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ESTHER HITCHEN

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# **The 'Austrian Subject' and the Multiple Performances of Austerity**

Degree of Master of Arts (by Research) in Geography



DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

2013

## Abstract

This thesis explores the current state of austerity in the UK, understanding it as *multiple* phenomena – as both discursive and as lived. Drawing upon UK political and policy statements, austerity is explored as a set of discursive formations. Governmental discourses generate the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur, through invoking a threatening future if the public deficit is not reduced. Yet, whilst discourses after the 2010 general election generated the notion of ‘we are all in this together’ in the face of adversity, this was quickly replaced by a binary between the ‘striver’ and the ‘shirker’. This constructs the idea that certain individuals are undeserving of governmental support, legitimating the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies. This thesis also explores the idea of the *Austrian subject* – an ‘ideal’, as well as an ‘actually existing’ subject summoned in the governing through austerity. Yet, this is a blurred subjectivity, expressing elements of a disciplined, entrepreneurial, resilient and neurotic subject. The Austrian subject, therefore, has a paradoxical relationship with austerity. The thesis then explores how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. This pays attention to the affective experiences of austerity and austerity as an affective atmosphere – how austerity generates *collective* affects and feelings that are transferred into different bodily experiences. This has been achieved through carrying out in-depth interviews with families affected by disability, as they have been disproportionately impacted by governmental spending cuts. These interviews highlight the multiple affective relations that ‘actually existing’ Austrian subjects have towards austerity – they struggle, adapt, contest and ‘get on with life’ – further showing how their relationship with austerity is paradoxical. Consequently, the thesis understands austerity as discursive and as lived in order to explore how, and with what consequences, austerity has become part of life today.

ESTHER HITCHEN

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>0.1. Researching austerity as discursive and affective .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>0.2. Thesis structure .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Austerity: Understanding it as discursive and lived .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1. Section One: Austerity: A dangerous idea? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.2. Section Two: Discourse and performativity.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2.1. Discourse.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2.2. Performativity: Austin, MacKenzie, Callon .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.2.3. Performativity: Butler .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.3. Section Three: Neoliberal governmentality and its significance to austerity .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.3.1. Foucault’s understanding of power.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.3.2. Disciplinary power, biopower and the entrepreneurial subject .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>1.3.3. Neoliberal governmentality and the ‘Austerian subject’ .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>1.3.4. Governing through uncertainty.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.4. Section Four: Affect and affective atmospheres.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.4.1. Affect and austerity.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.4.2. The liveliness of affect and its implications for austerity .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>1.4.3. Austerity as an affective fact .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>1.4.4. Affective atmospheres .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>1.5. Section Five: Moving beyond austerity as a dangerous idea .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Methodology .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.1. Section One: The central methodological challenge .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.2. Section Two: Austerity through the lens of political statements and the household .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.2.1. Discourse analysis .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.2.2. Semi-structured interviews.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2.3. Section Three: The relationship between discourse and affect and its importance to austerity .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Austerity discourses.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.1. Section One: Constructing the conditions of possibility for austerity .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.1.1. Debt as an immediate concern: Pre-emption and fear of the future.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.1.2. Debt as an immediate concern: Irresponsible spending .....</b>	<b>51</b>

3.2. Section Two: Legitimizing an uneven distribution of spending cuts.....	53
3.2.1. ‘We are all in this together’: a discourse that doesn’t last long.....	53
3.2.2. The ‘striver’ verses the ‘shirker’ .....	55
3.2.3. The ‘responsibility deficit’ .....	57
3.2.4. The entrepreneurial striver .....	60
3.2.5. The ‘victim’ of welfare .....	62
3.2.6. The discourse of fairness.....	63
3.2.7. The ‘DLA factor’ and the discourse of greatest need .....	64
3.3. Section Three: Concluding remarks .....	65
<b>Chapter 4: Living with austerity .....</b>	<b>67</b>
4.1. Section One: Struggling as a mode of relation to uncertainty.....	67
4.1.1. Struggling: The fear of losing governmental support .....	67
4.1.2. Struggling: An insecure future for children with disabilities .....	70
4.1.3. Struggling: Austerity means everyday life is a greater struggle.....	73
4.1.4. Struggling: Worry for parents in austerity .....	75
4.2. Section Two: Adapting as a mode of relation to uncertainty .....	77
4.2.1. Adapting: Financial self-management .....	77
4.2.2. Adapting: Changing everyday routines.....	80
4.3. Section Three: Contesting as a mode of relation to uncertainty.....	82
4.3.1. Contesting: Fighting for one’s child .....	82
4.3.2. Contesting: Contesting governmental discourses .....	85
4.4. Section Four: ‘Getting on with life’ as a mode of relation to uncertainty.....	89
4.4.1. ‘Getting on with life’: ‘Just get on with it’ .....	89
4.4.2. ‘Getting on with life’: Acceptance of austerity .....	91
4.5. Section Five: Concluding remarks .....	95
<b>Conclusion: The Austerian subject – living and feeling austerity within multiple discursive fields.....</b>	<b>99</b>
5.1. Austerity as discursive .....	100
5.2. Living and feeling austerity .....	103
5.3. Implications.....	106
5.4. What comes next?.....	108
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>110</b>
Interview with Isobel.....	110

<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>127</b>
Academic sources.....	127
Online sources, newspaper articles and political statements .....	135



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## Introduction



Source: Aslett (2013)

The photo above represents just one of many demonstrations against austerity that have taken place throughout the United Kingdom since the implementation of austerity measures in 2010. Here, nationwide anti-austerity protests were held in towns and cities, including London, Manchester, York, Leeds, and Ipswich. These protests coincided with Guy Fawkes Night on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2013, in order to assemble a 'Bonfire of Austerity', which actions included "occupations of public space to occupations of banks, from online petitioning to blocking roads" (The People's Assembly Against Austerity, 2013). Other significant demonstrations against austerity have included the 'March for the Alternative' on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2011 (March for the Alternative, 2011) and the 'Bedroom tax' protest on the 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 (McVeigh, March 2013).

Yet, what is this 'thing' called austerity? The word is often referred to in social and printed media, but is much more complex than simply a term. My thesis will explore and further the understanding of austerity, grasping the complexity with which the term is expressed, performed and experienced. As such, this study aims to approach austerity as a set of coexisting discourses, illustrating how it is produced discursively. However, it is not only the discursive

that is significant to the way in which austerity is understood; austerity is also something that is lived and felt in everyday life. Thus, an attention to austerity as discourse *and* as lived pays attention to the ways in which austerity can shape our thinking and actions, our individual and collective affects, and how we experience everyday life. An attention to collective and individual affects indicates how austerity can also be considered as an affective atmosphere that transfers into different bodily experiences. Overall, then, the thesis understands austerity as discursive and as lived in order to explore how, and with what consequences, austerity has become part of life today.

Whilst Britain's current austerity programme emerged in the wake of the 2007-2009 global financial crisis, austerity is *not* a new phenomenon; in fact, austerity as an idea can be traced back to 1692 and in practice has been repeated on multiple occasions between 1914 and the present day (Blyth, 2013a). As voiced by Blyth (2013a: 16-17) austerity is not a well worked-out body of ideas. Rather, "it is a derivative of a wider set of beliefs about the appropriate role of the state in the economy that lie scattered around classical and contemporary economic theory." The seventeenth-century philosophical works of Locke, Smith and Hume construct what Blyth calls the "can't live with it, can't live without it, don't want to pay for it" problems of the state in liberal economic theory, paving the way for austerity as an idea (ibid.: 17, 106). Locke set up liberalism to limit the state at all costs, whilst Smith saw a role for the state but struggled to fund it, and so argued that austerity should be embraced in the form of parsimony. For Hume, there was no meaning to the state since merchants were the productive class to whom the money should flow (Blyth, 2013a: 114). Additionally, Smith turned debt into a morality play, giving moral arguments against debt, which are still present today (Lazzarato, 2011). As such, although none of these philosophers directly referred to the term 'austerity', their ideas provided the grounding for austerity as an idea to form. Their work generated the understanding that "[s]aving is a virtue, spending is a vice" and, in so doing, the notion of saving as 'the right thing' came to the fore (ibid.: 114-116). Austerity, then, has roots dating back to the seventeenth century, which still impact upon austerity doctrines today, including the relationship between states and markets and the way in which this leads the former to fear debt (Blyth, 2013c).

Yet, having been implemented on multiple occasions throughout the twentieth century, austerity as a practice is also nothing new. A significant example is the enforcement of austerity throughout 1920s Europe in the aftermath of World War One. France and the United Kingdom owed the United States hundreds of millions of dollars, whilst Germany was ordered to pay billions of Goldmarks in war reparations as a result of the Treaty of Versailles (Blyth, 2013a). Stringent austerity policies were put in place with the aim of repaying their debts. Additionally, the United States in 1931, after the bursting of the stock market bubble and with an increase in

public spending yet a decrease in private spending, the US president Herbert Hoover saw austerity as the only way to restore ‘business confidence’ and balance the budget (ibid.: 187). In December 1931, Hoover raised taxes by \$990 million to eradicate the deficit, yet this simply resulted in an economic depression. For Blyth (2013a), the implementation of austerity in the U.S. in both 1931 and 1937 resulted in a worsening economy. Similarly, he also argues that Britain’s attempts at austerity between 1921 and 1939 never once helped their economic recovery. Furthermore, Blyth attributes the rise in popularity of the National Socialists in the 1930 German election to their anti-austerity stance. Therefore, what Blyth argues is that austerity is extremely dangerous both in practice and as an idea, and in the 1920s and 1930s “[a]usterity didn’t just fail – it helped to blow up the world” (ibid.: 204).

However, there are many more recent implementations of austerity, such as those in the 1980s including Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Australia. Often, Ireland is regarded as a success story of expansionary austerity; however, Blyth argues that the Irish success was at best overpowered by other factors and at worst had nothing to do with austerity itself. Consequently, the often claimed successful austerity cases have not achieved at producing economic expansion by cutting (ibid.). Blyth’s (2013a) book, therefore, illustrates how austerity has been continually unsuccessful as a doctrine, yet still manages to persist as a logical solution to public deficit; austerity does not work in the midst of an economic upturn, let alone in a downturn (ibid.). Regardless of this, austerity appealed to many Eurozone politicians in the aftermath of 2007-2009 financial crisis and is now perceived as the only possible response in both Europe and the U.S. (Blyth, 2013a). This is especially prevalent in Britain. How is it that austerity in the UK has become such common sense since the recent financial crisis? If British politicians advocate austerity, how do they naturalize it as the only viable solution to public debt? These are significant questions that require exploration, and therefore are one focus of my research.

The decision to rescue the banks and restore market stability was an economic problem. Yet, this transformed into a political problem about how to allocate blame and responsibility for the crisis (Clarke and Newman, 2012). Consequently, what was a private-sector banking crisis was rechristened by political and financial elites as a crisis of the sovereign state (Blyth, 2013a). The problem moved from a financial crisis to a fiscal crisis, which is an issue based upon government debt (Clarke and Newman, 2012). In doing so, there resulted in a shift of focus away from the financial services industry towards *public spending* (ibid.). This is significant, as it paved the way for the Conservative Party in Britain to emphasise that there was a crisis surrounding national debt, and subsequently public spending. The Conservative Party’s 2010 election manifesto argued:

*“Our national finances are mired in massive debt... We want your consent for a programme of public spending control.”* (The Conservative Party, 2010: vii-viii)

Through their focus upon a sovereign debt crisis and a need for public spending control, this enabled the Conservative Party to begin initiating austerity discourses. However, the 2010 election did not go quite as planned for the Conservatives, as the British public did not grant them an overall majority. In doing so, the outcome was a hung parliament between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party. Nevertheless, an indication that austerity would still be implemented remained in the coalition agreement. Not only was the notion of a “debt crisis” emphasised, but also deficit reduction as “the most urgent issue facing Britain” (HM Government, 2010: 15). As such, regardless of the failure of becoming a one-party government, there was still a mandate to put austerity into practice in Britain. Consequently, the British austerity programme is an important phenomenon to research, as it dominates the current political arena, making austerity present in political life. Yet, more significantly, the mandate for austerity suggests that it is made present in many parts of daily life, impacting upon the everyday of many individuals. Thus, austerity matters precisely because of the multiple ways in which individuals are made to live with and through austerity.

The following research, then, approaches austerity in Britain, austerity as *multiple* phenomena. Firstly, this research explores austerity as *discourse*, meaning it is approached as a set of discursive formations that are constructed in order to bring about the ‘conditions of possibility’ for austerity to occur. Additionally, these discourses not only bring about austerity, but also legitimate the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies. The second key exploration throughout this research is austerity as something that is *lived*, demonstrating how it lived and felt in everyday life. Austerity discourses can produce an affective atmosphere of austerity, which are collective affects that are then transferred into different bodily experiences. Individuals are forced to navigate and cope with the feelings generated by austerity in their everyday lives. The discursive and affective production of austerity, then, shapes how individuals live and feel austerity, demonstrating the importance of exploring austerity through both discourse and as part of life today.

This approach to austerity *matters* because it is able to convey how austerity is made possible through a set of discursive formations, and how these impact upon, and are *materialised* in, different parts of the everyday. Additionally, this research rejects the notion that discourse jettisons affect, and instead sees the discursive as intertwined with the affective. In doing so, we are able to understand how austerity as discourse can have particular affective consequences in everyday life, both for the collective and the individual. This is unique, as it enables me to engage with, and further, geographical ideas surrounding the term ‘atmosphere’, which is used to describe collective affects or emotions towards something – in this case austerity. It is also a unique angle from which to approach austerity, as it illustrates significant relationships between austerity as discourse and as lived. For example, discourses of austerity

are often placed in a binary division between austerity discourses and counter-discourses of austerity. Yet, this idea becomes problematic in the everyday living and feeling of austerity; individuals cannot be divided into being for or against austerity, as it is possible to perform an array of discourses that transcend the apparent binary divide.

### **0.1. Researching austerity as discursive and affective**

My methodological decisions reflect the focus upon austerity as discourse and as lived in everyday life. First, understanding discourse requires a focus upon texts – which are not confined to things that are written – that perform the austerity discourse itself. McCormack (2012) emphasises in his research into inflation that political speeches are a significant practice that renders it present and potentially actionable, and austerity is no different; as such, political speeches throughout this study become an important medium through which austerity is discursively formed. Policy documents are also focused upon to supplement the discourses produced by the political speeches. Both practices enable exploration into how austerity is discursively produced, due to the ways in which they are able to shape our thinking and actions. Consequently, a form of discourse analysis based upon the work of Michel Foucault is drawn upon, in order to explore the ‘rules of formation’ (Foucault, 1972: 38) that allow austerity discourses to exist. Basing my discourse analysis upon Foucault furthers the complexity of my analysis, through showing how austerity discourses also involve the subjugation of other knowledge, as well as how discourses are continually open to contestation.

Second, understanding austerity as lived requires a movement *beyond* the discursive, towards a focus upon how living beings feel austerity in the everyday. As such, this requires a method that is able to convey how individuals experience austerity throughout their daily lives. This not only requires attention towards the discursive, but also towards *affect*, in order to analyse how individuals cope with and navigate their feelings generated by austerity. The method chosen, therefore, is the semi-structured interview, as individuals are able to perform austerity discursively, as well as express how austerity is transferred into different and multiple bodily experiences. It is important to emphasise, however, that the interview is not considered the best method for understanding affect, as it proves difficult to be attentive to communication outside the representational. Yet, whilst I recognise that interviews have often been regarded as incompatible with affect, I wish to think through them as a way of producing affect.

Third, and given that austerity is not experienced uniformly across all individuals, the following thesis explores how it is felt unevenly across homes and bodies. The focus here is upon a particular group that is disproportionately affected by governmental spending cuts to illustrate how certain individuals feel austerity more. As will become clear throughout this research, people with disabilities are just one of many groups that are exceptionally affected by

Britain's austerity measures. Thus, this study focuses upon the experiences of families that have a child or children with a disability. In doing so, this enables me to explore how austerity is lived through the family, the household and through familial relations. Focusing upon families affected by disability also furthers our understanding of how austerity is felt both collectively and individually, illustrating the significance of austerity as an affective atmosphere.

## **0.2. Thesis structure**

Chapter One will outline the theoretical and conceptual framework for exploring austerity as discourse, as an affective atmosphere and as something that is lived and felt in everyday life. It begins with a review of existing austerity literature, demonstrating that there is no previous literature exploring austerity as both discourse and as lived. The chapter then turns to a critical discussion of Michel Foucault's understanding of discursive formations, which leads onto the literature on performativity, in which Judith Butler's work is most significant due to her engagement with Foucault and her attention to power. Thus, the literature concerning power is explored, in order to highlight the significance of neoliberal governmentality upon the study of austerity, incorporating the importance of disciplinary and biopolitical rationalities and uncertainty in governing through austerity. This impacts upon subjectivity, providing scope for thinking about the *Austrian subject*, which emerges in the governing through austerity. Finally, the significance of affect and affective atmospheres upon the study of austerity is discussed. This provides a comprehensive construction of the theoretical and conceptual framework for researching austerity.

Chapter Two involves a critical discussion of the methodological decisions and implications that this research involves. Firstly, the central methodological challenge is highlighted, demonstrating the difficulty in researching austerity both as discourse and as lived. Subsequently, this leads onto the chosen methods that allow austerity to be approached this way, outlining the significance of both discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews for my research. In doing so, this also outlines the types of texts (political speeches and policy documents) and research participants (families affected by disability) that will be focused upon. Finally, the relationship between discourse and affect is explored, illustrating its importance to researching austerity.

Chapter Three is the first of two empirical chapters. It begins by analysing how the 'conditions of possibility' for austerity to occur are constructed. Through this, the discourse of debt as an immediate concern is explored; this incorporates discourses of a threatening future if the deficit is not reduced, as well as the discourse of previous irresponsible spending, constructing austerity as enacting 'fiscal responsibility'. This chapter then explores how an *uneven* distribution of spending cuts is legitimated across homes and bodies. The discourse of



‘we are all in this together’ is analysed to show how it was quickly replaced by a binary division between striver and shirker, which proves crucial to legitimating unevenly distributed austerity measures. This leads onto the discourses of the ‘something for nothing culture’ and the discourse of the ‘responsibility deficit’, which constructs unemployment and claiming benefits as a rational choice. The striver, however, is constructed as an entrepreneurial subject that contributes towards Britain’s economic recovery. Leading on from this, the chapter explores how shirkers are also constructed as the ‘victim’ of welfare, in which the welfare system is a ‘trap’. Therefore, this constructs austerity as introducing fairness for the taxpayer and benefit claimant.

Chapter Four explores how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. The chapter begins by emphasising how austerity is closely related to uncertainty and individuals relate to this uncertainty in multiple ways. Firstly, individuals *struggle* with this uncertainty by fearing the loss of governmental support for their child with disabilities. This brings about multiple negative affects that can take hold of the body. Individuals also fear that the future needs of their child will not be secured. Thus, for such individuals austerity results in everyday life becoming more difficult, bringing about multiple worries for parents. Secondly, this chapter explores how individuals *adapt* to the uncertainty of austerity by financially self-managing, including budgeting and planning financially for the future. Subsequent to this, how individuals also adapt through changing their everyday routine is explored. Thirdly, this chapter analyses how individuals also aim to *contest* the uncertainty of austerity by fighting against a (potential) loss of support for their child and contesting governmental discourses of austerity. Yet, as will be shown, contesting austerity is *never* a coherent process. Finally, this chapter explores how individuals simply wish to ‘*get on with life*’ as best they can in austere times by enacting the mentality of ‘getting on with it’. Individuals also accept austerity, yet acceptance comes with multiple affective relations; whilst some may agree with austerity, others accept it due to sheer exhaustion upon the body, feeling better off than other families or simply by accepting that there are dangers outside of their control.

Conducting the following study is significant, as researching austerity now *matters*. Britain is currently expected to be in a state of austerity until at least 2018 (Stewart and Inman, 2012) and the repercussions of this are already beginning to be felt by many, including individuals, families, public services and charities. Worryingly, it is often voiced that the austerity measures that have already been implemented are simply the “tip of the iceberg” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013), suggesting that the impacts of governmental spending cuts will only become greater and more visible. Additionally, Britain’s Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated at in November 2013 that he wished for a permanent austerity to produce a “leaner, more efficient state” (Watt, 2013). Austerity, then, is unlikely to disappear for the

foreseeable future, demonstrating the importance of broadening our comprehension of austerity in academic research.

## Chapter 1: Austerity: Understanding it as discursive and lived

The following chapter provides a theoretical framework for researching austerity and, in doing so, reviews literature that is important to understanding austerity. Section One explores existing literature on austerity and, in particular, the contribution of Mark Blyth (2013a; 2013b). Section Two examines the significance of Foucault's (1972) understanding of discourse and, subsequently, the contribution of performativity to understanding austerity. Section Three examines the significance of neoliberal governmentality upon the governing through austerity. Finally, Section Four explores how affect and affective atmospheres are important to austerity.

### *1.1. Section One: Austerity: A dangerous idea?*<sup>1</sup>

*“Austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state’s budgets, debt, and deficits. Doing so, its advocates believe, will inspire ‘business confidence’ since the government will neither be ‘crowding out’ the market for investment by sucking up all the available capital through the issuance of debt, nor adding to the nation’s already ‘too big’ debt.”*  
(Blyth, 2013a: 2)

Mark Blyth's (2013a) book *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea* provides a significant contribution to the increasing body of work on austerity, and in particular into the 'age of austerity' that the U.S., the UK and the Eurozone now find themselves in. Blyth uses many examples of austerity since the 1920s to argue that the *ideology* of austerity, despite the evidence that it continually fails to achieve economic expansion, keeps reoccurring. This accords with Quiggin's (2012: 233) claim that austerity is a “zombie economic idea”. Blyth's definition of austerity above is noteworthy, since it highlights the idea of austerity as *expansionary* and aiming to inspire 'business confidence'. Krugman (2012) calls this the 'confidence fairy', in which the cutting back on government spending could lead to higher demand by reducing interest rates or by leading people to expect lower future taxes. Because long-term interest rates today reflect expectations about the future, this expectation of lower taxes could lead to higher investment spending straight away (ibid.: 195). Here, then, austerity is expected to result in an expansion of the economy, through a reduction in government

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Blyth's (2013a) book *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea*.

spending. However, for Krugman (2012: 196) expansionary austerity is highly implausible, as it is not enough for these confidence-related effects to *exist*, they have to be strong enough to more than offset the depressionary effects of austerity itself. Blyth's (2013a) work accords with Krugman's largely Keynesian stance towards austerity, and goes further by arguing that austerity as an idea is extremely dangerous.

Analysing the U.S. and the European turn towards austerity in the 1920s and 1930s, Blyth argues that austerity contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War, including the rise of National Socialist Party in Germany. Additionally, Blyth explores examples that were represented as success stories of expansionary austerity, including the REBLL countries – Romania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania – from 2008 onwards. In doing so, Blyth (2013a: 218) argues that their experiences prove neither the expansionary austerity thesis, nor provide much in the way of portable and practical lessons for the rest of the world. While it is almost true that austerity eventually, after huge welfare losses, put the REBLLs on an upwards growth trajectory, Blyth emphasises that austerity after the recent economic crash did nothing to prevent the deepening economic crisis.

As a result of Blyth's comprehensive analysis of austerity as a dangerous idea, his work has been applauded by many as a "compelling and extremely thought-provoking" book (Thompson, 2013: 729). Yet, this has not come without critique; a symposium in *Comparative European Politics* provided a platform for critical discussion of Blyth's analysis of the recent financial crisis and subsequent austerity. Jabko (2013) argues that austerity is not simply a tool for pursuing conservative agendas, but also appealing to many political actors of all colours. Thus, he emphasises that the appeal of austerity does not mean that actors adopting austerity policies harbour deeply held beliefs in the idea itself. Streeck (2013), contrary to Blyth, doubts whether an alternative to austerity is just around the corner, and suggests that economic expansion may not work, as both public and private debt has been rising considerably for almost half a century in the United States. Thompson (2013) disputes Blyth's indignation towards the fact that a private-sector banking crisis has been blamed on the state. She argues that if the state did not cause the financial crisis, the political use that the states were put to in the pre-crisis years – which included the close relationship between politicians and financial corporations – contributed to it. In critiquing Blyth, these contributors downplay the significance of austerity as an *idea* upon the implementation of the austerity doctrine. Yet, Blyth (2013b) responds to his critics by emphasising the importance of the *idea* of austerity policy rather than the more material factors that they stress. Blyth argues that 'good' ideologies are frameworks for action that have one defining feature: they are immune to empirical refutation. They persist despite the evidence, leading Blyth to stress that austerity is most of all an ideology (Blyth, 2013b: 3).

However, despite their critiques, all contributors emphasise the significance of Blyth's book in expanding the field of austerity research.

The extant literature is not, of course, confined to Mark Blyth's contribution and the debates that it has sparked. Austerity is also the topic of special issues in a number of academic publications. A significant issue has been in *Critical Social Policy* (August 2012) with contributors including Ruth Levitas, Jay Wiggan, John Clarke and Janet Newman. Clark and Newman (2012) focus upon the contradictory politics of austerity in the UK, in which the discourse of 'we are all in this together' further a notion of 'collective pain sharing'. They (ibid.: 303) argue that the coalition government construct the idea of "one nation united in the face of adversity", yet there is little perceived equity of sacrifice in austerity, making the notion difficult to believe. Wiggan (2012) focuses upon neo-liberal discourses of 'worklessness' and 'dependency' and their influence on how the welfare system can be viewed in a state of austerity. Both discourses claim that poverty and other social problems are as a result of individual or familial behaviour, such as family breakdown, economic dependency and educational failure. State support, then, is constructed as *reinforcing* social problems by permitting people to make the 'wrong' choices. Wiggan's work is significant, as it explores the discursive production of austerity, demonstrating how discourses can shape the way austerity is viewed and acted upon, as well as producing the 'conditions of possibility' for austerity to occur. Levitas (2012) provides a critique of the coalition government's rhetoric of the 'Big Society' in austere times, arguing that it is little more than an attempt to get necessary social labour carried out for nothing. Levitas also criticises the coalition government's cutting of welfare spending, emphasising that it impinges directly upon the poor, the young, the sick and the disabled. This is noteworthy too, as it highlights that austerity does not impact individuals in an equal fashion, rather there is an uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies. Yet, whilst there is an emphasis that certain individuals are disproportionately impacted upon by austerity measures, there is an absence of research into the ways in which these individuals *live* austerity. This is important because austerity is not just something that is discursively produced, but is lived and felt. This gap in the austerity literature, therefore, will be addressed throughout this research.

In addition, *Studies in the Maternal* produced a special issue into 'Austerity Parenting'; it examines the requirement of parents to become 'austere', to do more with less, for the sake of the future that their children and grandchildren will inherit (Jensen and Tyler, 2012). The work of Barnes and Power (2012) accords with Wiggan (2012) by arguing that personal responsibility has been applied to a range of social problems, blaming those that require support from the welfare state. Nonconforming parents are constructed as 'part of the problem' in austere times. The work of Jensen (2012) is particularly significant, as she explores certain discourses

emerging in the ‘age of austerity’ and the affective outcomes they produce. She explores the discourse of the ‘austerity chic’, which exploits the politics of recession, for example through TV programmes that generate nostalgia for post-Second World War self-sufficiency. Additionally, Jensen (2012) analyses the discourse of ‘new thrift’, which romanticises austerity through practices such as how to use up leftovers, how to shop strategically and how to reduce heating bills. Such practices were once a central part of living on the breadline, yet the ‘new thrift’ culture transforms them into aesthetic practices and art-forms (ibid.: 15). Jensen argues that the emerging discourses of thrift and frugality in austerity have the affective outcomes of producing pride and shame. This is significant, as Jensen indicates a relationship between discourse and affect: discourses of austerity can have particular affective consequences. Consequently, this research on austerity will draw upon the relationship between discourse and affect to show the importance of both the discursive and affective production of austerity.

## ***1.2. Section Two: Discourse and performativity***

### **1.2.1. Discourse**

The discussion of discourse is significant to this research, as the term ‘austerity’ can be understood as a set of coexisting discourses. Blyth’s (2013b) emphasis upon austerity as an ideology indicates the power that austerity discourses have. The ideology of austerity suggests that sovereign debt is to be feared (Blyth, 2013c), bringing about the ‘need’ to ‘balance the books’ if debt is present. The notion of debt as unwanted has spread across different actors, including in both the private and public sectors. This sets up a problem surrounding debt, in which austerity is the solution, as it discursively constructs the understanding that austerity will eliminate sovereign debt. Austerity as *discourse*, then, means that austerity has particular force by becoming a ‘common sense’ solution to government debt (Blyth, 2010).

To draw upon discourse means to reject knowledge as a natural reflection of ‘reality’ (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). The concept of ‘discourse’ has been elaborated by, amongst others, Michel Foucault. It is Foucault’s work that I turn to in order to explore the way in which his concept of discourse highlights how austerity is constructed and naturalised as a solution to public debt. Firstly, Foucault’s engagement with the notion of *discursive formations* is particularly significant. Rather than simply defining discourse crudely – for example, Fairclough (2003: 124) defines discourse as “ways of representing aspects of the world”, which is too simplistic – Foucault emphasises that discourse is not just a concept, it is a *practice*. Foucault (1972:38) states:

*“Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such as system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices,*

*one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions, and functionings, transformations), we... are dealing with a discursive formation.*”

Foucault shows here that a discursive formation is an ordering process through generating uniformities between discursive and non-discursive elements. This suggests that discursive practices are a way of ordering the social world. Foucault (1972: 38) argues that these discursive and non-discursive elements are subjected to *rules of formation*, which are the conditions of their existence (but also of their coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance). As such, discourses exist, coexist, maintain, modify and disappear in a “densely overlapping, networked, and often contested discursive web” (Philo, 2011: 365). These rules of formation are significant because they indicate various and differing relationships between discourses of austerity; discourses of austerity may coexist alongside each other, yet certain discourses may disappear and some might be maintained.

For Foucault (1972: 49), analysing discourses means to loosen the embrace between ‘words’ and ‘things’. Rather than words resembling the thing it is describing, resulting in no gap between ‘words’ and their ‘things’ (Foucault, 1970 cited in Gregory 1994: 21), resemblance yields to representation. As such, there is no such thing as words reflecting a mirror image of the world (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). Additionally, the analysis of discourse moves significantly away from language analysis; rather than defining a set of rules in which similar statements can be made, discourse asks:

*“[H]ow is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?”* (Foucault, 1972:28)

This quote raises two important concerns. Firstly, it highlights that discourses are fundamentally unstable. Asking why one particular statement takes preference over another indicates that the emergence of knowledge claims is not a neutral process. Rather, discourses are spatially, culturally, socially and temporally contingent (Wylie, 2006; Rose, 2007), meaning that discourses undergo constant change as new utterances are added to them (Foucault, 1991a). As contexts change, so too may discourses. As Foucault states (1972: 25), “[d]iscourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.” This suggests that, precisely because discourses are contingent, they must be analysed in the *context* of their emergence, as it is this milieu that allows certain discourses to appear over others. It is in specific regimes that mean some discourses assume to be common sense, whilst others appear unnatural. Foucault’s (1972: 25) choice of words when describing the emergence of discourse is particularly interesting; he states “[w]e must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden *irruption*” (emphasis added). Thus, discourses do not simply develop in a linear and predictable manner; *irruption* suggests a behaviour that is volatile and erratic, again showing

how discourses are intrinsically unstable. This idea has been particularly influential; for example, the instability of discourse has been taken up in a strand of identity studies, in which identities are regarded as volatile precisely because they are discursively formed (including Hall, 1997; 2000; Sarup, 1996).

Secondly, the quote above suggests that the emergence of discourse involves the subjugation of other knowledge; here, the construction of discourse involves disqualifying certain knowledges as inadequate to their task (Foucault, 1980: 82). As the production of knowledge is not a neutral process, discourses influence the outcome of this production. Foucault's (1972) publication, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is a useful choice of title, as by 'archaeology' he means the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define the limits and forms of the sayable (Foucault, 1991a: 59). Thus, the archaeology of a discourse determines what it is possible to speak of in a given context. As such, certain utterances are "destined to disappear without any trace", whilst others are "repressed and censored", yet others are "put into circulation" (ibid.: 60). This is particularly significant when thinking about austerity, as some discourses of austerity are put into circulation, whilst others disappear, or are repressed or censored. Thus, this further highlights the importance of taking into consideration what it is about the particular context that allows certain discourses of austerity to be put into circulation over others; for Foucault (1991a: 60) this is the *discursive field* in which discourses coexist, reside and disappear. He (ibid.) argues, to achieve this we must ask, what is specific about what is said and nowhere else?

It becomes clear here that power is intertwined with discourse. When acknowledging that there is no certainty in knowledge claims, discursive formations are the practice of truth production, and Foucault argues that 'truth' is always tied up with questions of power (Foucault, 1991c). This suggests that discourses have a "naturalizing power" (Barnes and Duncan, 1992: 9) that define and produce the objects of our knowledge (Hall, 2000). It is often understood within Geography that power is most effective when it is least visible (Corbridge, 2009). As such, knowledge becomes most powerful when it is assumed to be common sense. This is why some discourses become so powerful, and consequently need to be taken seriously in this research, due to the way in which they naturalize knowledge claims. In relation to austerity, this indicates that the most powerful discourses of austerity are those that are assumed to be common sense. Again, however, this relies on the subjugation of other knowledges.

However, Foucault (1972) argues that it is through the 'not said' that the 'said' is undermined. Consequently, criticisms perform their work through the emergence of low-ranking and disqualified knowledges (Foucault, 1980). This is noteworthy, as it suggests that discourses are continually open to contestation and re-evaluation. This not only further shows the volatility of discourse, but it also suggests that discourses of austerity are never beyond



contestation; for example, no matter how ‘necessary’ austerity is portrayed as, such knowledge claims will always be open to dispute through the emergence of repressed and censored discourses.

Additionally, a central idea in Foucault’s book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* has proven to be extremely influential in subsequent research; he (Foucault, 1972: 49) argues that discourses should not be treated as a group of signs, but as “*practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (emphasis added). This is particularly significant, as it shows that discourses are *performative*. This means that discourses are not simply descriptions of regularities between elements, rather they *produce* the effects they claim to name. The concept of performativity has been explored by various scholars who have used many different theorists to expand what can be understood by the term ‘performativity’. It is important to turn to the concept of performativity, therefore, as Foucault’s work suggests that austerity discourses do not simply describe a ‘reality’ that austerity is a ‘common sense’ solution to public debt, rather they *bring into effect* this idea. Performativity, then, matters to understanding austerity as discourse.

### **1.2.2. Performativity: Austin, MacKenzie, Callon**

The term performativity was first introduced by J.L Austin (1962) in *How to do things with words*. Austin (1962: 1) criticised the assumption of philosophers that a statement can only be used to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’. Rather, Austin (1962: 6) uses the term ‘performative utterance’ in which statements *produce* the effects they claim to name. This move away from the notion of statements as simply descriptive has proved very influential within political economy studies, and particularly in the work of Donald MacKenzie. For him (2003: 4), “[t]o claim that economics is performative is to argue that it *does* things, rather than simply describing... an external reality that is not affected by economics” (emphasis in original). MacKenzie advocates the significance of ‘Austinian performativity’, as his concern is with the *practical* adoption of a theory or model. As such, ‘Austinian performativity’ is understood as “a category used to express the notion that particular theories and theoretical claims in some sense *enact* the world they seek to theorise” (Clarke, 2012: 263, emphasis in original).

Consequently, MacKenzie (2004) discusses the way in which economic models can be performative – here, the adoption of a model can increase its verisimilitude, improving the fit between model and ‘reality’. Thus, to ask whether a model in financial economics is performative in the Austinian sense is to ask whether the practical use of the model is to change patterns of prices towards greater compliance with the model (MacKenzie, 2004: 306).

It is clear that MacKenzie has an experimental approach to performativity. This is particularly evident in his discussion of the Black and Scholes formula (MacKenzie, 2003). Here, MacKenzie describes the “the gradual actualisation of the world of the formula” (Callon, 2006: 320); the introduction of the formula results in the world becoming what the formula describes. ‘Austinian performativity’ is shown here; yet, interestingly, this actualisation process is described as a long sequence of trial and error. This is enabled through the performative dimension of statements, which allow adjustments to be made. The success of a performative statement depends on this adjustment (ibid.). Firstly, this suggests that MacKenzie’s understanding of performativity concerns the way in which the performative is achieved through a range of experiments – it is through trial and error that a successful performative is uttered. Secondly, it illustrates that not all attempted performatives are successful – there can also be failures. This understanding of successful and unsuccessful performatives can be traced back to Austin. Austin (1962) introduces the notion of *misfires*, when the act of performing is not achieved. When the utterance is a misfire, the procedure enacted is disallowed or has failed, resulting in the act being “void without effect” (Austin, 1962: 16). Thus, Mackenzie’s idea of experimenting is particularly useful when thinking about Austin, as it suggests that misfires can become successful performative utterances through trial and error.

However, both Austin and MacKenzie imply that performatives are only successful in specific contexts. Austin (1962: 8) argues that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way *appropriate*. Thus, Austin (1975: 139) emphasises the importance of analysing not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance *in a speech act*. The context within which the statement is uttered is vital in determining whether the performative will be successful. MacKenzie (2003) also notes that the Black and Scholes formula has meaning and effect *only* in its own world. Consequently, both Austin and MacKenzie show that performatives can only be successful within the worlds that they create.

It is clear that ‘Austinian performativity’ is useful for understanding how performative finance enacts a theory or theoretical claim. Yet, Clarke (2012) argues that with ‘Austinian performativity’ there is an over-tendency to focus on such theories and of knowledge about finance at the expense of other possible performances of finance. Therefore, Clarke (2012: 264) advocates that a more generic understanding of performativity may help capture some of the additional complexity involved in how finance is performed. Clarke’s argument can be extended beyond the consideration of finance towards the application of generic performativity to other concepts.

Yet, firstly, what is ‘generic performativity?’ For MacKenzie (2004: 305) ‘generic performativity’ is where performativity is at its most general, and consequently, “entirely obvious”. Yet, for many other theorists (including Callon, 1998; 2006; Butler, 1990; 1993; de

Goede, 2006; 2009) ‘generic performativity’ is highly significant. Michel Callon’s work engages with generic performativity in economics. He argues that “economics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions” (Callon, 1998: 2). Here, Callon, like MacKenzie, argues that economics, both as a theoretical and practical activity, is performative. Also, for Callon (2006), economic theories are ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’, in which if a statement is believed by you and other agents, this assumption turns into reality, suggesting that it is the communal belief about a statement that brings it into being. Additionally, whilst MacKenzie uses a very experimental approach to performativity, Callon’s work is refined by the semiotic turn and the ANT turn (Callon, 2006). Thus, for Callon (2006: 328) materiality is vital in performativity, or what he calls “socialtechnical *agencements*”; by this he means agreements which include statements that describe and contribute towards putting them into action (ibid.: 328). As such, the materiality of models and statements play a vital role in the shaping of economics.

A particularly significant strand of Callon’s understanding of performativity is his attention towards *repetition with a difference*. Callon (2006: 330) argues that performativity is a “constantly renewed process of performance.” It is this process that brings about the expressions, self-fulfilling prophecies, prescriptions and performances that (he argues) encompasses performativity. This is noteworthy due to the way in which it complements the work of Judith Butler on performativity and her notion of ‘slippages’. However, what makes Butler’s work more useful to this research on austerity compared to Callon (and also MacKenzie) is her engagement with Foucault’s understanding of discourse. For Butler, the *recitation* of discourse is integral in the construction of a gendered identity. Consequently, Butler’s work on performativity will now be explored.

### **1.2.3. Performativity: Butler**

Judith Butler’s work on performativity is also partly derived from Austin, drawing upon how linguistic declarations call into being the objects they claim to name (Brickell, 2005) and Butler (1990; 1993), like Austin, takes an anti-essentialist position, by arguing that gender is performative. Rather than gender being an internal core of the self, gender is enacted through the recitation of discourse (Butler, 1990). These gestures, acts and enactments are performative in the sense that they are fabrications, manufactured and sustained through discursive means (Butler, 1990: 173). Thus, performativity is significant in exposing these fabrications as discursive formations, moving away from the notion of gendered identities as ‘natural’. Key to Butler’s argument is that “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990: 33); Austin’s (1962) influence is evident here, as gender is constructed performatively by producing the effects it claims to name.

However, Butler moves away from Austin when thinking about questions of agency. For Austin (1962), there is an autonomous agent enacting the performative utterances, suggesting that the subject pre-exists the acts and gestures that are performative. Butler, on the other hand, rejects the notion of an autonomous agent and instead argues that the subject emerges through the repetition and recitation of discourse. This is illustrated through Butler's (1990: 33) definition of gender:

*“Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulated frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”*

This quote indicates it is through repeated, mundane and ritualised actions that identities become legitimate (Butler, 1990). The action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. Her understanding of performativity involves the repetition or citation of gender norms, which take place under ‘regulatory regimes’ which force some appearances of masculinity and femininity while prohibiting others (Brickell, 2005: 26). Some gender identities are thus seen as ‘natural’ whilst others are seen as ‘unnatural’. Here, Butler draws on Foucault's argument that coherent identities are generated through regulatory practices: the cultural matrix through which a gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of identities cannot ‘exist’, as they fail to conform to certain gender norms (Butler, 1990: 23-24). Consequently, the *repetition* of gender norms privileges some forms of gendering as authentic, whilst others are suppressed.

However, it is also through the recitation of discourse that a gender identity can be subverted, as there is no guarantee that this repetition will be successful (Gregson and Rose, 2000). These repeated productions “swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of ‘subjects’ that... expand the boundaries of what is, in fact culturally intelligible” (Butler, 1990: 39). This shows there are ‘slippages’ in the recitation of discourse, which expand what can be meant by that performance. Butler draws upon the Derridean claim of *differènce*, in which the repetition central to the maintenance and constitution of gender is always repetition with a difference (Lloyd, 1999). As such, participating in the practices of repetition that constitutes identity presents the possibility of contesting them (Butler, 1990: 147). It is here that Butler also takes a Foucauldian stance, emphasising the way in which this repetition creates space for transformation (Lloyd, 1999). Consequently, it is in the spaces between the impossibility of identical recitation and necessary reiteration that opportunity for gender transformation becomes possible (ibid.: 200-1). As such, ‘slippages’ in performance can inject notions of difference into discourse, which holds the potential, over time, to change the discourse itself. This provides scope for ‘doing’ identity differently (Cream, 1995; Bell et al.,

1994). It is here that Callon and Butler converge, as Callon (2006: 330) also highlights the importance of repetition with a difference by calling performance a “constantly renewed process.” Although Callon does not engage directly with discourse, his work implies a similarity with Butler’s notion of ‘slippages’. The act of ‘renewing’ indicates that the process of performativity always involves a change or transformation and, therefore, is a constantly varying process. This supports Butler’s argument that ‘slippages’ expand what is culturally intelligible by a performance.

Butler’s understanding of performativity has not only been taken up in a number of feminist literatures – for example, Longhurst (2000) – it has also directly influenced the understanding of finance and economics as performative. Marieke de Goede (2003; 2005; 2009) argues the finance is performative, yet differs from MacKenzie and Callon, due to her engagement with Butler’s performativity. For de Goede (2005: 7), finance is “a discursive domain made possible through performative practices, which have to be articulated and rearticulated on a daily basis.” This highlights the importance of discourse within de Goede’s work – finance, like gender, is constructed through the citation of discourse. The quote also shows that finance as a discourse, or multiple discourses, has to be rearticulated on a daily basis. Thus, like gender, it is through the *repetition* and *recitation* of discourse that finance emerges.

Additionally, as stated previously, the citation of gender norms take place under ‘regulatory regimes’, which force some forms of masculinity and femininity, whilst prohibiting others (Brickell, 2005). For de Goede (2003: 95) finance is constructed in the same way. She argues that “[f]inance is defined through general regulative practices that determine what can and cannot be legitimately said within its domain.” As such, it is through ‘regulatory regimes’ that some discourses about finance emerge dominant, resulting in their utterances being recognised as valid (ibid.). Significantly, de Goede highlights how understanding finance as performative focuses debate on the *exclusions* made for financial discourse to emerge as rational, normal, scientific, and respectable practice (2005: 9). Thus, this understanding of performativity provides scope to highlight the missing discourses that provide different, yet suppressed, ways of constructing finance.

However, Butler’s *Gender Trouble* has not come without criticism. As her theory of gender rejects any sort of pre-discursive body, and advocates a body as textualised through discourse, Butler implies the body as purely discursive (Wilson, 2001). As such, Butler argues that there is no access to a pure materiality outside of language (ibid.: 111). It is this that has left Butler open to criticism, and in particular by Nigel Thrift. For Thrift (1997: 137), “through representation as text the body as flesh is marginalised”. Due to the heightened sensitivity towards the “fleshy reality of the human body” (Latham and Conradson, 2003:1901) in geographical research, Butler (1990) has been criticised for too much focus upon the discursive

whilst ignoring the materiality of the body. Wilson (2001: 112) argues that while the body and its boundaries are related to the social, the body is also materially bound and therefore not “an endlessly malleable substance to be shaped at will by discourse.” As such, Kirby (1997: 70) argues that Butler’s post-structural approach to corporeality ignores “the biological facts of the body’s existence.” The work of Gilles Deleuze provides an alternative post-structural approach that can be used to critique Butler further; his ideas about bodies shake up the assumptions about their boundedness: what we take to be our own and how one body relates to another (Probyn, 2010: 76). Deleuze argues that the body is not a unified entity but is composed of many moving elements. Thus, this suggests that bodies are not bound by discourse like Butler (1990) implies. This could be put down to Butler’s (outdated) reading of discourse; her work prioritises the discursive over the non-discursive, due to her engagement with Foucault’s episteme in his earlier work. In Foucault’s earlier work – *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* – the episteme is “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems” (Foucault, 1972: 191). Here there is so much focus upon the set of relations that unite discursive practices it perhaps ignores the importance of non-discursive elements. However, this is not to suggest that Foucault’s concept of discourse in general is too discursive. Although Thrift (2007: 56) argues that Foucault is “on the side of *death* not *life*” (emphasis in original), Foucault can also be read in a way that has “lively implications” (Philo, 2012: 496). This will be explored in greater detail in Section Four.

As Thrift and Dewsbury (2000: 414) argue, Butler’s performativity “has very little sense of positive push – excitability even – of practices, rather than just discourse”, and there has been a turn towards a notion of performance found in non-representational theory. Thrift and Dewsbury (2000: 414) argue that Butler’s work is lacking the “sense of free play which would let creativity back in.” Thus, non-representational theory emphasises the flow and practice of everyday life as embodied, as caught up with and committed to the creation of affect, as contextual and as technologized through language and objects (ibid.: 415). Thus, everyday life is a creative process due to such encounters, rather than consciously planned codings and symbols. Butler has been criticised for her over-emphasis of the performative being based on such codings and symbols, due to the way in which gender and the body is always understood through signification. For some non-representational theorists such as Thrift, a term like ‘discourse’ does not capture the kinaesthetic vocabularies and imaginations that cannot be reduced to a textual model. Therefore, a non-representational understanding of performance shows how everyday life is a “set of skills”, not just language, that are “highly performative” (ibid.: 415). Thus, for Dewsbury (2000) performativity is *affective* rather than effective, which is able to capture the multitude of possible outcomes within an event.

Performance in non-representational terms draws upon the work of Gilles Deleuze. The significance of performance is the way in which attention is placed upon creativity, difference and to “making the new” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Deleuze (1991: 97) calls this the “actualisation of the virtual” in which making the new “does not operate through resemblance or representation but by generating difference, divergence, and creation.” The actualisation of the virtual is a creative process; with the virtual we cannot know the outcome, whereas with the actual the outcome is known. As such, it is this process of actualising the virtual that generates difference, as it is in the space between the virtual and the actual that difference arises. This is because in this space we can only guess what the outcome will be, and this imagination extends to practice, percepts, affects and sensations, not just language (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 416).

Despite these criticisms, an advantage of Butler’s work is her explicit attempt to think about power. Arguably Butler is a theorist of a particular kind of power; she draws upon Foucault’s earlier work on power, including *Discipline and Punish*, rather than his later lectures engaging with governmentality and biopower. As stated earlier, Butler (1990) draws upon Foucault’s argument that coherent identities are generated through regulatory practices. Thus, Butler engages with disciplinary power, generating the significance of bodies conforming to particular gender norms within a cultural matrix. This indicates the way in which discourses are suppressed in certain fields of intelligibility, showing its significance in relation to austerity. Although Butler focuses upon gender, her ideas are significant when considering discourse more generally. This also points towards the emergence of a particular kind of subject through disciplinary power: the subject is ordered, uniform and disciplined, conforming to certain regularities in the context of austerity. However, as will be shown later, disciplinary power is not the only useful mode of power in relation to austerity. Disciplinary power does not provide scope for thinking about the uncertain, which is so important when thinking about austerity.

Nevertheless, the existing literature on performativity is significant to understanding austerity as discourse. Whilst the work of Austin, MacKenzie and Callon do not directly explore discourse, they show the power that the performative has to bring about the effects it claims to name. This indicates the way in which austerity is able to bring into being the very notions that it claims to describe, such as the idea that sovereign debt is to be feared and that austerity is the only viable solution to this debt. Both the work of MacKenzie (2003) and Austin (1962) suggest that austerity as a performative idea is only successful *within* the world that it creates. This is useful for understanding austerity as discourse; as voiced by Foucault (1972), discourses (of austerity) must be analysed in the context of their emergence, as austerity is only naturalised in specific regimes. Thus, discourses of austerity are only successfully performative in contexts where it is deemed to be common sense. This accords with Butler’s (1990) argument that the

performances of gender are fabrications, sustained through discursive means. This suggests that performativity allows austerity to be understood, not as ‘natural’, but as something that is manufactured discursively and that is naturalised only in specific contexts. Yet, Butler is particularly significant, as she indicates (unlike Austin, MacKenzie and Callon) how austerity as a set of performative *discourses* can be understood. Austerity is constructed through the citation and repetition of discourses. The repetition of certain discourses of austerity privileges them as ‘authentic’. Thus, the performativity of austerity discourses is important because it highlights the ‘regulatory regimes’ that naturalise certain discourses, resulting in their utterances being recognised as valid, whilst other discourses are repressed (de Goede, 2003). This indicates that attention to austerity as discourse also explores the relations of power that are exercised in the discursive production of austerity. These relations of power have real and meaningful impacts upon the conduct of subjects in austere times. This, therefore, highlights the need to turn to relations of power and the question of neoliberal governmentality, and how they are significant to understanding austerity.

### ***1.3. Section 3: Neoliberal governmentality and its significance to austerity***

#### **1.3.1. Foucault’s understanding of power**

Exploring questions of power relations and neoliberal governmentality are important for understanding how austerity shapes the conduct of subjects in austerity, through disciplinary and biopolitical rationalities. In doing so, this indicates that it is *through* austerity that governing can take place. Additionally, drawing on the uncertain suggests that is also through the uncertainty of austerity that governing occurs. Firstly, however, it is important to understand power using Foucault’s work, as it suggests that relations of power in austerity are exercised through individuals, having implications for their conduct in austerity. For Foucault (2003a: 59), it is paramount to find a discourse of power that “cut’s off the king’s head.” This illustrates a rejection of absolute power, in which some people have it and hold it exclusively. Instead, power is something that circulates and is exercised through networks (Foucault, 2003a: 29). Foucault advocates a ‘capillary’ notion of power, where power is exercised in the same way at all levels and operates at the lowest extremities of everyday life (Foucault, 1990). Consequently, Foucault argues that we need to move away from the idea of juridical sovereignty – where power can be used to dominate over others – and understand the ways in which power passes *through* individuals. Thus, to “cut off the king’s head” is to highlight that modern forms of power do not exercise “the right to take life or let live” but by ‘making live’ and ‘letting die’ (Foucault 2003a: 240). This understanding of power has become extremely important in



Foucault's discussions of neoliberal governmentality, and it helps understand austerity as something through which governing takes place.

### **1.3.2. Disciplinary power, biopower and the entrepreneurial subject**

Before exploring key mechanisms of neoliberal governmentality, it is important to emphasise the argument made by Stephen Collier (2009) and others. Collier draws upon the work of Nikolas Rose (1999) to argue that there is no one generalised neoliberal governmentality. Instead it is just *one* in a succession of 'formations' of liberal government that have emerged over the past 200 years (ibid.). As such, austerity should *not* be explored simply as an extension of neoliberal governance, as there is no one neoliberalism. Collier (2009: 97) also argues that neoliberal governmentality is often initially identified through its 'parts'; these parts, once observed, are then taken as indications that we are dealing with a neoliberal 'whole'. Thus, exploring a neoliberal 'part' in austerity research does not justify making broad claims about austerity and neoliberalism; it is therefore essential to avoid taking neoliberalism as a "master category" (Rose et al., 2006: 97) that can be used to understand austerity. Collier suggests that this tendency is partly due to the concept of governmentality itself: it is often regarded as a coherent regime that has common 'conditions of possibility'. Austerity, then, should not be analysed in relation to common 'conditions of possibility', but as a set of phenomena that has varying, complex, deviating 'conditions of possibility'.

Foucault frequently argued that neoliberalism is an example of social control that typified governmental reason (McNay, 2009: 55). Governmental reason is an approach to social control that works not through direct state sanctions but through the indirect shaping of 'free' social practices (ibid.). This indirect shaping works on two levels: firstly, the "*individualizing, disciplinary mechanisms* that shapes the behaviours and identity of the individual through the impositions of certain normalizing technologies or practices of the self" and secondly, "*regulatory or massification techniques* that focus on the large-scale management of populations" (McNay, 2009: 57, emphasis in original). The former technique indicates what Foucault calls disciplinary power, whilst the latter illustrates the implementation of biopower. With the former technique of power the body is individualized as an organism endowed with capacities, whilst with biopower, bodies are replaced by general biological processes (Foucault, 2003a). Section Four will explore the significance of the notion of biological processes upon the concept of affect.

For Foucault (1991b: 241) neoliberal governmentality is governance "whereby everything would be controlled to the point of self-sustenance, without the need for intervention." This is driven by the anxiety that if one governs too much one does not govern at all (ibid.: 242). As such, neoliberal governance uses freedom as a *form* of power, and not as a

limit to the exercise of power. To govern, means to “structure the possible field of actions of others” (Foucault, 1982: 221) where freedom plays a central role (Huxley, 2007). Power is only exercised over free subjects, meaning there are several possibilities for individual and collective subjects to behave (Foucault, 1982). Therefore, modern forms of governing use freedom to form subjects that are autonomous and responsible, and therefore are able to freely choose how to behave and act (Miller and Rose, 2008). However, Miller and Rose (2008: 18) argue that the freedom of subjects is still regulated as they are coerced to perform what it means to have freedom: to be autonomous, responsible, active, and choosing. Thus, individual autonomy is at the heart of control in neoliberal governance (McNay, 2009). Freedom enables subjects to perform the meaning of self as enterprise: “[t]he autonomous citizen... who manages these diverse networks – work, household, pension, insurance, private property – in the most responsible and prudent fashion vis-à-vis the avoidance of risk and the maximisation of their own happiness” (McNay, 2009: 61). This has similarities with Foucault’s engagement with *homo economicus*.

For Foucault (2004) the neoliberal understanding of *homo economicus* is an entrepreneur of himself, being his own capital – in the form of human capital – being his own producer and being himself the source of his earnings (ibid.: 226). Thus, Foucault argues that the model of *homo economicus* can be applied, not only to the economic actor, but to every social actor in general. For him, this economic analysis can be extended to any rational conduct – any conduct which is sensitive to the modifications in the variables of the environment and responds to this in a systematic way – not just economic conduct. This suggests that the subject that emerges under neoliberal forms of governing is both an entrepreneur of himself, whilst also having the ability to respond to variables in the environment.

However, there is a problematic with *homo economicus* and the entrepreneurial subject, in that it is often ignores the importance of affect and emotion upon how people govern themselves. This has been taken up by Isin’s (2004) work on the neurotic citizen. For him the neurotic subject moves beyond the notion of the subject purely being sufficient, calculating, responsible and autonomous. Rather, it also arises from and responds to fears, anxieties and insecurities. This indicates that “affects and emotions are integral components of everyday conduct” (ibid.: 219). This has important implications for the governing through austerity; the subject in austerity understands itself as an affect structure, suggesting that affect is a key part through which it governs itself. This illustrates the need to take into account the part played by affect in the governing process. Subsequent work has highlighted the role of affect in the conduct of subjects. Langley (2013: 5), for example, emphasises the importance of affect in the construction of the entrepreneurial subject. For him, the entrepreneurial consumer of credit is “affectively animated” not only by the fear of moral condemnation if their repayments are not

met, but also through the optimism of knowing and acting on one's own credit score. This shows that the entrepreneurial consumer not only conducts itself through calculative decisions, but also through affect. Likewise, Munro and Smith's (2008) research into home purchase illustrates that buying a home involves both calculative decisions and affects. The 'feeling rule' – positive emotional attachments to specific properties – are as influential as calculative forces, such as price. This indicates the significance of affect in the conduct of everyday life. Yet, it also shows that affect is one of many 'object' of ways and techniques of governing in austerity; governing, here, uses affect to shape the conduct of subjects in austerity, through modifying their ability to feel and act.

### **1.3.3. Neoliberal governmentality and the 'Austerian subject'**

With neoliberal logics of governing in mind, there may be scope for thinking about the idea of a type of subjectivity that emerges specifically within neoliberal governance in a state of austerity, known as the 'Austerian subject'. The term 'Austerian' was coined by the financial analyst Rob Parenteau to describe those who advocate implementing austerity (Krugman, 2012). An Austerian *subject*, however, can be seen as a subject that emerges through the governing of austerity. The Austerian subject takes on the idea of *homo economicus* and adapts these into the state of austerity. For example, in the state of austerity, public debt weighs on every individual's life, since every individual must take responsibility for it (Lazzarato, 2012: 38). Lazzarato (2012: 94) argues that today's neoliberal policies produce human capital and 'entrepreneurs of the self' who are more or less in debt. Thus, Lazzarato introduces the notion of the 'indebted man': a subjective figure of modern-day capitalism, who will never finish paying his debts. Lazzarato (2012: 122) argues that sovereign debt may cause the indebted man to become the most widespread condition in the world. So, the question is what makes the Austerian subject different from the 'indebted man', as Lazzarato suggests that 'the indebted' man is so common due to the state of austerity in many countries?

Importantly, the Austerian subject moves beyond the 'indebted man' through its attention to affect. Like Isin's (2004) neurotic citizen, affect is significant to how the Austerian subject governs itself. The Austerian subject would recode loss into many different feelings; for example, Berlant (2011) argues that austerity claims the vulnerable should recode "loss as sacrifice", producing "an affective cushion to replace the loss of material ones" (Berlant, 2011: no pagination). Sacrificing is "the act of giving up something more valued for the sake of something else more important or worthy" (OED, 1996: 895); balancing Britain's sovereign debt is regarded as more important here, and so individuals must make sacrifices as a result of austerity. Lazzarato (2012: 94) argues that for the majority of the population, becoming an 'entrepreneur of the self' is restricted to managing its employability, its debt, the drop in wages

and income, and the reduction of public services. An Austerian subject would recode these losses into many different feelings and bodily experiences, which firstly means that they respond to modifications in the variables of the environment (Foucault, 2004); some may understand these losses as sacrifices (Berlant, 2011), in order to take individual responsibility that apparently should weigh upon everyone to reduce the sovereign debt (Krugman, 2012). Yet, others may recode these losses into other feelings, not just sacrifice as Berlant (2011) indicates. Additionally, the Austerian subject may experience multiple feelings towards austerity itself, such as anger, anxiety and fear. As these feelings are wide-ranging, they may often be paradoxical, suggesting that subjectivities in austerity are incoherent. Like the neurotic citizen, the subject in austerity conducts itself not only through calculative decisions, but also through affect.

This indicates two different understandings and implications of the term ‘Austerian subject’, in which both are significant to austerity. The first use of the term, is an ‘*ideal subject*’ of austerity discourses; they relate to austerity in a way that brings Britain’s economic recovery to the fore, seeing it of highest importance. Thus, any impact of austerity upon this Austerian subject is a sacrifice for the ‘common good’ of the economy. Yet, the second use of the Austerian subject is an ‘*actually existing*’ subject who relates to austerity discourses in many different, often paradoxical, ways. This subject, then, distinguishes itself from the ‘ideal’ Austerian subject by relating to austerity in ways that can both perform and contest austerity discourses. Yet, actually existing Austerian subjects are also distinct, as they are *not* reducible to austerity discourses; their subjectivities go beyond austerity, meaning that they are always more than Austerian subjects. This suggests that the ‘Austerian subject’ is an impure, blurred subjectivity; the process of making subjectivities is contradictory and laden with tensions, exemplified by Butler’s (1990) work on gendered performativities. Whilst governmental discourses may try to structure the action of others in the state of austerity (Foucault, 1982), the impurity of the ‘Austerian subject’ indicates that there is no determined response to austerity; the discursive production of austerity can be transferred into multiple different responses and bodily experiences in everyday life. Anderson (2011: 28) argues that life can refer to that which exceeds attempts to control it. Thus, austerity as *lived* always means that the ‘Austerian subject’, by living through austerity, can always escape being governed. However, an issue with the ‘Austerian subject’ is the privileging of the human subject over other non-discursive elements that are also involved in the *living* of austerity. As such, there needs to be an understanding of austerity that takes subjectivity into account, but does not privilege it at the expense of materialities of austerity.

The work of Miller and Rose (1990) further emphasises this. They (ibid.) use the term “technologies of government” to illustrate how the most mundane and humble mechanisms

make it possible to govern, such as the invention of devices like surveys and presentation forms like tables (1990: 8). This is significant, as Miller and Rose go beyond the discursive character of governmentality here, by exploring the way in which governing is *materialised*. This is significant, as it shows the importance of the *materiality* of austerity; discourses of austerity can go *beyond* the discursive as they become materialised into non-discursive elements, such as through government reports and statistics. This will be further explored in Section Four through the work of Chris Philo. Before this, however, we must explore the importance the *uncertain*, due to the way in which austerity also governs through uncertainty.

#### **1.3.4. Governing through uncertainty**

The *treatment of the uncertain* is significant to this research, particularly due to the way in which austerity can be seen as governing through uncertainty. Arguably, austerity brings with it uncertainty, and consequently it is *through* this uncertainty that governing takes place. Additionally, it is through neoliberal logics of governing that the contingency of life has become both a source of threat and opportunity, and both danger and profit (Anderson, 2011: 29). The understanding that uncertainty can be both a source of opportunity and danger has brought different strands of research into how uncertainty is framed. O'Malley (2010) focuses upon the significance of uncertainty through the notion of the 'resilient subject', which involves the governance of the self in conditions of uncertainty. This is significant to austerity, as it explores the emergence of a subject that embraces uncertainty, indicating how subjects may embrace the uncertainty of austerity. Resilience emerges as a new technique better adapted to govern situations of radical and incalculable uncertainty (ibid.: 505) Yet, the resilient subject here is expected to embrace risk, and this risk-taking attitude regards uncertainty as *opportunity*. Thus, O'Malley constructs a subject that relates to uncertainty through a sense of opportunity. Evans and Reid (2013) also explore the resilient subject, yet for them, uncertainty becomes a source of *danger*. The resilient subject is expected to embrace danger and accept that life is a permanent process of continual adaptation to dangers said to be outside their control (ibid.: 83). As such, whilst uncertainty becomes a source of danger, the subject here "accepts the dangerousness of the world" rather than attempting to secure themselves from it (ibid.: 83). Whilst these understandings of the resilient subject have differing stances to uncertainty, both emphasise the importance of embracing either opportunity or danger, which subsequently embraces uncertainty itself. Drawing upon uncertainty, then, suggests that subjects in austerity should not try to secure themselves from the uncertainty that austerity brings, but should embrace it by either seeing it as a source of opportunity, or by accepting that there are dangers outside of their control. Attention to acceptance is particularly significant when thinking about austerity, as arguably, austerity is the acceptance that 'we will live in uncertain times'. In a state of austerity,

it becomes uncertain what action will be taken to reduce the public deficit; will there be an increase in taxes or a slash in government services (Blyth, 2010)? If there is a cut back in government spending, which services will be targeted? Will they affect certain geographical locations more than others? The uncertainty is endless. Subsequently, it is through this contingency in austerity that the actions of individuals are shaped. For example, contingency means that people are encouraged to be financially 'responsible', as it becomes uncertain what the future will bring. For Dillon (2007), 'the contingent' is rivalling 'the economic' and 'the social' because even these domains are coming to be understood through an ontology and epistemology of the contingent. Consequently, biopolitical liberal governance both governs *through* and is in turn governed *by* the practices of 'the contingent' (ibid.).

Section Three has illustrated the significance of neoliberal governmentality and the uncertain for governing through austerity. Exploring different 'parts' of neoliberal logics of governing (Collier, 2009) shows that both disciplinary and biopolitical rationalities shape the conduct of subjects in austerity, through individualising, disciplinary mechanisms and regulatory, massification techniques respectively. The uncertain also suggests that subjects should embrace the uncertainty of austerity, rather than attempting to secure themselves from it. This allows us to think about the 'ideal' Austerian subject of austerity discourses that is disciplined to perform the notion that Britain's deficit reduction plan is of highest importance and, therefore, austerity means accepting losses as sacrifices (Berlant, 2011). Yet, the 'actually existing' Austerian subject indicates a subject that has a paradoxical relationship towards austerity, by having multiple, often paradoxical, feelings towards it. This has implications for understanding how austerity may be *lived*. The Austerian subject here is a complex, blurred subjectivity that cannot be shaped simply through austerity discourses. Rather, it is not reducible to austerity discourses, nor it is simply performing them. Austerity as lived implies complex experiences, in which there are numerous and conflicting relations to austerity, which accords with the actually existing Austerian subject. Yet, attention to this also requires movement beyond simply the discursive towards questions surrounding the *affective* production of austerity; attention to affect and affective atmospheres highlights the importance of the visceral energies, collective and individual affects and their movement between bodies, and how this furthers understanding of austerity as lived. The following section explores exactly this.

#### ***1.4. Section 4: Affect and affective atmospheres***

##### **1.4.1. Affect and austerity**

Before emphasising the importance of affect in understanding austerity, we need to explore key debates surrounding the term *affect*. This will subsequently provide moments of

reflection when it becomes significant to relate these ideas to austerity. Firstly, as there is no stable definition of affect – the term can mean many different things (Thrift, 2004). Affects can be described as “intensities of feeling” (ibid.: 57), as they are often associated with words such as emotion and feelings, including terms such as anger, hatred, love, happiness and so on. Yet, Thrift emphasises the need to get away from the idea of such words being simple translations of affect. To do so is to reject such emotions as being political ciphers. Thus, affect is political, in which power relations are important. Scholars such as Anderson (2010; 2011), Massumi (2002; 2005) and Isin (2004) engage with power as working *through* affect. It is this understanding of affect that is most useful to research on austerity, due to the significance that power relations have in enabling austerity to be played-out and performed in everyday life. For Anderson (2010), affect is saturated by forms of power that work ‘from below’, indicating a capillary notion of power that Foucault emphasises. Consequently, both Butler’s performativity and this understanding of affect are significant, as they both acknowledge the importance of power in the enactment of austerity. Thrift’s (2004: 57) idea of affect as “intensities of feelings” is useful to understanding austerity; the idea, performance and everyday experience of austerity can bring about multiple and wide-ranging “intensities of feeling”. Not only this, austerity also works *through* these intensities of feelings to bring about meaningful consequences, as affect makes us feel, think and act in different ways (Probyn, 2010).

Additionally, Thrift (2004) outlines a particular translation of affect that has associations with non-representational theory. A non-representational understanding of affect is particularly useful, due to its engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze and his discussion of Spinoza’s work on *affectus* and *affectio*. Deleuze (1978) argues that affect (*affectus*) is different from an idea that is characterised by its representational character. Affect is a mode of thought which does *not* represent something, such as a hope, a pain, a love. But this does *not* mean they are any less significant; affect “is a different kind of intelligence about the world, but it is intelligence all the same” (Thrift, 2004: 60). As such, affect avoids the risk of over-emphasising the representational in research. This is particularly useful in relation to austerity, as affect also provides scope to move beyond the discursive. Whilst discourse is an important lens through which to interpret austerity, it is by no means the only understanding. Prioritising discourse runs the risk of only exploring austerity through what can be signified, ignoring that which cannot. Thus, affect and austerity suggest that austerity can be expressed, lived and felt prior to signification. However, Katz (1999: 4) argues that people end up *talking* about their affective qualities and responses, making it very difficult to capture affect in its pure form. Thus, discussing and interpreting “intensities of feeling” is already applying significations to these feelings themselves; this suggests that it is only truly at the *moment* at which these intensities of feelings emerge that affect shows itself.

However, thinking about the idea that “affects have specific effect” (Probyn, 2010: 74) suggests something completely different. Rather than implying that attaching significations to affect means that it is not grasping the notion of affect, it suggests that a “precise emotion demands a precise description” (Probyn, 2010: 74). This implies that it is impossible to explore affect *without* signification. On the one hand, many emphasise the importance of defining affect in terms of autonomy from conscious perception and language (Massumi, 2002, cited in Clough, 2010). Yet, as indicated by Katz (1999), seeing affects as autonomous from reflectivity becomes increasingly difficult when conducting geographical research, as affect will often be discussed and reflected upon through language and signification. This has implications for thinking about austerity. Whilst austerity brings about and works through intensities of feeling, when trying to explore them through research, they are inevitably understood through signification. This is *not* to imply the superiority of signification over affect, rather this suggests that the former should not be seen as jettisoning the latter; both are forms of thinking that are significant to the performance of austerity. Although Thrift (2004: 60) strongly criticises the overemphasis of the representational, he also states, “previous attempts which either relegated affect to the irrational or raised it up to the level of the sublime are both equally wrong-headed.” This suggests that a prioritisation of either the representational or affect as autonomous from signification narrows the way in which austerity becomes intelligible. Consequently, to see signification and affect as mutually exclusive is to reject the way in which the two can actually be useful to one another.

#### **1.4.2. The liveliness of affect and its implications for austerity**

Significantly, affect is useful in exploring the liveliness of the world that many have argued is not enabled through discourse. As explored earlier, discourse is performative, bringing about the effects it claims to name (Butler, 1990). The performativity of discourse is useful for understanding how austerity is discursively produced, through highlighting the ‘regulatory regimes’ that naturalise certain austerity discourses over others. This understanding of performativity shows how austerity discourses are fabrications, but constructed and sustained through the citation and recitation of discourse. However, for Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) discourse captures little excitability about the world and signifies ‘dead geographies’. Affect, on the other hand, is lively because of the movement and creativity that affect allows (*ibid.*). The movements of affect are expressed through the proprioceptive and visceral shifts in the background habits and postures that are commonly described as feelings (Anderson, 2006: 76). Consequently, this “emergence and movement of affect and its corporeal expression in bodily feelings, create the transpersonal sense of *life* that animates and dampens space-time experience” (Anderson, 2006: 736-37, emphasis in original). Thus, it is the fluidity of affect that



generates life, through the sense of ‘freedom’ to a body ‘enlivened’ (Caillé, 2001, cited in Anderson, 2006). Yet, the term ‘body’ is not restricted to the *human* body. Whilst the human body is a key medium through which affect moves, “[a] body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity” (Deleuze, 1988: 127-128). Consequently, Deleuze’s non-representational understanding of affect is particularly useful, as it provides a truly anti-humanist perspective on affect. This therefore does not restrict the movement of affective qualities to between human bodies but to *any* body, which can mean *anything* (Anderson, 2006).

The significance of affect here, then, is the freedom of a body that generates a sense of life. Affect is the ‘push of life’ (Thrift, 2004), and as a result of this liveliness, new ways of living are constantly appearing amidst the ‘to and fro’ of everyday life (Anderson, 2011: 28). This idea is particularly useful when thinking about austerity. Austerity is something that is *lived* in everyday life. As such, it is not a stable concept with linear and mapped out experiences; rather, both because of austerity as a concept and also because it is lived, there is much contingency in the everyday living of austerity. The movement of affect also suggests that austerity is something that is felt and transferred through bodies, including the human body. This materiality of austerity is significant because it shows that austerity is *not* purely discursive. The embodiment and materiality of austerity consequently show that austerity becomes tangible and can be found in ‘real’ life objects and feelings. This implies, then, that discourse as is unable to capture the materiality of austerity, in which austerity is made present through non-discursive means.

However, the work of Chris Philo (2012) with his ‘new’ reading of Foucault, shows that discourse can actually capture the materiality of austerity discourses and how they are played out in austerity as *lived*; this ‘new’ Foucault has “lively implications” (ibid.: 496) on how we can view austerity through the lens of discourse. For various scholars, Foucault is considered gloomy and depressing. Thrift (2007: 56), who has already shown himself to be a critic of Foucault’s understanding of discourse, argues that his approach results in “a leaching out of many of the most vital ingredients of the world.” Thus, Philo argues that for Thrift, words and life become opposed. Philo (2012: 499) states that for Thrift, Foucault has “too many words, too little doing; too much knowledge in books, too little knowledge in action.” Thrift (2007: 55-56) also argues that Foucault’s work “is curiously devoid of thingness”, that is perhaps because of “a more general emphasis on language and texts that pervades so much of his work.” This creates the notion that affect and discourse are thereby opposed in that “to concentrate on discourse is likely to jettison affect” (Philo, 2012: 500). For Thrift, Foucault’s bodies are discursive objects, fashioned out of words, and therefore *not* bodies full of eruptive, vital life (ibid.).

Yet, Philo (2012: 499) acknowledges Foucault's stress on the materiality of discourse; this includes the physical there-ness of documents in circulation or as archived. Whilst Thrift argues that Foucault has an absence of things, Philo contends that his lectures are full of non-discursive things of all kinds: school, asylums, town, houses, bags of grain, bodies and so on. This has important implications for research on austerity. The 'old' reading of discourse would see austerity merely as something discursive, with an emphasis on language and text. Yet, Philo's acknowledgement of the materiality of discourse allows austerity discourses to become materialised into non-discursive elements, demonstrating the 'physical there-ness' of austerity in every life. It is here that discourse and affect can actually become quite similar. The materialisation of discourses of austerity can be likened to the 'bodies' that affective qualities move between; for Deleuze these are not just human bodies but *any* body, which can mean *anything* (Anderson, 2006). As these bodies can be anything, it implies they can be any non-discursive elements in which discourses of austerity become materialised.

Additionally, Philo explores where, in Foucault's work, there is a sense of life, disputing the notion that Foucault is on the side of death. In Foucault's (2003b) *Abnormal*, there are "lively bodies, full of vital energies, fluids and potentials" (Philo, 2012: 503). Philo adds that these bodies clearly have a prior reality, even if discursively framed. In Foucault's (2007) *Society, Territory, Population*, Philo (2012: 506) argues that Foucault here is "a theorist-historian of life, of vital processes of bodies." This is significant as it disputes Thrift's assertion that Foucault's work neglects affect and indicates a strong sense of bodies affecting and being affected, reoccurring on many occasions. This has important implications for exploring austerity. This suggests that austerity can be explored through discourse alongside austerity through an affective lens; thus, discourses of austerity do not jettison the affective qualities of austerity. In fact, the former complement that latter, due to the 'new' reading of Foucault that takes into account the materiality of discourse and the liveliness of Foucault's work. Additionally, acknowledging affect and the liveliness in Foucault's work also provides scope for thinking about the relationship between power and *life*. For Philo (2012) by taking seriously the lively bodies and populations over which power is exerted, it becomes clear that this liveliness is "often too much for the powers-that-be."

### **1.4.3. Austerity as an affective fact**

We now turn to the work of Massumi (2005), as his work can be used to understand the relationship between austerity as discourse and austerity as lived. I engage with Massumi's work in order to approach austerity as an affective fact, an idea which has significant similarities to understanding austerity as a set of performative discourses. Understanding austerity as an affective fact allows us to consider how the impacts of austerity may remain virtual, but are real

and present in their effects. Massumi (2005) uses the term ‘affect’ differently, through arguing there has been the birth of the *affective fact* as a key political indicator. By this he means “a capacity that affect itself has to self-effect” (ibid., 2005: 8). Massumi (2005: 8) uses a simple mechanism to illustrate this:

“*Threat triggers fear. The fear is of disruption. The fear is a disruption.*”

For Massumi, pre-emption works through affect, which makes present the future consequences of an eventuality which may or may not occur. Thus, the event remains virtual, but it is real and present in its effects. This is significant when thinking about austerity; pre-emption is fundamental to austerity, as it brings the future into the present through implementing austerity measures in the UK. The eventuality that may or may not occur includes the fear that Britain will find themselves confronting a debt crisis similar to Greece if the Britain does not apply austerity (Krugman, 2012). Thus, the fear of confronting a debt crisis similar to Greece becomes the disruption itself, due to the discourse that only austerity can act as a ‘solution’ to this eventuality that may or may not occur. Thus, austerity measures act as the real and present effects of the virtual event. Yet, the repetition of this warning can be enough to construct it as an empirical fact (Massumi, 2005). It is here that austerity as an affective fact appears to have similarities with austerity as a set of discourses. The repetition of a warning, rendering it an empirical fact can be likened to the performative effect of discourse. The repetition and recitation of discourse, then, creates the effects it claims to name (Butler, 1990). The repetition of the warning that Britain will become like Greece if it does not turn to austerity has performative effect, by bringing this eventuality into the present and implementing measures that are the real and present effects of this fear.

McCormack (2012) also develops the ideas of Massumi (2005; 2010) in his research on inflation as an affective fact. Inflation, like austerity, brings into the present the possibility of a threatening future, which may or may not emerge. Importantly, McCormack emphasises that the affective dimensions of inflation also mean that its effects – anticipated or real – are *felt*. This is significant for the concept of austerity as an affective fact; its effects are *lived* and *felt* in everyday life, through implementation of austerity measures. McCormack (2012) also focuses on the practices that render inflation as an affective fact and as a matter of *immediate concern*. He argues this is enabled through practices such as political speeches, governmental strategies, advertising and so on. However, austerity operates differently in that *debt* is presented as a matter immediate concern, which in turn renders austerity present and potentially actionable. Importantly, McCormack goes on to say that it is the practices and performances through which these futures are made present *imaginatively* and *affectively*. This suggests that practices and

performances of austerity make futures present through imaginative and affective means. *Both* are vital in the construction of austerity futures.

However, a critique of McCormack's (2012) work is that he actually explores the discursive formation of inflation as an affective fact, rather than focusing in depth on the ways in which its affective dimensions are *felt*. This is shown by his focus on the render of inflation as a public matter of concern "through a range of performative presentational techniques" (ibid.: 1541). This limits the opportunity to explore the capacities in which bodies affect other bodies and in turn open themselves up to also being affected. This is also significant for thinking about austerity; whilst it is important to explore the practices and techniques through which debt is rendered a matter of immediate concern, and subsequently austerity as present, attention should also be drawn towards the ways in which this opens up capabilities to affect and be affected. As such, austerity generates and works through varying and numerous affective relations. These affective qualities are also not confined to an individual. Rather, whilst austerity as affective is reducible to affects to the body and also other bodies, these affective qualities also *exceed* the bodies from which they emerge from. As a result of the need to explore these affective relations of austerity, and to explore these affectivities *beyond* the bodies from which they emerge, it is important to discuss a newly emerging and valuable body of literature known as *affective atmospheres*. As argued by Anderson (2009: 80), "the term atmosphere presents itself to us as a response to a question; how to attend to collective affect that are not reducible to the individual bodies that they emerge from?"

#### **1.4.4. Affective atmospheres**

Affective atmospheres are vital for understanding austerity. Like affect, affective atmospheres create a space of intensity that overflows a represented world into subjects and objects or subjects and other subjects (Anderson, 2009: 79). Yet, affective atmospheres distinguish themselves from affect in that while the latter is confined to the bodily experiences (by this I mean *any* body), the former is not confined to individual bodies. Thus, for McCormack (2008: 413), atmosphere in an affective sense is "something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies while also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal." Here, McCormack is suggesting that affective atmospheres, on the one hand, have a physical quality to them; they have a materiality by working through sensing bodies. Yet, on the other hand, they also remain *diffuse*, suggesting that whilst affective atmospheres are reducible to bodies affecting other bodies, they also exceed the bodies they emerge from (Anderson, 2009: 79). Anderson draws upon the work of the mid-nineteenth century phenomenologist Mikel Dufrenne (1973: 168), who argues that atmosphere is a quality that does not belong to beings in their own right because they do not bring it about.

This is significant for austerity by suggesting that whilst a being may feel affective qualities of austerity, it is not solely confined to them, as atmospheres of austerity *exceed* the bodies from which these affects emerge. As such, “atmospheres [of austerity] are singular affective qualities that emanate from but exceed the assembling of bodies” (Anderson, 2009: 80).

The spatiality of atmospheres means that they can ‘surround’, or something can be ‘enveloped’ by an atmosphere (Anderson, 2009). However, the centre of circumference of an affective atmosphere may not be fixed and can be unstable, *especially if it is not only occupying a space but permeating it* (ibid.). This suggests that affective atmospheres of austerity permeate the space through which they are felt, which not only show that they exceed the bodies from which they emerge from; it also shows that austerity as atmosphere is always in the process of becoming. As voiced by Anderson (2009: 79), atmospheres are “perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another. They are never finished, static or at rest.” Precisely because of this, atmospheres of austerity are unstable, as affective atmospheres are perceived and sensed through the body and they are never static (Bissell, 2010). Anderson’s quote shows how atmospheres of austerity are continually open to change, due to never-ending affective relations made between bodies and because these affects always permeate the spaces in which they are felt. This is why austerity as affective atmospheres is so wide-reaching and has such extensive bodily affects.

Importantly, understanding austerity as a set of discourses does not jettison the understanding of austerity as affective atmospheres; far from it in fact. For Bissell (2010) the circulation of discourse carries an affective charge. Bissell’s work on affective atmospheres of public transport illustrates this; he (ibid.) argues that using affectively charged words such as ‘dodger’ splinters the passenger body along different collective lines and also frames the dodger as the common threat of the ‘respectable’ passenger. All discourses of austerity will be affectively charged, such as ‘shirker’ that makes the benefits claimant a common threat to Britain’s economic recovery.

Consequently, this suggests that the discursive production of austerity should be explored alongside the production of affective atmospheres of austerity. These discursive formations contribute towards the atmospheres of austerity, due to their performative effect. Subsequently, austerity as atmosphere is transferred into numerous and varying bodily experiences, or affects, which are also transferred between bodies; this can be *any* body and therefore any *thing* (Anderson, 2006). The materialisation of discourse becomes important here too, as the discursive production of austerity does not only carry an affective charge for individuals. Rather, they also result in an affective charge being transferred to other non-discursive elements, meaning that these discourses become materialised into multiple bodies. As emphasised by McCormack (2008), atmospheres have a physical element to them, indicating

that the materialisation of discourse contributes towards the affective atmospheres of austerity. Additionally, relations of power play a large role, as affective atmospheres modify individuals' possible field of actions, changing their capacity to feel and act (Bissell, 2010: 273); Additionally, it has already been argued that discursive formations of austerity are saturated with power relations. Thus, power is exercised throughout the whole of the discursive and affective web of austerity.

### ***1.5. Section Five: Moving beyond austerity as a dangerous idea***

This chapter has set out the theoretical frame work for how austerity is understood in this study: austerity as both discourse and as lived. The work of Mark Blyth (2013a) has been extremely useful in understanding the power austerity has as an ideology. This suggests why austerity continues to reoccur, despite the evidence. Yet, I wish to move beyond Blyth's work to understanding austerity as a set of discursive formations that are performative. In doing so, austerity is taken as a set of fabrications, maintained through the citation and recitation of discourse. This allows me to explore the power relations exercised in the discursive production of austerity, including the subjugation of other knowledge. Austerity as discourse also enables exploration into how governing *through* austerity occurs by drawing on disciplinary and biopolitical rationalities. This highlights the significance of the Austerian subject, as both 'ideal' and as an 'actually existing' subject in the governing process.

Additionally, the following research moves beyond Blyth to understand austerity as an affective fact and as an affective atmosphere. Austerity as an affective fact indicates how the affective dimensions of austerity, anticipated or real, are *felt*. Attention to affective atmospheres suggests that there are collective affects and feelings surrounding austerity that are also transferred into different bodily experiences. Due to the focus upon these visceral energies encountered in austerity, both ideas help to understand austerity as something *lived*. In doing so, it moves beyond purely the discursive, towards something that is lived and felt in everyday life. Consequently, approaching austerity as discourse and as lived enables me to explore the intersections and disjunctures between the two. All this combined points towards a newly emerging and exciting lens through which to understand austerity.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

The following chapter discusses the methodology that has shaped this thesis. Section One explores the central methodological challenge that faces this study: how to research austerity both as discourse and as lived. Section Two critically discusses the chosen methods for this research – discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. Finally, Section Three explores the relationship between discourse and affect and how this is important to understanding austerity.

### *2.1. Section One: The central methodological challenge*

The central methodological challenge with this research is determining how to research austerity if it is *multiple* phenomena. As emphasised in the previous chapter, austerity is *not* a singular phenomenon. I understand austerity to be a set of discursive formations, as well as something that is lived and felt in everyday life. Thus, it becomes important to explore the discursive production of austerity alongside austerity as affect and as an affective atmosphere. Attention to the discursive and affective production of austerity, however, is easier said than done. If austerity is both discursive and affective, a methodology is required that considers how they both emerge, are performed, and the complex relationship between the two.

If austerity is a set of discursive formations, the research should have a methodology that is attentive to the specificities of austerity as discourse. Taken from Foucault (1972), austerity discourses have differing relationships with one another. The ‘rules of formation’ (ibid.: 38) are the conditions of existence of austerity discourses, but also of their coexistence, maintenance, modification and disappearance. The “densely overlapping, networked, and often discursive web” (Philo, 2012: 365) in which discourses reside and disappear, indicates the complexity at which the austerity discourses relate to one another. It is, therefore, imperative that the chosen method is able to grasp this complexity. In doing so, this enables the research to regard austerity discourses as unstable and open to contestation. Additionally, austerity as discourse means that attention must be paid to how the emergence of certain austerity discourses involves the subjugation of other knowledge. Thus, a method is required that attends to the power relations involved in the subjugation of knowledge and how these disqualified knowledges have the ability to undermine the discourses that have suppressed them in the first place. For example, the work of Paul Krugman (2012), who draws much upon Keynes, has often been subjugated by governmental discourses of austerity, as he criticises austerity as a ‘common sense’ solution to public debt. Whilst his ideas have been suppressed by austerity discourses, the knowledge produced by Krugman (and Keynes) help to contest and undermine

the discourses that naturalise austerity. Taking all this into consideration would allow this research to produce a complex understanding of austerity as discourse, in which austerity discourses are never beyond dispute. It would also emphasise that the discursive formation of austerity is a *practice*, and so is always in the process of becoming. Additionally, discourse pays attention to the summoning of subjects and subjectivities in austerity that subsequently shape the way these subjects think and conduct themselves. Furthermore, drawing on Philo's (2012) work on the 'new Foucault' requires a method that not only sees austerity as discursive, but that also captures the materiality of austerity discourses. Moving beyond the understanding of discourse as 'dead geographies' (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000) enables the exploration of the physical there-ness of austerity discourses, diffused over different parts of everyday life. The challenge, therefore, is to find a method (or methods) that enable the exploration of the discursive production of austerity, the ways in which this production is unstable, the subjectivities that are summoned due to austerity discourses, and also how these discourses become materialised in everyday life. To explore the latter, however, there also requires consideration of *affect*, as examining austerity in the everyday requires an attention to life and the visceral energies produced by living beings. It is not possible to think about the diffusion of austerity discourses across different parts of everyday life without raising the importance of affect; it provides a relation between the discursive production of austerity and how this is felt by living beings in austere times. This warrants, then, an exploration of affect.

Austerity as affect allows attention to be paid to the ways in which austerity is lived and felt in everyday life due to the importance of visceral energies in bodies that affect highlights. Austerity as affect also indicates a need to explore how austerity modifies individuals' capacity to act and feel and how this shapes their everyday conduct. Additionally, in affective atmospheres of austerity affects exceed the bodies from which they emerge. This may suggest a need for more than one method, due to the range of bodies that can feel austerity as affect. As such, the chosen methods must also be able to reflect the liveliness of affect and its movement through bodies, which will also emphasise austerity as a lively phenomenon that permeates the space from which it emerges. Thus, not only is it important for the methodology to explore the ways in which austerity is *felt*, but also how its affective dimensions move through bodies, including human bodies.

Subsequently, the challenge of exploring austerity as multiple phenomena – as both discourse and affect – can be met by using a mixed-method approach, in order to explore the discursive production of austerity and as lived and felt in everyday life. Firstly, a form of discourse analysis will be drawn upon to explore the discursive production of austerity, and to examine how multiple discourses coexist with each other. Yet, discourses also carry an affective charge (Bissell, 2010), indicating that attention to the analysis of discourse can also explore



austerity as affect. Yet, discourse analysis is not a coherent method, as there are many theoretical approaches (ranging from an attention to semantics to critical discourse analysis). As will be explored in Section Two, discourse analysis here is based upon a critical reading of Foucault's (1972) understanding of discourse. Secondly, semi-structured interviews are drawn upon, allowing the exploration of how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. Interviews can address the vital methodological issue of exploring how affect moves between bodies, subsequently expressing affect as an atmosphere. Yet, one stance is that affect is precisely that which cannot be expressed, demonstrating the challenge of finding a method that is attentive to communication outside of the representational. This indicates, then, that an attention to affect requires more than individual interviews; whilst I recognise that interviews have often been regarded as incompatible, I wish to think through them as a way of producing affect. Thus, I conducted twelve interviews with eleven families that are affected by disability,<sup>2</sup> as they have been disproportionately impacted by governmental spending cuts.

The following section will provide a critical description of each method, but preceding each method is further discussion of the types of statements and research participants this research will focus upon, as this is also vital for thinking about the discursive and affective production of austerity.

## ***2.2. Section Two: Austerity through the lens of political statements and the household***

### **2.2.1. Discourse analysis**

As austerity has primarily been implemented by the coalition government in the UK, political statements have been central mediums through which discourses of austerity have emerged. Political speeches have always been an important way in which to construct and perform certain discourses. Take President Clinton's speech subsequent to the American embassy bombings in Nairobi on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1998. According to Elden (2009), if the specificity of the African embassies were removed, this could have been delivered either by President Bush or President Ronald Reagan. Thus, political speeches can be rife with similar (or different) discourses that are constructed, performed, dispersed in order to create certain conditions of possibility.

The political speeches focused upon in this research, therefore, are loaded with discourses aiming to create the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur. The analysis focuses upon speeches delivered by Prime Minister David Cameron, Chancellor George Osborne and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan-Smith that emerged

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<sup>2</sup> The families interviewed had one or more child with a disability.

between June 2010 and June 2013. Cameron and Osborne are focused upon, due to the multiple austerity discourses constructed throughout their speeches that generate the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur. Duncan-Smith is also a focal point, due to the discourses surrounding the welfare system that helps legitimate the uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies. The significance of the ‘welfare debate’ in justifying uneven austerity measures also highlights the need to focus upon policy documents alongside political speeches. Documents published by the Department for Work and Pensions, including the *White Paper: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Welfare* (2010a)<sup>3</sup>, are central in analysing how austerity becomes targeted at certain bodies and homes, as welfare – and the individuals relying on it – are constructed as contributing towards the public deficit. Such political and policy statements, therefore, show the significance of austerity as discourse in enabling austerity to emerge as a ‘common sense’ solution to public debt. This subsequently indicates the need to use discourse analysis as a research method, in order to emphasise the significance of the discursive production of austerity through practices of speech and policy, yet also to grasp the complex relationship this has with the non-discursive, such as the materialisation discourses and the affective production of austerity.

Methodologically approaching discourse analysis can be difficult, due to the wide-ranging theoretical lenses through which analyses can take place. Yet, instead of following a set method of discourse analysis, such as the work from Norman Fairclough (2003), I develop a fluid analysis based upon Michel Foucault’s (1972) work on discourse. Foucault’s approach to discourse allows me to go *beyond* simply identifying austerity discourses. Rather than treating discourses as a group of signs, Foucault (1972: 49) sees them as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” This allows me to explore the ways in which austerity discourses have performative effect (Butler, 1990). Foucault’s focus upon the *discursive field* shows the importance of the context in which austerity discourses emerge that allows particular statements to appear rather than others. Thus, the analysis of austerity discourses includes exploring how the emergence of austerity discourses involves the subjugation of other knowledge. For example, Iain Duncan-Smith (2012) stated: “[t]his culture of irresponsible spending had its roots in Britain’s welfare system.” Likewise, George Osborne (2010b) stated that “[h]ere in Britain, the explosion in welfare cost contributed to the growing structural budget deficit in the middle part of this decade.” These have been analysed using Foucault’s (1972) understanding of subjugated knowledge to explore how welfare is viewed in a time of financial strain. Constructing the welfare system as a source of ‘irresponsible spending’ subjugates the

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<sup>3</sup> The White Paper is an address published by the government that sets out proposals upon a particular issue. In this case, issues regarding the welfare system and proposals for UK welfare reform.

knowledge that welfare is necessary. In doing so, welfare is framed as a ‘problem’ rather than a safety net for people in need.

However, it is also important to consider Chris Philo’s (2012) reading of Foucault. By incorporating his work into discourse analysis, it allows me to consider the materiality that austerity discourses have. Political statements and policy papers may discursively produce austerity, yet this does not mean that they do not have a physical presence in individuals’ lives. This is why discourse analysis is paired with interviews, as grasping how discourses become diffused in everyday life should be explored through individual experiences. The following quote from an interviewee illustrates this, but also shows how both chosen methods rely upon each other to bring a comprehensive analysis:

*“And every time a letter comes through the post from the Department of [sic] Work and Pensions you think oh God, what’s this going to be? Are they suddenly going to say you can’t have these benefits anymore?”*

This shows how austerity discourses become materialised in everyday life, through a DWP letter received in the post. Whilst this derives from an interview, the analysis here would not be possible without an attention to discourse analysis.

This generates grounds for analysis about how austerity discourses have an affective charge, which can lead to different bodily experiences and modify the capacity to feel and act. Here is an example to illustrate this. A political speech held by George Osborne (2011a) states:

*“Imagine if I was to actually stand up on Budget Day and say I’m abandoning the plan – if I said that we’re not going to tackle the deficit. Now imagine the reaction. The panic in the markets. The credit rating downgraded. And yes, the sky high market interest rates. Think what that would bring. The investment cancelled. The businesses destroyed. The jobs lost. Britain next in the queue behind Ireland and Greece.”*

Words such as ‘panic’, ‘downgraded’ and phrases such as ‘businesses destroyed’, ‘jobs lost’ all carry an affective charge through emphasising the ‘disastrous’ consequences if the deficit reduction plan is not followed. They are affectively charged because they generate feelings of fear and anxiety towards a threatening future that recipients of the discourse experience.

Consequently, using a reading of Foucault as a basis of my discourse analysis not only conveys the complexity surrounding austerity as discourse, but also its relationship with affect. This allows me to move from austerity as discourse to austerity as lived. An attention to affect enables exploration into the feelings and bodily experiences that individuals may feel towards austerity. Yet, my account of discourse is sufficiently complex as to enable an understanding of the affective charge of discourse. Thus, whilst semi-structured interviews attend to how

austerity is lived and felt in everyday life, the performativity of discourse can also be explored, through focusing on how individuals cite and recite austerity discourses.

### 2.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

In addition to austerity as discourse, this research will also explore how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life, grasping austerity as affect. Living and feeling austerity moves beyond simply the discursive production of austerity, towards a focus upon living beings that can experience austerity in the everyday. In order to do so, the household becomes a significant area of research; the household is of interest here, due to the *family* within the household and their complex relationship with austerity, that not only implicates the home in which they live, but also many other sites in their everyday lives. This allows me to explore in depth how families are living and feeling austerity. Focusing upon the household enables the exploration of how the discursive becomes diffused into the non-discursive everyday lives of families. Yet, a focus upon families also allows in depth analysis of how austerity is transferred into multiple and differing bodily experiences. The kind of households were carefully considered to involve families who are affected by disability. As argued by Blyth (2010), austerity measures disproportionately impact upon the bottom forty percent of the income distribution. I have no wish, then, to interview households unaffected by governmental spending cuts. The Campaign for a Fair Society (2012: 17) argue that people with disabilities feel “hardest hit” by the current reductions in support and Duffy (2013: 6) states that they are bearing twenty-nine percent of all cuts in the UK. This illustrates why households affected by disability are being interviewed, as they have more experiences of living and feeling austerity. Individuals, then, can express the ways in which austerity is made present, but also how they become intensified and dampened in particular parts of their everyday lives through semi-structured interviews.

Although human geographers researching everyday life seem increasingly hesitant about interviews – due to the move away from the representational towards more non-representational forms of research – Hitchings (2012) emphasises that we should not discount interviews on routine practice because they superficially seem inappropriate. Encouraging people to talk about their everyday practices, however, is *not* the same as them actually carrying out the practice; yet, this does not mean that interviews are unable to provide an insight to the mundane actions of daily life in austerity. Interviews, therefore, should not be rejected outright as a method, but researchers should remain mindful of how they overlook significant features impossible to ‘hoover up’ through verbal exchange (McPherson, 2010: 8). Therefore, semi-structured interviews should not be viewed uncritically in austerity research. Although words are generative of the world (Philo, 2011), there are difficulties with using talk as a research method. Talk cannot communicate the ‘unsayable’; yet, it is also unable to get across the

complex relationship between what the individual says and *how* they say it. There may be hesitations, pauses, tears, trembling in their voice when talking about austerity. These are all moments when language and speech express, in different ways, the non-representational. This generates the question of whether it is possible to grasp affect through interviews, as it is always framed within a structure of talk; can one, therefore, grasp austerity as *felt* if participants are made to *talk* about these feelings? Katz (1999: 4) argues that studies almost always end up analysing how people *talk* about their affective experiences, which are distinctive in that they are expressions that talk cannot grasp. Yet, as implied by Probyn (2010: 74) it becomes increasingly difficult to separate affect from its signification, as “a precise emotion demands a precise description.” Is it ever truly possible, then, to explore affect in its pure form because as soon as the affective experience has occurred *any* reflection upon this - including through research - is applying signification to affect. Talk may be no more problematic than other methods, such as ethnographic methods, aiming to capture affect in its pure form. This suggests that it is not impossible for interviews to explore the affective production of austerity and how individuals make sense of their own bodily experiences.

For Bissell (2010), the face is one of the most important sites of affect; affect, here, may be communicated through involuntary facial expressions (*ibid.*) or attending to how respondents react in the interview itself (Hitchings, 2012). Yet, this cannot be depicted simply through interviews. One way of getting past this issue is a video recording of each interview and being attentive to the expressions made by the participant. Yet, this brings with it another set of issues; individuals may feel uncomfortable being videoed, which can generate feelings such as tension and self-consciousness. Therefore, it may become more difficult to decipher between affects as a result of the video camera and affects due to austerity. Additionally, individuals may not be as open to discussing sensitive topics - such as family finances, which are imperative to discuss in austerity research - as they could feel more exposed when filmed. Consequently, video cameras were not used as part of the semi-structured interviews, in order to allow a more relaxed atmosphere for respondents to express their experiences of and feelings towards austerity. Although this made it more difficult to explore affect, it by no means eliminates the capacity to do so, highlighting that interviews are a viable method for exploring the affective production of austerity. I also attempted to produce a relaxed atmosphere through emphasising that the participants could say as little or as much as they wished, and that they were not obliged to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Having interviews in the participants' home or a place of their choice contributed to them feeling more at ease.

Twelve interviews were carried out with eleven families, lasting between fifty minutes and two and a half hours, all within the county of North Yorkshire. As emphasised earlier, people with disabilities are one of the groups disproportionately affected by government

spending cuts. As a result, the interviews were carried out with families who have a child with a disability.<sup>4</sup> Two families allowed me to interview their child, yet for the remaining ten families this was not possible, often due to the age of the child, or the level of distress the interview might cause. Thus, although interviewing all household members can increase the complexity and sophistication of the accounts collected by the researcher (Valentine, 1999: 67), often this was simply not possible due to the complex needs of the children and the lack of spare time parents (or guardians) had in their daily lives. Additionally, whilst three out of thirteen interviews were carried out with two household members, the remaining eleven were conducted with just one member. This was perhaps due to the assumption that the household has one spokesperson on ‘family’ matters, commonly the woman (ibid.). Inadvertently, all interviews were carried with the mother of the family, which may have implications for thinking about gender and everyday parenting in austerity. For Valentine (1999), traditionally work on the family has tended to be based on interviews with women, because the home and the ‘family’ have tended to be regarded as women’s domain.

Furthermore, two interviews were carried out in which two household members were interviewed together; these interviews consisted of a mother and her daughter (with disabilities), and another with a mother and her adult daughter that shared the caring duties of her two disabled brothers.<sup>5</sup> Joint interviews can encourage spontaneous further discussion (Valentine, 1999) through participants bouncing off one another’s conversation, leading to talk that they otherwise may have not considered. In doing so, this can provide richer accounts of how austerity is part of daily life. This was the case with the latter interview, as both respondents could provide accounts of their ability to care for their family member(s) in austere times. But this interview came with its own problems in that it became difficult to stay on topic whilst also encouraging both participants to speak. The former interview was perhaps hampered by both mother and daughter being interviewed at the same time, as the mother was not willing to talk as openly about certain issues of living with austerity, perhaps not to make them aware to her daughter. Such interviewing also can accidentally expose tensions in the relationship between household members (Valentine, 1999), which caused this interview to lead into irrelevant tangents that were hindering the ability for complex discussions. Consequently, the decision to interview family members together – or in this case the inability to carry out separate interviews – can result in more complex accounts of austerity, but can also greaten the production of irrelevant information.

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<sup>4</sup> One family had two children with disabilities.

<sup>5</sup> Another interview was carried out with a 23 year old woman with Down’s syndrome who still lived at home, in which her mother was present, yet her mother was interviewed separately.

All interviews carried out have also been important for a methodological reflection on affect, which is distinctly absent in research literature. A significant relationship between semi-structured interviews and affect has been the transfer of affect between the body of the respondent and the body of the researcher. Although this happened to greater and lesser extents, the feelings expressed by the research participant often were transferred into my body, generating empathy between me and the interviewee. For example, many participants aimed to get across the difficulties that many people now face in austerity and the inequality of how they are affected, which I greatly empathised with. Although we had never met before, one interviewee hugged and thanked me for interviewing her, demonstrating how much it meant to her being able to voice her experiences. Probyn (2010) argues that people write from their bodies hoping to get into the bodies of their readers. Research into austerity is similar; through the interview process participants hope to transfer their feelings and visceral energy into the body of the researcher; and through presenting and writing the research, researchers subsequently aim to transfer their feelings into the readers of the project. Research itself is affectively charged, simply because there are so many different feelings felt by the participants and encountered – and subsequently felt – by the researcher throughout the research process. Therefore, it is vital to reflect methodologically upon affect, as no doubt the researcher will feel the affects that they write about, due to the bodily encounters with their research participants. This also reinforces the importance of face-to-face interviews, as they allow bodily encounters – that would not be possible by phone interview for instance – that enable the movement of affect. Yet, this is *not* to imply that I as the researcher know the difficulties and enrichments of having a child with a disability or to raise a family in austerity. My positionality as a young, childless woman with limited responsibilities means that I do not intend to claim the feelings of the respondents as my own. Rather, I am emphasising that the bodily encounters of interviews enables a brief snapshot of the participant's everyday life and their feelings towards it. And in the moment of the interview I really did live and feel austerity with them.

### ***2.3. Section Three: The relationship between discourse and affect and its importance to austerity***

Whilst austerity has been framed as discourse on the one hand, and as affect on the other, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive, but intertwine in the production of austerity. Firstly, all austerity discourses are affectively charged, in which they generate particular bodily experiences, such as fear, that modify the ability for the individual to feel and act (Bissell, 2010). Thus, the affects generated by discourses contribute towards the conduct of Austerian subjects. Austerity as an affective fact also works this way in that it relies upon discourses to

generate particular affects about austerity. Discourses of austerity also contribute towards affective atmospheres of austerity, which are subsequently transferred into different bodily affects, yet these affects permeate the space from which they emerge. Consequently, for Philo (2012), affect and discourse *can* be researched alongside each other, and further still, both the discursive and affective production of austerity rely on one another in some form – whether it be the affective charge of discourses or the importance of discourse in affective atmospheres – to create the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur. Both are highly significant to the ways in which austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. Yet, the intensity at which the discursive and the affective production of austerity is made present differs; whilst austerity discourses are diffused and dispersed across everyday life, affect is made present with a greater intensification to the individual. This is significant methodologically, as this research should avoid falling into the trap of framing austerity discourses as things that individuals are continually aware of; as they are diffuse in everyday life, austerity discourses are not incessantly in the foreground, presenting a challenge of how to research austerity when it isn't always in the forefront of people's lives. In order to make austerity discourses present that were normally diffuse, I asked questions that focused upon austerity in mundane daily practices, such as daily routine, working hours, household bills and goods. In addition to this, I asked more direct questions about austerity that participants may not have considered are anything to do with austerity, such as “[h]ave the cuts in support affected you as a household?”

Another great challenge is how to research austerity going *beyond* affect as discourse. For example, McCormack's (2012) work can be seen to explore the *discursive formation* of inflation as an affective fact, which sees affect as discourse, rather than affect as something visceral or expressed through the body. This is perhaps due to the methodology of McCormack's work, as his research does not involve talking to individuals. This is not to suggest that the discursive formation of affect is insignificant, rather the question is whether this research has gone beyond affect as discourse. As part of the methodology involves talking to individual (and familial) experiences of austerity, research participants are expressing affects that they have *physically felt*. These visceral affects have been moving through their bodies and sometimes taking hold of the body. Thus, although interviews are primarily talk, the respondents have felt these affective qualities themselves. Consequently, affects here have been expressed through the body rather than through discourse. This suggests that this research not only explores the discursive formation of affect, through practices such as governmental speeches and policy documents, but also goes *beyond* it by exploring the ways which austerity physically feels through, and sometimes takes hold of, the body.



## Chapter 3: Austerity discourses

The following chapter explores how austerity is discursively produced, drawing upon Foucault's understanding of discourse. Section One examines the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur, through governmental discourses that invoke the 'disastrous' consequences if the deficit is not reduced and the 'irresponsible' spending on the welfare system. Section Two then explores how the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies are legitimated.

### ***3.1. Section One: Constructing the conditions of possibility for austerity***

Before austerity can be understood as a common sense solution to public debt (Blyth, 2010), the 'conditions of possibility' for austerity must be constructed. Yet, as emphasised by Collier (2009), this is *not* to suggest there are common 'conditions of possibility' for austerity, as it is a varying, complex and deviating phenomenon. Derek McCormack's (2012) research into inflation provides a significant framework through which to explore this. For McCormack (2012: 1537) focuses on

*"how the futures of inflation are rendered present and potentially actionable as an economic-affective fact through practices including advertising, political speeches, and governmental strategies designed to render the fight against inflation a matter of immediate concern."*

McCormack's emphasis on the multiplicities of inflation is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, austerity can be rendered present as an economic-affective fact through certain practices, including political speeches and governmental strategies. As austerity has been put forward and implemented by the UK coalition government, it is important that governmental practices, particularly political speeches, are the focus through which to explore *how* austerity is rendered present and actionable. Additionally, McCormack's work also highlights that these practices render inflation a matter of *immediate concern*. Austerity, however, operates differently in that *debt* is rendered as a matter of immediate concern, in which austerity becomes the only viable solution. As such, political statements are important for rendering debt as an immediate concern and, therefore, constructing austerity as a policy that should be implemented *immediately*. Consequently, political speeches and governmental policy documents are the practices focused upon here, as they prove to be highly significant in rendering debt as an immediate concern, and therefore legitimating austerity. So much so, that they also legitimate the *uneven* distribution of cuts over bodies and homes; this, however, will be explored in Section Two. The following

section, then, will focus upon how austerity is rendered present and actionable as an economic-affective fact and how debt becomes a matter of immediate concern.

### **3.1.1. Debt as an immediate concern: Pre-emption and fear of the future**

Political speeches are a significant practice through which debt is rendered as a matter of immediate concern and austerity present. Interestingly, the word ‘austerity’ is noticeably absent in political speech, in fact, it is barely used at all. Instead, austerity is rendered potentially actionable through the repeated discourse of the “the deficit.” David Cameron (2010b) argues that “the most urgent issue facing Britain today” is “our massive deficit and growing debt.” Through the relentless repetition of phrases such as “massive” or “record deficit” (Cameron, 2010b; Osborne, 2010a), the word ‘deficit’ carries an affective charge by potentially making recipient bodies feel unease and fearful; the deficit is constructed as a frightening materiality that “threatens to loom over our economy and society for a generation” (Cameron, 2010b). The word ‘loom’ carries its own affective charge, by indicating that the deficit is a dark shadow over society and the economy. As such, the term ‘deficit’ is constructed as a threat, potentially generating feelings of anxiety, fearfulness and unease.

Additionally, the political speeches use what Massumi (2005) calls ‘pre-emption’ in order to render austerity as potentially actionable. Pre-emption makes present the future consequences of an eventuality that may or may not occur (ibid.). Here, pre-emption emphasises the eventualities that may occur if the deficit is not acted upon:

*“[W]e want to be equally clear about what the potential consequences are if we fail to act decisively and quickly to cut spending, bring our borrowing down and reduce our deficit...If we fail to confront our problems we could suffer worse – a steady, painful erosion of confidence in our economy...If in Britain investors saw no will at the top of government to get a grip on our public finances, they would doubt Britain’s ability to pay its way. That means they would demand a higher price for taking out debt on, interest rates would have to rise, investment would fall. If that were to happen, there would be no proper growth, there would be no real recovery, there would be no substantial new jobs – Britain’s economy would begin an inevitable slide into decline.”* (Cameron, 2010b)

*“Imagine if I was to actually stand up on Budget Day and say I’m abandoning the plan – if I said that we’re not going to tackle the deficit. Now imagine the reaction. The panic in the markets. The credit rating downgraded. And yes, the sky high market interest rates. Think what that would bring. The investment cancelled. The businesses*

*destroyed. The jobs lost. Britain next in the queue behind Ireland and Greece.”*  
(Osborne, 2011a)

Cameron and Osborne stress that if the deficit is not reduced, confidence in Britain’s economy would plummet, leading to higher interest rates and less investment; this would then result in an economic decline, rather than recovery. Although these are virtualities, the repeated warnings of the ‘devastating’ consequences of not ‘dealing’ with the deficit are enough to render them into empirical fact (Massumi, 2005).<sup>6</sup> However, it is interesting that there is a specific time-geography to the threatening future occurring if the deficit reduction plan were not followed. The future that Cameron warns of is not an abrupt catastrophe, in which the death of the economy is like an explosion, where pain is brief. Instead, Cameron speaks of a “steady, painful erosion of confidence in our economy” and “Britain’s economy would begin an inevitable slide into decline.” Cameron indicates a slow burn condition – a long, drawn out, agonising death of the economy, which ultimately means *more* pain for individual bodies than an abrupt, temporally painful death. The specificity of this threatening future is highly significant. The drawn out, agonising death of the economy is placed in a binary with the much shorter time geography of the deficit reduction plan itself. Osborne in 2010 argued that the deficit reduction plan would only last until 2014-2015 (Osborne, 2010b), which has since been extended, yet represents a stark contrast to the lengthy time frame of painful economic decline. Therefore, the future threat here helps to emphasise that the response to this eventuality is a short period of austerity. For Clarke and Newman (2012: 304), this is a neat reversal in which it is argued that suffering is not a consequence of austerity measures but will arise if such measures are avoided. The repeated enactment of a threatening future, then, has a specific temporal quality that implicates individual bodies in this eventuality, as they themselves will feel the drawn out, agonizing decline of the British economy.

Cameron, then, implies the need for what Krugman (2012) calls the ‘confidence fairy’. According to this, cutting back on government spending could impress investors and

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<sup>6</sup> The repetition of the ‘disastrous’ consequences of not acting upon the deficit include:

*“There are some political opponents who claim that in setting out our decisive plans to deal with the deficit we have taken a gamble with Britain’s economy. In fact the reverse is true. The gamble would have been not to act, to put Britain’s reputation at risk and to leave the stability of the economy to the vagaries of the bond market, assuming investors around the world would continue to tolerate the largest budget deficit in the G20. The actions we took in the Budget have removed the biggest downside risk to the recovery – a loss of confidence and a sharp rise in market interest rates. Britain now has a credible plan to deal with our record deficit. We must stick by it. To budge from that plan would risk reigniting the markets’ suspicions that Britain does not have the will to pay her way in the world.”* (Osborne, 2010c)

*“So, why do we have to sort out the public finances? Quite simply – because we have to. Because any other road leads to ruin. If we don’t get a grip on government spending, there will be no growth.”* (Osborne, 2010d)

subsequently reduce interest rates; the expectation of lower future borrowing could then lead to immediate higher investment spending (Krugman, 2012: 195). Additionally, cutting government spending could also impress consumers, as they may conclude that future taxes wouldn't be as high as they had been expecting; a lower tax burden would make them feel richer and therefore could lead to more spending (ibid.: 195-196). However, Krugman (2012: 196) argues that expansionary austerity is highly implausible; for him, it is not enough for these confidence-related effects to *exist*, they have to be strong enough to more than offset the depressing effects of austerity. Nevertheless, an affective atmosphere of austerity begins to form here; although Cameron does not directly use the term 'austerity', it remains "in the air" and "ethereal" (McCormack, 2008: 413). By referring to the importance of spending cuts and the 'confidence fairy', Cameron generates an atmosphere of expansionary austerity, which permeates the space it occupies (Anderson, 2009). This means that this atmosphere of austerity is not confined to the speech from which it emerges. As such, due to the affective charge carried by debt as an immediate concern – through generating fear of a threatening future if the deficit is not reduced – fear has the potential to transfer into individual bodies. Therefore, affect can be transferred from affective atmospheres of austerity to individual bodies, meaning that they potentially *physically feel* the fear of a threatening future. Due to the visceral affects this generates, bodies may subsequently feel the *urgency* of responding to the deficit. Affective atmospheres, therefore, can transfer into other bodies and they subsequently have the potential to feel the affective qualities of the austerity discourse. As expansionary austerity is constructed as a way of avoiding the 'devastating' eventualities that occur if the deficit is not addressed, this may permeate affects from the space of the speech into recipient bodies, generating the feeling that austerity is the *only* viable solution to public debt. This must also be implemented immediately in order to avoid the threat of "Britain [being] next in the queue behind Ireland and Greece" (Osborne, 2011a).

Additionally, constructing a threatening future if the deficit is not reduced indicates how austerity "has a strategic nature" (Foucault, 1980: 195); similar to an apparatus, it emerges as a strategy in response to an "urgent need" (ibid.: 195). Like the apparatus of security, then, austerity is an *ordering process*, targeting at the level of the population, in order to reduce the public debt. Thus, austerity becomes an ordered response to the problem that is the deficit. Section Two explores how this ordering process is played out. Consequently, austerity as an ordering process shows how the deficit also presents opportunity and profit, not just danger (Anderson, 2011); it brings with it the opportunity to govern through austerity as a result of the deficit, by disciplining and exerting biopower upon the bodies of the population. Using the aim of avoiding economic meltdown and "[s]caling back the waste of the state" (Pickles, 2011), governing through austerity produces a particular kind of subject – the Austerian subject. Whilst

the notion of economic meltdown has been explored above, the “waste of the state” has not. This, therefore, brings us onto the importance of the ‘wasted’ government spending to further debt austerity as an immediate concern.

### **3.1.2. Debt as an immediate concern: Irresponsible spending**

Debt is also rendered a matter of immediate concern through the discourse of ‘irresponsible spending’. Here, the public deficit is constructed as a result of reckless spending by the previous Labour government. Clarke and Newman (2012: 300) argue that the question of the deficit has changed from an economic problem (how to rescue the banks and restore market stability) into a political problem (how to allocate blame and responsibility for the crisis). This is significant, as the root cause of the crisis is, therefore, constructed as result of an expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than high risk strategies of banks. This is illustrated by Cameron (2010b):

*“[M]uch of the deficit is structural. A problem built up before the recession, caused by government spending and planning to spend more than we could afford. It had nothing to do with the recession. And so growth will not sort it out.”*

This links to Clark and Newman’s argument, as there is no reference to the actions of high risk banking strategies; instead, blame is placed upon government spending. Osborne (2010b) argues that the coalition government have had to pay the bills of past irresponsibility. This has significant political consequences, as it allows the government to target public spending in the austerity programme, rather focusing upon tax. The discourse of irresponsible spending therefore constructs the idea that “[t]he country has overspent” and “has not been under-taxed” (Osborne, 2010b). As a result, this legitimates the government’s strategy that eighty per cent of total effort to cut the deficit will come from spending cuts (Osborne, 2012). It is here that the Austerian subject significantly moves away from Isin’s (2004) neurotic subject. For Isin, the neurotic citizen wants the impossible, and has been promised the impossible, such as absolute safety and security and the perfect body. And, as it cannot address its illusions, this generates anxieties and insecurities. Yet, the Austerian subject has not been promised the impossible, far from it in fact. The Austerian subject has been told that the country has overspent, in crisis due to the massive public deficit, and that the state can no longer afford such lucrative government spending. This kind of subject is also told that their “whole way of life” (Cameron, 2010b) will be affected as a result public deficit response, but this will be for the collective good. Although this may make life for the Austerian subject more difficult, it must accept these difficulties as part of Britain’s economic recovery and a more prosperous economic future.

Additionally, the discourse of irresponsible spending allows the government to target particular sections of public spending in the austerity programme. As Clarke and Newman (2012) suggest, the welfare system has become a specific target for spending cuts. Yet, for welfare spending cuts to be a solution to the ‘irresponsible’ spending, there requires a discourse that naturalises the welfare system as being too expensive. The coalition government have achieved this:

*“This culture of irresponsible spending had its roots in Britain’s welfare system...In government, Labour hiked spending by a massive 60%, rising even before the recession hit. Worse, in 2010, just before the election, in one year, Labour spent £90 billion on working age welfare – the same as the entire education budget for that very same year.”* (Duncan-Smith, 2012)

*“Here in Britain, the explosion in welfare costs contributed to the growing structural budget deficit in the middle part of this decade. Total welfare spending has increased from £132 billion ten years ago to £192 billion today. That represents a real terms increase of a staggering 45 per cent. It’s one reason why there is no money left.”* (Osborne, 2010b)

This has large implications on how welfare can be regarded in a time of financial strain, and subsequently narrows the possibility for other ideas about the necessity of the welfare system. By comparing working-age welfare expenditure to the education budget, as Duncan-Smith does, it implicitly suggests that the former outlay is not as worthy of the same budget as the latter; whilst the education budget and working-age welfare cost the same amount, the former is regarded as a necessity and the latter as irresponsible. This also suggests Foucault’s (1980: 82) argument that the emergence of discourses involves the subjugation of other knowledge. Osborne (2010b) argues that it is “not possible to deal with a budget deficit of this size without undertaking lasting reform of welfare.” Thus, to claim that welfare costs have resulted in there being “no money left” subjugates discourses that emphasise the necessity of welfare spending. Subsequently, this helps legitimate the discourse that welfare spending cuts are the “‘common sense’ on how to pay for the massive increase in public debt” (Blyth, 2010: no pagination).

Consequently, austerity as spending cuts, particularly the focus upon welfare spending, is regarded as exercising “[f]iscal responsibility” (Osborne, 2010c). This form of austerity is constructed as a responsible way to address Britain’s economy. As a result, both generating fear of a threatening future if the deficit is not reduced, and constructing past government spending – particularly on welfare – as irresponsible, produces an affective atmosphere of austerity. This atmosphere of austerity means bodies again may feel that austerity is the *only* viable intervention and must be implemented with haste in order to avoid a drawn out, agonizing

economic decline. Austerity somehow becomes held as a ‘saviour’ to Britain’s public debt and as a cure to the fear of the population. As voiced by Clarke (forthcoming), the coalition has developed a paradoxical position of ‘virtuous necessity’, claiming that austerity is necessary and that its adoption by the coalition represents an act of political virtue. Yet, this does not legitimate the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts over homes and bodies, which has occurred since the introduction of austerity policies in Britain. This has been justified through different discourses, that discursively and affectively shape who is ‘deserving’ of spending cuts and who is not. This will now be explored in Section Two.

### **3.2. Section Two: Legitimizing an uneven distribution of spending cuts**

#### **3.2.1. ‘We are all in this together’: a discourse that doesn’t last long**

After the May 2010 general election and towards the beginning of the coalition government, a discourse was continually drawn upon, aiming to generate a feeling of ‘unity’ in the United Kingdom. Whilst the coalition government invoked the discourse of Britain’s “unavoidable deficit reduction plan” (Cameron, 2010b), this discourse was strengthened by the notion that the reduction plan would at the same time be a source through which to bring people together:

*“We will carry out Britain’s unavoidable reduction plan in a way that strengthens and unites the country. We are doing this because we have to, driven by the urgent truth that unless we do, people will suffer and our national interest will suffer.”* (Cameron, 2010b)

Here, Cameron is drawing on the ‘national interest’ to invoke ideas that the reader or listener is part of a collective whole. As such, either accepting or supporting the deficit reduction plan means to “strengthen and unite the country”. This generates the affective quality of positivity, as individuals may feel that they are contributing towards a more prosperous future that does not involve a massive public debt. However, this discourse also relies on its dichotomy – that to avoid implementing austerity measures would have ‘disastrous’ consequences for the national whole. Consequently, for the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’ to emerge as powerful in its discursive field, it must generate *positive* affective qualities to make individuals feel that the deficit reduction plan is a viable solution to public debt.

*“We are all in this together, and we will get through this together.”* (Cameron, 2010b)

*“When we say that we are all in this together, we mean it.”* (Osborne, 2010b)

*“[W]e will do everything, work with anyone, overcome every obstacle in our path to jobs and prosperity. So that together we will ride out the storm.”* (Osborne, 2011b)

The continuous repetition of ‘togetherness’ generates feelings of “collective pain sharing”, which subsequently strengthens the idea of “one nation united in the face of adversity” (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 303). The persistent utilisation of ‘we’ also constructs an imaginary whole, in which individuals are connected through the challenge that is the public deficit. Osborne’s imagery of the storm is particularly significant, as storms are destructive, yet temporary; the storm that is the “situation facing the world economy” (Osborne, 2011b) will be made less destructive through implementing austerity measures, and most importantly is a *temporary* occurrence. Thus, this strengthens the feeling of unity further, through representing the adversity as something which will not last. Yet, this discourse also invokes the notion that with unity comes individual responsibility. For the deficit reduction plan “will affect every single person in our country” (Cameron, 2010b) and “everyone will be asked to contribute” (Osborne, 2010b). Consequently, precisely because it is a task to reduce *public* debt, it weighs on every individual’s life, since every individual must take responsibility for it (Lazzarato, 2011: 38). This is how debt is positioned as a problem of liberal government, and not merely the state. This is significant, as through arguing that the deficit reduction plan will affect every single individual, austerity moves beyond something that is purely a concern of the state. Individuals become entrepreneurial subjects, in which they are free to take the burden of reducing the public deficit upon themselves. Individual autonomy is at the heart of control in neoliberal governance (McNay, 2009), and as a result, subjects are regulated by performing what it means to be responsible, active and choosing (Miller and Rose, 2008). By emphasising that “everyone will be asked to contribute”, entrepreneurial subjects are expected to embrace the adversity in numerous and varying ways, which will be further explored in Chapter Four. Additionally, Langley (2008) emphasises that neoliberal government brings with it new forms of financial self-discipline. Arguably, austerity does the same by involving every individual in the responsibility of ‘balancing the books’.

However, with time, the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’ has quickly given way to more binary imaginaries, towards ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’, rather than ‘we’.

*“Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits. When we say we’re all in this together, we speak for that worker. We speak of all those who want to work hard and get on.”* (Osborne, 2012)

This is a significant quote, as it illustrates clearly the transition between the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’ towards a discourse that constructs a division between the individual in paid employment and the benefit claimant. Interestingly, Osborne, here, still uses the notion of ‘all in this together’, but with a conditionality. The notion of ‘togetherness’ is conditional upon being



in paid employment and those not adhering to this conditionality are excluded. As such, it is clear that ‘togetherness’ now has an ‘outside’, which is made up of individuals excluded from this imaginary ‘community’. This differs from the previous rhetoric emphasising that ‘all in this together’ means “work[ing] with anyone” (Osborne, 2011b). No longer is there absolute unity that will “strengthen...the country” (Cameron, 2010b), but unity *against* individuals that are “sleeping off a life on benefits.” Subsequently, binary thinking invades the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’ and results in the discourse of ‘striver’ verses the ‘shirker’ to become central to furthering the austerity programme.

### **3.2.2. The ‘striver’ verses the ‘shirker’**

It is difficult to escape binary thinking in everyday life, and it is also central to the construction of identity. For Bhabha (1994: 54), it is through the construction of difference that identity is formed, and occurs through a “double movement” between the two. Thus, binary oppositions always involve the construction of difference between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, which are caught up in “relations of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1978: 5). Dual dichotomies work precisely to exercise unequal power relations towards those that are constituted as ‘Other’, including “mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilised/primitive” (Haraway, 1991: 177). The construction of the ‘striver’ verses the ‘shirker’ in British governmental discourse is no different. As this section will illustrate, the construction of the striver and the shirker further provides the conditions of possibility for austerity measures to be implemented, but also provide opportunity for spending cuts to be *unevenly distributed across bodies and homes*.

For Bissell (2010), discourses carry an affective charge, and the discourse of the ‘shirker’ is no different. Both ‘striver’ and ‘shirker’ are affectively charged. As will be shown, the numerous binary distinctions that encompass the striver/shirker dichotomy bring about multiple negative feelings towards the ‘shirker’. This raises interesting questions about the notion of ‘*risk*’. By constructing a binary between striver and shirker it allows the government to differentiate between citizens in terms of risk to British economic recovery. Langley (2013) explores how the credit history and scoring techniques for credit consumers make it possible for lenders to differentiate customers in terms of risk. The same principle is at work here. People that rely on welfare – including those out of work, people with disabilities, people requiring housing benefit – are regarded as more risky than those that are not:

*“[J]ust as we should never balance the budget on the backs of the poor; so it’s an economic delusion to think you can balance it only on the wallets of the rich... it is wrong that it’s possible for someone to be better off on benefits than they would be in work.”* (Osborne, 2012)

By discussing ‘balancing the budget’ along with the ‘injustice’ of people being workless and receiving benefits indicates that they are regarded as ‘risky bodies’ in relation to Britain’s aim of reducing public debt. Here it is implied that people outside the labour market are ‘shirking’ their responsibility to contribute towards Britain’s economy, and therefore it is unfair to ‘balance the books’ through the rich (as they have met their obligation of being in employment). As will be illustrated throughout the remainder of this chapter, the striver/shirker binary ultimately results in shirker bodies being regarded as a ‘threat’ to Britain’s economic recovery, requiring an intervention. Importantly, the multiple ‘risks’ that shirkers pose are a way of suggesting that *spending cuts should not be evenly distributed across homes and bodies*. Rather, an uneven distribution of spending cuts is a way of destroying the apparent threats posed by ‘shirkers’.

Firstly, the “something for nothing culture” is one of many discourses that enable shirker bodies to be regarded as a threat to Britain’s economic stability. People relying on welfare payments are constructed as “sleeping off a life on benefits” (Osborne, 2012). Thus, rather than benefits being regarded as something that is claimed when individuals are in need of social security, claiming benefits is constructed as a matter of *choice*. For Cameron (2011) argues, “if the state is paying them more not to work, it becomes a rational choice to sit at home on the sofa.” Consequently, this constructs individuals relying on benefits as inherently lazy, compared to the ‘strivers’ in work “who want to work hard and get on” (Osborne, 2010d). By emphasising a “something for nothing culture”, Duncan-Smith (2011b) constructs the notion that individuals claiming benefits only ‘take out’ and do not contribute to society, which has been noted by Wiggan (2012). He highlights that people on benefits are not seen as playing a full part in society, as they are not in paid work.

Additionally, it further constructs the idea that the number of benefits claimants is not due to Britain’s economic situation, but due to a ‘culture’ in which individuals *choose* not to work. It suggests that unemployment is a matter of personal choice, and therefore, becomes the fault of shirker bodies. By describing this as a “damaging culture”, Duncan-Smith (2011b) generates it as a threat to Britain’s economic recovery, further constructing shirkers as ‘risky bodies’. Thus, whilst strivers are constructed as individuals that ‘aspire’, shirkers are from a “culture of low expectations” where “aspirations were suffocated” (Duncan-Smith, 2011b). There is an interesting relationship here between the shirker and its threat to Britain’s economic future. The shirker, on the one hand, is partially a rational, calculating actor by claiming that individuals make decisions based on the fact that benefit income is more attractive than employment (Wiggan, 2012). Because unemployment is regarded as a matter of personal choice, and therefore benefits become an excuse for avoiding work, shirkers are constructed as subjects capable of autonomous thought. They become active in their own decision to receive

benefits, rather than being one of passive submission in the labour market (McNay, 2009). Yet, on the other hand, the shirker is also a calculating figure without aspiration by living in a “culture of low expectations”. This indicates an entrepreneurial subject *without* the correct optimistic relation to the future. Whilst strivers ‘aspire’ – a positive relation to the future – shirkers do not relate to the future with an active, entrepreneurial outlook. Thus, shirkers cannot fully become entrepreneurial subjects, as they are not their own capital, in the form of human capital, nor are they the source of their earnings (Foucault, 2004).

Having an optimistic relation to the future, therefore, proves crucial in maintaining the binary between striver and shirker. It is also significant because austerity becomes a way of governing economic futures. The relation strivers and shirkers have towards the future impact the extent to which economic futures can be governed. Modifying the shirker’s apathetic relation to the future, then, becomes a justification through which to implement *uneven* spending cuts. Consequently, targeting shirker bodies is constructed as a step towards securing an economic future that is currently uncertain. The uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies, therefore, will be now be explored.

### **3.2.3. The ‘responsibility deficit’**

The previous section has brought to light the significance of the “something for nothing culture” in constructing unemployment and the subsequent claiming of benefits as a rational *choice*, rather than it being a turn to social security out of necessity. This warrants further exploration, due to the way in which it justifies the *uneven* distribution of cuts over *homes* and *bodies*. Cameron (2011) emphasises the importance of

*“fixing the responsibility deficit. That means building a stronger society, in which more people understand their obligations, and more take control over their own lives”*

Here, the ‘responsibility deficit’ makes connections between ‘troubled families’ and a lack of personal and parental responsibility. Thus, the ‘responsibility deficit’ is “[a] culture of disruption and irresponsibility that cascades through generations” including “parents that aren’t in work” (ibid.). This is significant, as it suggests parents are unemployed as a result of their own irresponsibility, rather than unemployment due to a range of external factors such as redundancies, high job competition and a dearth of work. Consequently, the discourse of ‘worklessness’ draws on the ‘responsibility deficit’ to argue that individuals ‘shirk’ the responsibility to be in work, and therefore, end up “playing the system” in order to remain workless (Duncan-Smith, 2011b). As such, the discourse of ‘worklessness’ invokes the notion of “widespread abuse” in the welfare system, which Duncan-Smith (2011b) argues contributes to over five billion pounds of unnecessary costs. He argues (ibid.) this is because the welfare

system causes people to be “financially better off out of work.” ‘Playing the system’ again sees individuals as rational economic actors, who choose to be workless, as income from benefits is more attractive than employment (Wiggan, 2012). Thus, unemployment in the discourse of ‘worklessness’ becomes a lifestyle, enabled by generous benefit payments.

The ‘DLA factor’ is also constructed as contributing towards ‘worklessness’ as a lifestyle. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) claim that individuals receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) see the benefit as some kind of ‘proof’ that they were unable to work, providing legitimacy not to seek work (DWP, 2010b: 4-5). This discourse suggests that DLA provides an ‘excuse’ not to work, implying that the recipients of DLA are in some way lazy. The DWP (2010b: 11) claim that “[w]here income from benefits [DLA] was much higher than average, the incentive to increase it by working appeared much less.” Rather than emphasising that people may be unable to work as a result of their disability, they are indicating that DLA claimants are *choosing* not to seek work. As such, the ‘DLA factor’ strengthens the discourse of ‘worklessness’ by implying that benefit claimants (including people with disabilities) are in some way shirking their responsibility to look for work.

Consequently, the discourse of the ‘responsibility deficit’ and ‘worklessness’ enables discourses that emphasise the *uneven* distribution of cuts over homes and bodies in order to restore responsibility:

*“We will not fix these problems without a revolution in responsibility; a recognition that we need in our country a massive step change in accepting personal responsibility, parental responsibility, and social and civic responsibility too.”* (Cameron, 2011).

The discourses of the ‘responsibility deficit’ and ‘worklessness’, as well as the discourse of “something for nothing culture” and the striver/shirker binary divide mean that certain individuals are regarded as ‘undeserving’ of welfare support. Those regarded as ‘shirking’ their responsibility of seeking work become the target of spending cuts, as financial support is seen to reinforce their ‘negative behaviour’. Additionally, the multiple affective charges that the discourses have, can result in the recipient feeling numerous *negative* feelings towards the benefit claimant; thus, this results in diminishing sympathy towards the victims of spending cuts, as they become the ‘undeserving poor’ and therefore undeserving of ‘generous’ welfare support. Consequently, cuts to benefit support are *targeted* specifically at bodies seeking financial support for unemployment and social homes:

*“You must work. And if you won’t work with us to find work – you will lose your benefit...we have toughened up on those shirking work.”* (Duncan-Smith, 2012)

*“[F]ailure to seek work, take work, stay in work, or cooperate, and you will lose your benefits. This is our contract with the British people. To bring an end to the something for nothing culture.”* (Duncan-Smith, 2011b)

*“How can we justify giving flats to young people who have never worked, when working people twice their age are still living with their parents because they can’t afford their first home? How can we justify a system where people in work have to consider the full financial costs of having another child, whilst those who are out of work don’t?”* (Osborne, 2012)

This is significant, as it indicates the ways in which bodies reliant on welfare support are targets of the austerity programme. The discourse of responsibility is drawn upon in order to claim that the cut in funding is with the aim of ‘responsibilizing’ the shirkers. The construction of discourses such as “something for nothing culture” and “worklessness” provides opportunity for the threats to be destroyed by targeting the bodies involved – the ‘shirkers’. Additionally, the discourses justify uneven spending cuts across *homes*. Drawing on the discourse of the ‘responsibility deficit’ allows Osborne to suggest that some bodies are not deserving of social housing or housing support. By making a connection between social housing and irresponsibility, it enables the coalition government to justify targeting poorer bodies, because they are constructed as being poor due to their own faults. The discourse of the ‘undeserving poor’, therefore, suppresses the moral question of targeting people in need of social security. Quite the contrary, it justifies the notion that the welfare system is “morally indefensible” without reform (Osborne, 2010d).

Furthermore, the targeting of spending cuts upon bodies seeking welfare support indicates the workings of a disciplinary rationality. As individual bodies become the ‘undeserving poor’ they are responsabilised in the name of the nation, public and state through cuts to benefit payments. By emphasising that “[n]o family on out of work benefits will get more than the average family gets by going out to work” (Osborne, 2010d), divides ‘good’ from ‘bad’ individuals (and families); families receiving more income from benefits than working families are ‘bad’ and should be responsabilised to go out to work. Therefore, benefit sanctions – losing benefits if individuals do not seek work – act as an “effective control mechanism” (Burton, 2008: 115, cited in Langley, 2013: 8), by making people anxious about actively seeking work for fear of losing benefits if they do not. The responsabilisation discourse, then, produces bodies that are anxious about losing their benefits. Consequently, the uneven spending cuts produce ‘docile bodies’ that anxiously meet their obligations to seek work, for fear of losing benefit payments if they do not. For Foucault (2007), discipline adopts the principle that nothing should be abandoned to themselves. Shirker bodies are not given the

freedom to find work on their own accord, rather they are controlled through benefit sanctions. This regulates how often a body should seek work (defined as entering the jobcentre), which has increased from every fortnight to every week (Osborne, 2013). If they do not meet this obligation, shirker bodies are sanctioned. This indicates, then, a disassociation of power from the body, which is signature of discipline (Foucault, 1977: 138, cited in Woodard and Lea, 2010: 163). Consequently, a disciplinary rationality results in shirker bodies becoming ‘docile bodies’, by meeting their obligations to seek work for fear of the condemnation if they do not. A disciplinary rationality, therefore, helps further the uneven distribution of cuts upon homes and bodies by responsabilising individual bodies in the name of the nation, public and state.

However, Collier (2009) argues that one technology of power does not saturate all power relations. Disciplinary power can be recombined with other technologies of power in different and interesting ways. The uneven distribution of cuts over homes and bodies is itself an exercise of biopower. Uneven spending cuts also means that certain bodies – valued bodies in the form of strivers – are nurtured by the uneven distribution of reward; valued bodies are spared from experiencing the impact of welfare spending cuts because they do not rely on them. This indicates a productive relation of ‘making life live’: the valued life is optimised against the threat that is shirker bodies (Anderson, 2011). Additionally, unevenly distributing cuts across bodies has performative effect, as it reinforces the notion that some bodies are less deserving of support than others. This, therefore, distinguishes between valuable and un-valuable lives (Anderson, 2011).

#### **3.2.4. The entrepreneurial striver**

Biopolitical and disciplinary rationalities are of significance in relation to the responsible, self-governing striver. Strivers are constructed as contributing towards the economic recovery, by the argument that it is “the strivers, the entrepreneurs, the engineers, the innovators, the savers, who create growth” (Osborne, 2011a). Such individuals described by Osborne are contributing because they are in some form of employment, yet they go beyond what is required: the striver innovates, engineers and saves.

The ‘striver’ indicates a connection with, and a movement beyond, disciplinary technologies of power. Whilst the individual bodies of strivers are disciplined by being made responsible for holding down a job and not relying on benefits, they also become entrepreneurial subjects by going *beyond* their responsibility of simply being in employment: “[w]hether it’s the owner of the corner shop staying open until midnight to support their family. Or the teacher prepared to defy her union and stay up late to take the after-school club” (Osborne, 2012). Here, strivers have an “entrepreneurial disposition” (Langley, 2013: 11) towards the deficit; they go beyond being ‘docile bodies’ and become “affectively animated”

(Langley, 2013: 5) by the hope of a more financially secure future. Strivers, here, have an optimistic relation to the future – unlike shirker bodies – by being active in their vision for a more prosperous future. Biopower, therefore, is combined with disciplinary power in the construction of the striver. Rather than being one of passive submission, the striver becomes the autonomous citizen with the capacities of autonomous thought (McNay, 2009). Individual autonomy allows the striver to become an entrepreneur, as they have the freedom of thought to “defy the union” and to “stay up late”. Governmental discourse emphasises that this entrepreneurial behaviour contributes towards Britain’s economic recovery. Therefore, the exercise of biopower is central to governing through austerity, as the entrepreneurial striver is protected and nurtured as a valued life (Foucault, 1978), demonstrating biopower’s ‘making life live’ (Anderson, 2011: 30).

This indicates an interesting recombination between a disciplinary rationality and a biopolitical rationality in the governing through austerity, through the entrepreneurial strivers verses the striver in need of responsabilisation. Individual bodies are divided between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’. As the entrepreneurial striver is a life that is valued and therefore must be ‘nurtured’, they become bodies that are deserving of government support whatever this may be, such as government support to start up their own business (Cameron, 2010a). As already explored, shirker bodies are the ‘undeserving poor’ unworthy of welfare support and must be responsabilised through uneven distribution of spending cuts. The division itself, between deserving and undeserving marks a disciplinary rationality, by distinguishing between bodies that meet their responsibilities and bodies that do not. Thus, strivers are responsabilised in the name of the nation or state, in order to ‘contribute’ towards reducing the public deficit. Yet, the strivers move *beyond* the disciplinary rationality by becoming entrepreneurial subjects. This indicates a power relation between striver and shirker that will always remain unequal. A responsabilised shirker, although meeting their outstanding obligations of seeking work – and therefore are disciplined through austerity – are still not quite like striver bodies. Striver bodies still distinguish themselves from a disciplined shirker simply by being entrepreneurial. As argued by McEwan (2009), the ‘Other’ must become like the ‘Self’, but not quite, as this would delegitimize the relations of power between the binary construct. This indicates that the notion of the striver as an entrepreneurial subject maintains the power relations between them and shirker bodies. Even if shirkers are responsabilised by meeting their obligations through a disciplinary rationality, they can never become quite like the striver, as they do not go beyond their responsibilities. Thus, the biopolitical rationality that is the entrepreneurial striver helps maintain the power relations between the striver/shirker, which subsequently reinforces the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts. To delegitimize the power relations between the binary construct would also delegitimize the targeting of spending upon particular bodies, as these

bodies would no longer be constructed as undeserving of state support. As a result, the responsabilised shirker (the ‘Other’) will never be quite like the entrepreneurial striver (the ‘Self’), as this reinforces the legitimacy of the uneven austerity programme.

### 3.2.5. The ‘victim’ of welfare

Interestingly, the discourse of a ‘responsibility deficit’ and its impacts upon the uneven distribution of austerity measures is performed *alongside* the discourse that individuals are ‘passive victims’ of a dysfunctional welfare system. On the one hand, individuals are ‘irresponsible’ for being workless and on the other, they are “smothered in welfare yet never able to escape” (Cameron, 2011). As such, welfare is presented as a barrier to work and the current benefits system is constructed as “trapping people in worklessness” (DWP, 2010a: 10). Here, people are not workless because they are irresponsible, but because they are oppressed by the welfare system. Welfare is constructed as “fostering dependency rather than self-sufficiency” (DWP, 2010a: 29). As such, this generates the discourse of welfare dependency in which people become ‘trapped’ into dependency:

*“Welfare dependency has become a significant and growing problem in Britain, with huge social and economic cost for both claimants and wider society. The welfare state is now a vast, sprawling bureaucracy that can act to entrench, rather than solve, the problems of poverty and social exclusion.” (DWP, 2010a: 9)*

Here, the welfare system is regarded as the source of poverty and exclusion, rather than due to the negative behaviour of individuals. People are constructed as unable to ‘resist’ the ‘oppressive’ power of the welfare system by providing incentives to stay on benefits rather than take on a job. This discourse carries an affective charge itself, which mixes the affective feelings that the reader or listener may experience. On the one hand, the recipient may feel multiple negative affective qualities towards the benefit claimant, as they are at fault for their own worklessness, and so become the ‘undeserving poor’; on the other hand, the discourse of ‘welfare dependency’ may generate feelings of sympathy, or concern, as the benefit claimants are “*suffering* from worklessness and dependency” (Duncan-Smith, 2011a, emphasis added). The word ‘suffering’ implies somebody’s distress that is not the fault of their own.

As a result, the Welfare Reform Bill implemented by the coalition government is constructed as “[t]he end of wasted lives, wasted money, the end of a system which keeps people in poverty and dependency. The end of welfare as a trap” (Duncan-Smith, 2011a). Here, Duncan-Smith emphasises that the reformed welfare system will no longer penalise the choice to work. This is a strange contradiction; benefit claimants are constructed as *both* rational economic actors able to ‘play the system’ and shirk their responsibility to work, and also



constructed as ‘victims’ that are ‘trapped’ in welfare dependency. Yet, both discourses are able to legitimate the same action: the uneven distribution of cuts over homes and bodies. The former discourse justifies spending cuts towards bodies that are reliant on benefit income, in order to reintroduce responsibility into their ‘dysfunctional’ lives; the latter discourse justifies the same spending cuts, yet to prevent welfare becoming a ‘trap’.

As a result of the discourses explored, new discourses emerge that not only strengthen the legitimacy of the uneven distribution of cuts across homes and bodies, but also *further* the inequality of the austerity programme.

### **3.2.6. The discourse of fairness**

Not only does the government draw upon the discourse of the ‘responsibility deficit’ and ‘welfare dependency’ to further legitimate the uneven distribution of spending cuts, they also construct the discourse of ‘fairness’. The term ‘fairness’ indicates an action that is just; thus, to emphasise that welfare reforms are fair is firstly to imply that they are morally justifiable. The government reforms aim to

*“establish a fairer relationship between the people who receive benefits and the people who pay them, and as crucially, between the people on out-work-work benefits and the people in low-paid jobs.”* (DWP, 2010a: 6)

This instantly makes a potential connection to recipients of the discourse, by indicating that it is ‘unjust’ for the taxpayer to pay for other people to “sit on benefits” (Duncan-Smith, 2011a). Generating feelings of injustice allow spending cuts to be *targeted* at people receiving welfare payments, and be regarded as ‘fair’. As such, the discourse of ‘fairness’ constructs taxpayers as getting a ‘fair deal’ through the welfare reforms:

*“Benefits with conditions. The two halves of the equation: fairness for the jobseeker, fairness for the taxpayer.”* (Duncan-Smith, 2011a)

Here, the bodies experiencing this discourse are expected to feel that the welfare reforms are introducing fairness for taxpayers and an end to the ‘injustice’. For Bissell (2010: 279), affects are attached to ideas and this does not happen by chance; rather “affective signals are intentionally engineered into these materials so that they achieve maximum effect.” As such, the discourse of fairness achieves maximum effect if the recipient bodies feel the affective signals it carries. Additionally, the combination of the discourse of fairness with previous discourses explored, including the striver/shirker binary and the ‘responsibility deficit’, may generate multiple negative feelings towards bodies reliant on benefit payments, which can intensify the feeling of injustice further. This suggests that the more intense the intended affects are felt, the greater effect the discourses achieve; here, the greater the feeling of injustice, the more effective

the discourse of fairness will be. And subsequently, the uneven distribution of spending cuts *become* a just and fair action towards the public deficit.

The performative effect of discourse is clear to see here; the uneven distribution of cuts only *becomes* fair due to the continuous performance of discourses that construct the targeting of bodies reliant on benefits as a ‘just’ action to take. Particularly important, is the part played by affect; the affects transferred to the readers or listeners of the discourse contribute to its performative power. Feeling a sense of injustice towards benefit claimants adds to the performative power of the discourse of fairness. If the intended affects are *not* felt by the recipient body, then the performative effect of the discourse is severely diminished. Consequently, the discourse of ‘fairness’ strengthens the legitimacy of unevenly distributed spending cuts.

### **3.2.7. The ‘DLA factor’ and the discourse of greatest need**

The discourse of ‘greatest need’ is enabled by the understanding that there are individuals undeserving of welfare support. The discourses of the ‘shirker’ and the ‘responsibility deficit’ have emphasised exactly this, allowing the DLA factor and, subsequently, the discourse of the ‘greatest need’ to emerge. In doing so, it furthers the inequitable distribution of spending cuts. As explored earlier, the ‘DLA factor’ is the claim by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that people who receive DLA are more reluctant to seek work. For them, receiving Disability Living Allowance “appear[s] to have some disincentive effect on employment” (DWP, 2010b: 12). Maria Miller MP stated in an interview with *Able Magazine*, that DLA is “a barrier keeping them [people with disabilities] out of the workplace – 80% of people receiving DLA don’t work” (Paul, 2010: no pagination). This discourse suppresses the notion that individuals may receive DLA because they are unable to work as a result of their disability. Rather, the ‘DLA factor’ naturalizes the notion that benefit claimants ‘shirk’ their responsibility to seek work and that benefits contribute towards welfare dependency.

Consequently, the ‘DLA factor’ enables the discourse of ‘greatest need’ to emerge. For the coalition government argues:

*“We must ensure that our resources are focused on those with the greatest need. We will continue to support disabled people who face the greatest barriers to participating in everyday life.”* (DWP, 2010c: 5)

Although the DWP emphasise that they will continue to provide support for people with disabilities, the phrase ‘greatest need’ implies it is support with a *conditionality*. It implies that support will only be available for individuals with more severe disabilities. Claiming that the

reformed DLA (Personal Independence Payment) will “support people who have the most needs” (Paul, 2010: no pagination) legitimates a progression of the uneven distribution of spending cuts. Not only are spending cuts targeting bodies reliant on social security, they are also targeting bodies that are particularly vulnerable. This creates a strange predicament; bodies that have been signified as vulnerable by receiving DLA payments may now be *not vulnerable enough* to receive Personal Independence Payment. Thus, bodies may be vulnerable by facing day-to-day challenges, yet not vulnerable enough to receive benefit payments. This is illustrated by the Treasury’s estimation that DLA reform will result in a 20 per cent reduction in expenditure (HM Treasury, 2010: 36). Yet, the discourse of ‘greatest needs’ attempts to morally justify the targeting of vulnerable bodies by claiming that bodies facing the greatest everyday challenges will still be supported.

### **3.3. Section 3: Concluding remarks**

This chapter has illustrated that there are multiple discursive fields present when understanding austerity as discourse. For Foucault (1991a), a discursive field is where discourses coexist, reside and disappear, and within this field certain discourses are put into circulation over others. This is significant, as it indicates relationships between austerity discourses and the relations of power exercised within the discursive field.

Firstly, this chapter indicates a discursive field surrounding the idea of *debt as an immediate concern*. Britain’s public deficit is constructed as a threat, in which debt is to be feared. This makes present the ‘catastrophic’ consequences for Britain’s economy if the deficit is not reduced. This enables the idea of austerity as a viable solution to this threatening public debt to form, rendering it present and potentially actionable. The discourse of irresponsible spending also renders austerity potentially actionable by emphasising that the welfare system is too expensive, and therefore suggesting that austerity is an enactment of fiscal responsibility. This is significant, as it illustrates how discourses can be suppressed in a discursive field; here, the discourse of irresponsible spending suppresses the discourse of welfare as an important part of social security, narrowing the possibility for other ideas about the necessity of the welfare system.

Additionally, a discursive field surrounding the *implementation* of austerity measures is made present. Initially, the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’ is constructed, in which the idea of “one nation united in the face of adversity” (Clark and Newman, 2012: 303) comes to the fore. Yet, this discourse quickly disappears within this discursive field, giving way to the discourse of the striver versus the shirker. This binary division is made up of complex relations of power, in which the latter is constructed as a threat to Britain’s economic recovery by relying

on benefit payments. Constructing unemployment as a matter of choice generates the idea that shirkers are undeserving of welfare support, as their exclusion from the labour market is deemed to be their own fault. Strivers, on the other hand, are regarded as contributing towards Britain's economic recovery by going beyond their obligation to seek work and being entrepreneurial through the hope of a more prosperous future.

The striver/shirker binary, then, enables another discursive field to emerge, which surrounds the *uneven* distribution of austerity measures across homes and bodies. The discourse of the 'responsibility deficit' generates the notion that there is widespread abuse of the welfare system, in which 'worklessness' is a lifestyle choice. This constructs the understanding that some 'deserve' to be the target of spending cuts, as financial support is seen as reinforcing their negative behaviour. Therefore, the discursive field here creates the conditions of possibility for bodies reliant on welfare support to be targets of the UK austerity programme. Yet, within this field also coexists the discourse of the 'victim of welfare', in which individuals are oppressed by a welfare system that 'traps' them into relying on benefit support. Whilst this is juxtaposed with the discourse of the 'responsibility deficit', they are able to coexist, as they both construct the possibility for an uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies.

Consequently, this enables discourses to emerge that see austerity as bringing fairness into a 'dysfunctional' welfare system. Unevenly distributed austerity measures are regarded as fair for both the tax payer and benefit claimant. The previous discourses also enable the idea of restricting welfare support for those with the 'greatest need', in that only people with more severe disabilities will receive welfare support. Thus, austerity is not only constructed as fiscally responsible, but is also a form of morality play, in which it is the solution to the 'morally indefensible' stance of shirking welfare reform.

Importantly, this chapter has implications for how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. The discursive formations explored are not mutually exclusive from how individuals experience austerity. Instead, they make austerity present for Austerian subjects by forming the discursive field within which they live and feel austerity. For example, the discourse of 'greatest need' has real and meaningful effects for how people with disabilities and families affected by disability experience austerity. It is, therefore, important that we now turn to how 'actually existing' Austerian subjects live and feel austerity in their everyday lives.

## Chapter 4: Living with austerity

Austerity is closely related with uncertainty. Whilst futures are always uncertain – and it is never desirable to eliminate uncertainty (Anderson, 2011) – austerity itself also brings uncertainty with it. This uncertainty is felt by Austerian subjects, generating varying bodily experiences. Thus, subjects relate to this uncertainty in complex ways. It is these modes of relation to uncertainty that are of great significance, as they indicate that individuals do not respond to austerity in linear ways. In some ways they feel as though they are ‘getting by’, yet in other ways they may be struggling. This, therefore, requires an analysis that emphasises these changeable modes of relation to the uncertainty of austerity. Consequently, four modes of relation to this uncertainty (of austerity) will be explored, which is by no means exhaustive of the ways bodies may feel austerity. Nevertheless, four modes of relation to uncertainty are explored here: 1) struggling 2) adapting 3) contesting and 4) ‘getting on with life’. It is significant that these modes of relation are verbs (‘doing words’), as it suggests that these relations are open to transformation, change or disruption. It is these differing modes of relation to austerity that highlight the paradoxical position of the ‘actually existing’ Austerian subject in austerity; yet, importantly, the Austerian subject is not reducible to austerity itself, meaning that it will always be more than an ‘Austerian subject’.

### ***4.1. Section One: Struggling as a mode of relation to uncertainty***

#### **4.1.1. Struggling: The fear of losing governmental support**

Firstly, interviewing research participants has illustrated that households can struggle greatly with the uncertainty of austerity. Families, some more than others, often expressed the fear they feel of potentially losing financial support for their child or children. For them, the financial support provided by the government – particularly welfare support – has become an invaluable source of income, specifically for their child with disabilities. For some families this support is the link between their child and their integration into the community:

*“[A]s long as we have the Disability Living Allowance it’s OK, because that just about funds what he wants to do. You know, his driving, his extra lessons, his physiotherapy – all that sort of stuff, and his swimming. If that were to stop then we’d be in a pickle. And I have to say I am frightened that when they come to do this review, if they drop it down, it will be quite depressing.”* (Helen)

For Helen (all names are pseudonyms), Disability Living Allowance enables her son to carry out activities, through which he becomes an active member of the community. Funding allows lessons to take place, such as for swimming and for driving that are specific to his needs. Many families acknowledged the importance of this funding, due to the fact that their child with a disability needed extra financial support to carry out their day-to-day activities. Nicola, for example, emphasised that “they’re the people that need the extra money, that need the extra care.” Therefore, the uncertainty that this support may or may not be lost or reduced generates affects of fear, as individuals are forced to imagine the eventuality of the funding no longer being available to them. For Helen, this is a frightening prospect because they would “be in a pickle”, were the funding to reduce. For Sarah, the fear of losing support is based on the fact that her child may not come under the government discourse of ‘greatest need’. The discourse of ‘greatest need’ means funding is only available for individuals with more severe disabilities. Thus, Sarah states, “I’m worried for Lauren, you know, because again it’s the borderline people that are going to miss out.” The uncertainty here is that Lauren may lose her support altogether, demonstrating the way in which the uneven distribution of spending cuts are targeting bodies that are particularly vulnerable. Yet, it also illustrates that the welfare reforms now see some bodies as *not vulnerable enough* to receive welfare support. For bodies in this situation their day-to-day challenges remain the same, yet the discourse of ‘greatest need’ no longer recognises these challenges as significant. This has been picked up by Nicola:

*“Why do they [the government] pull it [support] back? Is it all of a sudden you’ve become un-disabled? Is it all of a sudden you’ve got a brain? All of a sudden you’ve got legs? Is it all of a sudden you’ve got, you know, your life back? I don’t understand why they do that.”*

People with disabilities, therefore, are still required to go about their daily tasks as usual, yet for some this may be without or with less financial support, such as Disability Living Allowance (or Personal Independence Payment). This uncertainty is transferred into the bodies of families, particularly parents, in which they *physically feel* as though these cuts have been made to their support, as they are forced to confront the eventuality that may or may not occur. Thus, the potential cuts to support are real and present in their effects through generating bodily experiences of fear. These affects can transfer to other bodies through bodily encounters. Therefore, it may not only be the parents that feel this fear, due to the movement of affect through atmospheres. Some parents have noticed the fear in their own children too. Rebecca noticed a change in her daughter, in which “she was very quiet and not her usual self because she wasn’t sure what she was going to be doing and she likes to know what she’s going to be doing.” Here, understanding the body in terms of its capacity to form relations with other bodies

opens up the possibility of bodies affecting and being affected (McCormack, 2007, cited in Woodard and Lea, 2010). This indicates how bodies open themselves up to being affected, and consequently feel the fear transferred to them. As the term ‘body’ can mean *anything*, this fear can be transferred from any discursive or non-discursive element, such as a discourse or a parent.

Whatever the source of this fear, it indicates the presence of an affective atmosphere of austerity, for atmospheres *exceed* the bodies from which they emerge. Thus, the affective atmosphere of austerity as uncertain generates different bodily experiences, including people’s fear of losing support. Yet, this is not confined to the body feeling this fear; because atmospheres permeate the space from which they emerge, it opens up the possibility for other bodies to feel the same way. Thus, the fact that multiple families have expressed concern of losing support for their child suggests the way in which affects can permeate the space from which it emerges. This is emphasised by Helen:

*“I think it’s important to stress the anxiety that people have with all these changes and the pessimism that people have about these changes, and the fear and the lack of confidence in what is happening and is going to happen... It’s in my mind most days I have to say. You do, you do think about it, you think, oh gosh. And every time a letter comes through the post from the Department of [sic] Work and Pensions you think oh God, what’s this going to be? Are they suddenly going to say you can’t have these benefits anymore?”*

Helen emphasises here that she is not alone in feeling fear, anxiety, and pessimism towards the uneven distribution of spending cuts. Rather, it is something common with many families in similar situations to her, indicating an atmosphere that ‘looms’ over bodies impacted by spending cuts. Thus, the uncertainty of austerity “registers in and through sensing bodies whilst also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal” (McCormack, 2008: 413). Therefore, one way in which people *live and feel* the uncertainty of austerity is through fearing the eventuality of losing governmental support for their child. Uncertainty, here, becomes a source of danger, rather than opportunity (Anderson, 2011). However, Helen’s statement also illustrates the extent to which the uncertainty of austerity generates visceral affects, as even a banal, everyday experience such as receiving a letter can increase anxiety and fear. It also indicates the way in which the discourse of austerity becomes *materialised* into everyday non-discursive elements that also carry an affective charge. Due to the austerity discourse, the term ‘Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) printed on the letter is enough to create bodily feelings of fear that this envelope may hold within it details of lost or reduced welfare support. The striver/shirker binary has contributed towards this, due to the now widespread understanding that spending

cuts are targeting people receiving welfare support (which the DWP is responsible for implementing through the welfare reforms). Consequently, fear of losing support can be triggered by various everyday experiences, demonstrating that simple non-discursive elements, such as a letter, can be materialisations of the austerity discourse.

#### **4.1.2. Struggling: An insecure future for children with disabilities**

Whilst there is widespread fear of losing support, some families have already experienced a reduction in support for their child. This itself generates uncertainty about how the future of their child will be secured. For Rebecca, the financial support for her daughter, Natalie, was cut by fifty per cent:

*“This year is the year where we really noticed that the austerity measures were cutting in. Because instead of her having her direct payment money and the taxi money, they said ‘this is the amount of money you will have’. And I think it was about £7,100... That’s the amount she will get and that had to not only pay for her fees it also had to pay for her taxi fare, and then if anything else, came out of that. So her fees are about £2,400; taxi fares each week are £280. So even if it was just three days that’s still £210 for, I think its 32 weeks a year. So that was already more than she was going to get. So already it was a question of she could have two full days of taxi fares and we would have to do the other two full days. And then if there was any money left over that would be there to help pay for anyone to take her out. So it means that instead of having a direct payment and the taxi fare, and the course paid for, they said ‘you only have this amount of money’. So I think I worked it out last year that it had come to about – all of those three things together – it had come to about £15,000 pounds. And this year they said, ‘this is the amount you get, you don’t get anymore’. So it was halved, immediately.”*

For funding to be cut from approximately fifteen thousand pounds to just over seven thousand pounds represents a colossal reduction in governmental support. For this to occur immediately can also generate fear in other families, that this sudden and large loss of financial support may happen to them. Thus, bodily encounters with families in similar situations may transfer the anxiety from one family to the next. Additionally, it is clear that finances here are extremely important in meeting Natalie’s needs, through Rebecca’s accurate knowledge of how the money is allocated. All the funding is used for specific purposes: taxi fares, dance fees, respite care and so on. Consequently, the halving of this funding means that it becomes uncertain whether Natalie is able to carry on all her day-to-day activities. By emphasising “if there was any money left over”, Rebecca expresses her uncertainty about whether the remaining funding is enough to



meet her daughter's future needs. The cut in funding means that Natalie's financial support is no longer enough to cover respite care, which gives her time away from home and also gives her parent's respite:

*“So in the holidays we got people to take her out and go and do something to look forward to rather than, I mean she doesn't mind going out with me, she likes going out with me. But it then meant it gave me some time as well to perhaps do things with Abigail, go and take her out on her own, because she likes to go out with me on her own. Or just give me some time to go visit my mum on my own, or see my friends on my own. Erm, so I'll notice that mainly during the summer holidays this year when she finishes at the end of June, and then she's got sort of the whole of June, July, August, September; so, it's like 4 months where she's got nothing. So that was always nice, because someone would come and take her to the cinema or they'd take her out shopping, or go and do girly things with her. So we'll notice it more then.”*

Natalie is unable to receive the respite care she previously had, which allowed her mother to carry out activities on her own. The summer holidays, therefore, is now a time where Rebecca will have the least respite, as Natalie's support no longer covers respite expense. This can become a struggle for the family because Natalie's social life is greatly compromised, as the money is no longer available for her to spend time away from her parents. Therefore, Natalie herself notices the impact of spending cuts:

*“She [Natalie] notices that because she can't go out, and we've had to say, 'you mustn't arrange things with people unless you've checked with us first.' And I've got to really keep an eye on how much money is left for her to use.”* (Rebecca)

Firstly, this indicates that austerity is continuously present during the organisation of social activities. Previous to spending cuts, there was enough support for Natalie to carry out all her desired social activities; now however, this is dependent upon whether there is enough money left over for her to use. Natalie herself stated that she could not meet up with certain friends until the following month because this is when she would receive more money from the government and currently had no money left over.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, austerity remains ever present in both the social lives of parent and child, because this is dependent upon whether financial support is currently available. Thus, austerity here is “diffuse” and “ethereal” (McCormack, 2008: 413) because it continuously remains in the background, yet comes to the fore when

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<sup>7</sup> *“She [mother] checks how much [sic] hours I've got to meet up with my friends... I was supposed to be meeting up with Megan on Thursday, but since my direct payments are going on my transport, I have to wait until the end of August. So, I've got to wait for that.”*

trying to organise day-to-day activities. This suggests austerity is not continuously in the forefront of individual's lives. Rather, austerity has greater *intensifications* at certain points in individuals' everyday lives. Yet, this does not suggest that austerity is not present at other times in the everyday. Instead, it indicates that bodies live and feel austerity in ways that are not in the foreground, but the intensification of austerity at particular points in the everyday suggests that signification between their feelings and austerity occur. In other words, at given times, individuals understand that their feelings and actions are as a result of austerity.

Additionally, the experiences of Rebecca and Natalie illustrate the 'incalculable' uncertainty austerity brings (O'Malley, 2010). Such families may lose their ability to be spontaneous, as they are forced to make decisions based on whether their financial support stretches far enough. Something may also arise – a possibility for Natalie to socialise perhaps – and the governmental support simply is no longer available for this to occur. The 'incalculable' uncertainty, therefore, is significant, as families can never know whether something will 'come up' in their everyday lives that they can no longer afford to take part in or carry out. This has been noted by other families:

*“I mean an autistic child is hard to feed on its own, but a dairy free and autistic it's just impossible... And the price of food has gone through the roof, and you think how the hell are you supposed to feed him? I mean she [Nicola] can't have a job because there's always something with one of the boys. How the hell does she support the family, feed the children on what the government offer?”* (Kathryn)

Here there is extreme anxiety about the uncertainty brought by austerity. This anxiety is expressed through the feeling that the family will be unable to meet the future needs of their children due to the lack of governmental support. Nicola is a single mother and unable to be in employment, as she has two disabled sons; therefore, she is very reliant upon welfare support. Anxiety about feeding her children implies the extent to which certain bodies are feeling the burden of uneven spending cuts, as they are now forced to question how they will be able to afford to buy food. Parents feel that they themselves will be unable to meet the future needs of their child if their support is reduced. Whilst some parents are able to fill the financial gap left by the reduction in welfare support (explored in Section Two), for many parents this not possible due to their own financial circumstances. Other parents also expressed this concern:

*“Well my daughter might be the one that loses out. We might not be able to support her... I think for us it's OK, but I think for people like my daughter it's not really. And whether we'd be able to help her or not, I don't know.”* (Clare)

*“At the end of the day you've got to sort it out yourself, which is quite alarming because we can't afford to buy another house... So I don't know if the state will help us that*

*much to tell you the truth. I don't know, but I don't feel optimistic about it put it that way.*" (Helen)

This is significant because it illustrates the anxiety parents have about whether they would be able to find more support themselves for their children. Both Helen and Clare indicate this may not be possible, which furthers the notion of austerity futures as a source of danger and threat. Interestingly, Helen's concern is born out of her feeling that the state can no longer be relied upon to provide support. This has also been emphasised by Clare.<sup>8</sup> This firstly exemplifies the argument made in Chapter Three and also by Clarke and Newman's (2012) that austerity places emphasises upon 'responsibility'. Here, it is the shift in responsibility from the state to the individual, in which parents comprehend that their child is no longer the responsibility of the state. This neoliberal 'part' (Collier, 2009) indicates that people may be aiming to perform the entrepreneurial subject (by being responsible, independent and being the source of their earnings). However, this is not because individuals feel that it is their 'duty' as an 'ideal' Austerian subject, but because they feel that the state has shirked their responsibility of supporting their disabled child. Thus, individuals are forced to consider their future without the financial support of the state. This indicates that for many, life may become more difficult, not only due to the reduction in governmental support; for numerous families, the accumulating impacts of austerity have made life more difficult, making an uncertain future ever more threatening. As life becomes more difficult in austere times, this issue is vital to explore, as it exemplifies the way in which separate impacts of austerity come together to make some struggle more than others.

#### **4.1.3. Struggling: Austerity means everyday life is a greater struggle**

Many families have not only expressed their concern at a loss of welfare support, but also at numerous impacts of austerity that are contributing to their struggles. Thus, the accumulation of these concerns results in a more difficult everyday life. Firstly, for many, austerity has increased uncertainty and difficulty in the work place:

*"[W]hat's really, really hard is my other half is self-employed – he's got his own business. He works as a sculptor so he's in the arts. Because there's a lack of public money over the last couple of years since we've had the recession he found it very difficult. Things like commissions aren't coming up because public money isn't there for the arts. Also, even the commercial side of things it's hard because the commercial work isn't as broad, because people are making massive cut backs."* (Caroline)

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<sup>8</sup> *"We're always conscious of money. And especially because we know we can't rely on the state, or whatever they call it, to secure [John's] future."*

*“We’ve been more affected because we are both teachers. So now our pay’s been frozen you know, because that’s part of austerity. So that’s affected us, the cost of living has risen a lot. So that’s affected us.”* (Isobel)

*“I only teach part-time, as I say, and I’ve noticed people not coming to Yoga classes because they feel it’s expensive. Well I’m quite cheap, relatively, but obviously they feel it’s an expense they can cut back on... So that has a bit of a knock on effect, and so obviously if I’ve got fewer people in that class I earn less money, so there’s some impact there.”* (Helen)

Impacts such as stagnant pay or limited employment manifest themselves at the household level. Earning less money means less disposable income, and therefore, less possibility to fill the (potential) financial gap in governmental support for their child. It also means less money to spend on household goods, such as food. Yet, families *also* experience rising costs for household goods, which is a further cause for anxiety:

*“Food, I’m sure everybody tells you, I mean is just ridiculous; it goes up weekly!”* (Jessica)

*“[F]ood, petrol, general household bills, gas, electricity, everything’s really gone up. So bills are a lot more expensive for everyday stuff.”* (Clare)

*“I think that my husband and I won’t get paid any more for years, so in real terms we will be significantly worse off as inflation has been at 4 or 5%. It has been at 3 [%], but being at 3% worse off a year on paper isn’t really how it is because inflation is on average 3%, it isn’t for us. It’s massively higher than that because a lot of it’s in food and drink. So I’m sure you know, if you ask people about their supermarket bills in the last few years, it’s not gone up by 3% a year, it’s gone up by about 20 or 25 [%]. So in real terms we are going to be significantly worse off and we, kind of, know that.”* (Isobel)

The stagnation in pay and increase in household goods and bills suggest that life will no longer be as comfortable as prior to austerity. Whilst this is a source of great anxiety for many, there has also been acceptance that life will get more difficult in the future. Individuals have expressed their feeling of inevitability that “it’s going to get harder” (Kathryn), which they may not have any influence over. This acceptance indicates the performance of what Krugman (2012: 207) terms paying for “prior sins”. Governmental discourses have emphasised that austerity is “pay[ing] the bills for past irresponsibility” (Osborne, 2010b). Thus, people’s anxiety about the uncertain is juxtaposed with the understanding that life must become more difficult for the ‘common good’ of the economy. Therefore, whilst people struggle with

austerity they are also often inadvertently performing the discourse of austerity as a necessity. For example, whilst explaining the difficulty of receiving cuts to Natalie's funding, Rebecca stated "they've [the government] made that decision that they need to cut back on benefits. Things are tight and I can understand it." This can make it difficult for individuals to truly contest the uneven distribution of spending cuts, as they may feel themselves that austerity must take place. This is further explored in Section Three.

This also indicates *why* the discourse of austerity as a necessity is so powerful; by accepting that life may become more difficult in austere times, individuals are unintentionally performing the austerity discourse itself. Consequently, inadvertently, victims of uneven distribution of spending cuts are producing an "affective cushion to replace the loss of other material ones" (Berlant, 2010: no pagination). In other words, vulnerable bodies in austere times recode loss as sacrifice to suppress the struggle of living and feeling austerity. However, subjects here are not 'ideal' Austerian subjects, even though they are recoding loss as sacrifice, as their reasoning behind it is not related to prioritising the importance of austerity; rather, they are attempting to prevent negative affects, such as anxiety and fear, from taking hold of the body and taking over their lives. Nevertheless, whilst the Austerian subject may accept that life will become more difficult, this does not begin to eliminate the worry and anxiety this generates in body. In fact, this understanding could even *increase* the worry that parents have.

#### **4.1.4. Struggling: Worry for parents in austerity**

The acceptance of a difficult future, along with the understanding of individual responsibility over the responsibility of the state, may actually increase the worry for parents. Parents are understood as being responsible for their families and governmental discourses emphasise the importance of parental responsibility in a state of austerity (Cameron, 2011). This indicates that certain subjects are more prone to being worried about the uneven distribution of spending cuts, as it becomes their obligation to secure the future for their children. For many, the possibility of losing support and the concern that the future needs of their child will not be secured contributes towards parental worry:

*"It's just a worry really because someone like [David] is very vulnerable; he'll always need lifelong care. So, yeah, the thought of what will happen in the future is extremely difficult because no-one can give you the answer to that. Because we don't know where things are going."* (Emma)

*"It just scares me and I worry about [Michael's] future... I would really worry [about the change in support] because I would worry that he's not going to be OK. And who's going to look after him?"* (Caroline)

*“I think what in God’s name is going to happen to [Adam]? I worry about [Tom], what he’ll do, but my heart is filled with pain, anxiety, you name it with [Adam].”* (Nicola)

The uneven distribution of spending cuts is a great source of worry, particularly because of the impact they have upon the parent’s children. For Emma, Caroline and Nicola, the focus is upon their child’s future wellbeing and the uncertainty of austerity brings this into question. This brings about multiple bodily experiences, as illustrated by Nicola: she experiences physical pain due to the worry that her children’s futures are insecure. Thus, whilst governmental discourses emphasise the entrepreneurial subject – that is responsible, active, independent and so on – austerity produces subjects closer to Isin’s (2004) neurotic citizen. Neurotic subjects respond to fears, anxieties and insecurities. Yet, Isin argues that subjects emerge this way, as they have been “promised the impossible” (ibid.: 232). The Austerian subject, however, has been promised quite the opposite; governmental discourses have emphasised that their life will become more difficult, yet they should take these losses as ‘sacrifices’ (Berlant, 2010) to aid Britain’s economy recovery. Consequently, parental response here has not been to perform the entrepreneurial subject, but to actively mobilize affects and emotions and govern themselves through them (Isin, 2004). This suggests that parental subjects may govern themselves through the concern that their child’s future is put into doubt if they personally do not carry out pre-emptive measures. This implies that subjects have not been “affectively animated” in the hope of a more prosperous future (Langley, 2013: 5); rather, the adaptive actions taken by families are due to the fear of the consequences that will ensue if they are not taken. However, this is not to suggest that hope is completely absent from everyday life in austerity. The feeling of hope may also play a role in the notion of recoding loss as sacrifice. Austerian subjects may further take their losses as sacrifices, due to the hope that austerity is a “path to jobs and prosperity” (Osborne, 2011b), bringing an imaginary of post-austerity as a flourishing economy.

Additionally, worry expressed by parents is of further significance, as it suggests what O’Malley (2010) terms ‘incalculable’ uncertainty. This means that, unlike ‘calculable risk’, uncertainty cannot be assessed or quantifiable. This is illustrated by Emma’s emphasis that “no-one can give you the answer to” the future. For O’Malley this incalculable uncertainty highlights the importance of performing the resilient subject; Evans and Reid (2013), explore a resilient subject that sees uncertainty as danger. The resilient subject, here, accepts the dangerousness of the world as outside of its control and is *adaptable* so that life may go on living (ibid.). Consequently, this generates the need to explore the ways in which Austerian subjects have used adaptive measures to the uncertainty brought by austerity. Yet, Austerian subjects do not *become* resilient subjects in the process of adapting. On the one hand, their adaptive measures suggest an acceptance and even embracing of the dangerousness of uncertainty, indicating the performance of resilience; yet on the other hand, Austerian subjects

adapt with a belief in the possibility of securing an economic future themselves. Thus, subjectivity becomes even more complex and blurred throughout the process of adapting to uncertainty brought by austerity.

#### ***4.2. Section Two: Adapting as a mode of relation to uncertainty***

Whilst the previous section has illustrated the ways in which families struggle with the uncertainty of austerity, this section explores how subjects *adapt* to living with this uncertainty. The action of adapting indicates an adjustment to individual's everyday lives, showing how austerity modifies the ability to feel and act. Therefore, the following section explores how subjects modify their conduct with the aim of *securing* a future that is increasingly ambiguous, yet also adapt in ways that suggest an acceptance that life is a process of adaptation to dangers said to be *outside their control* (Evans and Reid, 2013: 83).

##### **4.2.1. Adapting: Financial self-management**

Firstly, as a result of austerity, many families are forced to financially conduct themselves differently. To be on a budget means to have a restricted amount of money (OED, 1996: 122). This indicates that austerity causes individuals to be more stringent about their everyday finances:

*“I’ve had to change just how I spend money, or not spend money [laughing]. Because when my eldest was young I’d go back to work a few days and Chris’ business wasn’t affected by all the cuts, so things were much better. I just didn’t really have to worry about money. But now I’m concerned about it all the time, erm, just because that’s how things are. And I suppose I’m much more careful than I used to be, erm, because I don’t feel I’ve got the choice not to have to worry about it.”* (Caroline)

*“I just feel I need to know exactly how much is going out on his [her son’s] care, how much is going out on his food bills, so I can sort of say, ‘look he’s only got this amount left’ per week. And that’s got to cover all of these social activities. He’s got to learn as well that he hasn’t got a limitless budget. You know, he’s got his DLA and also his Employment and Support Allowance and that is it.”* (Hannah)

Caroline suggests here that prior to austerity, there was no need to budget. Yet, as austerity has generated anxiety about whether enough money is coming into the household, and the concerns this generates about meeting the current needs of their children, this brings about the need to limit spending on certain household goods. For Hannah this is achieved through making calculative decisions about how much money should be set aside for aspects of her son's life.

Emphasising that her son does not have a limitless budget indicates her worry, like Caroline, about whether there will be enough money to meet the current needs of her child. Austerian subjects, therefore, are not budgeting because they are “affectively animated” (Langley, 2013: 5) by the hope of a more financially secure future. Rather, they are mobilised by the anxiety brought about by the responsibility of meeting current financial obligations, such as household bills. As such, adapting through budgeting suggests that individual bodies are *disciplined*, as they anxiously meet their household responsibilities. Austerian subjects, here, become ‘docile bodies’ that meet their familial and household obligations, rather than having an “entrepreneurial disposition” towards austerity.

The decision to purchase fewer luxuries also represents the exercise of disciplinary power. Again, due to the financial obligations families have, Section One illustrated that it is increasingly difficult to meet these responsibilities. Therefore, cutting back on luxuries has become an adaptation to this difficulty. This often comes in the form of cutting the family holidays:

*“Well we’ve never taken lots of holidays because we’ve not had masses of money, oodles of money. You know, so every 5 years we’ve managed to go to the east coast, say Whitby or Robin Hood’s Bay. But now I just know that we won’t be able to have a holiday. And that saddens me sometimes.”* (Annabelle)

*“It has affected our lifestyle... [John’s] quite difficult to take on holiday, for example, so it’s not like we’ve spent a lot on holidays and things like that anyway. But, yeah, that’s a thing you don’t have as much money for – a holiday.”* (Clare)

The notion of cutting back on family holidays firstly highlights the materialisation of the austerity discourse by manifesting itself in the *lack of* holiday possibilities. Austerity has shown itself to reduce the amount of disposable income that households have, which is again a materialisation of the austerity discourse, due to families *physically* having less money in their wallets and bank accounts. This results in a reduced ability to pay for family holidays. Here, therefore, austerity is associated with the notion of *loss*. For Berlant (2010), austerity claims that the vulnerable should recode loss as sacrifice to produce an affective cushion against the loss itself. Helen, for example, saw some of her losses as sacrifices: a reduction in leisure activities were seen as sacrifices to enable her sons to carry out what they enjoy.<sup>9</sup> Yet, there is also an

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<sup>9</sup> *“I think twice about what activities I can do or we can do. You know, I’m sensible about how many classes I can go to because that eats into our income... We’ve obviously got another son and he plays a lot of football and we spend quite a lot of money on football equipment should we say, kit, and he’s on trial with a football club, so we have a lot of petrol and driving backwards and forwards for that. So we don’t want to cut that back; so what we do for example, where I might go to a couple of exercise classes a week I could just go to one exercise class a week.”*



expression of *hope* that also encourages this loss as sacrifice, in that Helen's sacrifice may lead to a more prosperous future for her son. However, loss is recoded into many different feelings, making it difficult to govern the ways in which bodies should feel towards austerity. For Annabelle, the loss of holiday is recoded into sadness by the thought that family holidays are no longer an option. Perhaps for Clare the loss of holidays is met with indifference, as it was already too difficult to take her son on trips. This indicates the difficulty of governing through austerity, as it is impossible to guarantee how individual bodies will feel towards the materialisation of austerity discourses. Therefore, on the one hand, individual bodies here are disciplined; they become 'docile bodies' by cutting back on luxuries to meet their financial obligations. The possible actions of individual bodies are enclosed, due to the overriding importance of meeting their household responsibilities. Thus, disciplinary power here does not 'let things happen' (Foucault, 2007: 45), but ensures that the actions of individuals contribute towards meeting their requirements. On the other hand, the influence of affect means it becomes impossible to fully govern how bodies will feel towards their loss. Bodies will never simply become 'docile bodies', as they have the ability to feel loss in numerous and varying ways.

However, individuals have also become entrepreneurial through adapting to actual or potential cuts in governmental support. The fear of losing support, and the uncertainty this brings about of how the *future* needs of their children will be met has brought the need to fill the potential funding gap left by the coalition government. This uncertainty about their children's future has led to parents financially planning ahead:

*"Because we've always been aware that people might not get provided for what they need... a few years ago we decided to sell our house and move to a bigger house so that potentially we could downsize in the future and then buy [John] a small place. That's what we've sort of got in mind."* (Clare)

*"College were very good and said to me that she [her daughter] could have ESA, which is Employment and Support Allowance; and I applied for that about a year ago and she has got that too. So I'm encouraging her to save as much as she can because I don't know when, because of the austerity, times are worrying and I thought it may not always be as generous as this."* (Annabelle)

*"I think we are always of the view that [James] needs more than the average. The economic climate's not good, we're getting older, we'll earn our money while we can really and I think austerity is definitely part of that."* (Isobel)

Financial planning can be seen as the workings of an entrepreneurial subject. Such individuals have an "entrepreneurial disposition" (Langley, 2013: 11) towards the deficit by taking it upon themselves to secure the future of their children. Planning ahead to seek future financial gains

indicates a move beyond simply meeting their current household obligations. Thus, moving beyond their responsibilities means that such individuals are no longer being disciplined, but becoming entrepreneurial in a state of austerity. The governmental discourse of the ‘striver’ emphasises the significance of the entrepreneurial subject: strivers are entrepreneurial by moving beyond the obligation of simply participating in the labour market. This suggests that by financially planning, individuals have *become* strivers by possessing an entrepreneurial disposition towards their family’s future. However, this is not simply due to the hope of a better future for their children – which governmental discourses of the striver highlight – but also due to the fear of what *could* happen to their child if the parents do not introduce strategies for a more financially secure future. Whilst both feelings may lead to the performance of an entrepreneurial subject, fear and hope are entirely different affects. Individual bodies are mobilised by fear of the dangers posed by the uncertain, whilst hope mobilises by potentially securing a prosperous post-austerity future. This implies that the simple use of the term ‘entrepreneurial subject’ is problematic, as the Austerian subject also conducts itself through affects, not purely through calculative decisions. Thus, whilst individuals here perform elements of an entrepreneurial subject, they are by no means saturated by it; rather, the Austerian subject is a blurred subjectivity that performs an assemblage of subjectivities – such as the resilient, the disciplined, and the entrepreneurial subject – at any one time.

#### **4.2.2. Adapting: Changing everyday routines**

The blurred subjectivity of the Austerian subject points towards interesting relations between technologies of power. The combination of ‘docile bodies’ and entrepreneurial individuals indicate the workings of both disciplinary power and biopower. Changes in everyday routine also illustrate the exercise of various technologies of power, but also suggest how the Austerian subject may be governed through the household. For many parents, the loss of governmental support and squeeze on household budgets has resulted in a conscious decision to change their daily routines. Some changes are more significant than others, however. For Jessica, the increasing pressure on household spending simply means a reduction in visiting restaurants.<sup>10</sup> Yet, for others the changes are much more substantial. For Rebecca, a fifty per cent funding cut for her daughter has meant that Natalie can no longer travel to her performing arts college by taxi every day (and public transport is not an option). Therefore, Rebecca is forced to carry out the “two-hour journey there and back” (Rebecca) herself to enable Natalie to

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<sup>10</sup> “[W]e used to go out once or twice a week for a meal maybe five or six years ago and then the last time we went out was Valentine’s Day for a meal and the time before that was my husband’s birthday in December.”

continue attending her college. This loss of support impacts upon the family budget, yet, for Rebecca this is a sacrifice worth making: “but, you know, if that’s what we have to do so that she can carry on doing what she’s likes.” Again, this illustrates a case of recoding loss as sacrifice (Berlant, 2010), indicating an Austerian subject that is taking on the former responsibilities of the state in the hope that her child will receive the support she needs. Other changes in routine also indicate an Austerian subject that is responsible, active and choosing (Miller and Rose, 2008):

*“I’ve increased my hours at work. Well I got a new job actually, a different job. So I increased my hours at work.”* (Clare)

*“[S]chool budgets being cut in the austerity process means in our environment here at [High school] that part-time teachers are all on temporary contracts and it’s the temporary contracts that wouldn’t get renewed. So by coming back to a full-time contract it gives me permanent, full-time status. So I would be a lot lower down the list for losing my job... So, I took the plunge really and came back full-time for security.”* (Isobel)

*“I actually have started to work, but the money’s rubbish, it’s not what I’m qualified to do... And the only reason I’ve done this little job, I was offered it and I thought, do you know what, it’s a little bit of extra money a month and just for an extra little bit of something.”* (Caroline)

This is significant, as the increase in working hours suggests a change in routine that is entrepreneurial, by going beyond the obligation of simply being in the labour market. Increasing working hours means more disposable income and therefore less financial pressure upon the household. This indicates how austerity may govern *through* the household. For Foucault (2008) the household becomes a key mechanism through which neoliberal governance is performed, and this is evident here. The increasing uncertainty (and anxiety) surrounding the future of individual households forces bodies to become entrepreneurial and innovative, such as being the source of their earnings (Foucault, 2004). As the household becomes unstable in austerity, it becomes a site through which to modify the conduct of Austerian subjects as they aim to secure an increasingly ambiguous future. Pressures on the household have resulted in many interviewees seeking more work. Thus, the household has acted as a catalyst to mobilize the entrepreneurial potential of the Austerian subject, and so modifying their abilities to act. Consequently, the household is no longer simply a place in which austerity is lived and felt; it also becomes a site through which austerity is governed by coercing household members to be entrepreneurial merely to secure an uncertain future. Financial planning also illustrates how the household is a site through which to govern austerity; by trying to ensure future financial gains

using the household – such as the potential to downsize in the future – it becomes an enterprise itself. Here, the household becomes a site through which individuals perform self as enterprise. Thus, not only is the household a place in which the entrepreneurial subject is mobilised in austerity, it is also used as part of the entrepreneurial process.

However, Austerian subjects do not simply respond to the uncertainty of austerity by adapting and being entrepreneurial. For many individuals, they relate to this uncertainty by contesting the discourses and subsequent legitimacy of austerity itself. Bodies find numerous ways of relating to austerity, each equally as significant. Thus, the importance of contesting austerity should not be ignored.

### ***4.3. Section Three: Contesting as a mode of relation to uncertainty***

Section One and Two have shown how individuals and households have struggled, yet also adapted to the uncertainty that austerity brings. This indicates that there are multiple ways in which bodies can relate to the uncertainty of austerity. However, not yet explored are the ways in which individuals *contest* austerity itself. As shown in Chapter Three, austerity has become an extremely divisive ‘solution’ to the deficit, in which there has been much discord between advocates of austerity and those against austerity. Thus, attention must be paid to how individuals contest austerity in their everyday lives. Yet, it is not as simple as purely contesting austerity. Rather, contesting austerity is complicated by other elements, such as governmental discourses, as they coexist with each other in a discursive web. The complex feelings towards austerity, therefore, make it difficult for individuals to provide a coherent contestation to austerity itself.

#### **4.3.1. Contesting: Fighting for one’s child**

As illustrated in Section One, the uncertainty of austerity brings with it the fear of losing welfare support. Yet, whilst this generates affects of fear and anxiety, it can also produce contestation to austerity itself. In other words, individuals emphasise that they would try to prevent a loss of support at all costs. Interestingly, many participants were waiting for a decision as to whether their child would be able to gain funding of some form; the type of support ranged from funding for specialist residential colleges to funding for one-to-one support at school (known as a statement). Therefore, this uncertainty generates a sense of resistance towards the potential loss of support:

*“If he doesn’t get it [funding for specialist college] we’ll be appealing. Well to be honest, in a way we’re sort of, we’ve been pretty lucky with [John] that we haven’t had*

*any hitches in getting what we think is needed. But, obviously we might get it turned down. Well we probably will get it turned down – it's probably more likely that we will get it turned down than we'll get it granted. But we'll appeal against it and see what we get.*" (Clare)

*"[W]e had the statement review. Now we're just waiting to hear back whether that's been maintained. And if it isn't, I don't know what will happen really. We'll appeal it."* (Isobel)

Interestingly, Clare emphasises the inevitability of spending cuts, which prepares her appealing the rejection of funding. This is also voiced by Isobel.<sup>11</sup> For both Isobel and Clare the inevitability of losing or not gaining funding respectively is met by a determination to appeal this decision, in order to ensure that their children receive the appropriate support. Thus, by already deciding to appeal if their plea to funding is rejected, the legitimacy of austerity measures is problematized. An appeal is a call to justice, indicating that the loss or rejection of governmental support is unwarranted, as it suggests that a wrong decision has been made. As argued by Foucault (1990: 65-96) "where there is power, there is resistance." Appealing, therefore, acts as resistance to the disciplinary power exercised through austerity. By emphasising the importance of governmental support, appealing contests the responsabilisation of individual bodies. As highlighted by governmental discourses in Chapter Three, shirker bodies are responsabilised through the uneven distribution of spending cuts, in which they are freed from the 'trap' of welfare dependency. Challenging a loss of support helps to contest the shift in responsibility from the state towards the parent, individual or household. This problematizes the assumption that individuals should continuously be autonomous, responsible subjects as performed by the entrepreneurial subject. This is noted by Caroline:

*"I never really think about it as being dependent on it [the state] – it's because we brought [Michael] into the world and that's how things are, that's how it is. But he does need extra help, it's a fact. If things were different he wouldn't but does; it's a fact and there's nothing we can do to get away from it. And that's what it should be for. That's what it should be for – to help people that are in need."*

It is clear, here, that the neoliberal 'part' (Collier, 2009) of self as enterprise is unsustainable, as subjects cannot purely be autonomous or responsabilised. In emphasising the fact that Michael *needs* extra help, Caroline is contesting the notion that the uneven distribution of spending cuts

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<sup>11</sup> *"The amount of provision will just gradually go down because I just suspect that's what's going to happen from what I've heard as positions in local councils get axed and care workers and outreach workers and disability workers. I think that will reduce over time."*

is fixing the ‘responsibility deficit’. Instead, welfare becomes about supporting particularly vulnerable individuals that require more care than others. In doing so, Caroline challenges the governmental discourse of welfare dependency. The welfare system is not constructed as a ‘trap’ for people seeking work, but becomes a vital support for vulnerable bodies. As argued by Foucault (1972) it is through the ‘not said’ that the ‘said’ is undermined. The governmental discourse of irresponsible spending subjugates the knowledge that welfare spending is necessary. Yet, appealing the loss of funding helps to destabilise the discourse that the “culture of irresponsible spending has its roots in Britain’s welfare system” (Duncan-Smith, 2012). Here, then, welfare becomes a requirement, rather than a cause of public debt. As a result, this challenges the justification of uneven spending across homes and bodies, as it delegitimises the notion that spending cuts should disproportionately focus upon the welfare system.

However, invoking discourses that contribute towards the contestation of austerity are never performed in a vacuum. Rather, they continuously coexist alongside other discourses of austerity, including governmental discourses that legitimate the uneven distribution of spending cuts. This complexity can generate numerous feelings towards austerity and make it difficult to produce a coherent contestation of austerity itself. This has become evident in some individuals’ explanations about why their child deserves governmental support:

*“[M]y point is that Lauren should be entitled to that and I know everybody has different levels of needs but she will need that kind of support. So, you do everything you can for your children don’t you and you fight your corner and you just have to make sure that you get the best possible chance... I think it’s that financial support isn’t it? Stuart and I have worked all our working life and we’ve paid all our contributions and things and never claimed for anything. And Lauren quite clearly has needs in certain areas that she will need some kind of support with that.”* (Sarah)

Sarah is contesting the uneven distribution of spending cuts through emphasising that her daughter deserves governmental support due to her more complex needs. Yet, she justifies this through noting that both she and her husband have ‘contributed’ towards society by being in employment. This inadvertently performs the problematic understanding that being in the labour market means they are more ‘deserving’ of welfare support than individuals who are not. It also highlights Wiggan’s (2012) argument that people outside the labour market are regarded as not playing a full part in society. Furthermore, Sarah also emphasises that she has not claimed benefits before, making her daughter entitled to support. This unintentionally reinforces the binary between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, as it constructs the notion that individuals ‘earn’ their right to governmental support through not ‘depending’ upon the state. It also suggests that there is a threshold of how much funding an individual or household is able to

claim before they become ‘scroungers’. Sarah indicates that members of her household are not ‘scroungers’, due to both parents being in the labour market. As a result, contesting austerity is never coherent as individuals (often inadvertently) perform discourses that help reinforce binaries between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’. This suggests that whilst austerity as a ‘common sense’ solution to public debt may be problematized, divisions between individuals deserving and undeserving of welfare support still remain; it, therefore, becomes difficult to *fully* challenge the uneven distribution of spending cuts, as there is still an ethereal assumption that some bodies deserve to be recipients of austerity measures.

#### **4.3.2. Contesting: Contesting governmental discourses**

Although the coexistence of varying austerity discourses makes it difficult to perform a coherent contestation to austerity, this does not mean that governmental discourses of austerity are beyond challenge. Quite the contrary, the coexistence of discourses combined with the ways in which individuals *live* and *feel* austerity make governmental discourses open to contestation. Firstly, many research participants contest the discourse of austerity as a necessity:

*“Austerity generally I think they’re going around it the wrong way. Cutting back on everything... Erm, so I think austerity because they’re cutting back on everything there isn’t the money there. And people have got less money. And because they’ve got less money they can’t spend any more money; so it’s not going to happen that things are going to expand.”* (Rebecca)

*“And to me it’s wrong because like what I’m saying is, they’re cutting the education, they’re cutting the transport and things like that. But then, that’s all well and good on one hand; but then if they cut it what’s going to happen? That child is going to go on the dole, so then they’ve got to pay them dole so they’re cutting off their own noses despite their faces.”* (Nicola)

Both statements are significant as they question the reasoning behind implementing austerity measures. Rebecca questions the notion of expansionary austerity and the ‘confidence fairy’ (Krugman, 2012), highlighting the depressionary effects of austerity itself. Thus, Cameron’s (2010b) emphasis upon expansionary austerity is put into question by the ways in which individuals *live* austerity. Not only has Rebecca questioned the necessity of austerity, but Section One has illustrated how families have less disposable income as a result. This contests Cameron’s understanding that austerity would actually lead to more household spending, due to a lower tax burden (Krugman, 2012). This has also been emphasised by Caroline: “the ironic thing is, where’s the growth? Where’s the growth we’re meant to be seeing? We’re not seeing it... Sorry it’s bollocks isn’t it. It’s absolute bollocks isn’t it?” The lack of economic growth is

itself a contestation to austerity, which enables individuals to further challenge the discourse of austerity as necessity. For Nicola, contestation comes in form of questioning the fiscal logic of spending cuts: she argues that cuts to spending, such as to education and transport leads to more people being “on the dole.” Therefore, this problematizes the notion of austerity as an enactment of fiscal responsibility.

In addition, some research participants also destabilize the binary between ‘striver’ and ‘shirker’ simply by living and feeling austerity. For Annabelle this is expressed through her feeling of shame:

*“I touched on this a bit earlier about feeling ashamed and things.<sup>12</sup> I have because the headlines in some of the tabloid press particularly are very judgmental; you know it’s very easy to say that somebody’s scrounging if they’re not working - all these judgement values and to not know the full story sometimes. I don’t see it as a helpful, positive attitude towards disability or indeed people who are on benefits for other reasons... You know, because I think it’s a form of witch-hunting almost, it’s a sort of scapegoating isn’t it of probably quite vulnerable people often.”*

Due to her heavy reliance on benefit support, Annabelle has felt a sense of shame due to the construction of the striver/shirker binary. Her shame arises as result of performing the identity of a shirker (claiming benefit support). For Probyn (2005, cited in Bissell, 2010), shame illuminates our attachment to the world and our desires to be connected with others; thus, shame can only arise if the body cares about the interest of others. This is significant, as the desire to be connected with bodies can deconstruct the striver/shirker binary itself. It highlights that individuals constructed as shirkers do not have a ‘responsibility deficit’ (Cameron, 2011) or wish to ‘play the system’. If individuals indeed were ‘playing the system’, they would not feel a sense of shame by wrongly claiming benefit support, as they would not desire to be connected with others. Instead, Annabelle’s embarrassment of being a benefit claimant illustrates her aspiration to form attachments with others. This desire itself may stretch across the striver/shirker binary, rendering this division irrelevant. As shame generates particular sets of relations between bodies (Bissell, 2010), these bodily relations do not distinguish between valued and unvalued lives, enabling the binary between striver and shirker to be deconstructed. Therefore, rather than this binary holding some form of essential truth, it is problematized through the desire to connect with others, moving beyond binary divisions.

Deconstructing the striver/shirker binary is essential to contesting the uneven distribution of spending cuts. By questioning the division between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, it moves

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<sup>12</sup> *“And I feel, you know, that people in this situation that do rely heavily on benefits as we now do have such a bad reputation in the press that I find it almost a shameful thing, almost an embarrassing thing.”*



beyond the notion that some are the ‘undeserving’ poor. In doing so, this enables the discourse of austerity as fair – as emphasised in governmental discourses – to be challenged. Moving beyond the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor brings the focus back to the understanding of welfare being a system that supports vulnerable bodies. Austerity, here, then becomes a strategy in which vulnerable bodies are targeted, which is itself a performance of anti-austerity discourse (explored in Chapter Three). This enables the overt criticism towards the coalition government itself:

*“And what I think is so wrong, is the most vulnerable people in our society are the ones who miss out, every time... I think it’s a very worrying Britain at the moment. I really don’t think the government have got any connection with what goes on really. I think it’s beyond their comprehension to be honest. I don’t think they really come into contact with people who are really struggling. And I think there’s a lack of compassion as well, a lack of empathy. I do think it’s not a good place at the moment.”* (Sarah)

*“And that’s what I’m so angry about because I’m trying to keep him, like the government are saying try and keep them off the dole. So I’m trying to at the moment keep him in education, but I’m getting slapped in the face everywhere I go.”* (Nicola)

*“I just think they are brutal. And I don’t actually think they think of the repercussions... I just don’t think they get it sometimes. I don’t think they understand that the cuts they’re making, erm, they will affect a lot of people.”* (Caroline)

By emphasising that the most vulnerable people in society are being disproportionately impacted by austerity measures, this enables the moral judgement of the coalition government to be questioned. For Nicola this comes in the form of anger, and for Sarah and Caroline, this is expressed through exasperation. Phrases such as “lack of compassion” and “lack of empathy” carry an affective charge in which the coalition government are constructed as lacking in consideration for others. Additionally, the term “brutal” also suggests that the government lacks morality, as a brutal act is carried out with disregard for the humane. In doing so, this contests the legitimacy of austerity itself, as it indicates the implementation of spending cuts are an act of immorality, carried out by an immoral government.

However, producing a coherent contestation to austerity is made impossible by the coexistence of multiple and varying austerity discourses. Whilst problematizing the uneven distribution of spending cuts, some participants have found themselves performing the discourse of austerity as a necessity. Caroline, for example, emphasises: “[i]t’s a difficult one because I know politicians have to make cuts.” Whilst she fears the potential loss of support for her son, and emphasises her anxiety about the uncertainty austerity brings for the household, Caroline, here, is suggesting that spending cuts are essential. Thus, the coexistence of governmental

discourses and anti-austerity discourses alongside the lived experiences of austerity indicate that individuals themselves are performing blurred austerity discourses. This illustrates that governmental austerity discourses and anti-austerity discourses do not appear in a binary divide in people's everyday lives. It is rather more complex than this; the multiple ways in which individuals live and feel austerity suggests that austerity discourses merge and overlap, rendering it difficult to distinguish between supposedly binary discourses. On the one hand, individuals may criticise cuts to their child's funding or express anxiety regarding a loss of earnings. Yet, on the other hand they may also emphasise the need for spending cuts in order to reduce Britain's deficit. Therefore, to distinguish between governmental discourses and anti-austerity discourses in a way that suggests individuals only perform one or the other does not resonate with everyday lives. Bodies perform discourses that may contradict or oppose each other, but are equally relevant to their daily lives. Individuals perform discourses that, at the time, are most appropriate to them.

Additionally, Caroline's emphasis on austerity as necessity also highlights what Berlant (2006) calls 'cruel optimism'. For Berlant, cruel optimism is a subject's attachment to an object or scene of desire even though its presence threatens her or his wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, austerity is the object of desire here. As already suggested throughout this section, austerity threatens the wellbeing of the (actually existing) Austerian subject, for example, through a loss of governmental support and generating multiple negative bodily affects, such as fear and anxiety. Yet, governmental discourses of austerity (explored in Chapter Three) help *generate* this attachment to austerity by emphasising that austerity is necessary. Therefore, by performing austerity as necessity alongside the ways in which individuals struggle with spending cuts, Caroline – and Rebecca earlier in this chapter – shows how austerity becomes an example of cruel optimism. Governmental discourses construct austerity as a phenomenon that will generate multiple positive effects, such as thriving businesses and a flourishing economy, that produces affects of hope, yet austerity has also generated multiple negative affects and a financial loss for the individual. This illustrates what Berlant (2006) calls an attachment that is enabling but also disabling. Cruel optimism differs from Berlant's (2010) 'loss as sacrifice', in that unlike the former, Austerian subjects *know* with the latter how austerity will harm them, yet recode this as a sacrifice. Consequently, with cruel optimism governmental discourses of austerity enable investment in a promise (of a flourishing economic future enabled by austerity), which ultimately harms Austerian subjects further down the line, yet it is unknown exactly what this harm may be.

The difficulty in sustaining a binary between governmental and anti-austerity discourses, and the apparent attachment there is to austerity in general even though it threatens their wellbeing, suggests that individuals sometimes are simply keen to 'get on with life', rather

than continuously contesting austerity. Research participants have found various strategies enabling them to ‘get on with life’ and live with austerity as easily as possible. The following section explores exactly this.

#### ***4.4. Section Four: ‘Getting on with life’ as a mode of relation to uncertainty***

Whilst Section Three illustrated the ways in which individuals contest the implementation of austerity, particularly the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts, this is never a coherent process, due to the multiple austerity discourses coexisting with one another. It may also be difficult to contest austerity all of the time, indicating that, sometimes, individuals seek to ‘get on with life’ as easily as possible. Therefore, ‘getting on with life’ represents the feelings of research participants that simply wish to carry on with life and accept that austerity may be part of their future. This is expressed through the simple understanding of ‘getting on with it’, perhaps allowing individuals to see hope for the future. Yet, ‘getting on with life’ is also due to the fatigued body, as a result of continual negative affects, forcing individuals to reluctantly accept austerity. However, this acceptance can come in many affective forms; whilst some may acquiescently accept austerity, others also accept by fearing for other families and some also exasperatedly accept that austerity is here to stay.

##### **4.4.1. ‘Getting on with life’: ‘Just get on with it’**

For many research participants the uncertain future brought by austerity generates the simple desire to ‘get on with life’. Individuals have expressed numerous different relations towards the uncertainty of austerity, and the wish to carry on as ‘normal’ is a relation that also been emphasised. Thus, sometimes people wish not to think about the uncertain future:

*“I would rather not think about it [the future], because it’s almost like you deal with what you’ve got now and that’s all you can really do. Because there’s no point in worrying, she says, but you can only so much can’t you?” (Caroline)*

*“I think the main thing for us is that we’re not getting paid any more, living costs a lot more, and we’re going to have to work longer and we’re going to get less pension. And all those things combined, and then if you throw [James] into the mix it’s not a great prospect is it? But I don’t really dwell on it.” (Isobel)*

Although Caroline has previously expressed her anxiety towards the uncertain future, here she has also emphasised that there is only so much worrying she can do. Thus, a focus upon the present rather than the future helps to limit the generation of anxiety. Although this still indicates that the contingency of life is a source of threat rather than opportunity (Anderson,

2011), Caroline's relation towards uncertainty allows her to limit the negative affects generated by the thought of a threatening future. This suggests that whilst the future can be a source of danger, a retreat to the present can be a source of comfort, allowing individuals to 'get on with life' in austere times. Caroline's experience indicates the notion of 'getting on with it' as dealing with a *pathology*. A pathology is defined as "any deviation from a healthy, normal, or efficient condition" (Dictionary.com, 2013). As this chapter has shown, austerity has generated a mixture of anxiety and various depressionary affects. These affects are deviations from a healthy, 'normal' condition, and impacts upon the efficiency at which individuals can conduct their everyday lives, as people spend a disproportionate time worrying about the dangers of the uncertain. Therefore, austerity itself can be seen as generating a pathology for Austerian subjects. Caroline's understanding that "you deal with what you've got now" is dealing with the pathology of austerity by trying to restrict the deviations from efficient living conditions, through limiting time spent worrying. Thus, dealing with this pathology by getting on with life is an aim to return to 'normal' conditions.

In addition, Isobel's statement is also dealing with a pathology precisely due to her emphasis upon "but I don't dwell on it." Again, whilst austerity suggests a threatening future – through wage stagnation, rising living costs, less disability support and so on – Isobel stresses that she does not focus on this and, therefore, it cannot be a worry for her. Suppressing the threat of an uncertain future, then, can lead to feelings of hopefulness and positive affective qualities, and can further discourage negative visceral affects from taking over the body. Thus, positive affects can further deal with a pathology of austerity by allowing them to suppress negative affects such as anxiety. This is illustrated further by Isobel: "I'm crazily optimistic about [James'] life really, I have been from the start... somehow or other I think [James] will always be OK." A sense of hopefulness is also exemplified by Annabelle: "I think you've got to keep hopeful and say, no, life is going forward and we will put things in structure." As argued by Bissell (2010: 283), the precise shape of affective emergence is unpredictable, yet, there are ways that affects might be 'kept in check' to prevent them from taking a firm hold of the body. By encouraging positive affective qualities such hope and optimism towards the future, both Annabelle and Isobel are able to keep affects such as anxiety from taking over the body, which often greatly impacts upon the ability to act and feel. Optimism towards the future may even suggest a glimmer of uncertainty as *opportunity*, which can also help deal with the pathology of austerity. Although Section One has illustrated that their lives have become more difficult in austere times, the continual shift back to the importance of staying positive and hopeful further allows Isobel and Annabelle (and others<sup>13</sup>) to carry on with their everyday lives without being

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<sup>13</sup> "We're trying to be hopeful [regarding funding] because the people at college think we've got a very good case because of his mutism and that fact that he's really socially isolated" (Clare)

consumed by affects such as fear and anxiety, leading to more ‘normal’ feelings of everyday life again.

However, some Austerian subjects ‘get on with life’ through simply accepting that austerity is here to stay. Yet, the reasons for this acceptance differs; individuals may accept austerity through feelings of disempowerment, fatigue, feeling ‘better off’ than other families; through sensing that austerity is ‘right’ or simply through the mentality of ‘accept and deal with it.’ These reasons will now be explored, which leads onto a discussion of how the Austerian subject may embrace the danger of austerity.

#### **4.4.2. ‘Getting on with life’: Acceptance of austerity**

Firstly, the choice to accept austerity may be determined by feelings of disempowerment, and a fatigued body which can lead individuals to accept their losses in austerity. For Annabelle, her daughter was reassessed as being fit for work, even though she was still at full-time residential college. This, therefore, requires her to actively seek work, despite the fact that Annabelle does not consider her daughter as yet fit for work:

*“She’s being placed in the work-related activity group, which means that whenever, and she has been for an interview at the job centre in Sheffield, whenever they require her to go and talk about possible work or whatever they have discussed... I tried to appeal against it because she’s preparing, she’s making real progress in my mind towards employment in that she’s in a full-time college, but they said no, she’s still got to go... And I said I thought it might be appropriate, let’s finish her course and then let’s look at what we can do in terms of part-time employment or voluntary work or whatever. But, no they say, you must come. Or again you appeal, but there’s a backlog of cases and they can’t tell you when it will be and I thought it’s going to hang over us. So I said, oh we won’t appeal we’ll just, you know go ahead with it.”*

Significantly, Annabelle’s first appeal was rejected and although she was able to appeal again, the negative affects this would generate caused Annabelle and family to accept the decision. The idea that rejecting the verdict would “hang over” the family illustrates the negative affective atmosphere that surrounds the process of appealing. As voiced by Bissell (2010), a stream of multiple events that generate frustration can serve to increase these negative affects over time. Thus, the continual complications surrounding the availability of welfare support can lead to increasing negative bodily experiences. Bissell argues this can bring about more or less tolerance of the situation; for Annabelle, this has led to less tolerance and, therefore, is less

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*“I know like they said there’s no hope for [Adam] that he’ll ever hold a job, but we’re not giving that up.” (Nicola)*

willing to appeal a second time, even though she feels her daughter is not fit for work. In addition, the continual production of negative affects, like anxiety, can fatigue the body, making it more difficult to fight against the loss of support. Consequently, the wearing of the body – as a result of the multiple difficulties faced by the family – has changed the body’s disposition towards austerity in a way that makes it less willing to contest austerity itself. Thus, only through sheer exhaustion upon the body has austerity been reluctantly accepted. For some, then, continually living and feeling austerity can tire the body to such an extent that the ability to contest, or adapt is severely compromised; the fatigued body suggests there is limited ability to resist.

However, whilst Austerian subjects may reluctantly accept austerity as a result of the fatigued body, acceptance comes in many forms, which will bring to light the complexity at which bodies may end up accepting the discourse of austerity. Thus, while acceptance of austerity is the commonality here, the *affective relation* towards this acceptance differs. For some individuals, austerity is met with acquiescent acceptance:

*“I think unfortunately in our society, there are people, which I know sounds dreadful, they take advantage and they tell lies and they’re creaming the system... I think the trouble is we have too many people that are trying to claim benefits that shouldn’t claim benefits. I’m not pointing fingers at people or anything but there are certain parts of society aren’t there that, you know, people that have loads and loads and loads of children so that’s a drain on society.”* (Emma)

*“I always think that I would make more use of it had I got the money they got, because I do just see that it can be wasted quite a lot... Almost inevitably they smoke, you see it and then at the same time they’re moaning that the benefits bill, their benefits are in real terms going down. And then you think, yeah but I want you to have apples and oranges but I’m not so sure about the fags.”* (Jessica)

*“[T]hey all smoke, they all have Sky TV, they all get drunk a lot. That’s a wide generalisation, but you do see it and they all have holidays.”* (Jessica)

Both Emma and Jessica show that their acquiescent acceptance of austerity is due to the imagery constructed about the ‘type’ of individuals that receive benefit support. It is interesting that they also distance themselves from this understanding. Emma performs the governmental discourse of ‘playing the system’, in which bodies ‘scrounge’ from the state. The use of wording such as “they tell lies and they’re creaming the system” constructs the notion that some individuals claiming benefits are morally deficient. In doing so, she separates herself (and her family) from shirkers, constructing a binary between people that do and do not deserve welfare support. By accepting austerity with acquiescence, this furthers the discourse that austerity

should be *unevenly* distributed over homes and bodies, as it emphasises that some bodies do not deserve welfare support due to their moral deficiency. Reinforcing the binary between the deserving and undeserving, therefore, furthers the understanding that austerity acts as a ‘moral code’ between bodies that need to be ‘moralised’ from bodies that do not. Additionally, Jessica’s justification of her affective relation towards the acceptance of austerity is significant, as it suggests that individuals receiving welfare support should not be allowed a lifestyle that includes drinking, smoking and cable television, as it is deemed ‘too luxury’. This implies that accompanying benefits is a *basic* lifestyle that people should follow, and that other individuals have an entitled opinion on how claimants must spend their money. Suggesting that claimants should buy “apples and oranges” and not “fags” is illustrative of this. Like Emma, Jessica distances herself from shirkers, reinforcing the binary between those deserving and undeserving of welfare support. Yet, more significantly, it suggests a binary between benefit claimants that should be controlled and ‘policed’ and claimants (like Jessica’s family) that are allowed freedom. This indicates that certain bodies should be subject to the exercise of disciplinary power over others, in which they should not be abandoned to themselves (Foucault, 2007). Furthermore, by suggesting that claimants should have a basic lifestyle, it also implies that they do not deserve a similar standard of living to the ‘average’ household; it implies that claimants should live in rudimentary conditions, otherwise their support is wasteful. Consequently, using such discourses to emphasise an acquiescent acceptance of austerity furthers the notion that austerity is injecting ‘fairness’ into the welfare system that allows claimants to live in ‘luxury’.

However, rather than accepting austerity in a way that supports the uneven spending cuts upon homes and bodies, some Austerian subjects have a *relative acceptance* of austerity. This means that individuals accept austerity, as they feel that they are in a better situation relative to other people:

*“Both Stuart and I have worked in education all our lives, so we know what to do to support. But I worry about people who don’t have that back-up and that support really.”* (Sarah)

*“I think we’re protected from a lot of what goes on because of our family friends. The fact that I happen to work in a really nice place, the fact that we live in Harrogate and the voluntary sector’s buoyant really does act as a kind of cushion around [James]... I think that the families that don’t have that are going to struggle and do struggle.”* (Isobel)

Fearing for other families that may find austerity significantly harder helps individuals accept austerity as something that is ‘not as bad for them compared to others’. For Sarah, this is expressed in terms of knowing how to gain access to support for their daughter due to her

employment. For Isobel, this is expressed in terms of the environment in which she is surrounded that is particularly supportive. Both relate their experience to families that may not have access to the same assistance they have had. In doing so, this provides an affective cushion against the struggles felt by the Austerian subject (explored in Section One). Thus, they help to shield themselves by emphasising that they are not being harmed by austerity as much as other families are. In focusing on other individuals, it draws attention away from their own negative affects upon the body that may make them more attentive to the feeling that austerity is harming them. Therefore, a relative acceptance of austerity helps to suppress the negative affects generated by austerity upon the body; and although fearing for other families is a negative affect, it is less intense, due to the more distant connection with others rather than the 'self'.

Furthermore, whilst some Austerian subjects use relative acceptance to suppress negative affects upon the body, in order to deflect attention away from the feeling that austerity is harming them, some subjects do the opposite. Some individuals *embrace* the feeling of anger towards austerity resulting in *exasperated acceptance*. For Caroline, her acceptance came with affects of exasperation:

*“Well the way things are going it [cuts to support] probably will be inevitable. And it will be hideous really, but there’s nothing I can do about it. It’s just something we have to accept and deal with.”*

Caroline’s feeling of the inevitability of spending cuts to support is significant, as it prepares her for this eventuality and enables her to begin accepting austerity. Yet, her emphasis that the spending cuts will be “hideous” highlights her feeling of anger towards austerity measures. Stressing the need to “accept and deal with it” is not to legitimate the uneven spending cuts upon homes and bodies, but to emphasise her feeling of disempowerment at the ability to influence a reduction of austerity measures. This suggests that whilst Austerian subjects may accept austerity, often this is not due to a strong feeling that austerity is justifiable – with the exception of acquiescent acceptance – but due to a feeling that austerity is here to stay and they are powerless to change it, so they must get by as best they can.

However, the notion of “accept and deal with it” may also represent the workings of the resilient subject. Embracing danger is vital to the performance of resilience, in which the subject accepts the dangerousness of the world (Evans and Reid, 2013). Emphasising the need to accept the “hideous” possibility of a loss in support not only indicates the danger of uncertainty, but also an *embrace* of the dangers outside of our control (ibid.). In this sense, an acceptance of austerity can indicate the way in which the Austrian subject may embrace the dangerous uncertainty that austerity can bring. A need to “deal with it” further suggests an act of resilience, as Caroline promotes her own adaptability “so that life may go on living despite the fact that



elements of it may be destroyed” (Evans and Reid, 2013: 84). Consequently, the Austerian subject here is aware of his or her vulnerability in the state of austerity, which leads to an acceptance, and subsequent embrace, of the dangers presented by the uncertainty of austerity. ‘Getting on with life’ may, therefore, be a relation to austerity that enables the resilience of the Austerian subject to come to the fore, enabling them to learn from catastrophes, such as the impacts of austerity, so that they can be more responsive to catastrophes on the horizon (ibid.).

However, there are political ambiguities with the understanding of ‘getting on with life’. As the notion of ‘getting on with it’ has shown, positive affective qualities shield against harm of the individual, for example by suppressing negative affects from taking hold of the body. The various affective acceptances of austerity have also led to the understanding that accepting austerity enables individuals to ‘get on with life’ as easily as possible. In doing so, this acts as an affective cushion against the feelings that austerity is harming the body. Yet, this has implications at the collective level; although this may protect the *individual* from harm, if everybody is wishing to ‘get on with life’, the discourse of austerity is *accepted*. And in this form of acceptance, it implies that the uneven distribution of spending cuts is collectively justifiable, even though many individuals also contest austerity. This, therefore, makes it very difficult for anti-austerity discourses to make the collective feel they are being harmed by austerity, as it suggests that, at the collective level, austerity generates limited negative affective qualities. Consequently, although attempting to ‘get on with life’ helps shield the individual from harm, it can imply that austerity is collectively accepted, which may actually further the legitimacy to target certain homes and bodies in the austerity programme.

#### ***4.5. Section Five: Concluding remarks***

This chapter has provided a snapshot of how austerity is *lived* and *felt* in everyday life for families that are affected by disability. An attention to affect has highlighted that there are many different bodily experiences felt by Austerian subjects towards austerity and the uncertainty it brings. Yet, significantly, these feelings are *not* coherent, but are often varying and conflicting. This indicates austerity as an extremely complex set of phenomena, as it generates an assemblage of affects that can take hold of the Austerian body. The complexity of austerity is even greater when we add the multiple and various discursive fields within which austerity is lived and felt.

A significant finding from this chapter are the ways in which Austerian subjects have multiple, differing and often conflicting modes of relation to austerity. Four modes of relation were identified, yet there are of course many other relations to austerity that have not been explored. The first mode of relation to austerity illustrates the ways in which Austerian subjects

*struggle* with the uncertainty of austerity, in which parents (and other family members) fear losing governmental support for their disabled child. This can accumulate into an affective atmosphere of austerity that can result in the movement of fear, but also of similar affects such as anxiety, between bodies. The understanding of uncertainty as a threat can contribute to the movement of such negative affective qualities, as uncertainty then registers in sensing bodies as something that is a source of danger. The uncertainty of austerity, then, “registers in and through sensing bodies” (McCormack, 2008: 413) that generates multiple worries and anxieties for Austerian subjects, such as how the current and future needs of their child or children will be met. Yet, this section has also shown that austerity is not continuously in the forefront of individual’s lives, rather it has greater *intensifications* at certain points in everyday life. Thus, Austerian subjects may not incessantly feel anxiety and fear, yet these affects may take hold of the body when austerity is felt more intensely. At these points, it can also become evident to individuals that these feelings are as a result of austerity.

For many families an affective atmosphere of austerity that generates fear and anxiety is intensified by the accumulating impacts of austerity, making an uncertain future ever more threatening. Not only is life made more difficult by the fear (or reality) of losing governmental disability support, but also by stagnation in pay and rising cost of living, such as of household goods and bills, and also by the feeling that the state can no longer be relied on to provide support. Yet, this also generates a sense of inevitability that life will become more difficult in the future, in which some individuals feel this struggle is part of the nation’s economic recovery. Thus, anxiety about the uncertain is juxtaposed with the understanding that life must become more difficult for the ‘common good’ of the economy. In so doing, Austerian subjects are producing an “affective cushion” (Berlant, 2010: no pagination) against the loss and struggle experienced as a result of austerity.

The second mode of relation to austerity is the way in which Austerian subjects *adapt* to the uncertainty austerity brings. Individuals take adaptive measures – which includes budgeting, future financial planning and a change in everyday routine – in order to ensure a more financially secure future. On the one hand, individuals are mobilized to adapt by the anxiety brought about by a greater responsibility and difficulty of meeting financial obligations. Yet, sometimes, subjects are also “affectively animated” (Langley, 2013: 5) by the hope of a more financially secure future. Thus, not only does fear of a threatening future play a role in the conduct of Austerian subjects, but also the feeling of hope of a more prosperous, post-austerity future.

The third mode of relation of austerity, however, indicates how Austerian subjects also attempt to *contest* austerity itself. For Bissell (2010), affects modify the body’s ability to feel and act, illustrated in the ways in austerity is contested. Feeling that austerity is unfair leads to

individuals contesting these measures, by appealing against spending cuts made against their child and also contesting governmental discourses. Yet, the multiple affective relations towards austerity make it impossible for a coherent contestation to take place; for example, on one occasion, contesting the uneven distribution of spending cuts was also inadvertently performing the problematic understanding that being in the labour market meant some individuals were more ‘deserving’ of welfare support than individuals who were not.

The final mode of relation suggests that Austrian subjects sometimes simply wish to ‘*get on with life*’. This understanding can be fostered through feelings of hopefulness, in which encouraging hopeful feelings can keep harmful affects from taking hold of the body. Continually shifting back to the importance of ‘staying hopeful’ in everyday life, then, helps individuals conduct themselves in ways that are not consumed by anxiety and fear. Additionally, hope and optimism towards the future suggests a glimmer of uncertainty as opportunity (Anderson, 2011). Also, in allowing hope to take hold of the body, Austrian subjects may help deal with the pathological affects of austerity, such as anxiety and other depressionary affects generated by austerity. However, ‘getting on with life’ can also arise through an acceptance of austerity enforced by a fatigued body. Living and feeling austerity can tire the body to such an extent that the ability to contest or adapt is severely compromised, leading to individuals reluctantly accepting austerity. Other individuals may also accept austerity, yet the various affective relations differ; some may accept austerity with acquiescence or anger or by feeling they are better off than other families.

It is through the acceptance of austerity that the mentality of ‘accept and deal with it’ comes to the fore. Here, Austrian subjects are expected to accept the “dangerousness of the world”, and in doing so, they should *not* try to secure themselves, but accept that life is a continual process of adaptation to dangers outside of their control (Evans and Reid, 2013: 83). There is a paradox here: on the one hand Austrian subjects are required to be entrepreneurial by financially planning, which is an attempt to secure a more prosperous future. On the other hand, subjects should reject of any belief in the possibility to secure oneself and accept that there will be dangers outside of one’s control (ibid.).

How, then, can the Austrian subject deal with such a complexity towards the future? Austerity may, according to governmental discourses, ‘secure’ Britain’s economic future, but the same cannot be said for the economic future of the individual. The discourse of the entrepreneurial striver indicates the individual should secure their own future and in so doing not be dependent upon the state. Yet, at the same time they should never accept that this is possible due to uncontrollable dangers (ibid.) and ‘incalculable uncertainty’ (O’Malley, 2010). But the Austrian subject has actually achieved this paradox; the Austrian subject has both embraced the danger of uncertainty, through the mentality of ‘accept and deal with it’, and also

attempted to secure themselves from the uncertain by financially planning for the future. Consequently, the various modes of relation towards the uncertainty of austerity are significant, as they illustrate the complex and often conflicting relationship that individuals have with austerity; struggling, adapting, contesting and 'getting by' may indicate differing relations towards uncertainty and the future, yet they are all expressions of *how* Austrian subjects are living and feeling austerity in their everyday lives.

## **Conclusion: The Austerian subject – living and feeling austerity within multiple discursive fields**

*“I get on with it and I think we’re fine, and I always think there’s so many other people that are worse off than us... I do try to put a brave face on things.” (Caroline)*

What has been particularly striking throughout this research into austerity is the ability for the research participants to carry on with life as best they can, despite the difficulties they face. Even though Austerian subjects experience multiple anxieties and fears that can take hold of the body, they not only try to secure themselves from these eventualities – such as planning financially for the future – they also attempt to ‘get on with life’ and to encourage optimistic and hopeful affects. Putting a “brave face on things” shows that these individuals are not victims, rather they ensure that they are able to embrace life whilst also navigating an uncertain, and often threatening, future.

However, even though the strength of Austerian subjects enable them to ‘get by’, austerity still matters. Austerity is here to stay for a number of years as a political strategy in Britain and, therefore, governmental discourses are likely to continue to construct it as a ‘common sense’ solution to public debt. In addition, austerity takes place as an atmosphere. This is significant because atmospheres ‘surround’, ‘envelope’ and can “‘radiate’ from an individual to another” (Anderson, 2009: 80). Thus, an atmosphere of austerity functions as an ‘envelopment’ (ibid.), surrounding subjects in this ‘thing’ called austerity. In so doing, individuals live and feel austerity as it becomes transferred into different bodily experiences. Precisely due to its functioning as an atmosphere it is difficult to be mutually exclusive from austerity, particularly because an atmosphere of austerity *permeates* the space from which it emerges. Consequently, austerity can infuse all parts of discursive and everyday life, illustrating it as an important set of phenomena to research.

Importantly, this research has illustrated that austerity is both discourse and an affective fact, demonstrating it as *multiple* different ‘things’. As a result, the methodology focused precisely upon the multiple facets of austerity, drawing upon a form of discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews to explore how austerity is produced discursively, affectively and how it is lived and felt in everyday life. These methodological considerations have allowed me to explore and deconstruct austerity discourses, through focusing upon political speeches and policy documents. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus upon families that are disproportionately affected by austerity measures and how they are expressed in their everyday lives, as well as their relationship to the austerity discourse itself.

### 5.1. Austerity as discursive

The political speeches focused upon are significant, as they have rendered the austerity discourse present and actionable. Interestingly, the word ‘austerity’ is barely used, yet the construction of the ‘deficit’ as an *immediate concern* helps an atmosphere of austerity to form. The ‘disastrous’ consequences that will ensue if Britain’s deficit is not reduced has a specific time-geography: a slow-burn condition, in which there is a long, drawn out decline of the economy. This is placed in stark contrast to the short time-geography of the deficit reduction plan, emphasising that the response to the deficit is short-lived. Thus, although the term ‘austerity’ is scarcely referred to, it remains “in the air” and “ethereal” (McCormack, 2008: 413). In emphasising the importance of spending cuts and the ‘confidence fairy’ (Krugman, 2012), such political speech generates an atmosphere of expansionary austerity, which permeates the space from which it emerges (Anderson, 2009). Austerity is constructed as a way of avoiding the ‘devastating’ eventualities that may occur if the deficit is not addressed, potentially permeating the space of the speech into recipient bodies and generating the feeling that austerity is the *only* viable solution to public debt. Austerity, then, becomes an ordering process, emerging as a strategy in response to an “urgent need” (Foucault, 1980: 195). Thus, the deficit enables the governing of the population through austerity, producing a particular kind of subject – the Austerian subject.

Firstly, there is the ‘*ideal Austerian subject*’ of austerity discourses; they relate to austerity in a way that brings Britain’s economic recovery to the fore, seeing it of highest importance. Thus, any impact of austerity upon this Austerian subject is a sacrifice for the ‘common good’ of the economy. Yet, the second use of the Austerian subject is an ‘*actually existing*’ subject who relates to austerity discourses in many different, often paradoxical, ways. This subject, then, distinguishes itself from the ‘ideal’ Austerian subject by relating to austerity in ways that can both perform and contest austerity discourses. Yet, actually existing Austerian subjects are also distinct, as they are *not* reducible to austerity discourses; their subjectivities go beyond austerity, meaning that they are always more than Austerian subjects.

Debt is further rendered a matter of immediate concern through the discourse of ‘irresponsible spending’. The public deficit is constructed as a result of reckless spending by the previous Labour government, particularly as a result of an expensive welfare state. Austerity, then, is regarded as exercising ‘fiscal responsibility’ and a focus upon the welfare system allows this discourse to target particular sections of public spending in the austerity programme. Thus, both generating fear of a threatening future if the deficit is not reduced, and constructing past government spending – particular on welfare – as irresponsible, allows an atmosphere of austerity to form. However, not only have such discourses somehow constructed austerity as

the 'saviour' to Britain's public debt, other discourses have legitimated the *uneven* distribution of spending cuts over homes and bodies, discursively and affectively shaping who is 'deserving' of spending cuts and who is not.

Towards the beginning of the coalition government, the discourse of 'we are all in this together' was continually drawn upon, aiming to generate a feeling of "one nation united in the face of adversity" (Clare and Newman, 2012: 303). However, this discourse quickly gave way to more binary imaginaries of 'us' and 'them' rather than 'we'. This generates a division between the individual in the labour market and the benefit claimant. As such, the understanding of 'togetherness' is now conditional upon being in paid employment and those not adhering to this conditionality are excluded. Binary thinking, then, invades the discourse of 'we are all in this together' and results in the discourse of the 'striver' versus the 'shirker', which becomes central to the legitimacy of the uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies.

The discourse of the striver versus the shirker carries an affective charge, in which the shirker is constructed as a threat to Britain's economic recovery, through not being in the labour market. The multiple risks that shirkers pose are a way of suggesting that spending cuts should not be evenly distributed across homes and bodies; rather, an uneven distribution becomes a way of destroying the apparent threats posed by shirkers. Interestingly, the shirker is partially constructed as a rational, calculating actor by claiming that individuals make decisions based on the fact that benefit income is more attractive than employment (Wiggans, 2012). The austerity discourse generates the understanding that unemployment is a matter of choice, and so shirkers are constructed as subjects capable of autonomous thought. Yet, the shirker is also a calculating figure without aspiration, indicating an entrepreneurial subject *without* the correct relation to the future. Unlike strivers, shirkers can never fully become entrepreneurial subjects, as they are not their own capital, in the form of human capital, nor are they the source of their earnings (Foucault, 2004). Having an optimistic relation to the future, then, proves crucial in maintaining the binary between striver and shirker; and targeting shirker bodies is seen as a step towards securing an uncertain, threatening, economic future.

The discourse of the 'responsibility deficit' furthers the legitimacy of an uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies. Shirker bodies are seen as shirking their responsibility to be in work by 'playing the system' and, therefore, contribute to the lifestyle of 'worklessness'. The 'DLA factor' is also constructed as contributing towards 'worklessness', in which the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) claim that individuals receiving Disability Living Allowance see the benefit as 'proof' that they were unable to work, providing 'excuse' not to seek work. Consequently, an uneven distribution of spending cuts is understood as a way of restoring responsibility into shirkers' lives. Such discourses have affective charges that result

in numerous negative feelings towards the benefit claimant, thus, ensuing diminishing sympathy towards the victims of spending cuts. Shirkers have become the ‘undeserving poor’ and therefore undeserving of ‘generous’ welfare support. Bodies reliant on welfare support, then, are the targets of the austerity programme and the discourse of responsibility is drawn upon to claim that the cut in funding is with the aim of ‘responsibilising’ shirker bodies. This indicates the workings of a disciplinary rationality. The ‘undeserving poor’ are responsibilised in the name of nation, public and state through cuts to benefit payments. Benefit sanctions act as an “effective control mechanism” (Burton, 2008: 115, cited in Langley, 2013: 8) by making individuals anxious about actively seeking work for fear of losing benefits if they do not. The responsibilisation discourse is “affectively animated” (Langley, 2013: 5), as it produces bodies that are anxious about losing their benefits. The uneven spending cuts produce ‘docile bodies’ that anxiously meet their obligations to seek work for fear of losing welfare support if they do not.

However, for Collier (2009), one technology of power does not saturate all power relations. Disciplinary power can be recombined with other technologies of power in different and interesting ways. The uneven distribution of cuts over homes and bodies is itself an exercise of biopower. Uneven spending cuts suggests that certain bodies – valued bodies – are nurtured by the uneven distribution of reward; valued bodies are spared from experiencing the impact of welfare spending cuts because they do not rely on them. This indicates a productive relation of ‘making life live’ – the valued life is optimised against the threat that is the shirker (Anderson, 2011).

Biopolitical and disciplinary rationalities are also significant in relation to the responsible, self-governing striver. The striver is seen as contributing towards Britain’s economic recovery by going beyond simply being in the labour market by innovating, saving and so on. This illustrates a movement *beyond* a disciplinary rationality, as strivers have an “entrepreneurial disposition” (Langely, 2013) towards the deficit; they go beyond being ‘docile bodies’ and become “affectively animated” (ibid.: 5) by the hope of a more financially secure future. Unlike shirker bodies, strivers here have an optimistic relation to the future by being active in their vision for a more prosperous future. Biopower is exercised here in that the entrepreneurial striver is protected and nurtured as a valued life (Foucault, 1978); yet, this also relies on identifying the devalued life that threatens: the shirker. The biopolitical rationality of the entrepreneurial striver is vital for maintaining the unequal power relation between striver and shirker. A responsibilised shirker will never be quite like striver bodies, even when they meet their outstanding obligation of seeking work. Striver bodies still distinguish themselves from a disciplined shirker simply by being entrepreneurial. As such, ‘docile bodies’ of responsibilised shirkers will never become strivers, as they do not go beyond their



responsibilities, nor do they enact self as enterprise (McNay, 2009). To delegitimize the power relations between the binary construct would also delegitimize the targeting of spending cuts upon particular bodies, as these bodies would no longer be ‘undeserving’ of state support. In so doing, maintaining the binary between Self and Other reinforces the legitimacy of the uneven austerity programme.

However, a paradox emerges between shirker bodies in need of responsabilisation and the discourse of the ‘victim’ of welfare. Whilst the shirker is constructed as having a ‘responsibility deficit’, they are also seen as ‘passive victims’ of a dysfunctional welfare system that presents a barrier to work. Here, then, individuals are not workless because they are irresponsible, but because they are oppressed by the welfare state. This paradox can generate varying affective feelings that the reader or listener may experience. On the one hand, the recipient may feel multiple negative affective qualities towards the benefit claimant, as they are at fault for their own worklessness, and so become the ‘undeserving poor’; on the other hand, the discourse of ‘welfare dependency’ may generate feelings of sympathy, or concern, as the benefit claimants are suffering from welfare dependency. Another contradiction is that benefit claimants are constructed as *both* rational economic actors able to ‘play the system’ and also constructed as ‘victims’ that are ‘trapped’ in welfare dependency. Yet, both discourses are able to legitimate the same action: the uneven distribution of cuts across homes and bodies.

Consequently, the introduction of an uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies is constructed as being ‘fair’ for the taxpayer and ending an ‘injustice’ through welfare ‘reforms’. This is also extended into the realm of disability, in which the discourse of the ‘greatest need’ emerges. The term ‘greatest need’ suggests that support for people with disabilities is now provided only for individuals with more severe disabilities. Austerity produces the predicament that vulnerable bodies may now *not be vulnerable enough* to receive benefit payments. Thus, the *implementation* of austerity policies make it clear that austerity is not only discursive, but impacts upon ‘actually existing’ Austerian subjects that both live and feel austerity.

## **5.2. Living and feeling austerity**

Chapter Four was based upon semi-structured interviews with families affected by disability. This enabled a focus upon how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life, as well as how individuals relate to the discourse of austerity themselves. Importantly, this research has indicated that austerity is closely related to uncertainty, an uncertainty that is ‘incalculable’ meaning that it is unquantifiable (O’Malley, 2010). Thus, an austerity future is also an uncertain future and individuals relate to this in complex ways. These modes of relation to the uncertainty of austerity are far from coherent, illustrating the paradoxical position of the Austerian subject.

Whilst they can greatly struggle as a result of uneven austerity measures, subjects may also perform austerity as a necessity for economic recovery, highlighting that a coherent contestation or acceptance of austerity is impossible.

Firstly, families expressed their fear of losing welfare provision provided for their child or children, which has become an invaluable support. The uncertainty austerity brings, then, generates affects of fear and anxiety, as individuals are forced to imagine the eventuality of losing support. A reduction or loss of support is a materialisation of the discourse of ‘greatest need’, in which welfare reforms see some vulnerable bodies as now *not vulnerable enough* to receive support. Therefore, people with disabilities are still required to go about their daily tasks as usual, yet for some this may be without or with less financial support. This atmosphere of fear means that affects felt by Austerian subjects permeate the space from which they emerge, resulting in the movement of fear from one body to another. This also shows that uncertainty, here, is regarded as a threat rather than a source of opportunity (Anderson, 2011).

The uncertainty of austerity, therefore, generates visceral affects that can take hold of the body, but it also can become *materialised* into everyday non-discursive elements that also carry an affective charge. The austerity discourse can materialise into banal objects, such as a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions, which is enough to create bodily feelings of fear that the envelope may contain within it details of lost or reduced welfare support. Thus, fear of losing support can be triggered by various everyday experiences, demonstrating that simple non-discursive elements can be materialisations of the austerity discourse.

Additionally, for some Austerian subjects fearing a loss of support has become a reality, with as much as *half* of funding cut for their child. This reduction in provision brings with it the fear of how the future needs of their child will be secured. Often it means that there is no money left over towards the end of the month, impacting upon the social lives of both parent and child. As such, austerity remains “diffuse” “ethereal” (McCormack, 2008: 413), as it remains continuously in the background, yet can come to the fore at certain points in the everyday. Austerity may not be continuously in the forefront of individuals’ lives, but has greater *intensifications* at certain points in everyday life. Nevertheless, austerity still means that life becomes harder for Austerian subjects, including stagnant pay, limited employment, increasing prices of household goods and bills, which all manifest themselves at the household level. Yet, whilst this generates affects of anxiety, there has also been acceptance that life will become more difficult in the future. Anxiety, here, is juxtaposed with the governmental discourse that life must become more difficult for the ‘common good’ of the economy, illustrating that feelings towards austerity are never coherent. The focus upon affect here is significant, as it highlights that whilst governmental discourses emphasise the entrepreneurial subject – that is responsible, active and independent – austerity produces subjects closer to Isin’s (2004) neurotic

citizen. Thus, Austerian subjects do not simply conduct themselves through calculative decisions, but also through affect.

Additionally, Austerian subjects also *adapt* to the uncertainty that austerity brings. Often adapting involves a form of financial self-management, including budgeting. This indicates that austerity causes individuals to be more stringent about their everyday finances. Yet, subjects are not budgeting because they are “affectively animated” (Langely, 2013: 5) by the hope of a more financially secure future. Rather, they are mobilised by the anxiety brought about by the responsibility of meeting current financial obligations. Budgeting suggests that individual bodies are *disciplined*, becoming ‘docile bodies’ as they anxiously meet their household responsibilities. A decision to purchase fewer luxuries is also an exercise of disciplinary power; however, there can also be an expression of *hope* in which losses are seen as sacrifices that may lead to a more prosperous future (Berlant, 2010). In addition, Austerian subjects have also become entrepreneurial subjects through cuts in governmental support. The fear of losing support, and the uncertainty this brings regarding how the *future* needs of their children will be met has brought the need to fill the potential funding gap left by the coalition government. Thus, such individuals have an “entrepreneurial disposition” towards the deficit by taking it upon themselves to secure the future of their children. Planning ahead to seek future financial gains indicates a move beyond simply meeting their current household obligations. This suggests that by financially planning, individuals have *become* strivers by possessing an entrepreneurial disposition towards their family’s future. Yet, whilst individuals here perform elements of an entrepreneurial subject, they are by no means saturated by it, as the Austerian subject is a blurred subjectivity.

However, the threatening future brought about by austerity can also bring about a desire to *contest* austerity itself. Austerity has become an extremely divisive ‘solution’ to the deficit, in which there has been much discord between advocates of austerity and those against austerity. Yet, contesting austerity is never a coherent process, and so not simply as contesting governmental discourses. Individuals express the importance of appealing a potential loss of support for their child, which helps to destabilise the discourse that benefit claimants are trapped in welfare dependency, as well as emphasising that welfare is necessary, not a cause of public debt. However, due to the multiple feelings towards austerity, Austerian subjects can also perform governmental discourses alongside an attempt to contest austerity itself. This may be the performance of austerity as necessity, or the inadvertent reinforcement of the binary between striver and shirker. Consequently, producing a coherent contestation to austerity is made impossible by the coexistence of multiple and varying austerity discourses that may all be relevant to the experience of austerity in everyday life.

Sometimes, however, Austerian subjects are keen to simply ‘get on with life’ as best they can in austere times. Often individuals do not wish to dwell on an uncertain future that may be a source of worry. A focus on the present, then, can help limit the negative affects generated by the thought of a threatening future, which indicates an ability to deal with the pathology of austerity (which is a deviation from a healthy, ‘normal’ condition). Suppressing the threat of an uncertain future can also lead to feelings of hopefulness that can discourage negative visceral affects from taking hold of the body. Thus, positive affects can further deal with a pathology of austerity by allowing them to suppress negative affects such as anxiety.

Yet, individuals also accept that austerity is here to stay. Austerian subjects have numerous affective relations towards the acceptance of austerity. The choice to accept austerity may be determined by feelings of disempowerment and a fatigued body. For example, the continual complications surrounding the availability of welfare support can lead to increasing negative bodily experiences that wear out the body. In this case, only through sheer exhaustion of the body is austerity accepted. Additionally, some Austerian subjects may accept austerity, through feeling that others are worse off than them. Others, however, accept austerity as they feel that austerity is justified, and in doing so perform governmental discourses. This suggests that for many different reasons, and with numerous affective relations, individuals often are forced – with the acceptance of an acquiescent acceptance of austerity – to accept austerity. Whilst some may agree with the political strategy in place, many simply accept austerity because they deem their political influence insignificant, and so must try to ‘get by’ as best they can in austere times.

Austerian subjects, then, have a *complex* relationship towards the future. Not only do they fear – and subsequently aim to secure themselves from a threatening, uncertain future – but they also attempt to embrace the dangers that uncertainty brings. Yet, individuals also express *hope* for the future that their actions may bring about a more prosperous outlook for them and their family. As a result, this illustrates that austerity brings about *multiple* relations towards the future that are expressed through the lives and feelings of the people experiencing it.

### **5.3. Implications**

This research presents implications for not only the austerity debate, but also for more theoretical implications, such as surrounding subjectivity. Firstly, this research provides a critique of the apparent binary between austerity discourses and counter-discourses of austerity. These sets of discourses are often regarded as mutually exclusive. However, the paradoxical position of the Austerian subject suggests that individuals do not experience austerity as divided into two different camps of discursive formations. Rather, a focus upon how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life shows that subjects can perform both discourses *and* counter-discourses

of austerity. A notable example is the disjuncture between attempts to contest cuts to disability support, whilst also performing austerity as a necessity. Subjects may draw upon different discourses that, at the time, are most appropriate to their own experiences, and therefore, subjects cannot be pigeonholed into being either for or against austerity. As such, a contestation of austerity is never a coherent process, nor is an experience of austerity in everyday life, due to the complexity at which austerity is lived in everyday life. Additionally, the ways in which Austerian subjects come to accept austerity further complicates the idea of an austerity/anti-austerity binary. Whilst acceptance at the collective level suggests a positive stance towards austerity, individuals have different affective relations towards it, such as reluctant acceptance, exasperated acceptance or feeling better off than other families. As such, this project has provided a critique of the notion that the austerity debate is located in two opposing – austerity and anti-austerity – camps.

Additionally, this research has implications for how austerity is felt in everyday life. Austerity is not continuously felt in the forefront of people's lives. Rather, it is "diffuse" and "ethereal" (McCormack, 2008: 413) because austerity continuously remains in the background, yet comes to the fore at particular points in everyday life. Therefore, austerity is felt in waves of *intensification*, indicating that Austerian subjects feel austerity more intensely at certain times in their lives and less at others. Often, individuals may not feel the presence of austerity during mundane practices, yet at certain times, affective experiences of austerity can take hold of the body, making it intensely present in their lives. Feeling anxiety towards the potential loss of governmental support for a parent's child is an example of this. For some, however, these intensifications of affect are felt more often, including those that are *more* concerned about a loss of funding; one such example from my research is that for one mother "[i]t's in [her] mind most days." This indicates that austerity is continually present, but individuals *feel* it in peaks and troughs throughout the everyday, and for some these troughs occur more frequently.

Furthermore, this research has theoretical implications for understanding subjectivity. The Austerian subject performs a *blurred* subjectivity in austere times, with differing relationships towards the future. This includes expressing elements of disciplined, entrepreneurial, resilient and neurotic subjects. This paradoxical relationship towards the future suggests that Austerian subjects are not simply resilient subjects, whereby they embrace the dangerousness of the world (Evans and Reid, 2013), but also attempt to financially secure themselves for the future. Additionally, whilst these subjectivities have disjunctures between them – such as the conflict between the 'rational' entrepreneurial subject and the neurotic subject conducting themselves through affect – the Austerian subject is able to take *parts* of these subjectivities and use them in a way that expresses their conduct in austerity. This

research, therefore, illustrates the importance of exploring potential hybrid subjectivities, as it may reflect the paradoxical position of *any* subject.

#### **5.4. What comes next?**

Whilst my research gave an insight into the discursive and affective production of austerity, as well as how it is lived in everyday life, its particularity cannot be ignored. As my focus was very specific, there should also be consideration into what could be explored subsequent to this research. Firstly, there is a *methodological* question of how something can be researched that has varying intensifications. As emphasised above, austerity is felt in waves of intensifications and individuals feel it in peaks and troughs throughout the everyday; thus, this brings about the difficulty in researching something that isn't always in the foreground. Semi-structured interviews are not enough to explore this in depth, as it may require taking part in individuals' daily activities, in order to identify mundane actions that they have not themselves connected with austerity. This requires, therefore, a more ethnographic methodological approach to austerity, which would also further the understanding at which austerity is affectively produced.

In addition, it is important to consider subsequent steps to researching austerity *periodically*. This research has focused upon austerity in Britain, yet it has been used as a political strategy, amongst others, throughout Northern Europe and the United States following the 2008 financial crisis. As such, austerity has been lived and felt by individuals in many different countries, begging the question of how austerity is experienced *elsewhere*. Austerity may also be discursively produced in different ways, in which the conditions of possibility for austerity to occur are enabled differently. This concern could be addressed through a cross-national study of austerity, for example between Britain and a Northern European country. To do so would be to expand the understanding of how austerity varies discursively and affectively across spatial geographies.

Furthermore, the question of how austerity is *lived* is important. As exemplified throughout this research, austerity is not experienced in a linear fashion; rather the uneven distribution of spending cuts across homes and bodies means that it is lived and felt differently. Additionally, various other factors are significant to the experience of austerity, such as geographical location and household income. This begs the question of how something like austerity can be researched that is felt and understood so differently by a diverse range of subjects and bodies. This requires a study that moves beyond one group of individuals – here it was families affected by disability – towards more varying backgrounds and experiences.

These considerations not only indicate the limits of my study, but also suggest the scope there is to research the current implementation of the austerity doctrine. Not only is it possible

to explore how the experience of austerity varies across individuals and nations, but there is also potential to draw upon innovative methods that will help examine in depth how austerity is experienced in *every* part of everyday life.

## Appendix

### Interview with Isobel, 22.03.2013, 3.45pm

E: So, I was just wondering, if you could maybe, sort of, start with introducing your child...

I: OK.

E: ...the disability they have.

I: OK, so I'm the mother of three children, and the eldest of the three, [James], has Down's syndrome. He's in Year 7 so he's eleven years old.

E: And what support does he require?

I: Well he's always been in mainstream nursery and mainstream school so far and when he was about 3 or 4 or I think? He got his first annual statement (*um*) and he got a full statement of special needs which means (*um*) he has a legal entitlement to so many hours support a week and for [James] that's always been full support and we've, (*um*) kind of, thought to maintain the full support in his statement because of (*eh*) you know the necessity to have a piece of paper that says that...

E: Yeah.

I: Has been really important for him.

E: Yeah, Yeah, and sort of, over the years, has he received (*um*), you know governmental, like financial support?

I: Yep- he also, so that's his education, he also receives disability living allowance, which he's had I don't know how many years for? Since he was about 4 or 5 I think? Because the condition is that he required more help than a child of his age, and to be honest he did require that from birth, but we didn't really know about it til he was about 4 or 5. (*Um*) and that's just been reviewed and he's just had that maintained for the next 6 or 7 years I think?

E: Oh, OK.

I: So he gets, he doesn't get a very high rate.

E: Hmm.

I: But I can't remember the rates and bands, but he gets a low rate for something, and a middle rate for something else.

E: OK.

I: And in addition to that (*pause*), he' we've just recently, just since he transferred to High school (*um*) have just contacted social services about a year ago when he was ready to come up to year 7 (*um*) because I was worried that he wouldn't be able to be independent at High school unless I stopped work, because in the primary sector (*um*), primary education sector, there's lots



of before school, and after school provision. Which he plugged into very nicely- I think he got some inclusion funding from the government to make sure that they could give him one-to-one support. So we never paid extra for that, they- the provider got support from the government.

E: Ah.

I: But I was worried that once he came to High school those things don't exist because children of 11 are normally *OK* to walk to school on their own, to walk home, or whatever, or stay in the library, do the work and [James] isn't really.

E: Yeah.

I: So, we applied via social services for direct payments. And we got (*uh*) not very many *but* enough a week.

E: Yeah.

I: To mean that we could employ somebody to look after him for an hour before, and an hour after school, three days a week.

E: Yeah. And (*um*) have you noticed any differences in the last couple of years to these direct payments?

I: (*Uh*), I've only had the direct payments a few months so...

E: Oh right yeah...

I: So it's difficult to say, I don't know what *will* happen to those, I suspect they'll be tightened up (*pause*) gradually over time.

E: Yeah.

I: I mean the social worker didn't think we would get them to be honest....

E: Right.

I: She was very surprised when the result came back that we did, but the basis that she made the claim was that, we were a family that lived a very normal life and, that if we didn't get those direct payments we would become needy. And in economic terms we would cost them a lot more by becoming needy (*laughs*) than it would cost them to give them a few hours direct payment, (*um*) the school bit, the statement, *I, I* don't know of *our* case being reduced- he's just had his statement reviewed, so I'm yet to hear, but the SENCO at the school told me that a lot of the statements have come back this year massively reduced by about 50 or 60% in terms of the hours...

E: Yeah.

I: So we're just holding our breath really.

E: Yeah, and have you noticed any other differences in support, you know, in sort of, the local organisation side?

I: (*Um*) well he doesn't really. He's plugged into the voluntary sector for things like special needs football and special needs (*um*) sports generally- and they haven't really changed cos they're voluntary.

E: Yeah.

I: And a lot of it's lottery funded. (*Um*) The amount of provision will just gradually go down because I just suspect that's what's going to happen from what I've heard as positions in local councils get axed and care workers and outreach workers and disability workers. I think that will reduce over time. But, (*um*) it's, for us it's hard at the minute to know that because he's only just at the age where he's starting to access those things...

E: Yeah.

I: Cos [*sic*] he's really stayed very much within the mainstream, kind of leisure facilities with support.

E: Yeah.

I: He's only just at the age where he is plugging into disability things.

E: Yeah.

I: You know what I mean? So a lot of it's voluntary funded that [James] has.

E: Yeah.

I: (*Um*), I mean, I feel quite optimistic, I think I said this to you in my email that I don't particularly feel that our family has been very much affected.

E: Yeah.

I: We've been more affected because we are both teachers. So our pay's been frozen, you know, because that's part of austerity. So that's affected us, the cost of living has risen a lot. So that's affected us. But [James'] provision at the minute, I haven't seen- I keep fearing it- but I have seen a great deal.

E: Yeah.

I: That's happened, but then we do live in Harrogate and he is at [High school] which is atypical of course, [High school] is a much wealthier school than your average.

E: Yeah.

I: And I think, I mean I could be wrong in saying this, but I think even if his hours were cut in his statement, they would still fund his provision.

E: Yeah, yeah.

I: Where as I don't think that many schools could be in that position. I don't think they'd be able to...

E: Yeah yeah, I mean cos I was talking to a family yesterday and she was saying it's, it's just the every, it's not just the cut in support for her child it was also the other things, the job, pay being frozen...

I: Yeah.

E: Have you noticed other parts of your life that have been affected by austerity?

I: Well because we both teach, then yes, but I think that's because we teach, cos you are very aware of school budgets being axed, and for me sixth form funding has gone down, so all our class sizes have got bigger, so life's more pressured, because there's more people in my classes, and I'm not getting paid more, and you know time is more pressured, but actually [James'] provision at the minute isn't affected.

E: Yeah, yeah..

I: I suspect will be, but at the minute I couldn't say that it is. I suspect the direct payments will go down, and I did suspect that the disability living allowance would be cut because there has been a lot of media coverage, hasn't there? About people that get that and people that don't. I think [James'] came back the same, I was amazed. I think that's because downs-syndrome is- it's diagnosed at birth, you have the chromosome or you don't. It's not one that the government can really touch, because it's not like (*um*) a back condition or depression or something that they going to get their axe into aren't they?, because it's more vague and there's a spectrum of (*um*) whether you've got it or you haven't. Downs-syndrome, it's black or white isn't it?

E: Yeah.

I: I think when he gets to adult services I'll be a lot more worried. So then they're more poorly provided for in the first place.

E: I mean, obviously, it's a long way until [James] reaches, you know, independence, does that worry you about the services?

I: I'm sure it should (*laughs*). It doesn't because I don't really worry about anything. I learnt along time since that it was pointless (*laughter from both*). So yeah- it really should worry me. I worry as much about the other two children, if I'm honest.

E: Yeah.

I: Cos [*sic*], how anybody, yourself included maybe, is going to enjoy the lifestyle that their parents enjoyed is beyond me as an economist. You know, how do you do that? (*Um*) My first house cost me £38,000 – that's never going to happen again is it?

E: No.

I: So I worry about all three of them in that respect (*um*), I probably should worry about [James] more. I'm crazily optimistic about [James'] life really, I have been from the start. Because he has such a great life and he's surrounded by *really lovely* family, *really lovely* friends, I suppose I feel far more for the families that don't have that support, because they *are* vulnerable.

E: Yeah.

I: I mean we spend an awful lot on [James], (*um*) from our own money, you know he gets one-to-one everything- piano, tennis, whatever. We are going skiing at Easter, it's costing an

absolute fortune for [James] to ski. It's costing us £780 just for [James'] skiing lessons because it's one-to-one.

E: Yeah.

I: And we are in the really fortunate position where we can earn enough and work hard and fund that.

E: Yeah.

I: But I feel really for families that don't have that capacity because I do think that they're going to face a future that's, that's going to be really tough.

E: Yeah.

I: I mean, I don't know what [James] will do, we've always said that he'll live independently with some kind of semi- independent set-up, you know, a carer, (*um*) and I don't know how that'll work yet.

E: Yeah.

I: It worries me, the quality of the care he might get in that setting (*um*) and I can't see that that's going to improve because carers are paid so little. So I suppose when I think about it, it does worry me, I just tend not to think about it.

E: And also with (*um*) semi-independent living with the housing caps, I mean housing benefit caps. I mean is it that sort of thing that worries you?

I: Yeah, I have no idea how we're going to fund his living, I've not even got there yet- it's really bad for an economist to say isn't it? (*chuckle from E*) I just keep thinking it'll be OK.

E: Yeah.

I: I will look at it cos [*sic*] we've always approached [James'], [James'] life like that. We've always, kind of, sorted this and then sorted the next thing and for us the big thing was getting him to the right High school with the right provision.

E: Yeah.

I: And (*um*) and then we'll think, end there will be a way, cos there always is, but it might be tricky, you know? I don't know yet....

E: Yeah.

I: I mean I'm assuming that we'll end up paying an awful lot of money for his future. And I'm assuming that we'll work hard and earn it. I don't ever assume that someone will pay it for us.

E: Yeah... Does it not worry you as much because you have the ability to pay for it?

I: Yeah, I think so, I think it does. I think I kind of just assume that that'll work because it always has really. I mean, if one of, either my husband or myself became sick and unable to work then that would become a very big worry.

E: Yeah.

I: We are very dependant on a double income lifestyle which we never planned had we not had [James], (*um*) I would have worked part-time and we wouldn't have gone for that approach, but we do because we have to. And it's OK, but (*um*) I am quite aware that when I look at all my peers, I'm the only one doing what I'm doing really.

E: Yeah.

I: (*Um*), but then I think that's the thing of the future, you know. I think women will do that because they'll have to anyway. But no, I suppose if I researched it, what was available and what was likely to be available for [James], I would probably not sleep... (*laughter from both E and I*).

E: And (*um*) for your other children do you worry about austerity?

I: Yeah I do. I probably worry more for them, because somehow or other I think [James] will always be OK. I don't know why I think that, but I.

E: Yeah.

I: I just think life's a bit like that really. So you know, we've got a really lovely supportive network and I always think that'll work. It'll be hard for my daughter, I've got a daughter and a son, as well as [James] and I think that- you know when I had my children, I never intended to work very hard. I intended to bring my children up and work hard in that way and maybe do a few hours of paid work. I did that for nine years and we were quite fine. My husband's salary and me doing that worked. I just can't see that that's going to pay the bills for most children now- and I can't see how my daughter is ever going to have those lovely years, you know?

E: Yeah.

I: But, she might meet a rich man- she might be all right! (*laughter from both E and I*). No but I wouldn't want that either, because that's another pressure and all the- you know, I know a lot of people in their twenties who were all- you know good graduates and you just look at them and think they're never going to have the life that we had really because there are cuts all over. It's come at a bad time hasn't it? Because it's come at a time when you've had to pay for your degrees and house prices have rocketed and that's a very bad combination.

E: Yeah, I can sympathise with that comment (*laughter from both E and I*).

I: Exactly, and it's hard isn't it? We didn't have to do that. So I think all those things combined are going to make it hard for that generation. I'm not sure its austerity that's the key cause, (*um*) and again that could be kind of over in the next five years. I think as the economy picks up we might have a bit more.

E: Yeah, I mean what do you see as post austerity Britain looking like?

I: (*Um*), I think, I don't think, they'll give up on the welfare reform thing because I think that (*um*) (*pause*), is what the majority of the population really feel.

E: Do you mean in terms of pushing through with the reforms?

I: Yeah, I think they'll push through with those reforms and I don't think that's- this might be highly controversial- but I don't think that's a bad thing if it's done properly. The welfare state is there to protect and I think it has got to a point now where it's started not to protect, it's started

to be a substitute for going out and working and that's not helping anybody. It's certainly not helping the people on welfare is it? Because it's keeping them on a very low income in the belief that they can't better that situation. It's got to be- I do think that- we've got to provide a welfare system who's main aim is to get those who can into productive work so they can better their own lives. I think it's absolute lunacy that we might have a system that's meant to do that because that's what it was all about isn't it?- When it started. It's lunacy that we have have a system that is keeping people out of the work because that's a better option- and it it for lot's of people, isn't it? Or it has been for years. Why would you get a job if your going to be worse off, because work is hard, and getting up everyday and doing work is really hard, so it's got to be worth while hasn't it. So I do think it needs reforming. I'm not against welfare reform (*um*), it's just who you target isn't it? You have to make sure you're looking after the people that need looking after.

E: Yeah, do you think it's been well targeted at the moment?

I: Can't see it is- at the minute. I mean I don't know. It depends which newspapers you read and which documentaries you watch to be honest. You've probably done a lot more research than I have? (*Um*) We watched a really interesting documentary by John Humphrys last year in class about the welfare system and how it had gone wrong. And it seemed that (*um*) the wrong people were being targeted for reform and it was kind of, threatening people on disability living allowance that basically, really couldn't work, whereas you were having you're able bodied people sitting at home watching TV all day and it just seemed awful really.

E: Yeah.

I: But, you know, it's media, I don't know, quite how...

E: Yeah, I mean it's a tricky one isn't it? (*Um*) and with these welfare reforms do you think they are to do with austerity?

I: No, not really.

E: Do you think they would have happened anyway?

I: Well I think there's this great realisation isn't there? That the public sector purse can't just keep funding people to not work and I think that's right. But then there's all these other pressures aren't there, like the ageing population, like the European crisis. I think the austerity has come after a period of absolute meltdown in terms of pressure on the public sector is huge. You know like older people, NHS, etc. (*Um*) But I think the thing about welfare reform is, if it's done properly it has to happen, to make Britain productive. It can't end up like the Greeks, or whatever, where you're just not productive enough to pay your way in the world. We've got to do that...

E: Yeah.

I: (*Um*) It's just how it's done, isn't it?

E: Yeah.

I: And it's tricky, I mean I don't think it's easy. I would be slow to criticise because I think targeting the right people is incredibly hard. You know, diagnosing something like severe depression is tricky isn't it.

E: Yeah, yeah, definitely. And, sort of, do you think, austerity is a necessity at the moment?

I: (*Ponders question*). I do, I think we can keep borrowing money and we can keep going into more debt if we are spending it on investments and things that are going to pay back in the long-term. I think if we were borrowing money just to pay salaries and just to pay benefits then we've got to stop it. We're not earning enough. But you know, they could put taxes up instead of cutting spending. You can't go on borrowing money just to fund current spending- it doesn't add up. (*Um*) you can't do that with your own personal finances so you shouldn't do that as a government. But, public sector spending in things like infrastructure projects which are going to make the economy more productive, then I'm all for that- I think you should borrow to do that.

E: And how do you feel about the way the public sector is framed within, the government, that it needs to be, public spending needs to be cut and that the public sector is too big?

I: I don't think that it's too big so long as it can pay for itself. I would never be one to cut back on things such as NHS services, or education, or public parks, or libraries. I just think that the basis for providing public services is massive and sound. Really, I just think it has to fund itself, so I think they need to target, you know, where the need is and they need to be clever about the way they tax people. And I think the tax base needs to increase, rather than tax rates. So you know, people who are earning a lot should pay a bit more, and it should be a bit harder to avoid tax, and those kind of things, rather than whacking up the tax rate another 5 pence, because you can't think of a better way to do it. I think that really matters.

E: You said libraries etc. are important- when you see them struggling, does that worry you?

I: Yeah it does, because I'd hate to think that my children were going to grow up in a world where they had to just pay at source for everything they consume. I don't think that's a good way to live. I think the principle of taking a bit of money from the rich and giving a bit to the poor is very sound.

You know, I don't think that's wrong. As a [teacher] I pay a bit extra, of higher rate tax myself, and I don't really think it's wrong. I think that's fine, but at the same time, I don't really think it's right that, I feel like I work really hard, I don't want that money to be encourage other people not to work, because that's really wrong. It's not helping them, and it certainly isn't helping their children. You know, the children of the people living on benefits are never going to break that cycle.

E: And, do you think that the way that there are caps on benefits- do you think that's the right way to go about it?

I: (*Um*), are you talking about things like the spare room tax?

E: Well, I mean, for example, one thing that George Osborne wants to bring in is that there is only a certain amount a family on benefits can get. I think it's £25,000 but no more than that. Do you agree with that?

I: It depends on need again. If it's a family with a highly dependant disabled child then I think, no, it's not right. It might cost more than that to keep them functioning. So I straight cap seems a little bit *harsh*, but I get the principle that he doesn't want people on benefits to be bring home more than people who are working 50 hours a week. But, I think benefit for not working, and benefit for disability need to be separated, don't they? They need to look at why people aren't earning. I think a lot of disabled people really want to work, and I think a lot of energy has to be put into helping that to happen. Its the fulfilment and personal satisfaction from that, that makes them mentally very healthy. So I think, I am a real fan of enabling people, and facilitating people to work rather than paying them not to. For loads of reasons. Not just the budget- for loads of reasons.

E: Would you encourage [James] to work then?

I: Gosh, yeah. In about the next two years I'm hoping he's got a part time job. I really do think it matters. I'll pay him to work at home if nothing else, because I think that ethic, my parents worked really hard and I've never questioned the need to work and I think it really matters which is why the children of people that don't are never going to get why you do, are they? I think he will work, we always laugh about it, because around Harrogate you see people with Downs-syndrome doing various jobs and we always guess what [James'] going to do. I don't know what he'll do (*um*), but I'm sure he's able enough to do something. But he'll need help to do it, and I think society is foolish if it doesn't provide that help. You know? They're missing out on him working, because he's great and good fun and he's really nice and able, but they're missing out on the long-term gain that they get back from him having a job. The social side and the routine, the health.

E: Does it worry you that the support that would allow [James] to work is going to decline?

I: I probably should be (*laughter from both E and I*). No not really. I'm just wildly optimistic about [James].

E: Well that's good.

I: We were told that [James] wouldn't live beyond about three months when he was born, so I think I've always, kind of, dismissed these negatives and just gone for positives. So I am a bit biased, and I know I am, but it kind of works. So I have stayed with it really. (*Um*) (*pause*), he will be all right really. We spend hours, and hours, and hours researching how he can be all right. If I'm really honest about it, it probably takes me another two or three hours a week of sheer mental energy surfing the internet, phone calls, to make sure that [James'] life is good. I do that and I don't think twice about it. This is what I've always done and that's why I worry so much about the people who can't do it. And I suppose that I will start to come across real blocks to him doing things, but I haven't yet. I think probably Harrogate is atypical again. You have a really active voluntary sector, really well motivated people that want to help. So I think it is atypical in that respect. It isn't that austerity isn't kicking in here, I just think the people I've got dealings with are the same as they always were. So it kind of is a layer of protection from whatever the government is doing.

E: You were saying that you work full time, has that had anything to do with the climate at the moment?

I: Yeah it has, definitely, because I'm not very secure about my husband's job in the future and (*um*) I just think that generally people are- I am generally less positive or less confident that things will be as they are now in the next ten years. So I think we always are of the view that [James] needs more than the average. The economic climate's not good, we're getting older, we'll earn our money while we can really and I think austerity is definitely part of that. The economy's been in recession now for so long and it's not out of the woods is it? It's only just in recession, the growth predictions are rubbish aren't they. It's going to be another five years before we're out of the woods. (*Pause*) I do feel the pressure to go out and earn while I can.

E: Is that a pressure you hadn't felt before, because I know you were saying that before you didn't work for nine years?

I: Yeah, that's right. Partly that was, because that after nine years the youngest one started school and I wasn't going to work full time while he was at home. But, then definitely I was more, more keen to get back, because I could kind of see what was coming. Like for instance school budgets being cut in the austerity process means in our environment here at [High



school] that part-time teachers are all on temporary contracts and it's the temporary contracts that wouldn't get renewed. So by coming back to a full-time contract it gives me permanent, full-time, status. So I would be a lot lower down the list for losing my job. And although, you know, it would never be billed as redundancy- it wouldn't hit the Harrogate Advertiser as redundancies- in effect people are losing their jobs and as class sizes get bigger, they need less teachers. So, I know in my department for instance, we might lose our part-time hours next year. But I won't lose my hours because I'm full time. So definitely that is a thought process that is key to me coming back. Otherwise I probably would have just upped my part-time hours- done maybe three days a week. So, I took the plunge really and came back full-time for security; and that is directly related to austerity.

E: And with the class sizes, is that directly related to cuts in education?

I: Yes, they've cut sixth form funding from something like £4,700 per student to £4,000, which is quite a big reduction, so it means our class sizes have gone up from maybe 18 to 23/24.

E: That's quite a big difference.

I: It is. Yeah it is- and so you need less teachers.

E: And have you noticed in school generally, has there been a bite?

I: Yeah, people are looking for cost cutting measures in a way that I never saw them doing as [High school]. I mean we're still a wealthy school, compared, but people are talking about how we are going to cut costs and I know that the head has it on his agenda, it's a big issue to sort, and I think 90% or so of our budget goes on staff at [High school]. They're aren't that many places to cut from.

E: [High school] is an academy now isn't it?

I: Yeah.

E: Do you mind talking a bit about the other ways that austerity in general might impact on your family, the household in general?

I: Yeah, I can do that. (*Um*) I think what will happen is, I think that my husband and I won't get paid any more for years, so in real terms we will be significantly worse off as inflation has been at 4 or 5%. It's down to 3 [%], but being 3% worse off a year on paper isn't really how it is because inflation is on average 3%, it isn't for us. It's massively higher than that because a lot of it is in food and drink. I'm sure you know, if you ask people about the supermarket bills in the last few years, it's not gone up by 3% a year, it's gone up by about 20 or 25 [%]. So in real terms we are going to be significantly worse off and we, kind of, know that. So I suppose we're just making sure that we earn it while we can and we're just thinking twice about holidays and whether to replace the car, or... So I think that'll be the case for us for a few years. But, it wouldn't make me jump into the private sector, because I think that would be even worse- because of the job security, because of the recession. So I don't think we're in a very bad place compared to other people. I just think we are all having to be careful.

E: Would you think twice about certain things that you would spend money on?

I: Yeah, I certainly have tried to cut down on things like food, and have tried to be more sensible with treats and...

E: You've noticed a significant difference in your food shop then?

I: Yeah, I would say in the last 18 months, I think food has... and I think a lot of people, it's not normally something I would talk to other people about but people are talking about it, so it must be real. The supermarkets are trying really hard, I think actually, to keep costs down, and I think they've got their margins squeezed, so I don't know who's making money. Maybe the banks? Someone's making money somewhere, but I don't actually think it's the retailers. I think they're squeezed. Don't know. I think money is tight for a lot of families isn't it? But then I think a lot of people who work in the private sector are worse off because they've lost their jobs. So they might have gone from two incomes to one. I know a few people in Harrogate who are having to sell up and down-size to release some capital to live on. While they get their jobs. In terms of austerity that's the kind of government spending side- our salaries will stay limited. [James'] provision like I have said- I don't really know. I should. I'll find out more about it I suppose in the long run. I suspect it'll get tighter, but I haven't got any great plans. In terms of the other two, I just think their education will cost a lot more than it even does now. And I think they'll be making the decisions that maybe your generation didn't quite have to make. I'm seeing now at school for the first time this year very able A- Level students opting out not to go to university. It's probably the first time I have seen it in any numbers this year.

E: I can really see that dilemma as well...

I: Because graduate unemployment is high isn't it? So why would you spend £30,000. It's a difficult decision. So I suspect my other two will be in that position. I think the value of the qualifications they get from schools is being questioned as well, isn't it? I don't think they're looking at a great future in that way. They're looking at a future where they'll get their A- Levels and people will say they're not worth anything. Then they won't get a degree because they'll be no point and I think that'll be tricky.

E: So is it their future that you worry about more at the moment?

I: Yeah, probably. Although if I was well read enough it would be [James] I would be most worried about really. I just don't know enough about adult services, but everyone I know, that I've mentioned it quickly to just shakes their head and rolls their eyes and says- well you know... It's very difficult.

E: So have any other people mentioned to you then that also have a child with a disability, are they concerned about provision?

I: Yeah, because I get the odd email saying that the provision has been cut and people are searching for a good alternatives. It seems to be accommodation a lot of the time. But I just don't know enough about it really.

E: I guess he's in an age where things seem relatively stable until they reach adulthood and then...

I: I think it does really. I think we're, [James'] kind of an easy version of what he could be. He's a really lucky lad, he's very able in lots of ways and I think- he's part of a family and for him that's about all he needs. He doesn't have very high level needs- I suppose he does if I'm being honest with myself in some ways, but it doesn't feel like he does. Day in, day out, we live a pretty normal life and that's fine. So I suppose for us, or for him, the biggest issue at the minute is getting the statement for school, which we have got, so I feel quite confident.

E: So what's the statement for school?

I: The statement for educational needs is the bit of paper you need to get one-to-one support in school. It funds your one-to-one support, and if he didn't have that statement, like a lot of people with special needs don't, the school has to fund it. So because he has a statement, any school he goes to gets that money directly from the government and it's not coming out of our [school's] budget. Which is great. If he had a lesser special need that wasn't well documented, well understood, the school would have to fund any other extra provisions and it comes out of their budget.

E: Would they then not be as keen to do that?

I: Yeah. That's how it is and you can understand that. If they're stuck for money, it's putting them in a really awkward position isn't it? Whereas I always feel really confident that [James'] money is safe and it's going to be there. We've just had the annual review and it may or may not come back the same.

E: Right, so you have an annual review of this statement?

I: Every year this statement is renewed yeah, and the government looks again at it and assesses his level of need and decides how many hours of funding to give the school. So up until this point, from him being 3 or 4 when he first got it, they've tried to take a few hours of his, here and there, every year and we've always written and complained and we've always got them back. I don't know what will happen, but when we had the review the Cenco? Was saying that she had a lot of them cut this year.

E: So, he's in year seven? So he's had one statement so far for secondary school?

I: Yeah that's right. He came to secondary school with his existing statement from primary school and it carries on. Then it got to about a month ago, and then we had the statement review. Now we're just waiting to hear back whether that's been maintained. And if it isn't, I don't know what will happen really. We'll appeal it. I suppose the worse case scenario is that they reduce it from 25 hours to something like 18 or... and then [High school] has to decide whether it will provide the funding for [James'] one-to-one. And I suppose in my crazy optimistic head I just think well if they don't, then we'll pay it. Because that's what I always think (*chuckles*). But obviously they'll be a limit to how much we can do.

E: How long does the process take for them to do?

I: About six weeks. I mean it will come back any time now really.

E: And you optimistic about it?

I: I'm more optimistic than if he had a condition that was more on a spectrum, more debatable. I think there's plenty of evidence to show that [James] needs that support. It's a dilemma really, because he's doing very nicely but you almost dare not say he's doing nicely because you might get the support taken away, but the reality is that he's only doing very nicely because he's got excellent one-to-one provision. On the one hand, you've got to write that he's doing well because he is. On the other hand you don't want to mislead the government into thinking "oh this child is great, he doesn't need the support". Because actually if he wasn't supported he could be under a bus. You know, it's that type of danger and he wouldn't learn anything. If you sat him in a normal class without any support he just wouldn't learn. He couldn't access it.

E: Would you mind letting me know if he does get the same support? That would be really interesting.

I: Yeah, yeah, I'll tell you.

E: Thanks. Do you feel like you've changed your routine at all in the last couple of years through potentially spending cuts or rising prices?

I: I guess the routine's changed, because we've worked harder. We work harder than I ever thought we would. I don't resent it. I have a lovely job. My husband doesn't particularly have a nice job, but he works very hard. I think we've just accepted that that's life really. And I think when we question it and look around we just say, well we live in a lovely place, we've got three great kids and that's what you do. But I think if I took a step back and I really thought about it- we're working harder than what is probably good for us to maintain the standard of living. We're not excessive people, but you always want your children to have at least what you had, don't you? Which is hard.

E: So do you feel like you're just working harder to maintain what you've got?

I: Yeah.

E: And in the future do you think you'll be able to maintain it?

I: Well that's the worry if there is one. I'm 42 now and I'm quite fit and I get tired after a week at work- very, very tired. I don't know whether in ten years time- I might be more tired. And pensions, that's another thing I haven't mentioned. That's austerity. I am going to have to work a lot longer now and I'm not sure- well I can't do what I do now when I'm 65, that's for sure. That's another reason for me doing it now. I know I have to do it now, because I really can't teach full on, full-time, in my sixties. I would like to teach, I love teaching, but probably not at this level.

E: So do you think eventually you will have to go part-time.

I: Yeah. You couldn't maintain this if you were either a bit unwell, or... you know we work a lot of hours. We get great holidays of course, but increasingly, we're working those. So I wouldn't- no I don't think it would be a good way to live, to do this in your older age. I don't think that would be wise at all. I mean I enjoy working and everything, it's just very tiring, it's very demanding. I don't think you should probably, looking at my own parents, I don't probably think it's a great idea in your mid sixties to be doing that really.

E: And in the holiday times for [James], like you said he goes to a lot of places that are voluntary, what sort of services does he use when he is not at school?

I: He doesn't really, but when we first applied for direct payments last year, we had to do that through social services and that was the first encounter I had had with social services from him being born. We'd never really needed to contact them and once that approach is made you then, kind of, start being sent stuff. But I never had really been made aware of what was out there, apart from when I had had to find something, like I had searched for a special needs football group and a special needs swimming group. But I can't say he's using anything that he was using a year ago. There doesn't seem to be that much going on to be honest.

E: You don't think that there is that much out there for people with special needs?

I: There doesn't seem to be. I mean there's special needs swimming at the Hydro and stuff like that, but there's not a load of stuff out there. Not really. Leeds seems a bit more active. We've plugged into that, because he's done some tennis at the John Charles Centre in Leeds. I know they run quite a lot of programmes in the holidays, but that's what I'm trying to say about

[James]. He's kind of, one our family, we don't want him to go anywhere in the holidays. It sounds a bit mean, but we want him at home. We both teach and one of the main reasons is so that we can have family time and the other two would be really upset if he was whisked off somewhere. That may change as they get older. He might need a bit more specialist provision. We just have to make sure that everything we do is accessible for him, so like skiing. The other two are going in standard classes, he's going one-to-one skiing for the week. It just costs triple the amount. The fact that he can do it is one of those great motivators for us, because I guess we thought he might never be able to. And given that he can and that he loves it.

E: So is he quite mild on the downs spectrum?

I: I don't know really. I only know four or five kids with downs and I suppose that he quite like to the other boys his age. I think in terms of hearing- there's two of them in Year Seven and he quite a bit more able than the other little girl. He seems to work with the two girls in Year Nine a lot at their level. So maybe he is quite able. But you know a kid with downs is along way from normal development, so there is a massive gap between him and his peer group. But I suppose that's not to be questioned. That's what he's got. That's going to be the case. I suppose yeah he is. He is very good. We've worked really really hard so that he would reach a level that meant that he can access a lot of things. We like to swim and cycle so he was going to swim and cycle if it killed us really. My husband spent hours (*laughs*) making sure that he could ride a bike. Obviously if he had had some conditions that would not have been an option, but I suppose, because we knew that he probably could then we went for it. It took a lot of hours, but he did it. He loves riding a bike now. I mean he's not safe on the road so we can only go off road with him. Swimming took *years*, absolutely years. I was having three lessons a week at one point but he can do it. He can swim quite well. So I suppose he's quite able. A lot of kids with downs don't ride bikes, can't swim, a lot of kids with downs can't speak very well, but really [James] can do all of those things. That still means that he is a *very* long way from his peer group. In the way he thinks, in the way he understands the world. He's just very different, he's wired differently.

E: Have you ever noticed things that hat maybe affected your life in ways that you didn't expect being in the state of austerity?

I: I don't think so. I think the main thing for us is that we are not getting paid any more, living costs a lot more, and we are going to have to work longer and we are going to get less pension. All those things combined, and then if you throw [James] into the mix it's not a great prospect is it? But I don't really dwell on it.

E: From other people that I was speaking to, it's a lot of things combined and then their child is just one of those parts.

I: Yeah I think that is right. He is just an expensive child full stop. I suppose we accepted early on that that was the case and that we would fund whatever we could. That might become impossible and that's what probably will happen is that. Swimming lessons cost a load of money but we did it. Whereas when it comes to independent living there isn't provision there- we will be stuck, because we won't be able to earn enough to do that.

E: Do you feel that there's enough support. You say he's an expensive child. Is there enough support from the government to fill that gap?

I: It's hard to say, because we do get disability allowance. They do pay us something like £270 a month. It's a lot of money. But it only needs a few one-to-one swimming lessons and it's about three months DLA for one-to-one skiing, but the government would probably die if they heard me say that. You know what I mean? The fact that we take him skiing with that little bit of

money, but that's what our family is doing. So he should come. I don't feel the government should pay that, because that's a luxury activity. I just think you take it on the chin really and if well that's what you want to do you have to work hard. I think they probably do pay us enough. I think they do. It's really hard to get that money in the first place.

E: Oh is it?

I: Oh! I gave up numerous times trying to get direct payments. I clocked up- I did keep a tally of it- I clocked up nearly five hours on the phone before I got to the right person in social services. Even with the help of with my friends, who said you need this person. They just kept telling me that I wouldn't get them and that there was no point.

E: Really?

I: Yeah! Every different department went oh yeah, it's not us, it's them. Then they would give me the number, then I would ring the number, then I would be on hold for 20 minutes, then they'd go look at the website, then I would look at the website and it just went on and on. I did just give up and I thought there's just no point really and then Mrs Shanks here, she was just fantastic. She sat me down one day and said you know you deserve that money don't you? She said "you've got to get on the phone". So when my Year Twelves left and I had a free day one week, I just locked myself in a room and stayed on the phone until I did it. But that's what I meant at the start about it you weren't me and you didn't have really good family, and really good friends and you weren't able to fight your corner and you didn't understand the stuff on the website, you'd be absolutely up the spout.

E: You said that you have appealed before for the statement?

I: Yeah, we've appealed most years, I think?

E: And then you have had the money back? So I guess it must be quite difficult for people who haven't got the fight to appeal.

I: Completely, or if they're that literate themselves. I mean the parents of children with special needs don't they? I do, I get quite upset about that thought really. That those children don't have a network to look after them. They might not have really good social support from their family and they probably have got parents that can't fight their corner quite so easily. I mean, I don't particularly fight nastily, I just have to persist and that can wear you down a bit. I think you just have to be bold and think "no I'm gunna try and do that". And it's time, I knew about direct payments for years but I just didn't get round to doing it, because I knew it was going to be a lot of hours and I didn't have them. Even now, I'm in trouble at the minute from social services, because I haven't filled in the last three months paperwork. Because it's just time and, it's so hard to get them and you have to monitor all this money coming in and out. You have to act as employer to the person your employing. So you have to pay National Insurance and tax. It's just a nightmare really, and all for six hours help a week. I'm really doing it on principle rather than for the money.

E: Do you have to pay tax on the benefit then?

I: Well, you can. They give you direct payments. You set up a bank account and they put the money in the bank account and then you choose who you pay. Which is great. So you get someone really good. We've got a great guy that comes and works with [James], *but* your then their employer and that brings with it a whole host of responsibilities. So you have to buy public employers liability insurance. You have to National Insurance and tax. So the easiest way to do that is to me to employ a payroll company to do all that for us. So the moneys going around and

about, around and about, and it would just be so much easier to give him cash in hand. Obviously you're not aloud. So it generates all this time and I just don't have the time to do it really. So I have to that this weekend. Or else I really am in trouble. I got reminded today. But again, working where I work, [High school] is really kind to me in that, although I work full-time, they give me a kind of compassionate allowance in my timetable. So every Wednesday morning for an hour I don't teach, I just do [James] things.

E: That's really nice.

I: Well, that's typical [High school], you'll know cos you've been here. And I do. I spend that every Wednesday morning just sorting [James]. So if there's things like that to do, I'm meant to do it, but I obviously haven't done that job. Just stuff like taking him to the hospital, he has a lot of hospital appointments. So I'll try and book them in for a Wednesday morning.

E: And they allow him to have an hour off from timetable as well?

I: Yeah, yeah. I can take him out of school whenever really. That's not really so much the issue, it's me really. Most full-time teachers don't have any flexibility, you know how it works? You get 12 weeks holiday a year, you don't take term time- you can't. Whereas they just write me a timetable that keeps me free for a bit on a Wednesday so I can nip in and out with him.

E: That's very good!

I: It's very good. It's very, very good. But that's what I mean. If you didn't have that life, if you didn't happen to work for a really great place like that, which a lot of parents with kids of special needs won't, if you didn't have an employer who said "yeah it's OK, you can take him to the hospital for an eye check" then what would you do? You wouldn't be able to work, or you'd have to work very part-time and then your income falls.

E: So do you feel like the networks you have enable you to maintain that lifestyle?

I: I do completely. I think we're protected from a lot of what goes on because of our family friends. The fact that I happen to work in a really nice place, the fact that we live in Harrogate and the voluntary sector's buoyant really does act as a little cushion around [James]. It wasn't particularly planned that way. We obviously lived here before we had him, but I do think that, I think that the families that don't have that are going to struggle and do struggle. That gives them add stresses and strains, doesn't it? It puts strains on the relationships, it leads to family breakdowns, its a viscous circle really. But I don't name any of those families just, because the people I met, with children with downs, one's a teacher, one's a GP, so I don't really know those families that well, because they are all kind of like us. One of my friends with a child with downs-syndrome, has had leukaemia as well, so they have had a much harder time. I think she has actually found social services support to be quite good, because she had a social worker early on, but she would be interesting to talk to about austerity. They get a lot more help because Joe's been plugged into that from being about three. Two and a half, I think he got leukaemia. So she's had a lot more input from them.

E: So their son had leukaemia as well?

I: Yeah, there is a kind of increased risk for all sorts when you have downs, and leukaemia is one of the big risks.

[...]

I: I'm a bit dizzy when it comes to the future. I just don't think about it much.

E: Just one thing quickly, have you heard of personal independence payment?

I: Isn't that direct payments?

E: It's going to replace DLA.

I: That's right, yeah. I've heard of it. That's what I was worried about, but we've just had our DLA renewed. So I'm assuming that we are OK. When I filled in the paperwork to get it renewed, all the time I thought they probably won't be giving us this and it's pointless and then it came back the same it has been. So whether that protects us a bit, from what there about to do, I don't know? Again, wildly optimistic, I'm probably completely wrong. They might be about to take it all off him. I think they're targeting a different group.

E: It might be because he is still a child?

I: Right. That he's below 16?

E: Yeah or it might even be below... DLA does that go on until 16 then?

I: I think so? I'm not sure? No, no adults get it.

E: No, but I mean...

I: Yeah, that's right he'll be reassessed at 16 for the next phase of it.

E: I know another family who were saying that they still get big youth DLA benefits and I think when you become not a youth there might be different rates, but I'm not entirely sure. It seems so complicated!

I: Well it is! That's the thing. If you're not very well read yourself it's a nightmare. I'm kind of guessing that social services help you out with all of those things if you're not coping by yourself, but I don't know. No, I don't know much about it. I've heard bits on Radio 4, I've not read up on it at all. If we got that taken away we would struggle. That would be a real nightmare for me. If they took his DLA away we would really have to cut corners.

E: Are you guaranteed to have it for a number of years now?

I: I can't remember. I'd have to look at the paperwork. I think it said until he was 16, but I could be wrong. I think we've applied when he was five and I think we've had it renewed once. This is only the second time. So what's that a cycle of? About... maybe it's every 3 years. I don't know.

[...]

E: Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed, you've really helped me and it's been really nice to meet you.

I: It's been a pleasure.



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