

Emotional Capital as a Neoliberal Strategy of Identity: Coaching Upper Middle-Class Subjectivities in Poland

Michał Mokrzan

DOI: 10.21104/CL.2019.2.04

Abstract

This article suggests that emotional capital can be treated as a neoliberal strategy of identity. The ethnographic research is based on work with a community of Polish coaches and their clients. The paper argues that the identity and the status of members of the upper middle class is built, not only through the accumulation of material goods and the creation of beneficial social relations, but also by adopting lifestyle habits such as participating in coaching sessions, in order to attain self-awareness, emotional well-being and the ability to manage one's emotions. From my analytical perspective, coaching is seen as a materialisation of neoliberal technologies of governmentality, helping to reach and tweak the cognitive-emotional dispositions that make up a form of emotional capital.

Key words

emotional capital, upper middle class, neoliberal governmentality, coaching, Poland

Acknowledgment

This article presents the results of a study carried out within the research grant *Retoryczne konstruowanie neoliberalnych podmiotów. Antropologiczna analiza coachingu* (Rhetorical emergence of neoliberal subjects. Anthropological analysis of coaching) funded by Narodowe Centrum Nauki (National Science Centre, Poland) (UMO-2014/15/D/HS3/00483). Certain parts of this paper were translated from Polish by Jarosław A. Szymański.

Owing to the confidential character of ethnographic studies, all the coaches and coaches quoted in this paper were assigned pseudonyms.

Contact

Ph.D. Michał Mokrzan, University of Wrocław, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Szewska 50/51, 50-139 Wrocław, Poland; e-mail: michal.mokrzan@uwr.edu.pl.

Jak citovat / How to cite

Mokrzan, Michał. (2019). Emotional Capital as a Neoliberal Strategy of Identity: Coaching Upper Middle-Class Subjectivities in Poland. *Český lid* 106, 205–228. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.21104/CL.2019.2.04>

Introduction

The rapid growth of personal development practices observed in recent years has certainly been driven by dynamic changes in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres. The global phenomena of unemployment, career leaps, longer working time, fragmented support structures, loneliness, and individualization, which redefine social relations, boost the demand for support from expert institutions managing our ways of governing the self. Contemporary studies of personal practices (Binkley 2011; Illouz 2007) show that – in the words of Janusz Surzykiewicz (2013: 125) – “the demand for help through sharing expertise is becoming one of the basic needs of the modern human being. (...) [Recently there has been] a growing tendency to turn to specialists for help in making decisions or resolving other issues”. One of the priorities in late capitalism is subjective well-being. Specialists which offer methods to achieve it include such “experts of the soul” (Rose 1999: 11) as psychologists, psychotherapists, and also new kinds of professionals, such as self-help gurus, motivational speakers and coaches.

The activities of the latter have become one of the fastest growing industries in the world. A study based on a survey commissioned by the International Coach Federation and conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP shows that “global total revenue from coaching in 2015 was \$2.356 billion USD” (2016 ICF Global Coaching Study), whereas in 2006 it was 754 million GBP (approx. 1.300 billion USD) (Starr 2008: 7). Over the last ten years this rapid growth in coaching has also been observed in Poland. This has come in various forms of educational coaching, ranging from a few days of training to academic education and long-term courses. In 2014, in accordance with the Regulation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the occupation “coach” was entered into the Polish register of the Classification of Occupations and Specializations for Labour Market Needs. Coaching has been used successfully by managers, executives and academics, and ,in Poland, has gained the status of an occupation offering techniques for supporting individuals and groups in their quest to achieve emotional fulfilment and to increase productivity at work.

In this paper, which is based on my ethnographic research within a community of Polish coaches and their clients (coachees), I try to examine the role of coaching in the processes of establishing upper middle-class status and striving for self-understanding. The main question of the analysis is: how the upper middle class identity is constructed through the coaching process? I argue that the identity and the self-image of

members of the upper middle class, which is the object of my research, are created not only through the accumulation of material goods, the acquisition of ideas and objects of cultural value, and the creation of beneficial social relations, but also by adopting lifestyle habits such as participating in coaching practices in order to attain happiness and emotional balance as well as professional fulfilment.

The coachees I interviewed participated in the following types of coaching: life coaching (directed towards the improvement of personal relationships), business coaching (focused on the development of economic activity), career coaching (oriented towards career development) and executive coaching (focused on the development of the company's management). Regardless of the type of coaching, the activities they undertook within the coaching processes were aimed at gaining the ability to manage emotions, achieving self-awareness and mental toughness, and attaining subjective well-being. They argued that coaching helps them to reach and tweak the cognitive-emotional dispositions, which in the social sciences make up a form of so-called emotional capital (Cottingham 2016; Illouz 2007; Ward – McMurray 2016).

In order to describe the role of coaching and emotional capital in the processes of producing upper middle-class status, self-image and identity, I intend to elaborate on the ideas proposed in the above-mentioned works devoted to emotional capital and to supplement them with the perspective offered by studies in governmentality. Inspired by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, studies in governmentality show that coaching was developed as a consequence of the emergence of technologies of governmentality that are defined as neoliberal (Binkley 2014; Foucault 2008). These technologies are deployed to motivate individuals to become more efficient, to help them feel satisfied with their own achievements and to allow them to feel greater responsibility in various areas of social relations. These technologies aim to produce accountable, enterprising and resilient upper middle-class subjectivities in Poland.

As such, this paper can be located, on the one hand, within the framework of the anthropology of the middle class (Donner 2017), which does not limit the definition of class to its economic situation, but takes into account “a sense of belonging that makes up for a shared identity, including shared lifestyle and a sense of dignity associated with it” (Zarycki 2009: 13). On the other hand, the presented studies are part of anthropologies of the good life (Fisher 2014), in which subjective well-being, care of the self, and self-esteem are the key subjects of the ethnographic enquiry.

Procedures and Social Actors

This article is based on the fieldwork research I conducted in the years 2015–2017 with a group of coaches and coachees who live and work in major Polish cities or in their suburbs. Among the ethnographic methods I used to help me capture the local and subjective nature of social actors' experiences were participant observation, as well as structured and open in-depth interviews.

I participated in twenty workshops and courses organized by coaching associations and schools. I observed coaches in the professional context and coaching sympathisers (managers, entrepreneurs, HR professionals, academic teachers) who wanted to explore the professional side of coaching or who strived to achieve happiness and self-realization. I observed the habits of the coaches and listened to their language of expertise. In fact, participation in those coaching workshops and courses forced me to fully engage in the subject of my research. During these meetings I played both roles: of a coach and a coachee. As a coach, I learned to ask questions, create trust-based agreement with coachees, listen carefully and use coaching tools. As a coachee, I learned to manage my emotions and take care of myself. When taking part in the workshops, I tried to make my research motives clear to the other participants. I attempted to present my anthropological identity as clearly as was possible during the introduction ceremonies opening the workshops.

Additionally, apart from using participant observation, I conducted sixty interviews with professional coaches and coachees. Over a period of three years of fieldwork research, I carefully listened to the narratives of my respondents about their coaching experiences. In the discourses, I looked for a set of tropes forming a kind of screen, which renders coaching activities meaningful. The interviews I conducted were public and took place in coaching offices, cafes, restaurants, university lecture halls, and my own room at the University. I conducted a number of the interviews via instant messenger. This is the natural working environment of coaches, and is often used to run coaching sessions. The narratives produced by my interlocutors during these interviews were their interpretation of meanings they assigned to their own actions as well as the actions of others.

The group of professional coaches I interviewed consisted of thirty people: eighteen women and twelve men, between the ages of 30–65. They had at one time worked as managers in various companies. Some provided coaching services and at the same time worked as HR professionals, or taught expensive student courses in coaching schools, or ran

workshops for other coaches who needed to improve their qualifications. Many coaches had a degree in psychology and ran private coaching and psychotherapy centres. I interviewed only accredited coaches or those who had completed coaching schools that adhere to high educational standards. They defined themselves as professional and ethical coaches and distinguished themselves from motivational speakers, mentors, or, what they called, “self-styled coaches”. They argued that professional coaches must remain impartial and support clients in their own decisions, no matter whether the decision is to look for a new job opportunity or get involved more deeply in the development of an organization.

Considering that a one-hour coaching session is expensive, people who use the service are mostly well-paid managers, businessmen, entrepreneurs and professionals. In answer to my question of whether miners or car mechanics used coaching, one coach, Ms Lucyna, replied that coaching is “a luxury service”, while another, Ms Marzena, said that this was a service for “the elites”, and not for “the others”. These emic terms show that a distinction between the social classes in Poland may be made on the basis of access to coaching practices. “I’ve never heard about coaching sessions targeted at nurses, miners or cleaners. They are definitely for the corporate world” – claims coach Mr Patryk, echoing the opinion of my previous interviewees. He also claimed that the reason for this lies in the very nature of the work performed by those professional groups. In his view, “miners and cleaners are those who take, rather than give, orders (...). We coaches are approached by people with a certain degree of power, who delegate tasks to other people.” It follows that professional coaching services are used by those whose class status can be defined in relation to both the size of their wallets and the power they wield over others within professional relations. My research among coachees confirms the above-mentioned observation and allows me to posit the class dimension of this form of support.

On account of the professional positions they held, my interviewees (coachees) could be associated with attributes of power and leadership, which form as strong a bond between the members of social classes as economic capital (possession and associated exploitation), treated within the neo-Marxist tradition as a determinant of class membership. Similar to the American and French interviewees of Michèle Lamont, the coachees I interviewed, “exercise influence on events, products, and people: they conceive, advise, hire, promote, judge, select, and allocate” (Lamont 1992: xxiii). They were well-educated managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. The managerial group included executive, project, and middle-level managers as well as human resources generalists (HR),

who worked in global and local corporations with headquarters located in the major cities in Poland. The group of entrepreneurs comprised self-employed professionals and business owners. The group of professionals included academics (habilitated doctors and doctors who were leaders of research projects) as well as healthcare professionals, such as therapists, physicians, and dietitians, working at government-sponsored and private institutions alike. The group consisted of thirty people aged 25–45, the majority of whom were women (twenty-four).

Understanding of upper middle class

I define both groups, both the individuals (coachees) and the coaches (helping professionals), as being members of the upper middle class. This classification is grounded in the social theory exposing the class-creating role of lifestyles and forms of cultural capital. It is crucial because, as Scott T. Fitzgerald (2012) notes, “despite copious studies on the middle classes, there is no single, widely held definition of the middle class. Some scholars define middle class in terms of the relation to the means of production, others in terms of relative incomes, and still others in terms of consumption patterns”. In my analysis of the Polish upper middle class, I follow the sociological and anthropological works based on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Buchowski 2017; Gdula – Sadura 2012; Lamont 1992; Schröder 2008; Zarycki 2009). They recommend relating the definition of middle class not only to economic factors such as ownership, production, and modes of subsistence, but also to social, symbolic and cultural capital as well as the notion of *habitus*.

Ingo Schröder, referring to Bourdieu’s theory, argues that the Central and Eastern European middle class should be considered as:

a true product of the transformation and a rather heterogeneous assemblage of mid- to upper-level government officials and managers, businessmen, professionals, academics, technicians, and some skilled laborers. The middle class is defined not only by its economic condition but also by its level of education and its predominantly urban lifestyle characterized by consumption and certain leisure activities, and by its self-image centered on the quest for social recognition. The consumption of material goods and media images plays a key role in self-identification (...). The middle class self-image also includes ideas about high degrees of adaptability to the market economy, of flexibility and social mobility, a positive attitude toward the transformation process, and key values

aligned with free enterprise, private property, and individualism
(Schröder 2008: 14).

While accepting the aforementioned features of the middle class, Henryk Domański acknowledges that, due to the fact that the Polish middle class is a group composed of such different professional categories as academic teachers, entrepreneurs, managers, doctors, technicians, and administrative employees, it does not meet the criterion of so-called internal homogeneity, which the author treats as a key determinant of class separateness (Domański 2016: 143). Despite the conclusion that the middle class is not a social class in the strict sense (Domański 2012: 13), according to Domański, the social groups that co-create it are linked by the fact that they all perform similar functions in the political, economic and cultural spheres, and their occupations situate them in the upper part of the social hierarchy (Domański 2016: 144). When referring to Bourdieu's theory, Maciej Gdula and Przemysław Sadura (2012: 28–56) prefer not to abandon the definition of the Polish middle class as a social class in a strong sense. In my opinion they rightly argue that the middle class in the Polish context, understood as a category of people occupying a specific place in the social stratification, is distinguished by a shared lifestyle. According to Gdula and Sadura, on the one hand, it imitates the patterns of ways of living recognized as specific to the upper class, and on the other, it recognizes its lifestyle as being different from that of the lower class.

With reference to the above-mentioned insights, I decided to define the groups of coaches and coachees as upper middle class. My interviewees held university degrees and professional positions involving the management of other people's activities (lower level workers, research associates, assistants, those with an MA or MSc degree, and dependent labourers). In addition, as was the case with the members of the upper middle class participating in Lamont's study, their lifestyles, "are offered as a model to the rest of the population [to members of the lower middle class and lower class] by the mass media and the advertising industry" (Lamont 1992: xxiii). Their economic capital and level of education may be perceived by the lower classes as high and desirable, and yet – in contrast to the capitals owned by the upper class – still attainable. On the other hand, my interviewees still aspired to the model of life and levels of income and symbolic capital embodied by the owners and presidents of the companies and institutions they worked for, as well as other people higher in the professional hierarchy, such as, top managers and full professors doubling as university rectors and deans. This

is, indeed, why my interviewees decided to use coaching services: to get closer to the social positions held by their superiors. At the same time, given their distinctive feature of entrepreneurship, the coachees were convinced that moving up the social ladder was well within their reach.

The very act of using the services of professional coaches was treated as part of the lifestyle endorsed by the upper middle class. As noted by the coach Mr Przemek, in contrast with psychotherapy, which the business sector associates with “emotional problems and mental instability”, coaching is “ennobling for business people, managers and entrepreneurs”. According to my interviewee, “attending therapy is perceived as a sign of weakness, while saying ‘I’m seeing my coach’ is associated with attributes of strengths, something that makes you even better”. In this light, partaking in coaching sessions can be treated as a cultural sign of social distinction, in a similar way to playing tennis or attending opera performances. With reference to Bourdieu’s theory, I argue that social classes in Poland differ in terms of their access to coaching practices. A fraction of the upper middle class, which is the subject of my research, is defined by the lifestyle characterized by its use of coaching practices that provide opportunities to acquire and expand the form of cultural capital that is recognized as emotional capital. This statement requires reflection on the role which emotional capital plays within the social sciences, especially in Bourdieu’s theory of capital.

Emotional Capital as a Subject of Social Sciences

Tony Bennett and Elizabeth Silva argue that in Bourdieu’s theory, “capital (...) is any resource which confers an advantage on those who hold it and which, further, can be accumulated and passed on through mechanisms of inheritance” (Bennett – Silva 2011: 430). Different class position reveals various levels and types of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. Economic capital is „money and material objects that can be used to produce goods and services” (Turner 2013: 597), whilst social capital can be understood as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1986: 248–249).

As Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau (1988) point out, the third of type of capital, i.e. cultural capital, although of key importance to Bourdieu's theory, evades the grasp of unambiguous conceptualisation. Bourdieu's oeuvre witnessed a transformation of the concept, which was also differentially defined for the purpose of individual analyses. Lamont and Lareau argue that Bourdieu along with Jean-Claude Passeron (1979) understand cultural capital as:

informal academic standards which are also class attributes of the dominant class. These standards and attributes are: informal knowledge about the school, traditional humanist culture, linguistic competence and specific attitudes, or personal style (e.g., ease, naturalness, aloofness, creativity, distinction and 'brilliance') (Lamont – Lareau 1988: 155).

In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) narrow down the scope of cultural capital exclusively to linguistic competence (grammar, pronunciation, tone of voice), academic culture, formal knowledge, culture, and school diplomas. In turn, “attitudes toward school, manners and personal style, and taste for high culture are now conceived of as class ethos rather than cultural capital” (Lamont – Lareau 1988: 155). Yet another definition of cultural capital can be found in *Distinction*: “it is an indicator and a basis of class position; cultural attitudes, preferences and behaviors are conceptualized as «tastes» which are being mobilized for *social selection*” (Lamont – Lareau 1988: 155). Taste becomes the privileged indicator of social class. As Bourdieu (1984: 6) puts it:

taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.

In turn, Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three basic forms of cultural capital: institutionalised, objectified, and embodied. Institutionalised cultural capital comprises diplomas, certificates and distinctions. Cultural capital's objectified form is made up of all one's cultural goods, including books, dictionaries, paintings, recordings and musical instruments. Embodied cultural capital, then, manifests itself through the attitudes, knowledge, competences and skills acquired in the process of socialisation, acculturation and education.

Bourdieu introduces a fourth type of capital – symbolic capital, that is, “a form which is assumed by different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1990: 128). According to Bourdieu (1986), specific forms of capital may be converted into other types of capital, making for the key factor in the process of reproducing class divisions.

In a critical review of Bourdieu’s theory, Tony Bennett et al. observe that:

*later analyses [proposed by Bourdieu in *The Social Structure of Economy*] have suggested the need to recognise, in addition, other forms of cultural capital that social groups might be able to mobilise. In one of his last works, Bourdieu introduced the concept of ‘technical capital’ to refer to the distinctive assets that members of the working classes acquire through their vocational skills and pass on to their children through domestic training (Bennett et al. 2009: 29–30).*

Bourdieu, then, felt a need to continually correct and complement his own theory and, moreover, as Diane Reay (2000: 569) describes, “he has invited researchers to develop his theoretical framework in order to make sense of their empirical findings”. One of the results produced by the effort to develop his theory is the conception of emotional capital, understood as the embodied form of cultural capital. And even though “Bourdieu never refers explicitly to emotional capital in his own work” (Reay 2000: 571) and his “treatment of emotion is extremely vague and is often implicitly associated with women’s work” (Ward and McMurray 2016: 91), his theory helped ground the conception of emotional capital from the sociological position, making it distinct from the influential conceptions developed in the field of positive psychology (Goleman 1995; Salovey – Mayer 1990). The thesis is confirmed by the works of Marci Cottingham (2016), Eva Illouz (2007; 2008), Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray (2016) on emotional capital. They accentuate the mechanism of capital conversion, which is crucial for Bourdieu’s theory.

Ward and McMurray (2016: 93) define emotional capital as “the capacity to perceive, perform and manage contextually relevant emotions (where such capacity is) acquired through exposure, experience and praxis”. The categories refer to social contexts such as early and late socialisation, when individuals can gain or extend emotional capital. Ward and McMurray (2016: 94) additionally argue that “the ability to read the feeling norms and display rules associated with a given ‘field’ allows us to convert that emotional capital into social capital

(...). Emotional capital, in the form of emotion management, leads to an accumulation of economic capital”. The assumption regarding the conversion of emotional capital is also shared by Cottingham (2016: 452), who perceives emotional capital as a separate type of embodied cultural capital “that includes the emotion-specific, trans-situational resources that individuals activate and embody in distinct fields” (Cottingham 2016: 451). In her opinion, “emotional capital is a tripartite concept composed of emotion-based knowledge, management skills, and capacities to feel that links self-processes and resources to group membership and social location” (Cottingham 2016: 452). Cottingham argues that emotional capital, like economic capital, is unevenly distributed in society and is inextricably linked to differences in access to power and class privileges. It is also a tool for the exclusion and unification of social classes (Cottingham 2016: 460).

The idea of the conversion of emotional capital and its unequal distribution in society as truthful to Bourdieu’s theory is also found in the works of Illouz, which take up issues similar to those presented in this article. In analysing the phenomenon of emotional capitalism, Illouz points to the key role that psychological discourses play in the production, distribution and reproduction of emotional capital. With the professionalisation of psychological knowledge and its dissemination in various contexts of social life, emotional capital – understood by Illouz (2007: 69) as “self-awareness, the ability to identify (...) feelings, talk about them, empathize with each other” – has become a competence required in business (companies recruiting employees carry out personality and emotional intelligence tests) and in private life. Referring to Bourdieu’s theory, Illouz argues that:

emotional forms of capital can be converted into monetary ones. (...) Surpassing traditional forms of cultural capital, such as wine tasting or familiarity with high culture, emotional capital seems to mobilize the least reflexive aspects of habitus. It exists in the form of ‘long-lasting dispositions of mind and body’ and is the most ‘embodied’ part of cultural capital (Illouz 2008: 214).

It is worth noting here that the research conducted by Illouz corresponds with what the representatives of studies in governmentality write in the context of psy-discipline (Rose 1999; Binkley 2014). Therefore, I believe that updating the above-mentioned social analysis with considerations developed in studies in governmentality is strongly recommended. The key concept of governmentality was coined by

Foucault. In his research studies in the 1970s, he focused mainly on the technologies of power, and overlooked the existence of a set of attitudes, actions, and ideas, which he later referred to as technologies of the self (Foucault 1988: 19). The shift of focus to technologies of the self and their relation with technologies of power, which Foucault made in his late works devoted to the relations between various forms of power and subjectification processes, marks the so-called third theoretical shift in his theory (Foucault 1990: 6). Foucault refers to the link between technologies of power and technologies of the self by using the neologism of governmentality. He believes that governmentality is not only the domain of political discourse on state government and administration, but also appears in medical, philosophical, religious and pedagogical discourses in relation to such issues as government of souls and lives, government of children and government of the self (Foucault 1991: 87). One of the forms of governmentality explored by Foucault (2008) is neoliberalism, defined as a set of reasonable technologies facilitating the government of social subjects, in the fashion of economic entities. On the basis of Foucault's theory, Sam Binkley concluded that, as part of neoliberal governmentality, the subject is encouraged to:

cultivate themselves as autonomous, self-interested individuals, and to view their resources and aptitudes as human capital for investment and return. Neoliberal governmentality presumes a more or less continuous series that runs from those macro-technologies by which states govern populations, to the micro-technologies by which individuals govern themselves, allowing power to govern individuals 'at a distance' as individuals translate and incorporate the rationalities of political rule into their own methods for conducting themselves (Binkley 2009: 62).

Psy-disciplines, analysed as part of studies in governmentality, are a materialisation of neoliberal governmentality. Inspired by Foucault, the analyses are aimed at capturing how psy-disciplines shape social subjects by means of the technology of power, and how social subjects draw on the acquired psychological knowledge to shape their selves. According to Nikolas Rose (1999), social subjects are encouraged by experts of psy-disciplines to work on themselves through incorporating the discourse of psy-disciplines. They use the techniques taught to them to create themselves in the most effective way. As an example, Rose refers to behavioural techniques that teach self-government. These techniques help control one's emotions and feelings and facilitate self-control. Drawing

on psychological discourse, neoliberal subjects are able to manage their anxieties. They can identify their own emotional states as well as the emotional states of others. This ability improves their interpersonal communication competence. What is more, they can use the acquired knowledge of behavioural therapy to achieve a state of subjective well-being, or to influence the way other people behave or think (Rose 1999: 233–242). Although Rose does not use such wording, we can say that, through participation in a behavioural therapy programme, individuals gain emotional capital.

To supplement Rose's discourse, Binkley observes that in comparison to disciplinary technology, which manifested itself in the 18th and 19th centuries in schools, the army, hospitals, and other such institutions through disciplinary acts and regulation practices, neoliberal psy-enterprise technology uses a different logic. In the neoliberal technology, based on the concept of the liberalisation of social relations, one's inner life is treated as an enterprise with the objective of creating individuals who are fully independent, active, mentally resilient and responsible for their actions, rather than merely adjusted to certain social standards (Binkley 2011: 92). According to Binkley, the positive psychology of Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihályi (2000) (teaching techniques used to achieve happiness), the emotional intelligence of Daniel Goleman (1995), as well as various forms of coaching, are all manifestations of neoliberal technologies of governmentality. These technologies contribute to the creation of the neoliberal subject, "for whom emotional well-being provides a category of identity, a biographical yardstick by which the passing of life is registered and interpreted" (Binkley 2014: 17). This optimistic vision of neoliberal psy-enterprise technology, in which the self has become a reflexive project (Giddens 1991: 180), should be challenged with the fact that personal development practices are strongly based on the grassroots discourse of frustration and a sense of being unfulfilled. Anders Petersen (2011: 5), referring to empirical research, even argues that "the expectation of lasting fulfilment of authentic self-realization may be regarded as a chronic stress factor for the individual and risks creating depression" (for more critiques, see: Cederström – Spicer 2015).

As demonstrated above, studies in governmentality can effectively support and complete the above-mentioned emotional capital social analysis. Relying on both sources of inspiration, I understand the form of embodied cultural capital that is recognised as emotional capital as an ability to effectively use or control emotions in various economic, family, work or social life circumstances, and as a competence to critically

review one's own intellectual beliefs and identify self-limiting as well as self-supporting thinking patterns. Emotional capital, as Illouz (2007: 64) notes, consists of "self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, [and] handling relationships". These dispositions can be acquired in the coaching process, or so the interviewed coaches and coachees strongly believe.

Affective Labour: Narratives about the Coaching Experience

In order to exemplify how the ideas of neoliberal governmentality and emotional capital are embodied in social practice, in this section, I invoke the narratives of my interlocutors illustrating their own experience in relation to their participation in the coaching process (the data gathered by means of participant observation are mentioned here only incidentally). These narratives are interpretations of the meanings they give to themselves and to the social world. This is their own, but, at the same time, a culturally defined, understanding of what appears in their consciousness. Due to their professional roles and attained education, my interlocutors had the ability to critically examine their situatedness in the world. They were entangled in the discourses and theoretical practices whose mechanisms they were aware of (Bernasconi 2010: 862–863). During the analysis, I do not shy away from a transliteration of the narrative. In my view, this strategy remains coherent with the interpretative model of social sciences which are interested in describing how people interpret their experience and create knowledge on the basis of the descriptions of these interpretations.

The reasons why my respondent-coachees decided to use the services of a coach ranged from the desire to improve their professional and personal life to the need to overcome negative emotions or a bad frame of mind related to an issue. Managers, entrepreneurs and academic teachers enrolled on career or executive coaching programmes in search of answers to a variety of questions, such as: How can I become the leader of an efficient team? How can I motivate my colleagues and subordinates to work more efficiently? The coachees who enrolled on a life-coaching programme were looking for insight into themselves and a new perspective on their personal relations. They were driven by the desire to be a better mother, father, spouse or partner. Their key question was: How should I work on myself to become "a better version of myself"? – as coachee Ms Diana put it. Some of my respondent-coachees were driven by negative emotions and anxieties. When asked about their reason for enrolling on a coaching programme, they often

referred to “frustration” with regard to, for example, losing control of their time management abilities, wasting time, an inability to take difficult decisions, a loss of life-work balance, unsatisfactory relations with their superiors or colleagues, a lack of professional fulfilment or satisfaction with work, the feeling of loneliness in an executive position, or the sense of being a bad partner or parent. Many of my respondents had already frequently participated in coaching processes and coaching workshops. They confessed that they had felt it necessary to re-use the coach’s services to “recharge with energy” – as Ms Agnieszka said. It was evident that participation in the coaching process had become their neoliberal lifestyle. The above-mentioned reasons and motivations for using coaching reveal the neoliberal context of coaching practices.

The main conceptual metaphor which organises practices within coaching is a metaphor of life as “labour of self on self” (Foucault 1987: 117). The experience of my respondents illustrate that the distinction between social classes is reflected not only in the judgment of taste or modes of production but also in access to the different technologies of the self, which – as Foucault puts it – “permit 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” (Foucault 1988: 18). The role of the coach, consisting mainly in asking questions to unveil new perspectives for clients and encourage them to change their attitude or take action, can be referred to as affective labour, and coaches themselves can be considered as operating in the sector of immaterial goods (Hardt 1999: 94). The concept of affective labour also characterises the practices which coachees, inspired by their coaches, perform on themselves. What does this labour consist in and what are its effects? Coach Mr Dawid explains it as follows:

The crucial moment in the coaching process is when the client gets an insight. However, a client won’t get an insight, or is very unlikely to get an insight, in the times between coaching sessions. The most wonderful moment in the work of a coach is when the client is going through a coaching session and, all of a sudden, having been asked one or two questions, they get this ‘ah-ha’ moment and everything clicks into place. They say ‘Of course! It’s crystal clear! I get it now!’.

The coach’s job is to activate the coachee’s ability to build self-knowledge. As Mr Dawid puts it:

The coach is supposed to lead the client to this 'Wow, obviously, now I know' moment; to make the client communicate with themselves and look for the answers within. The coach supports the client in being mindful to increase their chance of things 'clicking'.

One of the intangible assets that a client, therefore, gains is a form of emotional capital that can be described as self-awareness. Coaching, then, is a technology of the self, aiming to transform the coached person. This process relies on a body of work conducive to understanding the patterns of thinking and behaviour, as well as the coachee's goals, dreams and limitations. This expert interpretation of coaching corresponds to the experiences of coachees.

For example, in the case of Ms Amanda, an academic professor, the coaching process was supposed to teach her how to efficiently lead a research team, collaborate with other researchers, delegate tasks and make people accountable for themselves, resolve conflicts and motivate others to work. She believed that competences in the area of project and human resource management would allow her to effectively manage research projects. In her opinion, one can acquire these competences, which can be classified as elements of emotional capital (Ilouz 2007: 64), by working on expanding self-awareness or – in her own words – by “looking deep inside oneself”. Ms Amanda confessed:

Work with my coach has let me open drawers in my head which I had no idea were there to open. (...) Well ... opening... Let's say it was learning to see things from another viewpoint... learning to understand that people can see things in different ways. (...) It was an internal analysis of myself, of the person that I am, of what I could change.

The theme of getting to know oneself, as the first step that a coachee has to make to change his or her life, refers directly to the “Cartesian moment”, which is the subject of Foucault's attention in his analysis of the aesthetics of existence (Foucault 2005). The “internal analysis of myself” mentioned by Ms Amanda would, therefore, be a modern variant of the technology of the self. Many of my informants, including Ms Amanda, emphasised that they implemented the insight they had gained during participation in coaching in their everyday lives. Being self-aware had become a state by which they defined themselves.

What this “internal analysis” is and what its effect may be is also illustrated by the experience of Ms Diana's coachees, who are entrepreneurs,

physiotherapists and dietitians. Ms Diana makes “the need to sort out my life”, as she puts it, the main topic of her coaching sessions:

Why did I decide to go through a coaching process? I was driven by the desire to sort out my life. When you have your life sorted out, relations with others become easier. My occupation was another reason. The crucial thing in my job is to understand the client and recognize the root cause of their problem. I know that if I keep repeating my old patterns, reproducing stereotypes and thinking on autopilot, it will impede my personal growth, and I won't be able to help others, because I will always be comparing myself to them. To be able to understand others, first you must feel good with yourself and your self-talk. So it was mainly my need for self-development and coming to peace with anything that was hindering my personal growth that inspired me to go through a coaching process.

When asked to describe herself before the coaching process, she said that she often felt negative emotions and “anxiety”. The negative charge was related to her habit of taking on too many professional challenges. Her coaching process had an affective dimension because the focus on feelings and attitudes gave her the power to transform herself. Ms Diana said she was ambitious and always put her duties before her own health. She realised that “the old [Diana] was all over the place. I took on all assignments because it was my pattern – always go the extra mile. Ambition, my own ambition, and the rush.” In the light of the categories proposed by Ward and McMurray, which invoke contexts in which one can gain emotional capital, coaching practices can be considered a kind of praxis. Ward and McMurray (2016: 103) argue that emotional capital is gained through “engagement with and negation of specific situations, feelings and approaches, that is, praxis. (...) praxis is the action and reflection upon practice which has the potential to lead to transformation”. Through the coaching process Ms Diana critically reflected on her own emotional states, self-limiting beliefs and behaviour patterns, thus acquiring the emotional habitus: that is, self-awareness. She described the effect of this work of self-awareness with the metonymy of foundations and the idea of friendship:

I'm recovering, working on my well-being, and laying down new foundations. The coaching process emphasises the concept of being your own friend. When you learn to be your own friend, be good to yourself and take care of yourself, you stop wasting time

on silly matters (...). When you walk at your own pace and don't fail yourself, when you are your own friend, it translates into success in your professional and private life. When you are calm and happy with your life, you see the good things in life, you become happy yourself.

Ms Diana's narrative about the experience of going through the coaching process shows that coaching is not only a technology of self-awareness but also a practice of the care of the self. Emotional well-being as well as being self-aware had become the determinants of Ms Diana's identity, and in this sense she can be recognised as a neoliberal subject (Binkley 2014).

The practices of self-care also involve acquiring skills to manage emotions appropriately. As Mr Dawid explains it metaphorically:

When one gets carried away by emotions, one loses the ability to think rationally. In acting on emotions, one stops reasoning and gets cut off from one's own resources (...). My role as a coach is to teach the client how to handle emotions (...). It is as if you were sitting in a kayak without oars. All of a sudden, you get carried away by the current and cannot navigate. At such a moment of uncertainty, coaching is nothing more than providing you with the oars to navigate your way out of stormy waters back to safety.

This is the affective labour performed by coaches: they equip their clients with skills in order for them to deal with social and personal risks (Binkley 2014: 66–68). Ms Amanda, a coachee, also confirmed the above-mentioned observation. She argued that her work with a coach taught her to handle stress and negative emotions.

The experience of Ms Agnieszka, who had had several years of experience of working as a manager, also highlights this dimension of coaching, which is the technology of emotion management. Before her participation in the coaching process, Ms Agnieszka perceived herself as being “eternally upset”, “exploding with anger”, and unable to communicate at work in an informed manner devoid of unnecessary emotions. With bitterness in her voice, she admitted that she was not “mentally resilient” and that fact interfered in her everyday professional interactions as well as family relations. According to her, the greatest benefits of taking part in coaching included “self-control” and “emotional intelligence”. She claimed that these were the capital benefits that are extremely desirable when working as a manager. Being emotionally intelligent had become a factor on the basis of which she defined herself.

I started to manage my emotions better through coaching. I'm not exploding anymore. Because of such explosions, I have always perceived myself as a not very emotionally intelligent person. And now I hear from people that emotional intelligence is actually my strength. It has definitely changed. I am so aware of myself that there are few things that can put me off balance.

During the interview, to illustrate the affective work that she had done on herself to gain the ability to manage her emotions, Ms Agnieszka recollected a coaching exercise proposed by her coach in response to the accompanying frustration associated with the relationship with her boss.

I received a task from the coach that when I was in my car, I would talk to the boss. He would not be there, but I would just speak my mind to him. And I did it. That's what happened. When I was driving alone by car, I imagined that he was sitting there and I started to tell him what I thought and what I didn't like. And after that conversation, it was amazing. I've stopped being frustrated about this relationship. I had been rather focused on the relationship, and it had consumed my energy, and then, after I let it go, this energy started going in the right direction.

A Debatable Issue and Conclusion

The narratives of my interlocutors prove that coaching can be treated as an embodiment of the neoliberal technology of governmentality understood as the conduct of conduct. This phrase, which was coined by Foucault, underlines the fact that, on the one hand, individuals are conducted by external forces, and on the other, by means of their conduct they govern themselves. In the context of coaching, coachees' self-governance consists in work aimed at achieving or increasing the ability to manage emotions, to examine one's self and to care for one's emotional well-being. These skills make up the emotional-cognitive competences to govern oneself, which Binkley (2014: 103–104) writes about in the context of the neoliberal psy-enterprise. Like Carl – Cottingham's interlocutor – who “believes that empathy is teachable” (Cottingham 2016: 465), my respondents recognised that they are able to learn the desired dispositions by taking part in the coaching process. The emotional capital acquired during the coaching process is, using the term coined by Cottingham

(2016: 460), a type of capacity that can be activated in specific contexts. However, does it have the power to convert into other forms of capital? This is certainly a debatable issue.

From the perspective of the anthropology of neoliberalism, it is important that my respondents believed that, owing to what I call emotional capital, they can effectively and consciously govern themselves and others. Although they argued that emotional dispositions such as self-awareness and mental toughness allow them to establish satisfactory professional and private relations (social capital), and increase their income (economic capital), I suspend judgement on whether that turned out to be true in their lives. Putting forward the thesis on the conversion of emotional capital into other forms of capital in the context of coaching practices could reproduce the neoliberal discourse on coaching created by the coaches themselves and later implemented by coachees. In such a situation, anthropological analysis would change from critical reflection on the mechanisms of identity production into an advertisement for coaching services. Therefore, I would prefer to emphasise that the activities undertaken by my respondents during the coaching processes and the language they used to describe themselves represents the materialised logic of neoliberalism. Their ways of thinking and acting are based on this logic. What is crucial here is the very fact that my respondents expressed the idea that emotional capital plays a significant role in their lives, and that not only did they feel the need to achieve it, they were also ready to work on acquiring it. Thus, the key question in the analysis of coaching upper middle-class subjectivities is: What is considered by my respondents to be the benefit of this labour of the self on the self in coaching? The answer to this question expresses their attitudes towards the world and themselves. My respondents assume that coaching leads to an increase in - so-called - “emotional maturity” or “mental toughness”. For them, coaching is a “reflexive practice” that allows them to learn more about themselves, their resources, their dreams and the actions they would like to take. They admitted that the coaching programme they went through taught them how to look inside themselves and control and use their emotions to shift the patterns of thinking and behaving that had been shaping their professional and private lives. They argued that they had boosted their self-esteem and learnt to measure their own abilities. They believed that they could face challenges and successfully mitigate stress. They also believed that they could take responsibility for their actions and be assertive, calm, happy, more productive, and creative, while taking care of their physical and mental health.

In the presented approach, emotional capital as an embodied form of cultural capital is not so much a tool by means of which other forms of capital can be achieved, but a determinant of the identity and status position of members of the upper middle class. It is a neoliberal strategy of identity. My interlocutors defined themselves and the members of the class they associate themselves with on the basis of the neoliberal logic and the discourse of emotional capitalism (Illouz 2007). Being happy, self-aware and emotionally mature, and thus more productive, have become the key elements of their identity. To my question of “who are you?”, they first pointed to their profession (“I’m a middle-class manager”, “I’m an academic professor”), and then they all added, “I’m a coachee”. This indicates that the respondents treat the affective work of acquiring or expanding emotional capital as an important element of their lifestyle. The issue of whether they have more or less of the capital than other social classes I consider problematic, as it can essentialise the difference as a basis for constructing identity. Therefore, instead of claiming that differences in social class membership reveal different levels of emotional capital, I argue that coaching as a neoliberal technology of governmentality plays a crucial role in the production of the self-image of members of the upper middle class, whose existence is determined by the economy of profit and the care of the self. Nevertheless, this does not mean that other social classes in Poland do not have their own technologies of the self, which they use to expand their awareness and achieve emotional fulfilment and subjective well-being.

April 2019

References

- Bennett, Tony – Savage, Mike – Silva, Elizabeth – Warde, Alan – Gayo-Cal, Modesto – Wright, David. 2009. *Class, culture, distinction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bennett, Tony – Silva, Elizabeth. 2011. Introduction: cultural capital. Histories, limits, prospects. *Poetics* 39: 427–443.
- Bernasconi, Oriana. 2010. Being decent, being authentic. The moral self in shifting discourses of sexuality across three generations of Chilean women. *Sociology* 44, 5: 860–875.
- Binkley, Sam. 2009. The work of neoliberal governmentality: Temporality and ethical substance in the tale of Two Dads. *Foucault Studies* 6: 60–78.

- Binkley, Sam. 2011. Psychological life as enterprises: Social practice and the government of neo-liberal interiority. *History of the Human Sciences* 24, 3: 83–102.
- Binkley, Sam. 2014. *Happiness as enterprise: An essay on neoliberal life*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University of Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. The forms of capital. In: Richardson, John (ed.): *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood: 241–258.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In other words: essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre – Passeron, Jean-Claude. 1977. *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Bourdieu, Pierre – Passeron, Jean-Claude. 1979. *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Buchowski, Michał. 2017. *Czyścić. Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Cederström, Carl – Spicer, Andre. 2015. *The wellness syndrome*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cottingham, Marci. 2016. Theorizing emotional capital. *Theory and Society* 45, 5: 451–470.
- Domański, Henryk. 2012. *Polska klasa średnia*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Domański, Henryk. 2016. Czy inteligencja przekształca się w wyższą klasę średnią? *Nauka* 1: 143–157.
- Donner, Henrike. 2017. The anthropology of the middle class across the globe. *Anthropology of this Century* 18. [2017-04-01] Retrieved from: <http://aotcpress.com/articles/anthropology-middle-class-globe/>.
- Fischer, Edward. 2014. *The good life. Aspiration, dignity, and the anthropology of wellbeing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, Scott T. 2012. Middle classes. *Oxford Bibliographies in Sociology*. [2019-03-01] Retrieved from: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0093.xml;jsessionid=8F96F9176E1625D777AF77563D757B3C>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1987. The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: an interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12, 2–3: 112–131.

- Foucault, Michel. 1988. Technologies of the self. In: Martin, Luther H. – Gutman, Huck – Hutton, Patrick H (eds.): *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University Massachusetts Press: 16–49.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The use of pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. Governmentality. In: Burchell, Graham – Gordon, Colin – Miller, Peter (eds.): *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 87–104.
- Foucault, Michel. 2005. *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gdula, Maciej – Sadura, Przemysław. 2012. Style życia jako rywalizujące uniwersalności. In: Gdula, Maciej – Sadura, Przemysław (eds.): *Style życia i porządek klasowy w Polsce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar: 15–70.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Goleman, Daniel. 1995. *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Hardt, Michael. 1999. Affective labor. *Boundary 2* 26, 2: 89–100.
- Illouz, Eva. 2007. *Cold intimacies: The making of emotional capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Illouz, Eva. 2008. *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Lamont, Michèle. 1992. *Money, morals, and manners. The culture of the French and the American upper-middle class*. Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, Michèle – Lareau, Annette. 1988. Cultural capital: allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. *Sociological Theory* 6: 153–168.
- Petersen, Anders. 2011. Authentic self-realization and depression. *International Sociology* 26, 1: 5–24.
- Reay, Diane. 2000. A useful extension of Bourdieu's conceptual framework? Emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers' involvement in their children's education. *Sociological Review* 48, 4: 568–585.
- Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*. London and New York: Free Association Book.
- Salovey, Peter – Mayer, John D. 1990. Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9: 185–211.

- Schröder, Ingo. 2008. The classes of '89: anthropological approaches to capitalism and class in eastern Europe. In: Schröder, Ingo – Vonderau, Asta (eds.): *Changing economies and changing identities in postsocialist Eastern Europe*. Münster: LIT Verlag: 3–27.
- Seligman, Martin – Csikszentmihályi, Mihaly. 2000. Positive psychology: an introduction. *American Psychologist* 55, 1: 5–14.
- Starr, Julie. 2008. *The coaching manual: the definitive guide to the process, principles and skills of personal coaching. Second edition*. Harlow, London, New York: Pearson Education Limited.
- Surzykiewicz, Janusz. 2013. Podstawy teoretyczne coachingu w pedagogice społecznej i pracy socjalnej: ku coachingowi społecznemu. In: Surzykiewicz, Janusz – Kulesza, Marek (eds.): *Coaching społeczny. W poszukiwaniu efektywnych form wsparcia osób w trudnych sytuacjach życiowych*. Warszawa: Deifin SA: 15–141.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 2013. *Contemporary sociological theory*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage Publications.
- Ward, Jenna – McMurray, Robert. 2016. *The dark side of emotional labour*. New York: Routledge.
- Zarycki, Tomasz. 2009. Kapitał kulturowy – założenia i perspektywy zastosowania teorii Pierre'a Bourdieu. *Psychologia Społeczna* 4, 10: 12–25.
- 2016 ICF Global Coaching Study. [2018-06-01] Retrieved from: http://www.coachfederation.org/files/FileDownloads/2016ICFGlobalCoachingStudy_ExecutiveSummary.pdf.