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Governing the (un)healthy child-consumer in the age of the childhood obesity crisis

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, multinational food and drink corporations and their marketing practices have been blamed for the global childhood obesity 'crisis'. Unsurprisingly, these corporations have been quick to refute these claims and now position themselves as 'part of the solution' to childhood obesity. In this paper, I examine how and why corporations fund, devise and/or implement 'healthy lifestyles education' programmes in schools. By using a critical ethnographic research approach alongside Foucault's notion of governmentality, I interrogate what those with the 'will to govern' (such as corporations) wanted to happen (e.g. fight obesity, change marketing practices and increase consumption), but also what actually happened when these corporatised education programmes met their intended targets in three New Zealand primary schools. I critically examine these programmes by focusing on the ways in which three technologies of consumption – product placement, transforming children into marketers and sponsorship – attempt to govern children to be lifelong consumers of the corporate brand image and their allegedly 'healthy' corporate products. Although students were not necessarily naïve and easily coerced into becoming mindless consumers of corporate products, students and their teachers readily accepted that sponsorship, product placement and marketing in schools were normal, natural, necessary and mostly harmless. Healthy lifestyles education programmes represent a new 'brand' of health, health education and corporation. The child-citizen is governed to become the child-consumer. Corporations' anxieties about being blamed for childhood obesity are fused with technologies of 'healthy consumption': the consumption of corporate products, corporate philanthropy, the corporate brand and corporate 'education'.

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Marketing to children in schools: an introduction

Corporations, particularly those of the food and drink industry, regularly incur the wrath of anti-obesity campaigners, public health researchers, academics, nutritionists, journalists and the public. Critiques of this global industry tend to be based on the idea that 'fast food' and 'junk food' companies 'do everything possible to persuade people to eat more – more food, more often, and in larger portions – no matter what it does to waistlines or well-being' (Nestle, n.d., para. 2).¹ In a nutshell, there is a shared belief that the corporate quest for profit has resulted in an epidemic of childhood obesity and unhealthy lifestyles.

It is hardly surprising that the food and drink industry rejects and attempts to refute claims that their products and marketing are responsible for *causing* childhood obesity. The public is regularly

informed that food and drink corporations' marketing practices are already regulated (albeit self-regulated) and do not need further regulation. Those who bemoan the place of junk food and advertising in today's society are positioned as 'food police' or 'food Nazi's' that 'have forgotten the joys of childhood' (Stewart, 2014, para. 14). The food and drink industry continues to reinforce the idea that children and their parents need to take greater personal responsibility for their food and drink consumption, as well as their physical activity levels, health and fatness (see Powell & Gard, 2014).

So although the food and drink industry clearly state that they are not part of the problem of childhood obesity or unhealthy lifestyles, they now promote itself as *part of the solution*. For example, in 2011, the International Food & Beverage Alliance (IFBA) (a formalised coalition between the CEO's of multinational corporations Nestlé, General Mills, Ferrero, Kellogg's, Grupo Bimbo, Kraft Foods (now Mondelez International), Mars, PepsiCo, The Coca-Cola Company and Unilever)² wrote to Dr Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO):

We all recognize that non-communicable diseases and childhood obesity are major public health problems that require multi-stakeholder solutions. As a member of the private sector, we firmly believe that the food industry has a role to play as *part of the solution*, and have committed our time, expertise and resources to do our part. (IFBA, 2011a, p. 1, my emphasis)

The phrase 'part of the solution' is now well worn when it comes to the food and drink industry promoting their business, corporate social responsibility and official 'position on obesity' (see The Coca-Cola Company, 2012, p. 2).

The food and drink industry's relatively newfound interest in children's (ill)health and education is closely connected to their reconfigured policies on marketing to children. As early as 2009, the IFBA introduced their self-regulated *Global policy on marketing and advertising to children* (see IFBA, 2011b). Each IFBA member agreed to adopt 'a global marketing policy to children which covers all of the countries around the world in which it operates', a policy the IFBA claims 'has been shown to effectively limit how and what IFBA companies advertise to children under 12 years' (2011a, p. 2). On the surface this global policy is promoted as 'limiting' how and what these corporations can advertise to children. However, the industry promise includes a noteworthy exception – an exception that appears to create further opportunities for the food and drink industry to market their products to children:

Members commit not to engage in product marketing communications to students in primary schools, except if requested by, or agreed with, the school administration for *specific educational purposes*. (IFBA, 2011b, para. 8, my emphasis)

With this in mind, I was interested in investigating these 'educational purposes' and the purposes they served for corporations, schools, principals, teachers and students. To do this I focused my examination on 'healthy lifestyles education' programmes that have been funded, devised, produced and/or distributed by corporations, programmes that were understood as being 'part of the solution' to childhood obesity and children's unhealthy lifestyles (see also Powell, 2013).

Examining healthy lifestyles education programmes in schools

There are a multitude of healthy lifestyle, health education, physical education, physical activity and sports programmes aimed at children in schools. In this article, I examine a number of corporatised programmes and associated education resources that targeted children in three New Zealand primary schools, including: a McDonald's® pedometer programme called *My Greatest Feat*; the 5+ A Day® programme and its downloadable educational resources (see www.5aday.co.nz/), spear-headed by the 5+ A Day Charitable Trust³; *Life Education* – a programme run by the Life Education Trust,⁴ where a Life Education teacher visits schools with a mobile classroom; *Be Healthy, Be Active*, a healthy lifestyles programme which includes lesson plans, online interactive games and other educational resources, such as a 'food plate' (see www.behealthybeactive.co.nz) and is funded by Nestlé

New Zealand; and, *Iron Brion* – an educational programme produced by Beef + Lamb New Zealand that includes lesson plans and a visit from Iron Brion who ‘teaches’ students about the importance of consuming iron, beef and lamb.

These programmes were chosen because they were actually implemented in New Zealand schools, but also because they provide useful examples of some the diverse ways in which private sector companies form relationships with schools and with children – often in the name of ‘health’ and/or ‘education’. Of course, these types of programmes are not the only means by which schools, teachers and students are being re-shaped by private sector interests. Although traditionally the responsibility of the state, education has now become ‘big business’ for public, voluntary and private sector organisations (for discussions, see Ball, 2012; Molnar, 2005; Saltman, 2000). The field of health and physical education (HPE) has not been immune to the neo-liberal turn in education and the attempts by corporations to profit from this particular curriculum area. A number of authors have critically examined the processes, practices and potential impact of the neo-liberalisation of HPE, including: the ‘privatisation project’ in education and HPE (Evans & Davies, 2015); and the increasingly pervasive practice of outsourcing HPE programmes and resources to corporations and their various partners (e.g. Powell, 2013; Vander Schee & Boyles, 2010). Whilst these scholars identify a number of problematic practices that are underpinned by neo-liberalism, privatisation and the corporate quest for profit, there continues to be a paucity of research that demonstrates the multifarious ways in which the private sector connects (or at least attempts to influence) a key group of ‘customers’ in schools: students.

To be able to critically interrogate these healthy lifestyles education programmes and the ways in which their ‘educational purposes’ were connected to both the ‘purpose’ of corporations and the lives of students, I needed a theoretical, analytical and methodological framework that enabled me to collect and examine a range of evidence. This evidence included the ‘official’ rhetoric of corporations (i.e. the rhetoric found in corporate websites and annual reports, published educational resources, media releases) and evidence garnered from talking to, listening to, and observing children, teachers, principals and external providers in schools. In order to do this I used a *critical ethnographic* approach (see Madison, 2005), one that allowed me to investigate what those with the ‘will to govern’ (Li, 2007) wanted to happen (e.g. fight obesity, change marketing practices and increase consumption), but also what actually happened when these governmental programmes met their intended targets in three schools: St Saviour’s School (with students from Year One to Year Eight – 5 to 13 years old); Dudley School (also Years One to Eight) and Reynard Intermediate School (Years Seven and Eight only) (for ethical reasons, the names of all schools, children and adults are pseudonyms).

By gathering together a number of traditional ethnographic methods – spending time in schools, building relationships with participants, taking journal notes, collecting documentary evidence, and observing and conversing with children and adults – I was able to interact with members of these three school communities and gather evidence about the everyday practices that occurred in these schools (see also Fitzpatrick, 2013). In some instances, I was able to observe the healthy lifestyles education programmes ‘in action’ and discuss with children and adults their perceptions of these programmes as they undertook them. At other times, the programmes did not take place while I was in the school, so my research focused on collecting documentary evidence (e.g. the resources provided to schools, websites and marketing materials), as well as conducting both formal (i.e. semi-structured and audio-recorded) and informal research conversations (Fitzpatrick, 2013) with children, teachers and principals about their experiences and understanding of the programmes.

As a critical study of government, the aim of my research was to provide insights into how corporate-funded healthy lifestyles education programmes represented the *plans* to govern, as well as what *happened* when these plans met their intended targets. By assembling a range of evidence I was able to reflect on and analyse how the official plans to create non-obese, healthy lifestyle-living children were actually enacted, understood and experienced by the students, teachers, principals and external

providers who used them. It also helped me better understand how the 'blueprints' to make children healthier and less fat were fused to technologies that aimed to make children consume corporate products – and the corporate image.

The governmentality of healthy lifestyles education programmes

In order to develop my understanding of these school-based 'solutions' to childhood obesity and children's unhealthy lifestyles, I used Foucault's (1991) notions of government and governmentality. These were employed as both theoretical and analytical frameworks, allowing me to explore, interrogate and critique individual elements of the healthy lifestyles education programmes (e.g. corporations, neo-liberalism, schools, curricula, marketing, pedagogies and branded products), as well as their complex relationships with one another.

Foucault's (1993, p. 203) conceptualisation of government focuses on the interactions between technologies of power and technologies of the self, 'the points where the technologies of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves'. In this way, governmentality is a form of power and a practice that endeavours to direct 'the conduct of conduct' (Gordon, 1991, p. 2) of individuals and populations. It is a type of government that is undertaken by an 'ensemble' of authorities, institutions and agents (Foucault, 1991, p. 102), using an array of technologies, tactics and bodies of knowledge, in an attempt to guide conduct towards definite, albeit unpredictable, ends. Agencies of government are, therefore, not restricted to formal state authorities (e.g. police, schools), but can be from a range of for-profit (e.g. multinational corporations) and not-for-profit institutions (e.g. charities) on a local, national or global scale.

The ways in which we think about government are inextricably tied to knowledge, power, truth and discourse, as well as the technical means by which conduct is conducted. This point is critical. An analytics of governmentality requires a disentangling of the ways in which our thoughts, actions and self have converged and intertwined with rationalities and technologies of government. Indeed, the notion of governmentality represents Foucault's understanding that it is not possible to examine technologies of government without an analysis of the political rationalities that underpin them.

Rationalities of government are modes of thought that bolster the programmatic aims of government: to govern populations towards specific ends (see Dean, 2010). Although some programmes of government may come with sophisticated rationalisations, the disparate elements from which they are drawn rarely, if ever, consist of a single rationality or essence (Li, 2007). One way to analyse the specific rationalities of governmental interventions is to examine key elements within the assemblage of rationalities – the multiple 'styles' of thinking about government.

The rationalities that underpin any problem of government are not represented in 'thought' or 'discourse' alone; they must be rendered both thinkable and technical (Miller & Rose, 2008). It is through the convergence of rationalities and technologies that government attempts to achieve its ends. My analytics of governmentality does not, therefore, focus solely on the political rationalities that underpin corporatised healthy lifestyles education programmes in schools, but also the mechanisms that make government possible. An integral aspect of this form of analysis is the examination of the complex and multifarious ways in which rationalities converge with technologies of government, including technologies of consumption (see Miller & Rose, 1997).

Technologies of (un)healthy consumption

A number of scholars are critical of the dominant approach to governmentality studies in which government is reduced to its rationalities and 'humble and mundane' technologies (for examples of these criticisms, see Li, 2007; O'Malley, 2009). One frequently mentioned criticism is the tendency for scholars to focus on the plans for government with little or no attention paid to the *actual*

practices and experiences of those who govern and are governed (see O'Malley, 2009). Like Leahy's (2014) examination of health education in three Australian secondary schools and McDermott's (2012) analysis of PE practices in a Canadian elementary school, it was critical that my research encapsulated both the 'official' plans of government (such as those articulated by corporations that aim to teach children to live healthy lifestyles), as well as how specific technologies played out with children and adults in three primary schools.

In neo-liberal times there are 'new technologies of government that fashion new institutions and modes of delivery within which new social subjectivities are being fostered; extensions of the logic of the marketplace that socialize individualized subjects and discipline the noncompliant' (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 390). Technologies of consumption are one such group of technologies that have re-fashioned the educational sphere, extending market 'logic' into schools and attempting to foster children as consumers (see Miller & Rose, 1997). These governmental technologies depend

upon fabricating delicate affiliations between the active choices of potential consumers and the qualities, pleasures and satisfactions represented in the product, organized in part through the practices of advertising and marketing, and always undertaken in the light of particular beliefs about the nature of human subjectivity. (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 31)

They are technologies that shape educational resources and pedagogies, and attempt to align children's subjectivities with the goals of corporations, especially their endeavours to increase consumption and profit. These technologies act as a critical contact point between consumers (e.g. children and teachers), producers (e.g. corporations and industry groups) and political rationalities (e.g. neo-liberalism). With this in mind, here I aim to critically examine the ways in which technologies of consumption have assembled with the notion of children as consumers within actual healthy lifestyles education programmes. To do this I have analysed three specific technologies of consumption – sponsorship, product placement and transforming children into marketers – and interrogated how each of these technologies have fused with the resolve of corporations to govern children to be life-long consumers of the corporate brand image and their allegedly 'healthy' corporate products.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship was a key technology that connected notions of education, health and increasing consumption of private sector products. For example, United Fresh (2014, p. 2) asserted in a brochure that the 5+ A Day Charitable Trust 'promotes fresh produce, working towards raising consumption for all New Zealanders through ... Sponsorship, Advertising, Public Relations and Communications' as well as 'Curriculum linked education material for early childhood centres, schools and health professionals'. Under the heading 'Raising Consumption', United Fresh (2014, p. 3, my emphasis) also promoted to potential funders that:

5+ A Day is very well established and links directly into the national school teaching curriculum, including early childhood education centres. The Trust is a respected provider of practical and fun classroom concepts that encourage children to learn about and eat, fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Promoting your products to consumers through education, social media, public relations, television, advertising, marketing and sponsorship.

United Fresh and 5+ A Day's sponsorship helped to provide educational resources to schools, yet also acted as a technology of consumption – one assembled together with multiple other technologies of consumption (e.g. social media, advertising and public relations) – in order to promote corporate members' fruit and vegetable products and encourage children to consume these products.

Attempts to forge relationships between a disparate ensemble of elements (such as corporations, schools, branded products, discourses of health and sport and sponsorship) were often a cause of tension. One such tension noted by most of the Year Six and Year Seven students I talked with (across all three schools) was the problematic relationship between food and drink corporations and the types of initiatives they sponsored. In a lengthy conversation with three Year Seven boys (aged 11 years old) at Dudley School – James, Brian and Eton – they recognised the multiple and

contradictory elements that are cobbled together when 'fast food' companies sponsor healthy lifestyles education programmes (as well as sports teams and events). I began this part of the conversation by asking the boys about McDonald's® *My Greatest Feat* pedometer programme they had participated in:

- Darren: Why do you think McDonald's would be wanting people to measure their steps?
 Eton: To try and encourage people that McDonald's is helping people get fit.
 Brian: (Laughs)
 James: But it's not really – look at me! (James points to his own stomach)
 Brian: [People] have McDonald's, keep fit and then exercise a day later.
 Eton: They try to encourage them to go to McDonald's.
 Darren: What do you think the ultimate goal for McDonald's is in doing these programmes in schools?
 Eton: Profit?
 James: To see who has the most shops.

James also recalled eating McDonald's at the same time as he noticed McDonald's marketing on television:

- James: Even at basketball, I was watching a basketball game, it was the [Townsville] Crocs versus something else, the [New Zealand] Breakers, and the Crocs had a big M [the McDonald's golden arches logo] on their shirts ... And I was like, 'Dad look, we're having McDonald's right now'.
 Darren: So do you think people are more likely to go to McDonald's because they support sports?
 Brian: Quite a lot.
 Eton: Yes – more advertising, then people will remember about it.
 James: They just want to get their name out.
 Darren: Would you consider that the *My Greatest Feat* thing was an education programme?
 Brian: No.

The students were well aware of the intentions of McDonald's® sponsorship: to 'get their name out' so 'people will remember it'; to encourage [people] to go to McDonald's®; to be competitive; to be seen to be 'helping' people 'get fit' and 'exercise'; to 'profit' by increasing advertising opportunities and connecting the McDonald's® brand with physical activity. In James' case, this awareness certainly did not discourage him and his family from consuming McDonald's.

A number of students also recognised that sponsorship was a corporate tactic, one not primarily for education or health 'purposes', but money. I talked to Leroy and Sam, Year Seven students at Reynard Intermediate School, about *My Greatest Feat*. I asked them for a reason why McDonald's® sponsored this physical activity programme, to which they succinctly replied:

- Leroy: Money.
 Sam: Money – fast money.

Nonetheless, 'money' was not a simple or straightforward answer, nor was it the only answer. The children recognised that a sponsoring corporation's quest for monetary gains and their 'will' to teach children how to be healthy was fundamentally linked to their desire to increase consumption of certain products and improve the brand image of the corporation. For example, I asked Helen and Nicole, Year Six girls at Dudley School, why McDonald's® may want children to be more active. They replied:

- Helen: Make them [children] eat more.
 Nicole: For McD's [McDonald's] to be more popular.

Leroy from Reynard Intermediate School also made a connection between public relations increasing consumption and improving profit. He talked about the financial losses that corporations may suffer when a product (or corporation itself) is seen as unhealthy. I asked Leroy why he thought McDonald's® failed to sponsor the *My Greatest Feat* programme for the London 2012 Olympic Games, to which he responded: 'Losing too much money. Wanting to spend more on themselves. Some people watch those "What's really in our food" [television] programmes and stop eating McD's [McDonald's®]'.

Students were mindful that a corporation's use of sponsorship was aligned with their desire to develop more positive public relations and increase revenue, especially at a time when certain corporations (and their goods) were perceived as being unhealthy. In a conversation with a group of Year Six boys from St Saviour's – DJ, Mark, Hone, Carlos and Afakasi – I asked them why a company like Beef + Lamb New Zealand would want to create a character like Iron Brion and bring him to their school:

- DJ: So that we know what food to put where in the food chart [pyramid] to eat and also keep us healthy at the same time.
- Darren: Why do you think that a company would want you to be healthy or keep healthy?
- DJ: To be strong.
- Mark: To stay fit and stay healthy.
- Hone: Because they care about us.
- Carlos: So we can live a longer life and buy more of their products.
- Darren: So you think part of it is-
- Afakasi: -to get more money.
- DJ: Yeah, to get more money!
- Darren: How do you think they get more money from doing these sort of programmes?
- Afakasi: They put a vivid image in children's heads so they can go home and tell their parents about the company.

Whilst the children were cognisant of the 'money motives' of corporate sponsorship, they were also aware of the 'other' technologies of consumption that intersected with sponsorship to help accomplish the profit-seeking intentions of the corporation: the corporation's desire and need to *be seen* to be philanthropic, to 'care about us', to make children fit, healthy and strong; to teach children about food and to pester parents to buy their food; to foster a positive brand image 'in children's heads'; to make children healthier, so they would live longer and 'buy more of their products'. These were elements that were assembled together with the overall aim to shape children's (and even their parents') thoughts and actions, health, lives and consumption in ways that aligned with private sector interests.

'A message from Just Juice': product placement in educational resources

Product placement was another key technology of consumption that endeavoured to form a bond between corporations, (un)branded objects and children's understanding of health and self. Product placement is a term commonly used to describe a form of advertising where corporate logos, products, trademarks and services are promoted in the context of a television programme, film, video game or music video (e.g. a character in a movie drinking a can of Coca-Cola®). In a number of instances, corporations and their 'not-for-profit' partners used the healthy lifestyles education programmes to market their corporate brand and corporate products directly to students. For example, Nestlé New Zealand (2011) explicitly stated in the foreword to their *Be Healthy, Be Active* teacher resource, 'The content of the programme is not commercial in nature', yet Nestlé-branded products were surreptitiously placed within students' resources. The interactive 'Food Plate' (see Nestlé, n.d.), for instance, contained links to a 'Snack Time' section where students could view and use recipes for 'twelve simple snacks you can make for home or at school'. However, some of the ingredients of these recipes were branded Nestlé products. 'Sensational Smoothies' was a banana-chocolate smoothie made with popular brand MILO®. 'Mighty Muesli Bars' were to be made with Nestlé® Sweetened Condensed Milk, whilst 'Super Noodles' included Maggi® 2 Minute noodles – chicken flavour. This form of product placement and branding appears to contradict one of the central assurances of Nestlé's Healthy Kids Global Programme: 'NO product branding' (Nestlé, 2015).

Nestlé was not the only organisation to use their healthy lifestyles education programme to promote and market corporate products. The *Life Education* resources (as well as its promotional materials and mobile classrooms) displayed and promoted a number of sponsors' products. In fact, two of *Life Education's* named national sponsors – Just Juice® and Macleans® – were products

(as opposed to the corporation, Frucor or GlaxoSmithKline respectively, being named as the sponsor). On the inside cover of the 'Warrant of Fitness' workbook (Life Education Trust, n.d.-a), the Just Juice® logo was displayed twice with the following credit: 'This book was produced with the generous assistance of Just Juice'. In this student workbook, a picture of a Frucor product – a bottle of H2Go® water – was conspicuously incorporated into one of the food pyramids that informed students about the 'recommended fuel for a healthy body' (Life Education Trust, n.d.-a, p. 9). The same bottle appeared in another lesson entitled 'Consuming' (p. 20), where children were encouraged to keep hydrated by drinking water. In this lesson, students were also taught how to read a food label branded with '125ml Tetra Just Juice Orange and Mango flavour' (p. 23).

The resources and lessons provided to Years One and Two students at Dudley School (five to six years of age) also comprised marketing for Just Juice®. The children were sent home with a leaflet that outlined to parents what their children were learning in *Life Education*. At the bottom of the letter it read:

A message from Just Juice – did you know ...

That one glass (250ml) of fruit juice counts for one of your daily fruit servings for everyone over 5 years.

This information sheet has been produced with the kind support of one of our national sponsors, Just Juice. (Life Education Trust, n.d.-b)

The decision by *Life Education* to promote Just Juice® was unusual, given that the Life Education teacher, Marion, spent much time warning the children about the dangers of sugar and 'fizzy drinks' (i.e. carbonated, sugar sweetened beverages), yet Just Juice® had the same proportion of sugar as Coca-Cola® (see Community and Public Health Board, n.d.). We can also see in this example that product placement was a tactic to attach a corporate product to children's knowledge of what a healthy product looks like and which specific products they needed to consume, as well as a public relations strategy to shape children's and adults' understanding of the corporation's image. Product placement acted as a technology of consumption by attempting to re-invent Just Juice® and its producer/marketer Frucor as healthy, as well as educational, 'kind', supportive, caring and 'generous'. This technology appeared to work particularly well. The students at Reynard Intermediate School also had a positive connections with Just Juice®, as a number of the Year Seven's recalled receiving a free box of Just Juice® for their class to share after they had won a Life Education quiz.

In the three primary schools, what was meant to be an *educational* endeavour was transformed by the technologies of product placement and sponsorship into an enterprise that represented the *commercial* interests of private sector players and partners. It is difficult to see exactly how placing a branded H2Go® bottle in a food pyramid, or a Nestlé-branded product into a recipe, worked in the educational interests of children. Product placement was a technology of consumption used by the private sector, with the assistance of voluntary sector organisations and schools, to form relationships between *objects* of consumption – Just Juice®, H2Go®, beef and lamb, and Maggi® 2 Minute noodles – and the *subjects* of consumption: children (see Rose, 1999). This is not to suggest, however, that this is a straightforward, certain or simplistic process. As Foucault (1991, p. 102) acknowledged, an ensemble of authorities, institutions and agents attempt to guide individuals' conduct towards definite ends, but often have unpredictable results. For instance, in a conversation with Dudley School Year Seven students, Eton and Brian, they discussed a page in their 'Warrant of Fitness' workbook that featured product placement for a Frucor-brand of bottled water:

Darren: What sort of water was it?

Brian: Yeah, it was H2Go-

Eton: -but in our books, instead of like, putting just there a bottle of water ... in the food pyramid ... it would be like, all the healthy stuff, and at the bottom would be like, bottles of H2Go.

Darren: Was that a food pyramid in your workbook or in the van?

Eton: In our workbook-

Brian: -and on the van, like inside.

Darren: Why do you think they chose Just Juice, not just orange juice?

- Eton: Because Just Juice sponsored them and like, they deserve [it]. Just Juice would be like, 'if we sponsor you, you have to put us in your books', so it's like, advertising at the same time to all the kids that they go to.
- Darren: And what do you think about being advertised to in school books and things like that?
- Eton: I think it's kind of dumb, because we're there to do our school work.

Product placement was a stealthy marketing strategy that *attempted* to align children's desires to make healthy choices with the desire of for-profit and not-for-profit players to shape children to be uncritical consumers of their 'healthy' products. It was not the only technology to do this.

Transforming children into marketers

A number of the corporatised programmes featured a pedagogical strategy that interconnected technologies of sponsorship and product placement, whereby children were required to become marketers of corporate products. For instance, the *5+ A Day*® programme aimed to raise 'awareness, critical thinking and action' about food marketing by providing opportunities for children 'to create their own advertising and marketing campaigns to promote fresh fruit and vegetables to their friends and families' (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011, p. 4). Predictably, these marketing 'lessons' exclusively promoted products manufactured/sold by the corporate sponsors/partners/developers of the 'educational' programmes and resources. They were used as a tactic to increase consumption of their products. In fact, the 5+ A Day Charitable Trust, an organisation devoted to 'increasing the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables' (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2013, para. 1) produced an entire resource called 'Bright ideas: marketing and advertising fresh fruit and vegetables' (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011). One of the intended learning outcomes was for children to be able to 'plan for and implement advertising strategies to encourage a greater consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables' (5+ A Day Charitable Trust, 2011, p. 2). For students to meet this outcome, teachers were asked to: 'Tell children that they have a very important job to do. They have to help 5+ A Day promote fresh fruit and vegetables to other children and their family' (p. 6). The point of the lessons and activities was for children to disseminate 5+ A Day®'s marketing message to their classmates, parents and the wider community, a message funded by a number of food industry organisations.

The marketing-focused 'learning activities' acted as technologies of healthy consumption in three distinct ways. First, they reinforced the idea that in order to be healthy, children need to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables to at least five servings a day. Second, they reinforced the 5+ A Day® logo/slogan/brand/message as essentially a public health imperative, a regime of truth about health that has been significantly shaped by private sector interests. Third, even though the resource stated it would encourage children to think critically about marketing, health and consumption, by turning children into marketers the resource writers attempted to govern children to be *uncritical* of marketing; those strategies that saturate public and private spaces in their endeavour to shape children as subjects of consumption. In other words, turning children into marketers of corporate products aids in the naturalisation of advertising and consumerism in children's everyday lives, as opposed to a form of socio-critical health education that encourages children to challenge or take action against the normalisation of marketing.

Again, this is not to say that children were uncritical and unwilling to problematise the somewhat obvious attempts to transform them into advertisers for the corporate sponsors. For instance, following a Life Education unit of work for Dudley School's Years Seven and Eight classes, entitled 'Warrant of Fitness' (see Life Education Trust, n.d.-a), the children demonstrated that they were not 'cultural dupes' (Hall, 1981). In one 'Warrant of Fitness' lesson the children were required to create and perform a 'commercial kind of thing' (Eton) for H2Go®, Just Juice® and Just Juice Splash® – all three were Frucor products. According to Eton, the point of the student-created commercials was to entertain the audience, 'tell them all about the calories in it' and make the product 'look good at the same time'. However, Eton and his friend Brian (as well as a number of other students) were

also critical of these lessons (and others like them) because they perceived the 'educational purpose' of the lessons or resources as essentially undermined by the more blatant corporate efforts to promote their products. As I talked more with Eton and Brian about the 'dumb' use of sponsorship and product placement by Just Juice® and H2Go®, they also reflected on this 'commercial kind of' lesson:

- Darren: What was the point of talking about advertising and making up your own ads?
 Eton: I'm not sure, I reckon it was just another fun game.
 Brian: I think there might've been a point behind it, but I don't think she got round to telling us.

Eton and Brian were aware of some of the attempts being made to promote corporate products to them, as well as some of the reasons why corporate sponsors were able to insert their products into their workbooks, lessons and classroom spaces. They did not simply perceive these forms of 'stealthy' (or in this case, not so stealthy) advertising as 'dumb', but were also sceptical of the educative value of 'teaching' them to be marketers of bottled water and fruit juice.

Governing the (un)critical child-consumer

By using technologies of consumption – sponsorship, product placement and children as marketers – what the private sector (and teachers) attempted to do was mobilise children 'at a distance' to consume. Corporations employed these specific technologies of consumption to form connections between 'very specific features of goods enmeshed in particular consumption practices' (especially in terms of health) and children's 'needs, desires, pleasures and terrors' (Miller & Rose, 1997, p. 43). From my numerous conversations with children, it was evident that a number of children (from 5 to 13 years of age) had clear 'needs, desires, pleasures and terrors' that were aligned with neo-liberal notions of health and fatness. Key features of corporate products (e.g. 'low calorie', 'sugar-free' and 'gives you energy') were attached to these beliefs about health in ways that fulfilled the child's 'desire' to make the right choices, their 'pleasure' in having a thin body, their 'terror' of being fat, and their 'need' to consume healthy, often branded, goods.

The re-invented 'healthy' corporation and their 'healthy' products were re-imagined by a number of children (as well as teachers, principals, external providers and corporations) as vital solutions to multiple 'problems', such as iron deficiency, a lack of fruit and vegetable consumption, energy levels, sports participation, 'junk' food advertising, unhealthy lifestyles and obesity. These re-invented corporations, their products and practices were promoted and understood as providing simpler means for children to make healthier choices (e.g. to choose H2Go® over sugar sweetened beverages); as a way to be active and have more fun (e.g. MILO® as the 'official drink of play'); and, to avoid being unhealthy, fat and disgusting (e.g. McDonald's® selling fruit, vegetables and Weight-watchers® products).

However, it was not only 'healthy' corporate products that children were coerced to consume. Governmental technologies were also employed in an attempt to govern children (and to some extent teachers) to become uncritical consumers of corporate strategies and profit-seeking tactics: advertising, marketing, public relations and philanthropy. For instance, Dudley School Year Two teacher Mrs Donna dismissed the intent of sponsorship, believing that 'they're not using it as advertising to the kids'. Mr Woodward, principal of Dudley School, stated that profit was not the 'prime purpose' of the programmes he allowed into his school and believed to be of value to his students, such as McDonald's® *My Greatest Feat* and *Life Education*. Eton and Brian's teacher, Mr Spurlock, admitted he had 'not noticed' the Just Juice® and H2Go® marketing in the 'Warrant of Fitness' workbook he asked his students to complete. In this way, the healthy lifestyles education programmes acted as 'Trojan horses', concealing the governmental technologies and the rationalities that underpinned them.

Teachers and principals played a vital role by not merely allowing the programmes into schools, but also actively endorsing the corporations, their products and individualistic messages about

health. These types of corporatised pedagogies are 'intimately connected with commodified consumer culture and therefore [represent] a site for potential corporate exploitation of youth identities' (Vander Schee & Boyles, 2010, p. 171). They are indicative of a complex ensemble of discourses, technologies of government, political rationalities, organisations and subjectivities that govern teachers to 'choose' to outsource healthy lifestyle education programmes with some obvious commercial messages. Tensions between the health/education value of the programmes and the profit-seeking purposes of the private sector were resolved when teachers believed that they were not experts in HPE, had limited professional development opportunities, felt there was more emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and had a plethora of 'free' resources and external providers to choose from (see Powell, 2015). Even when an experienced teacher, such as St Saviour's Year Six/Seven teacher Ms Ellie, recognised a healthy lifestyles education programme as being far more 'promotional' than educational, she still rationalised that her students 'needed' this programme, and that when it came to fighting childhood obesity, it was 'better to do something, than nothing'.

The success of these stealthy forms of government to work 'at a distance' on children and not be seen as obvious, coercive or ponderous were rather mixed. For example, when I asked Reynard Intermediate School Year Seven student Sam if he thought McDonald's® cared about children's health: 'I think McDonald's probably does care a bit ... they have like Weightwatchers meals, so it shows they kind of care for health. But then again they mainly deal fast food'. The relay points – points of connection between technologies of consumption and technologies of the self – were not always robust, but susceptible to fracture. Similarly, there was both resistance and acceptance of the 'official' corporate rhetoric that they wanted to make children healthier. I asked Dudley School Year Seven students Helen, Laura and Nicole if they thought McDonald's® implemented programmes in schools to make children active or healthier, or to teach them about health, to which they replied:

- Laura: No.
 Helen: If they're going to teach you about health-
 Nicole: -make your food healthy!
 Helen: But they have healthy food, like apples.

Uniting the 'healthy' corporate *products* with the 'healthy' (and caring) *brand image* of the corporation acted as an additional technology of consumption, one that helped to smooth over any perceived tensions between the aims of a corporation (e.g. to sell junk food or to make profit) and the impact on children's health or education.

I am not suggesting that children were naïve and easily coerced into becoming mindless consumers of the corporate brand. Like Kenway and Bullen (2001, p. 110), I found that a number of children 'are highly literate when it comes to explicit advertising and [are] well aware of its purpose'. Indeed, a number of children actively contested, negotiated and resisted dominant discourses of health and consumption, as well as more *explicit* forms of marketing, such as the placement of an H2Go® bottle in the *Life Education* food pyramid. However, despite the students' cynicism towards the intent of some of the technologies of consumption, there was also an acceptance of sponsorship, product placement and marketing in schools as normal, natural and even necessary. As Eton recognised, when a corporation sponsored a programme, they 'deserved' to promote their brand to children in schools.

Conclusion: a new 'brand' of healthy consumer

These corporatised healthy lifestyles education programmes combined with technologies of consumption in ways that represent the 'strategic attempts to market not a benign conception of health, but a particular *brand* of health ... ultimately connected to consumer culture' (Vander Schee, 2008, p. 5, italics in original). As Rose (1999, pp. 164–165) also argued, with neo-liberal forms of governance there are 'new forms of consumption ... the regulation of habits, dispositions, styles of existence in the name of identity and lifestyle ... the citizen is to become the consumer'.

This new 'brand' of health, health education and corporation is intimately connected to new lifestyles and new identities for children, where the child-citizen is governed to become the child-consumer. This is especially evident when children's 'need' to be healthier and non-obese, schools 'desire' to produce healthy students, and corporations' 'anxieties' about being blamed for childhood obesity, has been fused with technologies of 'healthy consumption': the consumption of corporate products, corporate philanthropy, the corporate brand and corporate 'education'.

It may be obvious, but corporations and industry groups are unlikely to encourage children or adults to critically examine or take collective action against business strategies that attempt to influence children's choices, lifestyles, education or lives. These corporatised healthy lifestyles education programmes and technologies of consumption certainly did not attempt to significantly 'empower' or 'inform' children how to take radical or critical action and challenge how corporations and their educational resources may *negatively* influence their own and others' health. Not one of the resources encouraged teachers or students to critique the role of the food industry in shaping rules, laws and regulations around food production, labelling, marketing, pricing and selling. Not a single external provider or mascot spoke out against the absence of regulations in New Zealand to restrict marketing in schools and in educational resources. No one asked children to question if the private sector should be allowed to advertise to children at all. Any potential debate about problematic politics and policies relating to targeting children as consumers was silenced. This represents what Ferguson (1994) described as 'the anti-politics machine', where solutions to various 'problems' – health, obesity and marketing – fall within the repertoire and expertise of the organisations with the most to gain (and the most to lose) from any challenges to the status quo. In this case, it was members of the food and drink industry who were re-invented as experts on children's education, as well as their (un)healthy consumption.

What a number of for-profit organisations (and 'not-for-profit' partners) did do was exploit schools (and their promises to restrict marketing to children), using 'education' as a vehicle to reproduce the idea that for children to be healthy they needed to choose certain products, such as MILO®, beef, Just Juice®, fruit or H2Go® from 'healthy', 'caring' corporations: McDonald's®, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Frucor, 5+ A Day® or Nestlé. The organisations who funded, developed, promoted and implemented these various programmes in schools, in particular those with profit-seeking motives, have a vested interest in shaping children into becoming and being a certain type of 'healthy' consumer. As Vander Schee (2005, p. 20) argued, 'corporations would not be involved in schools were it not for the promise of increased profits and market share'. Healthy lifestyles education programmes have become an important 'part of the solution' to childhood obesity. They are also an essential element of the overall strategy to ensure that the endeavours of corporations and governments to govern children to healthy and actively consuming ends are rendered thinkable, do-able and, most of all, profitable.

Notes

1. To avoid confusion, I use Nestlé to reference *Food Politics* author Marion Nestle, while I use Nestlé for the world's largest food company.
2. In 2012 McDonald's became a member of the IFBA. The IFBA has a number of 'associate' members also, such as the Grocery Manufacturer's Association, The World Federation of Advertisers and Food Industry Asia (FIA).
3. 5+ A Day® is an organisation created, governed and managed by United Fresh New Zealand Inc. (hereinafter United Fresh). United Fresh (2014, p. 2) is a 'non-profit' organisation that works 'for the good of the entire [fresh produce] industry' (United Fresh, 2014, p. 2). It is funded by 'donations' from a number of multinational, national and regional *for-profit* corporations, including Turners and Growers, Dole Asia, and New Zealand's largest supermarkets, Countdown (a subsidiary of Progressive Enterprises) and Foodstuffs New Zealand Limited.
4. The Life Education Trust, along with a number of 'national sponsors', implements the *Life Education* programme. At the time of my research, the national sponsors included: two gaming trusts (also known as 'pokie trusts') – The Lion Foundation and Pub Charity; two product brands – Just Juice (owned by Frucor) and Macleans (owned by GlaxoSmithKline); and five private sector businesses – ANZ (bank), AWF Group (temporary labour supplier), Konica Minolta (printing supplies), Mainfreight (freight) and The Warehouse (household items). In this programme a Life

Education teacher visits the school with a mobile classroom, and the students participate in two or three health education lessons.

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