Poking holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life

The Neoliberal Life Cycle of Success: Alternative Perspectives, 13 Nov 2014
The queer art of failure

What kinds of rewards can failure offer us? Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.
Celebrity and Aspirations
With Kim Allen, Laura Harvey, Aisha Ahmad

David Cameron: too many British children want to be popstars and footballers

David Cameron met with school children in Monrovia today and said that too many children in Britain wanted to be "popstars and footballers" when they grow up.
Images of success/failure: Will Smith

http://youtu.be/2EIBFNsenF4

I think that there's a certain delusional quality that all successful people have to have, you have to believe that something different than what has happened for the past 50 million years can happen.

Being realistic is the most commonly travelled road to mediocrity.

What’s the point of being realistic?

It's unrealistic to walk into a room, flip a switch, and have light come on, but fortunately Edison didn’t think so.
Images of success/failure: Jenna Marbles

http://youtu.be/h23oPnh1WJM

No one wants to fuckin’ date me.
Boo-fuckin’-hoo.
Young people’s stories of success and failure

51 individual interviews across 6 schools
On locality and family, celebrity, aspirations, gender and class
Person McPerson: Expressing doubt and not knowing

H: So let’s start with can you tell me what it’s like to live round here?
P: To live round here? It’s okay.
H: Yeah.
P: Er, I don’t know. [slight laugh]
H: Do you live in [area round school]?
P: Erm [neighbouring area].
H: Oh okay that’s quite close isn’t it. Yeah. And have you always lived here?
P: Yeah.
H: Okay ... So what would you say to someone like me who doesn’t know the area like the highlights and the lowlights of [area round school]?
P: [pause] I have no idea.
H: So what things about it kind of stand out for you, in the area?
P: Erm. Stand out? [sounds uncertain] It’s okay.
H: Okay. And do you think you kind of want to carry on living here?
P: Maybe, I don’t know.
H: And it’s okay but there are other places that you think you would want to live, more than here?
P: Maybe, I don’t know.
Person McPerson: Refusing to tell her life

H: Okay. So what do you want to do after school?
P: Maybe go university.
H: Okay. Erm, and have you got any idea of where you would want to go?
P: No, I have no idea.
H: Okay do you want a chance to stay in London, would you like to leave London?
P: [exasperated] I don’t know. [both laugh]
H: Okay. Have you figured out what subject you want to do?
P: Nope.
H: Okay.
P: I might do English but I’m not sure.
H: Okay. So why English rather than film or drama?
P: I don’t know.
H: [laughs] Okay, and have you got people to talk to to help you make your choices?
P: Not really. ...
H: Okay. So what is it about university that makes you want to go there?
P: I don’t know, to kind of put off whatever I have to do with my life.
Person McPerson: It’s difficult to achieve your dreams if...

H: So the first question is: Do you think there are things which make it difficult for young people to achieve their dreams?
P: Erm. [pause] Like what type of things?
H: It could be anything. It could be like, I don’t know it could be like money, or it could be like things which happen to some people rather than others. It could be like I don’t know, erm, like where you’re born, where you live. Just some things people have said before.
P: Er, erm. [pause] I’m not sure, it might be difficult to achieve your dreams if you don’t have any. But I don’t know maybe.
H: That’s a really good point no-one’s ever said that. It kind of assumes that you have something you want to end up doing, but if you haven’t got that then actually if you just let things happen, as they happen which is kind of what you do isn’t it?
P: Yeah.
R: I think my mum said it was one year ago, two days ago. I remember it like it was yesterday.
H: Really. So why do you remember it so much?
R: Dunno, I was at my nan’s and my mum like just came knocking on my nan’s door and like said mum and dad had had an argument and then I said ‘Oh why! I leave you two k- two kids alone for two minutes and you squabble’. And then yeah [pause] It was mainly because I left them for a day to sleep around my nan’s because I hadn’t seen her for a long time, and then she just tells me.
H: Yeah. So it sounds like from what you’re saying that you feel a bit responsible for what happened.
R: Yeah I feel like the man in the house now. ...
H: So what kind of things do you feel this role involves, like being the man of the house?
R: Erm. Sometimes it involves getting money, like I have to work with my dad, to get some money. Sometimes it involves like just mowing the grass, or like tidying up sometimes, looking after my little brothers, helping them do things.
Homer: Aspirations

R: I don’t know whether to be a plasterer, a plumber, a electrician or a welder. My granddad is a- My dad’s a plasterer. My granddad’s a welder. But a electrician and plumber I don’t anybody who does it, apart from my dad does. Electricity’s always interested me because it's like dangerous.

H: Right. So is there like a first memory that you have of when you became interested in electricity?

R: When I was at work with my dad I touched a plug and I got an electric shock. I stood there like just shaking for like two seconds, it was weird. ... It was good though. I felt all right with it. It doesn’t like hurt, it just makes you like shake and you can’t control your body for it only lasts for like two seconds – and then you just go ‘Oh that’s a weird feeling’. ... It weren’t even that long ago, I don’t think. It's like the other month. ...

H: And welding?

R: My granddad does that and he’s quite a successful man. Erm, wife, three kids, grandkids, and he’s still alive at the age of 70 and he smokes. ... He’s got quite a lot of money, he’s got a nice house, car, van, and he’s like kind and stuff so. ... He’s always been a role model. ... And it seems quite fun; you get to play with fire.
Homer: University

H: ... your grandpa’s a really important influence, do you talk to him about what you want to do in the future and stuff?
R: Yeah, he’s always been trying to get me to like colleges and unis and er, yeah I just tell him I want to do an apprenticeship. See how I like that for a couple of weeks, if I don’t like that I’ll try to get to a college or a university.
H: Right. So why would you prefer the apprenticeship to the college?
R: Because I want to like work straight away ... I think ... experience is better than knowledge, because if you’ve experienced it you’ll remember it more than just learning about it in school. And yeah, if I get experience at a young age then I might have potential to be good at that, sort of thing ... My auntie, she tries to convince me to go to university and college as well. ... She, she’s [pause] Yeah. She likes gets me to go to erm- She gets, you know the brochure things for colleges, she gets me them, and then she asks me if I like any of them. I normally just tell her I don’t want to stay in school. [Both laugh]
H: So do you find that that puts pressure on you or do you just like let it go?
R: I think it's just them looking out for me, but it does kind of make you feel pressure, because like, it makes me think how old I am, even though I don’t really feel it. I still feel like I’m like 10.
I would love to be him, but no, I just don’t like him really.

I reckoned he would’ve been on drugs and everything already, but I reckon he would’ve been a laugh.

If I got rich. Like if I got rich, I wouldn’t bother spending the money on me, I would bothered about my family and putting it in a safe place. And then I would probably move my entire family, if I was that rich, and then we got, live in a nice estate, properly nice. Like, like upper London, not upper London, like in central London, busy and stuff. But like not on a highway, so that we can go to like shopping centres a lot. I’d probably be like- I’d probably buy them everything they wanted, because I’d have that much money I suppose. But that won’t happen.
H: So you kind of want something that won’t happen.
R: Yeah. I’ve got used to it, that it’s not going to happen, because I’m not really clever and yeah.
H: So why do you think you are not clever?
R: Because I’ve not got an A in one subject yet.
H: But some people are clever at things which you don’t learn at school.
R: Yeah I know but, I count clever as things as like, things that you learn in school, while we’re at school, until we like get outside of school. Like physics, that’s hard, so people that do that are clever.
H: Right. Sometimes people become clever later on. They’re not clever at school, but they’re clever when they’re like 25. So you might find that you’re clever when you’re 25.
R: I could do, you never know. Yeah, it would be good.
H: So you’d like to be clever.
R: Yeah I would like to be clever, yeah, and then I would like to be rich.
H: What would you like most?
R: To be rich.