makes it possible for professionals to move beyond a mere critique of psychological standards, evidence-based practices, and disciplinary institutions, and to develop alternative standards for subjectification. I will term these as “2nd order,” “user-driven,” and “affective” standards and show how they: expand the field of intervention beyond the “identified client,” allow subjects to develop their own standards (for life, drug use, etc.), and subjectify affectively through energies and intensities (Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016; Juelskjær et al., 2013).

In the following I will introduce Governmentality studies as my analytical framework, and develop this with a focus on standards and ontologies. In the first analytical section I will use the theoretical framework to articulate and theoretically expand on prevalent criticisms of psychological standards in drug treatment. In the main analytical section I will analyze how social workers in a municipal drug treatment institution draw on post-psychology to produce post-psy standards and how these are used to subjectify and organize their practices. Finally, I will present a few possible critiques and some hopes for how we might use such post-psychological standards.

Methodology

Governmentality studies have developed a range of analytical strategies for studying how subjects in liberal societies are governed “*in terms of their freedom*” (Rose, 1998, p. 16) through “conduct of conduct” in relations of power and knowledge (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 2009, 2010; Rose, 1990). A central focus within Governmentality studies is, according to Dean (2010), the study of how institutional practices have “*characteristic ways of forming subjects, selves, persons, actors or agents.*” (page 33, (emphasis added)) Analytically this has been done by showing how heterogeneous assemblages of discourses, experts, materialities, and technologies modulate on subjects’ actions and relations by making subjectivity an *object of knowledge* (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1977; Hacking, 2007; Rose, 1990, 1998). Against that background some scholars have recently criticized Governmentality studies and post-structuralist theory as being a purely epistemological affair, arguing for an ontological or affective turn (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick & Frank, 2003). As a counter argument Hemmings (2005) emphasizes that such a critique is only possible through a reading of Foucault that separates epistemology from ontology. Following Hemmings (2005), I would argue that a more loyal and productive interpretation is that Governmentality studies are concerned with how institutions, subjects, and

standards are co-produced, performed, or enacted. In this reading, I align Governmentality studies with the view that there is an interdependence between epistemology, ontology, and practice and that “the ontological” is a practical and technical matter (Rose, 1998), produced or “enacted” in specific historical, socio-material practices (Foucault, 2000; Mol, 2002). My approach is to use the concept of standard both as an analytical tool and as an object of study. This means that I can articulate a range of governmentality studies as analyses of how *psychological standards* for seeing, thinking, questioning, producing, and governing subjectivity are developed and dispersed in a range of practices (e.g., Rose, 1998). Many scholars have analyzed such processes using concepts such as positioning, subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990), institutional categories (Varenne & McDermott, 1998), social categories (Davies & Hunt, 1994), ethnicity (Staunæs, 2004), gender (Søndergaard, 1996), or psychiatric categories (Hacking, 1995). I will term these as “psy-standards” as they can be said to standardize, order, or appropriate subjectivity by making it visible as an *object of psychological knowledge*.

This article develops these studies further by investigating how contemporary social work and drug treatment practices draw on critical perspectives in psychology and beyond in order to develop what I term “post-psychological standards.” Post-psy standards can be understood as largely immanent, emergent properties that are developed in local practices and used to govern subjects and guide and regulate professional practices in a flexible way (Jensen, 1987, 1992; Nissen, 2016).

These standards are not necessarily explicit, but they are in principle publicly accessible as it is possible to observe patterns in how professionals act or to make them articulate the standards they use in guiding their practice. Drawing on Foucault’s (1990) considerations on ethical self-government, such immanent standards for professional conduct have both “technical” and ethical or normative properties. This means that when professionals face difficulties or dilemmas it is (in principle) possible for them to articulate and reflect on the immanent standards in their practices—what they are aimed at, how they are used, for what ends—and conduct themselves in relation to this, or develop these standards in order to attain certain goals implying certain ethos or standpoints (Nissen, 2016; Thorgaard, 2010). Conceptualizing standards as immanent means that standards are not just “given” and then “tinkered with” to fit a situation (Timmermans & Berg, 2003). Rather, in a governmental framework subjects (both professionals and “users”) and standards are constantly produced in ongoing reciprocal processes. In this way novelty can occur as subject and standards co-constitute each other. Standards are in this way “technical,” normative (Nissen, 2016; Rose, 1998), ontological, and enact ontologies. It is rather straightforward to conceptualize psy-standards such as psychiatric categories as standards that are regulative and imposed, but what about immanent standards? How are they stabilized? One way of thinking about this is that even immanent standards are part of a complex ecology of standards that installs a certain “strategic disposition” in the practices where they are used. This more general level can be described as institutional rationalities (Rose, 1998), institutional logics (Mol, 2008), or as a dispositive (Bussolini, 2010; Deleuze, 1992; Foucault, 1980). This means that standards have what Hacking (2007) terms a “looping effect,” as they produce some tendencies or dispositions in practices, and new techniques and concepts, etc., can be regarded as standards if they are in “ontological alignment” with the strategic disposition in the specific

practices and make it possible for persons, things, and standards to work together. In this way we can think of standards without assuming a homogeneity or regulative body (cf. Timmermans & Berg, 2003).

The empirical data are taken from the research project “User-Driven Standards in Social Work,” where our research team did ethnographic fieldwork in two municipal drug treatment institutions: U-turn in Copenhagen and Helsingung in Elsinore.² One of the main reasons for studying these institutions is that they take a critical stance towards psy-standards and practices and draw on post-psy—in particular, systemic (Anderson & Goolishian, 2004), narrative (White, 2007), and solution-focused (De Shazer, 1985) forms of therapy to develop new standards for working with youth and drugs. In order to analyze the differences between psy and post-psy standards I also draw on reports, articles, and other written materials from the field, since these were circulated and debated in the field and significantly influenced the developments of the post-psychological practices where the fieldwork was conducted. To provide a background I will now present some of the post-psychological criticisms of how standards from psychology and evidence-based paradigms respectively articulate, understand, handle, and subjectify drug-using subjects.

Problematizing drug treatment

In the late 1990s policy-makers, social workers, and scholars, as a part of the post-psy tradition in Copenhagen, recognized (again) significant barriers in the existent treatment system in relation to young drug users (Ege, Rothenberg, & Madsen, 1999; Orbe, 2010). A qualitative user-survey (Christoffersen & Kousholt, 1998) pointed out that existing treatment regimes stigmatized the users (as drug users or addicts) and neglected their perspectives by focusing almost exclusively on problems related to drug use. The same report problematized the fact that the youths did not receive reliable and believable information on drugs nor were they offered relevant activities that could increase their future agency. These and several other related problems were post-psychological explanations of why young drug users did not attend, or were excluded from, treatment institutions (Christoffersen & Kousholt, 1998; Nissen, 2012b; Orbe, 2010; Vinum, 2002). In particular, the discourse on “motivation” can be taken to illustrate how these difficulties are connected to how psy-standards install a certain “strategic disposition” in drug treatment practices. The emphasis on motivation as premise is an aspect of the policy of “voluntary treatment” (as opposed to coercion), but it is also a core feature of prevailing psy-standards and discourses about change.

This is critically analyzed in the earlier-mentioned reports where it was problematized that youths were met with binary restrictive demands for demonstration of motivation by abstinence from drugs and subjection to the treatment regimes. Motivation was seen as often used in an incoherent, ad-hoc way as a “floating signifier” to explain both success and failure in drug treatment practices (Christoffersen & Kousholt, 1998; Vinum, 2002). If the treatment works, it is because the user is motivated, if treatment is unsuccessful it is conversely explained that there was a lack of motivation. When motivation is used as a psy-standard for understanding change, this predisposes the (psy) experts to disregard those wishes and perspectives of the client that are not in alignment with the institutional

understandings of the relation between drugs, motivation, and change. For instance, a wish for continuing (perhaps a more moderate?) drug use can be interpreted as a symptom illustrating that the client is not sufficiently motivated for change and treatment, and that the person is not in contact with his or her true inner self (cf. Revstedt, 1994; Villadsen, 2003). In this way the user is caught in a Catch-22 situation because abstinence from drug use becomes the only action that proves that the user is *really* motivated for change. Paradoxically, motivation seems to privilege the users' perspectives, but on the other hand this standard potentially excludes contextual factors and delegitimizes and marginalizes a great deal of the users' perspectives, definitions of problems, and preferred ways of living. Motivation can be seen as a prototypical example of how psy-standards individualize and psychologize complex social problems by locating both the problems and the site for change in the subject.

Furthermore, when psy-standards individualize and psychologize, they initiate negative systemic consequences as users, relatives, and professionals are drawn into vicious circles of control, blame, guilt, and marginalization. This contributes further to stigmatization and the production of problematic subjectivities.

Standards from the evidence-based methodology

Another major trend that is problematized by post-psy professionals (Orbe, 2010) and scholars (Tucker & Roth, 2006) is the move towards evidence-based methods and practices in drug treatment (Orbe, 2010; Tucker & Roth, 2006), social work (Houston, 2005), and medical practices (Timmermans & Berg, 2003; Trickett & Beehler, 2013). The evidence-based methodology does not have any explicit theory on subjectivity or causation, and this supposedly makes it possible to produce and organize value-free scientific knowledge across disciplines, and use this to develop practices (Timmermans & Berg, 2003; Trickett & Beehler, 2013).

But analyzed in a governmental framework, the standards embedded in evidence-based methodology do not produce a neutral, technical knowledge (Rose, 1998). An example of this is mandatory diagnostic assessment interviews, standardized by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug addiction,³ which focus on drugs, social and medical problems, and, for instance, include questions about needle injection practices and sexual abuse. Analyzing the instruments as standards that subjectify, it is reasonable to claim that they stigmatize as they "*render individuals into knowledge as objects of a hierarchical and normative gaze, making it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish*" (Rose, 1998). Moreover, these standards are implicitly configured on—and enact—the ontology of a world of self-contained, context-independent, and relatively passive, discrete entities or what Hacking (2007) would call "indifferent kinds." According to such an ontology, treatment consists of using a well-defined active agent (medical, surgical, therapeutic) in order to affect disease entities in the body of the subject (Jensen, 1987). This is problematized by Tucker and Roth (2006) who suggest that there are important constraints in using evidence-based methods where both the "condition" and the "treatment" are highly complex, multi-causal, and context-dependent social phenomena. Along with Houston (2005), Minkler and Wallerstein (2003), and Schulz et al. (2011) they highlight that "the lived experience of community members is a critical

source of knowledge in the development and implementation of interventions” (Trickett & Beehler, 2013, p. 26). Further, Worrall (2010) argues that evidence-based methods push interventions in a less complex and more short-term direction and towards individualized interventions that depend more on medicalization.

The meta-standards of the evidence-based information structures are on an ontological level compatible with the psy-standards and psy-ontology and can, to some extent, be said to stabilize and legitimize the use of psy-standards, by lending scientific credibility and power to psy-experts, by equipping them with pre-defined institutional understanding of problems, and criteria for success. The standards of evidence-based regimes restrict furthermore the flexibility and development of local practices and thus immunizes practices against critique, as contextual factors, individual differences, and local knowledge, from practitioners, clients, and communities (Lambert, 2006) are seen as a bias that must be excluded (Trickett & Beehler, 2013, p. 26).

In alignment with these criticisms, post-psy professionals criticize the evidence-based methodology with its monitoring of problems and drug use as being unhelpful and, indeed, counterproductive because it marginalizes, stigmatizes, or expels youths from the institutions. Furthermore they see the predefined goals and methods in the evidence-based methodology as an obstacle for putting the clients’ perspectives to use both in relation to the youths’ development of more desirable ways of living and in the development of more appropriate treatment practices (Orbe, 2010).

I have now outlined two dominant trends in contemporary drug treatment through a governmental analysis of standards and ontologies. Psy-standards and standards in the evidence-based methodology, although different in terms of discourse, methods, and techniques, can be said to both modulate and stabilize each other. First, their standards become boundary objects that make it possible for people to work together across practices. Second, and most importantly, they both enact individualistic ontologies and predispose toward standards that make the psyche of the user visible as an object of intervention and a site for change.

In general terms, this predisposes towards subjectification through “ordering” or appropriation: Disciplinary, by using institutional standards, definitions of problems, imposing norms, surveillance, and exclusion—and pastoral, demanding the subjects’ articulation of thoughts and feelings to psy-experts in order to establish relations to self and standards of conduct (Foucault, 1977, 1982a, 1986). In effect, the users are positioned, stigmatized, and pathologized as drug users or addicts. This marginalizes their perspectives, restricts their agency, and produces negative subjectification. Following the above analysis, it becomes clearer why it is difficult, troublesome, and problematic to engage youths in drug treatment practices that use psy-standards according to a psy-ontology.

Post-psychological standards in drug treatment: The U-turn model

The abovementioned problems and critiques formed the background for a new strategy on youth and drug use in Copenhagen (Ege et al., 1999) that can be seen as a continuation of the post-psychological social work tradition. To avoid stigmatization, the strategy

stated that drug use should be understood as part of youth life and broader social problems and that the interventions should be based on self-help, voluntary participation, user-involvement, and participation in decision making (Ege et al., 1999). The strategy can be seen as a part of a broader trend toward user involvement across sectors and institutions in the Scandinavian welfare states (Asmussen, 2003). This can be seen both as potential for empowering users as citizens and as a neoliberal strategy, configuring the user as a rational consumer in an open market (Cruikshank, 1999).

A part of the strategy was to avoid specialized treatment institutions, but for various reasons this was not feasible and in 2004 the municipality of Copenhagen opened the institution “U-turn” for youths aged 15–25 who have a “*disconcerting or problematic use of substances*”. U-turn, and later the institution Helsingung (founded in 2011), developed on “the U-turn model” (U-Turn, 2011), are in this way based on a paradox of being a specialized drug treatment institution and at the same time using “inspiration from narrative, systemic and solution focused approaches” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 2) to develop practices that are non-stigmatizing, attractive, and helpful in relation to the youths’ own perceived problems and concerns.

In these interesting developments and tensions, a group of scholars has researched with and contributed to the ongoing development of the field (Bank, 2010, 2015a; Nissen, 2003a, 2012a, 2012b). This article is based on the research project “User-driven Standards in Social Work” and focuses on the “Day-team” in Helsingung that works with “youths between the ages of 14–17 who have a problematic use of substances and who are not involved in any other meaningful daytime activity” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 22). The “Day-team” is developed on the basis of descriptions of the “Day-group” in the U-turn model (U-Turn, 2011) and from ongoing dialogues among social workers in and between the two institutions. In order to analyze how social workers in Helsingung use and develop post-psychological standards I will draw on descriptions from the “U-turn model” and excerpts from our fieldwork.

In the U-turn model it is stated that the Day-group should be organized so it becomes “so attractive that the youths want to participate” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 5) and “The day-group’s different activities give the opportunity for new experiences and new pastime interests which contribute to making the treatment period attractive and challenging for the youths” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 25). It is emphasized that the intervention should “be in accordance with the youths and their self-understanding” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 6) and that “it is important that the youths, first and foremost, are viewed as youths and not as substance abusers, criminals, or mentally ill” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 4). To accomplish this and to try to handle the previously mentioned problems, the Day-group should be staffed by trustworthy adults that the youth can talk to and has a range of activities such as the opportunity to finish secondary school, workout at the local gym, and enjoy good food, new experiences, and cultural activities. Furthermore, the youth can participate in the program even if they use drugs outside the institution (U-Turn, 2011). To establish such a non-stigmatizing regime, the institution draws on post-psy, in particular:

a background in a systemic understanding, where the problems of the youths are not perceived as an “inner core” within the youth, but dependent on the relations and contexts the youth is involved in. Here in the U-turn model we work with a holistic approach. Substances are seen

primarily as a symptom of the additional problems the youths are facing in their lives. Simultaneously, substances will often worsen the already-existing problems. Causes can be effects and the other way around. In a holistic perspective, problems with drugs are understood as complex problems, which require complex solutions, solutions which are based on the entire life of the youths and what the youths experience as being problematic and are motivated to change. (U-Turn, 2011, pp. 14–15)

A post-psy ontology is being evoked with the explicit denunciation of a psy-subject with an “inner core.” This post-psy ontology is being enacted—and predisposes toward—relational, systemic, normalizing standards for seeing, articulating, understanding, and thus subjectifying the youth as youth. These post-psy standards and ontologies are composed—and stabilized—by heterogeneous materials. For example, the mundane language, where “youth” and “intoxicants”⁴ are normalizing linguistic standards that accentuate the pleasurable effects of drugs and enroll the youths in semantic networks about youth life, rather than diagnosis. The strategy of using youth/adolescence as a lever for a post-psychological approach can also be recognized as a recurring standard in social work (Nissen, 2003b).

If we think of such post-psy standards as installing a “strategic logic”—a dispositional tendency toward a post-psy ontology—this makes it difficult to use psy-standards, such as the “motivation” discourse to explain difficulties in working with the youth in these practices. This predisposes the social workers to favor and acknowledge the youths’ own perspectives and towards developing holistic, complex, and contextual “user-driven” understandings of youths and their drug use. The difference to practices where the psyche becomes the object of intervention, and the user has to articulate, confess, or recognize that “I am an addict” is striking.

Distributing user-driven standards

But when difficulties cannot be located in the psyche of the user through psy-standards, they reappear in new forms. As mentioned, it is a basic premise of the institutions that the youths voluntarily want to participate. However, the youths in the “Day-team” are minors, and it is often the case that parents and caseworkers, backed by the legal system, “twist their arms” to get them to participate in some kind of educational or treatment regime. This means that their “voluntary” participation is based on their perceiving the institution as a lesser evil or (in some instances) the only available option, and that the youth are often not inclined to participate in the activities, engage in change, or perceive their use of drugs as problematic.

I will now analyze how this “motivation” problem is handled through post-psy standards and a user-driven approach. Apart from using drugs and not being “involved in any other meaningful daytime activity [*sic*]” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 22) the subjective criteria for participating in the Day-team is that the young clients want a change in their lives. What this should consist of is, however, unspecified as the institution “focuses on the youth’s life as a whole and on what the youth experiences as problematic and is motivated to change” (U-Turn, 2011, p. 15). Let us have a look at how this is handled in practice. The following excerpt is from a seminar with social workers from Helsingung and U-turn:

- Tony: (social worker, Helsingung) the last I had under 18, there for example, uh... he wanted to have help to his... to get along better with his family, with his mother especially. Umm... there was an abuse or use or whatever we should choose to call it, that wasn't the big problem. Umm he thought. That's what the parents thought. So the problem...
- Tina: [laughs]
- Tony: ... he wanted to be more in control... it was to get keep the mother in check.
- Several people: [laugh].
- Ann: Can we get more control over Mom, right?
- Tony: Which has worked out really well, right?
- Several people: [laugh]

The laughing indicates how their common approach can be experienced as provocative and paradoxical, because they, as social workers in municipal drug treatment institutions, seem to make it easier for a youth to smoke hash by reducing the conflicts that this causes in relation to the parent.

The social workers do this by producing, articulating, and distributing post-psychological standards for understanding and relating to drug-using youth, for instance standards about favoring the youth's perspectives, avoiding pressure, scolding, and disciplinary and restrictive measures in relation to their drug use. The social workers distribute these standards to parents (in counseling and parent groups), professionals (in day-to-day interaction, in seminars, meetings, network activities), and the wider community (feature articles in the local newspaper, popular television programs, and on their webpage). This is done on a miniscule day-to-day basis, for instance by opposing, commenting, or correcting people if they place too great an emphasis on drugs or talk about the youth as addicts, and by distributing more positive images and narratives about the youth (Bank, 2015b). The strategy of producing positive knowledge of subjects is a well-known theme in the social work literature. Philp (1979) describes how social work mediates between the deviant and normal society by ascribing them, for instance, potential and positive intentions.

There are obvious advantages to this approach. It is a pleasant surprise for many youths that the social workers do not advertise any particular stance on drugs, and are helpful in relation to *their* perceived problems. This makes it possible for them to see the social workers as attentive, relevant, and trustworthy adults they can relate to.

Institutionally, the standard about recognizing the youths' (reasons for) drug use and the relatively easy and non-committal standard that the youth should "want some kind of change" allows them to continue their use of drugs and still be included in the treatment regime. The standard becomes a boundary object that legitimizes both treatment and drug use in relation to the youth and their peer-groups and in relation to parents and professionals (Star & Griesemer, 1989). This opens up new possibilities for cooperation, movement, and change. In comparison to practices where abstinence is used as a standard for regulating users and distinguishing between motivated subjects ready for treatment and those who have to be excluded, this dramatically expands the possibilities for working with "difficult youths."

But, as mentioned, the youths are often not particularly inclined to participate in the activities or interested in reducing their drug use and “motivation” now reappears as pedagogical or therapeutic problems inside the institution. I will now analyze how the social workers handle this by producing post-psychological standards for understanding the youths’ relation to school activities. According to the U-turn model, a core element in the “Day-group” is that the school functions as “a bridge to the normal.” Getting the youth to participate in school activities can however be difficult, as many of them have had bad experiences with being expelled, bullied, or have “dropped out” of school (U-Turn, 2011).

The first excerpts are from a “development day” in Helsingung, January 2011, where the social workers were preparing for the startup of the “Day-team.” Flemming, a social worker who is also the local project manager in Helsingung, is talking about the fact that the youths that will soon start in the Day-team are not currently part of the educational system. He then states: “I mean, they do want to go to school, it’s just that they think the teachers are idiots and they are not allowed to do the things they want to and so on.” The sentence “they *do* want to go to school” does not seem to be referring to any particular youth or opening for a discussion about how the social workers *could* understand the youth. I understand this as a performative statement, where Flemming produces and articulates a local standard for *seeing* the youth. I term this a standard because it is in alignment with—and producing—a post-psy ontology of always-already participating, pro-active learning, developing subjects in process of becoming. But how is this standard handled in practice?

The next excerpt is from a session where the social workers are getting supervision on their work 10 months later, where the “Day-team” has been running for 3 months. The case the social workers have chosen to discuss is regarding Tom,⁵ who has been part of the Day-team for 2 months. Tom attends the “Day-team” but shows no obvious signs of actively engaging in any of the activities. The social workers struggle to understand this as it does not fit with the standard about an always-already pro-active subject who wants to go to school. Should they intervene and how could this be done?:

Lotte: (supervisor) What are the worries?

Morten: (social worker) Are we reaching him? I know that’s a cliché, but I doubt whether I’m getting through to him, because I experience... He is neglecting if we emphasize anything positive, answers no, doesn’t know, or it doesn’t matter.

Lotte: Does that mean that it is difficult to have a conversation with him?

Nanet: (teacher) During class, he rejects much of what is going on.

Didda: (social worker) At the same time, he is very polite which is actually a bit worrying... Can that be a way to deal with it? Has he found a way so he doesn’t need to be engaged and slips through the cracks?

In the above, the social workers articulate their concerns and observations about Tom. The sentence: “are we reaching him? I know that’s a cliché but ...” indicates that they are reflexively aware of the difficulties they are having in making sense of Tom’s actions and how Tom’s actions in other practices could be understood through psy-standards. In the

suggestion: “Can that be a way to deal with it? ... has *he found* a way ...” the social worker Didda tentatively tries to attribute subjective reasons and agency to Tom’s actions. This explanation is, however, not feasible, as it leads to the conclusion that Tom actually tries to avoid being engaged, which does not fit with post-psy standards and social work discourse (Philp, 1979). So let us see how the social workers proceed:

Morten: I had, by the way, ... a thought or an idea which... um... which actually helped me to understand or think about this thing with Tom, a bit differently ... I got this thought that ... learning can also happen through the way one participates. And I think that for Tom, in many ways he participates as a, uh, what’s it called, a legitimate participant. Uh, like a bit from the sidelines. So I think actually, when he is in math class or when he is in group or down at the house, I think in fact there is actually a lot of learning going on as far as how he has to behave and what he has to do and what is happening. And I think he absorbs a whole lot, ... But he needs to be a bit on the periphery because he hasn’t mastered all those things yet. Um and there are a few small signs, like you say, so when he is sitting watching a film. I think it’s a *very* difficult situation for him.

Nanet: Mm.

Morten: Because there are so many feelings and things, and that it [the film] is in English and he has to read [subtitles]. So I think he has to be a bit on the periphery.

Nanet: Mm.

Morten: So he participates in his own fine way. And I really think we should also keep seeing that he actually is learning, so we don’t go um and challenge him too quickly or too much. But really pay attention also too that he learns sort of at his own tempo. Just being in group, that, that is a *huge* step for him.

Didda: Mm.

Morten: And just that he is sitting there and listening behind his cap, and sometimes there is a little comment or sometimes he just nods to what someone has said. In other words, it’s a huge sign that he actually, uh participates and learns through his way of participating. And I think he really needs that, also that, like uh, that there is openness where there is uh, where it is possible for him to participate and sort of check in and out.

Over these few lines, it looks like Morten performs an epistemological breakthrough. When Morten says “I think that for Tom, in many ways he participates as a, uh, what’s it called, a legitimate participant. Uh, like a bit from the sidelines,” he is drawing on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and using this to develop a standard through which he can interpret the minute details of Tom’s movements as signs that he *is* already actively participating “in his own fine way.” This standard makes it possible for the social workers to recognize Tom’s participation and potentialize his development and capacity for change. A particularly interesting aspect of this is that when practices get structured according to post-psy ontology, this disperses and multiplies the target of intervention, as environmental factors and the social workers themselves become the relational conditions for the development and change of the “identified client.” If the social workers do not already view Tom as a participating,

pro-active subject it is *their* subjectivity and not only Tom's that has to be worked upon. This work is often precarious and difficult and the social workers describe how their abilities for "inclusiveness," their own ambitions for the youth to develop, or their own personal views on drugs are challenging to *them*.

The post-psychological standards that are developed in the Day-team can be described as "user-driven" or "second order" standards. In contrast to psy-standard they do not govern through prescribing, appropriating, defining, categorizing, or positioning but rather by alleviating the youth from some of the standards about "rational" choice, abstinence, and normality they face from relatives and professionals (Rose, 1998). This expands the horizon for how one can be(come) a legitimate self-governing subject and makes it possible for the youth to gradually develop their own (user-driven) standards for life, drug use, etc. Aspects of this approach have roots all the way back to client-centered therapy (Rogers, 1951) and this is accentuated and developed further in the post-psy therapeutic literature that empathizes the role of the professional as a "de-centered" (White, 2007) "not-knowing expert" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) who abstains from normative judgments. This literature focuses, however, primarily on subjects who seek therapy voluntarily and are "motivated" for change. But as this is not necessarily the case for the youth in Helsingung and many other subjects in social work practices, the question that arises is, how do the workers positively *enhance* the youths' processes of change, choice, and development? To answer this I will draw on a final empirical excerpt from a team meeting in Helsingung. At this meeting statistics depicting the flow of youth through the institution were discussed. The social workers seemed very pleased by the results, which prompted me to ask them about their own explanations for this:

Dorte: Well, ah..., I think that some of the success rate of the treatment, in this type of treatment also has to do with our ability to become excited on their behalf.

Toni: Mm.

Dorte: That we are really good at saying "well done" or we'll like give them a belief that this can be done. That we give them strength and power, um and I think that our personalities play a big part there as well. Because it's not everyone that can produce a contagious enthusiasm. I mean so it still seems authentic and. And I think that we really all do that. I mean, I, I think that there is a connection there, as far as our success rate goes. Because this, this requires a hell of a lot of energy to keep up and inspire for a change. It requires that one invests a lot of energy into it.

Dorte talks about how they use their own energy and produce a contagious enthusiasm that affects and modulates the youths' potentials for change. I articulate this as a post-psychological standard for working with change or "motivation" that I suggest to theorize as "affective subjectification" (Bank, 2015a, 2015b). As an example, a social worker energetically exclaims "*Wow, you haven't smoked for three days, that's amazing!*" This expression of enthusiasm, on behalf of the youth, is transferred affectively to the youth and according to the social worker, this energizes or potentializes their process of change by "giving them some strength and some power." This way of working with change is not mediated by psy-standards using appropriation or signification as a relay for

reflexivity and change, nor is it in the first instance based on a liberal obligation to choose (Rose, 1998). Instead it can be read as a “selective modulation,” “affective boosting,” “energizing,” or “amplification” of already existing processes. This selective amplification of positively valued processes extends, prolongs, and affirms the youths’—perhaps minimal, indiscriminate—movements and developments. This form of affective subjectification works through both bodily/affective and cognitive registers and depends on specific ways of being, relating, and communicating. As Dorte says: “not everyone ... can produce a contagious enthusiasm... I mean so it still seems authentic.” Perhaps what is described as “authenticity,” can also be described as a successful performance (Martin, 2007) that depends on affective and contagious energies that connect subjectivities and opens a common horizon of understanding (Bank, 2015b; Heidegger, 1962).

In a post-psy ontology subjectivity does not stop at the skin, but is profoundly relational. Configured on post-psychology, “motivation” is not something inside individual bodies or minds but can be thought of as distributed relational energies that can be produced socially and flow in and between bodies—human bodies, discursive bodies, and all other sorts of bodies (Blackman, 2012). In this way the (presumed psychological) distinction between separate subjects and bodies is dissolved as subjectivity and experiences are constantly performed and produced relationally or intra-actively. In Helsingung the user-driven standards mediate and make this form of affective subjectification possible and vice versa.

Critical perspectives

I have tried to positively articulate how post-psy standards are used to produce subjectivity and organize practices. But of course, these are forms of power that call for new kinds of criticism.

One possible and radical criticism that could be put forward is that “empowering” through user-driven standards is yet another form of neoliberal governance (Cruikshank, 1999). In post-industrial, liberal democracies, the most pertinent threat to the state is not that masses gather for a violent revolt, but that subjects are unproductive or depressed (Ehrenberg, 2009). In the age of depression (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2005) governance is less about disciplinary control than about mobilizing subjects and producing movement. In a neoliberal competition state (Cerny, 1997; Pedersen, 2011) this means that the former marginal subjectivities, the drug user, the artist, the communist, the homosexual, and the queer are no longer patrolling the boundaries of normality through disciplinary exclusion, confinement, or death (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). Even the drug user can constitute normality from the inside, by recognizing that to *choose* drugs can be a way to take on the “obligation to be free” (Rose, 1998) and to be in a process of development and change. The postmodern neoliberal standards for subjectivity are not identity, sameness, or even rationality, but constant movement and development of self-governing enterprising individuals (Martin, 2007; Rose, 1998).

When the youths in the treatment facilities we have studied are asked what *they* want, they often answer “I don’t know.” Perhaps it is because they really do not know? Or perhaps it is a way to be outside the normative demands for desire? Or perhaps because answering “smoking hash and doing nothing in particular” is not valid if one still wants

to be recognized as a legitimate subject, whose perspectives and standards for the good life are recognized?

Another criticism that could be raised is that post-psychological standards can be double standards that obscure the effect of norms and mechanisms of power. Discursively, the standards about client-centeredness (Anderson & Goolishian, 2004; Rogers, 1951) and transparency (White, 2007) favor the youth's own perspectives and standards. But at the same time affective technologies are used to mobilize, recruit, energize, and selectively amplify normatively valued processes and specific ways of being a person. As the affective forms of subjectification do not use signification as a primary mechanism they can be harder to recognize, resist, and criticize. If the youth, after some time, "decide" to cut down their use of drugs, this could be seen as a normalization that reflects the social worker's and the larger society's standards on drugs, smuggled in affectively through the body.

Turning to criticisms more in line with the argument in this article, we could ask what a post-psychological expertise implies. As I have analyzed, the social workers have to cultivate both their abilities to abstain from certain normative judgments, their reflexivity, and their capabilities to affect the youth energetically. This affective work is demanding and precarious as they are trying to modulate on not-yet recognizable potentials and processes, something virtual in the process of being actualized.

As Dorte says: "this requires a hell of a lot of energy to keep up and inspire for a change. It requires that one invests a lot of energy into it." As the social workers become the fuel for change, doing a new kind of affective work (Hochschild, 2003) where they must relentlessly produce intensity, there is an immanent danger of individualization. As social worker Dorte says: "I really think it is our personalities that play a part as well." This means that if change is not produced it is the social worker, as a person, who has failed.

On an organizational level a similar problem can appear as post-psy practices might require more resources compared to psy-practices that expel the most difficult users and hence can document "cheaper" and apparently "better" results. In this way post-psy practices are in an inherent danger for self-marginalization as the difficulties, conflicts, and problems that can no longer be attributed to the users might be relocated either in the professionals, the institutions, or the "post-psychological complex." A further problem is that difficulties and conflicts connected to more "structural aspects" of the users' difficulties—the mandatory educational system, difficulties in the job market, criminalization of drugs—are not necessarily addressed.

Conclusion

The analysis of post-psychological standards in social work could lead us to theorize more generally about standards and strategies for subjectification. In my emphasis on post-psy standards I am not suggesting that psy-standards—and what governmentality studies could analyze as disciplinary or neoliberal strategies of government—are not involved in the practices I have studied. Rather they are modulated, or reconfigured by post-psychological standards and strategies that function through other logics and registers.

Thinking through a post-psy ontology enables us to analyze how post-psy standards are used to disrupt the prevailing psy-standards, and enable subjects to move from problematic subject positions, discourses, and narratives and develop more preferred

standards and subjectivities. Following Davies (1990), I suggest we term this as an affective production of agency.

I have drawn attention to how post-psychological, user-driven, and affective standards and strategies can enrich and expand our understanding of how subjects govern and are governed. Such standards and strategies could be used for forming subjects, building relations, and organizing practices and communities in a way that is not “motivated” or “energized” by a neoliberal rationalistic diagram of competition or economic exchange. Instead these strategies point towards how we can mobilize flows of energy, connect subjects and communities, and open up for novel enactments of new types of subjects and standards.

This could be a way for contemporary social work to be critical and productive. First, by empowering and enrolling subjects in the production of subjectivity through user-driven standards that can facilitate ways of living that are more in accordance with the subject’s own values, wishes, and beliefs (Foucault, 1982b). And second, by modulating and transforming dominant forms of power by contributing to the development of new standards for social work practices in the welfare state (Nissen, 2012a).

Proposing post-psychological standards for subjectification is precarious and risky. The standards and analytical strategies we develop can be used for many different purposes, but rather than having a merely “negative” critique of power, standards, and institutional practices perhaps the time is ripe for us, as critical scholars, to engage more directly with power and produce vital and productive theoretical concepts and standards in—and for—the practices we study (cf. Stenner, 2016).

In our ongoing dialogues with social workers, we contribute to a post-psychological reflexivity about how their practices are normative and intertwined with power, by suggesting concepts such as affective and user-driven standards. This opens up an ongoing production, problematization, and development of the standards they use (Bank, 2015b; Bank & Nissen, 2015).

Our modest hope with this is to attempt to follow Foucault’s dream of an affirmative criticism (Foucault, 1997) that contributes to the production of user-driven standards,

which permits individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (Foucault, 2000, p. 225)

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Notes

1. For instance Bateson (1977), James (2011), and Vygotsky (1978).
2. In 2011–2014 our research team conducted approximately 285 hours of participant observation and interviews with professionals and youths. The materials were recorded, coded in

- NVivo, and partly transcribed. Methodologically the project drew on ethnography (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Spradley & McCurdy, 1988), institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), praxiography (Mol, 2002), and practice research (Nissen, 2009) See also turn.kk.dk, helsingung.nu, and substance.au.dk
3. <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/>
 4. Drugs, substances, intoxicants; the Danish word is “rus-midler,” literally: “means for getting high.”
 5. The names of the young people are anonymized.

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