

'We All Have the Same 24 Hours': Exploring the Prevalence and Impact of 'Hustle Culture' Amongst Young People.

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2024



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1. Introduction

Hustle culture is the addictive notion of an always on lifestyle, commonly glamourised on social media (Morgan, 2016). It has been defined as a mindset that emphasises working hard and constantly striving for success which is a collective urge felt through society to grind at maximum capacity, every day, to accomplish goals at a lightning speed matching the digital world we have built around ourselves (Salzman, 2023; Da Costa, 2019). This is an exemplification of the societal rewards given to constant hard work which perpetuates into unhealthy habits and practices across all aspects of life filling the precious 24 hours in the day (Beverley and Elliot, 2021; Bartlett and Hague, 2021). The aspirational continuation of this all work, no sleep mentality is a phenomenon highlighted through idioms such as ‘the early bird catches the worm’ and ‘I’ll sleep when I’m dead’ (Briggs, 2018; Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). These popular phrases promote the notion that rising before those around you and putting in extra work results in achieving one’s goals. This phenomenon has impacted many generations in the working world through the normalisation of working long hours to the detriment of health, free time, and rest to climb the corporate ladder, earn more money or reach specific targets.

This essay will focus on the recent shift of hustle culture perspective causing it to manifest in serious leisure activities, placing a greater emphasis and romanticisation on an individual’s 5-9 pursuits – whether that be morning or evening - rather than the traditional 9-5 working day (Geall, 2022). Throughout this essay the prevalence of hustle culture and its presentation on social media will be discussed in the context of the global advertising of Nike which uses emotional marketing tactics to promote both their products and striving to live a more fulfilling and successful life.

2. The Interrelationship of Hustle Culture, Generation Z, and Social-Media

Hustle culture was discussed heavily after a Steven Bartlett, Diary of a CEO podcast with Molly-Mae Hague where she stated ‘we all have the same 24 hours’ and that ‘if you want something enough, you can achieve it and it just depends to what lengths you want to go to get where you want to be in the future’ (Bartlett and Hague, 2021). These comments ricocheted through mass media commentary due to the controversy surrounding the universal ability to sacrifice 24 hours in the day to strive for success whilst still maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The notion that we should be productively and actively using all 24 hours in a day has resulted in the further permeation of hustle culture into all aspects of life, utilising the daily 24 hours, especially through people’s leisure activities, making even them into more serious, purposeful pursuits.

Young people and Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, will soon surpass Millennials, the preceding generation born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock 2019), as the most populous generation and are predicted to be 27% of the workforce and one third of the global population by 2025 (Deloitte, 2019). For Generation Z a world without the internet has never existed, therefore the norm of hustle culture promoted throughout social media and the constant access to viewing people’s success makes this a normalised concept, despite its obvious potential for harm.

Social media often encourages hustle culture – which is regularly discussed by Oxford graduate, businesswoman, entrepreneur, and social media influencer Grace Beverley who has stated ‘the reason [her] relationship with productivity is so toxic is because [she’s] always been so highly rewarded by it’ (Beverley and Sbeg, 2024). This highlights the duality of hustle culture and creates an obvious paradox of choice many experience due to their awareness of needing to rest whilst also being addicted to the rewards received from constantly working. This paradox of toxic productivity has been described as ‘performative workaholism’ and

an obsession of outpacing the competition that has become intertwined with the search for meaning in our lives (Griffith, 2019; Beverley, 2021). Furthermore, the confusion surrounding the balance between toxic productivity and success has been discussed as the need to hustle has become an accepted form of stress and an example of unhealthy boundaries in our culture. Beverley (2021: 175) stated 'our "no days off" mentality is a harmful glorification of burnout culture, where burnout is seen as some morally superior finish line coupled with a badge of honour' in the context of societal expectations surrounding working patterns. As well as this, Haldon and Haldon (2024) on their Not So Fit Couple Podcast posed the important question which encompasses the paradox of hustle culture, toxic productivity, and success in society: 'are you simply toxically productive until you reach success, and then its seen as something else?'. This question expertly demonstrates the blurred lines in our society surrounding success as it is rewarded but often the journey to achieve the goal is heavily criticised due to the hard work that has gone into it either due to people's jealousy, lack of self-agency to work that hard themselves or unhealthy habits.

3. Hustle Culture in Society

Individuals experience demands from three life realms: work life, home life, and leisure life (D'Abate, 2005). For Generation Z there has been a significant shift away from the work realms towards hustle culture permeating the home and leisure realms because of the always on lifestyle of comparison that social media facilitates. The digital age we live in has intensified our experiences and views of what is possible to achieve therefore creating a compounding cycle whereby people feel the need to constantly be improving in all aspects of their life.

Hustle culture was highlighted in media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic where people were encouraged to be upskilling or exercising during lockdowns which has subsequently been viewed as an emotional response and coping mechanism to deal with the discomfort of the pandemic (Ferszt, 2021). Jeremy Haynes (2020) best expressed this societal pressure on Twitter, tweeting 'if you don't come out of this quarantine with either:

1. a new skill
2. starting what you've been putting off like a new business
3. more knowledge.

You didn't ever lack the time, you lacked the discipline.'

The emphasis on self-agency is a central focus of the discourse surrounding hustle culture, especially in our post pandemic society as young people are reclaiming the concept of hustle by using it as a 'form of everyday resistance' against societal working norms (Scott, 1985: 29). By rejecting workplace hustle culture, which often involves going above the standard 9-5 working hours expectation and setting boundaries between themselves and toxic narratives young people are becoming increasingly able to prioritise a greater work-life balance, achieving greater self-fulfilment (Scott, 1985).

Despite positives associated with the shift of hustle culture from the public to private sphere, the proliferation of validation and rewards presented as a direct result of working hard in either sphere still have the potential to encourage toxic habits for young people. The digital world has created a lens of comparison enabling a constant view of the people achieving more than ourselves, waking up earlier or putting in more hours towards a target. Furthermore, hustle culture often negates people's personal circumstances as comparison can constantly be drawn to anyone in the world creating the perception that there is never a good time to rest as someone will always be grinding which would place you behind them. This has contributed to the glorification of the grind to reach a desired life or goal that is portrayed on social media, resulting in eventual toxic productivity, hustle culture, and performative workaholism (Griffith, 2019).

4. Serious Leisure

Serious leisure, described by Stebbins (1982: 253), is a way of finding personal fulfilment, enhancing identity, or for personal expression if leisure for many is to become an improvement over work. By following serious leisure pursuits people direct their hustle mentality away from working into leisure which can provide greater purpose and fulfilment in their lives. Stebbins (1982: 251) categorises these specific leisure pursuits into: amateurism, lobbyist pursuits, and career volunteering which become eventual behavioural expressions as these activities offer major lifestyles and identities for their enthusiasts (Stebbins, 2001: 56). Significant distinction has been made between serious and casual leisure making the serious form a more worthwhile investment of time, money, and effort to achieve a sense of purpose. Bunea (2020) states that serious leisure is distinguished from casual leisure due to six characteristics; requiring significant effort in mastering the skill, perseverance during setbacks, a unique ethos, a strong serious leisure identity, can lead to a leisure career that progresses through the participants life, and enduring benefits such as self-actualisation, confidence, and connection.

Furthermore, there is greater benefit to engaging with serious leisure practices due to the ability to find meaning, purpose, and self-fulfilment as 'any change of self-fulfilment depends on the grind and personal sacrifice' (Maize, 2020). Purpose defined either as 'the reason for which something is done' or 'a person's sense of resolve or determination' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). The popularisation of discourse surrounding purpose was encouraged by author and inspirational speaker Simon Sinek (2009) who inspires people to 'find your why' which is the reason for an individual or company to do something leading to greater purpose. This follows the need for serious leisure in our society as it channels our hustle culture mentalities into a positive and purposeful activities in our lives. In addition, Jamil and Sinek (2024) discussed on the I Weigh podcast 'living with purpose, on purpose' which is an aspirational ideal that encompasses peoples need to hustle and succeed whilst doing with consideration instead of mindlessly grinding.

People are so heavily drawn to serious leisure pursuits due to the intrinsic human need for self-fulfilment and purpose which is expertly articulated within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This hierarchy details how humans need basic, psychological, and self-fulfilment needs with the self-fulfilment being the last and hardest category to attain (Poston 2009). Participating in serious leisure pursuits offers the chance to utilise the notion of hustle and grind into a purposeful addition to peoples every day whilst providing a detachment from the world of work that can become all-consuming without a positive way to express energy and the intrinsic need to succeed or self-develop as humans.

These pursuits offer significant detachment from thoughts of work which give people freedom away from their hustle for someone else or an organisation (Bunea, 2020). In a study using interviews from 16 CEOs of Fortune 500, S&P 500, or comparable organisations, serious leisure was discussed as being a precious source of freedom from the all-consuming CEO role and a detachment from work thoughts which could not be achieved through casual leisure (Bunea, 2020). The ability to have goal-oriented pursuits of a non-work passion encouraged a distraction from work to focus their energy on bettering themselves directing hustle into a positive outcome. In our post COVID-19 world this is becoming ever more common as the pandemic forced people to re-evaluate their work-life balance. Brooks E. Scott, an Executive Coach and Interpersonal Communications Expert discussed that since COVID-19 people have started to reject hustle culture as they are no longer willing to do work that does not matter and are setting boundaries between themselves and toxic narratives as this hustle is no longer integral to becoming successful (Carnegie, 2023). 'Most serious leisure participants know that the satisfaction gained from their leisure will be attenuated from time to time by various costs' however they are also aware that 'their costs are relatively minor, that in the typical case the rewards are too powerful, too attractive to be undermined by a handful of petty annoyances' (Stebbins, 2001: 55). This understanding encourages resistance against traditional societal working patterns as people are less likely to endure costs at work such as working longer hours as it would take their time away from the fulfilling pursuits they participate in outside of work which provides similar challenges but is more

fulfilling. This boundary setting enables people to find greater purpose in life by engaging in a 5-9 pursuit that creates separation between the work, home, and leisure realms.

5. Nike, Persuasion, and their Promotion of Serious Leisure

Serious leisure is expertly demonstrated through the effective emotional marketing utilised by the sporting goods company Nike. As detailed on their website, 'NIKE, Inc. is a team comprised of the Nike, Jordan and Converse brands driven by a shared purpose to leave and enduring impact' (Nike Inc., 2024). As a corporation they aim to be culturally innovative whilst '[taking] action to create a future of continual progress for athletes, sport and our world' (Nike Inc., 2024). For the 2023 fiscal year Nike had revenues of \$51.2 billion and served consumers in over 170 countries around the world which highlights their global reach created through their community driven by likeminded athletes (Sher, 2024).

Nike advertisements use manipulation and motivation to play into people's intrinsic and extrinsic needs to succeed by being 'propaganda for the healthy self' bringing with it self-worth and individual power (Cole and Hribar, 1995: 363). As a company, Nike uses hustle culture through their emotional tag lines which have the intention to resonate with people and appeal to their individual exceptionalism. By recognising the struggles people have with their inner self, Nike places themselves and therefore their products within the discourse that 'one can never be satisfied with anything less than excellence and becoming who they want to be' (Helstein, 2003: 289). Sport is expertly used by Nike to show hustle culture behaviours to the masses as lots of people engage within sporting practices as a form of leisure, whether that be for serious or casual means. Despite this, their emotional motivation tactics are associated more greatly with the ideals of serious leisure to bring fulfilment and purpose to people's lives whilst tying them to greatness and achievement.

Nike utilises the tools of persuasion by both manipulating and inspiring consumers by creating a community of like-minded people who are not comfortable with the status quo and want to constantly be pursuing what is next (Sinek, 2009; Hoffman, 2022). Keraf (2004: 118) states that persuasion is the effort of the speaker to influence the listener to do the intended meaning which is expertly demonstrated in their motivational tag lines and advertising campaigns such as 'No Finish Line' and 'Just Do It'. Employing Aristotle's rhetoric by combining ethos, pathos, and logos strengthens the reliability of their advertising, using credible characters as speakers, appealing to the emotional state of the listener, and having strong arguments which leave lasting impacts (Rapp, 2002). The combination of these three elements have been expertly used throughout Nike's advertisements since their conception, making them a credible source of motivation and the presented idealistic lifestyle for self-improvement. Furthermore, Nike's use of persuasion and emotional branding plays on the idea of heroism by telling stories of struggle and persistence which are caveated with eventual reward (Eyada, 2020: 33). By recognising the duality of human beings and playing on both positive and negative bias humans possess, Nike make people both the hero and villain of their own lives (Stovea, 2017). This strategy which recognises the duality of humanity enforces a sense of self agency for the consumer, endowing them with the power of the decision on which path to take in life.

5.1. 'There Is No Finish Line' and 'Just Do It'

From Nike's original 1977 slogan of 'There Is No Finish Line' to their most recent campaign for summer 2024 leading up to the Paris Olympic Games 'Winning Isn't for Everyone' there has been a significant glorification of hustle culture as it often comes with great rewards. The original slogan of 'There Is No Finish Line' highlights the never-ending work and grind needed to succeed which promotes potentially damaging and

all-consuming messages to Nike's global audiences. John Hoke, Nike's Chief Design Officer articulated that this statement 'is not a lazy reference to an unending grind or destination less journey, but rather an expression of our belief in the limitless potential of sport and design' (Nike Inc, 2023). This description plays on the duality of human emotions by framing limitless potential in a positive light so that it can be an aspirational goal. However, it also suggests that there is always more to do, and one can never be satisfied with what they are doing or achieving in the present moment. This plays into the hustle culture ideal through the power of sport and serious leisure as there is a never-ending commitment, almost addiction, to beating yourself. Therefore, through their impactful slogans, Nike's messaging is relevant to sport and design as they describe what can be motivational in all aspects of life playing on the paradox of choice in human thought due to being either aspirational or critical dependent on the consumers viewpoint.

Hague's articulation about the importance of using the available time and having the self-agency to work hard enough to achieve a goal is a mentality that is evident throughout Nike's advertisements and their company philosophy. Nike's deep-rooted slogan 'Just Do It', originating in 1988 and replacing the original 'There Is No Finish Line' saying, epitomises the self-agency needed to strive towards greatness. This emotional branding synonymous with Nike and their products 'serves as an intonation for people to claim when they challenge their goals' (Eyada, 2020: 33). The use of imperatives in this slogan promotes consumers to act, playing into the intrinsic need to hustle and constantly be striving for more. This emotional appeal exemplifies the hero and villain archetypes by simplifying the struggles people have with their inner self into a simple, three-word statement that encourages decisiveness, individual power, and a will for change in the consumers (Stroeva, 2017).



THERE IS NO FINISH LINE.

Sooner or later the serious runner goes through a special, very personal experience that is unknown to most people.

Some call it euphoria. Others say it's a new kind of mystical experience that propels you into an elevated state of consciousness.

A flash of joy. A sense of floating as you run. The experience is unique to each of us, but when it happens you break through a barrier that separates you from casual runners. Forever.

And from that point on, there is no finish line. You run for your life. You begin to be addicted to what running gives you.

We at Nike understand that feeling. There is no finish line for us either. We will never stop trying to excel, to produce running shoes that are better and better every year.

Beating the competition is relatively easy.

But beating yourself is a never ending commitment.



Figure 1: There Is No Finish Line campaign re-imagined highlighting Nike athlete, Eliud Kipchoge, the first person to run a marathon in under 2 hours. The campaign is for



Figure 2: Just Do It. The iconic Nike swoosh along with their slogan which features at the end of all their advertising campaigns. It targets people's inner self and encourages them to act which plays into the discourse of hustle culture and the belief that we have to be performing or striving towards something more all the time, even if it is taking the first step towards a goal (Nike Inc., 2024).

5.2. 'Find Your Greatness'

A major shift in marketing for Nike, was used in the 2012 Find Your Greatness campaign as Nike was not able to use athletes in their adverts after losing the London 2012 Olympic sponsorship deal to Adidas. Instead, this advertising campaign created a shift away from the stereotypical use of famous athletes or bodies in marketing and used an assemblage of bodies, ages, genders, and sports of regular people to create positive reinforcements and deconstruct the traditional notion of greatness. Nike states on their website, originating from Bill Bowerman, American track and field coach and Nike's co-founder that 'we serve athletes* (*if you have a body, you're an athlete)' (Nike Inc. 2024) and this campaign emphasises that messaging by being representative of normal people participating in sport whilst still associating them to the values of the Olympics.

The 2012 campaign was comprised of a collation of videos with the focus being on 'The Jogger' which was centred around an overweight teenager running along an empty path at sunrise. By opposing the traditional appearance of an athlete Nike demonstrated to the public that greatness is not reserved for elite athletes at the Olympics and is available to anyone willing to work for it. The setting of this scene also plays into the narrative of the rise and grind mentality by portraying it at sunrise, along an empty path, before anybody else is awake. The intimate narration mimics the visual serenity and mediative tranquillity of the sacred moment of The Jogger, Nathan Sorrell, who taking agency of his life as stated by the narration 'if greatness doesn't come knocking at your door maybe you should knock on its door'. Throughout this advertisement the camera moves away from The Jogger as he moves towards it (Maržić and Štajduhar, 2016) depicting the constant hustle needed to achieve greatness or athlete like qualities. This advert plays into Nike's underlying

messages that 'There Is No Finish Line' and promotes the chase for greatness as Sorrell has taken the first step to self-improvement and fulfilment however it is something he will continually be aiming to reach. Moreover, the emphasis on rise and grind and a continual hustle is framed in an overwhelmingly positive and aspirational light as Sorrell is making small habitual changes which will have long term benefits which viewers of the advertisement can also implement into their lives forming a community of likeminded people. By redefining greatness, hustle culture through serious leisure is promoted by Nike to achieve greatness no matter what type of athlete you are as it highlights that greatness achieved through sport is accessible to everyone if they work hard enough for it.



Figure 3: Statement displayed on Nike's website originating from Bill Bowerman's quote 'if you have a body, you are an athlete' which remains to be part of Nike's mission to this day (Nike Inc, 2024).

5.3. 'Rise. Grind. Shine. Again.'

Similarly, the 2018 'Rise. Grind. Shine. Again' campaign created for Nike expertly demonstrates the connection between hustle culture, serious leisure and the rise and grind mentality. This advertisement highlights the National Basketball Association (NBA) champion Kevin Durant through his training towards success. The repetitions of 'Rise. Run. Rest. Repeat' across the screen, during the advert, highlight the cycle of growth and the compounding actions that lead to success. These repetitions are used to show that success doesn't come easily and comes to those who train, hustle and work hard for it. Another focus of this campaign is the alarm clock sound which gradually gets earlier and earlier as the film progressing, regressing from 06:20 to 05:20 throughout. This alarm sound is what finally finishes the advert playing into the rise and grind mentality which is commonly associated with hustle culture as well as playing into the traditional idioms of hustle culture 'the early bird catches the worm' and 'I'll sleep when I'm dead' (Briggs, 2018; Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The constant alarm sounds throughout the advert emphasises the importance of waking up early and doing something productive for a purpose which has been commented on by Sharma (2018) in his 5am Club philosophy promoting getting up whilst the rest of the world is asleep to find time to build oneself. This ideal encourages being one step ahead of anyone else, your competition, by waking up before anyone else and finding purpose in the solitude and time between 5-6am. Amy Carmichael comments 'we will have an eternity to celebrate the victories but only a few hours before sunset to win them' which perpetuates this idea that the time that other people are not filling is the most important time as it sets you apart from your competition (Sharma, 2018).



Figure 5: Screenshots from the Rise. Grind. Shine. Again. campaign which flashes up throughout the advert repeatedly demonstrating the routine of training and competing that Kevin Durant goes through daily to win which promotes the rise and grind mindset (Catch&Release, 2019).

5.4. 'Winning Isn't for Everyone'

Nike's most recent campaign for summer 2024 epitomises their constant contrast between the hero and villain used to convey hustle culture to consumers. The campaign 'Winning Isn't for Everyone' emphasises aspect of life. This advertising portrays some of the world's greatest athletes, some of which were going to the Paris 2024 Olympics, the biggest stage for sport. Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Eliud Kipchoge, Sha'Carri Richardson, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Serena Williams are some of the athletes along with twelve others used throughout the advert narrated by Willem Dafoe. Throughout this narration there is listing of traditional negative qualities such as being 'single minded', 'obsessive', 'selfish', and 'delusional' whilst repeating the question 'am I a bad person?' (Nike Inc., 2024). Nike details qualities that would be perceived to make one a bad person but there is a clear juxtaposition with the video clips of athletes succeeding at the highest level (Calfee, 2024). The advert reminds the world that athletes are relentlessly fuelled by the idea of winning and there is also nothing wrong with wanting to win but only those who make great sacrifices will reap the rewards of their hard work. Moreover, the duality of hustle is expertly articulated throughout the balance between the discussion of negative qualities as well as the success as a result which removes some of the glamour commonly associated with success. The campaign came directly from Nike's athletes who are unapologetically competitive and have intense dedication whilst conveying 'Nike's unapologetic view of victory [that] helps athletes all over the world make their dreams a reality' (Nike Inc., 2024).

This messaging can be carried through to consumers lives after watching the advertisement as it is not only applicable to Olympic or top-level athletes due to costs being associated with serious leisure and working culture as well. The depiction of hustle culture in this honest manner is effective as it does not negate the costs that are associated with hard work and highlights both the positives and negatives surrounding hustle culture to enable the consumers to choose on which path they will take.



Figure 6: Screenshot from the Winning Isn't For Everyone campaign which features at the end of the advertisement reinforcing the powerful statement that forces people to consider their own life choices (Nike, 2024).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the prevalence of hustle culture within society is heavily perpetuated by the constant comparison that social media facilitates. This phenomenon has implications across the whole of society due to people's perceptions of accepted working patterns, time off, and how leisure time should be filled to maximise time and success. For young people, especially Generation Z, hustle culture has shifted from being a workplace rite of passage to an action used to develop people's personal pursuits into fulfilling, purposeful serious leisure activities, making the most of their 24 hours in a day. The rise and grind mindset and hustle culture discourse highlights the paradox of human choices and actions as hustle itself can be viewed as both a positive and negative force in people's lives, providing either a source of motivation or inspiration to follow a lifestyle that enables people to 'Find [their] Greatness' or a toxic trait that has the potential to be masked by success in the long run.

Nike's advertising presents this expertly to a global audience depicting the ability to transfer hustle towards serious leisure that can be a positive attribute whilst still recognising the hard work and dedication required to succeed in anything. The duality of hustle presented by Nike in advertising campaigns such as 'Rise. Grind. Shine. Again' and 'Winning Isn't For Everyone' demonstrates that the satisfaction gained from participating in serious leisure activities will be attenuated with costs, such as rising early or putting in hours training, but the rewards are too powerful and attractive to undermine the annoyances (Stebbins, 2001). Furthermore, the 'Find Your Greatness' advert presents an accessible and attainable view of sport promoting their message that 'if you have a body, you're an athlete' portraying the positive life changes that can be achieved through the simplicity of 'Just [Doing] It' leading to great future rewards. These advertisements juxtapose hero and villain archetypes that resonate with people's beliefs about their inner self to encourage hustling as a form of self-improvement or self-development creating lifelong positive change.

Therefore, the prevalence of hustle culture amongst young people has shifted from the workplace to serious leisure and people's 5-9 pursuits. This provides the potential for a more fulfilling life, as people can dedicate greater time striving towards success in their passions which Nike demonstrates to their global audience through their emotional marketing. In order to ensure we are not playing into the toxic narratives of hustle, that are an exemplification of societal rewards, we need to continually be recognising our behaviours, follow intrinsic motivations and strive for self-fulfilment rather than external societal validation to reap the benefits of hustle culture in our own lives.

7. Figure List

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