

The Role of the State in Shaping Young Women's Experiences of Austerity

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the gendered impact of austerity, contributing to an enhanced understanding of women's experiences of austerity. It approaches austerity as a set of coexisting ideological (moral-political-economic) discourses and policies, that construct gender in particular ways, and that have particular gendered social effects. This thesis argues that it is vital to understand the workings of the state and the wider historical legacies that helped to produce inequalities through material and symbolic violence, since it is this context which frames how austerity is lived and felt in the everyday. This thesis thus examines the symbiotic relationship between the states production and legitimisation of austerity, and the ways in which it is experienced and articulated by young women in their everyday lives. Exploratory and interpretative in nature, this study draws on interviews and group discussions with sixty-one young women from different classed and 'racial' backgrounds, aged between 18 and 35, in Leeds, London, and Brighton during 2014 and 2015. Through this combination of qualitative methods, the research highlights the multivalent ways in which difference contours women's everyday lives in the current context. This study demonstrates that the ways in which women negotiate, navigate, speak about, question, reproduce, and resist austerity are impacted by these differences.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Everyone's had enough. Staff are overworked, we haven't had a pay rise for years, services and patients are suffering, and everyone wants to leave or take time off. I work at a private practice one evening a week to get more money, and sometimes work weekends at a private hospital. I've cut back, and I've become a lot more careful. I mean, I'm not extravagant, I never have been, but I do enjoy myself, I go on holiday, but I try to not eat out all the time, and I won't go buy something just because I think it's nice. I can't afford to buy a house, despite the fact I've been working for almost ten years, and I don't have a student loan to pay back. *So I do notice it, and see that things* are more expensive now. Living in London, and working in the NHS, it's not easy.

(Anna, 27, middle-class, white, physiotherapist, London, August, 2014, italics my emphasis).

I notice it. Since the last year and half actually. *I can see it.* Now I'm working, it should be easier, right? I get Housing Benefit and Tax Credits and I can get credit now, I have an Argos card, which I couldn't get before. But my Housing Benefits have been deducted. When I first started [working] I was paying something like £36 towards my rent and that's now jumped to £60 per week. That's doubled in a year. I get in arrears just like that [pause] I'm trying to keep on top of it, but it's lot of work. Sometimes at the end of the month, I'm left with £30 to do shopping. I'm sweating to get to work, sweating to get him to school, and I've got £30 to do shopping!! And like any kid, my son wants the latest trainers. I do feel bad, but I just can't do it, and I tell him, 'I have to buy the bargains or it won't work'. The only thing I spend on quality is his uniform. *I'd love to know how others [women] do it, I really would.*

(Marie, 28, working-class, black, part-time waitress, London, March 2015, italics my emphasis).

This thesis attempts to understand the gendered impact of austerity. It does so through exploring the symbiotic relationship between how austerity is produced and

legitimised by the state, and articulated and experienced by young women¹ in their everyday lives. For the sixty-one young women involved in this study, aged between 18 and 35, from diverse class and 'racial'² backgrounds, living in Leeds, London and Brighton during 2014 – 2015, austerity was not only made present in different ways, but had differing consequences. As I explore, these differences arise from the differing resources and capitals available to be mobilised by them in the present, and the historical legacies that structure, reproduce and legitimate inequalities produced by the current crisis of financial capitalism. This thesis therefore examines the particular configuration of the state and gender, class and 'race' relations, in the specific context of UK austerity.

Foregrounding difference when studying women's experience of austerity is important. Austerity measures, to date, have disproportionately affected women, 86 per cent of cuts have fallen on women, particularly those from working-class and black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds who live in northern regions of the UK (NEWomen's Network and Women's Resource Centre (NEWN and WRC), 2012). Despite this unequal effect, austerity has been framed through the moral discourse of being 'fair' and 'necessary', in which the public has repeatedly been told 'we are all in this together' (Osborne, 2009, 2012, 2015). Those most affected by austerity measures have been labelled as 'undeserving' recipients of state support and blamed for the austerity programme. Examples of those 'undeserving' include the 'welfare mother', the immigrant and the unemployed. This thesis therefore approaches austerity as a set of coexisting ideological (moral-political-economic) discourses and policies, which construct gender in particular ways, and have particular gendered social effects. This understanding allows us to see the commonalities in women's experiences, but also the multiplicity of ways through which austerity is lived, felt and spoken about. This is clear

¹I understand that the category woman is a contested, and socially constructed category, rather than a biological category (see Butler, 1990).

²Throughout this thesis, I put 'race' and 'racial' in speech marks, since I understand these terms as being relational, plural, dynamic, and socially constructed concepts, rather than biological categories (see for instance Alexander and Knowles, 2005).

in the above quotes from Marie and Anna, and is further developed throughout the pages of this research. Marie and Anna both notice austerity in their daily lives, yet, this is lived and felt differently. This is due to their differing circumstances, and the types and amounts of resources and capitals that they each have available to be used in the current context.

This thesis unpacks and extends the understanding of austerity and its gendered impacts, through exploring the plethora of ways in which the term is produced and legitimised by the state, linking to wider historical legacies that helped to produce inequalities through material and symbolic violence. These historical processes have occurred both outside and within Western societies since the fifteenth-century. It is therefore necessary to understand how people have been constructed as 'inferior' and 'superior', through the designation of moral differences, in order to recognise the nuances of the gendered austerity project and the complex ways through which austerity is lived and felt by women in the everyday. My thesis thus explores the historical context for the current climate. It is through such an analysis that we can begin to understand the gendered nuances of the austerity project, and the complex ways through which austerity is lived and felt by women in the everyday. By examining the diverse experiences of women amidst austerity, this study provides an in-depth qualitative examination of the multivalent ways in which difference contours women's experiences in the current context. I explain how austerity affects women's lives to different degrees, and in different ways, effects which are shaped by their class and 'racial' background. I illuminate the ways in which women negotiate, navigate, speak about, question and resist austerity are impacted by these differences. My research thus adds to sociological understandings of how power works in the present, and it helps to myth-bust and fracture the dominant socio-political and media discourses.

Understanding Austerity Policies

Austerity appealed to many Eurozone politicians in the aftermath of the 2007–2009 financial crisis, perceived by the large majority of politicians as the only possible response in both Europe and the US (Blyth, 2013). This view was especially prevalent in Britain. The UK Coalition (Conservative–Liberal Democrat) government (2010–2015) introduced their programme of austerity in 2010, as a means of reducing the government budget deficit brought about by the 2008 financial crisis. The government originally stated that the programme would last for a five-year period. In 2014, the Treasury protracted the planned period of austerity until at least 2018, to try to further stabilise the economy (Kirkup, 2014). In 2015, it was extended to 2020. Following the UK EU referendum of 2016, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne (2010–2016), estimated that the goal of eliminating the deficit by 2020 was no longer realistic (Goodman, 2016). His successor, Philip Hammond (2016–present), has since continued with the austerity programme, but abandoned plans to eradicate the deficit by 2020 (Wilkinson, 2016; Parker and Jackson, 2017; Chakelian, 2017).

Records from the House of Commons Library show that by 2020, there will have been approximately £90.8bn in cuts made by the austerity programme (Cracknel and Keen, 2016). 86 per cent of these have fallen on women, 14 per cent on men (ibid). These translate into a range of budget cuts. Due to the expansive and complex nature of cuts and reforms in the UK context, it is difficult to provide a coherent account. I therefore focus on data detailing the real change in department budget cuts between 2010–2011 and 2015–2016, which are likely to have the most direct impact on women (see Figure 1 below).

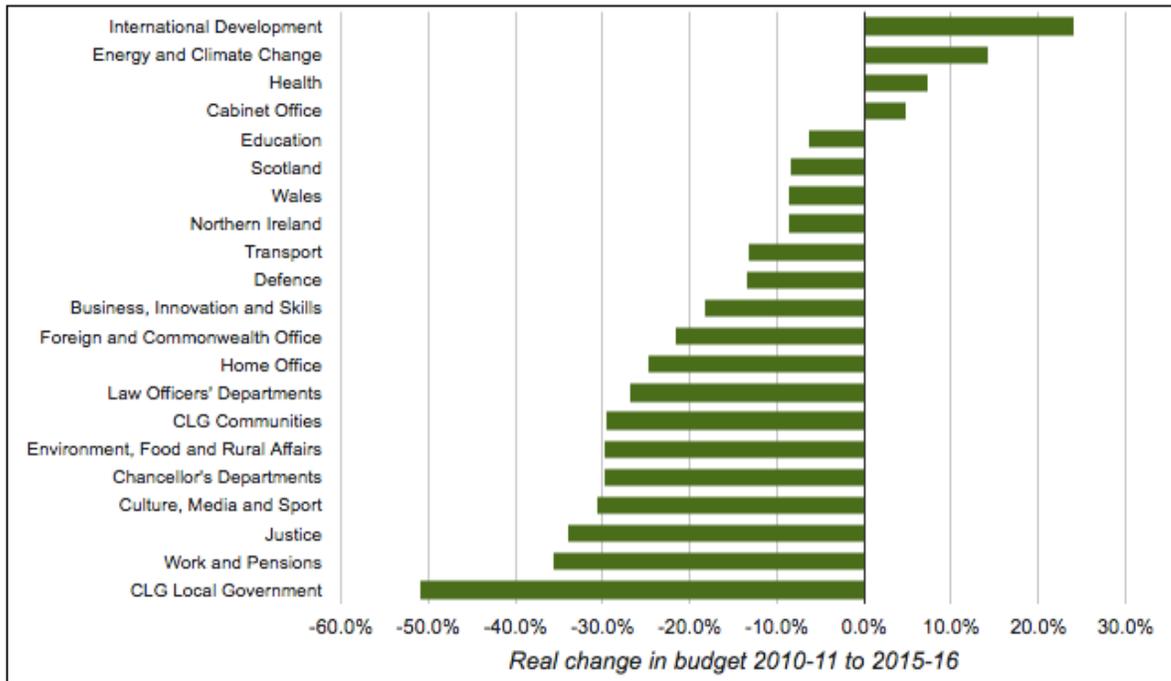


Figure 1: HM Treasury, *Public Spending Statistical Analyses 2015*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2015>) [June, 2016]

The Department of Communities and Local Government has had the largest per cent reduction of all government departments (51 per cent). However, as Ruth Raynor (2016a: 20) notes, 'the localisation of the process makes it difficult to give a standard account of the cuts'. For example, Leeds has been hit harder by government cuts than many other authorities, a 12.5 per cent cut, compared to the 10.3 per cent average for core cities. This has resulted in Leeds losing £180 million of core government funding since 2010 (Brown, 2016).

The Department of Work and Pensions has been cut by 35.8 per cent – more than £21bn has been cut from the welfare budget. These cuts include (but are not limited to): a 1 per cent limit on most benefit rises, cash freezes to Child Benefit, a cap on the total amount

households can claim for those aged between 16 to 64³, and cuts to housing benefit⁴. The removal of the spare room subsidy (known as the 'bedroom tax'⁵) has meant that, depending on the number of rooms 'available' in a home, a percentage of eligible rent is withdrawn. The introduction of Universal Credit (a single monthly payment) has changed how benefits are paid. For people aged 16 to 64, the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) has replaced the former Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Parents with children are now moved from Income Support (IS) to Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) when the child turns five. Since 2008, this age has been reduced from twelve, ten (in 2009), and seven (in 2010). Parents or carers receive the same amount of money, but must prove that they are actively seeking work, or face sanctions. This therefore imposes more conditionality on the receipt of welfare. There have also been significant cuts to legal aid, and a reduction in public expenditure on schools (11 per cent), further and higher education (33 per cent), social care (23 per cent), and early childhood education (19 per cent) (WBG, 2014a, 2014b).

Research Questions

The broad aims of my research are to explore the symbiotic relationship between the ways in which austerity is produced and legitimised by the state, and, articulated, and experienced by young women, in their everyday lives. Given these aims, my research questions are as follows:

³People living in London can receive a maximum benefit income of £23,000 per year; those outside of London can receive £20,000 per year.

⁴Since April 2017, people are no longer automatically entitled to Housing Benefit. This benefit can be claimed if you are a parent with dependent children, classed as a vulnerable adult, or if you have worked continuously for six months before making a claim (Money Advice Service, n.d).

⁵People with one spare bedroom have 14 per cent of their eligible rent withdrawn, and those with two or more spare bedrooms lose 25 per cent of their eligible rent.

1. How does the state produce and legitimate inequality in the current crisis? How is this connected with wider historical legacies?
2. How do differently positioned young women live with and navigate through austerity?
3. How do they talk about austerity and crisis?
4. How do young women speak about and dialogue with issues of gender equality and fairness in the context of austerity?
5. How do they think of and construct their futures in the context of austerity?

This thesis takes a qualitative approach to addressing these questions. I conducted forty-nine interviews and two group discussions (twelve women in total) with sixty-one young women aged between 18 and 35, from different class and 'racial' backgrounds. The interviews and group discussions were performed in Leeds, London and Brighton during 2014 and 2015. Despite examining women's experiences in these different cities, this research is not a comparative study on the effect of regional differences on young women's lives, and is not set up as such. Rather, these regional differences allow for an understanding of the diversity of women's experiences from different backgrounds, and from cities with different historical-economic processes. The use of interviews and group discussions allowed me to understand how austerity is lived and felt by these women. To understand my research questions, I have drawn on a wide range of feminist theories around gender, class, 'race', the state, and austerity. I also draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2014, 1986) when discussing the state and the mobilisation of capital. However, my approach to his work takes a flexible and feminist approach. The next section outlines the theoretical tools used in this thesis, including austerity, neoliberalism, the state, and the mobilisation of capital.

Theoretical Frameworks

Framing Neoliberalism

The term 'neoliberalism' is believed to have originated in the 1930s with the work of Arthur Rüstow and the Walter Lippmann Colloquium – an international meeting of liberal theorists including Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises (Gilbert, 2013:7, also see Anderson, 2016; Davies, 2014; Gane, 2014; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Foucault, 2008). While the term itself was rarely used in the decades that followed, succeeding the crisis of Keynesian policy-making during the early 1970s, neoliberal ideas quickly gained greater intellectual and political legitimacy, especially in the US and Britain (Davies, 2014). Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the long history of neoliberalism, it is important to define the term itself. To date, as Terry Flew (2015) rightly observes, 'neoliberalism has become an explanatory term to define almost everything, albeit from a certain critical angle' (2015: no pagination, also see Gamble, 2001). This results in neoliberalism tending to become, in Bob Jessop's terms, a 'chaotic concept' (2014). Aihwa Ong states that 'neoliberalism seems to mean many different things depending on one's vantage point' (2006: 1). For example, Elizabeth Bernstein and Janet Jakobsen (2013) point out that neoliberalism can be understood as a set of economic policies, as a political project, or as a time period that frames both economics and politics covering the last decades of the twentieth and first decades of the twenty-first centuries.

Although periodisations vary⁶, many scholars locate the beginning of neoliberalism in the 1970s. However, the major schools of thought debating neoliberalism tend to reinforce divisions, rather than make connections. The emphases of theories of neoliberalism also differ. For neo-Marxists, such as David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is

⁶David Harvey (2005) locates the manifestation of neoliberalism in the US and Britain during 1978-1980. Other theorists, such as Marcus Taylor (2006) and Naomi Klein (2007), locate the advent of neoliberalism earlier, with the overthrow of Salvador Allende as president of Chile in 1973, and the imposition of new economic policies promoted by the Chicago School of economic thought (Bernstein and Jakobsen, 2013).

understood as an agenda of upward economic redistribution. One that is characterised by structural adjustment policies, enforced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which have targeted the economies of countries within Latin America, Asia, and, since 2008, Europe. For neo-Foucaultians, such as Wendy Brown (2005) and Nikolas Rose (1999), neoliberalism has been imagined as a cultural project, premised upon a shift toward governmentalities that merge market and state imperatives, and which produce self-regulating 'good subjects' that embody ideals of individual responsibility (also see Dardot and Laval, 2013). For Loïc Wacquant (2010, 2012), who draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1994), neoliberalism is invoked as a new mode of 'statecraft', in which he sees the privatisation of formerly public goods and services, the shift from the welfare state to a carceral state⁷, and the attendant rise of new governing institutions (including NGOs and corporate entities) as core features. Teresa Gowan (2012) highlights the contradictory uses of the term 'neoliberalism' itself, noting how different theoretical lineages, 'based on fundamentally different ideas about the nature of political power, barely speak to each other' (no pagination). She suggests that some of these contradictions might be usefully resolved by bringing these theoretical frameworks into relation with each other, through close investigation of substantive issues. With this in mind, I argue that neoliberalism can be seen not only as a form of macro-political economy that helps to redistribute wealth upward (Harvey, 2005), but also as a cultural project, creating new self-responsible subjects (Foucault, 2008) or what Bourdieu (1994) would call 'doxa'⁸, resulting in a punishing, punitive state.

As Dardot and Laval (2013) have discussed, many in Europe and the US thought that the financial crisis had sounded the 'death knell of neoliberalism' and that the new epoch would see the 'return of the state' and 'market regulation' (1: 2013, also see Davies, 2013; Mirowski, 2013). The 2007 US housing bubble collapse and the fall of Lehman Brothers

⁷A 'carceral state' is a state modeled on the idea of a prison. It employs physical boundaries in order to gain control of urban space.

⁸'Doxa' is a term used by Bourdieu (1994) to denote what is taken for granted. For Bourdieu, it is when 'the natural and social world appears as self-evident' (1994: 160).

Bank in 2008 caused the near collapse of the global financial system and triggered the deepest and most protracted economic crisis after 1929 (Rubery and Rafferty, 2014). The UK financial crisis began comparatively early in the summer of 2007, and, as with the economic crisis of the 1970s, the global financial meltdown cast into question the political–economic thought that had produced it. Joseph Stiglitz, a heterodox US economist, was quoted in *Berliner Zeitung* in October 2008, as saying ‘neoliberalism, like the Washington Consensus, is dead in most Western countries’. ‘Wakes for neoliberalism’ were posted all about the Internet in 2008–2009 (Mirowski, 2013:33), with leading political figures jumping on the bandwagon. The then French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced the rehabilitation of government interventionism in the economy. I argue that this observation – that the crisis marked the end of neoliberalism – both underestimates, and fails to understand the characteristics of neoliberalism. As Dardot and Laval (2013: 1) argue, ‘to get the character of neoliberalism wrong, to ignore its history, and miss its profound social and subjective springs, was to condemn oneself to blindness and impotence in the face of developments that soon ensued’. They go on to argue, such thinking was premature: ‘far from impairing neoliberal policies, the crisis led to their dramatic reinforcement in the shape of austerity plans put in place by states that were increasingly active in promoting the logic of competition in financial markets’ (ibid).

Framing Austerity: (Gendered) Moral–Political–Economy

There are clear links between neoliberalism and austerity, since the ‘objectives of austerity align neatly with those of neo-liberalism’ (De Benedictis and Gill, 2016: no pagination; Jensen, 2012; Allen et al., 2015). This thesis speaks to the growing literature that explores austerity as a moral–political–economic project, highlighting the gendered, classed and racialised⁹ construction of its claims and processes. It is by

⁹When I use the terms racialised and racialisation, I note that racism cannot be seen as derivative of ethnic phenomena, but needs to be understood with reference to the discourses and practices by which ethnic groups (through their ‘culture’) are inferiorised, excluded, and subordinated. These processes cannot be

understanding austerity in this way that this thesis conveys how austerity is made possible by the state through a set of discursive formations, and how these are materialised in, and impact upon, women's everyday lives.

The framework of austerity that I have described is different from the dominant critical conception of austerity by political elites and economists as an economic programme of fiscal management. As Rebecca Bramall (2013: vii) notes, for some, austerity is 'first and foremost, and sometimes exclusively, an economic procedure'. In the economic sense, austerity is understood as 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 budget, debts and deficits' (Blyth, 2013:2). This has translated into a range of budget cuts in the UK since 2010, across government departments. As discussed above (and as will be explored more fully in Chapters 3, 5 and 6), this has included changes to welfare provisions such as the 'bedroom tax', punitive sanctions, and cuts to state-led services. These cuts have targeted *already* marginalised groups, and have aggravated *existing* divides of class, gender, 'race', sexuality, and disability at local, regional, and global levels (see for example, Dorling and Ballas, 2008; Hall, Massey and Rustin, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Mendoza 2015). I argue that austerity cannot be simply understood as solely an economic programme of fiscal cuts and reforms. Austerity is more complex. To fully understand the different aspects and features of austerity, it is imperative to move beyond this one-dimensional understanding.

Scholars have written extensively on the different aspects and features of austerity. Sara De Benedictis and Rosalind Gill (2016) describe austerity as 'a site of ideological and "discursive struggle", enacted and played out by the State and in public sites and popular culture in particular ways, with material outcomes' (no pagination). Therefore, austerity policy has an ideological dimension. Labelled as a 'dangerous idea', which has been

understood without considering their interconnections with ethnicity, nationalism, class, gender, and the state (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Martins Jr, 2016: 10-11).

deployed at different times and in different contexts, Mark Blyth (2013) argues that austerity is a means of providing political elites with a ready-made platform to execute their political will. John Clarke and Janet Newman (2012: 2) focus particularly on the current context, and go further into the specificities of this argument describing the 'alchemy of austerity' and its 'shape-changing' nature. They note that austerity can be understood as an idea, due to the way in which it has been constructed and re-worked, by so-called 'political and financial wizards'. They argue that the locus of the crisis has been moved from the private to the public sector, transformed from a financial crisis to a fiscal crisis, and shifted from a crisis located in the banking and financial sectors, to that of a global crisis. The crisis, they argue, has thus been 'ideologically reworked from an economic problem (how to rescue banks and restore market responsibility) to a political problem (how to allocate blame and responsibility)' (ibid; also see Krugman, 2012, 2015; Jensen, 2014; Blyth, 2013; Piketty, 2013; Graeber, 2013). Austerity, as an economic policy, is therefore produced by the state.

As I discuss more fully in Chapters 3 and 4, austerity has been constructed as the common-sense solution to the issue of debt. Austerity is enacted through moral imperatives, which emphasise the disastrous consequences of failing to reduce the deficit, frame the out-of-control welfare system as the cause of the crisis in need of being dismantled, and represent austerity as the only viable response. The question of welfare has always been a contentious issue – by no means has this anti-welfare discussion been brought about by austerity. However, it has intensified with the austerity project, since austerity has become firmly entrenched across mainstream economics as the only answer to the question of welfare (Jensen, 2012, 2013b, 2014). This is despite the fallacies inherent in such discussions, which, for example, claim that welfare spending led to recession and debt (Krugman, 2015, Blyth 2013; Kotz, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012; Graeber, 2013; Arthur and Inman, 2013; Elliot, 2013). The closing down of alternatives can therefore be understood to be a key ideological mechanism, since it establishes a singular view of economic circumstances, and solutions, and renders contrary positions illegitimate (Jarrett, 2014: 145).

The legitimization of austerity by the state has been done in gendered moral terms. As Clarke and Newman (2012: 11) note, 'the contemporary politics of austerity combines an economic logic with a particular moral appeal (shared sacrifice and suffering, to fairness, freedom, to a sense of collective obligation)' (also see Morris, 2016; Harvie and Milburn, 2013). When making the case for austerity, Liam Stanley (2013) argues that politicians liken the capacity and finances of the state to a household. When the state is likened to a household, it appears that we are all to blame for the crisis. Reducing debt is therefore experienced as a moral imperative, since we all need to live within our means (also see Forkert, 2014). However, the idea of the 'household' has a specifically gendered connotation. It puts the onus on citizens - specifically women - to 'help the nation' recover from the crisis. The role of (female) citizens is therefore to conduct themselves in accordance with the values of enterprise, resilience, thrift, hard work, and economic productivity at home and in the workplace (see Allen et al, 2015; Jensen, 2012, 2013a; Evans, 2015, 2016, 2017).

This sense of collective guilt and obligation is not the only use of (gendered) moral economy. The programme also produces and reinforces divisions and blame inside of the population, through the binary figures of 'skiver' and 'striver'. As will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the 'skiver' (the unemployed, single mother, immigrant, sick and disabled) is understood as economically unproductive (unpaid labour and forms of care are not recognised) and lacking in norms of good behaviour (undisciplined, chaotic, and irresponsible). This form of austerity moralism (as will be discussed below and in more detail in Chapter 4) shares similarities with earlier forms of moralism, principally the observation that specific groups in society take advantage of the hard-work of the majority (Forkert, 2014: 43; Hall et al., 1978; Hancock, 2004; Tyler, 2008; Todd, 2014). These (gendered, classed and racialised) binaries are, as Tracey Jensen (2013b: no pagination) argues, 'polarising, designed to censure, accuse and condemn, to de-contextualise and individualise blame for stagnant social mobility and the conditions of poverty and worklessness – rather than structural inequalities

systematically produced by neoliberal economies'. They are also 'designed to produce or procure a consensus for welfare rollback and the reasons for deepening inequalities' (ibid; also see Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016).

Such sensibilities and subject positions are also symbolically legitimised within the cultural sphere (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Jensen, 2014). As Raynor highlights, 'exceptional cases are made grotesque, in order to stereotype benefits claimants, and produce and/or feed public appetite for what has been described as "poverty porn"¹⁰ (Raynor, 2016a: 28). This, she continues, demonstrates how 'a blurring of the cultural and political discourses of austerity hold together both a sense that a) we are "all in it together" and therefore all collectively responsible for taking control of excess and b) that responsibility can and should be taken by somebody or something elsewhere (most commonly those undeserving excessive figures)' (ibid).

I therefore frame austerity, in this thesis, as an economic policy with unequally distributed effects, as a complex set of political-moral ideologies (Bramall, 2013: 3) and as a cultural tool that works in part to sustain those political-economic strategies (Jensen, 2013b; 2014). It is by framing austerity in these ways that this thesis is able to convey how austerity is made possible through a set of discursive formations, and how these are materialised in, and impact upon different women.

Framing the Gendered State

As discussed above, the state and social institutions play an important role in the (re)production of difference and inequality. This thesis moves away from social, Marxist and liberal feminist positions on the state, which understand the state as either a neutral

¹⁰As Jensen (2014) notes despite being a highly contested term, 'poverty porn' 'has been used to critique documentary television in post-recession Britain which focuses on people in poverty as a-political diversionary entertainment' (no pagination).

arbiter, as solely patriarchal or as essentially capitalist (see for example, MacKinnon, 1983, 1989; McIntosh, 1978). This is despite the importance of these analyses, specifically Mary McIntosh's analysis, which highlights the strategic convolution of state action in gender politics, noting how state agencies act under contradictory pressures to yield ambivalent policies (also see Barrett, 1980; Eisenstein, 1979). Yet, such theorisations suffer from a lack of complexity. For instance, as Sophie Watson (1990: 4) notes, despite Marxist and socialist feminist emphases on the state not just as an institution, but as a form of social relations, the state still appears to be an 'entity which limits and determines our lives'. She goes on to argue that the state is also understood to 'act in the interests of capital, which defines who we are and what we need, which deflects class conflict and which obscures class divisions' (ibid).

Despite the state being understood as a site of conflict and contestation, and as an arena of struggle, as Watson posits, feminist have nevertheless tended to 'imply a relative coherence to the state' (1990: 7). The state is thus assumed to be a homogeneous entity that lies almost outside of society, rather than being something which is created in part because of interactions with different groups (ibid). The state should instead be understood as a complex arena, consisting of complex structures and complex actors (Connell, 1990). Sonia Alvarez, for instance, has taken issue with the state being understood as a homogenous entity. In her study of transition politics in Brazil (1990: 271) she suggests 'a need for a more complex, less Manichean perspective on gender and the state', emphasising the importance of looking at different conjunctures and periods. Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson (1992: 54) reconsider the state in the light of post-structuralist theory, which they argue, is 'accorded no unity, individuality or rigorous functionality, but is nevertheless recognised as an important focus of power'. Despite understanding the multifaceted complexity of the state which does not lie outside of society, unlike post-structuralist feminists I do not abandon the concept of 'the state' as such. I see the importance of conceptualising the state as an entity and as a central feature of society.

Bourdieu (2014) is useful for understanding the state and its complexities, but does not consider how it relates to women. For Bourdieu, the state is a social field – ‘a set of objective and historical relations between positions of social actors and institutions who struggle over the appropriation of symbolic power’ (2014: 4). In other words, he sees the state as a space organised around the conversion of direct conflict and struggles between parties, professionals, and groups, over the power to impose a legitimate vision of the social world. In this sense, the state has the power to create social divisions and to reproduce social identities through its dominant discourse, categorisations and judgments. In the words of Mauricio García Villegas (2004: 60), ‘the state has the power to (re)make reality by establishing, preserving, or altering the binary categories through which agents comprehend and construct that world’, such as moral/immoral and good/bad. Consequently, the state becomes ‘centrally involved in the (re)production of symbolic domination and symbolic violence’, in which arbitrary relations of power are masked by the naturalised process of naming and categorising (Loyal, 2014: 3; Bourdieu, 1987). For example, drawing on Bourdieu’s argument in ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’ (1989), Stephen Crossley summarises that discourses produced by the state carry more weight than others because they are official, and are viewed and often accepted as being authorised and legitimate accounts (2016:2). They have, Bourdieu argues:

the power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par excellence. It is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society. (1989: 23)

As Bourdieu wrote, the ultimate objective of a discourse is the ‘recognition of legitimacy through the misrecognition of arbitrariness’ (2014: 163). Through the proliferation of discourse, beliefs and ideas that are actually socially and historically specific, discourses that emanate from the state are legitimised by their seemingly universal and natural appearance. For Tyler (2013a: 46), this naturalising state discourse results in the production of abject figures, ‘adjudicating on who is expendable and who is of worth’.

Adding to this analysis, I argue that it is necessary to further unpack the historical and objective relations of the state, through its gendered, classed, and racialised components. For instance, feminist scholars point to the importance of not only understanding the structure, but also the history of the gendered state. As Carole Pateman (1988) argues, the fraternal 'social contract' was based on an implicit sexual contract requiring the subordination of women and regulating men's sexual access to women. The state subject therefore becomes an individual male – citizen, worker – a reasonable man (Pettman, 1996). Women are constructed as not only different, but defined in relation to men, and given inferior value. This involves a gendered dichotomy of 'active/'passive', 'mind/'body', 'independent/'dependent'. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4, the state has crafted and shaped gender, class and 'race' in particular ways, throughout history, which are continually re-crafted to suit the needs of the specific timeframe. Therefore, as Connell notes; 'gender dynamics are a major force constructing the state, both in the historical creation of state structures and in contemporary politics' (1990:519). Agreeing with Georgina Waylen, 'gender (and racial and class) inequalities are buried within the state, but through part of the same dynamic process, gender relations are partly constituted through the state'. The state therefore 'partly reflects and partly helps to create particular forms of gender relations and gender inequality' (1998: 7).

It is by understanding the state as a social field, in which different actors struggle and compete for power in their daily lives, which allows this thesis to explore the gendered impact of austerity. Firstly, this allows for a consideration of the particular configurations of gender, class and 'race' that are shaped in different ways, and in different historical periods, as well as the particular configuration of state and gender relations in the context of austerity. Secondly, understanding the state in this way allows for an analysis which considers the material and symbolic consequences of such a configuration on women's everyday lives. The ways in which austerity is produced and legitimised affect how women experience and navigate through austerity.

Framing Metaphors of Capital to Understand Women's Differing Experiences of Austerity

In this period of growing social inequality, it is necessary to perform analyses that allow us to understand how women's differential access to economic, social, and cultural resources affect their lives on a daily basis (Oppenheim and Harker, 1996). Although Bourdieu has been critiqued for failing to fully develop the role of women in his work, his concepts have been used, adapted and 'appropriated' (Moi, 1991: 1018) by feminist scholars concerned with the intersection of class with gender and 'race' (for a more comprehensive discussion see for instance, Moi, 1991; McCall, 1992; McNay, 1999, 2004; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Fowler, 1997; Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; McLeod, 2005). Bourdieu's definitions of social class and his metaphors of capital (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) are also applicable to this thesis – they provide the greatest explicatory power to understand how differences of gender, class, and 'race' affect women's experience of austerity and how they are able to navigate, speak about, and imagine their futures within such a context. It is this general theoretical framework that informs each empirical chapter of this thesis, and which will be modified based on the specificity of the analysis. It is important to note that my analysis will focus more particularly on the impact of class on women's experiences, rather than that of 'race'. This is despite my thesis demonstrating the interrelationship of class and 'race' in shaping their everyday experiences of austerity.

For Bourdieu (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991), social classes do not exist; what exists is a social space – a space of differences, in which classes occur in a virtual state, not as a given, but as something that comes to be constructed (Bourdieu, 1991). The concept of capital is central to Bourdieu's constructions of social space; in which the social space is structured by principles of variation. Understanding society is therefore based on the movement of capital through social spaces as it is accumulated or lost by individuals (Skeggs, 1997: 8). Bourdieu regards capital as 'the set of actually usable resources and powers' (1984: 114). As Elliot Weininger (2005: 87) notes, Bourdieu describes multiple species of capital which

cannot be subsumed under a single generic concept. These different kinds of capital mark out different dimensions in the socio-economic field.

Bourdieu operates with three main forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) – which together, provide individuals with advantage and disadvantage in society. Economic capital is about material conditions: wealth, income, financial inheritance, and monetary assets, which are 'immediately and directly convertible into money' (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). Cultural and social capitals contain cultural information based resources that can be measured by education and social relations (Bourdieu, 1979). For example, cultural capital can exist in three forms – the embodied (in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body: 'masculinity' and 'femininity'), the objectified (in the form of cultural goods), and the institutionalised state (resulting in, for example, educational qualifications). Social capital is the accumulation of resources, both potential and actual, generated through relationships. These are based on connections and group membership (such as family, work, and other institutions). Symbolic capital is the form in which the different capitals take once they are 'perceived and recognised as legitimate' (Skeggs, 1997: 8). These capitals may be accumulated, lost, invested, distributed, and traded within a particular social field. Crucially, because all forms of capital are context specific, they must be perceived as legitimate before being converted. Only legitimate capital accrues value and holds power. It is here, Skeggs notes, that 'the symbolic system creates, circulates and maintains distinctions from the perspective and interests of those with power (symbolic power) enabling them to accrue value to themselves whilst keeping others contained' (2010: 271). Individuals are thus distributed in the overall social space according to: the global *volume* of capital they possess, the *composition* of their capital (the relative weight in their overall capital of the various forms of capital) and evolution of the volume and composition according to their *trajectory* in social space (ibid). The trajectories differently position the agents in the social space within class fractions (Bourdieu, 1984).

Such an understanding of capital is important to this thesis, to emphasise not only *how* and *why* women are not 'all in this together' (Osborne, 2009, 2012, 2015), but also why they have *differing abilities* to navigate within the context. For example, as argued throughout this thesis, the way in which austerity materialises itself in women's lives is dependent on the volume, composition and trajectory of capital (see Chapter 5). Those with a lower volume and composition of capital will be 'closer to necessity' as opposed to those who are 'further from necessity' whom have higher volumes and different types of capital. In addition, austerity may affect women in similar ways (because they are in some ways adjacent to each other in social space), but due to their different ratios of economic to cultural capital, their experience will be different. As Diane Reay (2004) notes, these differences are a consequence of complex relationships between individual and class trajectories.

How one accumulates capital makes an important difference to its capacity to be converted. Therefore, it is not just the volume and composition of capital, but how it is accumulated, which affects the ability to navigate through austerity. Access and accrual of capital (their composition and volume) depends on particular social inheritances and embodiments, and involves generational transmission. The historically generated social space therefore becomes important here, since 'we enter an inherited social space from which comes access and acquisition of differential amounts of capital assets' (Skeggs, 1997: 8-9). This is not a level playing field. For Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), the factors deriving from location in the social space (class) are identified as 'primary', and the demographic characteristics (including gender, age, region, 'race' and ethnicity) are designated as 'secondary' factors (Bourdieu, 1984)¹¹. However, in his later work Bourdieu abandoned this assumption:

Whatever their position in social space, women have in common the fact that

¹¹In his early work, Bourdieu (1984) suggests that ethnicity and gender have different functions. Ethnicity, he argues, 'distributes its members into social classes according to its location in the hierarchy of ethnic group whereas gender acts as a distributing mechanism within the social group. Gender by this formulation, is thus a secondary characteristic and capita remains neutral' (Skeggs, 1997: 16).

they are separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient which, like skin colour for blacks, or any other sign of membership in a stigmatised group, negatively affects everything that they are and do, and which is the source of a systematic set of homologous differences: despite the vast distance between them, there is something in common between a woman managing director ... and the woman production line worker. (2001: 93; also see Weininger, 2005)

This understanding results in a revision of 'the existence and mode of existence of collectives', since 'social class, as a symbolic principle of vision and division' has to compete with 'other principles (including gender) in the classificatory struggle through which collectivities are constituted' (Weininger, 2005: 112-13). It is this approach that feminist and other scholars have been theoretically developing and empirically applying (Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997; McCall, 1992; Moi, 1991; Wacquant, 2016). For example, as Skeggs notes, born into gender, class and 'race' relations, we occupy the associated positions of 'woman', 'black' 'working-class' and inherit ways of understanding, meanings, and positions in knowledge (1997: 9, 2004; also, see Moi, 1991). Therefore, different forms of capital can only exist in the interrelationships of social positions. These positions bring with them access to, or limitations on what capitals are available to certain positions. As Skeggs (ibid) says,

they become gendered through being lived, through circulation, just as they become classed, raced and sexed: they become simultaneously processed. The social relations of capitals into which we are born and move have been constructed historically through struggles over assets and space.

Gender, 'race', and class are not capitals as such (Moi, 1991), but they provide the relations in which capitals come to be organised and valued. For example, 'femininity', Skeggs (1997) argues, can be seen as a valued and legitimate form of cultural capital. However, this is only so when it is analysed through a version of middle-class femininity which is associated with morality, and only then in comparison to working-class femininity and masculinity in general. Therefore, our social locations influence our movement and relations to other social positions, and hence our ability to capitalise further on the assets we already have. Those who do not have access to legitimate

capital, then struggle for legitimate capital (McKenzie, 2010). As will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6, it is this struggle that alters women's abilities to convert, accrue, or generate capital in this current context. Hence Bourdieu's economic metaphors are useful to understand women's differing experiences of austerity. More specifically, they allow for an understanding of how their capital shapes the ways they deal with changes in the current austerity context, and how much they are affected by the measures within their everyday lives. This thesis shows that the volume, composition and trajectory of their capital shapes not only how much they are affected by austerity, but also how they navigate through this context.

Bourdieu's metaphors of capital are also useful, Toril Moi (1991) notes, because they enable us to identify the interests and benefits of particular groups. It is, as Skeggs (1997) argues, these symbolic struggles that enable inequalities in capital to be reproduced. Weininger (2005:98) describes the purpose of these struggles as being to impose the superiority of the dominant group's worldview and lifestyle as hegemonic, valued or 'the norm'. This is especially pertinent in the current context of austerity, where morality and lifestyle have been used as a way to produce, legitimate, and sustain the austerity programme (also see Chapters 4, 7 and 8). In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu showed how tastes and lifestyle are ways in which agents symbolise their social similarity and differences with/from one another (also see Weininger, 2005). Dominant groups generally succeed in legitimising their own culture (lifestyles/tastes) as superior. For example, the working-class are symbolically represented and constructed as the antithesis of dominant middle and upper classes, through oppositions such as distinguished/vulgar, aesthetic/practical, pure/impure, quality/quantity, and manners/matter (Bourdieu, 1984: 245; Lamont and Molnár, 2002). In such binary constructions, aesthetics are translated into morality. Those positioned as lacking 'taste' are also positioned as morally lacking (Bourdieu, 1984; Lawler, 2005). The discussion made throughout Chapter 4, 7 and 8, demonstrates how representations of black and white working-class women as excessive, fecund, animalistic and un-modern, have, throughout history, been used to legitimate the reproduction of inequality and symbolic

violence¹² (see for instance Hancock, 2004; Tyler, 2008; Todd, 2014).

Such representations therefore contribute to devaluing and delegitimising women's already meagre capitals. If one's cultural capital is delegitimised, then it cannot be traded as an asset, it cannot be capitalised on, and its power is limited. When conversion is blocked, positions of inequality are maintained, and systematic disempowerment engendered (Skeggs, 1997: 10). Thus, 'taste/lifestyle and morality work as important markers in constructing objective ties of solidarity, on the one hand, and prejudice and symbolic violence on the other' (Martins Jr, 2016: 25). This does not mean that delegitimacy cannot be contested or resisted: the space for contestation occurs at local, national, and global levels, as can be seen in the work of Skeggs and Vik Loveday (2012) who argue that those positioned as already marginal to the dominant symbolic, generate alternative ways for making value (also see Lawler, 2005; Reay, 2004)¹³. However, the different arenas where capital can be traded, and, or blocked, have different powers (Wacquant, 1993). As an example, 'the media as an institutional site of symbolic power is able to legitimate the symbolic power of the middle-classes' (Skeggs, 1997: 7) and produce symbolic violence against others. It is these more powerful fields that are put to use in the context of austerity. The state itself, as Wacquant (1993) argues, is the greatest reservoir of symbolic power and the central bank of symbolic credit.

Chapter Outlines

This thesis not only seeks to discover, but, also extend, the understanding of austerity and its gendered impacts, through exploring the role of the state in shaping

¹²Domination is articulated and experienced through the use of symbolic violence, which is exercised through the articulation of economic, social, and cultural capital. This articulation operates in such a way that the symbolic systems – through which we establish classifications and determine the essential categories of social inclusion and exclusion – have both a cognitive/social organisation function and also a political function of domination. Language is a main tool of the symbolic system in the classification of the social world. It is not only a means of communication but also a medium of power, providing symbolic power (and violence) through legitimate discourse (Bourdieu, 1991, 1984; Villegas, 2004).

¹³Despite not expanding further on the discussion of value here, I develop the argument in Chapter 7.

young women's experiences of austerity. It is divided into ten chapters. This initial chapter has presented an overview of the study and context, and framed the theoretical perspectives upon which it draws. *Chapter 2: 'Researching the lived experiences of austerity'* outlines the methodological and ethical dimensions of the research process. The chapter describes how the research came into being, the methodology used, and gives a description of participants and the cities chosen. It also exposes the messy and untidy nature of the research process. It argues that such 'messiness' arises from the complexity of austerity. The 'messiness' of the research process mirrors the 'messiness' of the concept of austerity, and the ways in which it unfolds in, and affects, young women's lives.

Chapter 3: 'Literature Review' reviews the key empirical literature and theoretical approaches to the themes investigated in this thesis. This chapter examines the gap existing in current studies, and argues that although contemporary literature offers in-depth analyses of the lived experiences of austerity, a fuller gendered empirical analysis is necessary, which considers women's different social positioning. In addition, I note that, to fully understand these differences, and how austerity is lived and felt by young women, a connection needs to be made with workings of the state in the current context and its wider historical legacies which (re)produce and legitimate inequality, and material and symbolic violence.

Chapter 4: 'The Role of the State in Shaping Gender, Class, and 'Race'' draws on arguments made in the previous chapter. Situating the crisis within its historical legacies, this chapter explores the ways in which the state has been put to use during different times of crisis. It reveals how the state has crafted and shaped gender, class and 'race' relations within such regimes. Showing how austerity therefore builds on a previous history, it explores the ways in which austerity is produced, legitimised and made present by the state in the current context.

This understanding makes it possible to analyse how young women experience, navigate, speak about, resist, and contest austerity in nuanced, complex and contradictory ways in the following empirical chapters. *Chapter 5: 'Living with Austerity'* and *Chapter 6: 'Navigating through Austerity'* discuss how austerity, as an economic programme of fiscal management, is lived with, and navigated through. *Chapter 5* explores how differences of class and 'race' affect the diversity of women's lived experiences, and the different ways in which austerity manifests and materialises itself in their everyday lives. *Chapter 6* then explains how these differences affect the way women respond to and navigate through the effects of austerity.

Chapter 7: 'Austerity-Talk' and *Chapter 8: 'Austerity-Bourgeois Feminism: Legitimising Austerity's Moral Project'* explores how the symbolic nature of austerity, as a moral-political project, is played out in women's everyday lives. *Chapter 7: Austerity Talk* explores the complex, contradictory, and nuanced ways in which young women are dialoguing with state discourse. It shows that women simultaneously reproduce and reinforce moralistic narratives of economic productivity and aspiration, and, at the same time, question and talk back to existing discourses through processes of distancing, blame, and boundary formation. *Chapter 8: 'Austerity-Bourgeois Feminism: Legitimising Austerity's Moral Project'* draws on feminist identification to further examine austerity's moral discourse. An analysis of middle-class young women's understandings of, affiliations with, and positionings within feminism illustrates how there is a convergence of austerity discourse and feminism. This is articulated through narratives of morality and distinction. I argue that this convergence is crucial to understand how contemporary forms of inequality are produced and justified through the production of the 'good', 'bad' and 'indifferent' (gendered, classed and racialised) subject positions and sensibilities.

Chapter 9: Austerity Future(s) provides a nuanced analysis of how class differently affects the ways in which young women can speak about and imagine their futures, in the context of austerity. *Chapter 10*, the concluding chapter, returns to the empirical questions, and considers the main findings of this thesis. It reviews the empirical and

theoretical contributions of the study, and briefly outlines how some of the main findings of the study can be taken forward in future research.

Chapter 2

Researching the Lived Experiences of Austerity

The aim of this chapter is to expose the 'messiness' of my research process (Letherby, 2003). Instead of trying to clean up or conceal the untidiness of the development of the research, this methodological chapter lays bare the many issues that I encountered during different stages of my research. Such 'messiness' in the research practice arises from the complexity and multiplicity of austerity itself (as discussed in Chapter 1). The 'messiness' of the research process, I argue, therefore mirrors the 'messiness' of the concept of austerity and the ways in which it unfolds in, and affects, young women's lives. The first section of this chapter describes the research process, explaining why and how at different stages, there was a need to adapt, adjust, or change direction. The second section of this chapter discusses the ethical dimensions of the research, using encounters within the field to illustrate such concerns. In particular, this section focuses on not only understanding the complex ethical issues involved in speaking for and across difference, but also the specific significance of this for the context of austerity and in these specific fieldwork sites.

Research Beginnings

My own experience of working in the women's sector (part of the charity sector, directed towards meeting the needs of women) fostered my development of a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959), inspiring me to undertake this research. As Charles Wright Mills argues in the appendix of *The Sociological Imagination*, 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship': '[t]he most admirable thinkers ... do not split their work from their lives. They seem to not allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other' (2000: 195). After finishing my master's degree in the autumn

of 2010, I spent four years working in various roles within this sector. Over the years, I witnessed the gradual implementation of austerity measures, with the onset of redundancies, resulting in decreased funding and diminished state recognition and support for both the sector and women in general (see Fawcett Society, 2012; Pratten, 2014). Within the sector, organisations have been struggling, concerned about their future sustainability. A large number of organisations have had to either reduce their number of staff or close due to the loss of funding (Pratten, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 1, as austerity continues, the impact on women's life conditions in general, has also worsened. Women, it has been reported, are facing a 'triple jeopardy' of benefit cuts, job losses and reduced services (Fawcett Society, 2012), which are further impacted by differences such as class, 'race', sexuality, age, disability, immigration status, and region (NEWN and WRC, 2012; O'Hara, 2014).

Conversely, at the same time, I witnessed both a public and national disavowal of feminism and gender equality, and a renewed localised interest in, and commitment to, gender equality. I had seen how such measures by the government added impetus to feminist politics and campaigning throughout the UK, largely facilitated by online social media¹⁴. Many women had been politicised and influenced by other movements, particularly the 2010 student campaign against university fees, but also wider campaigns against austerity measures and the Occupy movement. This made me interested in understanding how women were living and experiencing austerity, their feelings towards austerity measures, and how this corresponded with their relationships with feminism. From my own individual experience, and hearing other conflictual relationships with the movement, I was curious as to whether there might be a relationship between women's experiences of austerity and their feeling towards equality and feminism. I sought to understand how feminism is lived by young women, focusing on the reasons for their distance or closeness to the movement. Reading around the topic – with my questions in

¹⁴Groups such as UK Uncut, Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC), UK Feminista, and The Fawcett Society. The campaign group Focus E15 has become active since 2013.

mind – I found that previous studies on young women’s relationships with feminism discovered feminism to be an unpopular term, in which explanations either fall within an understanding of fierce repudiation or that of irrelevance (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012). The rise of neoliberalism and individualisation contextualised such repudiation, whereby it has been argued that young women have entered an age of ‘post-feminism’, in which feminism is taken into account, whilst also forcefully repudiated (McRobbie, 2004a; 2004b; 2009, also see Scharff, 2012). Therefore, by integrating the analysis of women’s negotiations with feminism within a framework of socio-cultural change, I wanted to understand the disjuncture between the current affirmation of, and the resistance to, feminism, within the UK. Concerned primarily with the way different axes of power and differentiation impact these negotiations, the central aim of my research was to understand how social class and geographical location played a role in mediating young women’s relationships with feminism and gender (in)equality. With this in mind, I wanted to understand and tell this narrative within the context of austerity. Thus, I sought to apply my ‘life experiences’ to my ‘intellectual work’ (Mills, 1959: 196).

Initial Fieldwork

I decided to use semi-structured interviews as a means of understanding the relationship between feminist dis/identification and the context of austerity amongst a diverse group of women in London and Leeds. The research questions were piloted in Leeds from January to February 2014 with eight young women aged between 18 and 27. While these encounters were revealing, they were so in a different way than I had first anticipated. The transition of my research questions from the page to the field did not go as I had planned. Interviews would become built around experiences in the present, which would not necessarily lead to questions surrounding feminism and equality; or feminism and equality would be spoken about in addition to the young women’s discussions about their everyday lives. Hearing about their experiences allowed me to

understand the ways in which austerity was being lived and felt in the everyday. It was this that I became aware needed specific attention and should not be ignored, overlooked or given less consideration. In the novel *If nobody speaks of remarkable things* Jon McGregor (2002) writes about a man with scarred hands telling his daughter about the world. The man says to his daughter: 'this is a very big world and there are many, many things you could miss if you are not careful ... there are remarkable things all the time, right in front of us'. He then says 'if nobody speaks of remarkable things, how can they be called remarkable?' (239). The man signifies that the ordinary events of the world and the ordinary people who inhabit it are themselves worthy of attention and observation. They are, in this sense, remarkable. Similarly, Kathleen Stewart (2007), in her book *Ordinary Affects*, discusses the seemingly trivial experiences of everyday life, to bring attention to the ordinary as an integral site of cultural politics. In her writing, Stewart brings the reader to the realisation that in order to even begin understanding what is going on, we must first simply take notice (Eichhorn, 2009).

I therefore began to take notice of young women's experiences of everyday life. As opposed to the dominant austerity discourse, in which we were being told 'we are all in this together' (Osborne, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015; Cameron, 2010), such discussions enabled me to 'read against the grain' (Pearce, 1991; Mills, 1997) and listen to the alternative stories that tend to not feature within dominant narratives (Back, 2007). It was during these encounters that I realised the significance of letting people express and raise issues that were important to them in relation to their everyday experience of austerity: hearing the feelings that could be generated by a brown letter coming through the door from the DWP; being told about the tactics of Sunday discount shopping; or having one woman explain to me why she was wearing her staff lanyard on her day off (to stop the verbal harassment she faced on the street for being in a wheelchair). The situations that I have described above led me to redefine my research questions, listening to the narratives of the young women and hearing what spoke to me from the field. This has involved foregrounding the everyday lived experiences of young women in the context of austerity rather than focusing on feminism, as I had initially planned. This

study therefore investigates how young women, aged 18–35 years, from different classed and 'racial' backgrounds, experience, understand, and speak about the impacts of austerity on their everyday lives. Like Lynne Pearce (1991; also see Mills, 1997) who places the importance of focusing on 'gaps' and 'absences' within conventional texts, I place importance on focusing on the gaps and absences within the dominant austerity discourse. It is by reading against the grain, connecting these stories with more orthodox narratives (see Back, 2007), that I hope to shed light on some of the less-dominant and more complex accounts that are weaving their way in, around and through the state (and media) discourse that position austerity as necessary, fair and leading towards a better future.

Interviewing Young Women in Leeds, London and Brighton

My fieldwork began in March 2014 and ended in May 2015 (fourteen months in total). I interviewed forty-nine women and conducted two group discussions with twelve women (sixty-one women in total) living in Leeds (from March 2014 – September 2014), London (from October 2014 – March 2015) and Brighton (from January – May 2015). I initially decided to interview women in Leeds and London (cities in the North and South of the country); this was then expanded to include interviews with women in Brighton (Southeast). These cities were chosen since they have been differentially affected by the cuts to public spending. Despite the importance of examining the diversity of women's experiences in these different cities, as noted in Chapter 1, this is not a comparative study on the effect of regional differences on young women's lives. Yet, it is important to give an overview of the impact of austerity on these cities, and to understand how women's experiences in the present are linked to the wider political, economic and social context.

Leeds, London, and Brighton Past and Present

Since the 1970s, gradual economic, political, and social restructuring has occurred within cities in the UK (including deindustrialisation and social decline, countered by efforts at regeneration and image-building) (Hollands et al., 2001). As Robert Hollands, Paul Chatterton, Bernie Byrnes and Cait Read note, since the Thatcher years, 'this has eroded the established labourist city that is strongly connected to its manufacturing and industrial past in favour of private or corporate capital, knowledge-based activities, middle-class consumption and an entrepreneurial turn in urban governance aimed at attracting and satisfying the demands of highly mobile global capital' (2001: 4, also see Jessop, 1997). Although this has been done to differing degrees within each city studied, all have passed through this political project.

Essential to understanding the context of Leeds is its dramatic economic change over the last two decades. Primarily a textile industry between 1780 – 1850, the decline of the textile and flax industries in the mid to late nineteenth-century became diversified with printing, engineering, chemicals and clothing manufacture (Fraser, 1982). By the 1970s, the clothing industry was in irreversible decline due to foreign competition. Despite this, the Leeds city region still retains larger role in the UK's manufacturing base, with Leeds having the third largest concentration of manufacturing jobs by local authority area (BRES, 2013). With a population of 781,700 (comprising of 397,900 females) and increasing, Leeds is one of the largest city in the UK (NOMIS, 2016). The city has now developed into a telephone-banking centre, connected to the electronic infrastructure of the modern global economy. Recognised as a national centre for financial and business services, Leeds is the UK's second largest financial and legal centre after London, which amounts for 38 per cent of the total output (Leeds City Council, 2015). At the same time, Leeds has one of the highest ratios of private to public sector jobs of all major UK cities - for instance, Leeds City Council and the NHS employ over 100,000 people (Leeds City Council, 2015).

In contrast, London has a population of 8,787,900 (4,408,600 are female) (NOMIS, 2017). Known as the world's leading financial centre for international business and commerce, London is one of the 'command centres' for the global economy (Roberts, 2008). For the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries London was a major manufacturing centre. However, manufacturing declined dramatically from the 1960s onwards: entire industries such as shipbuilding and most of the vehicle construction industry were lost. This trend continues, with the decline of the pharmaceutical manufacturing sites. London is now mostly a service-based economy, with over 85 per cent of the currently employed population of Greater London working in the service industries (UNCSBRP, 2016).

In comparison, Brighton has a smaller population of 289,200 (comprising of 143,800 females) (NOMIS, 2017). The Brighton and Hove economy has evolved from a low wage traditional coastal and manufacturing based economy into a more balanced and technologically advanced economy (Whitehead et al., 2006). Becoming the third fastest 'recovering city' from the recession in the country, the economy is driven by the tourism, culture, creative industries and digital media sectors (Centre for Cities, 2015). Business and financial services employs 30 per cent of people in Brighton and Hove, tourism, hospitality and retail counts for 20 per cent, and creative industries, including digital media, another 11 per cent (Brighton and Hove Council, 2014). The city also has a strong service sector economy, through the public services, education, health and financial sectors.

The effects of the crisis have had different impacts on these cities¹⁵. Research has demonstrated huge regional disparities in the effects of the recession between the North and South (Centre for Cities, 2013, 2014, 2015). According to the Cities Outlook report (2015), despite a consistent political commitment to improve the relative economic

¹⁵It is important to point out, that statistics used to explain the impact of the recession/austerity measures on the cities chosen, best reflect the effects on these cities during the times of the interviews and group discussions with my participants (2014-2015).

performance of places outside of the South, the difference between cities in the South and cities in the rest of the UK has increased, not diminished, particularly in the North East and North West. However, when comparing Leeds, London and Brighton, it is too simplistic to conclude that Leeds, situated in the North of England, has been affected more than southern areas. For example, both Leeds and Brighton during 2008 and 2009 saw a large contraction in GDP (of four per cent) and a sharp increase in unemployment (Centre for Cities, 2013: 29). Hit hard in the first period of the recession, these cities have staged a recovery in the second period (2009–2012) and it was reported that they were benefitting from slightly better economic prospects (Centre for Cities, 2013). London, by contrast, had little or no change in performance.

However, there are still major disparities between their experiences of recession. Between 2004-2014, Brighton created the fourth highest growth in net jobs and the third highest level of growth in private sector jobs out of all sixty-four UK cities (Centre for Cities, 2015). Brighton also had one of the highest levels of employment in the UK (75.5 per cent) in 2014–2015 (3.6 per cent increase from the previous year) (ONS, 2015). Relatively worse off, Leeds' economy remained 2.6 per cent behind its peak output by the end of 2012 (ONS, 2014). Despite being in a stronger position than most other northern cities, employment in Leeds was 68.9 per cent in the period January 2014 to December 2014 in which women's employment was 65.6 percent (also lower than the national average and lower than both London and Brighton) (ONS, 2014). Yet, it is important to bear in mind that although for some areas there has been a rise in employment; the type of job creation has been dominated by rising self-employment and part-time work (TUC, 2014). Therefore, although overall levels of employment have increased, only a small proportion of those jobs are full-time employee roles (1 in 40). Within this wave of increased employment are those who are employed on zero-hour contracts.

In Leeds, unemployment was also higher than the national average at 8.4 per cent (ONS, 2014). According to the Joseph Rowntree report (2014), this figure rises to more than 20

per cent in some local areas (2014: 19). In terms of the real value of earnings, there is a discrepancy between northern cities and the Southeast. According to figures from the GMB Union (2013), the real value of average earnings of all employees resident in Yorkshire has dropped by 13.3 per cent between April 2008 and November 2012. For employees resident in Leeds, the drop has been 19.2 per cent, compared to the UK average of 12.8 per cent (ibid). Wages in Brighton and London are higher than this average figure. In Leeds, 14.1–29.4 per cent of people earn less than the living wage, in comparison with Brighton (16.1 per cent) and London (18.3 per cent) (ONS, 2014). Leeds also has a larger majority of JSA claimants (2.8 per cent compared to 2 per cent in London and 1.6 per cent in Brighton) and a larger percentage of claimants who have been unemployed for more than a year (ONS, 2015).

Despite higher levels of employment and earnings, during this same period, Brighton's housing affordability ratio has declined. In 2004, the average cost of a house was 9.4 times the average income, but by 2014 this had risen to 12.2 times the average income (Centre for Cities, 2015: 21). Brighton, alongside London, saw house prices rise by more than 10 per cent in a single year – more than twice the national average. Overall, London experienced the greatest increase in its affordability ratio. By 2014, the average house was almost sixteen times average earnings, up from 9.5 in 2004. The average house price in London (£501,500) was almost three times higher than that in Leeds (£174,500), which had a 1.6 per cent growth (Centre for Cities, 2015: 22). Both London and Brighton saw few houses built in 2004–2013 (in Brighton for instance, only 6,260 new homes built). It is not surprising these cities are witnessing a housing crisis.

Both London and Leeds have some of the largest levels of inequality in the UK (Centre for Cities, 2015). For example, there remain areas of Leeds where economic inactivity is more than double the city rate – 150,000 people (around 20 per cent of the population) live in areas ranked in the top 10 per cent most deprived nationally (ibid). In many cases, the same neighbourhoods experience severe and persistent deprivation, even during periods of growth. The financial impact of the welfare reforms will therefore have an

affect on these areas. According to Christina Beatty and Steven Fothergill (2013), at the extremes, the worst-hit local authority areas lose around four times as much, per adult of working age, as the authorities least affected by the reforms. Welfare reforms therefore hit hardest in the places where welfare claimants are concentrated, which in turn tend to be the most deprived areas. Although the Leeds district had the third largest absolute loss attributable to welfare reform (a £232 million loss/ £460 per head per annum) (Beatty, 2013), some London boroughs (alongside other older industrial areas, largely in the North East and North West) have been most affected by the welfare reforms (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). This, according to Beatty and Fothergill (2013), is primarily because Housing Benefit reforms (affecting tenants in the private rented sector), plus the household benefit cap, greatly impact London boroughs. For example, the new Household benefit cap impacts overwhelmingly on London; all the worst affected twenty local authorities in Britain are London boroughs. The benefit cap mostly comes into play for households that have been claiming large sums in Housing Benefit, claimants in London are therefore hard-hit due to the exceptionally high rent levels in the capital. The reforms to Housing Benefit have also had a substantial impact on Brighton due to the city's large private rented sector and higher rent levels (Beatty, 2014). By contrast, Britain's older industrial areas, hit hard by many of the other welfare changes, are less acutely affected by the Local Housing Allowance reforms (and subsequently the 'bedroom tax') because a higher proportion of their low-income households live in the social rented sector (council and housing association) or in lower-price owner-occupied property (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). The above discussion therefore demonstrates how these cities share some similarities in their experiences of recession and welfare reform, yet due to their specific political, economic and social contexts, they have also been impacted in different ways.

Identification, Access and Ethics

Interviews and group discussions took place with sixty-one, middle and working-class, white, black, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, who were residents of, or recently settled in, London, Leeds or Brighton, and aged between 18 and 35 years. Fifty-six out of sixty-one respondents were born in the UK, with five research participants having multi-national backgrounds: Benin, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Romania, and Sierra Leone. Likewise, I interviewed a diverse group of women in each area since different social positions affect the ways in which austerity impacts their lives (see Figure 2 for more details). Of the two group discussions conducted, the social make up of each group was quite different; the first group was comprised of white British working-class women; the second consisted of British south Asian working and middle-class women (see Figure 3 for more details). All the groups were self-selecting and each group discussion lasted between two to three hours.

Figure 2: Table of interview participants (for more detail on each participant see Appendix A)

Interview Location	Total out of 49	Class background	'Race' and Ethnic background	Nationality	Mothers	Occupation ¹⁶
Brighton	15	12 Middle-class 3 Working-class	14 White 1 Pakistani	14 British 1 Romanian	6 Mothers 9 Non-mothers	2 Income Support 1 Support Worker/ DLA 1 Complaints Mediation Officer 1 Debt and Benefits Adviser 2 Teachers 1 PhD Student 1 DLA

¹⁶It is important to note here that women who are reliant on state support often receive several different benefits at one time. For the purposes of this thesis, I cite the primary benefit women relayed to me that they received during the interview. If these women did not specifically cite the benefits they received, I will note that they were generally 'reliant on state support'.

						1 Advocacy Support Worker/Dog Walker 1 Volunteer 1 Account Manger 1 Doctor 2 BA Students
Leeds	14	8 Middle-class 6 Working-class	10 White 2 Black 1 Indian 1 Mixed other	14 British	3 Mothers 11 Non-mothers	2 Occupational Therapists 1 Marketing Manager 1 Teacher 1 Teacher/MA Student 2 BA Students 1 Marketing Officer 1 Factory worker 2 Income Support 1 JSA 1 Accountant 1 DLA
London	19	12 Middle-class 7 working-class	9 White 7 Black 1 Indian 1 Pakistani 1 Anglo-Indian	16 British 1 Pakistani 1 Sierra Leonean 1 Beninese	6 Mothers 13 Non-mothers	1 Payroll Trainer 1 Physiotherapist 1 Doctor 1 Account Manager 1 Recruitment Consultant 1 Shop Assistant 3 Income Support 1 Content Producer 1 HR manager 1 Head of Training 2 Unemployed 1 Waitress/State Support 1 Cleaner 1 Stewardess 1 Nursery Nurse/State Support

						1 Events Assistant
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Figure 3: Table of group discussion participants (for more detail on each participant see Appendix A)

Group discussion	Total out of 12	Class Background	'Race' and ethnic background	Nationality	Children	Occupation¹⁷
1	6	6 Working-class	6 White	6 British	5 Mothers 1 Non-mother	3 Income Support 1 State Support 2 JSA
2	6	1 Middle-class 5 Working-class	6 Bangladeshi	6 British	3 Mothers 3 Non-mothers	1 Income Support 3 JSA 1 Volunteer 1 Charity worker

I began each interview and group discussion by asking questions about the women's family background, employment, level of education, and type of housing. Throughout the interview, I discussed these questions further, as well as asking about women's social position, living conditions, leisure and social activities, domestic and cultural habits and taste. These questions allowed me to gain a sense of the capitals these women had access to, and the different social fields they occupied (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1991). When asking questions about whether and how they would identify themselves in class and 'race' terms, compared to 'racial' orientations, discussing class was sometimes problematic. Middle-class women would often name themselves as such and claimed this valued position. For example, in discussions throughout the interview, middle-class

¹⁷As above.

women would often say, 'that's just from my middle-class perspective'. Other middle-class women, when discussing their class positioning would draw attention to their economic and cultural capital; for example, Nina, a 27-year-old, white woman, living in Brighton and working as a teacher replied, 'I have a university degree, a permanent job, security, I couldn't not be [middle-class]'. Similar to previous research (Skeggs, 1997; Skeggs, Thumim and Wood, 2008) there was an unwillingness by my working-class groups to directly answer questions about class. Respondents often avoided or rejected classed categorisations or reiterated that they were just 'getting by', a 'hardworking parent' or 'normal'. Like the work Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008) who when faced with this disinclination and vagueness, asked participants further questions such as, 'do you think you get a fair deal in life?', I asked similar questions, to focus discussions more easily around the subject, such as their opinions on the fairness of austerity and the impact it had on their lives. Such questions did allow for some women who had avoided initial classification to make distinctions away from, or towards, certain classed groups. For example, Marie, a 28-year-old, black woman from London, when asked about her class position answered 'I'm just a hardworking parent'. Then when I asked her if she felt the current context was having an effect on everyone, she replied;

Not everyone. I think some people are too bitter and don't know how good they have it. I open a café at 10am and someone will come in ... Swiss Cottage is quite posh, full of professional people, they come and I'm like 'morning' and they are so rude and I think to myself, you've come out of your nice expensive house, and you're like this! It's a brand-new day, I'm going to give you nice coffee, just be happy. I run there to make their coffee, having dropped my son off and rushed here, maybe I'm not the same level as them but I smile, unlike them. What do they have to frown about?

This quote shows, through the discussion of the effects of austerity, that Marie saw herself distinct from those who had 'nice', 'expensive' homes and who were 'professional people'. Others had difficulty discussing class due to their trans-national experience. For example, Marta, a 35-year-old, white woman from Romania, who lived in Brighton, did not know how to place herself in class terms, simply replying 'I have no idea here'. Again, following the work of Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008: 5-6, also see Hage, 1998; Ong,

1999), class was thus translated through women's movement from one national classification system to another. Some forms of capital travel and convert whilst others do not (for example, education, occupational knowledge, religion).

My social position also helped to make class visible in the research encounter. As will be noted below, participants interpreted me differently: as an equal, as a representative of the state, someone they could help or who could help them. Therefore, on the basis of the information above, I made the decision to define these women as middle and working-class using the framework developed from Bourdieu's (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) description of four different types of capital – economic, symbolic, social and cultural – which were attached to my research participants in different volumes and compositions, convertible into value depending upon the fields in which they are exchanged (also see Skeggs, 1997, 2004, 2008). As per Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008), this allowed me to understand how gender, class and 'race' come together over space and time to generate a person's overall value.

Recruitment

In order to obtain a diverse sample, I spent time identifying and accessing suitable participants. Snowballing was used to contact women in the areas chosen. I also used Facebook in an attempt to drum up interest. However, such methods did not produce a diverse enough sample to fully understand the lived experience of young women in the context of austerity. I therefore approached thirty-five different organisations¹⁸ within these areas, and sought to contact women that had used their services. However, after initial enthusiasm, my requests for assistance were often met with reluctance; a large number of organisations did not answer my enquiry. Of the thirty-five organisations that I approached, only six maintained contact: an independent food bank, an advice centre,

¹⁸These organisations consisted of food banks, mother and baby groups, housing organisations, Citizens Advice Bureaus, women's sector organisations and local charities.

a housing organisation, two women's sector organisations and a local charity. After face-to-face meetings, phone/email conversations and the exchange of research outlines and consent forms, I was granted access to women who used their services through these organisations. This was either by putting me in contact with young women via email or by allowing me to 'hang around' their organisations, doing as Chicago School sociologist Robert Park calls 'shoe leather ethnography' (1925 in Shildrick et al., 2012: 56). For instance, I was permitted to 'hang around' a food bank and an advice centre one day per week. During this time, I approached women using the services to see if they were willing to participate (providing they met the recruitment criteria of the study). During my time at the organisations, I spoke to a number of women who did not meet the criteria. Despite these discussions not featuring in the thesis itself, these conversations provided valuable insights for ideas about further research projects on the lived experiences of austerity (this will be further discussed in Chapter 10). During my time at the food bank, I also gained important insights, observations and details into and about the inner workings of the organisation. Such details feature in Chapter 6. My request for participants was also shared on websites or distributed through the newsletters of six organisations, through which eight women made contact with me, six of whom agreed to be interviewed.

Incentivisation

When contacting these different organisations, some employees advised that offering 'an incentive' might help with the recruitment process, as calls for participants from previous researchers had often been met with reluctance. 'Ethical guidelines for social scientists often warn that financial rewards should not be used to incentivise or coerce participants' (Hall, 2015b: 4), yet, the question of if financial reward should be used to incentivise participants procure a renewed significance in austerity, especially when asking participants to speak about their experience of financial hardship. Sarah Marie Hall (2015b), during her ethnography on the everyday experiences of austerity in Greater Manchester, decided against offering an incentive. This was due to payment for

participation in long-term ethnography being uncommon. Scholars who have also conducted research in austere contexts have proposed participants financial or material support as part of a research project (McDowell, 2001; Meth and McClymont, 2009; Hammett and Sporton, 2012; Shildrick et al., 2012). Therefore, when advised by the organisations, I did offer £15 'out of pocket expenses' to those who wanted to participate. Yet, employees at several of these organisations told me that despite the incentive, there was an unusually large uptake from service users wanting to take part in the research.

Informed Consent

Whilst I informally told the participants about my project when first establishing contact, I provided detailed information about the study at the beginning of each interview and group discussion in order to obtain oral consent (see Appendix B). However, it is impossible for interviewees to give their fully informed consent as the direction of the interview cannot be anticipated (Scharff, 2012). Despite these difficulties, informed consent was as an essential tool with which to establish some of the basic principles of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and the opportunity to withdraw, and to encourage participants to view the interview as a 'guided conversation' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The research was planned to ensure integrity, transparency and confidentiality following the British Sociological Association and the Economic and Social Research Council ethical guidelines, which were approved by Goldsmiths College's Research Ethics Committee. All interviews were recorded with permission and then transcribed by me, using pseudonyms to protect the interviewees' anonymity. All data collected was secured on a password-protected server. The data, which emerged from the field, was then coded and analysed.

Un-structuring the Research Process

Moving Away from A Semi-Structured Approach: Learning to Listen

Early feminist researchers (Roberts, 1981; McRobbie, 1982; Stanley and Wise, 1983) argued for feminist research to be based on women, for women. Research, they argued, should alleviate the conditions of oppression and attempt to break down traditional male-centred research agendas that make women invisible and normalise the male gender. One of the initial arguments of these feminist researchers was that all research is carried out in the interests of particular people/groups and thus the resultant knowledge cannot be value-free or objective (Roberts, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983). As Skeggs (2007: 429) notes, 'these different debates provided the impetus for feminist researchers to concentrate on qualitative research, to focus on women's experience, and to listen and explore the shared meanings between women with an aim to reformulate traditional research agendas'. Therefore, rather than focusing on broader social trends by using quantitative methods, like the feminist researchers above, I am interested in understanding the diversity of young women's experiences within the current context, which can often lie hidden and unarticulated. Hence, I argue that the use of the qualitative in-depth interview as a method is well suited to provide insights into such experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Hesse-Biber, 2014). According to Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, 'qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds' (1995: 1 in Scharff, 2009: 333). Interviewing allows researchers to listen to context-specific thoughts and enables the research participants to tell their story in their own words (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 11). With this in mind, instead of finding 'true' descriptions, I treat interview accounts 'as moral tales that are interesting regardless of whether they are lies or simply wrong' (Back, 2007: 164). I am less concerned about getting the 'facts' correct, but instead interpret the narratives of my participants as stories and tales, which are interesting regardless of 'truth'.

More specifically, the interview consisted of open questions based around four main themes: 1) the respondents' family background; 2) their lives in the present; 3) their discussions of the future; 4) perceptions of and opinions about the crisis/austerity

measures. As discussed earlier, the first theme aimed to recover the life story of the participants. I asked them to tell me about their life growing up (family background; mobility of the family, occupation of parents and level of education). I then asked them to describe their everyday lives (their occupation, where they lived, with who and their leisure activities). These questions were important tools to give contrast to, and sometimes challenge, established discourses and representations revealing, for instance, how social differences of class and 'race' differentiate young women's experiences. My interviews permitted me to see, firstly, how these young women's social trajectories differently position them in social space (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989), and, secondly, how their position in social space shapes how austerity is experienced and negotiated. Moreover, the last two themes present in my interview – respondents' discussions about their future, and perceptions of, and opinions about, the crisis/austerity measures – also permitted me to further understand how austerity is lived and felt by young women. For example, such questions allowed for an understanding of how austerity works as a series of moral–political discourses and how these discourses are taken up and challenged. These questions enabled an analysis of how austerity (in its different forms; as a gendered moral–political–economic project) affects women's everyday lives.

Initially, I decided to have 'semi-structured' conversations with the young women. I felt that asking different interviewees the same questions would allow comparison of their experiences of austerity. Interviews lasted roughly one to two hours and would take place in women's homes, in cafes or restaurants, or in the meeting rooms of participating organisations. Children were often present during the interview, necessitating frequent breaks to care for them. Over time and on reflection, the interview process changed. As Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2014) notes, 'the researcher must stay on his or her toes and listen intently to what the interviewee has to say, for the researcher should be prepared to drop his or her agenda and follow the pace of the interview' (203). My original research plan did not permit such flexibility. Using my judgement, I decided it would be more fruitful to allow for a more unstructured agenda, to let the women lead me to the topic of

conversation they felt most important to them in the context of austerity. After all, I was interested in the lived experiences of the young women and the various ways austerity affects women's lives. Therefore, it was vital that I did not dictate the route I felt was most important. Kathryn Anderson serves as a cautionary tale when she discusses how her constant preoccupation with producing material for her exhibition became a lost opportunity. She notes: 'I am painfully aware of lost opportunities for women to reflect on the activities and events they described and to explain their terms more fully in their own words' (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 13). I did not want to displace the attitudes and experience of the women in my study with my own agenda, and look back on the research process as lost opportunities of reflection from the women I was interviewing.

Facilitating (Unexpected) Group Discussions

Methodologies do not innocently discover pre-existing information or uncover a world beyond us, but create and provide different means through which participants can articulate themselves (Jackson, 2010). Once again, like the change in research focus and the move from a semi-structured to a more unstructured interview technique, I also discovered that the type of methodology that I felt would be most appropriate, seemed unfitting at times, and thus, also needed to change. As noted above, having contacted organisations in an attempt to interview women who used their services, I was granted access by different organisations, two of which were in Leeds. One was an organisation providing housing support that worked with single young people, single parent families, young people leaving care, and victims of domestic violence. The other delivered a wide range of services to local women and their families. On both occasions, despite women agreeing to take part in an interview prior to the scheduled time, some women preferred to conduct a group conversation rather than a one-to-one interview.

Although unexpected, the group discussions provided an invaluable space for exploring how the women talked about and experienced austerity, as well as giving space to listen to their opinions, beliefs, wishes and concerns. Young women spoke about their

individual biographies (marriage breakdown, mental health problems, parents' drug problems, instances of domestic violence); issues which may or may not have been shared during a one on one interview. The group discussion also enabled the women to generate their own questions and pursue their own priorities in their own terms. Listening to the many different forms of communication that the young women used in day-to-day interaction – including jokes, anecdotes, teasing, and arguing – was also useful because as Jenny Kitzinger notes 'everyday forms of communication may tell us as much, if not more, about what people know or experience' (2005: 56). In this sense, the group discussion reached topics that the interviews I had conducted did not: revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques.

It has been argued that the collective nature of focus groups or group discussions makes them particularly useful for research on sensitive topics (Kitzinger, 2005). This was particularly true in my case. Each group consisted of women who relied heavily on state support, some of who were survivors of domestic violence and who had experienced mental health problems in the past. However, unlike most focus group research, my group discussions were self-assembling – as discussed above, the participants had opted to take part in a group discussion rather than an individual interview. Therefore, instead of following a prescribed procedure, the shape and analytical status given to the interview process should reflect the researcher's theoretical position. In the case of the group discussion as an emergent encounter, it opened up the possibility of ongoing dialogue; the women were willing to talk to me but on their own terms.

Knowledge Production and Reflexivity

As demonstrated in the section above, it is important to remember from where the knowledge within this thesis has arisen. As Skeggs (1997: 17) notes, drawing on the work of Donna Haraway (1991) and Nancy Hartsock (1983): 'to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allows some to abdicate responsibility for their productions and

the representations'. It is important then, to explain not only how I have chosen my participants, and thus the methods I have used, but also how their stories have been analysed, written and interpreted. Discussions surrounding the position of the researcher within the research process is then, very important in giving such an account. In the previous section, I spoke of how my social and cultural position has shaped my positioning within the research process. I described how such a position, in the first instance, caused me to foreground issues of gender and feminism when considering how aspects of inequality may affect women within the context of austerity. However, it is not enough to state my position. It is also important to articulate how such a position of difference may lead to further bias within the research.

One of the main questions surrounding position and knowledge production is how white scholars can study those who have been historically subordinated without further producing sociological accounts distorted by the political economy of 'race', class and gender (Anderson, 1993: 41 in Gunaratnam, 2003). In her famous article 'Can the subaltern speak?' Gayatri Spivak (1988) highlights such risks when members of a privileged group, for example intellectuals, make political claims on behalf of oppressed groups. Scholars can patronise, or essentialise, the researched group and also reinforce the oppression of the group spoken for (Alcoff, 1995; Scharff, 2009). On the other hand, limiting research to relationships between those who share as much as possible does not necessarily resolve the problem of 'representation', since 'sameness' within research can 'blur the vision' of researchers, preventing them from conducting a critical analysis (Hurd and McIntyre, 1996).

Reflexivity can be the first step to obtaining further insights into how both the position of the researcher, and the researched, impact on the production of knowledge (Scharff, 2009). As Skeggs writes; 'we must recognise the partial, situated nature of all knowledge production, whilst also recognising our own position as mediators in knowledge production where power relations are unavoidable' (1994: 73). As described above, I recognise that my position or approach affects the work I produce, but I have no interest

in indulging in a reflexivity that places myself at the core of the research by making my voice become more visible than those I am researching. To quote Audrey Kobayashi, 'while reflexivity is an important, and some may say essential aspect of recognising the difference between the studier and the studied and even in some cases of taking moral responsibility for that difference, indulgence in reflexivity is ironically the very act that sets us apart' (2003: 348). Drawing attention to another way in which reflexivity may contribute to reinforcing differences, Skeggs points out that the ability to be reflexive is a privilege, representing a position of mobility and power. 'Reflexivity is made possible through access to resources, and the technique of telling for the middle-class depends on accruing the stories of others, of those less privileged' (2004: 129). By advocating reflexivity, researchers engage in a classed practice and potentially reinforce unequal power relationships. Therefore, merely writing myself into this research and claiming reflexivity cannot eradicate the issues of power and knowledge claims and can thus reinforce and contribute to reinforcing the differences that I am trying to avoid.

Issues of Power

Power Balance Between the Researcher and the Researched

As argued above, the un-structuring of the interview process was used to explore the specificity of individual women's understandings, emotions and actions, allowing women to lead the conversation to the topic they felt most important. However, within such an attempt, the research process itself is not an equal encounter, regardless of the type of method used. It is characterised by power imbalances (Cotterill, 1992; Opie, 1992; Phoenix, 1995; Wolf, 1996; Luff, 1999; Grenz, 2005). Feminists have become increasingly aware that the feminist in-depth interview can be used clumsily and even exploitatively and carries the risk of doing rapport 'too effectively' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002: 111 in Scharff, 2009: 73). Janet Finch (1995) for example, holds that trust is easily established between women and has an exploitative potential. Participants may disclose information

that they potentially regret having shared and which carries the risk of later being used against them. The high degree of interaction between the researcher and the participant may reveal 'deeply personal, emotionally charged information' (Kirsch, 2005: 2163), placing research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal (Stacey, 1991).

Nevertheless, I would caution against claiming that the research process can *only* be seen as causing objectification and exploitation. As Gayle Letherby argues, 'it is important not to over-pacify respondents within the research situation' (2003: 116). Research participants, for instance, have the power to deny or gratify access, they can exert power by not 'telling the truth', refusing to answer and decide what it is that they want to talk about (Olsen and Shopes, 1991: 196; Phoenix, 1995). Power relations do not remain fixed, but as Ann Phoenix (1995: 55) writes; 'shift over the course of a study'. It is important then, to see power as not being static, but as constantly changing (ibid). During my interviews, power was in a constant process of negotiation, however, power dynamics of class and 'race' were still extremely evident. For example, at times I was seen as an expert, where the gendered knowledge of authority became present. I was often asked questions such as 'was that right?', 'did I answer correctly' and 'how did I do?' Polly, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman, working as an occupational therapist in Leeds, discussed at length who she thought was to blame for the current austerity cuts. I sat back and listened. Once she had finished, she turned to me and said 'is that right?' This happened in subsequent interviews, in which people apologised to me for 'not being up-to-date on this', 'not knowing about politics' or that they thought they had been 'unhelpful or not of much use'. Once they had finished their discussions, some would also say that they would go and read up on the current changes because they felt embarrassed that they didn't know about the topic. As the interview questions moved along and changed, sometimes my position as the 'expert' was relinquished and the power of the respondent was exercised. This was often since topics were raised about which I had no prior knowledge, and I asked for further information and clarification to make social issues visible (also see Opie, 1992). Often terms and acronyms had to be explained to me.

On occasion, the women would move the conversation on when they wanted to, thus having the power to set an alternative agenda or resist the 'expert knowledge' of the researcher. Lauren, a 33-year-old, working-class, white woman from Leeds, who at the time of the interview was receiving JSA, began to talk about a job interview she had later that afternoon, and asked if we could go over the interview questions she had rehearsed. Setting the agenda for the remainder of the interview, the research interview then became a mock job interview. Nadia, a 32-year-old, middle-class teacher from Leeds who described herself as 'mixed other,' exercised power in a different way. Before we began the interview, Nadia told me that she was starting a master's degree in September, which heavily focused on research methods. She then began to grill me about my choice of methods and how I was going to interview her, reminding me about the way I should and should not conduct an interview. This put me on edge and I began to get apprehensive about the interview process. After discussing interviewer bias, leading questions and interviewer effect, I then felt that she was grading my technique throughout the interview, which I found extremely off-putting. Thus, on both occasions, Nadia and Lauren were able to resist the 'expert knowledge' of the researcher and exercise a degree of power. However, it is important to note the significance of the class position of these two respondents. Power, was being resisted or recast differently; in Lauren's case, I was still seen as an 'expert' in some ways, in which I took on the role of the 'job interviewer', a different but equally powerful position. Whereas my 'expertise' was unsettled by Nadia's comments and questions.

I explained previously that some women felt various topics to be onerous and depressing. However, some interviewees saw the experience as being mutually beneficial (if, for example, their participation could be added to their CV). The Jobcentre in their area had advised that taking part in voluntary work would be helpful for their future job prospects and their attendance at the interview would be deemed as voluntary participation working in the local community. Women often told me that they experienced the interviews as therapeutic, where they were able in some cases to air grievances and seek

reassurances (also see Olsen and Shopes, 1991; Phoenix, 1995). Women used the interview to talk over issues they were having, especially for those who felt the strain of unemployment, money worries and ill health. However, despite conceiving such examples as being mutually beneficial, it is impossible to ignore the fact that these conversations would be used to generate material that I would broker to try to inhabit the academy, thus demonstrating the power play with the field itself. As Diane Wolf states; 'the crises and tragedies occurring to our respondents or study population may enhance our own research' (1996: 20).

Deciding to be silent, or acting in order to silence others, can also be seen as a way in which power is enabled. On many occasions, I heard xenophobic, racist, and classist prejudices. Eastern European immigrants were often blamed for the lack of employment opportunities; working-class women were described as lazy and uneducated; Muslim women were described as oppressed and un-modern, needing help and guidance; and northern women as having undesirable accents. Pragmatically, Phoenix (1995: 56) claims that such voiced prejudices in the interview can produce interesting data, emphasising that the whole point of conducting interviews is to evoke respondent's accounts. While this might pertain to the subsequent interpretation of data, at the time, such voiced prejudices made me feel uncomfortable and unsure about how to react. In such circumstances, to quote Ann Gray, 'it was impossible for me to keep nodding along in encouragement but at the same time, to interject and enter into an argument would also be problematic for the interview' (1995: 163). Many feminist researchers have written about the messy relationship between maintaining rapport whilst pointing out prejudice. Some have instinctively remained silent. For instance, Christina Scharff (2009) discusses how during an interview with one of her research participants she was shocked to hear a xenophobic remark. Unsure how to react, Scharff writes that she did not challenge the remark because she felt she could not criticise her interviewees view since it could have negativity impacted on their rapport and did not want to present herself as someone who knew better, 'occupying the moral high ground' (2009: 91). Others such as Christine Griffin (1991) have encouraged researchers to care more about wider inequalities and

less for the researched. In her study of racism, Griffin argued that researchers should 'talk back' when respondents are reproducing damaging and prejudiced ideas, 'to not do so, (the ethical prescription of care, for instance) would reproduce, legitimate and collude in the ideas being articulated' (cited in Skeggs 2007: 434).

In my experience, there is 'no clear course of action in these situations' (Becker, 2000 in Scharff, 2009) and I responded in different ways throughout my different interactions within the interview process¹⁹. When I did 'talk back', I did so in different ways, all of which produced different outcomes. When I was asked my opinion, I would mostly respond honestly, which on occasion caused slight offence or increased silence, but in general, generated further discussion. For example, on one occasion I was asked my opinion about whether I agreed that Somalians were taking all the council properties in North London. I disagreed. After a brief silence, the respondent then said 'well, maybe it's not Somalians but it's definitely Muslims'. When presented with these prejudiced stereotypes I would challenge them, asking respondents to generate examples of such things. A few times I openly disagreed and called respondents out on what they had said. On occasion, this did alter the rapport between the interviewee and myself, but it also produced some interesting responses. During my interview with Celia, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman, living and working in London as a HR manager, I disagreed with her over a comment she had made about 'black women not being able to talk as well as white women'; I pointed out that she was being racist. The day after the interview she re-contacted me, giving me the names of two friends of hers (both non-white) whom she knew would like to do the interview. I found this very interesting; as she had made it explicitly clear to me, when I called her out on her comment, that she was in fact not racist as she had 'loads of different friends'. She endeavoured to reinforce this statement by her further contact, in which she passed on the contact details of her 'different friends'.

¹⁹I should also point out that my ability to not remain silent became easier over the course of the fieldwork, where I became increasingly more comfortable in calling out such prejudice.

Within the above section, I have described how power is constantly negotiated, using illustrative encounters within the field. I am not advocating that power relations within the research process are equal in any way. However, from the discussion above, I would caution against claiming that such a process can *only* be seen as objectification and exploitation (Patai 1991; Stacey, 1991). The research process can never be perfect; we need to be cautious and vigilant in not oversimplifying the ethical dilemmas within feminist research, but we should not see the women in our studies solely as victims with no power. The research process may never be completely equal and ethical, however to deny a lack of agency is also unethical. Yet, as touched upon briefly above, the dynamics of class and 'race' are important factors in the research process. These issues will now be discussed below.

'Race' and Class based Power Dynamics

Lauren walked into the meeting room at organisation X, 'I've been waiting for 15 minutes, they wouldn't let me come in. Sarah [her support worker] said to come for 10 am but you had someone in here already'. I apologised and asked if she still had time to do the interview, she said yes and we sat down. She then turned to me and said 'so what is this all about then?' I explained about the nature of my research, that I was a PhD student at a university in London, and asked her if I was able to record the interview. She agreed and we began. Midway through the interview, she told me that she had been sanctioned²⁰ for six weeks and she had been told to come to the organisation by a friend who said that they would be able to help her. I asked her how the organisation had been useful to her during this time. She said, 'without them [organisation] I wouldn't have known where to start, they [Jobcentre] just leave you, but they shouldn't be able to, yeah my son might be able to live on his money but what about his food and that?' She paused for a second, turned to me and asked, 'so who are you with then? Jobcentre or part of the organisation?' I replied saying, 'neither', reminding her that I was here to ask questions for my research project. She responded, 'I just don't want to be sanctioned again, do you hear me?' I tried to carry on the conversation, back

²⁰Sanctioning is when benefit payments to the recipient are stopped. There are three sanction levels; lower, intermediate or higher. The level and length of sanctioning depends on: the reason for claiming JSA, whether the recipient received an earlier sanction in the last year, or if the claim has been ended. Sanctioning can last between 4 weeks to 156 weeks (DWP, 2016).

tracking to ask how the organisation had helped her whilst she had been sanctioned. She told me that she could understand how people get sick because of stress, offering an example of how she had been having to use food banks whilst waiting for her sanctioning to end. Before continuing, she paused for a second, turned towards me and said 'you know, I'm telling you all this and you're just sat there and there's nothing that you can say. You just sit there, nod along or smile because you can't say nought, you really have no idea, do you?' (Field note: Thursday 28th August 2014)

The interview itself has a history, where, as can be demonstrated above, power dynamics of 'race' and class are inevitably at play. During my interview with Lauren she highlighted my position as an inquirer in a position of power when asking, 'so who are you with then? Jobcentre or part of the organisation?' Although she did not refuse to answer my questions, despite telling me that she 'didn't want to get sanctioned', she highlighted my positionality within the process by saying that I had 'no idea' about her situation. Skeggs (2004, 2015) argues that class is made through methodologies, since middle-class participants generally find the interview a more comfortable process, positioned as fellow professionals and thus social equals to their interviewers. Working-class participants, she argues, 'often find the interview a more laborious affair, offering only curt responses' (2015: 215). As Carolyn Steedman (2000) describes in the history of the English administrative state, the working-class were demanded to repetitively tell the self. For example:

the 1834 Poor Law gave middle-class legal professionals the ability to make judgments of the habits of the poor, especially of mothers. It enabled middle-class women to enter public space as evangelical social workers in the name of saving the deserving working-class woman. By claiming the right to judge standards of health and care, a whole professional classed group has now been institutionalized via welfare, law and education, who put into effect classed moral judgments, such as whether your child is taken into care, whether you get access to housing, what sort of sentence you will receive if you riot, etc. (Skeggs, 2015: 215)

As the above field note shows, these orientations were present in my research. Some young women would describe the comfortable process of the interview and the interest they had in the questions. On several occasions, I received Facebook messages and

emails from women that I had interviewed thanking me for the interview, often describing how 'lucky' they felt about their own position after reflecting on the interview and the comments they had made. The affective response of young women who were significantly affected by welfare changes and public sector cuts was drastically different. Both during and after interviews and group discussions, I would hear women saying that they 'felt depressed' talking about the subject or that they 'wouldn't have come if they knew they were going to get depressed'. On other occasions, other methods were favoured instead of the one-on-one setting. The encounter below illustrates this:

The group had already started eating as I walked in; I sat down at the end of the table. 'This is Vicki, she is the woman I was telling you all about last week, the one who wants to talk to you about the cuts and that'. After going round and introducing themselves, Scarlett, one of the women attending the group held up a plastic plate gesturing me to help myself to the food. This group meets once a week, it is a support group for women who have suffered domestic violence, in which they come here one afternoon per week to do an activity. Today was glass-painting day. There was a knock at the door and a policewoman entered. 'Charlotte, can you come and have a word with Marion about the incident the other day?' Charlotte got up and left. 'Sorry Vicki, just to let you know that some people will be in and out because they have things to sort out, so sorry for the intrusions ... so how do you want to do the interviews?' I replied that whoever wanted to talk to me could let me know and we could go in another room and talk. 'The room that we were going to use is now taken up with Charlotte, so there is one next door that you can go in, how does that sound?' I replied 'that's fine with me', however, everybody went quiet. Scarlett then said that she didn't feel like 'talking today'. Instead she offered to talk to me during the glass painting in a group. Everyone else agreed that they would also be happier to do that and so we began the group discussion. (Field note: Thursday 28th August 2014)

In the above encounter, I had made an error. I had suggested going to another room within the building, which would enable us to have privacy, and which, I thought, would make the women feel more comfortable. However, when I suggested this, the women looked unsettled, hesitant and uncomfortable. This room was often used for discussions with the police, social services and government officials, in which women were compelled to give accounts of themselves on a regular basis. As discussed by Emma Jackson (2010: 50) in her work with homeless people in London, I had accidentally

proposed to replicate what she calls the 'frightening interview setting', which was not conducive for expressing comfortably their views and opinions. As argued above, asking women to 'speak' about their experiences, has, for some, been tied to domination and techniques of surveillance. This is particularly significant in context of austerity and in this specific fieldwork site. Scarlett, (a 23-year-old, working-class, white woman on Income Support) had expressed that she didn't feel like 'talking' on that occasion, but on reflection that meant in the setting that I had suggested. Instead of shutting down the possibility of the interview, the women suggested an alternative, and were happy to sit and talk to me as a group in the communal room on their terms. The non-hierarchical interview setting that I aimed for was fraught with power dynamics. It is important to consider what it means for people to give an account of themselves in a specific context, especially those who are already required to do so within systems of governance. The above example shows that when we ask people to give accounts of themselves and their lives, we need to be aware and open to the other ways of working and be reflexive enough to amend and shape our practices as necessary. Yet as my encounter with Lauren illustrates, listening cannot always alleviate or compensate for difference.

Power Dynamics During Interpretation and Analysis: Speaking for Others

So, what's this research going to do? Help squeeze us further?
(Priya, 35, middle-class, Pakistani, Brighton, on DLA, February 2015)

The issue of power changes once you leave the setting of the interview and begin to interpret and represent the people who have been active in the process. The discourse around these challenges typically focuses on exploitation, inequality, misrepresentation, and betrayal. As Letherby (2003) notes, after leaving the field, the researcher has ultimate control over the material. She has the power to organise and present the data as well as turn people's lives into an authoritative text (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 113). This begs the question, can, as Gesa Kirsch (1999: ix) asks, 'researchers represent the experiences of others without misrepresenting, misappropriating, or distorting their

realities?’ Questioning the ethics involved in speaking for, and describing, others, this final section, describes how I negotiated these ethical issues within this specific fieldwork site, in order to avoid as Priya said, helping ‘to squeeze us further.’

According to Les Back, ‘thinking, talking and description is always a betrayal – albeit a necessary one – of either the person whom one is speaking or the things that we know about them that remain unsaid’ (2007:4). Taking the act of description as the initial starting point, I want to think through the dilemmas of such description. Due to the relationship between knowledge and power, researchers have been cautious with regards to describing ‘others’. Jo Armstrong (2010: 237), for instance, discusses how, by embarking on a project that foregrounded gender and class, she was aware ‘that an author’s words continue to signify in spite of, and sometimes against, her intentions’. She therefore feared that such detailed representation may be used against the researcher’s own aims and may ‘provide ammunition to those who would choose to employ it in way with which I disagree’ (ibid). This is especially the case in my fieldwork site, since representations of certain women as ‘undeserving,’ ‘work-shy,’ and ‘irresponsible’ are being used to further the government’s austerity agenda of cutting public spending. However, while such a discussion demonstrates the inevitable difficulties in writing about research participants, ‘if the texture of the lives is lost where excerpts of quotations are expected to speak for themselves, the words of respondents will not carry vivid portrayals of their lives (Back, 2007: 17). I therefore agree with Skeggs (2004) in her belief that we need to think about ‘how we do the research’ itself. As she notes:

We need to ask, if the subaltern speaks, how is it that we hear her? Can the subaltern authorize herself if she cannot speak or only be heard through the self/words of others? Gayatri Spivak (2000) argues no. But unless researchers ... make subaltern stories available, how would most people know about the subaltern at all? If subaltern groups have no access to the mechanisms and circuits for telling and distributing their knowledge, how do others even know they exist? It is surely a matter of *how we do the research* rather than abdicate responsibility entirely. (130, italics my emphasis)

When conducting research, we therefore need to think about, and consider, 'the relations of production', 'the possibilities of appropriation' and the 'constraints of disciplinary techniques and the power relations of location and position' (Skeggs, 2004: 131). It is this type of research Skeggs continues, which does not 'reify and reproduce the categorisations of exploitation and symbolic violence' (ibid). Following this important discussion, I argue that the question made by Priya, in the beginning of this section, should not, as some advocate, cause me to abdicate responsibility for telling the story. However, when researching experiences of austerity, researchers need to think what the research might *do*, as well as *how* we, as researchers, avoid reproducing and perpetuating such exploitation and symbolic violence. As Armstrong (2010: 237) notes, researchers should stay alert to possible points of ambiguity, but also acknowledge the limits that the researcher has over how the research could be interpreted by others. I therefore used the same tactic as Armstrong, approaching the research with care, caution and understanding, aware of the ways in which some of my participants' responses could be used and interpreted by others. As can be seen throughout this chapter, this care, caution, and understanding is of special importance within the context of austerity.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the methodological dimensions of researching the lived experiences of young women - through the outlined fieldwork and methods employed, and the politics surrounding knowledge making - exposing its 'messy' and untidy nature. It is therefore necessary to close this chapter by reiterating how profoundly the complex nature of austerity (as a gendered moral-political-economic project with differing social effects) commanded the shape of the research process. The 'messiness' and untidy nature of austerity and its differing impacts on young women's lives meant that there had to be continuous changes of direction, adaptation, negotiation and adjustment, which took place at every stage of the research's production. However, I argue that such

processes did not impinge on the research but, in contrast, became necessary in order to effectively research austerity and its impacts.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the key literature of the themes investigated in this thesis. I outline how my study critically engages with research on the lived experiences of austerity, as well as the contribution my study offers to this scholarship. In what follows, I examine the gap existing in current studies, arguing that, despite contemporary literature contributing in-depth analyses of the lived experiences of austerity, there is a lack of research which analyses the relationship between the state's production and legitimisation of austerity, and women's everyday experience(s) (especially analyses that focus specifically on difference, primarily how gender, class, and 'race' affect experience of austerity). Documenting such a gap throughout this literature review, I argue that a fuller gendered empirical analysis is thus necessary since austerity itself, is a gendered state project, with gendered social outcomes, which are affected by social markers of class and 'race'. In the final section of this review, I make a brief discussion (which will be taken up in the following chapter) arguing that we also need to consider the historical legacies that have shaped gender, class and 'race' in particular ways, in order to fully understand austerity and its gendered impacts.

Austerity Policy and its Gendered Impacts

Since the implementation of austerity measures in 2010, a large quantity of research has documented how neoliberal restructuring, the economic crisis, and austerity measures have led to increasing inequality, social polarisation and societal disintegration. Scholars have examined how cuts and reforms have targeted *already* marginalised groups, and have aggravated *existing* divides of class, gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, and disability at local, regional, and global levels (see for example, Dorling and Ballas, 2008; Atkinson, 2013; Hall, Massey and Rustin, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Mendoza, 2015). In the current crisis, feminist economists and women's sector

organisations have written extensively on the gendered impact of austerity (Walby, 2009; MacLeavy, 2011; Fawcett Society, 2012, 2013, 2015; WBG, 2014b, 2016; NEWN and WRC, 2012; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Pashkoff, 2014; TUC, 2012, 2015; Pearson and Elson, 2015; Brah, Szemen and Gedalof, 2015). As Hall (2017: no pagination) notes, women bear the brunt of economic crises with research showing that recessions, downturns, austerity and economic changes imposed from above are not evenly felt or distributed across society; an analysis backed up by the House of Commons Library (2016). This analysis has revealed that since 2010, 86 per cent of the burden of austerity has fallen on women (Cracknel and Keen, 2016). Therefore, in this current context, the work of feminist economists and women's sector organisations have made a distinctive contribution to our overall understanding of the effects of austerity on women in general, as well as highlighting the disproportionate impact such measures have had on certain groups of women. Much of this research draws on large-scale surveys and census data, or analyses austerity budgets according to their financial costs.

Reports and analyses have published detailed evaluations of the gendered impact of austerity measures. One of the most exhaustive summaries of the cumulative impact of such policies has been written by Ruth Pearson and Diane Elson (2015). They demonstrate, drawing on a wide range of evidence (from WBG, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Rubery, 2014; TUC, 2012, 2015), how women have borne the brunt of these policies and the disparate effect such policies have had on the spheres of finance, production²¹ and reproduction²². The equality campaigner, The Fawcett Society (2012),

²¹Elson and Pearson (2015) note that the impact on the productive sphere is demonstrated by the changes in women's employment and earnings. For instance, public sector employment has fallen, and since women make up about two-thirds of the public-sector workforce, this has had a greater impact on women (Women's Budget Group, 2013a).

²²Public expenditure in social care has been reduced by 23 per cent; investment in social housing has gone down by 34 per cent, while the 'bedroom tax' has inevitably increased the rental cost to social tenants. Significant cuts in public expenditure on schools (11 per cent), further and higher education (33 per cent), as well as social care (23 per cent) and early childhood education (19 per cent), reflect further areas where public policy has affected social reproductive activities by reducing public provision, generally relying on women's unpaid labour to fill the gap. Many women working in these sectors have either lost their jobs entirely or seen hours and earnings reduced (WBG, 2014a, 2014b).

labels this a 'triple jeopardy', since the current austerity programme of deep spending cuts has left women facing cuts to jobs, benefits and vital services. The austerity agenda is therefore particularly damaging to women – they typically use state services more than men, they are typically employed at a higher rate in the public sector than men, and they rely more on benefits and tax credits than men (due to their caring responsibilities and their relative economic inequality and poverty). The described research is helpful for this thesis, since it not only explains *the ways in which* women are 'bearing the brunt' of the deficit reduction strategy, but also documents the *extent to which* women are increasingly disproportionately disadvantaged. As my analysis shows in Chapter 5, women spoke of how austerity measures were impacting their daily lives in different ways, especially in relation to the changes made to their experience of employment, access to welfare benefits and state-funded services. The referenced research above is therefore important in showing *how and why* austerity's effects are inherently gendered.

Literature has also highlighted the disproportionate impact of austerity on *particular groups of* women – single mothers and single women who are unemployed or in low income employment²³ (Pearson and Elson, 2015), those from working-class and BAME backgrounds (TUC, 2012, 2015; Sandhu and Stevenson, 2015; WBG and Runnymede Trust, 2017)²⁴, young women and older women (WBG, 2012, 2013, TUC, 2015)²⁵, women with disabilities (Wood, Cheetman and Gregory, 2012)²⁶, and women in northern regions

²³For instance, these 'disadvantaged groups' have experienced the biggest fall in disposable income because of austerity policies (Elson and Pearson, 2015).

²⁴Most recently, a report from WBG and Runnymede Trust (2017) has indicated that low-income black and Asian women are paying the highest price for austerity. The analysis shows that by 2020, individuals in the poorest households lose most from tax and benefit changes, but in every income group BAME women will lose the greatest proportion of their individual income.

²⁵According to the TUC (2015) young women's employment which fell furthest in the recession years, has still not recovered.

²⁶A report by Claudia Wood, Philida Cheetman and Thomas Gregory (2013) has shown that disabled and chronically ill women – many of whom are carers themselves – face huge and continuing cuts to disability support, from fit-for-work tests to the latest changes to personal independence payments.

of the UK (NEWN and WRC, 2012)²⁷. For example, the Women's Budget Group and Runnymede Trust (2017) performed a cumulative distributional analysis of tax and benefit changes since 2010 and found that women are hit harder than men across all incomes groups, with BAME women particularly hard hit. By 2020, Asian women in some of the poorest families will be £2,247 worse off. Black and Asian lone mothers stand to lose £3,996 and £4,214, respectively, from the changes, about 15 and 17 per cent of their net income. This illustrates that austerity is not only distinctly and inherently gendered, but is also a socially uneven condition which exacerbate pre-existing social and economic inequalities. As Kalwinder Sandhu and Mary-Ann Stevenson note in their article 'Layers of inequality' (2015), one of the key features of women's experience of austerity is that they often face several cuts simultaneously. Women's experiences, they note, are made worse by the simultaneous operations of the social divisions of gender, 'race', ethnicity, class and disability. Like the research above, this thesis explores how these differences affect women's material experience of austerity. It helps to explain the gendering of austerity in economic terms – as an economic programme of 'fiscal management, revealing how austerity policies have produced and enabled gendered, classed, and racialised material exclusions.

Austerity Discourse and its Gendered Impacts

As outlined in detail in Chapter 1, austerity is more than just a programme of fiscal management. It is also a moral–political gendered project, and a cultural tool which, as feminist scholars have examined, has facilitated the production of certain gendered (classed and 'racial') subject-positions. These subject-positions are played out, circulated and reinforced, in particular ways, by the state, in public sites, and through popular culture (Allen et al., 2015: 908; also see for instance, Jensen and Tyler, 2012; Bramall,

²⁷For example, the TUC (2012: 4) documented the 'increasingly perilous position of women' in northern areas and predicted much worse to come when further welfare reforms hit. Research on women in the North East has since proved this; 46 per cent of all women working in the area have jobs in the public sector compared with 18 per cent of working males in the region (North East Women's Network and Women's Resource Centre, 2012).

2013; Tyler, 2013a, 2015; Littler, 2013; McRobbie, 2013; Negra, 2013; Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis, 2014; Griffin, 2015; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015; Evans, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017; De Benedictis and Gill, 2016).

Austerity discourse, Orgad and De Benedictis (2015: 420) note, often casts women as passive and personal respondents to the economic downturn, while simultaneously stressing their responsibility and need for positive thinking (also see Negra and Tasker, 2014). Austerity discourse, scholars argue, thus privilege certain practices (middle-class), while vilifying others (working-class), and creates connections between those practices and specific subject positions. For instance, the ideal female citizen is congratulated for being a future-orientated, self-regulating, economically active, and consumer driven (labelled as a 'yummy mummy', 'happy housewife', 'striver', or part of the 'hardworking family'). This figure 'fits' into contemporary economic and social formations and helps the 'nation' recover. Others ('ghetto trash', 'chavs', 'feral parents', 'riotous mothers' or 'skivers') are condemned as excessive and destructive, and blamed for the crisis of capitalism (Jensen, 2012, 2014; Allen et al., 2015; McRobbie, 2013; Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis, 2014; Griffin, 2015; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015; Evans, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Scholars have noted how the gendered dimension of austerity can be seen through the emergence of thrift, nostalgia and gendered domestic entrepreneurship (Jensen, 2012, 2013a; Bramall, 2013; Biressi and Nunn, 2013; Negra, 2013) – ideals which fit with the austerity agenda. Female thrift, Diane Negra writes, 'works for an era of adjusted economic realities ... with female consumer resourcefulness becoming a new theme on many fronts' (2013: 124). Similarly, the 'domestic ideal' has also been a focal point of austere values and subjectivities. As Allen et al. (2015) argue, the benchmark of successful femininity in the context of austerity has been coded around homemaking and childcare, which are seen as sites of happiness and moral worth (also see Littler, 2013; McRobbie, 2013). This domestic ideal, as these feminist scholars highlight, is a distinctly middle-class and heterosexual (planned) family unit, which does considerable cultural

work for a government determined to revive 'traditional' family values and cut public spending (Allen et al., 2015).

Yet, the focus on homemaking, thrift and domesticity cannot be seen as a 'return narrative'. Such a description, Evans (2015: 150) notes, is at odds with the modernising aspirations of contemporary neo-liberalism: women need to work and consume. Thus, 'as far as the purposes of present-day capitalism are concerned, that women continue to spend money as active consumers is crucial. Far from saving the string, we are now exhorted to buy new string as often as possible' (Evans, 2013: 839). Feminist scholars have highlighted how the 'good mother' - the responsible, resilient, middle-class mother – thus reflects the norms of contemporary citizenship (Allen and Taylor, 2012: 5). As Allen and Taylor explain, the 'good' mother not only withstands the consequences of the recession, but, at the same time, helps to reinvigorate the economy and society by governing themselves and their children in the 'right' ways. This normative view of 'good parenting' Orgad and De Benedictis (2015: 421) stress, is 'predicated on self-governance of certain gendered selves and interlinked with the economy is intimately connected to the intensifying entanglement of mothering and neoliberalism'. Female labour power is 'far too important to the post-industrial economy for any [government] to be an advocate of long-term stay-at-home wives and mothers' (McRobbie, 2013: 121), especially a government determined to reduce the cost of welfare. Thus, austerity's ideal mother must not fully retreat, but carefully balance her career with childcare. The ideal female citizen – 'mother and carer or not' – is an economically active citizen (Evans, 2016: 449). It is this figure, the female worker, Evans argues, that women's 'respectability' is now become clearly associated with. Yet, as Orgad and De Benedictis note, stay-at-home mothers (SAHM) are gaining renewed status. Providing she is upper-middle class the SAHM validates 'a retreat from the idea of combining full-time successful careers with motherhood' and 'gives new, more professional status to full-time mothers' (McRobbie, 2013: 301, in Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015: 624).

In contrast to the ideal figure above, the described values have also facilitated the emergence of other figures, subjected to the disapproval of others. The 'welfare mother', Evans writes (2016: 439), 'is a new character on a political stage that has long included individuals apparently dangerous to the nation' (also see De Benedictis, 2012, Tyler, 2013a; Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis, 2014; McKenzie, 2014; Allen et al., 2015; Casey, 2015). Met with various kinds of contempt, the 'welfare mother' is held up in contrast to the 'good mother'. With citizenship being framed around work, the shaming of the so-called 'welfare mother' can be understood through their absence in the workforce and thus the inability to provide for their children (Evans, 2017; Tyler, 2013a; Casey, 2015). Scholars have therefore examined the ways in which these figures of disapproval are circulating within political and media discourse. De Benedictis (2012) for instance, has unpacked the transcendence of the 'feral' parent discourse (infused with classed and racialised undertones) through British media commentary via public political statements before and after the 2011 UK riots. She argues that 'the discourse of the "feral" parent emerged to position the blame for the riots on a class of "feral" children borne of "feral" parents' (1). Blame was thus centred upon the lone, working-class mother, 'imbued with unique meaning to aid socio-economic and political incentives under austerity' (ibid).

Most notably there has been the shaming and blaming of these figures across RTV shows about welfare recipients (this will be discussed in more detail below) (see Jensen, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014; Allen et al., 2015). Described as 'poverty porn', these shows are frequently mobilised by politicians as evidence of a society plagued by welfare dependency and moral breakdown (Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis, 2014; Jensen 2014). The production and circulation of these subject positions across political and media discourse demonstrates, as Allen et al. argue, 'how austerity has afforded opportunities to reboot classed and racialised discourses that have historically positioned black and working-class mothers outside of the hegemonic ideal of white, middle-class maternity (Gillies, 2007; Phoenix, 1991)' (2015: 918).

In Chapter 4, I return to this analysis. I further examine austerity discourses circulating within the political register, not only highlighting in detail *why and how* austerity has been produced and legitimised by the state, but how these discourses interlock and contradict each other. Drawing on the work above, I also show *how* these discourses discursively and affectively shape which groups are 'deserving' of spending cuts, as well as how spending cuts are made present and actionable. Exploring the circulating contradictory discourses helps to understand how austerity is put to use by the state and the particular ways in which austerity shapes gender, class and 'race' relations.

In addition, it is also important to understand how such sensibilities are taken up and lived out in the everyday. As my analysis shows in Chapter 7, women dialogued with these 'good' and 'bad' gendered, classed and racialised subject positions and sensibilities, drawing on the discussions of hard-work and responsibility. The research discussed above is therefore important since it demonstrates *how* certain kinds of subject positions and sensibilities have been produced within the moral landscape of austerity, and also *highlights* austerity's specifically gendered, classed, and racialised dimensions.

Austerity, however, (as briefly touched on above) has *real outcomes and social effects*. It is this symbiotic relationship, between austerity as a state project and its social effects, that this thesis is interested in understanding. As Georgina Waylen notes, 'it is important to remember that actions cannot be understood outside of the structures which constrain them, just as those structures cannot be understood without some consideration of the impact of the choices made by actors both in and outside of them in creating and changing those structures' (1998: 2). Therefore, this analysis is supplemented with empirical research on the everyday lives of women.

Everyday Experiences of Austerity

The following sections in this chapter will describe the empirical research that has been undertaken to date on the lived experiences of austerity and highlight some of the

limitations and gaps within this literature. In doing so, I will show how my research dialogues with and extends these discussions. By reviewing literature that explores the material and symbolic effects of austerity in the everyday, I highlight how these discussions often focus on particular groups of women and their specific experiences. In contrast, my study demonstrates that to fully understand the experiences of women in the context of austerity, it is important to foreground difference. I argue that studies on austerity can produce fuller and more complex accounts of the gendered impacts by examining how difference and processes of differentiation interact with these experiences. As I discuss in this section, literature has considered how austerity affects people in different ways due to the multiplicity of austerity itself. However, an examination of such multiplicity, I argue, must also take into account the ways in which different social markers shape women's experience, as well as the ways austerity intensifies and extends existing social and economic inequalities.

Living with Austerity

The majority of the empirical research on the impact of austerity focuses on understanding the effects brought about by such measures (Shildrick et al., 2012; O'Hara, 2014; Valentine, 2014; Pemberton et al., 2014; Hitchen, 2014, 2016; Patrick, 2014, 2016, 2017). Polly Toynebee, in her book *Hard Work* (2003) argues that 'ordinary people' who do ordinary, necessary, but underpaid and undervalued jobs at the bottom of the labour market 'do not figure on the national landscape at all. They are the forgotten, the invisible' (149). However, empirical studies on the everyday experiences of austerity counter such an argument, making the lives of those 'ordinary people' visible. These studies have been conducted by scholars across geographical areas, disciplinary spaces and theoretical approaches.

One of the most comprehensive and compelling accounts of the social effects of austerity is the work of Mary O'Hara in her book *Austerity Bites*. Based on a series of

interviews conducted throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland during 2012 and 2013, O'Hara examines the lives of everyday people, through their own words, who have been adversely affected by austerity measures. O'Hara's research maps out the different (but often intersecting) effects felt in the everyday through the implementation of austerity measures: the rise in food poverty, the consequences of welfare reform (especially sanctioning and the 'bedroom tax'), increased levels of debt, increased pressure on household income and wages, and changes to employment. More specifically, O'Hara also focuses on the disproportionate impact that such measures have had on people with disabilities and women and children. Her book exposes the material, psychological, and symbolic effects of the austerity programme. It supplements discussions from 'ordinary people' with an extensive body of research and reports from statisticians, journalists, academics and politicians and paints an overall picture of the landscape of austerity for those 'at the sharp end of the cuts.' O'Hara's book is extremely important in documenting the different ways in which austerity impacts different lives in different ways.

Scholarship has also focused on specific areas through which austerity has materialised within (for example welfare reform and employment). The large majority has concentrated specifically on the impact of welfare reform; assessing the experiences of those who are reliant on welfare benefits (for instance, Gathwaite, 2014; Patrick, 2016, 2017; Manji, 2017). Through understanding the daily life of those accessing welfare benefits, the research examines the extent of the disjunction between citizenship as conceptualised from above and citizenship as lived and experienced from below. In addition, studies have also looked at the lived experiences of those moving between unemployment and insecure work. Research conducted in Teesside by Tracey Shildrick, Robert MacDonald, Colin Webster and Kayleigh Garthwaite (2012) for instance, not only shows the lived experiences of those in precarious employment but also contests the myth that work is 'the best route out of poverty'. Other investigations have considered the lived experience of low-income groups (Valentine, 2014; Pemberton et al., 2014), people and families with disabilities (Hitchen, 2014, 2016) and BAME groups (Netto and

Fraser, 2009; Sosenko et al., 2013). Scholars have also looked at how the material effects of austerity have complicated the ways in which the future is being imagined (Roberts and Evans, 2013; Bradley and Ingram, 2013; Hitchen, 2014, 2016). Their research furthers our understanding of the experiences of specific groups and the specific impacts of austerity on employment and benefits and highlights the difference between government rhetoric and lived reality. However, these studies have not specifically focused their attention on the experiences of women or how difference comes to matter in their daily lives.

As I examined, in the first section of this literature review, women bear the brunt of austerity measures. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of these social effects on the lives of women is not only important, but is necessary to fully understand the current context of austerity. To date, there is an emerging body of feminist research detailing such experiences (Loneragan, 2015; Hall, 2015a, 2017; Raynor, 2016a, 2016b; Bassel and Emejulu, 2015, 2017; Poovey, 2017). These feminist scholars examine how austerity is experienced in the lives of women, highlighting the importance of women's experiences and the intersection of difference. Ruth Raynor (2016a, 2016b), for example, documents the lives of a group of women who attend a family support centre in the North East of England to understand how they encountered austerity. Raynor notes that within this group, austerity touched 'women's lives in different ways, at different times and in different places' (2016b: 3). For the women in her study 'micro-situational differences mattered to the effects of austerity', concluding that 'specific cuts or reforms should be understood in relation to one another as well as in context as they intensified the precarisation of already economically marginalised lives' (ibid). Raynor's research is therefore helpful, since it provides an intimate view of the experiences of these women, and demonstrates how austerity impacted these women's lives (with this shared demographic) in different ways.

Research has also focused on minority ethnic women's experiences of austerity (Loneragan, 2015; Bassel and Emejulu, 2015, 2017). Leah Bassel and Akwugo Emejulu

(2015, 2017), for example, taking an intersectional approach (focusing on gender, class, 'race' and immigration status) documenting minority women's experiences of, and activism within, the austerity regimes of France and Britain. Their research focuses on the ways in which minority women are negotiating material and discursive crises that undermine and problematise their activism. Their research highlights how the crisis has affected the everyday life. As Bassel and Emejulu (2015: 87) note;

some minority women are particularly disadvantaged due to precarious employment, legal status and/or greater reliance on dwindling public services. The seemingly prosaic and routine hardships that some women experience have profound impacts on their activism – for instance, a lack of affordable childcare; diminished core funding for minority women-led organisations; the withdrawal of funding for transport costs to attend meetings in rooms that are no longer freely provided.

Gwyneth Lonergan (2015) similarly discussed the effects of the austerity regime on migrant women, albeit through a different focus. Lonergan demonstrates how the cuts to English as a Second Language or Other Language (ESOL) classes challenged migrant women's social reproductive activities and their attempts to find paid work. Such research from these different scholars gives a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how austerity impacts women *between and within* certain groups in messy and multiple ways. However, I argue that what is lacking in furthering our understanding of the gendered austerity project, is a comprehension of *how young women from different backgrounds are living with austerity*. How are women from different social classes and 'racial' backgrounds experiencing austerity? How might these differences materialise in the everyday? For instance, as Hall (2015a: 1) notes, conducting research in the context of austerity involves people who are affected in different ways, 'those already living in or close to poverty; those witnessing or knowing others struggling and offering support; those largely insulated from the consequences'. These differences are important to understand. Hall continues:

the realities of austerity are, for some, intrinsically connected to experiences of poverty, precarity and insecurity (see Jupp 2013), and many of the cuts to welfare

will have a disproportionate impact on those in already difficult situations (JRF 2015). However, it is possible to be impacted by austerity but not necessarily be (or define oneself as) living in poverty or a personal condition of austerity (see Hall 2015a; Waite 2009), or to be living in poverty in a period of economic prosperity (see Smith 2005). While there is no generalised personal condition of austerity, austerity as a socio-economic condition is nonetheless a point of commonality and mutuality, something that many people may be 'living in' but not 'living with'. (2015a: 1-2)

Therefore, I argue that in order to fully understand austerity and the impact it has on women's lives, difference needs to be at the forefront of such work. I hence extend and deepen previous analyses by undertaking interviews and group discussions with a diverse group of women in three cities of the UK (Leeds, London and Brighton) to consider how class and 'race' affect the experience of austerity. I use Bourdieu's theory of capital (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) to specifically show how young women differently navigate through austerity according to their economic, cultural, social capital and other resources. My data reveals the multifaceted ways austerity is experienced through different social markers at a material level, research which has not yet been done to date.

Navigating through Austerity

Empirical research on the lived experiences of austerity has been supplemented with literature discussing *how* people are 'managing' or 'coping' within the landscape of austerity outside of the UK. There is a wealth of literature documenting how those living precarious lives 'manage' and 'navigate' through contexts of insecurity. For example, Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) *Nickled and Dimed*, Jennifer Johnson's (2002) *Getting by on the Minimum* and most recently Linda Tirado's (2014) *Hand to Mouth*, are all examples of research that documents the ways in which people not only *experience*, but also *navigate through* times of precarity and insecurity. This research is extremely important for understanding the current context. These studies, in different ways, detail how people 'get by'; through the use of food stamps (if eligible), discount food and clothes shopping,

'going without', the help of partners, family networks and friends and the use of outside agencies.

These tactics are not dissimilar to the ones discussed by work highlighting the coping strategies of individuals in the context of austerity. For example, Shildrick et al. (2012), O'Hara (2014), Pemberton et al. (2014), Ruth Patrick (2014, 2016, 2017), Hall (2015a, 2017), Esther Hitchen (2014, 2016) and Kayleigh Garthwaite (2016) discuss the different tactics and strategies that are being implemented in people's daily lives. Yet, this recent research shows *how* such tactics have been *further compromised* by external factors, such as cuts to services, reduction in benefits, rise in the cost of living, and the scarcity of credit.

These current studies have focused in detail on the *different ways* in which individuals have been 'getting by': investigating the rise of food poverty and foodbank use (Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2017), use of credit (Deville, 2015), use of voluntary services and charitable organisations (Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte, 2015), through family networks (Hitchen, 2015, 2016), using time-intensive strategies and practices, such as low-cost supermarket shopping (Patrick, 2014, Hitchen 2015), and through the strategy of 'heat or eat' (Lambie-Mumford and Snell, 2015). Scholars has also concentrated their attention on the multiple tactics and strategies used by *specific groups* (see Patrick, 2014; 2016; 2017 and Hitchen, 2016 on benefit claimants; see O'Hara, 2014 and Pemberton et al., 2014 on those at the 'sharp end of the cuts' and Shildrick et al., 2012 for those in 'low-pay-no-pay cycle'/ experiencing 'in work poverty'). All studies found that people showed compromise, ingenuity and resourcefulness, despite hardship, increased pressure and struggle in their everyday lives.

Overall, the body of research has helped to further understand the complex social reality of those living on a low income, as well as the complexities of these different practices. It points to commonalities experienced by those on a low income: increasing pressure makes lives far more difficult (and busy) than suggested by political discourse. To a

certain extent, the research also highlights the divergence in resources and social capital that influences the coping strategies selected. Understanding the commonalities and divergences is of central importance to my research. Foregrounding gender within such an analysis, I argue, allows for a more nuanced understanding. It is through such a nuanced analysis that we can further understand both the commonalities and divergences of women most affected by austerity in the context of austerity.

In addition, as I demonstrate in Chapter 6, it is not only women who are living 'precarious lives' that are 'navigating' through the context of precarity and insecurity; cutting back and budgeting were strategies also used by middle-class women. Therefore, despite paying close attention to how people live and navigate as other scholars have done, I am interested in difference. My data shows how middle-class and working-class women's navigation strategies were based on material concerns, but commonalities and divergences were shaped by different capitals (economic, cultural and social) and resources. Research to date has not provided such an in-depth gendered analysis and, as I show in Chapter 6, this research thus further explains how difference comes to matter in women's experiences of austerity. Through an understanding of austerity as, in part, an economic programme, this thesis will discuss how austerity is materialised in (Chapter 5) and navigated through the everyday (Chapter 6) as well as how such experiences affect how women's future imaginaries are felt in the present (Chapter 9).

Speaking about Austerity

As noted in the earlier section of this review, scholars have discussed the symbolic nature of austerity; highlighting how ideological and discursive struggle is played out within the political, social and cultural spheres (see for instance Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Tyler, 2015; Allen et al., 2015; De Benedictis and Gill, 2016). This symbolic campaign, Imogen Tyler (2015: 506) notes, is 'ruthlessly employed to divide people along a vampiric axis of blame for diminishing social resources': the 'skiver' is contrasted against the 'hard working family'. Scholars have explored how consent for austerity and the dismantling

of the welfare state has been achieved and legitimised in micro-level everyday discussions (Stanley, 2014; Valentine, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Pemberton et al., 2014; Garthwaite, 2016a). Such research has specifically focused on the different ways in which austerity is discussed across and within different groups; through processes of othering, distinction-making, distancing and boundary formation (Stanley, 2014; Valentine, 2014; Jackson and Benson, 2014) and through forms of disaffection and opposition circulating in reference to the extremes of austerity (Carastathis, 2015; Bassel and Emejulu, 2017). In addition, research has also highlighted how consent and resistance have been reinforced and evidenced through the cultural sphere (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014; Allen et al., 2015).

To understand the politics of austerity, scholars have focused on understanding how those labelled as 'hard working' by the government discuss, think and feel about austerity measures; specifically, in relation to their consent for or dissatisfaction towards the welfare state. Research has shown that in respondent's discussions there is often a process of boundary making between themselves and 'Others'. Liam Stanley (2014, 2016; also see Edmiston, 2016; Bramall, 2016b), for example, explored how members of the public make sense of the fairness of austerity, undertaking focus groups with 'tax payers'²⁸ during 2012. Examining the micro-level dynamics of such legitimisation, his research offers unique insights into the politics of austerity. The morally 'undeserving poor' were the focus of such debates – the participants debated the unfair redistribution to supposed 'undeserving groups' and made moral distinctions between the 'squeezed hardworking middle' and the 'undeserving other'. Gill Valentine (2014) noted similar behaviour. When discussing austerity, middle-class respondents tended to identify and condemn 'chav' culture, reinforcing individualised, less compassionate attitudes towards such groups. This research showed the construction of boundaries between 'us' and 'them' through the use of 'national abject subjects' (Tyler, 2013a: 4) – in this case the 'chav' and the 'undeserving other'. Describing the use of such boundary making

²⁸Comprising of middle-income homeowners or community volunteers.

language, Tyler, drawing on the work of Joe Rigby (2014), has argued that when 'the precarity effected by neoliberalism is not confined to those living with poverty, the antagonism between capital and living labour is no longer concentrated in specific places of work, but traverses the whole of society (Rigby, 2014: 87)' (2015: 506). Therefore, she goes on to argue, for the middle-classes, it becomes even more important to set boundaries separating 'us' from 'them'. The research of Emma Jackson and Michaela Benson (2014: 506), despite not focusing specifically on the politics of austerity, is applicable here. Their ethnographic study of middle-class residents of an inner-London neighbourhood demonstrates how the urban middle-class try to find new ways to protect and differentiate themselves. Like the research of Valentine (2014) and Stanley (2014), differentiation was done through symbolic and spatial articulations of class difference – in part, through 'violent intolerance' for racialised and classed 'Others'.

Research has also been undertaken which not only evidences the transformation of public opinion, but also shows the mechanisms through which it is *sustained and produced*. Jensen and Tyler (2015), for instance, use a 'cultural political economy' approach towards the medium of reality television (RTV), to document the ways in which this cultural mechanism helps to solidify consent for welfare reform and the representation of those reliant on the welfare state as 'undeserving'. In their article "'Benefits brood": The cultural and political crafting of anti-welfare common-sense' (2015), they argue that anti-welfare common-sense is reproduced, mediated and legitimated through media representations of people on welfare, generating 'welfare disgust'. They draw special attention to 'benefits brood' families, arguing that such figures 'not only help manage precariat populations (as technologies of control) but also as technologies of consent, through which a wider and deeper anti-welfare common-sense is affected' (475). Furthering this research, Kim Allen, Imogen Tyler and Sara De Benedictis (2014) unpack the TV participant 'White Dee' from the RTV show *Benefits Street*²⁹. These scholars highlight how the figure of 'White Dee', both within the show

²⁹Benefits Street was a RTV series broadcast on Channel 4, first airing in January 2014. The show 'documented' the lives of several residents of James Turner Street in Birmingham. A second series was

and in audience responses to it, is made abject, the 'other' of the "‘good’, ‘hard-working’ future-oriented, individualistic and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizen" (2014:6, also see Allen and Taylor, 2012; Jensen, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Allen et al., 2015). 'White Dee' (marked as feckless, lazy and 'undeserving'), they argue, generates public consent for welfare reform. However, she is also positioned on the programme and in audience responses as 'a hero' – a community worker, campaigner, and a resilient caring mother. 'White Dee', they argue, *to an extent, also muddies and fractures* such an understanding. These different depictions inform analysis of consent for welfare reform and the representation of those in poverty.

Taking into account such discussions, data from narratives of middle-class women in my sample showed how consent for austerity was shaped through the use of moral (classed and racialised) distinction. These distinctions were informed and reinforced by examples from cultural mechanisms such as RTV (see Chapter 8). My data also showed that austerity policy was questioned by women, in which they displayed care and empathy for those at the sharp end of the cuts. These discussions were affected by young women's proximity to the effects of austerity. Furthermore, I argue that to build on the research above and consider how austerity affects young women socially, it is important to find other avenues to examine how austerity is produced and sustained. What are the other ways in which women can assert their class and 'race' position and legitimate austerity? How might these discussions also rupture and create new configurations? In Chapter 8, I draw on narratives from middle-class women speaking about the importance of feminism in the context of austerity. I argue that feminism is a productive site through which we can understand these different configurations. Dialoguing with and drawing on feminist analyses (see Fraser, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014; Evans, 2015, 2016), I demonstrate how the moral project of austerity is reproduced and legitimised through processes of

filmed in Kingston Road, Stockton-On-Tees in 2015. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the series was mentioned in the House of Commons, and prompted political debate on the topic of welfare.

boundary making between those in need of feminism (working-class and BAME women) and themselves (the self-sufficient, individualised, feminist woman).

Navigating Symbolic Injury

In contexts of precarity and insecurity, scholars have researched the 'symbolic injury' experienced by those most affected by hardship and inequality. For example, Lois Weis' (2004) and Jennifer Silva's (2013) differing analyses are situated within the context of contemporary neoliberal transformations (in the US), demonstrating the different ways in which people live out such changes. For example, while scholars have shown that neoliberalism demands 'de-raced, de-classed and de-gendered' individuals (Apple, 2001) Weis' study demonstrates that the working-classes were insisting, on some level, being classed, and certainly raced, in spite of the fact that they increasingly entered and remained attached to the economy as individuals. Such allegiances created a new 'white working-class fraction' in which men and women acted together as a racialised class fraction to sustain 'the white community' against perceived racial competitors. In a somewhat different and more recent analysis, Silva's (2013) research shows how political, economic and social changes split individuals, families and communities apart. These changes created the belief that personal responsibility, via a therapeutic narrative, was the key to meaning, security and freedom. Working-class men and women drew boundaries between the 'worthy' and 'unworthy', 'deserving' and 'undeserving', using the narrative of 'self-help and self-transformation'. Those who were seen to not be able to make it on their own were seen to be undeserving and objects of scorn. As Silva points out, even though individuals named their problems through the therapeutic narrative, and despite struggling with similar and structurally rooted problems, there is no sense of 'we'. In contrast to Weis, Silva observes, 'the possibility of collective politicisation through naming one's suffering is easily subsumed within these large structures of domination because others who struggle are seen not as fellow sufferers but as objects of scorn' (2013:142).

Focusing specifically on the context of austerity, research exploring the experience of those at the sharp end of the cuts shows both similarities to and differences from the studies above. For example, research has highlighted that participants were 'talking back' to the government rhetoric that says that benefits and welfare is a lifestyle choice (Shildrick et al., 2012; Patrick, 2014). Research has also explored the everyday experiences of those deemed 'abject' (Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012; Baumberg, Bell and Gaffney, 2012) as well as the ways in which those who face insecurity and hardship discussed themselves and others (Shildrick et al., 2012). For example, Patrick (2014) argued that her participants challenged the idea of welfare as a lifestyle choice, commonly employing strong negative language to describe the reality of life on benefits. Like the women in this thesis, participants questioned how it was possible to have a 'life' on benefits.

Research has also considered the role of disgust and stigma in mediating the lives of those most affected by the austerity programme. In her book *Revolting Subjects* (2013a), Tyler discusses the politics of disgust, arguing that while disgust is experienced physically, quoting Ngai (2005: 11) it is 'saturated with socially stigmatised meanings and values' (21). As Mary Douglas (1966: 2) highlights, disgust is not an intrinsic feature of the 'disgusting' object - there is no such thing 'as absolute dirt' - 'it exists in the eye of the beholder'. In this sense, disgust (the feeling produced by dirt, for instance) is a 'byproduct of a systematic ordering and classification of matter' (36). Therefore, as Tyler (2013a: 24) notes, 'disgust is political', used throughout history 'as a powerful weapon in social efforts to exclude certain groups and persons (Nussbaum, 2004:107)' (25). Yet, 'disgust is not just enacted by subjects and groups in the process of othering, distinction-making, distancing and boundary formation, but it is also experienced and lived by those constituted as disgusting in their experiences of displacement and abandon' (Tyler, 2013a: 26). Thus, drawing on this discussion, research has explored the experience of those deemed disgusting in the context of austerity, for instance, the experiences of disabled women in the Australian welfare state (Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012) and

people's experiences of food bank use (Gathwaite, 2016; also see Tyler, 2013a). Karen Soldatic and Helen Meekosha's (2012) research shows how the reconfiguration of the disabled women in the public image from 'victims' to parasitical welfare scroungers has affected women's interactions with official state actors and other citizens (in Tyler, 2013a: 26). This process of stigmatisation towards single mothers, migrant women and women with disabilities, in relation to my work, resulted in feelings of shame, embarrassment, and even fear (see Chapter 7 and 8).

In addition, empirical research has shown how there is also a tendency amongst those living in poverty and/or reliant on benefits to simultaneously characterise themselves as 'deserving' and identify other claimants as less deserving, who perhaps should not be entitled to state support (Shildrick et al., 2012) through the mechanisms of distancing, blame, dis-identification and dissociation. As Shildrick and MacDonald (2013: 300) note, ideological discourses about the 'undeserving poor' are not simply the 'top down' rhetoric of the powerful (or the 'non' poor) but are shared and enacted by those at the bottom, skewed downwards towards others, objectively, like them'. For example, Patrick (2014) demonstrated that her out-of-work participants often gave anecdotes and examples of 'other' benefit claimants who saw benefits as a 'lifestyle choice', who claimed fraudulently, or received more than that to which they should be entitled. Documenting a similar process, Shildrick et al. (2012) argues, that the use of 'them' and 'us', 'we' and 'them', is perhaps part of an attempt to distance themselves from the stigma and shame associated with welfare 'dependency' and poverty by deflecting it onto other people.

In Chapter 7, my data builds upon previous research, showing that young women not only took part in a process of distancing and othering, but that they also produced values that counter the predominance of moralistic narratives of economic productivity and aspiration. Similarly, the literature from Sukhwant Dhaliwal and Kirsten Forkert (2015) on ethnic minority British citizens and recent immigrants, and Raynor's (2016a, 2016b) and Hitchen's (2014) research discussed above, highlights this behaviour. Dhaliwal and

Forkert note that the tendency of both recent migrants and people from established ethnic minorities to make this distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving', or 'good' and 'bad' migrants and citizens is a central feature of their own bid for recognition and legitimacy. However, they also found that people produce values that counter the predominance of moralistic narratives – they resist a dominant discourse that seeks to intensify hostility towards migrants and instead assert other values, such as compassion, empathy, and solidarity. Likewise, Raynor (2016a, 2016b) explained how in her research with a group of working-class women forms of stigmatisation and discrimination played out in nuanced and complex ways. For example, within women's narratives, instances of 'micro-othering' circulated alongside persistent expressions of 'micro-care'.

Like the research cited above, my data explores the messiness of austerity, in which women discuss austerity in contrasting and contradictory ways. My data shows that young women's discussions are narrated through contradictory dialogues of negotiation and distancing towards and away from the figures of the 'good' and 'bad' citizen. However, their narratives are also loaded with expressions of care and empathy (see Chapter 7 and 8).

(Briefly) Situating the State within its Current Context and Historical Legacies

Not only is it important to understand that women are constantly negotiating their positioning in relation to austerity, but also it is necessary to see how historical categories of the state shape young women's experiences. As noted in the previous sections of this chapter, and as will be shown throughout this thesis, austerity intensifies existing inequality in both the material and symbolic sense. Research to date has not spent enough time thinking through the ways in which gender, class and 'race' have been shaped by the state in different ways throughout history, and how this has affected women to different ways and to differing degrees in the present. As Gargi Bhattacharyya (2015: 155) notes, 'austerity relies on histories and practices of gendered exploitation'.

These are both material and symbolic, classed and racialised. Feminist studies have argued that analyses need to take into account the histories of gendered, class and racialised inequality produced and legitimised by the state (Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Farris, 2015; Tyler, 2013a, 2013b). They have also pointed to the ways in which austerity discourse has recycled and drawn on previous historical figures of contempt, or adapted gendered ideas from previous historical contexts (Evans, 2017, 2016, 2015; Montgomerie, 2016; Jensen, 2012, 2013a, 2014; Bramall, 2013; Tyler, 2013a, 2013b; De Benedictis, 2012). Drawing on and further mobilising these insights, I argue that we cannot properly understand how austerity affects the lives of young women without considering how women have been constructed in terms of moral differences throughout history. Thus, to fully comprehend the relationship between the state's production of, and women's navigation through austerity, it is important to unpack how the state has historically shaped gender relations. Therefore, in the following chapter (4), I draw on feminist discussions of the state to examine how social markers have been hierarchically produced and re-signified since the fifteenth century within the Western world and beyond. This discussion informs a more nuanced understanding of austerity in the present, beyond its generic typology, as well as how class, gender and 'race' have been shaped by the state in different state formations.

Conclusion

Drawing on an extensive body of literature, this chapter mapped the different approaches to the lived experiences of austerity. The first section of the review reflected on scholarship that has assessed the gendered impact of austerity on women through economic policy and gendered discourse. I highlighted the usefulness of such research for explaining how austerity is inherently gendered and reproduces classed and racialised material and symbolic exclusions. I then noted that I will draw and build upon this research to further unpack the role of the state in producing and legitimising these exclusions. I then moved onto examine empirical research which has studied the effects of austerity on people's everyday lives. Describing the various ways through which

austerity has been empirically analysed, I drew attention to the lack of research which provides an in-depth gendered examination. By foregrounding gender, class and 'race', I showed how my research thus opens room to further understand how and where difference comes to matter in women's experiences of austerity. Situating this analysis within its historical legacies, I argued further allows me to discover how austerity differently affects and impacts young women's lives. This analysis will therefore be undertaken in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

The Role of the State in Shaping Gender, Class, and 'Race'

Situating the present context of austerity within its historical legacies, this chapter not only explores the ways in which the state has been put to use during different times of crisis, but also, how the state has crafted and shaped gender, class, and 'race' relations as a result. My argument throughout this chapter is as follows: while class, gender, and 'race' relations have clearly been reconfigured through different historical periods and crises, certain central features remain. Working-class women are repeatedly used (seen as a solution) and blamed (labelled as the problem) by the state in the interests of capitalism. As discussed in Chapter 3, an understanding of these legacies is therefore important for this thesis, since they shape discussions in the present. By understanding the role of the state in making gender, class and 'race', and producing difference and inequality in these different periods, we see how the workings of the state in the current context affect young women's everyday lives. Such legacies impact how austerity affects the everyday experiences of young women according to their social positioning, and how they navigate and negotiate this context in different ways. Historical configurations not only structure such debates, but also help to reproduce and legitimate the inequality produced by the current crisis of capitalism. Therefore, in this chapter, I describe the historical unfolding in the key phases of capitalist development and crisis, moving from the fifteenth century and the enclosure movement, to the New Labour government. The final section of the chapter I discuss how the state, in the current context, is producing and legitimising austerity, briefly, pointing to the ways in which it shapes gender, class and 'race' relations.

The Transition to Capitalism

It was during the transition to capitalism that the state began shaping gender, class and 'race' relations. This was, in part, through the coercive force, discipline, and

violence of the witch-trails. Feminist scholarship (Federici, 2004, 2012; Merchant, 1980; Mies, 1986; Silverblatt, 1987) has described how the production of the female subject was not one which occurred through random elongated historical shifts, but was the outcome of a historical imperative – enforced by the state and others who benefited from such economic arrangements – to produce untenable situations for females who did not fit with the needs of the state, persecuting them as witches³⁰. As Federici writes, it is no accident that 'the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonisation and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, [or] the beginning of the slave trade, the enactment of "bloody laws" against vagabonds and beggars' (2004: 164). These seemingly unrelated tragedies were initiated by the same European ruling elite during the formation of capitalism. Contrary to 'laissez-faire' orthodoxy, which holds that capitalism functions best without state intervention, Federici posits that it was precisely the state violence of these campaigns that laid the foundation for capitalist economics. However, the importance of the witch-hunt to the development of capitalism has been largely missing from mainstream discussions (see the work of Marx, 1909). As will be shown below, the changing role of proletariat women across Europe and the Americas was a vital part of the process of primitive accumulation (Federici, 2012; Merchant, 1980; Mies, 1986; Silverblatt, 1987). Therefore, agreeing with Federici, we must 're-imagine the process that led to the development of capitalism ... and the extent to which it was premised on the relentless destruction of the social/gender relations that have characterised the social world' (2012: 7).

There is an important connection between the rise of the witch-hunt and the developing concern about reproduction and population size. Women's bodies were necessary for the reproduction of the workforce, both at home and in the newly colonised areas. The

³⁰'Witches', Federici notes, were from the lower classes; midwives who passed down knowledge of reproductive medicine, women who avoided maternity, the beggar, the prostitute, adulteress, and generally, the woman who exercised her sexuality outside the bonds of marriage and procreation. The witch was also the rebel woman at forefront of the heretical movements, often organising in female associations, posing a growing challenge to male authority and the Church (2004: 184).

witch-hunt thus finds its historical origin in a post-Black Death era where the decimation of working populations made labour extremely scarce, critically increased its cost, and strengthened resolve to break feudal rule (Federici, 2004: 44). With a major shift in power relations between the land-owning classes and serfs during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the feudal economy faced an accumulation crisis. In an attempt to remedy the situation, various efforts were made by those in power to increase the rate of exploitation, either through forced labour service restoration, or through the introduction of slavery (Federici, 2004: 45). However, such measures tended towards sharpening class conflict, and further encouraging peasant rebellions. It was in response to this crisis that the European ruling class launched a global offensive, 'laying the foundations of a capitalist world-system, in the relentless attempt to appropriate new sources of wealth, expand its economic basis, and bring new workers under its command' (Federici, 2004: 62). This 'counter-revolution' created a new system of production based on a different conception of work, value and wealth. People were systematically divorced from their means of production, their land, and were forced to choose between a life of vagabondage, or one of wage dependency. Vagrancy and pauperism were criminalised, with laws prescribing cruel punishments for those accused. Vagrants were also morally classified and labelled (with the help of the media of the period), Skeggs notes, as 'a monstrous and dangerous group, likely to threaten the propriety and order of the nation' (2014b: no pagination). It was also during this period that idleness was defined as a sin (following the Calvinist logic), and 'idle' persons were held up as the constitutive limit to propriety. Although such measures could not prevent the growth of vagrancy and pauperism, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker (2000) argue that it allowed for the legitimisation of the stealing of common land and broke the resistance of the dispossessed, forcing them to accept hired work in the worst conditions. It also created moral legislation for controlling and forcing people into labour, and was central in shaping gendered, classed and racialised ideas about what constituted a 'proper' person (Skeggs, 2014b). For instance, colonisation was proposed as a solution in response to the unrest created by the surplus population, who had been thrown off common land. The Virginia Company for instance, whose lead organiser was the Lord Chief Justice of the

Kings bench (1592-1604), 'legitimated their colonization of the Americas by claiming they were offering a public service by removing the "swarms of idle persons" by setting them to work (building the first American slave colonies)' (Skeggs, 2014b: no pagination).

During this context, women can be understood as direct targets in the process of primitive accumulation, singled out as subjects whose biological capacities were of more importance than their ability to work. The goal was therefore not just the 'transformation of the body into a work-machine' but also 'the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the workforce' (Federici, 2004: 63, also see Mies, 1986). Skeggs (2014b) notes that reproducing the 'right' type of labour has always been a concern to capitalists, the state and those who work for their interests. Therefore, as Maria Mies argues, 'the proletarian woman had to be housewifized' (1986: 105). However, restriction from the realm of industry was not enough to cause women to actively subsume themselves into this 'new sexual contract' (Pateman, 1988). Women resisted these constraints. Authorities, and individuals who were part of the local power structures and had close ties with the central state, used witch-hunts as a means of controlling and regulating reproduction, surplus labour and potential rebellion³¹ (see Larner, 1983). For example, sexuality and reproduction (especially termination or avoidance of pregnancy, and women's independent or non-procreative sexuality) were issues central to the destruction of so-called witches. This provided the construct for the development of the ideal of the nuclear family. As Federici (2004: 194) states:

the witch-hunt condemned female sexuality as the source of every evil, but it was also the main vehicle of a broad reconstruction of sexual life that, conforming with the new capitalist work-discipline, criminalised any sexual activity that threatened procreation, the transmission of property within the family, or took time and energy away from work'.

³¹Authorities publicly expressed anxiety about witches, and 'travelled from village to village in order to teach people how to recognise them, in some cases carrying with them lists with the names of suspected witches and threatening to punish those who hid them or came to their assistance' (Larner, 1983: 2 in Federici, 2004: 93). Mass propaganda was also used to generate mass psychosis among the population.

Prostitution also became illegal for the first time during this period, and many prostitutes were burned as witches. These women were economically and sexually independent and did not fit the new model of femininity. Women who were also on public assistance, or who survived by going from house to house, were also labelled as witches. The regulation and destruction of women's bodies, also meant the destruction of an intense history of reproductive knowledge, methods and controls. When discussing the genocides and epistemicides in Europe, Africa and the Americas from the sixteenth century, (de)colonial scholars have argued that such methods aimed to racialise all other forms of existence that did not fit with the European universal man, destroying the 'lifestyle' and culture of the populations³² (Grosfoguel, 2013). The burning of bodies and the erasure of knowledge in the context of the witch-hunts similarly contributed to a specific way of defining women and making gender. Through propaganda, authorities successfully divided women from men, erasing class-based solidarity. Men who had been expropriated, pauperised and criminalised were prompted to blame their personal misfortunes on the 'castrating witch' (Federici, 2004: 190).

The witch-hunt was therefore a major political initiative instituting, as Federici (2012: 13) writes,

a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged the new model of femininity to which women had to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world, accepting as natural their confinement to a sphere of reproductive activities that in capitalism have been completely devalued.

³²As Souza Santos (2010) argues, colonialism was a process of racialisation that happened through the creation of dichotomy between European (mind) and non-European (body). This was possible due to the processes of homogenisation of heterogeneous groups: Incas, Aztecs, Mayas, all became known to be American Indians, such as ethnic groups in different African countries becoming known as black (in Martins Jr, 2016).

Primitive accumulation was therefore 'not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working-class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as 'race' and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat' (Federici, 2004: 64). It destroyed a universe of practices, beliefs, and social subjects whose existence was incompatible with the capitalist work discipline, thus redefining the main elements of social reproduction. The shaping of class, 'race' and gender relations by the state (with the help of the media, gentry and the Church) in part, through force and violence, allowed for the development of a specific way of defining women and making gender with the needs of the government - women who exhibited the ideals of womanhood and domesticity. Those women who did not take on this new model of femininity, or who did not fit with the model, were scapegoated, blamed, and/or executed.

Liberal Capitalism: The Creation of the Family

During the nineteenth-century, in the era of Liberal capitalism³³, gender, class and 'race' relations were again, shaped by the state in the interests of capitalism. Proletariat women, through legislation and social policy, were used as one of the means to maintain social order: understood as figures through which such crises could be displaced onto and obverted. As Nancy Fraser (2016: 105) notes, 'in the early manufacturing centres of the capitalist core, industrialists dragooned women and children into factories and mines, eager for their cheap labour and reputed docility'. The result, Fraser goes on to argue, was a crisis on at least two levels – 'a crisis of social reproduction among the poor and working classes, whose capacities for sustenance and replenishment were stretched to breaking point; on the other, a moral panic among the

³³Used to designate the ideology advocating private property, an unhampered market economy, the rule of law, constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and of the press, and international peace based on free trade.

middle classes, who were scandalized by what they understood as the “destruction of the family” and the “de-sexing” of proletarian women’ (ibid). Such a contradiction was managed by creating ‘the family’ in its modern restricted form, by inventing new, intensified meanings of gender difference; and by modernising male domination (ibid). In the UK, this began with protective Labour legislation (Factory Acts beginning in 1844), which placed restrictions on women’s labour, reduced women’s hours of labour, and unified the laws regulating the work of women and children in factories and workshop, which helped the movement of women to the home. It also reinforced the idea that ‘individual men were responsible for the economic welfare of their families, and that women were fully responsible for the health and well-being of their children’ (Rose, 1992: 73). However, such arrangements did not necessarily satisfy workers – they formed trade unions, joined labour and socialist parties, which increased sharp, broad-based class conflict.

It was also during this time that conflict between groups was remade and understood as a problem of morality, rather than structural inequality. As Skeggs notes, ‘battles over morality and access to the dominant symbolic were central to the formation of the English bourgeoisie, who, from the seventeenth century onwards were trying to position themselves as a superior class in order to access state power and resources. Their first struggle in their own legitimation was against the decadent aristocracy *and* the decadent working-class. In these battles, they placed themselves firmly on the moral high ground as *the* source of moral authority³⁴ (2014b, no pagination; also see 1997: 46). As Anne McClintock (1995) and Ann Laura Stoler (1995) state, the relationship between ‘race’, sexuality and gender generated particular class formations (also see Finch, 1993). For instance, in her detailed historical analysis of British imperial discourse, McClintock (1995: 46) writes that the concept of degeneracy was applied as much to classifying types as to the urban poor:

³⁴As Skeggs (2014b: no pagination) notes, ‘this led to many contradictions in their own practice made apparent in the struggles over the abolition of slavery’.

the degenerate classes, defined as departures from the normal human type, were as necessary to self-definition of the middle-class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress, for the distance along the path of progress travelled by some proportions of humanity could be measured only by the distance others lagged behind.

'Race', class and gender, McClintock (1995: 5) argues, are therefore not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other ... rather they come into existence in and through relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways'. 'Dirt and waste, sexuality and contagion, danger and disorder, degeneracy and pathology, became the moral evaluation by which the working-class were coded and became known' (Skeggs, 2004: 4, also see Gilman, 1990). Respectability, for example, was a central mechanism through which division emerged, a way middle-class women defined themselves against the 'rough' working-class and in opposition to the imagined excess passion and sexual deviancy of the women of the 'undeserving poor' (Skeggs, 1997: 46). This merging of 'race', gender and class through discourses of degeneracy, shows how these categories enabled, legitimated and were mapped onto material inequalities.

Colonial expansion was also validated by moral values, in which the 'backward, patriarchal' state of pre-capitalist indigenous kinship arrangements was used as rationalisations (Fraser, 2016). Racism, which had developed as a justification for slavery, continued, expanded, and mutated to justify empire (Fryer, 1984). Native children, for instance, were forced into missionary schools, and subjected to coercive disciplines of assimilation (Adams, 1995). Moral classifications were also used to justify the transportation of the 'undeserving poor' put to work as servant labour, in the name of the empire. However, as Cecily Forde-Jones (1998) details, certain classifications were conveniently removed, when the white plantation ownership class became depleted through illness and failure to reproduce themselves. Stoler's (1995) research on nineteenth century European colonialism suggested that the policing of interracial sexuality to maintain 'racial purity' was intimately bound up with constructing and

maintaining white supremacy. Despite moral fears about working-class women contaminating the proper through their sexuality and reproduction, the 'monstrous immoral white woman' had to be re-validated and re-coded in order to be used for breeding during a white governing crisis. As Skeggs (2014b: no pagination) notes, 'the dirty white woman was cleansed and transformed – for a short period'.

By 1910, the working-class had generally become consolidated by upper-class commentators and the state as a problem in two senses: first, as a potential revolutionary force; second, as social diluters of civilization and respectability (Skeggs, 1997:43, also see Stedman Jones, 1971; Dyhouse, 1997; Bruley, 1999). To alleviate these threats, working-class women, through the use of legislation and social policy, were used to maintain social order. They were understood as figures through which such crises could be displaced onto and obverted. Social stability was assumed to be dependent upon moral purity; the moral condition of the nation was seen to derive from the moral standards of women. They were also seen as potentially dangerous if not self-regulated. One of the perceived solutions to the problem of social order was familiar regulation of the working-classes (Finn et al., 1977), primarily through the mother via gender-specific welfare provision and education reform. As Skeggs notes, 'working-class women, especially (potential) mothers', in this context, were seen as 'both the problem and solution to national ills' – they were used and they were blamed (1997: 48). For example, the development of educational provision alongside labour market restructuring indirectly influenced family duties, commitment and responsibility and gave these responsibilities to the mother (David, 1980; Skeggs, 1997). Early school provision for the working- classes was seen as a way to compensate for a morally deficient family, acting as a stabilising force to impose middle-class values. It was hoped, by the government at the time, that education would form a new generation of parents whose children were dependable and amendable (Johnson, 1979). The dangerous, polluting, working-class were resolvable if mothers were educated to civilise – control and discipline their sons and husbands, perceived as likely to cause anticipated problems (Skeggs, 1997: 43; Donzelot, 1979).

Despite women being seen as possessing the ability to 'civilise' (through childrearing), their sexuality, childcare approaches, and domestic orderliness, was scrutinised (Skeggs, 1997: 47). Infant death was seen largely as a matter of maternal irresponsibility. 'Feckless mothers' were blamed for their sickly children, whilst virtually no recognition was given to the fact that mothers had to raise their infants in circumstances over which they had no control. Legislation was therefore put into effect to monitor and regulate specific mothering practice. For example, the Maternity and Child Welfare Act (1918) empowered local authorities to provide new services such as day nurseries, health visitors and child welfare clinics. It was not aimed at helping mothers themselves, but at monitoring them to ensure they did their job of bearing and raising children correctly. The status of midwifery was raised and from 1904, local authorities introduced health-visiting schemes. Taking advice from traditional sources (grandmothers or neighbours, for example), was now viewed as irresponsible – women were encouraged to follow 'expert opinion' (Bruley, 1999:12). As Sue Bruley (1999) notes, if national decline was to be reversed, the mothers of the labouring classes had to be taught mother-craft by the authorities and respectable middle-class women who were thought to know better³⁵.

Therefore, as can be seen from this discussion, during the crisis of nation and social order, the state shaped class, 'race' and gender relations in particular ways. Conflict between social classes was remade as a problem of morality, and 'the family' in its modern, restricted form helped to invent new, intensified meanings of gender difference. Gender, class, 'race' relations were molded by the state, and through such actions, developed a specific way of defining women and making gender, casting social reproduction as the province of women within the private family. This regime elaborated the ideal of 'separate spheres', even as it deprived most people of the conditions needed to realise it. Those who did not take on this new model of femininity or who did not fit with the model

³⁵This has a long tradition, in which 'middle-class professionals have been created to enable them to define, quantify, observe and control and reform those who are so different from themselves (Hughes et al. 2001)' (Skeggs, 2004: 88).

(Black, Irish, Jewish, and white, working-class women) were blamed and used to signal the constitutive limit to national propriety. As Skeggs notes, 'if women refused to take responsibility for social order, they were blamed for its disruption' (1997:42). The regulation of moral behavior was therefore part of the wider formation of class identity, nation and empire and provides a discursive legacy to understand the shaping of gendered relations, as will be shown through the following sections of this chapter.

The Crisis of 1929, Depression and Austerity

During the Depression, world wars and implementation of austerity policy, the state once again shaped class, 'race' and gender relations in particular ways. After World War I, states assumed a growing role in economies. However, the treasury's response to the crises of the 1920s (triggered by the collapse of the post-war economic boom in 1921, increased competition from abroad, the disaster of the General Strike of 1926 and the decline in the mining and steel industries) remained liberal and austere. During this time, austerity as a policy appeared in its own right. The role of austerity in responding to the crisis was enhanced in the 1930s by attempts to solve the catastrophic economic crisis of the UK Great Depression³⁶ (Evans and Sewell Jr, 2013:8). The Treasury, which up to that point had continued with the laissez-faire approach, proposed a series of temporary work programmes to help alleviate mass unemployment. However, although the state seemed to be in a position to salvage the economic and social situation, the government retained the central role of reducing spending and monetary contraction. As Bill Janeway argues, 'the constraining power of austerity ideas persisted: fear of loss of confidence, still limited action by a government exempt from external financial and political change' (2012: 248 in Blyth, 2013: 125).

³⁶This lasted from 1929 to 1939, and was the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialised world. It began after the stock market crash of October 1929 in the US.

The iconic image of the Depression is 'The Forgotten Man': the newly poor, downwardly mobile, unemployed worker, often standing in a breadline. However, the crisis of 1929, the recession, and the subsequent depression had a more significant impact on women. By 1931, unemployment reached nearly 3 million – 23 per cent of male workers and 20 per cent of women workers were out of work (Todd, 2014: 6-7). The industrial and mining areas in the North of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales were particularly hard hit by economic problems. By 1938, the unemployment rate in each of the basic heavy industries of coal, cotton, shipbuilding and steel was twice what it was in other forms of employment. In these areas, and in these industries, unemployment became an unavoidable way of life.

Although the crisis triggered mass unemployment, the government's response to the crisis was to cut costs. The first target of these cuts was the benefits paid to the unemployed³⁷, making it harder for individuals to ride the storm of the Depression. The cuts to unemployment benefit were accompanied with a means test (Turvey, 2008). The introduction of such a measure helped to suggest and reinforce the idea that individuals were culpable for their own poverty. Not dissimilar to the current context of austerity, Selina Todd notes that there 'was a persistent assumption made by the powerful and privileged that the willful idleness of the poor caused poverty' (2014: 62). Families in receipt of such benefit were labelled as a 'heavy burden', in which it was said that the 'workless breed' and that receiving the dole was the reason for their 'fecklessness' (Todd, 2014: 68). The moral standards of women were specifically judged. For example, in the middle of the century, due to the denigration of living standards, working-class areas recorded ten maternal deaths per 1000 live births (Todd, 2014: 85). It should be noted that the usual rate for the dole was 75p per week for man and wife and about 25p for each child. However, the British Medical Association estimated that a family of two adults and three children needed at least £1.12 for food for a week. In 1931 the dole was cut by 10

³⁷A man without work was entitled to benefits under the unemployment insurance scheme, known as the 'dole', which was paid for the first six months.

per cent (Turvey, 2008: no pagination). Characteristically, the response of the government and the media to this crisis was to blame the victims. Todd (2014: 86) cites a *Times Newspaper* editorial from 1934, which blamed 'the ignorance of many young mothers' for their increased risk of death during childbirth.

Women were also blamed for the mass unemployment created by the Depression in industry and manufacturing – reinforcing the pressure to eradicate women from the workforce³⁸. Single women were especially vilified in the media. During this period, the government set the unemployment benefit for women at a lower rate than that for men. As Bruley (1999) notes, working-class women therefore either unwillingly returned to unpopular and badly paid jobs such as domestic service, or were placed there by Labour Exchanges. The alternative was starvation, as women were denied unemployment benefit if they refused to undertake such work. Middle-class women, however, benefited from increased opportunities in the labour market, in which women accounted for about a quarter of posts in the civil service by 1935. These were mostly at clerical and administrative grades, rather than the technical and professional jobs, which were still dominated by men. As with the return of working-class women to domestic roles, middle-class women's employment also helped to reinforce traditional stereotypes of what constituted women's work (Ware, 1981). A revived 'cult of domesticity' also emerged during the 1930s, in keeping with the dominant (but contradictory) ideology of the times, dictating that the ideal housewife's place was in the home (ibid). Women in their role as housewives and mothers were forced to 'make ends meet' by maintaining the home on a limited budget (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000: 99), required to take on even more important roles in their homes, and were given extra obligations through the state transfer of responsibility. Women thus played often-unrecognised roles in helping the country through the Depression.

³⁸Women were being forced to leave employment before the crisis of the 1920s due to the 1919 Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act. However, its application went far beyond the original agreement, and was often used to dismiss women in firms that did not exist before 1914 (Bruley, 1999: 61).

During World War II and the 1940s, there was still class prejudice and inequality. Todd notes that 'the myth that the war was characterised by the elision of class distinctions as all strata of British society pulled together in the face of a common foe is false' (2014: 140). The heroic evaluations that were necessary to incite nationalistic eagerness and enthusiasm, would often slip into devaluations of working-class soldiers as 'unhygienic cannon fodder' (Skeggs, 2014b). However, the war did have a progressive impact on British society. This was primarily through the generation of a meaningful conceptualisation of 'the people' as a source of identity and allegiance (Todd, 2014). The necessity of enrolling the physical and emotional support of millions of workers in the cause of total war led the state to condone the inculcation of a sense of the greater good to justify the sacrifice of lives and conditions. As Todd puts it,

the legitimacy of social inequality was constantly, if subtly challenged by the war effort ... in view of the increasingly heroic positions that working-class soldiers, munitions workers and thrifty housewives assumed in both press and propaganda, it was no longer tenable after 1945 to argue that the lower orders should know their place. (2014: 140)

Housewifery and motherhood acquired an enhanced sense of national importance. The successful implementation of rationing and other economy measures was vital in maintaining public health and morale, and so housewifery, no longer regarded as a private concern, became a central component of the war effort and post-war reconstruction (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000). Despite reinforcing traditional gender roles, the housewife's battle on the kitchen front was understood to be as critical to victory as that of the soldier or the worker in essential industry. However, this sense of importance also came with judgement when working-class women were seen as not 'producing their menfolk as quality artillery' (Skeggs, 2014b).

Women had to adjust their housewifery skills and child-rearing techniques to the altered circumstances. However, the idea of a 'common purpose' and 'shared sacrifice' across the nation was not actually a reality for women. As Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska writes, 'this disproportionate sacrifice frequently shielded men as well as children from the full

impact of the reduction in consumption' (2000: 149). Despite the fact that rationing reduced income differentials in consumption standards, these were by no means eliminated and class differences in vital statistics persisted virtually unchanged. Historian David Kynaston (2007) draws on mass observation diaries and interviews to discuss the hunger, dirt, damp and sacrifice, which was indicative of working-class women's experiences during this period. The reality of many working-class women's lives at that time was of queues, shortages, and the struggle to combine domestic responsibilities with some form of paid work (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000: 149-150).

Women in their role as housewives and mothers became central to the policy of austerity, since they were responsible for putting it into effect on a daily basis. The government had to muster housewives' and mothers' co-operation to implement the austerity policy successfully. The importance of female contribution was highlighted through the unprecedented outpouring of propaganda reinforcing the idea that women's housewifery skills and child-rearing techniques were extremely important to the wartime conditions, national identity and citizenship (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000: 99)³⁹. For instance, in 1943, the Board of Trade urged Britons to 'Make Do and Mend'. The leaflets and posters reminded housewives that 'a neatly patched garment is something to be proud of nowadays', rather than a shameful sign of poverty. 'Making do' was no novelty for working-class women, but it was a novelty to be praised, rather than vilified, for their initiative (Todd, 2014: 140).

Although praised, expressions of anxiety about women's sexual morality were framed by constructions of national identity and the ideals of citizenship. As Rose (1998: 1147)

³⁹As Zweiniger-Bargielowska (2000: 99-100) writes, 'women were not passive recipients of government policy and propaganda, attitudes varied depending on the policy as well as the income group. Moreover, women's attitudes towards austerity changed over time and wartime patriotic acceptance gave way to disillusionment and discontent among many housewives during the late 1940s'. 'Women's principal role in the austerity policy domesticity became a site of political and economic power and a basis of female citizenship. Housewives became a major political force after the war and their discontent with the continuation of austerity had important political and electoral consequences'.

notes, there was an upsurge of public concern about immorality on the part of women, with 'talk about young women whose behavior was threatening to populate the country with illegitimate babies, some of whom could well be black'. As discussed in the previous section, fears of sex and interracial marriage between black men and white women has a long cultural history. Rose (1998) drawing on the work of Stoler (1995) argues that rather than maintaining the boundaries of empire, in this context, the empire 'came home' when nonwhite colonial troops were stationed in Britain. A national fantasy was therefore constructed by the government, propagated in newspapers across the country, which depicted some women as 'antithetical to the nation, especially those women whose amorous escapades were so perverse as to jeopardize the nation's racial homogeneity. It simultaneously incorporated virtuous women and all men as comrades in struggle' (Rose, 1998: 1176). Rose continues, 'although class differentiated which women were made the targets of overt policies of social control, public expressions of apprehension about women who frolicked with soldiers constituted a normalizing discourse that had as its goal the making of female moral citizens appropriate to fighting a "people's war," and building a "new Britain" when it was over' (ibid). This was in contrast to 'internal others' (or 'anti-citizens') which the nation defined itself against.

Class, 'race' and gender was therefore once again, shaped to meet the needs of the state. The working-class (specifically working-class women) were mobilised during the period of depression, austerity, and war in a different way. Up to this point, as we can see through the discussion in the previous two sections, the working-class (especially women) has largely been understood as a problem of the nation, assumed as needing to be controlled and regulated. The crisis for instance, reinforced class division, in which working-class men and women were not only affected by the Depression, but were blamed for their situation. However, in the 1940s, the working-class became seen as heroic and authentic. Although these terms were usually attributed to working-class men, in the period of austerity, working-class women assumed a central role. Nevertheless, despite symbolically receiving praise (if they upheld the national moral code), the material experience of austerity landed on working-class women's shoulders.

State-managed Capitalism and the Family Wage

State-managed capitalism emerged from the Great Depression and World War II, in which there were both continuities and changes in how the regime shaped class, 'race' and gender relations. Named by its original architects as a 'cradle-to-grave' safety net for citizens, the welfare state was understood to protect citizens from the risks of the markets, while supplying welfare-enhancing collective goods – diffusing the contradiction between economic production and social reproduction. As Fraser (2016: 109) notes, 'the creation of the state-managed regime was a matter of saving the capitalist system from its own self-destabilizing propensities – as well as from the spectre of revolution in an era of mass mobilization'. She goes on to explain:

productivity and profitability required the 'biopolitical' cultivation of a healthy, educated workforce with a stake in the system, as opposed to a ragged revolutionary rabble. Public investment in health care, schooling, childcare, and old-age pensions, supplemented by corporate provision, was perceived as a necessity in an era in which capitalist relations had penetrated social life to such an extent that the working classes no longer possessed the means to reproduce themselves on their own. In this situation, social reproduction had to be internalized, brought within the officially managed domain of the capitalist order. (ibid)

Accepting unionisation, which brought higher wages, and public-sector spending, which created jobs, policy-makers reinvented the household as a private space for the domestic consumption of mass-produced objects of daily use. As Fraser explains, 'linking the assembly line with working-class familial consumerism, on the one hand, and with state-supported reproduction, on the other, this Fordist model forged a novel synthesis of marketization and social protection' (ibid). However, it was, above all, the working classes – both women and men – who led the struggle for public provision, wanting full membership in society as democratic citizens. Therefore 'unlike the protective legislation of the liberal regime, the state-capitalist settlement resulted from a class compromise and represented a democratic advance. Unlike its predecessor, too, the new

arrangements served, at least for some and for a while, to stabilize social reproduction' (ibid).

However, gender and racial hierarchy was not absent from these arrangements. Unequal gender relations (as well as 'race', disability, age and sexuality) underpin 'welfare regimes, their outcomes, the organisation of labour [...] the delivery of services, political pressures and ideologies and patterns of consumption' (Williams, 1994: 50 in Jensen and Tyler, 2015: 3). It is therefore, as Fraser notes, 'important to register the constitutive exclusions that made these achievements possible. Such a regime financed social entitlements in part by ongoing expropriation from the periphery' (2016: 110). As in earlier regimes, the defense of social reproduction in the core was entangled with (neo)imperialism. Explaining one example of expropriation, Skeggs states that 'it was the brutal British colonization of Malaysia and the \$118 million dollars made through indentured Chinese and Indian labour that provided the money for the development of the UK welfare state' (2014b: no pagination).

In addition, the accommodation of a class compromise benefited only certain sections of the working-class, particularly skilled white men, in which its 'racialised and gendered character generated a hierarchy of oppression' (Bakshi et al., 1995: 1548). As Amina Mama describes:

the history of the development of welfare and the circumscribed nature of access to it demonstrates that provision has always been constituted along social divisions. Class, race and gender discrimination have often operated through notions and judgements about who are 'really deserving' and who are 'undeserving'. In short, the welfare state has never existed universally for the public, but has operated to exclude minorities and uphold dominant ideologies about the family, motherhood and sexuality, often behaving punitively and coercively towards ... marginalised groups through various ideological mechanisms and administrative practices. (1992: 86)

In the US, for example, the welfare system took a dualised form. On one hand, it was divided into stigmatised poor relief for ('white') women and children lacking access to a

male wage; on the other, respectable social insurance for those constructed as 'workers' (see Fraser, 1989; Brenner and Laslett, 1991). By contrast, in the UK, benefits were available to individuals as 'public' persons by virtue of their participation – usually claimed by men, and benefits claimed by dependents of 'public persons' (also known as 'private persons') – usually women (Pateman, 1988). This was further compounded by 'race' and immigration status. As Mama notes, the discriminatory nature of the welfare state is perhaps most clearly felt by black women. As citizens and consumers, they have experienced most keenly the fact that 'healthcare, education, housing, social security and social services have been differentially delivered' (1992: 86, also see Misra and Akins, 1998). Thus, the broad tendency of state-managed capitalism was to 'valorise the heteronormative, male-breadwinner, female-homemaker model of the gendered family' (Fraser, 2016: 111). These norms are reinforced by public investment in social reproduction (ibid, also see Fraser, 2009; Wilson, 1977). However, the gendered, classed, and 'racial' order of state-managed capitalism also contributed to its contradictions and its breakdown.

Despite the prosperity created by the welfare state, a cultural and political crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a period of disillusionment with the status quo. The so-called 'capitalist–citizen accord' broke down in the 1960s. Mass social movements – civil rights, women's liberation and anti-war movements – were part of this change. In addition, as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2013: 152) note, the 'virtuous' model of Fordist growth came up against its endogenous limits, with the slowdown in productivity as a result of the balance of industrial power and subsequent high unemployment. The coexistence of the two phenomena – high inflation and high unemployment – seemed to discredit the tools of economic policy, in particular, the positive impact of public expenditure on the level of demand and the level of activity, starting with the level of employment (Dardot and Laval, 2013). Stagflation⁴⁰ seemed to sign the death certificate of the Keynesian art of 'managing the conjuncture', which assumed a trade-off between

⁴⁰High inflation combined with high unemployment and stagnant demand in a country's economy.

inflation and recession (Evans and Sewell, 2013). The 1973 Arab oil embargo, precipitated by pro-Israeli US involvement in the Yom Kippur war and the extended stagflation following Richard Nixon's withdrawal from the Bretton Woods accord⁴¹ led to a stock market crash and a deep recession from late 1973 to 1975. The states of advanced capitalist countries initially responded to the economic crisis of the 1970s with initiatives that were variants of existing state-centric policies – for example, fiscal stimulus programs, extension of social spending, or income policies. When the cultural and political crisis was compounded by an economic crisis in the early 1970s, the state-centred synthesis of the post-war political and economic world began to come apart (Evans and Sewell, 2013). The individualist and anti-state bias offered fruitful ground for a renewal of a wide variety of liberal political ideas, and enabled the move away from Keynesianism, shattering the belief in the capacity of government regulation of markets.

The Neoliberal State and Financialised Capitalism

Class, 'race' and gender relations were radically shaped by the state in the context of neoliberalism. Like the Liberal regime before it, the state-managed capitalist order dissolved in the course of a protracted crisis during the 1970s. Neoliberalism entered the political field in the UK, 'on the one hand via the budgetary constraints imposed on by a reluctant Labour government by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition of assistance with the funding chaos of the 1970s, and, on the other hand, through upheavals within the Conservative party in opposition wherein the perceptual schemes of the future Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, were consolidated and triumphant' (Atkinson, 2013:3).

⁴¹In the summer of 1944, delegates from forty-four countries met to reshape the world's international financial system in Bretton Woods. The delegates focused on how to establish a stable system of exchange rates, and how to pay for rebuilding the war-damaged economies of Europe.

'Thatcherism' (1979-1990), Stuart Hall argued, employed the ideology of 'authoritarian populism', to reach out to big and small businesses, the middle-class, and parts of the working-class, drawing on racialised nationalist spirit and advocating a return to Victorian values of discipline, restraint and morality. This was accompanied with the slogan of 'there is no alternative' (TINA). The agenda's distinctive elements, as Satnam Virdee (2014: 147-148) notes, 'emphasised self-reliance over government intervention, of individualism over collectivism, and a racializing nationalism underpinned by shared allegiance to cultural homogeneity'. This vision, Virdee continues, 'was counterposed by Thatcher to the unassimilable, the enemy within, made up variously of racialized minorities, trade unions, socialists, feminists and other alleged "social deviants" (148, also see Hall and Jacques, 1983). It was in this context, that the 'underclass', irredeemable 'other' re-appeared.

Law-and-order politics were used as the 'legal apparatus' for 'containing social and industrial conflict' (Hall, 1988a: 136), which helped to dismantle the trade unions when working-class men became the 'enemy within'. Law-and-order politics were also employed to combat the alleged increase of 'mugging' and street crime. As Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (1987) note, mugging was presented as a key element in the moral panic over the breakdown of law and order, and it was the 'black mugger' who was used to symbolise the threat of violence. As Virdee argues, 'such state racism was a crucial ingredient in the toxic cocktail that Thatcherism was constructing around its authoritarian populist agenda, a racism where blackness and Britishness were reproduced as mutually exclusive categories' (149, also see Gilroy, 1987). Violence and crime thus became synonymous with 'un-British', 'alien cultures', committed by 'outsiders'. In this way, the public could be persuaded that 'immigrants' rather than the capitalist system, caused society's problems of high unemployment and crippling recession. The working-class thus became effectively divided on racial grounds – the white working-class was encouraged to direct its frustrations towards the black working-class for 'taking' their jobs, housing, and public services.

However, despite its importance in understanding the climate of Thatcherism and austerity, the 'Thatcherism' thesis, as noted by Jean Gardiner (1983) and Elizabeth Wilson (1987), was vulnerable in relation to women. The thesis argued that the coherence of 'Thatcherism' rests on its creation of a seamless repressive ideology that placed women firmly in the home. However, it is not as simple as this suggests. The Thatcher government used women in complex ways. It cannot therefore be suggested that during the crisis and era of Thatcherism, women were placed back in the home. As Evans (2016: 443) notes, 'Thatcher, and the neoliberal resistance to extensive welfare provision by the state, brought into a central political focus two pictures of womanhood'. This, Evans goes on to say, was on the one hand, the affluent, 'emancipated' woman, and on the other, the 'thrifty housewife'. Women were therefore being asked to 'spend liberally' and 'provide for themselves', 'supporting the two central tenets of the neo-liberal state' (ibid).

However, during this context, some women were more able to take on these roles than others. Policies pursued by the Conservative government did not affect women uniformly. Instead, policies widened the gap between better-off women and those at the bottom of the employment hierarchy, especially BAME women (Wilson, 1987). This was, in large part, due to the loss of women's jobs in the manufacturing sector. For instance, as Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson (1984: 93) note, 'decline in manufacturing meant that there were fewer jobs for the poorest women, which was not offset by the increasing size of the service sector. It was also in manufacturing that relative pay declined most rapidly'. For black working-class women, racism and, for some, their immigrant status made them even more vulnerable. Privatisation and pauperisation accelerated and intensified during the crisis as a result of the government's general economic strategy and policies pursued in order to create a low-wage economy. However, the government defended part-time work as a solution for women, arguing that such work was what the women of Britain wanted, since it fitted in with their domestic responsibilities. The rhetoric of choice and freedom was used to mask the reality of super-exploitation and falling real incomes (Wilson, 1987).

Alongside the discussion of choice and freedom, the rhetoric of 'the family' was also used to provide an ideological legitimisation for the recession and austerity policies (Gardiner, 1983: 7). For instance, the philosophy stressed the need to return responsibility and choice to the family, both of which it claimed had been eroded by the growth of the welfare state. However, the practical effects of austerity policies associated with the philosophy were, for example, lowering the real value of benefits and privatising services. Women were disproportionately affected by these cuts in health, education, housing, and social services. Therefore, as Wilson summarises, the Thatcher welfare picture was, broadly speaking, similar to the situation found in women's employment:

while the underlying imperative of Tory policies is the desire to cut back public spending, to privatise and to increase productivity, the results bear disproportionately upon women. Women are less likely – particularly if they have young children – to be earning a full-time wage, and their consequent poverty makes them both more dependent on state welfare and more exposed to its growing deficiencies. (1987: 222)

Emphasis was laid more on the parental control of children, and on the family as the central institution in an individualistic and competitive society, which, at times, called for a return to patriarchal values. Lone mothers were understood as a social threat, cast 'as a drain on public expenditure and as a threat to the stability and order associated with the traditional two-parent family' (Lister, 2002: 115). The media became increasingly hostile to lone mothers, exemplified by headlines such as 'Wedded to Welfare' and 'Do They Want to Marry a Man or the State' (Sunday Times, July, 11th 1993). Afro-Caribbean single mothers were especially vilified, 'being linked to the welfare bill' (Lister: 2002: 115). This demonstrates a direct attack on the working-class, in which the Thatcher government shaped class relations in the interests of the free market. The unemployed were blamed for their situation, and collectivism was replaced with individualism. Despite the contradictory and ambiguous nature of the state in relation to women, Thatcherism helped to facilitate and intensify women's exploitation in the worst-paid

and least-protected jobs and increased their unpaid labour in the home, due to the eroding of the welfare state, as well as blaming parents, especially working-class single mothers, for juvenile delinquency and the decay of morals.

New Labour State

Although Bill Clinton and Tony Blair were critical of the excesses of Reagan and Thatcher, it was during the peak of their leadership, in the late 1990s–2000s, that a thoroughgoing neoliberal international policy regime was codified and organisationally instantiated in bodies like the World Trade Organization (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010). Although the material, symbolic and political landscapes changed very little, during this period, there were certain contradictions in regards to the shaping of gender, class and 'race' relations.

Citizenship became redesigned around work and worklessness, and inclusion and exclusion. Paid work was regarded as a moral duty, an important component of good citizenship in an advanced, globalised, multicultural, liberal, modern society. In particular, paid work and the ability to consume became traits of the ideal subject: the autonomous, independent, self-regulating individual who takes responsibility for managing his or her own risks and those of their family (Cameron et al., 2002: 574). This, as Linda McDowell (2008: 155-156) notes, radically changed the meaning of motherhood. While femininity, domesticity, and mothering used to be inextricably intertwined, the 'good mother' transitioned into a mother who entered the labour market to raise her income for the benefit of her children, and who no longer occupied the home as a continuous presence. This was accompanied with the introduction of active labour market policies that combined ideas about national competitiveness with policies to challenge social exclusion (McDowell et al., 2005b). In addition, this has also been supplemented by the filling of the 'care gap', by typically racialised migrant workers (Fraser, 2016).

It is in the context of New Labour (1997-2010) that the white working-class were characterised as an obstruction to what Chris Haylett (2001) terms 'multicultural modernisation', labelled as 'poor abject whites', reproducing the historical division of respectable and abject within the working-class (Levitas, 1998; Morris, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). Socially excluded individuals were perceived as needing to be 'helped or coerced to become included citizens' (Gillies, 2005: 838). Both national and local government policies emphasised cultural changes through policies of re-education, parenting classes, and even lessons in dress codes, to facilitate their re-inclusion in 'normal' (for which read middle-class) society (Haylett, 2001). For instance, the Sure Start programme, which provided child-care and other forms of support to parents, (especially single women in cities identified as disadvantaged), working-class women were discursively defined as inadequate, as socially excluded, because of their social and cultural attitudes, rather than by poverty (McDowell, 2004). This rhetoric, Skeggs (2005: 972) notes,

reveals that whiteness does not naturally predispose people to social privilege and success while making the figural association between black and working class disappear (Haylett, 2001). This unhinging, as Hall (1996) demonstrates, enables culture to become the defining feature of race.

This demonstrates 'a shift from naming the working-class as "underclass", a racialised and irredeemable "other", to naming them "the excluded", a culturally determined but recuperable "other"', which, as Haylett argues, 'was pivotal to the recasting of Britain as a post-imperial, modern nation' (2001:351). This shift, Christy Kulz (2013: 156) notes shows how 'categorisation can temporally shift and do different work'.

The government also deployed punitive policies to manage these citizens, by 'limiting financial or material aid in order to make citizens take responsibility for their own welfare' (Tyler, 2013a: 161). This was done, in part, through civil orders such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's), Parental Orders (POs), and Individual Behaviour Orders (ISOs), which treated working-class cultures as both lacking and pathological (Skeggs, 2009: 38; Haylett, 2001; Tyler, 2013a). Such punitive and disciplinary orders

reinforced the myth that poverty could be reduced, and social equality improved, by changing attitudes and behavior of the 'workless' (Todd, 2014: 340). Loïc Wacquant, who identified the spread of what he calls the new penal or 'carceral state', argues that liberal democracies of the global North have transformed into authoritarian 'Daddy States', characterised in policy by 'the new priority given to duties over rights, sanction over support [and] the stern rhetoric of the "obligations of citizenship"' (2010: 201). In the US, he says, this is done through the process of incarceration, which developed initially as a backlash against the social advances made by the black and white working-class. He argues that it offers a new meaning to poor relief, 'not to the poor, but from the poor, by forcibly "disappearing" the most disruptive of them' (204).

Therefore, although social reforms were aimed at women and employment opportunities, New Labour amplified the shaping of class, 'race' and gender relations through disciplinary moral 'cultural' reform. Women were brought forward in their capacity as independent citizen workers in the interests of global capitalism. Racialised neoliberal state regulation enabled class to take new shapes and form new relationships via culture, representing (white) working-class women as having nothing to offer, as being un-modern, with a valueless culture, at the edges of the nation (Skeggs, 2004).

Up to this point, this chapter has analysed how the state has shaped gender, class and 'race' relations in the last centuries. This analysis shows that certain dominant features remain: black and white working-class women have been interchangeably used, and/or blamed, in the interests of the state. They have been given the task of helping the nation, by being placed into the home and given the un-doable duty of becoming 'respectable'. They have had to successfully carry the impact of austerity and government reform, and have needed to juggle paid employment and childcare, as state services were withdrawn. The same working-class figure has also been continually blamed and shamed for the lack of social order. These women have come to be known as carriers of immorality, degeneracy, and danger, as witches being removed from the land and burned alive, as the 'undeserving poor' sent to the work-house or shipped off as servant labour, as the

'anti-citizen' endangering the 'natural' racial harmony, and as the black and/or (dirty) white welfare mother. They are perceived as exhausting national resources (welfare), and as being in need of confinement, instruction, or moral reform. Therefore, the state in different forms, at different times, and through particular configurations, not only controlled and disciplined women for the things that they have 'done', but also used and mobilised them in the interests of capital.

Understanding the Present State of Austerity

These historical legacies inform the present era of austerity. In this final section, I show how austerity, as a moral-political-economic gendered project, is produced and legitimised by the state (shaping gender, class, and 'race' relations). As noted in Chapter 3, feminist scholars have explored the different gendered, classed, and 'raced' subject positions that are presently being played out within the political, social and cultural spheres. Drawing on, and building upon this research, I argue that to fully understand the relationship between the state's production and legitimisation of austerity, and women's experiences in the everyday, a more detailed analysis needs to be undertaken – one which studies the state and its shaping of social relations in detail. The remainder of this chapter does just that, examining how moral discourses that emanate from the state, both justify changes to the welfare system, and shape and reinforce (gendered, classed and 'racial') divisions inside of the population. This section does not exhaustively review all recent governmental discourses (2010-2017). Instead, it focuses on those that are most helpful in understanding the overarching goals of the austerity programme. These discourses contextualise subsequent empirical chapters in this thesis, and provide a framework for critical dialogue.

Producing Austerity through State Discourse



Figure 4: *'I Doubled the National Debt Vote for Me', Conservative Party Poster 2010.* Image by Political Advertising, available at: <https://politicaladvertising.co.uk/2010/05/12/the-guardians-pick-of-general-election-2010/> [12th May, 2010]

In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron argued that Britain's 'massive deficit' and 'growing debt' was 'the most urgent issue facing Britain today' (2010: no pagination). This issue, he argued, threatened to loom over the economy and society for a generation – a threat to the nation, and the future of the country. He claimed that disastrous eventualities would occur, if the debt and deficit was not resolved 'decisively and quickly'. For instance, he argued that failing to get 'a grip on our public finances' would result in investors raising 'doubt [about] Britain's ability to pay its way', resulting in a rise in interest rates and a fall in investments. Cameron claimed that this outcome would mean that 'no real recovery' could take place, and that Britain's economy would begin an inevitable slide into decline (ibid). He raised the idea that cutting government spending will lead to renewed confidence and economic recovery – what Paul Krugman (2012) calls the 'confidence fairy'. This idea holds that suffering will occur if government spending is not cut, not that suffering is a consequence of acting to cut spending and reduce the deficit (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 304). This future threat supports the notion that a

short period of austerity is better than a long painful decline to help the nation recover.

This discourse frames the cutting of public spending as both necessary and urgent – since the core element of the austerity story is that state spending led to debt and deficit. Discussing the crisis in 2011, Germany's Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble wrote in the *Financial Times* that it was 'an undisputable *fact* that excessive state spending has led to unsustainable levels of debt and deficits' (2011: no pagination, italics my emphasis). The root cause of the crisis has, therefore, been constructed as the result of an expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than the high-risk strategies of banks (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 300). This approach constructed austerity as the 'common-sense' solution to debt (Blyth, 2013). For instance, when discussing the reasons for the 'deficit', Cameron (2010: no pagination) said, 'much 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'. Failing to reference the high-risk banking strategies, blame is instead placed upon irresponsible government spending. This discourse thus constructs the idea that the country – especially the previous Labour government – has overspent, and become heavily in debt. Debt is thus constructed as a national issue and is framed in political terms. This has significant political consequences: it not only allows, but legitimises, the government's targeting of public spending in the austerity programme.

The welfare system has become a specific target for spending cuts. Yet, for these specific cuts to become framed as the solution to 'irresponsible spending', a discourse was required that naturalises the idea of the welfare system as being 'too expensive', 'out of control', and having a stagnating effect on growth and prosperity. As noted previously, the framing of the welfare state through a 'crisis lens' has not arisen in the current context. This discourse has been circulating for the last few decades (most notably during the Thatcher years). However, within the context of austerity, these discourses have intensified, framing welfare as helping to cause the 'crisis of capitalism', as George Osborne (2010: no pagination) states:

The explosion in welfare costs contributed to the growing structural budget deficit. 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.

The assertions above have implications for how welfare can be regarded in a time of financial strain. Claiming that welfare costs are 'one reason why there is no money left' suppresses discourses that emphasise the necessity of welfare spending. This subsequently further helps to legitimate the discourse that welfare-spending cuts are the 'common sense' solution for financing the public debt (Blyth, 2010). The programme of austerity becomes framed as the saviour to the nation's problems, seen as necessary in both economic and moral terms.

The term 'age of austerity' was first popularised by Cameron in his keynote speech at the Conservative Party forum in April 2009. In 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government implemented the programme of austerity as the way to 'cure' the deficit and clear Britain's debt. Framed within the moral discourse of 'virtuous necessity'; 'we are making tough choices ... if there was another way, some easier way, I would take it' (Cameron, 2013: no pagination), austerity was constructed as the 'only option,' with 'no alternative'. As with Thatcher and the rhetoric of 'there is no alternative' (TINA) to neoliberal policies, this emphasis that 'there is no alternative' to austerity closes down the notion that there are other ways in to decrease the deficit (see for instance Piketty, 2013; Carmel, 2015; Jarrett, 2014). TINA is therefore central to the politics of austerity.

Consequently, questioning austerity is seen as irrational, since the 'austere' response to the deficit is backed up using economic research. In 2010 Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, gave a speech laying out his plan to eliminate the deficit. He cited Carmen Rogoff, former chief economist at the IMF and his colleague, Kenneth Reinhart directly, drawing on findings from their paper 'Growth in a Time of Debt' (2010). The paper argues that, once debt reaches more than 90 per cent of GDP, the risks of a large negative impact on long-term growth become highly significant. However, the economic research

that allegedly supported the austerity push has since been discredited (Krugman, 2015; Blyth 2013; Stiglitz, 2012). These results were based on highly dubious assumptions and procedures – plus a few outright mistakes – which should have evaporated under closer scrutiny. The data showed that there was no such link between high debt and low growth, but their conclusions were based on a spreadsheet error (Graeber, 2013). The Chancellor admitted he knew this when questioned. Economists revealed that causality lies in the opposite direction: low growth leads to high levels of debt (Elliot, 2013). In 2014, Reinhart and Rogoff authored a new working paper, shifting their arguments away from favouring austerity. The premise behind the cuts therefore turns out to be faulty – there is no proof that high levels of debt necessarily lead to recession. The IMF has since concluded that austerity policies can do more harm than good, resulting in increased inequality and stunted economic growth (Ostry et al., 2016). Therefore, as Krugman (2015) has argued, the economic intellectual explanation for austerity is bankrupt.

Despite this, fiscal probity has been championed as the only way of fixing the economy, restoring market confidence and helping Britain's future. As Gavan Titley (2013) describes, 'dissent or the proposition of alternatives is constructed as taboo, for it is seen to dent market confidence, raise spectres of unrest and show a limited grasp of reality' (in Jarrett, 2014: 144-145). For example, countries running significant budget deficits in the aftermath of the crisis were deemed at imminent risk of 'becoming Greece', unless they immediately began to implement austerity (Krugman, 2015). At this point, Greece was using Keynesian policies to better their situation. Advocates for a policy of austerity zoned in on this, and Greece became an example of how Keynesian policy did not work. During this period, Osborne made repeated comparisons to the fiscal situation of Greece and the UK, 'you can see, in Greece, an example of a country that didn't face up to its problems, and that is the fate that I want to avoid' (Reuters, 2010 in Blyth 2013: 73). The IMF has since admitted it had failed to realise the damage austerity would do to Greece during the bailout (Elliot, Inman and Smith, 2013).

Legitimizing Austerity through State Discourse

This final section will explore how austerity is legitimised through state discourse. Focusing on the key themes of 'we' and 'us and them', I demonstrate how austerity has been justified through different gendered, classed and 'racial' discourses, which discursively and affectively shape which groups are 'deserving' of spending cuts, and which are not. I will show how these sometimes-contradictory discourses are enacted to suit the needs of the particular moment.

'All in this together': The unity of 'we'



Figure 5: 'We are all in this together', Conservative Party poster, London, 2010. Photograph by Perfect Day, available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/politics-political-design/> [2nd February, 2016]

As discussed in the previous section, not only is the deficit engineered as being the fault of the 'nation' (public debt), but also it becomes 'our' responsibility to help dissolve the debt. To enact this agenda, the Coalition government employ the discourse of 'we are all in this together' (Cameron, 2010; Osborne, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015), aimed

at generating feelings of collective pain sharing. This strengthens the idea of 'one nation united in the face of adversity' (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 303), and moves beyond something that is purely a concern of the state (Lazzarato, 2011: 38, in Hitchen, 2014: 25). Austerity, thus, involves every individual in the responsibility of 'balancing the books'. Individuals are called upon to be frugal, productive, and responsible (Tasker and Negra, 2013:183, also see Bramall, 2013). Not only is it his or her individual responsibility to help the nation, but, by doing so 'together', everyone helps recovery by sharing the pain. Similar to the post-war austerity discourse discussed in a previous section, this 'unity' solicits consensus and cross-class cooperation and aims to head off resistance and complaint. It is also arguably used to appease opposition, to manage dissent and to blur inequalities of resources of all kinds (Tasker and Negra, 2013). This is even though we are *not* all in this together, due to the unequal distribution of spending cuts.

The 'Striver' and 'Skiver': The Language of Welfare Debate



Figure 6: 'Let's Cut Benefits For Those Who Refuse Work', Conservative Party poster 2010. Image by Political Advertising, <https://politicaladvertising.co.uk/2010/04/21/conservative-poster-cut-benefits-for-those-who-refuse-work/> [21st April, 2010]

In the re-writing of the reasons for the crisis, binary imaginaries have been used to discuss the welfare state, and show why the benefits system should be reformed (also see Chapters 1 and 3). Binary divisions, as emphasised in this chapter, have a long history, and as Jensen (2014:2.3) argues, 'are complex and multiple – some recycled and reanimated from the zombie category of the "underclass" (so-called because despite sociological attempts to "kill it off" with evidence, it keeps returning: see MacDonald, Shildrick, and Furlong 2014), while other terms are relatively new'. The figure of crisis in the current welfare debate is 'the skiver', gaining traction because of its connotations with criminality, fraud and worklessness (ibid). Inheriting the ideological baggage of preceding abject figures, the 'skiver' has become a catchall term for figures of social disgust (the single mother, the immigrant, the unemployed, and most recently, the sick and disabled) imagined in opposition to the 'striver' – the hard-working citizen. Osborne (2012: no pagination) exemplifies this binary when he says:

Where is the fairness ... 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 ... They strive for a better life. We strive to help them.

The 'skiver'/'striver' binary therefore creates two types of people, one that 'strives for a better life' and one that 'sleep[s] off a life on benefits'. These figures, Jensen argues, are 're-imagined as static testimony to a perverse welfare system that rewards irresponsibility and punishes commitment' (2014: 2.5). Despite the repeated claim that 'we are all in this together,' the notion of togetherness becomes conditional upon being in paid employment.

The obligations of citizenship, which, as demonstrated above, have always been open for contestation, intensify in this context around work and worklessness. 'Good citizens' are held up as helping the nation recover from the crisis by being autonomous, individualised, economically productive, and fitting with conservative social norms of

good behaviour (which are highly gendered). For instance, Osborne (2011: no pagination) states, 'it is the strivers, the entrepreneurs, the engineers, the innovators, the savers, who create growth'. Employed 'strivers' contribute towards the economic recovery. They go beyond what is required, since the striver 'innovates, engineers and saves'. In moral terms they 'play by the rules' (Cameron, 2012b: no pagination). The cutting of welfare is thus framed in relation to the 'striver'. It is done to help the 'hard-working people', since as Cameron notes, 'dealing with the deficit, getting our economy moving, increasing the level of responsibility in our society and getting on the side of hard-working people' becomes what 'matters the most' (ibid) to the government. Unity does not include individuals that are described as 'sleeping off a life on benefits' (the 'skiver') and who, it is implied, are neither playing by the rules or matching up to what is required by the government and the nation.

Within this context, benefit use is constructed as a matter of choice. For instance, Cameron (2011: no pagination) argues, 'if the State is paying them more not to work, it becomes a rational choice to sit at home on the sofa'. This constructs individuals who rely on benefits as being inherently lazy, compared to the 'strivers' in work 'who want to work hard and get on' (Osborne, 2010: no pagination). In addition, the emphasis on 'something-for-nothing culture' (Duncan-Smith, 2011), constructs the notion that individuals claiming benefits 'take out' and do not contribute to society. Such 'bad citizens' are therefore not seen as playing a full part in society, since they are not in paid work. This further constructs the idea that the number of benefits claimants is not due to Britain's economic situation, but to a 'culture' in which individuals choose not to work. It suggests that unemployment is a matter of personal choice: the fault of the 'skiver'. Binary thinking therefore invades the discourse of 'we are all in this together' and results in the discourse of 'striver' versus 'skiver' becoming central to furthering the austerity programme. The distinctions help to legitimate the uneven distribution of spending cuts, and win approval for otherwise unpopular economic policies, such as punitive welfare-to-work policies. As Jensen (2014: 2.3) argues, 'it is through imagining or inventing anxieties about the scheming deceits of those entitled to social protection, that such

entitlements become easier to undermine and dismantle’.

A Revolution in Responsibility



Figure 7: *'Strong Families, Strong Society', Conservative Party poster, London, available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/politics-political-design/> [2nd February, 2017]*

Furthering the previous argument, welfare has been framed within two different state discourses. First, individuals are understood as rational economic actors, who choose to be workless, and second, they are represented as 'passive victims' of a dysfunctional welfare system. These discourses effect the powerful narrative of state and personal failure around welfare, which is re-cast as an expensive, lumbering and ineffective system that rewards wilful worklessness and generates dependency. In 2011, Cameron discussed the need for 'a social recovery' in Britain:

my mission in politics – the thing I am really passionate about – is 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 and actions. (no pagination)

Supplanted with moral rhetoric about conduct and behaviour (Jensen and Tyler, 2012), the 'responsibility deficit' suggests, for instance, that people are unemployed because of their own 'welfare dependence', 'culture of entitlement', and 'irresponsibility', rather than unemployment due to a range of external factors such as redundancies, high job competition and a lack of jobs. As in other times of crisis, 'individual behaviours' are thus imagined as the problem of political and economic crisis (Dowling and Harvie, 2014) and these 'bad/failed' subjects are projected as a sinister threat to civility that must be controlled, corrected, or kept at bay (Tyler, 2013b). This diminishes sympathy towards the victims of spending cuts, as they become positioned as the 'undeserving poor', undeserving of welfare support. This discourse suppresses the moral question of unfairly targeting people in need of social security, and justifies the notion that the welfare system is 'morally indefensible' without reform (Osborne, 2010). To restore this lack of responsibility, there is an emphasis on the need for 'a massive step change' and a 'revolution in (personal, parental, social, and civic) responsibility' (Cameron, 2011: no pagination). The family, once again, becomes one of the central means by which this 'revolution in responsibility' can be implemented. As Cameron (2011b: no pagination) notes:

Strong families are where children learn to become responsible people. When you grow up in a strong family, you learn how to behave, you learn about give and take. You learn about responsibility.

The 'strong family' (read nuclear family) is envisioned to be able to instil responsibility, morals and values needed for social harmony to fix 'Broken Britain'. This ideal is placed in opposition to the 'broken family' (read lone parent), which is shaped in heavily gendered, classed and racialised terms. The mother of the 'broken family' is regarded as an inevitable failure, marked with negative value, who has not fulfilled the new social contract of the government. This relationship between responsibility, motherhood, and society can be seen through the depiction of the 'feral' parent - a figure which gained

traction in the aftermath of the 2011 riots, combining discourses surrounding dirty whiteness, 'gang' culture and black families. Discussing this figure, De Benedictis (2012: 1) highlights how austerity discourse positioned the 'feral' parent as being to blame for the riots, having failed her children, herself and Britain through her parenting decisions. Deemed as a 'counterpoint to 'ordinary' (and middle) whiteness' (Lawler, 2012: 2), the discourses of the 'strong family' and the 'broken family'/'feral' parent work alongside each other to implicitly and oppositionally inscribe the strong family with 'ordinary', middle-class whiteness (De Benedictis, 2012).

The 'broken family'/'feral' parent is therefore held up as a justification for cuts and welfare reform, since it is her lack of responsibly fostered by the welfare state, that has resulted in her inability to care/provide for her children. Reliance on welfare becomes synonymous with failure, irresponsibility, laziness, and unemployment. The RTV series, *Benefits Street*, especially the central protagonist in the show 'White Dee', have been used as further 'evidence' for the need of such reforms by MP's. As Conservative MP Phillip Davies (2014: no pagination) argued:

Every time people look at White Dee ... it will serve as a reminder to people of the mess the benefits system is in and how badly Iain Duncan Smith's reforms are needed. White Dee is bone idle and doesn't want to work another day in her life and has no intention of finding a job.

Labelled as 'bone idle', the figure of 'White Dee' not only serves to justify the need to reform the system, but also 'acts to dichotomously inscribe cultural, economic and moral value with the middle-class, white, heterosexual, married, responsible parent' (De Benedictis, 2012: 16; Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2012; Allen and Taylor, 2012).

The discourse of 'a responsibility deficit' occurs alongside the discourse that individuals are 'passive victims' of a dysfunctional welfare system; which 'traps' people in 'welfare dependency'. For instance, in January 2014, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions,

Iain Duncan-Smith used the RTV show *Benefits Street* to also justify his series of reforms. Yet, in contrast to the discussion from Philip Davies MP above, Duncan-Smith argued that the show exposed 'the hidden reality' of the lives of people 'trapped' on state-benefits (2014). The welfare system, the 2010 White Paper argued, 'can act to entrench, rather than solve the problems of poverty and social exclusion' as opposed to the negative behaviour of individuals. The welfare system has also been blamed for allowing migrants to 'fill the gap in the labour market left wide open by a welfare system' (Cameron, 2011: no pagination). Thus, it is claimed that reforming the 'woeful welfare system [will] end welfare as a trap' (Duncan-Smith, 2011: no pagination) and will also help to control immigration. The Welfare Reform Bill (2011) represents the implementation of such reforms as helping to end 'wasted lives, wasted money, the end of a system, which keeps people in poverty and dependency' (Duncan-Smith, 2011: no pagination). Benefit claimants are therefore constructed as both rational economic actors able to 'play the system' and shirk their responsibility to work, and 'victims' 'trapped' in welfare dependency. Both discourses, however, legitimate the same action: the uneven distribution of cuts. The former discourse justifies spending cuts to reintroduce responsibility into the 'dysfunctional' lives of those reliant on benefit income, the latter discourse justifies the same spending cuts to prevent welfare becoming a 'trap'.

Fairness for the Job Seeker; Fairness for the Taxpayer



Figure 8: 'Get Britain Working', Conservative Party Poster 2010. Image by Perfect Day, available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/politics-political-design/> [2nd February, 2017]

Welfare reform, it is also argued, establishes a fairer relationship between those who 'take benefits' and those who 'pay for them'. The state discourse of 'fairness' therefore not only strengthens the legitimacy of the uneven distribution of cuts, but also helps to further the inequality of the austerity programme. According to Cameron (2012c: no pagination), there is a 'welfare gap in this country between those living long-term in the welfare system and those outside it':

Take two young women living on the same street in London. One studied hard at college for three years and found herself a full-time job – say as a receptionist – on £18,000 a year, or about £1200 take-home pay a month. She'd love to get her own place with a friend – but with high rents in her area, the petrol to get to work and all the bills, she just can't afford it. So, she's living at home with her mum and dad and is saving up desperately to move out. Then there's another woman living down the street. She's 19 years old and doesn't have a job but is already living in a house with her friends. How? Because when she left college and went down to the Jobcentre to sign on for Job Seeker's Allowance, she found out that if she

moved out of her parents' place, she was automatically entitled to Housing Benefit. So, that's exactly what she did. Again, is this really fair?

Discussing the (gendered) figures of the 'welfare claimant' and the 'worker', the issue of fairness is brought to the fore by telling their respective stories and asking 'is this really fair'. Welfare, it is argued, has led to 'huge resentment amongst those who pay into the system, because they feel that what they're having to work hard for, others are getting without having to put in the effort'. Such a discussion indicates that it is 'unjust' for the taxpayer to pay for other people to 'sit on benefits' and that the government needs to reform welfare in the interest of the hard-working 'good citizen'. Generating feelings of injustice and unfairness, legitimises spending cuts targeted at those receiving welfare payments (understood to be 'undeserving' of them). Reforming the welfare system and introducing 'benefits with conditions' (in the form of sanctioning and back-to-work policies) therefore re-establishes 'fairness' – 'fairness for the job seeker' and 'fairness for the taxpayer' (Duncan-Smith, 2011b: no pagination). As Cameron says:

the system is saying to these people, can't afford to have another child? Tough, save up. Can't afford a home of your own? Tough, live with your parents. Don't like the hours you're working? Tough, that's just life. (Cameron, 2012c: no pagination)

Sanctions are positioned as being 'fairly applied' since it is argued, 'it shouldn't be a lifestyle choice and if people can work, they should work'. That's why we have a sanctions system and I believe that sanctions system is fairly applied' (Cameron, 2016: no pagination).

The combination of the discourse of fairness with previous discourses explored, including the 'striver'/skiver' binary and the 'responsibility deficit', allows for the possibility of creating multiple negative feelings towards those reliant on benefit payments. This further intensifies feelings of injustice. For instance, the figure of the 'undeserving skiver' being sanctioned due to their failure to seek work becomes more affective, since the feeling of injustice towards those 'bad citizens' has been continually reproduced by

differing, but complementary state discourses. The greater the feeling of injustice, the more effective the discourses of fairness will therefore be. Subsequently, the uneven distribution of spending cuts becomes a just and fair action towards the public deficit, strengthening the legitimacy of the cuts.

Groups formally regarded as 'deserving' and 'off limits' (Garthwaite, 2011) – because of ill health or disability – are now targets for welfare reform. It has been argued that some receiving DLA are 'fit to work' since the allowance 'appears to have some disincentive effect on employment' (DWP, 2010: 12). This discourse suppresses the notion that individuals may receive DLA because they are unable to work because of their disability. Rather, it naturalises the notion that DLA benefits claimants 'shirk' their responsibility to seek work and that benefits contribute towards welfare dependency. Consequently, this has enabled the discourse of 'greatest need' to emerge, suggesting that support will only be available for individuals with more severe disabilities. This implies that of those previously entitled to state provision, not all were in need and deserving of support.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how historical legacies inform the present, since, as Skeggs notes (2004, 1997) such legacies are recycled and repeated. Having shown the historical constructions of the state, demonstrating how black and white working-class women have been repeatedly used (as the solution) and blamed (as the problem) by the state during different times and state configurations, the final section addressed how state discourse is shaping gender, class and 'race' in the present context, through the production and legitimisation of austerity. I argued that austerity has been understood and (ideologically) promoted by the state as the only viable solution to the 'crisis'. This was done through the threat of debt, deficit and the consequences of failing to act, and the need to enact fiscal responsibility on an 'out of control' welfare system. Such discourses suppressed the view of welfare as being an important part of social security, narrowing the possibility for other ideas about the necessity of the welfare system and

of alternative ways to cut the deficit. The UK Coalition and Conservative governments have continued these discourses 'in order to impose their own vision of the world' (Bourdieu, 1991:234) which justifies the course of action that they intend to/have taken.

Austerity is also legitimised, I argued, through contradictory discourses of 'we' and 'us and them', which are enacted to suit the needs of the particular moment. The discourse of 'we are all in this together' is constructed through the idea of 'one nation united in the face of adversity' (Clark and Newman, 2012: 303). The 'striver' versus the 'skiver' is then used to blame certain sections of the population for the need to cut spending (single mothers, immigrants, the unemployed and the sick and disabled). This binary allows other discourses to emerge, which helps to further legitimise the uneven distribution of austerity measures and the need for welfare reform. Although the discourses that coexist can be seen as contradictory, they legitimise the same action: the uneven distribution of spending cuts. It is by understanding how austerity is produced, legitimised and made present by the state and connected to historical legacies, that it is possible to analyse how young women live with, and navigate through austerity's policies and (moral and ideological) discourses. This will be analysed in the following chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 5

Living with Austerity

The first analytical chapter of the thesis complicates George Osborne's infamous phrase, 'we are all in this together' (2009, 2010, 2012, 2015), a phrase used to legitimate the uneven distribution of austerity measures. In order to show *how* we are in fact, *not* 'all in this together', this chapter discusses the ways in which austerity manifests and materialises itself in young women's everyday lives. It is important to remember, as was shown in Chapter 2, that the impact of the austerity measures on the cities chosen (Leeds, London and Brighton) vary. Austerity has made an impact on each area to different degrees and in different ways, which is linked to discussions of the wider political, economic and social context. However, this does not mean that those women in each area experience austerity in the same ways. Gender is not a unified category and the effects of the recession have impacted upon women to differing degrees. It is therefore important to challenge representations of the crisis as being affective to women in equal measure (Fakuda-Parr, Heintz and Seguino, 2013). Such a misrepresentation can be seen, on the one hand, in the use of the phrase 'we are all in this together', and on the other, with the assumption that women as a group are suffering disproportionately from austerity measures.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Bourdieu's metaphors of capital (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) is a useful tool to understand how women's differential access to economic, social and cultural capital and other resources shape the way in which they are effected by austerity in their everyday lives. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, conditions of existence are not undermined, but exacerbated in the current context, imposing greater hardship (Evans, 2015), 'reconfiguring the value of one's capital, the range of possibilities open and, ultimately, the degree to which economic necessity presses on the senses' (Atkinson, 2013: 14). Therefore, despite austerity decreasing the 'space of possibilities' (Bourdieu, 2014) for women in general, the *volume*, *composition* and *trajectory* of their capital shape

their experience. Therefore, Bourdieu's metaphors of capital, is used to show why it is not only important to observe the way women are experiencing and living austerity, but also to be mindful of how differences of gender, class and 'race' affect and shape their experiences of austerity.

In the first instance, due to austerity being, in part, an economic programme, it is thus important to understand in depth, how women have been affected by austerity in terms of employment and general living standards. To understand the points raised above, this chapter is divided into two sections: (i) the affect of austerity on employment and (ii) on living standards. Women's experiences of employment in the context of austerity are firstly analysed, focusing on how women discuss changes to the sectors they work in, the trend towards casualisation and unemployment. Issues related to living standards are then assessed, such as changes to state support, housing, and leisure and consumption practices. It should be noted that it is only for the purpose of this chapter that I have made a decision to split the analysis in this way, since it is important to understand how the fields of production and reproduction are affected in detail. This however does not mean, as is seen below, that such issues are not interlinked. The following sections not only show the impacts of austerity on a material level, but also complicate the understanding of who has been affected.

This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to or overview of austerity in the UK or elsewhere, and neither is it a macro-economic analysis of the changes since 2008. Rather, this chapter is concerned with the direct impact and ramifications of austerity policies on young women's lives. It therefore addresses some of the most prominent discussions from the sixty-one women I spoke to, and is restricted to the issues repeatedly raised by them.

Working with Austerity

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the recession that followed the financial crash of 2008 triggered major changes to the labour market. A report by the TUC (2015: 1) on the changes to women's employment during the context of austerity found that: (i) young women's employment, which fell furthest in the recession years, has still not recovered; (ii) there has been a rise in the number of women on zero-hours and short-hours contracts; (iii) pay in real terms has fallen for women in contrast to men's; (iv) women working full-time earn approximately nine per cent less per hour than men but women working part-time earn nearly 38 per cent less; (v) women still make up the majority of those paid less than the living wage; (vi) more women than ever before are in part-time work. These findings show that austerity has had a large effect on women's lives. In what follows, I draw on the most discussed topics in relation to work and austerity - namely, changes within certain sectors, unemployment and the trend towards casualisation – to explore how their experience of employment manifests itself within their lives. However, as will be shown below, class and 'race' come to matter in such manifestations.

Changes to the Public Sector

Current austerity policies have focused on cuts to public spending, and so the public sector workforce has been subjected to major changes (TUC, 2015). This has included widespread job losses in addition to pay restraints, significant changes to pensions, and a range of other revisions to the terms and conditions of employment. With 65 per cent of public service workers being women, this means that they have been disproportionately affected. Women are more likely to be employed by local authorities and in the public sector more generally. They are also more likely to be subcontracted to the state via private-sector organisations (Seguino, 2010; Taylor-Gooby and Stoeker, 2010; Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2011). Fifteen of the women that I interviewed worked in the public sector, twelve in full-time positions and three in part-time roles. However,

their experiences of the sector were very different. Not all of those women experienced redundancies or pay cuts, but spoke about the changes at a more general level. Yet, this was due, in part, to the type of jobs they performed within the sector (some were more secure), but also the duration of public sector employment.

'Everyone's had enough,' Anna told me, when discussing the NHS. Having worked in the sector as a physiotherapist since 2008, Anna, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman living in London, described the transformation she had seen the NHS go through in recent years - witnessing redundancies, the reduction of funding, increased waiting lists, fewer resources and low staff morale. This, she said, had made many staff move to the private sector, or take leave from the NHS. Likewise, in the Education sector, Nadia, a 32-year-old, middle-class teacher from Leeds who described herself as 'mixed other', who had been employed in the sector since 2010, called the changes to her sector 'significant'. Like other teachers I interviewed, Nadia explained how cuts were being made in the 'wrong places'. For example, the reduction of support staff for children with increased needs meant that some children were no longer getting sufficient help and encouragement.

Nadia likened the public sector itself to being 'run like a business'. Discussing the introduction of performance related pay and Academies⁴², Nadia felt these shared similarities with the private sector. Kate, a 30-year-old, middle-class, white woman, living in Leeds, who also worked as a teacher, described her school in a similar manner. Working in an Academy, she told me that although the school had received more government funding in recent years, the ethos of the school was changing. Reflecting on this, Kate explained that the school had become more like a 'private company' – the school itself had more power to make decisions and had implemented performance-related pay (which had made so teaching professionals fearful of missing their targets).

⁴²Academies are independent schools receiving funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority.

Trisha, a 34-year-old, middle-class, white woman, working as an advocacy support worker in the charity sector in Brighton, also labelled the sector in 'business' terms. She said:

We've had a series of managers and we've ended up with a woman who is a robot. She doesn't care about the service users but she's great at writing reports and making stuff up, manipulating figures, finding ways to look like we provide this great service that's reaching everyone.

With the change in focus from service to results, Trisha felt the work suffered under this type of 'corporate management'. The discussions above therefore illustrate the way in which the public sector has and continues to transform under the current context of public sector cuts. Those working in the sector mentioned the effects on both the users of the services and those in public sector employment, especially those in less secure or part-time positions (such as school support staff). Characterising the sector as being 'run like a business' highlights the change to a generalised managerial/performance culture employed to regulate and discipline the workforce in line with features of the private sector.

Yet, these changes have affected women differently depending on when they entered the labour market. Several young women stated that, if they had graduated a few years later, their experience would have been different; timing therefore generated more or less security and an increased or reduced level of opportunity. Sophie, for example, a 25-year-old, middle-class, white woman working in the NHS as a marketing officer in Leeds, said that she would most likely not have got a job in her area if she had applied a few years later, due to the effects that the crisis and recession had on the public sector. Likewise, Mia, a 27-year-old, middle-class, Anglo-Indian, doctor working in London had managed to avoid the junior doctors' pay freeze⁴³ since she graduated in 2010 and would

⁴³The Department of Health has rewritten the employment contracts of all new doctors below consultant level in England, who started employment from August 2016. The contract affects the amount that junior doctors get paid, and their decisions surrounding which specialties they choose to train in.

qualify as a GP in the summer of 2016. It should also be noted that although women were aware of the changes to their chosen careers and sectors, they did not think that these changes had or would negatively affect their personal trajectories. Sophie, for instance, described herself as being 'incredibly fortunate' getting a full-time job within a few months of finishing university. She told me that three months into her employment, there was a large reshuffle in her department and many people were asked to take voluntary redundancy. This meant that Sophie was able to move up the ladder faster, taking on work that she was not necessarily qualified to do, gaining more responsibility, working with senior members of the team, and having the opportunity to undertake further training courses (opportunities which would have not been available to in her in her previous role). Although the effect of the recession was largely positive for young graduates, Sophie and others said that, despite promotions and increased responsibility, they had only recently received a pay rise. These women noted that this had not negatively affected their lifestyle, as they had only just left full-time education. Nevertheless, the low pay tempers the positive effect of increased employment opportunities. This demonstrates one of the mechanisms in which labour costs are consistently reduced across different sectors. However, for the majority of these women, despite not increasing their economic capital in terms of income, their employment was relatively stable and secure and provided the space to accrue both social and cultural capital, which may be converted into economic capital in the future.

Witnessing the Trend Towards Casualisation

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, the quality of employment in the UK has also been declining in the last few decades. Yet, as shown above, in the context of austerity, this deterioration has intensified. According to the TUC (2015: 7) there has been a persistent and worrying trend towards the normalisation of less secure, part-time work. By 2014, more than 1.7 million workers were in some form of temporary work. This trend has forced many women to accept reduced working hours as well as lower wages, resulting in a significant increase in the precariousness of their situation. For example,

the proportion of women in temporary work has increased from a quarter to nearly a third since 2008 (ibid). Such precariousness was also found in full-time and part-time work as well as within different sectors. In spite of this, the degree of precariousness women experienced within their jobs was dependant on and affected by the volume, composition, and trajectory of capital they possessed – those with greater amounts/types of capital had a different experience of the present than those who possessed less.

Trisha felt the impact of austerity in terms of the trend towards less-secure part-time work. Having been moved from full-time to part-time hours, Trisha had been working fifteen hours per week since December 2014. She told me, 'it was either stay full-time but work evenings and weekends or go part-time'. Being a single mother with a 16-year-old son about to take his GCSEs, working evenings and weekends would not have suited her lifestyle. Having worked at her organisation for the last six years, Trisha explained that the alteration in her circumstance was due to changes in the ways in which projects were being commissioned. The increased competition for project-funded work forced organisations to bid lower than they usually would, affecting the amount they can pay their staff. Once again, this is another example of how labour costs are consistently being reduced across different sectors by different mechanisms. Trisha explained to me that, despite being disappointed at having to go part-time, she counted herself as 'one of the lucky ones' – she had not had to take voluntary redundancy. Despite the change to her stable position, Trisha did not take the full-time role that was offered, as she thought that she would be able to find another job if she needed to. With both economic capital – savings and owning her own home – and cultural and social capital – in the form of a master's degree, years of experience and networks within and outside the sector – Trisha was positive that should the situation stop suiting her needs, she would be able to find another job. Since going part-time, Trisha had taken up dog walking to 'fill the time' she had. This, she said, was more because she 'loved dogs' than because she 'needed the money'.

Rebecca, a 28-year-old, middle-class, white woman also working in the charity sector as a debt and benefit adviser in Brighton, discussed the trend towards casualisation in a different way. For her, the increase in short-term precarious contracts had a major impact on her standard of living. Rebecca found it extremely difficult to find employment after completing her master's degree in 2013. Eventually finding employment in the charity sector, Rebecca had been on short-term six month contracts for the last eighteen months. Having recently been promoted, Rebecca described the contract as 'the holy grail': 'given the industry I'm in, it's all short-term contracts, I've just been offered a year's contract but a lot of people are existing on month to month or three month contracts and you can't make commitments with that'. In the current context, with the trend to casualisation, this type of short-term contract is becoming the norm in certain industries since contracts are based on securing project funding. This situation is having a second-hand impact on employees, since they are unable to 'make commitments'. For instance, Rebecca told me that even if she had a deposit for a mortgage, her lack of a permanent contract would count against her. She therefore felt she was being made to live 'project by project'. This type of lifestyle, she said, is typical of her group of friends living in the Brighton area:

We are all at the stage now when we're all employed, we can afford to live. Nobody's living back with mum and dad because they can't get a job. But it's the first time ever. I think Brighton's particularly bad for it because it is its own little bubble and it's easy to avoid that transition to get a job and house, because it is impossible. It's left a lot of people in the transitional, not sure what they're doing, in low paid employment, living project by project.

In this sense, 'living project by project', jumping from one unsecured job to another, Rebecca and her middle-class friends have their space of possibilities (Bourdieu, 1983) decreased.

However, this decreased space of possibilities, which is connected to the insecurity of employment, is even more embodied by the increase of zero-hour contracts. Not only do these contracts give fewer guarantees for employees, but those employed on these

contracts earn, on average, 40 per cent less than those with part-time and full-time contracts (Resolution Foundation, 2013). Hannah, a 23-year-old, working-class, white woman was one of those employed on a zero-hour contract. Graduating from university in July 2014, and unable to find full-time employment, Hannah had been working in two zero-hour contract jobs, doing concession work at a football stadium and stewarding at various music venues in London for the last six months. Describing zero-hour contracts as a 'pain', Hannah told me, 'the problem that I have at the minute with my two casual jobs is that I'm working in four different places. It's hard to remember where you need to be'. With no 'basic workers rights'⁴⁴, working odd shifts, with no set timetable, Hannah described herself as not knowing whether she was 'coming or going'. She said:

You never get set days, I've worked fifteen or sixteen days this month so I have done quite a few shifts, whereas next month I'm looking at five or six, that's the problem, especially working in music venues, they've had quite a few shows this month, whereas next month they've only got seven. Lucky enough I've been given four out of seven.

Although having only been given four days work in the next month, Hannah favoured her current employer compared to her previous one. In her former job (a zero-hour contract on a kiosk at another football stadium), she only earned on average £30 per fortnight.

Molly, a 26-year-old, middle-class, black woman, was also a university graduate and had experienced life on a zero-hour contract. Having been born in the UK to Nigerian parents, Molly moved to Nigeria with her parents at a young age. However, wanting to pursue a career in fashion, Molly decided to move back to London in 2012 after finishing her degree. After living there for six months unemployed and staying on a friend's sofa in the affluent area of West London – living off money she had saved whilst working in Nigeria – Molly began looking for work in the fashion industry. However, she described her job search as 'next to impossible:'

⁴⁴Such as the right to know what hours you were going to work in a week, the right to know what you could expect to be paid and the allied right to sick pay and holiday pay.

It was next to impossible, it was difficult. It was humble beginnings. I kind of knew it was going to be hard, but I didn't know how hard it was. So, I said OK, I'll work my way up, you know ... so I was looking for retail jobs, something in fashion, but I started getting worried and I was searching, searching, searching.

Despite having previously worked in the fashion industry in Lagos, Molly spoke of the lack of recognition of her experience and transferability in the current context, which became a barrier to her finding employment. This lack of appreciation of non-UK experiences (as well as qualifications) is cited by other studies researching experiences of BAME background people in the current period of austerity (Sosenko et al., 2013; Bassel et al., 2013; Netto and Fraser, 2009). Bassel et al. (2013) for instance, in their study on the views and experiences of Glasgow residents from BAME backgrounds, highlighted how the lack of recognition of their overseas qualifications and their shortage of UK work experience became a barrier to their employment. Thus, unable to find work in the retail sector – one of the hardest hit areas for job losses during the recession (TUC, 2015) – Molly took a job in sales, working as a door-to-door salesperson, on commission in a zero-hour contract. However, unlike Hannah, Molly quit the job after a few weeks:

I was cold calling. I had to knock on people's doors. It was the worst. There was a point when I said, I can't do this again, this is not my life, I'm not broke, I'm not hungry, I don't know why I'm suffering because I am scared that I'm not going to get a job. So I quit. It was hard-core, it kind of showed me like ... some people hustle hard and it's terrible ... I thought, this is just too much for me; I can't handle this crap. It's not like I'm weak minded, it's just that I choose not to do this kind of job because I know I'm better than this (laughs), it was too much stress for me.

Despite both finding the work frustrating and having similar experiences of zero-hour contracts, Molly and Hannah's outcomes differed due to their different volume of capitals. Molly could quit her job, since she knew that she was able to live off her savings and did not have to pay rent, since she was staying in her friend's apartment. Describing herself as 'not broke', 'not hungry' and 'better than this', her economic and social capital allowed her to leave the job. Hannah, on the other hand, was living at home with her

parents, struggled for money, and needed to work in her current job to be able to help with utilities and rent. Faced with the current context and her 'under-employment', she spoke of wanting to invest her time in undertaking an internship to improve her CV and chances of being eligible for a 'graduate' job. However, needing a regular income, Hannah felt she would not be able to take on this step, unless she could find an internship that paid the living wage. Such an investment was not possible without a wage, due to Hannah and her family being closer to material necessity.

In contrast, Molly was offered an unpaid internship with a bespoke designer. She was able to invest her time and take the position since she saw her 'passion' for design as being more important than receiving a monthly wage. In other words, her relative distance from material necessity allowed her to take the internship and accrue further social and cultural capital. McRobbie in her book *Be Creative* (2015) discusses the rise of unpaid internships within the fashion industry (as well as within the wider field of the cultural and creative industries) in the last few decades. She notes that despite 'creatives' being aware of the long hours and low returns of these unpaid positions, that 'passionate work' or 'pleasure at work' (Donzelot, 1991), – in which work is seen as a passionate attachment – compensates for their lack of security and protection. Molly's declaration of this work being her 'passion' demonstrates such compensation. However, a few weeks into the internship, Molly was 'let go', 'it got cancelled because the government said that it isn't fair on interns to be working for free and not getting paid. She [the designer] said if you aren't a student you can't intern anymore'. Having found out later that government policy made it mandatory for interns to receive a minimum wage if an individual was not a student, the designer decided from that point on, to only take on students. A few weeks later, Molly, due to her social capital, was offered a job in her friend's father's organisation, working as a payroll trainer. Although this was in an area that she had not envisaged working, the full-time contract and prospect of job progression meant that, for the foreseeable future, Molly felt happy in her current job.

The above narratives demonstrate that despite the trend towards casualisation and its impacts on women's employment as a whole, women's experiences differed considerably. The trend towards less-secure, low-paid work can be seen in the narratives of all the women above. Middle-class women, such as Trisha and Rebecca, felt the effects of this on their employment, with changes to their circumstances and the decrease in the space of possibilities (Bourdieu, 1983, 2014): having to take part-time employment (losing economic capital); or existing on short-term contracts which affected the ability to plan long term (and the ability to accumulate economic capital in the form of a property). However, to some extent, they are shielded by the stability, volume and composition of their capital. Likewise, although Molly's experience in the Lagos fashion industry did not translate to the London context, having to take a job in an area she had not previously envisaged, Molly could avoid having to take on a zero-hour contract since her economic and social capital allowed a degree of movement away from such necessity. Hannah, on the other hand, did not have as much choice; time was spent trying to halt any potential economic losses, rather than trading up or accruing extra value. Hannah was therefore situated closer to such necessity.

Unemployment and 'Back to Work' Schemes

Despite changes to certain sectors and the increase in casualisation, nowhere were austerity measures manifested more than through unemployment and punitive 'back-to-work policies'. Sixteen women I interviewed had experienced life on JSA between 2008 and 2015, and the changes brought about by the Coalition government. For these sixteen women, despite all feeling the negative changes to welfare reform, it was white and BAME working-class single mothers, who were most affected.

In the first instance, most women described their experience with the Jobcentre as 'frustrating' and 'demoralising'. These feelings were said to have increased in recent

years with the introduction of the Coalition's Universal Jobmatch in November 2012⁴⁵. Ila, for example, a 35-year-old, working-class, Bangladeshi, single mother of three, was looking for part-time work whilst receiving JSA in Leeds at the time of the interview. Labelling the current system as being 'very difficult', she told me that she had to apply for over ten jobs a week that she felt would not suit her needs. Lacking in economic and cultural capital (Ila had no previous employment experience or qualifications), she knew the jobs that she was being told to apply for by Jobcentre advisors were not suitable. She explained:

I'm supposed to find ten jobs per week, but you can't. It's impossible. I went with five or six jobs that I found and she [the advisor] looked at me and said that's no good. But I could find one-hundred jobs but if they're not suitable what's the point in writing them down? She wants me to apply for anything but you can't apply for anything if it doesn't suit, am I going to apply for a manager's job when I have no experience with that? I can't apply for a manager's job straight away; I need to work towards it ... and they should understand that.

Having moved to Pakistan when she was fourteen, Ila told me that as a result, her written English 'was not very good', which affected her ability to apply for jobs. Ila did not possess the type of cultural capital which could be converted and traded into symbolic capital and economic reward. Others also felt such unsuitability in the jobs available on the Universal Jobmatch system. Rebecca, who was now working in the charity sector in Brighton, discussed her experience in a similar way. However, she also described how her social and cultural capital (having a master's degree and previous work experience) worked in her favour. She told me that because the Jobcentre knew she had a master's degree, she felt that they 'left her alone' to look for work. This contrasted with the experience described by Ila, whose advisor was 'constantly on my back'. Rebecca said that despite experiencing pressure from Jobcentre advisors to find a job, now working in

⁴⁵Universal Jobmatch 'is an online jobs search system designed to monitor Jobseeker's Allowance claimants' online job search activity to confirm claimants comply with the requirement to do a minimum of three job-searching activities per week. Registration with Universal Jobmatch can be made mandatory for receipt of benefit, and sanctions applied if the jobseeker does not comply' (O'Hara, 2014: 115).

debt advise, and hearing many stories from users of the service of their experiences, she felt her own experience paled in comparison.

Many women who had found work using the online job system, tended to end up in what Shildrick et al. (2012) call the 'low pay, no pay cycle' – a cycle of having low-paying temporary work and then being reliant on welfare. Amira, a 25-year-old, working-class, black woman from Ethiopia, is illustrative of this cycle. Amira had recently been given her British Citizenship after coming to the UK on her own as an asylum seeker in 2004. Now living alone in social housing in the outskirts of Leeds city centre, Amira was working on a zero-hour contract for a multinational consumer goods company in the packing department. Discussing how her current job was much better than her previous one, she said, 'I worked at a bread factory it was cold freezing, I will cry there, I couldn't, it was four months over Christmas. I was wearing three or four layers and two socks, I had pain in my hand, when I see my hand I cry, very difficult life.' Comparing this to her current job she explained, 'it's good, standing for twelve hours and packing, but winter its cold'.

Amira described her life in the UK as 'difficult' despite the fact that she told me that she was 'British now'. Having her papers, she was able to work 'properly'; but said that the system was not working for her. Having been claiming JSA on and off for two years, in between low-paid, short-term contracts, she had incurred debts and arrears. She explained, 'if I am working I will pay everything for my council tax, my rent, everything I will pay. If I am not working I will go in the Jobcentre and they will pay it for me'. However, since she had been in and out of precarious work, her benefits were often paid incorrectly. She said; 'I might work for one month, I stop, then I need to wait two weeks to get JSA'. During this time, she was often left with no money – living on minimum wage did not allow her to save up money for such occasions. Despite meeting all her appointments for fear of sanctioning, Amira incurred an £800 over-payment debt, since there was a miscommunication regarding the amount of benefits that she should have received over the last two years. Additionally, Amira often found the technical language

of the correspondence between her and various arms of the DWP and Jobcentre difficult to understand.

Similarly, Lauren, a 33-year-old, working-class, white woman, also living in Leeds, experienced the 'low-pay no-pay' cycle. Having been made redundant from a part-time job in retail, and having been looking for work since 2011, Lauren was now again claiming JSA. Unlike Amira, Lauren was a single mother, which made her experience of the system far worse. A recent independent inquiry co-ordinated by the Fawcett Society (2015), raised serious concerns about how single parents (92 per cent of whom are women), were being treated in the welfare system. It found that Jobcentre staff and work programme providers were not aware of the flexibilities that single parents were entitled to, such as being able to restrict their availability for work to fit around school hours. As has been illustrated above, since 2008 there has been a big rise in sanctions against single parents – in 2014 an increase from under 200 sanctions a month to 5,000 a month, resulting in their day-to-day living being most severely affected (Fawcett Society, 2015; Rabindrakumar, 2017). This is not surprising since a report by the PSC Union (2015) noted how Jobcentre managers are putting pressure on staff to impose financial penalties on benefit claimants; staff who fail to make sufficient sanctions referrals are placed on Performance Improvement Plans, which can result in them losing out on annual pay awards.

The Jobcentre had recently sanctioned Lauren for six weeks (she had missed an appointment because she needed look after her son) – two weeks longer than expected. During that time, Lauren had to wait for her 'hardship money' (£50), which took four weeks. Likewise, Leoni, a 26-year-old, working-class black single mother from London currently receiving Income Support, also experienced sanctioning. Sanctioned during pregnancy, she told me:

I was pregnant and getting JSA. I was sick one time so I didn't go to the work placement. I was six months pregnant bearing that in mind so the guy knew I had very bad morning sickness. But he decided to tell the Jobcentre I was not

attending and I was sanctioned for a month, bearing in mind I was six months pregnant.

This shows that, despite women's experiences of unemployment being described by the majority as frustrating and demoralizing, for some, the experience is slightly easier than for others. Those with a higher volume of social, economic and cultural capital and resources – qualifications or with work experience – which can be capitalised on, are, in the words of Rebecca 'left alone'. For others, their ability to convert, accrue, or generate capital is impinged by the lack of suitable employment, and system which does not recognise their needs. For example, Amira was in and out of paid work, often left with no income during times of unemployment. Despite not missing an appointment for fear of sanctioning, the language barrier led to debt and arrears due to administrative errors in the over-payment of her benefits. Leoni and Lauren, single mothers who found it more difficult to take precarious jobs due to family commitments, were also sanctioned due to caring responsibilities or pregnancy. Therefore, not only does unemployment and precarious employment situate these women closer to necessity, but the system itself brings them even closer.

Living with Austerity

Having discussed the effects of employment above, living standards are equally important in showing how austerity manifests itself in women's lives. Since 2010, the UK government has reduced spending on welfare and made large reductions in local government budgets (JRF, 2015). At the same time, the cost of living continues to rise. Research has suggested that certain groups are particularly affected, particularly single parents and those reliant on welfare (WBG, 2012; WRC, 2012; Fawcett Society, 2012, 2013, 2015).

Day-to-Day Living

Similar to other times of economic crisis (as discussed in Chapter 4), one of the most significant ways in which austerity had manifested itself into the lives of young women was through the changes to their day-to-day living. For example, 'The financial capability of the UK' report, published by the Money Advice Service in 2013, concluded that a fifth of people had experienced 'a large drop in income' since 2010, and that 42 per cent of people would 'have to think' about how to cover an unexpected bill of as little as £300. This drop-in income, coupled with a rise in the cost of living, has meant that living standards have fallen significantly (in O'Hara, 2014: 99). In addition, the 'Impoverishment of the UK' report, on poverty and social exclusion funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) published in 2013, found that a quarter of the UK population had an unacceptably low standard of living: around 5 million adults were going without essential clothing; 4 million children and adults were not being properly fed; and roughly 14 million people could not afford one or more essential household item (O'Hara, 2014: 58-59). This is set to rise by another 3 per cent by 2018 (Forbes, 2016). Food poverty has also been reported to be on the rise. A study conducted by the Centre for Economic and Business research, published in March 2013, found that people in the UK were spending 20 per cent more on food but eating less, with the poorest in society cutting down on fresh food to make ends meet. The report estimated that 4.7 million people in the UK lived in food poverty and projected the average annual UK household food bill was set to rise by £357 over the five years from 2013–2018 (in O'Hara, 2014: 27). However, this research does not seem representative of every woman that I spoke to. Although many discussed some of the issues above, such as increases in the price of food and the sharp rise of the cost of utilities, their experiences differed according to the amount and type of capital that they possessed.

Fifty-six of the women mentioned the rising cost of living. Those who did not mention it lived with their parents or grandparents, and did not contribute to the household finances. Women who did recognise the changes spoke of how goods and services have

become more expensive in recent years, especially in relation to utilities. This is not surprising – the cost of fuel and electricity has more than doubled since 2000 (O’Hara, 2014). Nevertheless, these changes were not discussed in the same terms; austerity was materialised differently and to differing degrees. Women whose standard of living had been significantly affected would discuss in detail the changes they faced, talking about the monetary value of items, specifically which items had become more expensive and their opinions about this. For others, the rise was acknowledged, but they did not go into detail about their spending practices.

For example, although Celia knew about the recent decline in the standard of living, the impact on her day-to-day life was insignificant. Celia, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman, worked full-time in an architecture firm as a HR manager, and owned a flat with her partner in North London. She described the inconsequential impact the recession had on her employment. Having mused that she was aware that things had generally got ‘a bit more expensive’, Celia then joked that the only affect the recession had had on her living standards was that she ‘had seen and enjoyed all the restaurant vouchers’ that had been on offer since the crash of 2008:

I lived the same lifestyle in 2008 that I did in 2009 and 2010 ... yeah people became far more money conscious, sure I didn’t get a big salary rise but I worked my way up and got a few promotions. I think for the most part I just saw and enjoyed all the restaurant vouchers, buy one get one free, the recession started that trend and now we are all voucher conscious, I got loads of vouchers!

In less jovial terms, Mia, who was working towards qualifying as a GP and owned a flat in London, told me that she could feel the difference in living standards. However, unlike Celia, she felt that she had changed her behaviour in the last few years. When I asked her to elaborate, she said, ‘I’ve noticed things are far more expensive, I would never do a massive shop in Waitrose anymore ... I’m personally now more aware of money’. Instead, Mia said she would drive further and go to Sainsbury’s or ASDA to do her weekly shop. Despite Mia’s admission that she had changed her shopping behaviour, both women

were in full-time employment, with a stable income and could not be characterised by the findings in the research reports above. Other middle-class women had characteristically similar responses to Mia and Celia. Polly, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white, occupational therapist living in Leeds, reacted to the increase in the cost of living by changing supermarkets. She said that instead of going to Sainsbury's, she might go to LIDL (a lower cost supermarket), but would also go to a health foods shop for her 'essentials for the week' (like chia seeds and almond milk). Essentially, Polly was still able to live comfortably – she told me that she had been on numerous holidays abroad during that year. These women were all in full-time employment (albeit with differing income, amount, and type of capital), had not been significantly affected by the rising cost of living, and would be able to cope with an unexpected bill (unlike those described above by the Money Advice Service). Austerity was materialised in the form of an increase in living costs; however, these women coped by minorly altering their shopping habits.

For other women, the increased cost of living was felt significantly more and was discussed in different ways. Trisha, for example (mentioned in the previous section), had recently had her hours reduced because of organisational restructuring. Describing herself as being part of the 'squeezed middle' she said, 'I know it affects me ... there is an element of it where people like me feel it ... I guess I'm somewhere around the squeezed middle-class'. Asking her to elaborate on what she meant by 'people like me', she said that, although she considered herself to be 'quite comfortable' as opposed to others in the current context, the increase in the cost of living had affected her to some degree. Despite this, she was quick to note; 'I'm still able to buy my organic veg box and all those things,' and 'I can get by and have a holiday'. Although this sounds somewhat contradictory, her narrative can be read differently from the women such as Mia, Celia and Polly above. As research, has suggested, single mothers are being affected more by austerity in general (Fawcett Society, 2013; WBG, 2014a, 2014b; Rabindrakumar, 2017) and so it is not surprising that Trisha's experience does not mirror that of the women above. However, we cannot take Trisha's experience as representative of all single mothers. Trisha, despite losing economic capital and having to take a part-time position,

was in a well-paid managerial position. She had previously accumulated larger amounts of capital (property, networks and a master's degree), which allowed her to 'get by', as she says, more easily than other women with fewer resources.

Marie, a 28-year-old, working-class, black woman, lived in London, and like Trisha, also worked part-time in the public sector. However, unlike Trisha, Marie spoke of the constant strain she felt on her day-to-day finances, since being on a low-income salary made sustaining her household finances more difficult with the increasing cost of living. Also a single parent, Marie worked as a waitress in a café library in North London, and rented privately through a housing association. Finding it a challenge to pay the bills and 'fill the cupboards' with the ongoing rise in the cost of living, she openly told me, 'sometimes I can't fill the cupboards, I get paid and finish all the bills and I can't fill them, things are getting so expensive'. With £30 per month to do her household shopping, she told me that she worried about being able to keep up with her son's needs.

However, Marie felt that she was able to 'breathe more' since coming off state benefits since she was able to get store credit. In a sense, this newfound access to credit had broadened Marie's horizon of possibilities. She then wondered how those who are not currently working, reliant on state support or who have more than one child, were coping within the current context. Lucy, a 21-year-old, white, working-class woman from Brighton was such a woman. Feeling the greatest impact of the crisis, Lucy explained; 'I survive but I'm not living. Bills, rent, clothes for my daughter, food, trying to get a good meal everyday, I manage but it's not easy'. A single mother with one young daughter, Lucy was struggling on Income Support. She told me that, for example, if a utility bill came in which was not accounted for, 'it will mess me up for weeks'. Other women who were also dependent on state support equally felt the strain. This is not unexpected – it has been widely reported that since 2010, social security benefits have been tightened and payments reduced (WBG, 2012; WRC, 2012).

As we can therefore see from the narratives above, women's experiences of the rise in living cost vary considerably. Whilst those middle-class women above no longer did 'a massive shop', for those women at the other end of the spectrum, *what* to buy, *where* to buy from and whether they are *able* to buy was of equal importance. Discussions surrounding the topic often took place in monetary terms, describing their outgoings month by month. With a small amount of money to spend, their budget only allowed for essentials and therefore sacrifices had to be made. However, proximity to necessity was further affected by reliance on state support, those women who were in some form of employment described feeling more able to 'breathe'. Therefore, although austerity manifests itself within day-to-day consumption practices, not all women interviewed felt the strain to the same degrees. This was therefore heavily dependent on the amount and different types of capital they possessed.

Changes to State Support

As described by Lucy above, the changes to state support unsurprisingly affected those who had or were (wholly or partially) reliant on receiving state support. The reduction in monetary payments in the form of caps and the changes to the way payments were allocated and administered (resulting in delays and sanctions) substantially affected their day-to-day living. Those who received more than one form of benefit discussed how the multiple caps and cuts had affected them. Marie, for instance, received Working Tax Credits, and Housing Benefit. Struggling economically with the rising cost of living, as noted above, she found it hard to manage – although her hourly rate had increased, her annual benefit increases were restricted and her housing benefit had been cut. Nevertheless, as she was not wholly reliant on state support, she was still 'able to breathe.' Similarly, Elaine, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman, working part-time as a welfare support officer in a High School in Brighton, had faced considerable difficulties over the last few years as the cost of living outstripped her benefits. At the hardest point, relying solely on Employment Support Allowance (ESA), she found herself living on £5,000 per year, spending approximately £10 per fortnight on

groceries. Now living with her partner, working part-time, and with the addition of her DLA, she also described herself as also being able to 'breathe'. However, both these women were adamant that if their circumstances were to change, for example, if they lost their jobs, having to rely on welfare for their only source of income would be a great struggle. Women whose sole income came from welfare felt this increased strain. Heather, a 26-year-old, working-class, black single mother of four from London, was solely reliant on state benefit. She told me how the value of her benefits had reduced substantially since 2010, 'yeah it's gone down, no question. I don't really see where it goes, I don't really have money for anything, you know what I mean, I'm not saying that it doesn't help but it doesn't make ends meet'. With the cost of living outstripping benefit payments, those who relied solely on this as a means of income, are tremendously affected.

It was not only the change in monetary amount, but also the changes in administration of benefits and increase in penalties, which made life harder. The introduction of Universal Credit was conceived to simplify the system by replacing tax credits, and merging six existing separate means-tested benefits – JSA, ESA, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit – into one monthly payment. Yet, these women cited this as an 'unhelpful change'. Adele, a 23-year-old, working-class, white single mother with a daughter under the age of three, from Leeds reliant on state support, told me that the changes to the way her Housing and Income Support have been paid had put her in an increasingly precarious position:

I used to get paid weekly, and then my Income Support would come every two weeks and that suited me because I could pay things each week. Now that's completely changed with the one payment and I find it really hard to cope because I don't get that much ... I'm struggling sort of thing, with my rent and so on.

Faced with the prospect of one larger lump sum in her account each month, she told me that the new scheme was difficult as she tended to organise her household budget from

week to week, making it much harder to manage her finances. Faye, a 23-year-old, working-class, white single mother from Leeds, who was receiving Housing Benefit and Income Support, also mentioned Universal Credit. She was waiting for the change to take place⁴⁶, and echoed Adele's discussion above, 'apparently, they are going to start paying everyone monthly ... it's stupid though because if you have kids and you're skint and you know that money is in the bank you will dip into, just to get ends meet, that's just stupid, well your baby is more important isn't it, it's stupid'. Labelling the introduction of Universal Credit as 'stupid', Faye knew, like Adele, that the new proposal would not suit her needs due to being proximate to necessity.

For those with a disability or a serious health condition, changes to specific benefits generated unease, insecurity, stress and for some, great financial difficulties. Elaine was registered as disabled after becoming ill during her gap year. She finished university in 2010 and was placed on ESA and Incapacity Benefit. In 2012, Elaine then did some permitted work, in which she was able to work up to 16 hours per week whilst being on ESA at a 6th form college. Coming off ESA in December 2013, having been offered a part-time job at the college as a welfare coordinator, Elaine still received DLA⁴⁷. Having spent five years on means-tested benefits, Elaine described her anxiety about the use of companies such as ATOS in the delivery of services. As part of the government's 'back to work' scheme, ATOS introduced a test to gauge whether a claimant with an illness or disability was fit to work. This 'test' was not performed by the claimant's doctor as before (doctors who were well versed in their patient's medical history). The government contracted out the task of assessing the claimant's ability to carry out certain functions to ATOS. If during the test the claimant was awarded enough points, they qualified for ESA. Elaine said, 'before ATOS, in my assessments I had to describe my symptoms and

⁴⁶The introduction of Universal Credit is has been delayed for all claimants due to issues with government administration. Records suggest that by December 2013, only 2,000 claimants with the least complicated benefits were on Universal Credit. It was then confirmed that the transfer of all claimants to Universal Credit would not make its 2017 target for implantation.

⁴⁷It should be noted that at the time of the interview DLA had not yet changed to PIP.

it wasn't very confrontational. ATOS is a much more confrontational situation'. She said that she found the assessment staff 'indifferent' and 'dismissive' of her condition, and she suffered stress and humiliation from having to pander to their 'points' system.

Likewise, Louise, a 35-year-old, white, working-class woman living in Leeds, diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome ten years ago and unable to work, also described how her benefit changes had had a major effect on her standard of living. Since the introduction of stringent checks and cuts to benefits, Louise's Mobility Allowance, (which she used to help her get around and travel to hospital appointments), has been stopped. Having to pay for her transport herself, without her allowance, she told me that she was having difficulty managing financially and was having to sacrifice her treatments and appointments as she couldn't afford the transport. She explained the impact on her day-to-day living:

If I come in and out of hospital and I get too faint, I can't just go running on buses, I can collapse, so I need a taxi. But because they've stopped this allowance, I can't afford to go in taxis so I haven't been going to the treatment. Some days I feel so ill I just can't get about, so you can't go to get your shopping, your prescriptions and things like that. So really your quality of life rests in their hands, my recovery is in their hands.

Having appealed at a tribunal against the decision to stop her Mobility Allowance, Louise was waiting for the decision. However, she felt the appeal had caused her increased stress and affected her condition. Her doctor advised her not to attend the hearing to avoid the stress. Louise said: 'it's been nearly fourteen months, our illness is affected by induced stress, I was throwing up, crying all the time, I can't sleep, it's awful. It's like they're sending you to death row, that's what it feels like, sending you to kill you, it's horrendous'. If the appeal is granted, she would receive fourteen months' worth of backdated allowance. If the appeal is rejected, Louise is not sure how she would manage. Although she had spoken many times to doctors, medical staff and her local council about her situation, she felt 'kept in the dark' most of the time. She explained that this

was due to changes being implemented without consultation and the fact that she was unable to understand the technical language used to discuss such changes.

Mirroring the above, Elaine also felt unable to keep up with the changes to state support. However, unlike Louise, she had been employed to give benefit advice for a number of years. She told me:

There are so many different systems and calling the Jobcentre or the local council they will usually give you the wrong advice. I now go and look up the big DWP handbook and try to find the latest PDF copy but it's not useful for many people because it's written in a very technical, legal way and often takes a lot of cross referencing different documents to figure out what the amendments mean ... yeah there are a lot of good sites out there that give a lot of information but again they get out of date very quickly.

Despite her knowledge and experience of the system, Elaine said that she worried about having to renew her benefits. Confused about the latest change to her benefits (the change from DLA to PIP which was supposed to be implemented in 2014), she felt she was being kept on her toes 'trying to figure it all out'. Summarising her experience of the current social support system, Elaine said; 'I have the perpetual feeling that everything is about to come crashing down around me because somebody, some faceless person, can just take away your support systems, very stressful'. For those who do not have knowledge and experience of how to understand the system, the anxiety is likely worse.

The discussion above demonstrates that, despite the overall level declining, women's experience of state support is dependent on several factors. Those who received more than one form of benefit, or who are wholly reliant on the state, suffered more as the caps and cuts affected them in several ways. Welfare reform leads to precarious lives, even for those whose lives are less reliant on welfare, such as Marie and Elaine, who have varying amounts of economic and social capital that allow a degree of movement away from such necessity. For those women, such as Louise, Heather, Faye and Adele who are entirely dependent on such support, this precariousness intensifies due to their proximity to necessity.

Housing

Women's experience of housing varied just as much as their living standards and experiences of employment. This is not surprising since changes to housing benefits, council tax benefits, the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' as well as soaring rents, have had a huge impact on housing security. The financial pressures on households have led some to struggle to pay rent, fall into arrears or even face eviction. At the same time, the residential property market remains a productive field of investment and wealth generation for many. Despite record high housing prices, eight of the women I interviewed owned their own property, which they had bought in the last few years. Four of these women had bought in London or Greater London and were all middle-class. Those who were renting spoke of the increase in rent over the last few years, none more so than those renting in the capital, who discussed the lack of affordable housing. Nine women spoke of either having to moving home, to save money or being unable to leave their parents' homes.

Those on lower incomes, from minority backgrounds and with children, suffered considerably more from this 'housing crisis'. Many women who were renting wanted to move to social housing, but the lack of affordable social housing meant that they had remained on the waiting list for some time. Marta, a 35-year-old, working-class, white woman from Romania living in Brighton, discussed housing as one of the main issues she was having and the affect it was having on her family's living standards. Marta moved to Brighton in 2007 from Romania as a student. She began working in a hotel in the South-East of England, and after meeting her husband, became pregnant in 2011. Marta had since left her job as a hotel supervisor and moved back to Brighton. She rented a room from a private landlord with the knowledge that they were on a short-term contract. However, they were assured by him that they would be able renew the contract after the initial six months. Three weeks after giving birth, Marta and her family received notice that they were being evicted:

In that time I got frustrated and stressed and almost lost my milk. I went to ask for help at the council and try to get council house, I didn't get any help, they told me I needed to rent privately because they didn't have any houses ... I didn't know where to go or what to do, the only idea that came to my mind was to kill myself because I have a small baby.

Having appealed to the landlord about their situation, the landlord agreed to let them rent another room in the same house but for an increased price – £750 instead of £650. Living only on her husband's income (working as an assistant manager at a discount store), this increase in rent significantly affected their monthly budget. Marta hoped the situation would get better once they moved from private rented accommodation to social housing; however, having been on the waiting list for almost two years, Marta was unsure when or if this might come to fruition.

Despite this, it was those who relied on housing benefit who felt the greatest impact of the housing crisis. Fifteen women received Housing Benefit, three living in privately rented housing and twelve in social housing. It was not only the capping of housing benefits coupled with the surge in rent that was discussed, but also the planned changes in the way payments from the government to the recipient would be administered. For the first time, Housing Benefit would be paid to the recipient, who would then be expected to pay their landlord rather than the government directly paying landlords. Among the primary concerns was the shift to a single monthly payment. As discussed above, women were concerned about the effect of a larger monthly lump sum, as they budgeted from week to week. Since having her daughter, Lucy's housing benefit had been lowered by £75 per month. She explained: 'I just get letters saying we've reassessed your claim, well clearly you haven't, why would you, it's gone down from £600 to £525'. With changes to her Income Support, in which she was £40 worse off per month and the continuing decrease in her Housing Benefit, Lucy was worried about how this might affect her current housing situation if she got into arrears or if her rent continued to increase over the next year. Other women also felt such anxiety, especially those living in London. Since the capital is becoming increasingly unaffordable for people on low

incomes or who rely solely on benefits, some women feared that they would have to move out of the area (see for example, the experiences of the women in the campaigns group Focus E15).

In addition, it was discussed that cuts to Housing Benefit had made an impact on family structure within BAME 'communities'. Ila, specifically discussing the effect of Housing Benefit on extended Asian families said:

Within Asian families there are a lot of extended family members so not only have you got children and cousins, you've got grandparents. But now you've got to a point that you can't even have your parents with you because financially now, the fact that they're living with you, you're worse off actually, they are worse off, so you are forced to live apart and when you're forced to live apart, obviously their mental and physical state is affected, I find that instead of keeping families together, they [the government] are intent on splitting families.

Research has shown that the government's Housing Benefit reforms have affected aspects of multigenerational living for families. According to a briefing by the Chartered Institute of Housing (2012), rather than encouraging potentially beneficial ways of living for low income families, benefit caps and 'non-dependent' deduction increases for housing benefit recipients have essentially been a disincentive to voluntary sharing. For Ila and other women from minority backgrounds who had previously lived with their extended family, benefit reform caps therefore worked against multigenerational living. As Ila noted, in the context of welfare reform, 'you are forced to live apart'. They said that such changes were making families become more individualistic and made an impact on caring responsibilities, since extended family members looked after children when necessary. Now with families living apart, sometimes in other areas of the city, this was no longer possible.

The 'bedroom tax' was also discussed. The policy, which came into force in April 2013, introduced financial penalties for anyone of working age living in rented social housing who was in receipt of Housing Benefit and deemed to be 'over-occupying' – according to

a set of criteria set out by the government. The new rules meant that 'each single adult or couple should occupy one room while two children under 16 of the same gender were expected to share a bedroom and two siblings under 10 of different sexes must share' (O'Hara, 2014: 76). Having experienced cuts to other benefits they received, the 'bedroom tax' made an enormous difference to some young women's standard of living. Of all the changes in recent years, Priya, a 35-year-old, Pakistani, middle-class, single mother, reliant on state support, who lived in Brighton, found that this change affected her most. Priya moved to Brighton in 2005 with her son, after experiencing domestic abuse from her partner. Having suffered a breakdown a few years ago, Priya was getting treatment and counselling for severe depression and anxiety – but was paying for her counselling because of the increasingly long NHS waiting lists for mental health treatment. Since her son, who until recently lived with Priya on a full-time basis, left home to attend private school in Kent (paid for by his father), his room became temporarily unoccupied. Priya had been told that she would have to pay the 'bedroom tax' on this room, since her son was no longer living at her flat permanently. Not being able to cope with the reduction (according to O'Hara (2014), an average 14 per cent of a person's benefits would be taken away), Priya told me that she was thinking of moving to a one-bedroom flat. However, this would mean that her son would not have a bedroom when he stayed with her at weekends, and would not be able to move back in if he wanted to live with her permanently again.

Louise faced a similar situation. Diagnosed with a genetic condition in which she was unable to work, as discussed above, she had ongoing issues with her DLA and reassessments. In addition, Louise was made to leave her property due to the 'bedroom tax' the previous year. She said, 'I had to move out because you can't be in a property bigger than your needs, I wasn't allowed a second bedroom'. However, Louise's condition, in which she had part-time carers who used the second bedroom, was not taken into consideration. She could not pay for the second bedroom as her mobility benefits being in dispute (for the last fourteen months). Louise was moved from the city centre (where she lived for six years) to an area further away. Describing the area as

'rough', she told me she missed the convenience of being in the centre, near to her friends, and often felt unsafe in the new area.

Housing therefore represents an area in which austerity is materialised within women's lives. Some middle-class women (those who can buy houses in London, for example), despite the current context, can invest, accumulating capital through property. For those who can live with family members, the impact of austerity was less. For those who do not have the economic and social capital to avoid the 'housing crisis', the impact was felt more considerably, especially for those on low incomes and those from white and BAME working-class backgrounds. Although housing benefit is meant to alleviate housing problems, caps on the amount of benefit paid coupled with the increase in rents and the changes to the administration of payment, meant that women who relied on housing benefit often found themselves in arrears. The introduction of the 'bedroom tax' made already unstable positions even worse, as women needed to pay more or move property. Those women with some level of protection from parents or partners, are able to survive the economic onslaught. Those without are laid bare to real precarity.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how austerity has manifested itself in women's lives through employment and living standards: through general changes to employment, casualisation, unemployment, rise in cost of living, changes to and loss of benefits, and housing. The degree to which these changes affect women's lives can be minimal, significant or extreme, which I demonstrated was affected by women's differing position in the social space. We are therefore, not 'all in this together'. I revealed how the volume, composition and trajectory of young women's capital and resources differently position women in social space, opening up and/or closing down the degree to which austerity impacts their daily lives. Women with a higher volume of capital and resources, had relative distance from material necessary, since they possessed multiple forms of capital that enabled protection, security and distance from such effects. Yet, this does not mean

that women who are adjacent to each other in the social space experience austerity in the same ways. Due to women's different ratios of economic and cultural capital and resources their experiences of the rising cost of living, changes to employment and trend to casualisation meant that their experiences were different. In some cases, young women were able to accrue capital (such as property and additional qualifications) within the context due to their particular social inheritances and embodiments, from which they had access to and acquisition of differential amounts of capital assets (Skeggs, 1997).

As in other times of crisis, austerity (in the form of employment changes, the trend to casualisation, changes to 'back to work' policies and the rise in living costs) had a greater effect on white and BAME working-class women. They possessed less amounts and types of legitimate capital and resources, or found it harder to convert their capital to a different form. This placed them closer to necessity and made their experience of austerity being more extreme. Women who were solely reliant on state support and who had dependent children suffered most – their space of possibilities was therefore further diminished by the lack of protection, security, resources and capital. Cultural (qualifications) and social capital (networks and family/partner support) therefore becomes extremely important for young women in the context of austerity, since they help in placing women at a distance from material necessity. Such an analysis, which observes the ways women are experiencing and living austerity at a material level opens room to recognise austerity's complex and multiple effects. At the same time, it shows how experiences in the present are shaped by pre-existing markers of class and 'race', which are being exacerbated by austerity measures. Building upon these discussions, the following chapter argues that economic, cultural and social capitals not only affect how women were impacted by austerity, but also how they are able to navigate its effects.

Chapter 6

Navigating through Austerity

I appreciate that there are families who face considerable pressures. Those pressures are often the result of decisions that they have taken which mean they are not best able to manage their finances. We need to ensure that support is not just financial, and that the right decisions are made.

(Michael Gove, Education Secretary, September 2013)

When Olive was first born, I had roughly about £170 a month spare for food, nappies and clothes. Now we have about £80, which I'm struggling with. I don't know how it goes so quick ... I try and do everything, I have lists all over my kitchen, I must look crazy, everything that goes in, the day and exactly what comes out. I have all my direct debits set up perfectly but if one thing messes up, like, I didn't know, my internet wasn't coming out and I got a letter saying I owed £160 and I was like what? How? If anything is higher than it should be I'm like 'oh my god'. But I get there, I do my shopping and it's the same every week. I get massive boxes of nappies off Amazon and wipes and they last. I think I have it kind of covered for now but if anything else changes I have to redo my lists again (laughs).

(Lucy, 21, working-class, white, on Income Support, Brighton, March, 2015)

Extending the argument made in the previous chapter, which highlighted the multiple ways in which austerity, in part, as an economic policy, has materialised and manifested in young women's lives, this chapter adds a further dimension to this argument. It draws attention to the various ways in which women are *navigating* through such a context and how such navigation strategies are impacted by differences of gender, class and 'race'. This chapter therefore complicates the above statement from

Michael Gove by demonstrating how differences impact the ways in which young women respond to and navigate through the effects of austerity.

In the context of austerity, what falls under the banner of neoliberalism represents a series of profound social, political, cultural and economic shifts, which has resulted in the intensification of social regulation to protect the deregulation of the economic (Goldberg and Giroux, 2014). As was highlighted in Chapter 4, such shifts have come along with ideological discourses of personal entrepreneurship, individual competition, meritocracy, innovation, flexibilisation and commercial enterprise (Bourdieu, 1999), which place the individual's misfortunes into their own hands, denying that the existing social structures produce inequalities. Such social regulation becomes even more evident during a crisis, when people are, to quote Gove, 'facing considerable pressure'. Gove, in stating that he appreciates the pressure being placed on families, makes implicit reference to macro socio-economic problems, and the fact that we are 'all in this together'. He then frames the pressures on families as being the result of individual decisions. The crux of his argument is that families should make the 'right decisions' and not rely on financial support. According to Gove, those who are unable to 'manage their finances', are suffering because of their own bad decision-making. In this framework, differences of class, gender, and 'race' are no longer relevant to the individual's condition. The social issues are denied and 'buried alive' (Goldberg and Giroux, 2014) under the language of individualism and responsibility. As during previous times of crisis (see Chapter 4), such language decontextualises and naturalises these so-called 'pressures' by placing sole responsibility onto the individual's will and action. This therefore dismisses not only the structural context of austerity and its processes, but also the individual's attributes, resources and capitals, which allow them to manage their finances better than others.

This chapter is divided into four sections, each of which explore the different ways in which young women are navigating through austerity. It is important to note that such 'navigation strategies' have not emerged within the context of UK austerity. As was

noted in Chapter 3 and 4, there is a depth of literature documenting how those living precarious lives 'manage' and 'navigate' through contexts of insecurity (Ehrenreich, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Tirado, 2014). Empirical work on the lived experiences of austerity (Shildrick, et al., 2012; O'Hara, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Pemberton et al., 2014; Deville, 2015; Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte, 2015; Hitchen, 2015, 2016; Garthwaite, 2016a; Hall, 2016) has extended such findings, discussing the different ways in which people at the 'sharp end of the cuts' are 'managing' or 'coping' within the landscape of austerity and *how* such tactics have been *further compromised* by external factors, such as cuts to services, reduction in benefits, rise in the cost of living and the scarcity of credit. Taking such work into account, this chapter highlights that it is not only those living 'precarious lives' that have to 'navigate' through the context of precarity and insecurity. Austerity's impacts are complex, messy and multiple. However, like the analysis made in the previous chapter, the ways in which the young women I interviewed can respond to and navigate through such precarity, is dependent on the volume and composition of their capital and resources, as well as their trajectory (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1991). It is these three axes which produce differentiated positions in the social space and therefore open up or close down the space or horizon of possibilities (Bourdieu, 1983, 2014) that young are able to navigate within/through.

Reskilling and Changing Sectors

One of the ways in which women navigate through the impacts of austerity was by making changes to their employment prospects through changing sectors or reskilling. This was in an attempt to ensure better job security in an increasingly uncertain environment. As was highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, the growing trend towards casualisation (TUC, 2015) has resulted in the normalisation of less secure, part-time work, of which the majority of those impacted by such a growing trend, are women. Sarah, a 25-year-old, middle-class, white woman living in Leeds, working as an occupational therapist, experienced this trend. To navigate this uncertainty, she undertook further qualifications (accruing cultural capital in the form of a master's

degree) in the hope of entering a more secure profession. Originally from Fife, Scotland, Sarah graduated with a BA in Social Policy from the University of Glasgow in 2009. Graduating in the midst of the crisis, with few graduate level jobs available, she decided to pursue a master's degree in Occupational Therapy at the University of Leeds, for which she received a bursary (£360 per month) and had her fees paid for by the NHS. With the ageing population in the UK, Sarah thought that this would be an extremely secure profession to go into. However, since finishing her master's degree in 2012 and working in the sector as a full-time member of staff for one year, she told me that despite enjoying her job, she had several issues with the sector. Sarah explained that the first job that she was offered after graduating was a 'zero-hour' contract:

At first I was offered a temporary zero-hour contract. It was weird, I was covering maternity and they said, look you will get your five days 8:30-4:30, but it wasn't written on paper, they did tell me when it was going to end – but again it wasn't on paper and I felt really uneasy about that. This type of contract also doesn't pay for training and in that role, I was supposed to do a five-day course and another six or seven days of training.

Having rejected the job offer, Sarah was then offered a 27-month contract. Nevertheless, she still felt uncomfortable about taking that contract since she would have to look for another job in two years' time. Seeing 'jobs being cut all over the place', she applied for jobs only with permanent contracts because she knew that without this, it would be more difficult to apply for a mortgage and she would feel 'uneasy' and 'unsettled' in her post.

Like Sarah, Nina, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class primary school teacher living in Brighton, also discussed the necessity of gaining further qualifications (cultural capital) in an attempt to increase her job security. Now a teacher, Nina originally thought about working in digital marketing, having graduated from Sussex University in 2008 with a degree in Media and Culture. Interning at an agency whilst also working in the hospitality sector, she became unhappy with the insecure, low-paid work. Explaining this in more detail, she said that she felt that they 'waved this carrot with "there might be a job at the end of it or there might not"'. Unable to continue working within such a precarious and

insecure environment, Nina decided to retrain as a teacher and qualified in 2012. Discussing teaching she told me:

The workload is tough but there is huge job security. I know from other colleagues that I have an incredible pension and if, for some horrible reason, something happened to me, my family would get a massive pay out. When I have children in the future, my maternity package is one of the best I could wish for, and in terms of job progression, I think it is somewhere that I could go quite far quite quickly in so ... that for me is good.

Nina then said, had it not been for the recession, she would have possibly come to the teaching profession later in life and pursued digital marketing further. However, in such an insecure context, the need for this stability outweighed her passion to pursue an alternative profession. It should be noted here that both Nina and Sarah were able to obtain grants or bursaries, which enabled them to retrain or reskill, gain further qualifications, and accrue additional cultural capital to pursue more 'secure' professions within these various sectors. If they had taken each course a few years later, they would both have had to pay university fees of £9,000 per year to acquire these qualifications. For those who do not possess the economic capital to undertake such a shift in career and salary to gain further qualifications (cultural capital), their capability to feel 'more secure' in employment terms therefore becomes significantly harder.

In contrast, having been employed in the public sector in teaching, Nadia, a 32-year-old, mixed other, middle-class woman living in Leeds working as a teacher, reskilled and gained further qualifications (cultural capital) in an attempt to move out of the teaching profession. This was in order to move into another profession that would guarantee her a higher income. Undertaking a master's degree in Psychological Research, Nadia hoped this would lead her into the consulting sector. She explained that it was her increasingly negative experience of working in the public sector that made her rethink her career and pursue a post-graduate degree. She told me:

I'm leaving it because of the fact, as well as all the other reasons, that I can't trust it, I can't trust it, not like those who are leaving it now can or have over the years.

Things are changing so much, if I continue being amongst the hundreds of thousands of dissatisfied teachers who are bumbling along, then I'll regret it in years to come.

Explaining that she might be in 'trouble' financially if she stays in the teaching profession, she went on to say, 'I have to invest in me now, for the future, so I don't need to rely on pensions, for instance'. This investment was in the form of going part-time as a teacher whilst paying £9,000 in fees over two years. Speaking to Nadia again the following year, she told me that she had since quit her teaching job due to the demands of the master's degree, and had moved in with her partner due to financial issues. Had she not had the possibility of living with her partner, Nadia would have had to choose between pursuing her master's degree and taking out a loan to cover her expenses, or returning to teaching full-time. Her investment was therefore aided by her social capital in the form of protection and security from her partner.

For others, gaining further cultural capital through education and reskilling was seen as an important investment. However, the current climate and their current position either rendered this impossible, or they thought that it would not make a difference to their situation. Marie, a 28-year-old, black, working-class woman living in London, who was working part-time as a waitress in a library café, discussed how changing her career might allow her to become more financially stable. Having heard rumours from her colleagues that the library might lose its funding and that her hours might reduce due to cuts, Marie worried about her job security. Having done a diploma in Business Management whilst being pregnant with her son, Marie wanted to take her qualification further and accrue more cultural capital to be able to get a better paying job with more stability. However, as a single mother who was solely responsible for the household income, she felt that it was a gamble to take on further study. She explained:

I can do teaching if I keep studying but it's a lot of work. I've considered it, but I'm working now I have to pay for everything as well, can I afford to do another added thing to make me better off? I know people say it's an investment but there is no room for that at the moment. You know, I guess I'm comfortable ... I only get one

day off in the week and my son needs me. Maybe it's small minded of me but ... I don't know.

Unlike the middle-class women described above, Marie could not make an investment to acquire further cultural capital, and she had no security through a partner to offset economic losses during the transition period. Nadia, Nina and Sarah (who were able to use their higher volumes and types of capital to reskill) were hoping that this would confer more security and a better standard of living in years to come, thus expanding their horizon and space of possibilities. Marie's lower volume of capital meant that the time and financial costs of reskilling outweighed any potential future investment. As Bourdieu notes, because cultural capital is embodied, its acquisition requires an investment of time (1984: 244). Marie's investment of time was through halting economic losses and investing in caring for her son, rather than investing in herself. This, as Skeggs has argued, prevents women focusing on themselves (1997: 161).

Therefore, this section demonstrates that the insecurity of the job market (in both the private and public sectors) has resulted in young women thinking about the necessity of accruing further cultural capital in order to try and increase their level of security in a progressively uncertain context. However, as was shown above, undertaking such strategies is possible for some more than others. Nina, Sarah and Nadia, on the one hand, albeit in different ways and due to different circumstances, could use their various amounts and types of capital to reskill, investing in gaining additional forms of qualifications for more 'secure' or higher paying professions. For Maria, on the other hand, despite knowing that further qualifications would help her to find more secure and better paying employment, such a form of investment was not possible – time was spent trying to maintain her lifestyle and care for her son in a context of insecurity and precarity. Accruing further capital brought with it too much potential insecurity which could result in losses, since the types of capital that she needed to facilitate her investment (outside help and income and savings) were lacking. Therefore, the ability to open one's horizon of possibilities and navigate through the current context, is impacted

by the type of cultural capital women possess, as well as the volume of, and the trajectory of their capital.

Cutting Back and Living Cheap: Sacrificing Luxuries, Sacrificing Essentials

As discussed in Chapter 5, increases in the prices of essential everyday goods (food, products and fuel) has put more strain on women's budgets, whether they were in work or not. The cost of fuel and electricity had more than doubled since 2000 (O'Hara, 2014), and had steadily made it harder for people to heat their homes adequately. The rising cost of food has also affected the cost of living. A common strategy for navigating through the effects of austerity was by 'cutting back' and/or 'living cheap'.

Many women said that they had changed their shopping habits over the last few years, by frequenting low-cost supermarkets, and not doing 'big shops'. However, they had not completely abandoned their favoured 'mainstream' supermarket or wholefoods store, and still favoured organic over value products. Many women noted that they only bought 'essentials' and not 'luxuries' and that they were 'cutting back' or 'living cheap'. However, what might be essential by one person's standards could also be a luxury for another. Equally, 'living cheap' and 'cutting back' can mean two very different things. For example, most women said they had 'cut back' to a certain degree. Emma, a 25-year-old, white, middle-class woman, was living at her parent's house in south London and was unemployed, having had her contract at a charity organisation come to an end the previous month. She said her family had 'cut back'. When I asked her to elaborate, she told me, 'I mean, we don't have Sky any more'. In comparison, both Anna, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class, physiotherapist living in London and Lucy, a 21-year-old, white, working-class single mother reliant on welfare living in Brighton, told me that they had stopped buying luxuries. I asked them both to explain this further. They said that they had become 'more careful'. Anna said, 'I mean I'm not extravagant, so for example, I try to not eat out all the time and I won't go buy a dress because I think it's nice, if it was on sale maybe, but things are a bit more expensive now and living in London and working in

the NHS I don't think I can live an extravagant lifestyle'. I asked Anna to tell me the last thing she can remember that she bought for herself. 'Maybe booking flights to go away or a jacket, I can't remember'. In comparison, Lucy also said that she had been 'cutting back'. When I asked her the last thing she had bought herself, she paused, 'if I have a spare fiver I might buy myself a coffee, that's the nicest thing I do, that's my treat, my little luxury'. Thinking about her answer, she then went on to say, 'if you think about it, that's not really a treat is it ... going for a coffee?'

Continuing, she told me that she had £80 per month to spend on food, nappies, and clothes. Describing herself as 'struggling' but 'getting by,' she spoke about her shopping habits. 'I'm good with knowing where to go to get food at certain times and things like that, for example, on Sunday, pretty much every supermarket has discounts'. Discount shopping in bulk with her mother, Lucy explained to me that they froze the food so they could 'have an alright meal' every night of the week. She also shopped online to bulk-buy nappies and wipes. 'Living cheap' she noted, took up a substantial amount of labour power, time and effort. Like Lucy, other women discussed similar shopping habits. Marie described herself as a 'very much a shop-around type of girl':

I go a lot of places seeing things thinking do I need it, do I not? What I do is I try to buy so I don't need to buy it again for the next month, like washing powder and things like that, I go to the butchers, you get more for your money, it's a bit cheaper than supermarkets, but I just shop around. Things for his [her son's] packed lunch, I get from the pound shop.

Such tactics have also been discussed by Patrick (2014; also, see Atkinson, 2013; Hitchen 2015) who notes the 'very hard work' of getting by on benefits: with time-intensive tight budgeting practices and activities (like Lucy and Marie above), hand-washing clothes, skipping meals, deciding to 'heat or eat,' as well as scavenging supermarket bins for waste food. Women with children also talked about having to cut back on goods and practices such as children's costly social activities, lengthy Christmas and birthday lists and day trips away.

Like Patrick's findings, some women who were dependent upon state support said that they sacrificed essentials or skipped meals, and often had to decide between buying food and heating their homes ('heat or eat') (also see Lambie-Mumford and Snell, 2015). Rita, a 35-year-old, white, working-class woman who was receiving state benefit and lived alone in Leeds, had not eaten for two days at the time of the interview, as she could not afford to pay her heating bill of £180 and feed herself at the same time. With her gas on a meter, it was considerably more costly for her to heat her home; however, being in rented accommodation, she was unable to change the system. Aware of the costly nature of her meter, she said that she rarely put the heating on and was often cold. She had suffered from pneumonia a few months earlier. Similarly, Scarlett, a 23-year-old, white, working-class single mother of two, on Income Support in Leeds, told me, 'last week I had to take out of my mouth to put uniforms on my kids'. She noted that this practice had become increasingly recurrent in the last year. For those struggling in the current context of austerity, lists were often discussed as a way to keep track of their finances. Lucy's discussion is illustrative of this when she said, 'I have lists all over my kitchen, I must look crazy, everything that goes in, the day and that comes out and I have all my direct debits set up perfectly'. However, many spoke of how unexpected 'essentials' such as children's clothing and high utility bills would disrupt their careful financial management and would leave them unable to manage all their outgoings.

Discussing the tactics and pitfalls of living cheap, – or as she calls it 'a benefit mind-set' – Elaine, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class woman living in Brighton who was registered disabled, reliant on DLA but also worked part time at a school as a welfare support officer in Brighton, made a very interesting point. She asked, 'we all live cheap because we have to, but where do we get the knowledge to live cheap?' Telling me that her father had previously worked as a social worker helping people with budgeting, she explained that she had been educated in financial management and felt that her situation was different from those who might not have had access to such information. She went on to say:

I had the knowledge of how to do that. It was important for me to pay my bills by direct debit, I didn't have to worry about running up a meter that would cost more and wouldn't have to worry that if I used the hob it would knock out the power. And I knew about contacting all the energy and utility companies and saying about tariffs. I'd saved as much as I could when I was a student from my student loan, tried to put £100 away each month knowing that I wouldn't have that to rely on after I graduated. I was told by my parents to avoid payday loans and just given general financial education, which I think a lot of people don't get. Schools certainly don't do anything about the realities of budgeting. For example, you hear about "the woman said how cheaply she made her porridge," but she isn't taking into account you are going to have to use your hob and if you are on a meter that's going to use up your electricity for the rest of the week, whereas a cereal bar, it's instant.

Elaine's ability to navigate austerity was therefore easier due to her cultural and social capitals. Educated her in financial management, Elaine could save money more easily, since she knew the best ways to do so. Without such knowledge, navigating these challenges would have been a lot harder.

Therefore, what this section demonstrates is that, once again, women are navigating the current context and trying to preserve economic capital through cutting back and trying to live cheaper – sacrificing luxuries and, in some cases, essentials. For some women, this meant cutting back on clothes and frequenting low-cost supermarkets while not completely abandoning their previous shopping habits. For others, who had always had to manage their finances, it meant spending a considerable amount of effort on discount shopping and buying in bulk. In some cases (most often those women who were fully reliant on state support), women had to choose between 'heating or eating,' or between feeding themselves and feeding their children, as they could not afford both. This was despite careful implementation of financial management on a daily basis. Those with a higher volume and types of capitals could use fewer tactics and less effort as they were a lot further from necessity. Women who were close to necessity (through the devaluation of economic capital and cuts in welfare expenditure), found it much harder, despite the considerable effort that went into trying to make the best decisions.

Alternative Lifelines/ Alternative Options

Family Support/Partner Protection

Some women use their relationships as 'alternative lifelines' when navigating the changes brought about by austerity and their decreasing 'space of possibilities' (Bourdieu, 1983, 2014), but the extent and necessity of help differs between women. Most had received help from their families in one form or another. For some, this was in the form of a contribution towards a house deposit, to help them get onto the property ladder. Bourdieu calls this a 'reproduction strategy', a practice designed (and mediated) to maintain and improve one's positions (1984: 125). Without this financial boost from their parents, it would have likely taken the women much longer to get a mortgage. This inheritance reinforced their stability in their position within the social space. For others, it was being able to live at home with their parents, either when they could not rent because of low income and rising rents (especially in London and Brighton), or when they wanted to save money to secure a mortgage of their own. Most of the women who lived with their parents were either not asked for a financial contribution towards living costs, or they were only asked for a token amount (considerably less than what they would be paying whilst renting). This allowed some women to take unpaid internships or low-paying graduate jobs, without needing to be financially independent.

Alice, a 23-year-old, white, middle-class woman lived at home with her parents in south London and did not pay rent. Having graduated from Cambridge University that summer, Alice was looking for full-time employment. Alice had applied for jobs within the charity sector, but had been rejected so took on an unpaid internship to gain relevant experience. Her ability to live with her parents, who owned their home and who were in stable occupations (a GP and a teacher) during this time, allowed Alice to gain the requisite experience. She told me that she was also looking for a part-time job that she would do whilst interning. However, this additional work was to permit her to have an income to spend on socialising with friends. Deciding to go abroad for a year or so, Alice

hoped this would not only give her time to figure out what she would like to do with her life, but also give her a chance to earn money (economic capital), learn another language (cultural capital) and 'sit out' the 'painful job market for a while'. Knowing that she could always move back home without having to contribute to the household finances generated a sense of security.

Hannah, a 23-year-old, white, working-class woman, moved back in with her parents after graduating from Cardiff University (Cardiff). She was unable to find a job and could not afford to rent with friends. However, her parents' precarious financial situation (working as a hotel cleaner and a lorry driver and renting in south London) meant that Hannah's presence put a considerable strain on their resources. Therefore, Hannah began doing concession work at a football stadium and stewarding at various music venues in London on a zero-hour contract, to bring money into the household. Like Alice, she had applied for graduate jobs and had been rejected. Unlike Alice, her living situation did not allow her take time to volunteer or undertake an internship. Although parents could help their daughters in the current context, the degree of help depended on the amount of capitals available to both the women and their parents. This altered how the women perceived and navigated the possibilities and constraints. The differing trajectories therefore opened or closed their horizon of possibilities, providing degrees of stability and protection, and the ability to accrue further resources and capital. However, for others, time was spent halting losses and therefore their ability to navigate through the context was limited by their lower amounts of capital and their family trajectory.

For young women with children, family support became paramount for their ability to navigate austerity. Nicola, for example, a 34-year-old, white, middle-class woman, also lived with her parents in their 4-bedroom house in Brighton. As a currently unemployed single mother with a four-year-old daughter, Nicola received very little help from the state in the form of Income Support, because she was not actively seeking work (she had health problems) and had a small amount of savings from her previous jobs in teaching.

Living rent-free, she was not asked to contribute to the household finances. Her parents also helped financially in relation to her daughter. Nicola described finding the situation humiliating, but said that living with her parents meant that her daughter didn't 'go without'. She said, 'luckily, my parents are very helpful and understanding and they are supportive and don't want my daughter to suffer with me not being able to look after her financially and not have the same lifestyle that I grew up with'. Her family's support meant that her current financial situation had not affected or changed her daughter's middle-class lifestyle. Nicola's trajectory therefore enforced stability and prevented any downgrade or change to her middle-class trajectory. However, for many women, moving in with their families was not an available option because of overcrowding or strict housing rules (as discussed in Chapter 5).

For other single mothers that I interviewed, help was given in different ways. Frequently, friends and family gave small monetary contributions. Borrowing money from family members was common when money was tight. Scarlett, as discussed above, often spoke of borrowing 'a tenner' off her mum to help pay for essential utilities. Similarly, Faye, a 23-year-old, white, working-class single mother of one on Income Support from Leeds, 'borrowed the odd fiver' from her dad every few days, which was a lifeline when money was tight, 'if it wasn't for my dad helping me, I would have been, I don't know, I don't know what I would have done. My dad helps me a lot, he gives me money when he can'. Aside from monetary assistance, help with childcare from friends and family enabled women to attend meetings at the Jobcentre, or helped them to avoid benefit sanctions by allowing them to attend mandatory work placements. Family support prevented them getting into debt or losing benefits through sanctioning. This had a critical impact on their day-to-day lives.

Support and protection of partners also made a huge difference in young women's ability to navigate austerity, especially for those who relied on welfare. For instance, Elaine was registered disabled and received benefits, worked part time and lived with her partner:

I'm ok now but that's only because I live with my partner who works full time. So, if I didn't live with him I'd have to take tax credits. I was back on the benefits, I think ... it would be in fact harder because the benefits have changed more and more often and going back to it, Universal Credit is coming in, the premiums are going, so yes it would be a big struggle. And if I had to move, if I had to go back to private rental I wouldn't be able to afford it, I would find myself in arrears really quickly. You will easily wait two years on the list for a council house in Brighton.

The protection of her partner made a vast difference to Elaine's circumstances. As she said, if she was on her own, 'it would be a big struggle' and she might find herself 'in arrears very quickly'. However, at the same time, said that she had come across a lot of women with disabilities who were worried about getting into a relationship because of this issue. Depending on the type of benefit and amount received, partner protection could in fact, become a problem and could foster dependency, due to the difficulty in applying for social housing once again. Many of Elaine's friends who relied on this type of support, felt that it might become too risky to 'choose to spend their life with a partner'. As Elaine explained: 'if your benefits stop and this guy turns out to be the wrong choice, you're tied in, you could be waiting month to get a flat, and during that time, what do you do. So, it's going to trap women in bad relationships and it's just not worth waiting to see if it happens'.

Agencies and Organisations

Not everyone was able to borrow informally – different life histories and trajectories rendered this type of strategy impossible. Those who did not have a large support network or couple protection often used outside agencies. Eleven of the women interviewed told me that they had frequently relied on housing organisations, unemployment centres, debt advice centres and women's support services in the last few years. Scarlett, Faye (discussed above) and Adele, a 23-year-old, white, working-class woman, were all single mothers with young children on Income Support. They had all been attending a support service in Leeds for the last two years, for housing, debt and benefits advice. This organisation allowed them to use the phone to discuss issues they

were having with their benefits. Faye told me, 'if it wasn't for the organisation, I wouldn't be able to ring about my tax credits or ring the Jobcentre, I wouldn't be able to do any of that if it wasn't for them'. Since Jobcentres no longer offer a free telephone service on the premises, this affects those who do not have access to a phone, or cannot afford to call from their own. Similarly, Lauren, a 33-year-old, white, working-class woman, receiving JSA, who attended the same support centre, said that the organisation had helped her when she had been sanctioned, and had assisted her to coordinate a payment plan when she fell into arrears. She told me:

When I got a letter from the social saying that they had overpaid my Working Tax Credit, I've took it all up there and they sorted it out for me. They've been amazing. And when I got a letter from the Social Fund saying they were going to try take money off me when I had been sanctioned, they managed to get my payments down from £20 a week to £9 a week.

Despite the importance of these organisations to the young women's lives, they are persistently underfunded. Rebecca, a 28-year-old, white, middle-class woman living in Brighton, who worked as a debt and benefit adviser, described the increased need coupled with the reduction of services as a 'double edged sword'. Explaining further she said: 'they are expecting advice services to run on a shoestring and everyone is frazzled because they have so much work to do and nowhere to send people to'. She then went on to say that with the increased pressure to do 'more and more work with less and less money and resources', she felt that these services 'can only go on for so long'.

These organisations did not only provide benefits advice and support, but also helped the women in other ways. Marta for instance, a 35-year-old white, working-class woman from Romania, who looked after her daughter full-time, began attending a Brighton-based community centre, because she felt isolated (her and her partner's family lived abroad and she had very few friends in the area). At the centre, Marta's daughter could stay in the crèche and interact with other children, which Marta felt was extremely important to her socialisation. Marta had also begun volunteering in the crèche. She additionally received help with clothes, shoes, toys, and books for her daughter. Ila, a 35-

year-old, Bangladeshi, working-class, single mother, currently unemployed and in receipt of JSA attended a BAME women's centre in South Leeds, told me how the organisation had helped her. It ran a befriending scheme, which brought women together in the area for both skills sessions and day trips with their children. Ila had felt the squeeze on her finances, and she often felt guilty about not being able to provide her children with what they wanted. The day trips helped Ila to keep the children happy and entertained. Others who attend similar organisations in London and Brighton also discussed this sense of community that organisations provide. Priya, a 35-year-old, middle-class, Pakistani woman currently in receipt of DLA, attended a BAME counselling service at a women's centre in Brighton. She said the centre not only made her feel safer than other services that she has attended in the past, but also she felt that they understood her needs more fully. Yet, many such organisations in Brighton have recently closed, and Priya worried for the future of this service. As for other at-risk services, women worried about what they would do if the support services were closed. This is not an unfounded worry, since findings from the Rosa Fund report (Pratten, 2014; Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte, 2015) show that that sixty per cent of women's sector organisations have struggled to maintain their income over the last five years, with nearly five per cent being forced to close support services altogether due to lack of funds. Smaller specialist organisations, such as BAME support services, are disproportionately affected. The women using these organisations, who already had a smaller horizon of possibilities to navigate within, are left with even fewer resources to weather the storm of austerity.

Food Banks

The use of food banks was another way which helped women to navigate within the context of austerity. Fifty-four women discussed the use of food banks generally. Four young women had tried to get food bank vouchers but, as they were in low-paid employment, they did not qualify. As discussed in Chapter 2, I visited two food banks during my fieldwork. Like Garthwaite's observations during her ethnographic research in a Trussell Trust food bank in Stockton-On-Tees titled *Hunger Pains* (2016a), most of

those whom I observed and spoke to during my time at the food banks and of the women that I interviewed who had used the service (five in total) did so due to mounting pressures on household finances. These were caused by, among other things, job cuts, wage stagnation, spiralling utility and shopping bills, and an array of austerity-driven benefits changes including the application of sanctions. As argued by O'Hara (2014), food banks unquestionably have become one of the most visible symbols on the austerity landscape. Despite the controversial statements by some government ministers – which have tended to overshadow more pressing concerns about food poverty and increased need in the UK, attributing the rise of food banks with supply and demand – figures show a 200 per cent increase in the number of people receiving help from food banks in the year 2013-2014 (Trussell Trust, 2014). This was during the three months that immediately followed significant benefits cuts and social security reforms. The most recent report from the Trussell Trust (2017) has shown that foodbanks in areas of full Universal Credit rollout to single people, couples and families, have seen a 16.85 per cent average increase in referrals for emergency food, more than double the national average of 6.64 per cent.

To access food banks, people must obtain a referral voucher from a frontline care professional or 'voucher holder' (such as a doctor, health visitor, schools and social workers). The voucher holder identifies people in crisis and issues a red voucher to those who they think are in need (also see Garthwaite, 2016a: 43). Marta, Lauren (both discussed above) and Heather were all referred to food banks via charitable organisations or schools. Heather, a 26-year-old, black, working-class woman, receiving Income Support, living in London for instance, was given a 'red voucher' from a woman who worked in family services at her daughter's school. She told me:

I was pregnant and she [family service officer] was asking me about the baby and how I'm finding it and I was like 'it's really hard'...she said she had something if I was interested in it, but to come to a meeting with her. So, I went and you see it in films like, with people going to the food bank, I never thought that they existed (laughs) and she was like yeah we have that to help you over the Christmas period if you want and she said she would give me a voucher for the food bank and then I could go and see what I thought and if it was ok and I wanted to go again she

would give me another voucher. I think we got about four vouchers under this scheme. It's better than nothing.

Likewise, Lauren and Marta also received 'red vouchers' from organisations they were in contact with. Lauren had been sanctioned one-month prior and having been in contact with a housing organisation she had been given three vouchers to use during that time period. Similarly, Marta and her family were struggling to live only on her partner's sole income and a health visitor had issued her with some vouchers.

When these women attend the food bank they are met by volunteers, told to take a seat, offered tea/coffee and biscuits or baked goods such as muffins and pastries, and asked what food they would like from the list of items available (a choice of, for example, pasta or rice, tea or coffee). This list is then taken to the 'warehouse' or 'store room.' The food is packed by volunteers and then handed to these women. A parcel might include cereal, juice, soup, tea or coffee, tinned tomatoes, pasta sauces, sugar, tinned vegetables, tinned fruit, rice/pasta, tinned fish, tinned meat, biscuits, long-life milk, sugar, and extra treats (when available) of jam, chocolate, and sauces (Trussell Trust, 2017). At times, bakeries donate fresh baked goods, which are added to the parcel. The food bank in North London also provides people with toilet rolls, nappies, and hygiene products such as deodorant, toothpaste and sanitary towels. The parcel is intended to last a household for three days; however, all three of these women told me that they stretched the food out as far as possible so that these vouchers would last longer. These 'strategies within strategies' allowed the young women to navigate such precarity for a longer period of time.

Unlike Heather, Marta and Lauren, Cherry, a 35-year-old, black woman originally from Sierra Leone was not in contact with a referral agency but came to hear about the food bank from the council. As Garthwaite notes (2016a: 45), it is a common misconception that anyone can turn up at the food bank and get free food and there is a risk that some of the most vulnerable will not be able to access support as a result. When I met Cherry, she had moved to London from Chicago (US) following a relationship breakdown seven

months before, and, with her four daughters had been going to the food bank on and off for the last few months. She had previously lived in France and had European citizenship. Cherry was accustomed to a 'middle-class lifestyle', having previously owned hair and beauty businesses. However, in London, she had no current income or savings and was not eligible for state support due to problems with her papers and her children's passports. Cherry had therefore been sleeping in a bus stop and a garage for four months and was now living in temporary accommodation with nine other families. Working at Tesco's part-time and earning £400 per month, she explained her situation to me:

When I came here, for four months we were sleeping on the ground, my children suffered, they became very ill, I'd have to wash them every night with very hot water and use a very warm towel, they said everywhere hurts; sometimes we didn't have bread to eat. Now we are staying in a house where I'm not sleeping at all at night because a man lives close to us, smoking the whole night, coming out of the house, every time he comes back in he bangs the door. The house is full of nine different families; it is awful (cries). It's now seven months on and I am still waiting for my benefits, they haven't given them to me. I couldn't afford to eat, buy my children's school uniform, nothing! I don't have Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Income Support. I don't have anything. I work at Tesco's part-time but it's not enough. I've been to the council week after week asking for help, but they said there isn't any. I even asked them to help pay for my children's school uniform because school was starting and I couldn't afford the uniform, but they said they couldn't help me. So one day when I went to the council again, they gave me the number of a food bank that might be able to help me...so I went there one day, I was really broken and Martin [the director of the food bank] asked me what the problem was, so I told him about my children's uniform. He said 'I can pay it'. That same day he gave me someone to drive me to get the uniforms from the shop. Martin paid for my children's uniforms!!! Sometimes I have to run to Martin for him to pay my transport, he will call the council and they will reject him but he will still pay it for me. (Crying) it is too much, we have been going there for a long time now, I want to stop going, it's like always Martin, I'm always going there ... I want to stop, like the last time I didn't go there for three weeks and the past three weeks we were struggling.

Like Heather and Lauren, Cherry also stretched the food parcels as far as possible, and 'struggled' between each visit. For some, this quotation could be seen as supporting the notion that food banks foster dependency. Government ministers, MPs and councillors have made this argument. However, I maintain that this narrative illustrates the

importance of such organisations. For example, Cherry, discussing her income and outgoings, said, 'I get £400 from Tesco. I have a bill from T-Mobile £500, because my daughter was going to the internet, she didn't realise that it costs, so now I am paying £95 for that and my telephone £68, transport £80 and what will remain...nothing'. With such deductions, Cherry had £39.25 per week to live on. Food parcels were extremely important for Cherry to be able to navigate her extremely precarious situation. Therefore, what the above discussions demonstrate is the importance of these organisations to young women's lives. Despite not being fully adequate to their needs, in which women were having to adopt what I call 'strategies within strategies' to navigate such precarity, without such a network of support, feeding themselves and their family would have become even more difficult.

Despite the importance of these organisations to some young women's lives, women often felt reluctant or embarrassed about receiving vouchers or attending food banks. Heather for example, after discussing her experience at the food bank, told me: 'I feel like if people find out I'm going to the food bank they are going to think that...you know...I can't afford food, it's got nothing to do with that, it's just sometimes it's hard, you know'. Worried that people would find out she was using a food bank, Heather stated that she was using the food bank since 'it's hard' but not because she 'can't afford food'. Similarly, Cherry said, 'this is for poor people, not for me'. In such discussions, both Heather and Cherry distance themselves from those who are seen as 'typically' using food banks ('poor people') and themselves (those who sometimes 'find it hard'). Such a distancing move is not surprising (and will be discussed further in Chapter 7) since mothers have long held the main responsibility for maintaining respectability in which being able 'to make ends meet' is a visible marker of being 'a good mother' (Skeggs, 1997; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). In the current context, as Garthwaite (2016a, 2016b) has argued, feelings of stigma and embarrassment may have been aggravated by representations in 'poverty porn' RTV shows, and by political and public discourse which 'question the lifestyles and personal attitudes of people using the food bank, branding them "undeserving of support"' (2016a: 136). As with Garthwaite's observations, such a moral

discourse, coupled with pre-existing notions of respectability, may cause these young women to experience feelings of stigma, shame and embarrassment when using food banks, despite their growing normalisation.

Have Now, Pay Later: Loan Sharks and Pay-day Lending

Johnna Montgomerie (2015) has argued that 'deepening austerity measures in the UK ensure that households will continue to pay down the public debt by taking on more private debt, be they student loans for the young, home equity loans for pensioners and small businesses, and every other kind of loan for the rest' (no pagination). For instance, the Office of Budget Responsibility predictions following the March 2015 budget showed wages only nudging upward while household debt levels rocket up from 150 per cent debt-to-GDP in 2015 to over 170 per cent by 2019. Personal debt has therefore become a symbol of how some households have had to make ends meet in an atmosphere of severe austerity.

Four young women discussed how they used personal loans and credit cards as a way to navigate within the current context of austerity. In addition, five other women discussed friends or relatives who had also taken out such loans due to necessity. These women were all single mothers who relied on government support. These experiences took place against the backdrop of the government's removal of the emergency loans and grants that had previously helped to tide people over: Community Care Grants (non-repayable grants to help people to live independently in the community, or to ease exceptional pressures on families) and Crisis Loans, both of which were administered by Jobcentre Plus.

Scarlett, as discussed above, told me that she first went to a 'loan shark' (a moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest, typically under illegal conditions) two years ago when she was struggling with various debts:

My first one [loan] was £100 and I managed because I paid a lot of debts off with that, I had the money to pay it back. Then he [loan shark] came to me and said would you like a bigger one [loan], so I'm like you know what, yeah, he [her ex-partner] was knocking ten bottles of shite out of me and we had no money, so he [loan shark] said right your next one is £250, you have to pay £450 back, so because I needed it, I took it. I didn't listen to the repayments and I ended up taking out another loan to pay everything back.

With two loans still to be repaid, Scarlett told me how she managed the repayments;

Now they both come knocking at my door asking for more money, sometimes they give me a few weeks, sometimes they don't. One will text me before saying, 'is there any point coming?' and I'll say no, please, and he'll say, 'right, love, do not worry about me', but my other one, no, he's just at me all the time. I have to give him £35 per week, and because I haven't been giving it recently, he's been getting short tongued with me, but this morning he was really short tongued with me and I thought, you know what, I've been through hell and back, and the reason I am in this mess is because you come advertising these loans door-to-door, so who in their right mind isn't going to take it? I'm sorry, but if you're in the situation you're going to aren't you? I'm trying to get out of it but when you get your money stopped or when you hear on the news they're going to take this much off you, you're going to.

Similarly, Heather, was in debt using credit cards. She told me:

I go through £10 carton of milk every five days, kids' uniforms, trips here, wow, it's not enough. I have five credit cards. Five. And even with them, it's bloody hard. Like people saying 'oh you shouldn't have done it', but, because of having so many houses and getting them empty, I've had to buy cookers, and get carpets and stuff like that. Where am I going to get that type of money? You don't get any housing grants anymore. So I've had to get credit cards. Obviously stupid companies give them to me, and you end up digging yourself into a bigger hole. I'm spending it on the house that my kids come home to, so they have a bed and heating and something to eat and it can be clean. They can go in and it's clean. If I don't have money to go out at least I know everything is there, and that's when I say when it snows and stuff, all we have to do is get the rations in and shut the curtains and that's us, we are all right.

Having to move numerous times in the past few years to unfurnished flats, Heather needed to buy 'cookers, and get carpets and stuff like that'. With no other option but to pay for furniture using a credit card, Heather had got herself heavily into debt. She then

went on to say: 'you have to do something. Money isn't going to fall out the sky. So what can I do? Turn to crime, just so you can get money to make us comfortable? I'd prefer to just pay interest'. All four of the women who were in debt through the used of loans or credit cards worried about how they were going to pay back the money. Yet, as far as they were concerned, they needed to care for their families in the short term, which was more important to them than being debt free. Without the necessary capital, which would allow them to avoid such financial pitfalls, these young women continued to accumulate interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed how young women are navigating through/within the context of austerity. Unlike previous work, this chapter has highlighted both the commonalities of a diverse group of young women's navigation strategies, and also where and how these diverge within this complex and messy social reality. Young women had used a variety of strategies, including reskilling and gaining further qualifications, cutting back, discount shopping and receiving help from family and partners. However, there were complexities within these different practices. The degree to which such strategies were needed and could be implemented depended on the volume, composition and trajectory of their capitals and resources (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1991). For instance, the strategy of reskilling or borrowing money from family to get on the property ladder and gain further security was only possible for women who had the time, social, cultural and economic capital to make such investments. The amount and types of capital they (or their family or partners) possessed allowed them to not only navigate austerity more easily, but even accrue capital whilst riding the storm. For those women who had experienced a change in their trajectory (illness or migration meant that various types of capital did not translate or were lost), social and cultural capital also became extremely important. Being able to learn from, live with or have the support of, family and partner made the difference between being able to keep their lifestyle and shield themselves (and their children) to a degree from

economic necessity, or experience a downgrade and become proximate to the effects of austerity. Such 'reproduction strategies', can be seen here as being 'designed (and mediated) to maintain and improve one's positions' (Bourdieu, 1984: 125).

There was a radical divergence in the use of strategies such as 'heating or eating', use of foodbanks, organisations, informal lending, pay-day loans and sacrificing food and 'doing without' to give to their children. Those with larger amounts of capital did, for example, 'cut back,' but did not need to employ any other strategies. For those women with lower amounts and types of capital (typically white and BAME working-class women), they employed multiple strategies to help navigate within the current context. This was since these women were closer to necessity, and had a much smaller horizon/space of possibilities. Yet, some strategies resulted in further insecurity and material instability (such as the use of credit).

In addition, this chapter has demonstrated that for those on a low-income; with the increased pressure of the current context, their lives are far more complex (and busy) than suggested by political discourse. This argument is recycled from previous legacies and times of crisis, which negate the relevance of social conditions and the structural context, and place everything on the individual's will and action. Navigating austerity requires significant time, energy and emotional strain. Therefore, complicating the current political discourse, which depicts hardship as being the result of individual decisions, these narratives thus challenge the discourses circulating within the current socio-political register. The following chapter focuses more specifically on the symbolic violence borne of the austerity discourses. In it, I explore how young women, who are affected to different degrees and in different ways, talk to and against the political discourse.

Chapter 7

Austerity Talk

Sonia: Now rich people are getting richer and poor people are getting poorer.

Layla: Yeah, you're right ... it's also depressing to hear that the government has a lot of money to spend to buy weapons, so why they causing wars when they could be helping people?

Ila: But some people don't want to be helped and they don't want to work neither. They take what they can get, so I think some of what's happening needs to happen, because why should they not work when other people do?

Sonia: What I don't understand is that there must be jobs, if people can come from abroad to come here, why can't British born apply for it, employers are taking advantage that they can get cheaper labour.

Layla: But I think communities blame each other, there is a lot of migration going on so if there's one pot of money and everyone wants some of that then you get blame...people say British born are given less priority and others are given more, but it's not the case. People think that people who are newly arrived get more money and it causes problems. When you have cuts, it brings out all sorts of negative outcomes.

(Group discussion, with Sonia, 35, working-class, Bangladeshi, volunteer, Layla, 35, middle-class, Bangladeshi, charity project coordinator and Ila, 35, working-class, Bangladeshi, on JSA in Leeds, September 2014).

To continue analysing the lived experience of young women in the context of austerity, in this chapter, I examine how women are speaking about austerity. Drawing on the discussion in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, I argue that such an analysis is importance, since,

austerity is not only economic, but a moral-political project, and a cultural tool (Jensen, 2013b; 2014) which draws on specific (gendered, classed and racialised) binaries ('striver'/'skiver') to produce and legitimise consensus for austerity measures and welfare rollback. These binaries, which build on a previous history (see Chapter 4), are used to blame those most affected by austerity measures for stagnant social mobility and the conditions of poverty and worklessness.

This chapter explores how different groups speak to and against such austerity discourse. As demonstrated through the discussion above with Sonia, Layla and Ila, this chapter shows how women are dialoguing with this discourse in different ways, reproducing, reinforcing, questioning and talking back to moralistic narratives of hard work, fairness and responsibility. Divided into three sections, the first section of this chapter discusses middle-class women's opinions of and attitudes towards austerity. The second section then explores how women who are devalued and made abject through dominant anti-welfare discourse discuss reasons for the crisis, as well as how they talk back and dialogue with such stereotypes and representations. In the final section of this chapter, I illustrate additional complexities in young women's narratives – how they question the austerity discourse by critically reflecting on structural constraints and current stereotypes.

Questioning and Challenging the Austerity Discourse: The 'Undeserving Rich'

Discussing the crisis and implementation of austerity measures, twenty-two out of thirty-one middle-class women questioned and criticised this discourse. Of these twenty-two women, three worked in the private sector, thirteen in the public sector, two were full-time students and three were reliant on state support⁴⁸. The financial sector, the government and the 'wealthy'/'privileged' were addressed in negative terms. Discussions were not always in relation to detailed or technical explanations about the

⁴⁸Of those nine who did not question or criticise the government discourse, five worked in the private sector, two worked in the public sector and two were full-time students.

origins of the crisis. However, considerations carried with them expressions of blame (directly or indirectly), feelings of anger and unfairness. Nadia, a 32-year-old, mixed other, middle-class part-time teacher from Leeds, when speaking about the crisis said that she felt that certain proportions of the population had benefited from the crisis. I asked her to elaborate, 'the ones who benefit out of all of this [the crisis] are the corporations, the politicians and the money-making machines'. The 'undeserving rich' (bankers and politicians) were therefore stigmatised, seen as unjust recipients of state redistribution who took more from the public purse than they gave. This stigmatisation of the 'undeserving rich' is present in other research conducted with 'taxpayers' (see Stanley, 2014). These groups were often labelled by middle-class women as 'greedy', 'tax dodging', 'privileged,' and 'out of touch'.

Some young women questioned the dominant narrative, which framed the out-of-control welfare system as the reason for the crisis of capitalism. Trisha and Emma, for instance, both questioned why the deficit had not been reduced in other ways. Emma, a 25-year-old, white, middle-class woman who was unemployed, but until recently been working in the charity sector in London, asked, 'tax avoidance from the rich would fund benefits for everyone, why aren't they doing that as well?' Women would also point out the tactics and scapegoats used by the government to dissipate the real reasons for the crisis. Trisha, a 34-year-old, white, middle-class woman who worked part-time as an advocacy support worker in Brighton, discussed the fixation that the government had on the spending habits of those reliant on welfare. She said, 'it's not David Cameron's business how people spend their money is it? I just think it's really vile politics actually and it's a distraction of what's happening'. She then went on to say, 'it's interesting how we are now forced to look outside at other things, so it covers up what is happening here'. For Trisha, 'vile politics' were being covered up by smoke screens, redirecting the population's attention away from domestic issues to trivial news stories.

Despite some young women agreeing with austerity measures more than others (as will be discussed below), there was an awareness by some that certain proportions of the population were suffering because of the austerity measures, whilst others were not. For

instance, when speaking about the implementation of austerity measures by the government, Madeline, a 24-year-old, white, middle-class woman working as a complaints mediation officer at a charity in Brighton, said, 'find a middle ground. We don't have to be at the point where people are really struggling'. Examples were often provided of certain policies the government had implemented which had affected people in negative ways. The 'bedroom tax', which was frequently in the news at the time of the interviews was often discussed. Nicola, a 34-year-old, white, middle-class woman from Brighton receiving Income Support, pointed out, 'if you are going to have a bedroom tax, levy it on everyone, if you have a mansion then they should be paying the bedroom tax as well'. Unfairness therefore figured in the narratives of these young women – they acknowledged (directly or indirectly) that small proportions of the population did not experience austerity in the same way, to the same degree, or at all. As with Stanley's 'taxpaying' participants, some also contested the 'moral abstract order' and the 'stereotype of the scrounger' (2014: 397), highlighting the structural impediments facing the unemployed. Those women who were more proximate to the effects of austerity, who worked with service users, in charity organisations, or who had experience of the welfare system, would often talk at length about the injustices people faced. As discussed in Chapter 5, Rebecca, a 28-year-old, white, middle-class woman who worked as a debt and benefit adviser in Brighton and had herself been reliant on state support, spoke about the realities of a life on benefits, and the desperation that service users faced. She noted:

People on benefits can't afford to live, it's not possible, so you get people that are just living from day-to-day with no food, no gas, electric, let alone anything as luxurious as having the internet or being able to go to the pub, nothing. People are just existing. And for the long-term sick there is no prospect of that improving. I can't even imagine what that would feel like, to look at your life and think this existence is my life forever, no wonder people are killing themselves, Jesus.

Women also used people's reliance on food banks to demonstrate the injustices of the austerity programme, resisting and arguing against the popular rhetoric. Trisha, for instance said, 'people are in poverty, food banks cropping up all over the place ... I don't

believe all the bollocks you hear about “you create them and they will come”. People have dignity and self-respect, yes David Cameron, even the working-class have dignity and self-respect not just everyone else, you don’t go unless you need to’.

Young middle-class women therefore questioned and talked back to the dominant austerity discourse, expressing disaffection and distrust towards those in positions of privilege and power. They also asserted values such as empathy for those affected by the changes within the current context. As was shown, cynicism manifested itself in different ways, drawing on different evidence and examples, which provoked different responses. However, there was an explicit understanding that ‘we are not all in this together,’ and that some were not in it at all.

Reinforcing the Austerity Programme: the ‘Undeserving Poor’ and the Hard-Working Taxpayer

People in the banking system lost the money in the first place but the spongers, scroungers ... those on benefits aren’t without fault.

(Anna, 27, white, middle-class, physiotherapist, London)

Anna’s comment above is crucial to analyse when discussing attitudes towards austerity and the ways in which young middle-class women dialogue with austerity discourse. Despite, Anna, like the women above, arguing that ‘people in the banking system lost the money in the first place’, Anna, also directed her narrative of blame and unfairness towards another figure by saying: ‘but the spongers, scroungers ... those on benefits aren’t without fault’. Although young middle-class women contest and resist aspects of state discourse and the actions of the ‘privileged’, at the same time, they also reproduce the dominant narrative circulating within the socio-political register by blaming ‘the spongers, scroungers ... those on benefits’.

In general, the welfare state was thought to be problematic, costly, and in crisis. Women would often make distinctions between 'the early welfare state' and its current condition. Tiffany, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class, marketing manager from Leeds, argued that the welfare state, 'was set up as a safety net for needy individuals', but was 'not being used in the way it should be'. Expanding on her points, Tiffany, echoing political discourse said, 'I do think that when the benefits system was set up it was for people in need. Now it is being too generous'. As Jensen (2014: 4.1) notes, such an understanding of the 'generosity of the welfare state is highly contestable' (also see Wacquant, 2009; Dorling, 2010; Shildrick et al., 2012; Atkinson et al., 2013). The greater conditionality of welfare payment (and more punitive sanctions) and cuts in various benefits (as shown in Chapters 5 and 6) seriously trouble Tiffany's understanding.

The assumed 'generosity' of the welfare state led into discussions about *who* used the welfare system and *if in fact*, they should be eligible for (and needed) such support. Mia, a 27-year-old, Anglo-Indian, middle-class GP from London, after discussing the welfare system and state of the NHS, said, 'there are people who are entitled. I would gladly give my tax money to those who need it'. By using the words 'entitled' and 'those who need it', the underlying suggestion within Mia's narrative is that there are people receiving benefits who are in fact the opposite: 'not entitled' and who 'do not need it'. Therefore, making the connection between the welfare state and her 'tax money', enables, as Simon Winlow and Steve Hall (2013) note, 'an ideological pitting of the abstracted hard-working taxpayers against the "benefits claimant"' (in Jensen and Tyler, 2015: 483). Mia then went onto explain that she felt that 'the people who are taking the piss and abusing the system' were not 'entitled' to welfare. Those who were referenced as 'undeserving', 'taking the piss' or 'abusing the system' extended into many different groups: the unemployed, the single mother, the immigrant and the sick and disabled. These stereotypes have a long history, and as discussed previously (Chapters 1, 3 and 4), have been employed in previous times of crisis to generate consensuses for the introduction of punitive economic and social policies (see Hall et al., 1978; Federici, 2004; Hancock, 2004; Tyler, 2008; Todd, 2014).

Therefore, this initial discussion highlights the ways in which the symbolic campaign of austerity, 'ruthlessly employed to divide people along a vampiric axis of blame for diminishing social resources' (Tyler, 2015: 506) is being reproduced within middle-class women's narrative. Not only was there processes of othering and blame towards those who are thought of as 'undeserving' of help from the welfare state, but middle-class women also distanced and distinguished themselves (the hard-working taxpayer) from the 'undeserving skivers'. The sections below further unpack such explorations, highlighting the different ways in which middle-class women blame and vilify the figure of the 'skiver', reinforcing the austerity discourse, but also, in the process, distance and distinguishing themselves from these figures.

Boundary-Making and Blame: The Spirit of Hard Work

As discussed above, women often described those on benefits as 'abusing the system', 'being lazy', 'work-shy' and 'getting something for nothing'. This imagined construct was then compared to those who did not rely on benefits and 'worked hard'. For example, Anna said:

There are a lot of people on benefits who aren't actively looking for work ... who may be gaining more in benefits than if they would if they were working. I don't think that's right. I think that there needs to be a more stringent process in evaluating the benefits that people are on and ensuring that they are doing everything that they can to get work. There are a lot of people in society who work hard for their wages, so it seems unfair when people are working and other people are getting more money for doing nothing.

Reproducing the binary of 'work' and 'workless', 'striver' and 'skiver,' Anna felt there were people on benefits who were not 'looking for work' and 'getting more money for doing nothing'. Anna described this as being 'unfair,' in contrast to other people who 'work hard for their wages'. Working in the NHS, Anna told me that she had been subject to a pay freeze since 2011 (no rise in line with inflation) and in recent years had had to make do

with less. Despite Anna not specifically naming those she described in the binary terms of 'skiver'/'striver', she reproduces the understanding that there are two types of citizens, which, as Jensen (2014: 2.5) notes, 'are held in static, essentialist terms; those who work hard and those who don't, with different morals, objectives and ideas'. In addition, her experience of 'working hard' and having a pay freeze provoked a sense of anger and resentment. This was directed towards those who take advantage of the hard work and everyday sacrifices of the majority, who are having to make do with less.

Work was therefore central to these young women's narratives. Many young women claimed that work was plentiful, despite some acknowledging that some jobs might be low paid. These jobs were seen as 'better than nothing,' and therefore, it was thought that people who were reliant on welfare must be 'turning their noses up at certain jobs'. Kiran, a 28-year-old, Indian, middle-class woman, living in London and working in training operations, said 'there are jobs ... it's just that these people choose not to take the job ... I don't think anybody can sit there and say I can't find suitable work'. These attitudes show a lack of fit with the everyday lived experiences of those looking for paid employment. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, young women who wanted to return to paid employment often experienced repeated setbacks, rejections and a lack of suitable employment to suit their needs (also see Shildrick et al., 2012; Patrick, 2014), especially those with caring responsibilities (this will be discussed in more detail below).

Yet some middle-class women argued that 'people should want to work and be able to contribute'. The spirit of hard work is enacted here – 'contribution', 'value' and 'productivity' are characterised in economic terms. Alternative value, such as non-paid care work was not discussed as relevant to societal contribution. Employment took on a morally weighted rhetoric, mirroring the political view that all citizens should help the nation recover through being autonomous, individualised and economically productive. As discussed in Chapter 4, the use of such rhetoric to justify economic behaviour is nothing new. For instance, Max Weber notably made the case in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) that the development of capitalism in Northern Europe had

been influenced by the Protestant values of prudence and frugality, where idleness was regarded as a sin. As Skeggs notes, during this period, 'idle' persons were held up by the state and gentry as the constitutive limit to propriety (2014b). Such an understanding, as was showed in Chapter 4 has been repeated and recycled, especially during times of crisis and subsequent periods of cuts (see Haylett, 2001; Atkinson 2013; Tyler, 2013a; Todd, 2014) to draw divisions between citizens who help the nation and those who do not, regardless of structural conditions. The young women's narratives thus reinforced and helped to further reproduce these divisions.

When I asked the young women if they knew anyone who matched their description of those who in the words of Kiran 'choose not to take the job' and 'showed no value' their understanding was driven by examples from tabloid and social media and political discussions. As Hall et al. (1978) discussed, 'the hardening of public opinion into consent relies upon the repetition and accumulation of expressions and beliefs "on the street", in conversations between neighbours, discussion on street corners or in the pub, rumour, gossip, speculation' (129 in Tyler, 2013a: 211). Tyler notes that in twentieth century Britain, 'the street' can in fact 'include the formal technologies of social media' (2013a: 211-212). In addition, examples from RTV (largely in relation to *Benefits Street*) were also provided to back up their arguments that those receiving welfare were 'tricking the system'. Mia used the example of *Benefits Street* to support her point that some people were making up certain conditions to get sick pay. Despite acknowledging the controversy surrounding the show, which she called 'skewed', she said:

It started with a girl walking down the street saying this person doesn't work, here's a job opportunity for this man called Fungi and he's not taking his job opportunity because he's on opiate substitutes. There's no reason why he can't work, it's because of the fear of working and not being used to it and an element of laziness. I think it's the laziness that's most aggravating. If people think other people aren't doing it because of laziness then the situation is obviously ... it's probably rarely just laziness, yeah, it might be fear of going back to work, anxiety about it fear of not being able to keep the job, failure, avoiding something that might make them feel like a failure ... but that particular guy who declined that job opportunity, it's probably badly paid, but still a job. A job that will reflect good on him and his children, who, he most desperately wants to see, who aren't

allowed to see him. Surely that's the right way forward and he probably knows it. I don't know but ... yeah so this guy would work hard on the street to make money. He would sell magazines, which is probably a nine-to-five job for him. So, if he's working that hard, he's not lazy, but maybe he's more motivated doing that and can make more money doing that. But that's not a good enough reason to receive benefits. There will be plenty more people like that doing the same thing.

Mia makes her point by focusing on the character 'Fungi'. Despite carefully considering and reflecting upon his situation and the structural constraints he is facing, she concludes that 'Fungi' does not have a 'good enough reason to receive benefits'. Although she described the jobs that he declined as 'probably badly paid,' she reasoned that 'it's a job that will reflect good on him and his children,' which she felt is 'the right way forward'. Mia is therefore not only minimising the effects of structural constraints, but by arguing that it is 'the right way forward, and he probably knows it' supplants such a discussion with moral rhetoric of conduct and behaviour. Although she recognised that the show is 'skewed,' her understanding of people on welfare is sustained and produced through this cultural mechanism, since she ends by saying; 'there will be plenty more people like that doing the same thing.' In this example, Fungi, acts, as Jensen and Tyler (2015) argue, as a figure of welfare disgust. This figure helps to 'manage precariat populations (as technologies of control) but also as technologies of consent' (2015: 475) since 'Fungi' provides Mia with evidence that such people are not working and are tricking the system, reinforcing anti-welfare common-sense.

This cultural mechanism has a history. As noted by feminist scholars (see Skeggs and Wood, 2012), there has been a concerted campaign since the 1970s⁴⁹, via TV and media, to represent the 'undeserving' as entertainment. This once again draws on much older legacies of the divisions between the respectable and the 'abject'. In the current context, 'poverty porn' (as Jensen terms it, see 2014) functions to reinforce and recycle forms of 'common sense' about welfare, worklessness and moral value (see Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis, 2014 for a discussion on classed and gendered shaming in RTV). RTV can be

⁴⁹For example, the genre began with the programme 'The Family' (1974).

seen in these examples to help to gain consent for welfare retrenchment, since it reinforces conservative social norms circulating within the current socio-political register about 'work' and 'worklessness' which are understood in moral terms. This therefore strengthens the division between groups, and the feeling that some do not work when they should.

Women also drew on heroic individual stories to further argue that 'worklessness' was a choice. Erica, a 25-year-old, black, middle-class, account manager from London had used the benefit system previously when looking for a job. Yet, she labelled most of those using welfare as 'not having the right attitude', even though she acknowledged that her cultural capital (degree and previous work experience) had helped her in her quest for suitable employment. She used the example of her mother to reinforce her point: that being on welfare was a 'choice' rather than an imposition:

My mum was seventeen when she had me. My nan was ill, in and out of hospital all the time, and my mum still went to uni and got her degree. A lot of people in that situation would go, 'oh you know I'm seventeen and I'm pregnant and it's really hard, I need to sign on right now'. But she never once took handouts. If she can do it, anyone can.

Likewise, Tiffany, speaking about her niece, reproduced the same discourse:

My niece could be not working and on them [benefits] but she chooses not to. She had a baby at nineteen and she had to stop her beauty course. But she works from home doing hair. She'd rather do that then claim anything.

Contrasting her mother with 'a lot of people in that situation', Erica gestured that the reason her mother did not 'take handouts' was because her strength of character helped her to cope even though her mother was young (seventeen) and her 'nan was ill'. Similarly, Tiffany explained that her niece's character was the reason that she 'could be not working and on them [benefits] but she chooses not to'. Proximate to the privileges of governmentality, these speech acts reinforce the neoliberal 'do it yourself rhetoric'; Erica's mother and Tiffany's niece (the heroic individuals) worked hard, received their

qualifications and stood on their own two feet. However, neither Erica nor Tiffany acknowledged the different contexts in which they are referring to, the context of unemployment and crisis in the present, as opposed to the context in which Tiffany's niece and Erica's mother could navigate within. Neither do these women mention social markers, which might impact certain individuals' circumstances. Since these women had seen examples of 'heroic' individuals 'doing it for themselves,' or had their own unique experience of the Jobcentre, they were more likely to blame unemployed individuals for their own situation.

Boundary Making and Blame: Morality and Lifestyle

Mirroring austerity discourse, young women asserted that failure to be 'independent', 'economically productive' and 'successful' was also due to morality: bad conduct, attitude and taste. For these middle-class women, there were acceptable and non-acceptable ways of behaving, consuming and living and it was argued that those on welfare were not living accordingly. As discussed in Chapter 4, such an understanding is tied up with pre-existing notions of negative value, that have been attributed to working-class women, historically marked through incivility, animalistic commentary (Rooke and Gidley, 2010), fecundity (Tyler, 2008), excess, dirt, and space (Skeggs, 2004). In the context of austerity, such notions are being recycled, used here by middle-class women to create distance and draw boundaries between themselves and 'Others'. The extract below, which involves a conversation with Mia is demonstrative of this. Mia made a statement that she could identify a working-class women/a woman on welfare by her nails. Asking her to elaborate on this comment, Mia said:

The long talons, nail art, jewellery and that kind of thing. It's a very specific type of nail. So much focus and money is in that nail (laughs). It means they aren't practical and they pay too much attention to non-essential things. It's a sign of being lower class. I would never have those nails. How can you have those nails and not be lazy? I'd rather spend money on something else, more long standing like education. You shouldn't waste money on nails. I think it more when I see, I mean if you are really poor, and you have a very small income, you aren't going

to spend it on big things like wanting a property or saving up for your children's education. If you have a small income and those things aren't on your radar, you are more likely to spend money on non-essential things. Whereas my parents, when they were saving money, they didn't buy a broom. They used a dustpan and brush. My mum would make my brother's nappies because they dreamed bigger. So if that's not on your radar, then you're more likely to spend money on the here and now and on things that don't matter. That, to me, suggests a lack of will and a lack of wanting to better yourself and your situation. They have a lack of foresight and forward planning and future ambition. Like the money they put into those nails could be put into advancing themselves.

VD: So, by saving money, these women would be able to have similar opportunities to you?

Maybe, well not their generation, but their kids. It's about yourself and children and if you can save and try to get a stable home and aren't reliant of anyone else giving you income then they could buy text books for their children and encourage them to work. Obviously, it's hard. It is hard, but my friend's mum did it. She had nothing and she worked three jobs and put all the money into her two children.

VD: And what did she do about childcare?

Well I think she was with her husband. And yeah in that sense the cuts wouldn't have affected her getting a job years back and earning money. But, either way people just live in the here and now, they don't try.

This extract is indicative of many other conversations I had with middle-class women: connecting class position, aesthetics and morality. Firstly, Mia described 'long talons, nail art, jewellery and that kind of thing' as a sign of being 'lower class'. She then drew a distinction between herself and working-class women (those who have those types of nails and those who do not). For Bourdieu (1984), dominant groups often legitimise their own culture and ways (lifestyles/tastes) as superior to those of the lower classes, producing class distinction through taste. Such a distinction is evident here. Mia then continued asking: 'how can you have those nails and not be lazy?' In this logic, 'aesthetics are translated into morality', since those taken as lacking 'taste' are also represented as morally lacking (Lawler, 2005: 441). To Mia, such a form of 'taste' therefore signifies being 'lazy', having a 'lack of will' and a 'lack of foresight'. This carried with it an

assumption that income was spent on excess and frivolity: 'non-essential items'. It is therefore through the body, as Bourdieu (1984) shows, that a whole way of life can be classified as admirable or repulsive and disgusting.

Mia suggested that these women should use better financial management to 'better themselves' and become responsible. For Mia, this would involve generations of 'thrift', drawing on the example of her parents using 'a dustpan and brush' and 'making her brother's nappies'. Although she acknowledged the difference in context, she still felt that women should deal with their situation individually. She laboured the point of 'living in the here and now' or 'not trying', placing the onus onto the women themselves. It was their lack of effort, responsibility, spending habits, and moral conduct – not their lack of income or wider structural issues – which would mean these women would be unable to have the same opportunities as she did. The ideas of learning how to be 'thrifty', disciplined and restrained can be traced back to Samuel Smiles' books *Self-Help* (1859) and *Thrift* (1875) which promoted such practices and claimed that poverty was caused largely by irresponsible habits. As shown in Chapter 4, such ideas have been used throughout history to reinforce (especially gendered) class and 'racial' boundaries. For example, during the Victorian era, when the conflict between the classes was remade as a problem of morality, middle-class women (as a source of 'moral authority' (Skeggs, 2014b)) both taught and scrutinised working-class women on the importance of restraint, responsibility, thrift and respectability in order to 'civilise them' (Skeggs, 1997; David, 1980) (see as an example, Octavia Hill founder of social work and the 'School for Mothers'). 'Thrift' and responsibility have therefore been encouraged and strongly promoted in different moments of history (targeted mainly at women); the inter-war period and Thatcherism, through the return to 'Victorian values' (of the Samuel Smiles self-help variety).

Mia's narrative shows how 'thrift' has once again been revived as a source of cultural value and a trait of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984 in Jensen, 2014: 4.6). Jensen argues that 'thrift' is 'certainly about taste and taste cultures' (4.7). She goes on to note that 'new

thrift' culture produces and circulates fantasies of the classed Others against whom austerity is positioned as necessary, and who need to re-learn the lessons of frugality' (ibid). From Mia's narrative, 'thrift' can be seen as site where classed 'Others' are produced and symbolically shamed for not being austere enough: specifically, in the sense of paying for goods that women 'waste money on' and don't 'need'.

Despite discussions from these women above not operating within a vacuum, through an emphasis of individual responsibility, hard work and morality, middle-class women blame, distance and draw boundaries between themselves and 'Others' (the rich and poor). Those 'Others' are subject to change depending on context. Yet, this differentiation is more apparent when young middle-class women make distinctions between themselves and 'Others' who use welfare – those who are already disadvantaged. In such discussions, women tend to reproduce and reinforce symbolic violence. Their discussions implicitly suggest consent for austerity measures and the dismantling of state provisions. These narratives also clearly reproduce austerity discourse, labelling some figures as 'underserving', since they are not responsible, thrifty or hard-working.

(Un)deserving of Welfare Cuts

As discussed above, although many middle-class young women directed anger towards the 'privileged' in society, talking back to public discourse, stigma and blame coalesced more fully around the figure of the 'skiver' evoking a distinction between such a figure and that of the 'hard-working citizen'. In this section, I explore how women who are devalued and made abject through dominant anti-welfare discourse are discussing reasons for the crisis as well as how they are dialoguing with such stereotypes, through mechanisms of distancing and blame. I briefly show how those women talk back to the government discourse. I then demonstrate how the devaluing of those on welfare has led to a range of negative impacts, such as increased racism, fear, high levels of anxiety, and concerns about the growing mistreatment from the general public.

Despite such experiences, this does not necessarily mean these young women's narratives are straightforward. On the contrary, their discussions are narrated through contradictory dialogues of negotiation and distancing towards and away from the figures of the 'good' and 'bad' citizen, which are achieved through utilizing the same language the middle-class women use above. However, rather than assuming that such distinctions reflect the prevalence and internalisation of anti-welfare messages and austerity discourse, this section argues that the tendency of these women to make such distinctions between the 'skiver' (undeserving) and 'striver' (deserving) is a central feature of their own bid for recognition and legitimacy. Yet, as shown below, the ways in which these young women try to value themselves are dependent on and specific to the immediate context, as well as to the resources and capital that they have available to be mobilised.

Blaming 'The Greedy Beggars Who Walk Around in Posh Suits'

Rita, a 35-year-old, white, working-class woman receiving state benefit, living in Leeds, spoke angrily about the current state of the country, blaming the 'greedy' government for the recession. During a group discussion with other working-class women, Rita said, 'we've got idiots who put us into a world recession because of greed'. The banking sector was also described in these terms. In the same group, Scarlett, a 23-year-old, white, working-class woman receiving Income Support, questioned why the banking crisis happened, saying jovially, 'me and you could run a bank, if money's coming in and you invest what you've got ... you get interest ... so I don't know how they all got it so bloody wrong ... it's just greed!' Most women directed their anger at the government and politicians, who, they argued, did not have their priorities in the right place.

For those who had been most affected by welfare cuts, discussions were met with raw expressions of anger. These women felt that the government did not care about their lives. Jaya, a 24-year-old, Bangladeshi, working-class woman from Leeds, who at the

time of the interview, was looking for full-time work whilst receiving JSA said, 'they [government] don't see it from our point of view, they just say "we're doing this" and "we're doing that" and its ok. But they don't see that we're struggling; they don't take that into account'. Many women felt their voices were unimportant and that there was a lack of dialogue between those in power and 'everyone else'. David Cameron bore the brunt of the anger. Women described him as 'a greedy beggar who walks around in a posh suit' (Scarlett), or they detested him; 'I hate him, I hate him' (Rita). These women also felt that they were unfairly stereotyped within the current context, and were blamed for the decisions taken by the government. Scarlett said, 'we get looked down at, I get looked down at all the time for being a single mum at twenty-three on my own, with two children ... as if this [cuts] is all because of me needing help'. Women also felt that politicians did not understand their day-to-day lives, as they had 'never lived on benefits' and had 'no idea what it's like' (Scarlett). Talking back to the austerity discourse, Scarlett went on to say:

I see politicians on the news saying 'we want to help change this world.' Well you don't, you want money to line your own pockets while everyone else is suffering. And I'm sorry, if I ever met you (God help you) I swear I wouldn't be able to keep my cool. I'd be like, what makes you think you have the authority to keep doing this? You are sat here doing it to us and blaming us for it. How can you blame us for something they are putting in place for the things they are doing, we can't say well we're stopping that and we'll do this, we can't do that, you're the ones doing it, so you're to blame for the mess we are in. You can't blame someone else for the rules you're putting in place. We don't have the authority to go make these rules. All the politicians out everywhere and around Leeds need to face themselves and the difficulties that everyone else is having. Maybe then they might be able to put something decent in place ... I don't think my opinions are too strong, and I think they should come and face it just like other people.

Woven throughout Scarlett's narrative is the issue of blame and authority. For Scarlett, it is apparent that people who lack the authority to make decisions are being blamed for the results of these decisions. Infused with anger and feelings of unfairness, Scarlett mentions many times how blame is manifested unjustly and that those in power 'need to face the difficulties that everyone else is having'. Dialoguing directly with the

dominant government rhetoric, young women would then speak back to the idea of their choosing benefits as a lifestyle choice. It was often asked, 'who would choose this?' This was then followed up with, 'we don't do it for the love of it.' As Scarlett put it:

They think I'm sat back and enjoying it ... enjoy what? I don't have two pennies to rub together after my bills, shopping and whatever else. What am I enjoying out of that? I had to take out of my mouth to put trainers on my kids last week ... what am I benefiting out of that?

Legitimising Hard Work and Morality: Drawing Distance from 'Bad Citizens'

Despite the discussions above, for young women who are closer to the stigmatised representation of the 'bad citizen' (single mothers, migrants, and those reliant on welfare), these women have to dialogue with such representations. As Bridget Anderson (2013: 9) has argued, it is those whose citizenship is merely tolerated, and must struggle to gain acceptance into the community of value, who are most expected to act as 'guardians of good citizenship'. In the first instance, such a dialogue was made through the use of distancing. Young women spoke of the negative experiences that they had encountered from the general public in recent years. These discussions were emotionally charged, and there were multiple references to fear and to concerns about the growing hatred of and lack of empathy towards them. Due to such experiences, women tried to distance themselves from the figure of the 'bad citizen', using the resources and capitals that were available to them. Marta, a 35-year-old, white, working-class, Romanian migrant living in Brighton with her husband and young daughter, who volunteered at a local charity, discussed the increased hostility she had experienced towards Romanians in recent years. Although she had lived in the UK since 2008, she felt more and more uncomfortable when speaking Romanian on the street. She said that this was because of the increased stigma surrounding certain migrants (especially those from Romania) expressed in political rhetoric, and tabloid and television media. For instance, research undertaken by Bianca-Florentine Cheregi (2015) on the role of images in framing the theme of Romanian people migrating to the UK, found that British television media mostly use economic (images of pauper Romanian villages), political (images of

politicians talking about the Romanian migrants), and national security (images of homeless Romanians rough sleeping) frames in the coverage of Romanian immigration which thus infers the polarisation between 'us' (the British citizen) and 'them' (the Romanian migrant) (also see Cheregi and Adi, 2015). Marta therefore actively negotiated such hostility by now speaking only English in public spaces. She explained:

I'm afraid to talk on the street in my own language with my daughter. She knows English and Romanian. I mean, I heard in some towns it's like that, if they hear you talking a different language they (long pause), I would like to speak my language to my daughter; she knows better my language than English, but we are more and more afraid, we just speak English.

It is clear that Marta was aware of the negativity directed towards immigrants when she says 'I mean, I heard in some towns it is like that, if they hear you talking a different language they (long pause)'. The long pause here indicates Marta is thinking about something that is known but cannot be named. Xenophobic attacks have increased in recent years, which have exacerbated in the UK post-Brexit (Gheorghe, 2016). Therefore, citing being 'afraid' to speak Romanian to her daughter, her decision to speak only English aims to avoid any conflict in the future.

Elaine, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman living in Brighton who is registered disabled and in receipt of DLA, discussed how the increasing negativity towards disabled people had affected her. Speaking about her everyday experiences, she described the visible hostility towards disability. As argued above, groups formerly regarded as 'deserving' (Alcock, 2006) and 'off-limits' (Garthwaite, 2011: 370) – because of ill health or disability, for example – are now prime suspects in the tabloid and wider socio-political debate about austerity. Such discourses are not without consequences. Leading charities have warned that the government's focus on alleged fraud and over-claiming to justify cuts in disability benefits, has caused an increase in resentment, abuse and record levels of 'hate crime' against people with disabilities (Riley-Smith, 2012). Recalling how such discourses had affected her day-to-day life Elaine said:

It got to the point, particularly around 2011 and 2012, when they were bringing in the first wave of changes and it was in the media, constantly, always stories, look at this person who gets, I don't know £30,000 a year and goes on holiday, some people get BMWs and all sorts of nonsense stories and it would coincide when there was a wave of those stories with getting more abuse in the streets just from strangers coming up and saying 'scrounger' or 'why don't you get a job'... The worst one was when people would come up to me and say 'people like you should be put down to save tax money' and I was like wow, pretty hostile, when I was just waiting for a bus. And yeah, what I noticed was, which was interesting, that at my current job I have a staff lanyard, if I wear that whilst I am travelling on a bus everything is a lot smoother, I don't get any comments or whispers or people coming up and asking 'what's wrong with you?', 'Are you going to get better?', 'Do you work?' interrogating me, but they let it go. When I was working in permitted work, I was on my way to work and the bus ramp was not working properly as they often don't, so it took a while for the driver to get it working and the man waiting to get on the bus said 'all this fuss and you spend our tax money' and I was literally on my way to work at a charity with vulnerable teenagers. I don't know, you can't stop and say hang on a minute, let's talk about this, you need to be like, ok, let's not raise this confrontation. When I started wearing my staff lanyard around all of that went away. So now I will just put it on and tuck it into my jumper and there we go, people will think I'm on my way to work and won't bother me.

For Elaine, these negative experiences of hostility that she experienced led her to wear her staff lanyard to avoid confrontation, despite not actually being in work on those days. Negotiating her position as disabled and as a 'worker' who was not 'spending tax money' was a way for Elaine to not be drawn into the figure of the 'bad citizen'. This resulted in people 'not bothering' her, unlike on previous occasions without her lanyard, which would result in instances of verbal abuse and relentless questioning.

Those who were 'proximate' to the class borders as Bourdieu (1986) argues, were most insistent when highlighting their distance from the 'bad citizen'. Priya, Marie, and Lucy, for example, marked their difference through recourse to narratives of work ethic and/or morality. In Marie's discussion below, she emphasises her work ethic, values, social contribution and economic productivity:

I do get help but I'm working. I just get help with the rent and stuff like that. But I do pay my way. I'm out there, sweating to get to work, sweating to get home ...

everyone's way of thinking is different, but mine was to go out and work, to stand on my own two feet. I've got major values.

For Marie, a 28-year-old, black, working-class single mother, who worked part-time as a waitress in a Library café in London, it was important to emphasise that despite receiving state help, she also worked for a living and has 'major values'. Having left the UK as a teenager, moving to Barbados to live with her grandparents and complete her education, Marie said that she felt she was different from her siblings and friends who had stayed in the UK. Living in a foreign country had allowed her to acquire more experiences (in the form of cultural and social capital) and a better standard of education (cultural capital). When she moved back to London at eighteen, Marie began working in a high-street store 'whilst she found her feet' – since the capitals that she acquired did not translate themselves easily to a UK context – and fell pregnant with her son shortly after. Now a single mother, working part-time and receiving state support, Marie was adamant that she could 'stand on her own two feet' and 'pay her way' because of her values and attitude. In this way, she tries to distance herself from the idea of welfare as a 'lifestyle choice' and its connection to the 'bad citizen' who did not have the same work ethic and values as she did.

For others, legitimising themselves had to take a different form; as they could not use employment to display their position as a 'good citizen'. For example, Lucy, a 21-year-old, white, working-class, single mother on Income Support from Brighton, said that she possessed 'individual responsibility' and 'good parenting skills'. Having previously lived abroad in Italy and Belgium working as an au pair, Lucy returned to Brighton after getting pregnant in 2012. Despite returning with her partner, due to the 'hard working conditions' in the UK, her partner returned to Belgium after a few months. Lucy was now a single mother reliant on welfare, but was adamant that her 'outlook' and 'mentality' differentiated her from those who also received state support:

I'm just different with it [benefits]. Others are just stupid with it. They think they're not getting enough to survive ... I still ... I think my mum brought me up

well, no matter how little money I have, I don't eat shit. Like I hate eating shit, like 'oh let's go to MacDonald's', no! It's disgusting, no way! I just, well it's personal how you handle it ... Olive [her daughter] never goes without, I always get her what she needs. It's just personal how you handle it.

Unable to narrate her position using economic terms, in this particular moment, her 'class positioning (alongside the other social positions) was the omnipresent underpinning which informed and circumscribed her ability to be' (Skeggs, 1997: 74). Thus, the way she was able to distance herself from the stigmatised representation of the welfare claimant was by focusing on her values and lifestyle. Even though she said she received state support, 'she is different with it' because she had a different mind-set and values. However, by doing this, she further reproduces such a narrative by making the connection between welfare and individual choice and behaviour.

Priya, a 35-year-old, Pakistani, middle-class woman living in Brighton, was on DLA at the time of the interview, and therefore also unable to narrate her position using economic terms. Like Lucy, she also focused on her morality. Despite acknowledging that she received help, again, like Lucy, Priya also reproduced the negative connotations attached to the figure of the welfare claimant:

I just take one benefit. I could go through all of them, but I don't want to. I see some of my peers on benefits, and I hate the way they are. They think they are getting paid. I don't see them doing what I do, going and getting therapy, I'm very active, I'm on benefits to get better, not to stay at this level. I pay for my own therapies as I get hardly anything on the NHS. I found this women's centre so I can get low-cost treatments and save waiting so I don't have to be on benefits even longer. I'm hard on myself and this is why I'm getting treatment myself. I don't want to get comfortable. I'm quite intelligent and I do know myself and if I wasn't uncomfortable, I'd get complacent like some of them. And I'm getting better. I don't belong in the working world yet, but I don't belong with my peers. I'm an honourable person and none of this that I'm on benefits for is my fault.

Highlighting that she 'takes one benefit', Priya then used moral judgments to discuss others who also received state benefit. By saying 'I hate the way they are,' she argued that 'they think they are getting paid' and characterises them as being 'complacent'.

Priya indirectly draws distinctions and distance between herself and 'the bad subject of value.' She does this by saying she 'doesn't belong to that world' since she is 'active', 'hard on herself', 'not comfortable', 'quite intelligent' and 'honourable'. Her peers are therefore by comparison figured as 'belong to that world', are 'inactive', 'unintelligent' and 'comfortable'. Although she cannot distinguish herself by highlighting her economic productivity, Priya, like Lucy above, differentiates herself through values, intelligence and honour. She again reproduces the dominant narrative, connecting welfare, individual choice and behaviour.

Worklessness and Immorality: Blaming the Bad Feckless Subject

Blame was another means by which young women positively constructed themselves in contrast to 'Others' who were believed, variously, to be work-shy, to claim benefits illegitimately and to be unable to 'manage'⁵⁰. It was them upon whom the stigma of being 'undeserving' was cast (Shildrick et al., 2012). As Ruth Lister discussed, 'Othering has been largely understood as a discursive practice which shapes how the 'non-poor' think and talk about and act towards 'the poor' (2004: 103). However, as Shildrick and MacDonald note, ideological discourses about the 'undeserving poor' are not simply a 'top-down' rhetoric of the powerful (or the 'non-poor') but are shared and enacted by those at the bottom, skewed downwards towards others, objectively, like them' (2013: 299-300). Like MacDonald and Marsh (2005) have previously claimed, some of the most vociferous critics of those using benefits are themselves unemployed.

Interviews were heavily loaded with moral assessments. Young women distanced themselves from others who were blamed particularly for their unwillingness 'to work' or 'to manage'. For example, Scarlett, discussed those around her area of Leeds, equating

⁵⁰It is important to note that self-blame was not a feature within the interviews. This contrasts with other works on young people, neoliberalism and crisis. For more on such discussions see the work of Silva (2013) and Whitehead and Crawshaw (2012).

welfare with being 'work-shy'. She said:

Some people are lazy and don't want to work. I've lived around here all my life and I know some sorts. I know they genuinely sit on their backsides coz they know they can. They know the more they breed children, the more income that comes. Thinking the government's their second husband. I'm sorry but it's true. And some women won't spend on them [their children], they'll look all one million dollars and their kids are sat there in dirty clothes and holes in their shoes. That's the people who need punishing, people that don't want to do anything, want to sit on their backsides and take, take, take. If I ran this country, believe me, they wouldn't be taking from me.

Having talked about those who did not want to work and 'take, take, take', Scarlett's narrative followed with a discussion of the immorality and failings of others in terms of provision and consumption. As argued in Chapter 4, mothers have long held the main responsibility for maintaining respectability in working-class communities. Adhering to high standards of household cleanliness, and being able 'to make ends meet', is as Skeggs (1997, 2005) notes, a visible marker of being 'a good mother' (also see Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Kathy Hamilton (2012), for instance, has shown how the 'stigma management' by low-income mothers required coping strategies through which to protect social identity. Hamilton explained how castigation of the 'undeserving' by her participants often focused on the perceived unwillingness of mothers to maintain standards and make sacrifices for the sake of the children and their inability to maintain standards.

During interviews, there was no shortage of disparagement of the allegedly disabled 'undeserving poor', even by those receiving sickness and disability benefits. Rita claimed Incapacity Benefit and described how she felt about some others who did the same; 'I think to myself you've never worked or earned money, they say wages, I think, you don't work for your wages, you work for a wage! This is supposed to help people in difficulties and I know they don't need it, none of them'. Here Rita reproduces the dominant austerity discourse by saying 'you've never worked or earned money', comparing benefit payments to wages. Here she indirectly reinforces the 'undeserving' narrative of those who are disabled as being 'scroungers' by referring to the fact that 'this is supposed to

help people in difficulties and I know they don't need it I know they don't need it'.

Although most women had emphasised their ability to 'get by' with limited resources (see Chapter 6; also, see Shildrick et al., 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013), they compared their situation to those who were 'getting something for nothing', or who were 'entitled to something they were not'. This reinforces division and blame between and within groups who were reliant on welfare. Those caught between low-paid jobs and unemployment referred to as 'the working poor' were the ones who became most enraged by those they perceived to be 'living it up at their expense' or 'receiving something they could not'. For instance, both Marie as discussed above and Fiona (a 23-year-old, white, working-class single mother, working part-time at a nursery and getting state benefit) directed anger towards those who were receiving food bank vouchers and who were eligible for social housing. Both these women had tried on different occasions to access food banks, but as Marie said, 'I'm not entitled to it because I work'. They were also on waiting lists (in band D⁵⁴) for social housing. Anger and frustration had therefore turned towards those who were eligible for such help and resources. For Fiona (who described herself as white), this was in relation to the 'non-whites', whom she said were more likely to receive resources because they had 'bigger families, more children and more mouths to feed'. For Marie (who described herself as Black), this was in relation to 'immigrants' who were described in exactly the same terms.

Those who expressed difficulty in finding employment also drew attention towards groups who were seen to be unfairly taking jobs and resources – often those who were 'non British born'. For south Asian women, these were 'non British-born' people, and for white women, 'non-white immigrants'. 'Immigrants' were berated both for 'coming here and taking all the jobs' and, paradoxically, for 'being a drain on the welfare state' because

⁵⁴When applying for social housing an assessment is made that allocates the applicant to a certain priority band and bedroom category. Using the banding scheme to allocate properties gives those with the greatest need highest priority. The bandings are as follows: Band A – for households with an urgent need to move. Band B – for households with a high priority to move. Band C – for households with an identified housing need. Band D – for households with no other housing need but interested in affordable social housing and Homebuy.

they 'did not want to work'. Such contradictions can be seen with the two quotes below from Heather and Faye:

They love England, thank you London, and thank you Britain because they can send it to their country and sit on their backside all day doing nothing. Come to the UK and drain us, get benefits, buy clothes, get a car and a house given. But then the person born here isn't entitled because they've taken it all. (Heather)

If we didn't have so many people coming over and they're not meant to be coming over then there would be a lot more jobs left for people to get and we wouldn't need cuts, I know it might sound harsh but I've always said there would be a lot more jobs if that wasn't happening, a lot more jobs. (Faye)

These extracts therefore show that despite the contradictory narratives that circulate, the figure of the 'immigrant' was blamed for the lack of resources and employment available. This narrative is similar to findings from previous times of crisis. As discussed in Chapter 4, in the climate of Thatcherism, anti-immigrant rhetoric was used as a scapegoat for high unemployment and recession. The working-class became divided on racial grounds – the white working-class was encouraged to direct its frustrations towards the black working-class for 'taking' their jobs, housing, and public services. What can be seen from the women's narratives above is the black and white-working class directing their frustrations towards 'immigrants' for taking their jobs and housing, and 'draining' their public services (also see Dhaliwal and Forkert, 2015). Thus reproducing current austerity discourse.

What becomes evident in the discussion about blaming the 'poor' and migrants within my research is the idea of investment, placing investment into those who have invested into something and those who have not. Although these descriptions were often met with nameless examples, like the middle-class woman above, RTV's genre of 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2014) once again served to reinforce their understanding and legitimization of blame and distancing towards certain groups. For instance, Scarlett said, 'there are people who are ruining it out there, who literally laugh when they walk out the Jobcentre, did you not watch that programme on Channel 4? It was disgusting, it was about us as

well as people coming into the country. There was a man, he was at the bank at 12 o'clock and I thought, you disgust me'.

This noticeable lack of resources generated an absence of empathy towards those suffering within the current context. For instance, Marie said:

I don't know why but certain people don't pay council tax. This woman she got evicted, she might be homeless now because of certain things like arrears, but she didn't have to pay council tax. How come she doesn't and I do? How is that fair that they don't have to pay it? I have to pay it.

For Marie, anger is directed towards those who do not have to pay council tax, in which she questions 'how come she doesn't and I do?' Such questioning generates a lack of acknowledgment towards eviction and homelessness. This shows how attention is directed towards specific individuals and groups and not towards wider structural issues. Groups in close proximity are therefore battling for resources and income, and so this gives them less room to question the wider issue of *why* they are battling for them.

What these interviews exposed is the deflection of blame onto others in an attempt to distance themselves from the stigma and the shame of 'welfare dependence'. However, within this process of dialoguing with the stigma, these young women create multiple layers of differentiation which vary according to the resources and capitals available to be mobilised (for instance, through the use of work, parenting skills, nationality, 'race' and so on) and to the specific contexts to try and legitimise themselves as distinct from the 'Other'/abject figure being blamed for the crisis. Such processes, through dialoguing with the austerity discourse, reinforce and re-produce divisions between and across different groups, setting groups against each other.

Critically Reflecting on Austerity Talk

In this final section, I draw on instances of critical reflection to present tensions and fractures within discussions in the sections above. As Skeggs reminds us, 'capital does not necessarily commandeer all social relations, and, even where it does, it produces its own contradictions' (2014a: 15). Although emerging in different ways and dependent upon their position within the context of austerity, some young women reached for as Skeggs notes 'values beyond (exchange) value' (ibid), bringing to the fore the effects of class and 'raced' prejudice, as well as making fractures within the well-worn austerity discourse.

Despite having discussed at length issues with the welfare system, this did not mean that young women would not reflect on the discourses circulating with the current socio-political context and the 'taken for granted assumptions' people have about welfare claimants. For instance, despite Tiffany's negativity towards welfare claimants, she problematised the discussion of welfare spending, saying: 'if you look on a wider spending perspective of the government the actual segment that benefits takes up is so small it really is nothing'. Similarly, Mia, who had talked at length about the problems of welfare, then said, 'I'd be interested to work all the stuff about people who are on benefits, I think fraud is actually a smaller figure than we all think'. Young women acknowledged that the media and government often homogenised groups, labelling people in certain ways despite their needs and experiences being different. For example, in spite of the grouping of individuals by women within each of these sections, there was an acknowledgment that differences did exist and affect one's experience. On occasion, middle-class women would show awareness of their own status, as Anna said, 'it's easy for me to say in my position'. Such reflexivity demonstrates that these women are aware of their own privileged position. Andrew Sayer (2005) suggests that this is part of a middle-class disposition.

In other cases, women reflected upon structural dimensions when thinking about 'hard work' within the context of austerity. Rita and Scarlett discussed their space of possibilities in the current context:

Rita: The point is in our country, if I wanted to be Prime Minister, if I had worked hard enough, I could have been. You can do anything you want to.

Scarlett: Do you think you can do that?

Rita: I can't, no.

Scarlett: No, I can't either.

Rita: I can't afford to send my daughter to university, but you can't get anywhere without going to university, point is you need tools to do it.

Scarlett: Yeah, I wouldn't have been able to go. I love and embrace university but I think them poor people that spend all that money getting their self to the end of it to have nothing at the end of it, and I've seen people on the telly crying saying I can't believe I've worked my backside off and been penniless, living in a student flat on nothing to get through and then to be told, well all those qualifications count for nothing, because there's no work for you. I feel sorry for them as well because every penny they've got has gone into building themselves a life and they can't even do it then.

Rita and Scarlett's reflexive account is important for several reasons. First, they acknowledge that they could not become the Prime Minister if they worked hard enough, which breaks with the meritocratic view circulating that the 'good citizen' works hard and succeeds. Secondly, by emphasising that their space of possibility is dependent on economic means ('I can't afford to send my daughter to university'), Rita and Scarlett 'un-burying' class differences and how these differences affect their space of possibilities, especially in the current context. Discussing how those with university degrees are also struggling to find work within the current context, both Scarlett and Rita complicate the common-sense understanding that austerity's casualties are suffering because of individual failure and pathological deviance. This idea was also reinforced later by Rita who said 'there are also people that do go to work, I know them, and there's no money left, they still need to use food banks'.

Others complicated the 'anti-immigration' and 'anti-welfare rhetoric', discussing the ways in which communities and groups were pitted against each other. Scarlett said: 'crime's gone up, depression's gone up, everything like that is up because the world itself is not surviving, because people are fighting in lumps. Groups are fighting for the same things, thinking they have it better, but literally everyone is depressed in themselves'. She points out that 'the world is not surviving because people are fighting in lumps'. She then goes on to say that 'groups are fighting for the same things', alluding to the discussion above that some groups are benefiting or gaining more resources from the state than others. However, Scarlett then says that these groups are 'thinking they have it better, but literally everyone is depressed'. In a similar vein, when discussing 'anti-immigration' rhetoric during a group discussion with other Bangladeshi women, Layla, a 35-year-old, British Bengali, middle-class, charity project coordinator, said:

Communities blame each other, there is a lot of migration going on so if there's one pot of money and everyone wants some of that then you get blame ... People say British born are given less priority and others are given more, but it's not the case. People think that people who are newly arrived get more money and it causes problems. When you have cuts, it brings out all sorts of negative outcomes, my niece is at university and she can't get a decent job, her surname is Islam, and because of the media hype about the religion Islam, it got to a point where she was thinking I can't get a job and there are people less qualified that were applying for the same job and the careers officer changed her surname and it helped her. That's not due to migration; it's bigger than that.

In the first instance, Layla acknowledges that 'communities blame each other' because there is 'one pot of money and everyone wants some of that'. Reflecting upon the claim that British-born people are given less priority than non-British-born people, she instead says that the cuts themselves produce negative outcomes, which lead to blame and resentment. Using the example of her niece who could not find a job, she complicates the understanding that migration was to blame for struggle for suitable employment.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has shown how young women talk to and against the austerity discourse. The discussions were layered with contradictions and intricacies through which they not only legitimised and reproduced the austerity agenda, but, also at times, fractured and ruptured the ideals of the 'good austere' citizen and a country that is implementing austerity for the good for the nation. Middle-class women who have been less affected by austerity, through an emphasis on individual responsibility, hard work, and morality, blamed and drew boundaries between themselves and the 'undeserving poor', focusing on their perceived 'moral failings' and 'worklessness'. These discussions reinforced the austerity discourse, fostering consent for welfare reform, since poverty and insecurity were understood to be the fault of the individual. Like previous historical legacies, these categorisations therefore enabled, legitimated, and were mapped onto material inequality.

For those women who were devalued through dominant anti-welfare discourse, I explained how their mechanisms of dialoguing with such stereotypes (distancing and blame) depended on the resources and capitals they could mobilise. Young women would distinguish themselves from others seen to be less 'deserving' of the right to receive help from the state. As with other times of economic crisis, socially conservative codes of respectability were mobilised to express disgust towards other social groups who were blamed for the lack employment and resources. Yet, some women challenged the established anti-welfare discourses, resisting the imperative for groups to pit themselves against each other based on their nationality, 'race' and class. Some young women produced values that counter the predominance of moralistic narratives of economic productivity and aspiration, and by reflecting on how structural constraints such as income may complicate the ideas of individualism and meritocracy. Although drawing heavily on the dominant rhetoric, they also considered structural constraints that affected them and limited their ability to become 'austere good citizens'. Discussions present in this chapter are further explored in the follow chapter. I argue that

feminism is a productive site through which to examine austerity discourse and practices, and further understand austerity as a moral project.

Chapter 8

'Austerity–bourgeois feminism': Legitimising Austerity's Moral Project

Yes, I'm a feminist ... my main view of feminism is equal opportunities and that you can do whatever you want to do ... I think feminism is important, but some [women] need it more than others. Some cultures are already three quarters of the way there, like ours and the people we know, our contemporaries ... those who have been brought up white, middle-class, generally will be quite, I guess, educated and feminist as a result. But there are other cultures and classes, so Middle Eastern, Asian where education isn't that widespread and old belief systems are in power and have a huge influence on how society runs. I guess yeah, those groups, they need feminism more.

(Mia, 27, middle-class, Anglo-Indian, GP, London, February 2014)

The previous chapter centred on understanding how young women speak about austerity. I argued that, despite young women's speech being layered with contradictions and intricacies, women often reproduced the austerity discourse of the 'good' and 'bad' austere citizen. Middle-class women specifically legitimised the austerity programme, by drawing divisions and distinctions, constructing a moral hierarchy between themselves ('the good citizen') and others ('the bad citizen'). This chapter builds on that discussion by arguing that feminism is a productive site to further examine austerity's moral landscape. Focusing on young middle-class women, this chapter explores what they say about feminism – how they identify with it, what they understand it to be, and for whom they think it is necessary. By analysing these discussions, I argue that there has been a convergence between feminism and certain austerity current discourses and practices. I term this form of feminism 'austerity–bourgeois feminism'.

This chapter shows how this specific feminist subject has become a way of reinforcing specific political values, discourses and sensibilities. 'Austerity–bourgeois feminism', I argue, serves to reinforce distance and distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' gendered subjects, and silence the inequality of the austerity agenda through a position of 'indifference'. 'Austerity–bourgeois feminism' has various connections with both 'neoliberal' and 'bourgeois feminism'. Emerging from the middle-class drawing rooms of Victorian England, 'bourgeois feminism' focused its efforts on reforming aspects of the female condition rather than specifically arguing for equality between the sexes (Walkowitz, 1980, 1992; Hall, 1992, 2002; Rendall, 1994; McDermid, 2013). This form of feminism became a civilising mission for middle-class women to spread middle-class Western morality to non-Europeans (Hall, McClelland and Rendall, 2000) and working-class women (Walkowitz, 1980, 1992; Rendall, 1994). This enabled the legitimisation of the dominant moral discourse of the time: self-discipline, earnestness, control and restraint. With the tendency of middle-class women to look down on working-class/non-European women as having low morals and bad housekeeping skills (in line with Victorian ideals of femininity and domesticity), despite the sympathy middle-class women might have had for their working-class/non-European counterparts, and however much they claimed to speak on their behalf, feminist campaigns were based on the assumption of class and 'racial' division, and moral hierarchy. For example, as discussed in Chapter 4, with middle-class women's belief in their own domestic morality, when visiting working-class areas in the attempt to help the 'poor', support was given to those who were deemed as being morally worthy and/or 'deserving' of help as oppose to those who were seen as 'undeserving' (Gidley, 2000).

I therefore use the term 'bourgeois' in this sense, and drawing on its classed, racialised and moral aspects, argue that such characteristics are being re-signified within the context of austerity. Similar to the Victorian 'bourgeois feminism', I contend that 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' reproduces and legitimises austerity discourse and principles. This is done by creating distance, and classed and racialised distinctions, from those suffering in the current context, labelled as failures of self-governance or victims

of culture. I argue that this distancing is crucial to the maintenance of the austerity project, since, instead of helping to put an end to gender inequality, this form of feminism aids the legitimation of hierarchical relationships and gendered socio-economic inequalities. This is produced via a form of indifference towards the 'bad subject,' who is seen as unable to manage and who is thus undeserving of help.

However, 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' is distinctive in the sense that it also draws on elements of 'neoliberal feminism'. Feminist scholars have argued that the dominant modalities of feminism in contemporary political and cultural discourse should be understood as neoliberal variants of feminism, informed by market rationality (McRobbie, 2013, 2015a; Rottenberg, 2014; Foster, 2016). This 'neoliberal feminism' it has been argued, 'seems perfectly in sync with the evolving neoliberal order' (Rottenberg, 2014: 419), helping to produce a particular kind of feminist subject, not defined by a collective gender affiliation, but rather by individual or personal challenges (Rottenberg, 2014 also see Fraser, 2013; Evans, 2015, 2016, 2017; Foster, 2016).

I argue that certain aspects of 'neoliberal feminism' can also be seen within 'austerity–bourgeois feminism'. For the middle-class women that I interviewed, in line with the values of 'late modernity' (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1998, 2006; Bauman, 2000), feminism is spoken through an individualised lifestyle discourse: characterised by individualism, independence, self-love and self-care. Like 'neoliberal feminism', there is an emphasis on the need for self-responsibility to deal with forms of inequality. Going forward, this chapter demonstrates how 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' connects with both 'neoliberal' and 'bourgeois feminism' in various ways. It also highlights how it is also distinctive, producing, in certain ways, a different feminist subject than its foremothers. The coining of the term is therefore meant to draw attention to how feminism is formulated and configured within this current context.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section of the chapter, I introduce discussions on feminism, drawing attention to previous forms of feminism that have converged with wider social, economic and political contexts. Then, drawing on

empirical data, the next three sections explore what middle-class women say about feminism. These sections show how a new form of feminism is coalescing within the current context, and describe its distinctive traits. I conclude by suggesting how we might raise questions to comprehend the limits as well as the emancipatory potential of such a type of feminism.

It is important to note here that the embedding of this form of feminism within such a process of austerity does not mean that feminism is 'dead'. Such an argument, as Lisa Adkins (2004) has previously argued, would be premised upon an assumption of what the proper objects of feminism should be. Instead, this chapter demonstrates that it is important to analyse the discourses and practices around the term 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' within the current context. Reinforcing the point above, by focusing on the discussion of 'austerity-bourgeois feminism', this chapter therefore does not dismiss the fact that many young women engage with feminism in different ways, nor does it assert that only middle-class women hold such values. Additionally, it also does not state that women have no empathy for those most affected by the austerity agenda (also see Chapter 7). This distinct feminist position can be held in tandem with concern for women as a group more widely. The argument that I make here can occur with more affirmative accounts of feminism in the context of austerity.

Neoliberalism, Austerity and Feminism

With a large body of knowledge documenting women's multi-faceted and contradictory relationship with feminism, researchers have highlighted women's opinions of, views about, and relationship to the term and/or movement. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an in-depth review on young women's engagements/disengagements with feminism (for a more detailed account see Scharff, 2012), it is nevertheless important to be aware of, and briefly unpack, this complex terrain. Met with ambivalence, disinterest, repudiation, identification or engagement, it has been argued by feminist researchers that factors such as heterosexual conventions,

neoliberalism, post-feminism and difference facilitate women's engagements/disengagements with feminism. It has been widely documented that feminism is an unpopular term for many young women, in which reasons for this either fall within an understanding of fierce repudiation or that of irrelevance (Scharff, 2012). Some researchers have argued that generational differences inhibit young women from identifying as feminists (Pilcher, 1998; Kehily, 2008), whilst several feminist academics and journalists stress how negative media representations and stereotypes of feminist figures impact on the popularity of the movement (Bulbeck, 1997; Press, 2011). Others suggest that young women see the movement as 'anachronistic' (Read, 2000; Budgeon, 2001; Jowett, 2004). For instance, Sinkka Aapola, Marnina Gonick and Anita Harris assert, 'young women are not especially interested in feminism as a label or a movement anymore' (2005: 195). Similarly, Madeline Jowett's (2004) research on young women's attitudes to feminism in Britain found that feminism was 'something that had contributed to female progress in the past, but (was) no longer seen as relevant' (2004:94), as equality was now understood to be the 'norm'.

Furthering this understanding, McRobbie argues that there has been a shift in young women's relationship with feminism (2004; also see Gill, 2007). While, as the above literature shows, such a relationship was marked by a 'distance from feminism', McRobbie argues that we have now entered the 'cultural space of post-feminism' (2004b: 257) characterised by an 'active, sustained, and repetitive repudiation or repression of feminism' (2004a: 6). This shift can be understood within the context of neoliberalism and individualisation, in which women are seen as champions of their own success. In line with broader sociological arguments about individualisation (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and more critical gendered perspectives on processes of individualisation, post-feminism produces a set of contradictions that involve declaring 'the [feminist] movement (predictably if illogically) dead, victorious and ultimately failed' (Walters, 1991: 106).

McRobbie sums this passing of feminism as being 'instrumentalised', in which feminism 'is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means' (2009:1). She goes on to note, 'drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like "empowerment" and "choice", these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. These new and seemingly "modern" ideas about women, and especially young women, are then disseminated more aggressively, to ensure that a new women's movement will not re-emerge' (2009:1). Empirical research on young women (Misra, 1997; Budgeon, 2001; Hughes, 2005; Rich, 2005; Scharff, 2012) has demonstrated how young women draw on a post-feminist, un-gendered, individualistic discourse to suggest that feminism is redundant, with no identification with the idea of a collective feminist movement.

In the current context, it has been argued that feminism has (in various forms) re-entered political culture and civil society (McRobbie, 2015a)⁵². This can be seen in representations of feminism entering popular culture (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Munford and Waters, 2013), the increased presence of feminism on social media (Keller, 2015), and the rise in feminist activism (MacKay, 2011; Franzway and Fonow, 2011; Cradock, 2017). However, despite examining the linkage between this so called 'new feminism' and notions of autonomy, authenticity and radicalism (Scharff, 2012), the celebratory and optimistic framing of feminism has been contested and contradicted. Scholars interested in the re-emergence of feminism in these different avenues have questioned how it has taken on, and is compatible with, wider cultural, political and economic frames. Discussing the increased complexity of feminism, McRobbie (2013) describes the endorsement of this

⁵²Current cuts to welfare by the government have added energy to feminist politics and campaigning. For example, the Fawcett Society made a legal challenge to the emergency budget in 2011. There have also been other online campaigns by smaller grassroots feminist groups such as Focus E15, Black Activists Against the Cuts and Feminist Fight back, which are headed by working-class, BAME women and anti-capitalist feminist collectives.

'new feminism' as a way of providing 'the centre right and centre left with a more up-to-date way of engaging with women's issues whilst simultaneously expunging from popular memory the values of the social democratic tradition which had forged such a close connection with feminism through the pursuit of genuine equality and collective good' (2012: 135, also see Farris, 2017).

As Evans notes, 'in some important ways [feminism] may assist the various forms of social inequality that support and sustain gender inequality' (2017: 76). For example, 'bourgeois feminism' (Hall, 1992, 2002; Rendall, 1994; McDermid, 2013), 'commodity feminism' (Goldsman, Heath and Smith, 1991) and 'consumer feminism' (McRobbie, 2009) have converged with wider cultural, political, and economic frames and contexts where women struggle for equality within existing social systems. As discussed above, some feminist scholars understand the dominant modalities of feminism in contemporary political and cultural discourse to be neoliberal variants of feminism, informed by market rationality. This 'neoliberal feminism,' scholars argue, helps to produce a particular kind of feminist subject, not defined by collective gender affiliation, but rather by individual or personal challenges, which reflect the discourse and values of the neoliberal context⁵³ (Rottenberg, 2014; also see Fraser, 2013; McRobbie, 2015a; Evans, 2015, 2016, 2017; Foster, 2016; Gill, 2016). Catherine Rottenberg, for instance, argues that this feminist subject accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus. In a similar vein, McRobbie (2015a) states that feminism has been made compatible with an individualising project and is also made to fit with the

⁵³It is important to stress here that some feminist scholars use the terms accommodation and appropriation to differentiate their arguments from what other feminist writers have seen as 'complicity' (Fraser 2009; Yeatman 2014). McRobbie (2015a) for instance, argues that 'to use the word complicity is somewhat accusatory and implies that certain kinds of feminists have allowed themselves to become aligned with the forces of conservatism and of the Right. In common sense terms, this is correct and one could look to Sandberg again in this regard. But one senses that writers such as Fraser (2009) have other more academically engaged feminists in mind, not the transparently corporate feminism of the 'lean-inners'. Complicity does not seem helpful when what one is discussing is the cultural appropriation of feminism such that it becomes part of everyday governmentality' (13-14, also see Rottenberg, 2014).

idea of competition. She argues that, with competition as a key component of contemporary neoliberalism, the focus on self-regulation in the form of the 'perfect' acts to stifle the possibility of an expansive feminist movement. In the current context of austerity, feminist scholars have noted how the figure of the 'cupcake feminist,' for example, fits with the ideals of the austerity agenda, doing significant cultural work for a government who advocate 'thriftiness', nostalgia and gendered entrepreneurial domesticity whilst cutting public spending (Allen et al., 2015; Jensen, 2012, 2013a; Biressi and Nunn, 2013; Negra, 2013).

In this chapter, despite being mindful that feminism and feminist frameworks take many forms, building on the discussion above, I explore the convergence of feminism within wider discourses and values, which is taking place within the current context of austerity.

Middle-class Feminism in the Context of Austerity

The data described in this chapter arose from various stages of the interviews, in which issues of feminism and equality were voiced. It is important to note, that these topics were not discussed in every single interview (thirty-nine out of sixty-one). During these interviews, some topics were explicitly addressed: the participants' opinions on gender roles and the state of gender inequality in the current context, and attitudes towards, and feelings about, feminism. Thirty women self-identified with the term 'feminist'⁵⁴, six dis-identified with the term⁵⁵ and three avoided or were unsure about the label⁵⁶. In this chapter, I focus on interviews with seventeen women who identified with feminism, and who adopted the 'austerity–bourgeois feminist' subject-position. These women were all middle-class. Fourteen of these women were white, one Anglo-Indian,

⁵⁴Four of these women were working-class (two white and two black) and twenty-six were middle-class (twenty-one white, two Indian, one Anglo-Indian, one Pakistani and one mixed other).

⁵⁵Four of these women were middle-class (white) and two working-class (white).

⁵⁶One of these women was white working-class, one Indian middle-class and one black middle-class.

one Indian and one mixed other. Ten of these women worked in the public sector, five in the private sector and two were full-time students. These women had been affected to a lesser degree than others by austerity measures and had high volumes of, and different types of capital.

In an era often described as 'post-feminist' – all seventeen of the middle-class women interviewed self-identified with the term feminist. As Susan, a 30-year-old, white, middle-class woman, who worked as an account manager in Brighton, said, 'yeah! Of course, I am [a feminist]'. Similarly, Pippa, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class content producer from London, noted: 'yes! I'm a feminist. We should all be feminists!' Identifying positively with the label, being a feminist was, for these women, synonymous with gender equality and women's rights. Discussing what feminism signified for her, Julie, 34-year-old, white, middle-class events assistant living in London, said, 'feminism, for me, represents women's rights, and women's equality, to ensure things are fair between men and women, giving women opportunities in society'. Likewise, Polly, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class occupational therapist from Leeds, explained, 'I guess my main view of feminism is equal opportunities, behaving the same as men, that's what feminism is'. This idea of equality and opportunity resonated through all discussions with these women, and feminism was discussed as important for, and relevant to, their lives.

Yet feminist identification was also marked by contestations and ambiguities. Many answers had caveats: feminism should 'not go over the top,' should not try to make women 'be better than men', or should 'not be too radical or extreme'. Susan made a comparison between what she called 'new' feminism and 'serious, staunch' feminism. 'I think it's a new feminism ... it doesn't have to be serious, staunch, it's not man-hating, it's just self-loving'. She then characterised this 'new feminism' as having more of an 'edge' and being 'fun'. Similarly, Francesca, a 28-year-old, Indian, middle-class accountant living in Leeds, also described her feminism by contrasting it to another form of feminism that she did not want to embody:

We [feminists now] have our choices and beliefs, which we incorporate into our lives, but we aren't actively fighting, burning bras, shouting and stuff ... we have beliefs, which we incorporate into society and our lives. Some of the things older feminists say are quite out-dated.

Contrarily, as shown by Susan and Francesca, feminist values of independence, choice, individualism, self-love and self-care were manifestly valued and deemed appropriate characteristics to take up and embody. Serious, staunch, actively fighting, bra-burning feminism was, on the other hand, not. Therefore, two 'types' of feminism were identified, which can be seen to be in direct conflict with each other - the 'old' - appearing to produce hostility and rejection - and the 'new' - which is valued and seen as necessary. Although the identification with feminism by these middle-class women above complicates the common finding that young women no longer identify with the term, as with previous forms of feminist identification, the desirable aspects of feminism are affirmed via a disavowal of more radical positions (also see Dean, 2010, 2012). As Gill and Scharff point out, an 'endorsement of "feminist" doesn't necessarily mean that forms of repudiation fail to take place, raising questions about the new feminisms' critical and emancipatory potential' (2011: 265).

In contrast to other studies on young women and feminism, which have argued that feminism is repudiated since it no longer fits with the values of the young women's generation (McRobbie, 2009), for the large majority of women who self-identified as this 'new' type of feminist, feminism/feminist was articulated through such neoliberal/post-feminist values (choice, success, individuality). As Polly said, 'it's a bit of an approach, I don't think you have to sign up and become a member and come to this meeting and work for this society and be down in London. For me, it's an approach to life, or the way that you are and the way that you think. I share what they think and what they believe in'. Similarly, Madeline, a 24-year-old, white, middle-class complaints mediation officer living in Brighton, explained, 'I'm not actively [feminist] but yes, I am a feminist, pro-women, equality, it's part of my lifestyle, it's part of who I am as an individual'. Her choice

of words, 'individual', 'approach', and 'lifestyle', show that feminism, for her, is a way of life – incorporating ideas of individualism and choice rather than collective action.

An earlier section of this chapter revealed how feminism has been actively incorporated into neoliberal cultural, political, and economic frames. One way this has been done is via consumer advertising and promotion (Douglas, 2010), with the characteristics of being independent and having choice being re-signified and appropriated by 'market logic'. This form of feminism has been reinforced and promoted across the media, and numerous cultural and political platforms, for the last few decades (Winship, 1985). Therefore, it is not surprising that young women today identify with this form of feminism – this is the feminism available to them. 'Popular feminism' (Skeggs, 1997), 'DIY feminism' (Bail, 1996), or 'neoliberal feminism' (Fraser, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014) all describe a form of feminism whereby women do not define themselves by some collective gender affiliation, but rather by individual or personal challenges. Skeggs (1997) argues that in so doing, feminism is detached from the social and the systematic, and reduced to the individual. In this sense, feminism is no longer a political and collective movement demanding social change.

This detachment from the social and the systematic was evidenced when participants discussed current patterns of gender inequality in the workplace, which had resulted from changes made by current policies of austerity. For example, an increase in precarious and casualised employment and an increased number of redundancies, were met with individual solutions and personal challenges. Individual traits, such as assertiveness, confidence, and ambition, were described as essential for women's progression, rather than other more collective forms of action. Polly emphasised the need for women to be 'strong,' not 'a pathetic, weak woman'. A 'strong' woman had certain attributes: she would speak up, and would ask for pay rises at work. For instance, Francesca, when discussing the pay gap between men and women said, 'there is a [pay] gap but how many [women] ask for a pay rise or promotion themselves? I'd ask! Sometimes I think it just comes down to being proactive and assertive'. Asking for more

and being proactive, as Evans notes (2016: 444) echoes the 'exhortations from highly paid female employees in the corporations of the United States who believe that individual woman have only to ask and they will be given'. Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook (2008 – present), in her book *Lean In* (2013), urges women to be more assertive in their work place. These examples demonstrate how 'doing' and 'asking' are understood as individualised, rather than collective, exercises.

As these quotations in this section illustrate, despite discussing the importance of feminism and gender equality, the interviews were laced with individualised discourses about the importance of agency, self-management and personal responsibility. In the case of such middle-class feminism, in line with the neo-liberal emphasis on self-improvement which obscures the grammar of exploitation with the use of a language of individual psychology (Walkerdine, 2003), solutions are proposed via the individual. Within the values and discourses circulating in the current context and wider neoliberal age – such as the challenges and effects brought about by welfare reform which are recoded as private matters to be managed individually - individualist, and individualising discourse shuns feminism's commitment to social solidarity, care and interdependence (see the work of Larner, 2000; Brown, 2005). The self is seen as the only solution to gender inequality in the current austerity context, burying classed, gendered, and racialised power differentials.

'Austerity–bourgeois feminism': Creating and Reinforcing Distance and Distinctions

Until this point, I have explored how these middle-class women identify with feminism. I have highlighted how 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' prizes individualisation and self-responsibility. Yet, as I signalled in an earlier section of this chapter, such a type of feminism should not be characterised as 'neoliberal feminism', since it fails to encompass the entirety of the current sensibility of feminist identification that these middle-class women are embracing. For the young middle-class women described in this chapter, their feminism also resulted in a form of indifference towards those women who

are suffering within the current context, labelled as failures of self-governance. This is achieved in part by creating distance between the 'good/proper' feminists and those 'in need' of said feminist values. This specifically classed and racialised 'austerity-bourgeois feminism', therefore produces a different, but complimentary feminist subject to its 'neoliberal feminist' foremother. One that reproduces austerity's moral project based on legitimating a disregard for others, who are seen as unable to manage.

As discussed in Chapter 7, when considering other women's experiences of austerity, young women did show empathy towards their situations. For example, out of the seventeen women, fourteen of them noted that they felt women (especially mothers) had been most affected by austerity measures. However, when discussing this in more detail, they resumed the feminist narrative of self-care and self-management. Mia, a 27-year-old, Anglo-Indian, middle-class GP from London, said, 'obviously, it's hard [for women] at the moment, it really is, but, I think when people are faced with a challenge they give up too easily'. Mia begins by acknowledging that 'it's hard at the moment, it really is'. However, her use of the word 'challenge' shows that she sees the difficulties as being a test of someone's ability, resilience or strength. If they are unable to succeed in such a 'challenge', they have 'given up too easily'. This framing makes it hard to consider the complexity of structural processes, in line with the discourse of austerity and how right wing/Conservative politics tend to operate more generally. Similarly, when discussing the disproportionate impact that austerity has on women, Francesca followed the same logic.

I definitely think that you know, women have a legitimate reason to be affected, fair do's, but personally for me, financial crisis or not, like if you're struggling or if inflation's gone up, pay's been lowered, you've been made redundant, you have to tailor your living accordingly ... I'm sure that's just a factor of life that you change your lifestyle in accordance to what you're earning and different factors that happen to you.

For Francesca, even though women were seen to have a legitimate reason to be affected by austerity due to her acknowledgment of redundancies, the rise in inflation and pay

cuts, the way women should deal with their situation was re-organised in individualised terms. She laboured the point that women should 'live accordingly' or in 'accordance to what you are earning,' placing the onus onto the women themselves. This discussion mirrors the narratives of financial management and thrift from Chapter 7. She believed that women were struggling not because of their lack of income, but because of their lack of good management of their finances. It is important to remember that 'living within your means' is how austerity has been framed in government discourse – at both a national and individual level. Therefore, like 'neoliberal feminism', responsibility was placed entirely with the individual. Gender (in)equality was acknowledged in terms of austerity's impact, but women who were affected were also seen as not behaving in the right way to make their situations better. 'Austerity–bourgeois feminism' becomes distinctive here – it creates distance between those who 'tailor their needs accordingly' through financial management, and those who don't. It therefore produces a feminist subject who not only disregards the experience of those women suffering, but also blames those women for their situation.

When discussing redundancies (a common occurrence within austerity Britain), some women described them in solely individual terms, instead of being a result of wider structural issues. Pippa, a content producer, noted that she had seen many redundancies in her firm during the early period of austerity (2009). Most of those who were made redundant were female middle managers. Pippa however, placed the blame onto the shoulders of individual women:

I can imagine women who were affected by the recession, who lost their jobs going into reflection mode, thinking, "what can I do?" To move them out of the hole they are in, they need to think outside the box, think about how to transfer skills. I use the term dwellers, I don't mean that unkindly, but individuals who cannot see past an obstacle, who just make do.

Pippa recognised that these women have been 'placed' in a 'hole' through no fault of their own, and understood that such changes were beyond their control. Nevertheless,

she felt that to 'move out of the hole that they were placed in,' these women should have become more responsible, resilient and entrepreneurial. They should have created individual solutions and relied on themselves. Resilience, as De Benedictis and Gill (2016) have noted, has become neoliberal trait par excellence for surviving austerity. As Mark Neocleous (2013) explains, 'good subjects will survive and thrive in any situation ... they just bounce back from whatever life throws, whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown' (in De Benedictis and Gill, 2016: no pagination). Pippa labelled those who were not able to successfully adapt and 'bounce back' as 'just making do', or 'dwelling', unable to construct and/or transform themselves into the good, flexible austere subject. Noticeably, her account shows a lack of appreciation of differences that might make some women unable to adopt these actions. Given the life experiences, trajectories, and resources available within the current context of austerity, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6, such changes are easier for some than for others.

'Austerity–bourgeois feminism' converges here with the political rhetoric surrounding austerity. The figures of speech regarding those who 'just make do' ('the dweller') is interesting – it mirrors that of the 'skiver' or 'shirker' (discussed above and in Chapters 1, 4 and 7). Theoretically, those who 'make do' are simply not able to adopt the necessary creative, resilient, entrepreneurial solution to their problem, because they lack morals, aspirations and values. Pippa continued, 'opportunities are there for everyone, it depends whether you are the kind of person and you have a ... glimmer of get up and go that will push you'. Pippa saw success (or the lack of it) as a product of self-responsibility, self-management, enterprise and risk-taking. Her understanding that 'opportunities are there for everyone' is narrowly defined and individualising and negates the broader inequalities that characterise the contemporary climate and shape the labour market (Allen et al., 2015). Not investing in aspiration, or in Pippa's words, those who do not have the 'glimmer of get up and go' are understood through the lens of individual pathologies and deficits - laziness, lack of motivation and poor choices - rather than the result of structural changes effected by austerity (Tyler, 2013a, 2013b).

As argued above, women who accept responsibility for their own well-being and self-care (appropriate 'productive' feminist values) possess the tools necessary to 'weather the storm' of austerity. By accepting full responsibility for their own well-being and self-care, 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' is thus mobilised to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair. 'Like 'neoliberal feminism', it helps to silence the language of inequality and unfairness within the context of austerity under an equalities umbrella. Gender, class and 'race' inequalities are thus 'buried alive' (Goldberg and Giroux, 2014; also, see Eng, 2010) in the neoliberal discourse. Therefore, the emotional sub-text of these interviews was - despite initially having empathy for their situation, if women could not re-model and upgrade their position – a lack of empathy. The particularity of 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' can therefore be seen here – situation's outside women's control become seen as a consequence of personal characteristics, rather than an outcome of structural inequalities and uneven wealth distribution.

Who Needs Feminism?

In line the discourses of the austerity project, 'austerity–bourgeois feminism' as discussed above, also works as a moral project based on legitimating disregard for others. This is achieved in part by creating distance between the 'good/proper' feminist and undesirable subject positions – the 'working-class woman' or the 'non-Western woman/'Muslim woman' 'in need' of said feminist values.

Class and Feminism: 'Working-class Women'

Working-class women were perceived to need feminism to help release them from the dependency of their traditional lifestyle. They needed to learn skills that would be necessary in order to become independent and, by association, successful. Anna, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class physiotherapist living in London, explained:

I think it might be helpful for them [working-class women], it might encourage them, the girls, to do more at school, work harder and have a goal, instead of thinking 'I don't need to do this as I am just going to bring up a family or whatever'.

Here Anna drew distance between the traditional and the modern – 'them', those who will just bring up a family and 'her', who already possessed and embodied all these feminist characteristics. The neoliberal self is often constructed in opposition to an allegedly powerless 'other' (see for example Scharff, 2012; Williams, 2014). Such a form of othering becomes explicit in 'austerity–bourgeois feminism', for example, when Anna explained why the working-classes needed feminism.

I see a lot of working-class men and women as uneducated, a lot don't know what feminism is, and I think if they are brought up into a life where they are going to claim benefits or they are going to have kids and stay at home and not work, they don't strive for anything different and I think that's why they don't, I just think they wouldn't have much of an understanding of feminism and kind of care about it because they will think that's what's my life's going to be like.

This extract exemplifies how the idea that working-class women need feminism due to their lack of education and opportunities and thus their ability to help themselves is weaved into narratives from middle-class women. This 'need of feminism' is connected to a discourse of the devalued lifestyle of the working-class. As Anna asserted, they 'claim benefits', 'have kids', 'don't work and stay at home'. Skeggs (1997, 2004) has argued that definitions of class often entwine ideas of a person's moral as well as economic value, linking the working-class with a non-modern, degenerate lifestyle. In this case, these middle-class narratives support this claim. The 'inferior', 'uneducated', 'traditional', 'dependent', working-class woman needs feminism to release her from the dependency of her 'traditional' lifestyle, and to enable her to overcome her struggle independently.

Middle-class women drew on the attributes of 'drive', 'education' and 'ambition' to define and defend their own position as knowing about and, thinking that they need feminism less than other women. As Anna said, 'maybe we don't need it as much; we

already have the drive and ambition to do what we want to do'. For Anna, drive and ambition are characteristics of feminism that she already had, which allowed her to be able to do 'what she wants to do'. This statement reasserts her class position, in which she distanced herself from the uneducated traditional women who needs feminism. As Stephanie Lawler (2005) argues, 'to distinguish oneself from the working-class is crucial to middle-class identity' (429). The idea of 'needing feminism' is a way of building such class boundaries amongst women. Moreover, as Skeggs (2004) argues, 'middle-classness' is about what is good, normal, appropriate and proper. Middle-classness in the context of austerity encompasses those 'hard-working' people' who as Evans (2015: 148) notes 'have properly understood the ideal relationship of the citizen to the state.' It describes the citizen who provides for themselves and works hard.

Feminism or gender equality is something that Anna thinks working-class women would not 'care about': 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' is thus understood and framed as middle-class. This framing resonates with the often-implicit framing of feminism more widely. As Rhian E Jones has noted, class is an endemic problem in contemporary feminism. She writes:

There remains a tendency for working-class women to appear in feminist discourse as objects to be seen rather than heard, expected to rely on middle-class activists to articulate demands in their behalf but considered too inarticulate or otherwise rough to be directly engaged with. (in Foster, 2016: 68)

However, empirical examples show that this understanding does not encompass the entirety of feminist identification, affiliation and activity in the current context. Working-class women do identify with the feminist label and are active in the fight for equality. As discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, the crisis has caused a political resurgence amongst different communities, in which working-class feminism is alive and well. For instance, Focus E15 was established in 2013 by a small group of single mothers in Newham, East London. This group campaigns for affordable and permanent social housing for everyone in the UK. Discussions with self-identifying working-class women

also points to the contradictory nature of the discussions of middle-class women. Some working-class women that I interviewed not only identified as feminists, but had also previously been active in community groups within their areas. For instance, Lucy, a 21-year-old, white, working-class woman receiving Income Support, had previously been involved in her local community group in Brighton and called herself a feminist. Her identification was not without contradictions (see Brenner and Ramas, 1984; Skeggs, 1997; Hunter and Seller, 1998; Denner, 2001; Aronson, 2003 for a more detailed analysis of the ambiguities in working-class women's dis/identification with feminism), but Lucy felt that the focus of feminism within the current context was unhelpful. She explained, 'some of the feminist stuff I see online now on social media, the self-help stuff and checking your privilege stuff, I'm not sure it's the most important thing, I'm more into ... more kind of slut shaming and stuff like that, abuse and things'.

Despite the empirical example from Lucy above, distinctions are drawn between different types of women – those who are feminist and those in 'need' of feminism. Distance is created between those who are morally worthy and those who are dismissed as failures of self-governance. The indifference of the 'good/productive' feminist towards such 'failures' is constitutive of this feminist position.

Culture and Feminism: Non-Western Women/ 'Other' Cultures

Previous research has documented how feminist disarticulation has been intertwined with the othering of Muslim women (Scharff, 2011, 2012). Scharff argued that when young women talked about feminism, the powerless and dominated (Muslim) woman represented not only a marginalised figure for them, but was also contrasted against their self-presentation as 'emancipated' and 'free'. Dissolving the cultural constraints in the West (via their un-gendered and individualised discourse) enabled women to push the need for feminism away from themselves onto 'other' parts of society and the rest of the world (2011, 2012). Scharff uses a neo-colonial framework to argue that young women are reinstating colonial modes of talking about, and knowing about,

the other (also see Mahmood, 2005). Like Scharff's findings, middle-class women in my study pointed to other cultures and parts of the world that they thought were in need of feminism. Yet, in contrast to Scharff, I argue that my middle-class participants used this comparison in order to cement their position as self-responsible, individualised feminists, rather than as a means of disarticulation. 'Culture', like 'class', was used as a means to dismiss these women as 'victims of culture', who need feminism.

Feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards have drawn upon histories of 'civilisation', which frame the progressive history of women and the family in the West at their centre and their idealised and domesticated role as characterising the modern commercial societies of the West (also see Chapter 4). Such progress was indicated through comparisons with the harems and polygamy of an undifferentiated Orient, and the burdened and labouring women of 'savage' populations. By the 1860s, British feminism was informed both by a consciousness of superior civilisation, and national identity, by a mission to civilise. Such a movement, though in opposition to the dominant politics, could, through its language and practices, embody relations of power and subordination. As Mary Carpenter wrote on her return from India, in 1868, addressing her fellow British women on their civilising mission:

Let them throw their hearts and souls into the work, and determine never to rest until they have raised their Eastern sisters to their own level; and then may the women of India at last attain a position honourable to themselves and to England, instead of, as is now so generally the case, filling one which can only be contemplated with feelings of shame and sorrow (Ware, 1992: 130).

Like the mission to 'civilise' from bourgeois feminists in the quote above, also drawing a distinction between themselves and their 'Eastern sisters', 'austerity-bourgeois feminist' stressed that feminism was needed to help women in other countries, rather than to help with any kind of collective struggle at 'home'. The 'Middle East' and 'Muslim women' were identified as areas and groups that needed to be 'raised to their ['austerity-bourgeois feminist'] own level' of equality that they were experiencing in the UK.

As Heidi Mirza (2012) has discussed, Muslim women are often seen as being in need of 'saving' by the enlightened 'west' (also see Abu-Lughod 2002; Zahedi 2011). This understanding, McRobbie (2009) argues, 'has become more sustained since the 9/11 attacks,' 'pre-empting the formation of critical solidarities amongst women from a range of backgrounds and displacing possible post-colonial criticism of the construction of the west as progressive' (in Scharff, 2012: 62). Mia, for example, told me that she was happy to live in the UK, having seen the treatment of 'Muslim women' abroad on the news. She said that she felt 'lucky to be born here,' and described the treatment of 'Muslim women' abroad as 'horrendous'. Mia can be seen to be drawing on the construction of the West as progressive and liberated and the Rest as oppressive and traditional (Khan, 2005; Butler, 2008; Pedwell, 2010; Scharff, 2012) when she makes the link between being 'happy and lucky' to be born and live in the UK against the 'horrendous' treatment of Muslim women in other parts of the world.

In order to reinforce their understanding of non-western women as oppressed subjects in need of feminism, cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage were discussed. It is important to note that such practices have been prevalent in media campaigns and recent government policy in recent years, especially during the time that interviews with participants were taking place⁵⁷. When talking about FGM, Mia said, 'it's horrible, I mean it's atrocious, these poor women having to go through that over there, it's just awful, we need to help them'. FGM was also brought up by Anna, 'FGM, genital cutting, it's part of the culture there but it's so damaging, the women don't know how bad it is, I mean can you imagine doing that here, I know it is practised, I'm sure it is ... it shouldn't be allowed'. Both Mia and Anna point to the

⁵⁷For example, in 2013 four funders announced a three-year £1.6million initiative to tackle FGM in the UK. In addition, to mark the International Day of the Girl (11 October 2014), £330,000 of funding was committed by the Government to help tackle FGM and forced marriage. The funding was used to extend several projects that provided expertise and support services to help eradicate the practice. This furthered the commitment made by the Prime Minister in July 2014 to galvanise international efforts to combat FGM and forced marriage. This was followed by many documentaries on the practice, one such example of this is the Chanel 4 documentary 'The Cruel Cut' presented by FGM campaigner Leyla Hussein.

inferiority of the non-Western cultures by describing their customs and practices as 'awful', 'damaging' and that they those 'shouldn't be allowed' – reinforcing the dichotomy between the west/Western culture and the rest/other cultures.

Despite, on occasion, the dichotomous relationship being complicated and questioned, such an understanding is further reproduced. Sarah, a 25-year-old, white, middle-class woman who was working as an occupational therapist in Leeds, had worked in Dubai during a university placement five years earlier. When discussing gender equality, Sarah drew on such an experience:

Some cultures have a traditional role; I think it is different across different cultures, for example, in the Middle East it's like this, but then ... I don't know, I guess it's about personally what someone wants. I spoke to the lady in Dubai that I was working with about some of the restrictions, like she couldn't walk to the cinema with us, she had to be escorted there with a member of her family, but that wasn't something that she didn't want, but there would be things that she would say "oh, I could never do that", but then seemed to feel a lot of comfort. And there were ways about her living that maybe I would judge and say, "my god that's awful", but to her it wasn't, so it's about kind of perceiving it for that person, but if you've not experienced, well if you haven't experienced freedoms or had the opportunities to do other things, then actually you'd be so terrified of being kind of unleashed, so you wouldn't want it.

Sarah begins her discussion by reinforcing the dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' by saying 'some cultures have a traditional role; I think it is different across different cultures'. However, realising this, Sarah problematises such a narrative by drawing on her experience with a colleague in Dubai. Although she mentions personal choice and circumstance, she manages to reproduce that which she has been trying to problematise and draw attention to. She assumes that her colleague is happy because she hasn't 'experienced freedoms or had opportunities to do other things' – in Sarah's view, her colleague knows no better. Fear of being 'unleashed' (a connotation of being imprisoned or held against her will) was assumed as a reason for her happiness and of her not 'wanting it' (to be free). This narrative, although unintentional, further reproduces the construction of the west and the rest – Muslim women need 'saving' by the

enlightened 'west' (see Abu-Lughod 2002; Zahedi 2011). This asymmetry between the representation of Western and non-Western women produces the image of what Chandra Mohanty calls 'the average third world woman':

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to take their own decisions. (1991:56)

Within these statements, the rationalised European woman therefore becomes seen as 'the standard against which to measure women from elsewhere' (Farris, 2012: 186; also see Farris, 2017). Drawing on the work of Edward Said (1985), these representations contribute to the Western orientalist construction of the racialised 'Others' barbaric customs and cultures. As Scharff has argued, 'statements that claim and thereby produce knowledge about the other are implicated in the reproduction of Western authority because they construct knowledge exclusively from a Western point of view' (2012:63). This therefore becomes problematic, since it produces the Western subject as the 'knower' and the non-Western woman as being 'oppressed'.

This theme of women's oppression in other parts of the world establishes, as Scharff has argued, 'a static model of homogenous entities'. She argues that this fails to allow 'for differences and hierarchies both within the west and those countries designed as other' (2012: 64). Hierarchies and differences of class and 'race' within these middle-class women's narratives are therefore ignored and/or disregarded. 'Culture', as shown through Sarah's narrative, thus becomes a structuring force; which homogeneously determines the behaviour of those who share it (see Brah, 1996). 'Culture', as Claire Alexander (1996) has argued, is conceptualised as fixed and essential, which fails to account for its constant creation and revision.

My interviewees extended this construction of cultural difference and depictions of 'Other' women as oppressed victims of patriarchy to 'other' women in the UK. They contrasted such women with their self-representation as responsible, individualised feminists. For example, when discussing gender equality in the current context, Anna drew a distinction between herself (being brought up in white British family) and a Muslim family. She said, 'I think all my doors have been opened for me as far as they can be. Maybe if I was brought up in a Muslim family I might not find myself in a similar situation'. She continued:

I think each culture is very ... different ... so I work a lot with the Bengali Muslim culture at work and they don't have feminism at all, they are the complete opposite, you know, women must cover up, cook, clean, look after the kids, a male must be present when they are with another male, like it's the completely opposite way ... and I think it's about getting that middle ground. I don't know, I think as a society we are split because we have so many different cultures and it's kind of more than a cultural thing maybe.

'Culture' was therefore used as the explanation for why Bengali Muslim women 'don't have feminism at all' and 'must cover up, cook, clean and look after the kids'. Stressing that 'it's the opposite way', Anna described these practices as being far removed from her understanding of how things should be, reinforcing the juxtaposition between cultures that are depicted as 'traditional' and 'progressive'. Mia, who identified as Anglo-Indian, also presented this distinction when talking about the differences between Indian and Muslim 'culture':

I also think ethnic minorities like Indians, although, well I don't know because generally Indians want their children to be successful, they want girls to have jobs but they do put pressure on them to have babies and get married, and I think the boys have more leeway in what they want to do. A lot of Muslim communities have a lot of inequality: the covering up and lack of freedom and education.

The level of education was used to distinguish between Indian culture and Muslim culture, employing the 'traditional/progressive' dichotomy. Indians were held up as being less 'traditional' as they 'want their children to be successful, they want girls to have jobs',

whereas Muslim culture was described as having a lot of inequality as they 'have a lack of freedom and education' as well as 'the covering up'. Education was also picked up on by Anna when describing Muslim women:

I think a lot of the Muslim women, not in a nasty way, but are so uneducated, they are probably happy with what they've got and that's because they don't know anything different and that's the way they have been brought up, that's what they think is normal, that's what all their friends do, that's what their family does. So actually, they are like a society within a society.

Within these narratives, the image of Western culture as flexible and educated is contrasted against the image of other cultures as deterministic and traditional (Fekete, 2006). When interviewees described changes in these cultures, they do so using a neoliberal rhetoric – Mia framed Indian success in neoliberal terms. To unpack these narratives, it is useful to use Wendy Brown's (2006) analysis of the contrasting views on culture in liberal democracies and 'other' supposedly repressive regimes. Brown notes that 'we *have* culture while they *are* a culture' (2006: 151 in Scharff, 2011: 131). Supporting this view, Scharff says that 'while liberal subjects are able to step in and out of culture, to 'have' culture, others are governed by culture' (2011: 131). Just as for the working-class woman discussed above, the traditional, uneducated, dependent Muslim woman also needs feminism to help to release her from the dependency of her traditional culture, and to overcome her struggle independently. The 'austerity–bourgeois feminist' contrasts herself with the 'other' woman and creates boundaries and distinctions. Inequality is explained through culture – the solution is therefore to 'step out of culture' (Scharff, 2011), and appropriate white, middle-class feminism. Instead of as Spivak (1994: 93) notes, 'white men saving brown women from brown men', brown women can now save themselves, using feminism.

Empirical examples show that this understanding does not encompass the entirety of feminist identification, affiliation and activity in the current context. Minority ethnic women do identify with the label and are active in the fight for equality. For example, organisations such as Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC) and Southall Black

Sisters (SBS) have been active both before and during the crisis and research has explored BAME women's feminist activism within the context of austerity (see Bassel and Emejulu, 2015, 2017). Self-identifying BAME women in my study held views that contradicted those of middle-class women. Uzma, a 27-year-old middle-class woman, originally from Pakistan, who was working as a recruitment consultant in London at the time of the interview described herself as a feminist, spoke at length about the representation of Muslim women and feminism. She said:

My sister's a feminist and she's a hijabi. She feels comfortable wearing it. I don't wear it, I wasn't forced to wear it, so some people might look at her and think she was forced to wear the hijab but it's a choice that she makes. She said now she's wearing a scarf, men respect her a lot more. I think it's women's fault as well. I was at work and I was having a similar conversation with my colleagues that I'm having now, about feminism and I said that I don't show my legs. This woman said that was inequality because women should be able to do what they want. Why does she think that's inequality when it's my choice of life? I said to my colleague, my sister wears the hijab and I don't, so if we were to go on norms I should be wearing it. She does loads of things, she skates. She's a hijabi and she skates, listens to music, goes out with friends, she does everything that I do and my colleague does, but with a scarf on.

Discussing feminism, her own experience and the experience of her sister, 'a hijabi', Uzma complicates the arguments made by both her work colleague and the women above. She unpacks the argument about equality, wearing a hijab, and being a feminist, by moving away from the essentialising argument that positions the headscarf and feminism in opposition. She notes that her sister 'does everything that I do and my colleague does, but with a scarf on'. As with the case of class above, 'culture' is used to draw distance and distinction between different types of women – those who are feminists and those in 'need' of feminism. Distance is made between those who are understood to be free and progressive feminists and those who, by contrast, are understood to be 'victims of culture'. Therefore, if those women are unequal, it is due to their 'backward' culture, and not structural inequalities borne of the austerity programme. This indifference from the 'good/productive' feminist towards such 'victims' is once again constitutive of this feminist position.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that a certain type of middle-class feminism has converged with austerity policies and discourses. This convergence has helped to legitimate austerity measures, which reproduce inequality. An analysis of middle-class young women's understandings of, affiliations with, and positioning within, feminism has illustrated how this convergence takes place via narratives of morality, culture, distance, distinction and blame. Like 'neoliberal feminism', the 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' that I have identified paradoxically acknowledges inequality – between men and woman, and among women, only to disavow it. Framing aspiration and success as within reach if women try hard enough 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' helps to displace the current social, cultural and economic forces producing inequality – especially in relation to gender, classed and 'racial' differences – by placing an individual's misfortunes into their own hands. Class and 'race' are denied and 'buried alive' (Goldberg and Giroux, 2014) under the language of individualism and responsibility. Despite showing empathy for women's experiences, this language de-contextualises and naturalises women's experiences by placing everything on the individual women's will and action alone.

Crucially, unlike 'neoliberal feminism', 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' blames and vilifies those who cannot 'manage' such changes. In line with the language of resilience, hard work and responsibility used by the current Conservative and the previous Coalition government, building from a previous history, 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' becomes an active force field to reinforce these political values and discourses, helping to mute the language of inequality and unfairness under an 'equalities umbrella'. Thus, 'austerity-bourgeois feminism', like 'bourgeois feminism', not only serves to create and reinforce distance and distinctions between those suffering within the current context, but also to blame them. It distinguishes between those deemed to be uneducated, traditional, and dependent, and those who are educated, modern and independent. It suggests that

those who are suffering should learn how to be (a particular kind of) feminist in order to cope. This precludes any kind of solidarity across gender, class or 'race'.

The convergence of 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' and austerity's moral project is crucial to understand how contemporary forms of inequality are produced and justified through 'good', 'bad' and as a result 'indifferent' (gendered) subject positions and sensibilities. However, it is also important to note its implications for wider issues of feminist identification. While it might be tempting to see 'austerity-bourgeois feminism' as undermining previous feminist goals of collective change, the task for feminism in this current context is to remember that the convergence of feminism that I have outlined here into a programme of austerity does not mean that feminism is 'dead' (Adkins, 2004). Instead, it is important to see how feminism has evolved into different forms whereby in the context of austerity, the configuration of 'austerity-bourgeois feminism', can be seen as another austerity discourse, since it reproduces and legitimises its principles. It is by understanding these processes of affiliations, within such a context, that we can raise questions to comprehend the limits as well as the emancipatory potential of feminism. The next chapter will draw on arguments made here and in previous empirical chapters (5, 6 and 7) to explore the relationship between women's material and symbolic experiences of austerity and their discussions of the future.

Chapter 9

Austerity Future(s)

I think the world is my oyster. I'm of the mind-set that I can do whatever I want if I set my mind to it. No I'm not worried at all [about the future].

(Celia, 27, white, middle-class, HR manager, London, December 2014)

I am worried [about the future] to a certain extent, but I think everybody is ... I'm anxious about where I am going to be in ten years time and how that's going to affect things in the long-term. Am I going to be able to buy a house? Or will I be renting forever? And also there's the general worries: will we be with the person that we want; will we have a family; will we feel secure in this scary world?

(Rose, 26, white, middle-class, university student, Brighton, May 2015)

Sometimes I just sit there thinking what does the future hold for me? What am I going to do with my life? ... I can't see it being a good one. It's bad now, I'm sure it's going to get a lot worse in years to come. Everybody wants a good future, but I just don't know if it's possible.

(Scarlett, 23, white, working-class, receiving Income Support, Leeds, August 2014)

Whilst previous chapters have focused on how austerity is made present through the lived experiences of young women, this final empirical chapter pays particular attention to how young women's future imaginaries are felt in the present. This chapter explores how austerity affects these imaginaries and asks which types of futures have young women begun to imagine in the context of austerity. Young women's future imaginings are multiple and, as this chapter shows, are affected particularly by class positioning. This chapter argues that inequality is produced and reinforced through

young women's different kinds of imagined and 'real' futures (Coleman, 2014a, 2014b).

Economic, political, technological and social changes, which began in the 1970s and intensified in the following decades, delivered new and different expectations for the future (Lewis and Hughes, 1998; Martins Jr, 2014). Many authors (Lasch, 1990; Sennett, 1998; Beck, 2000; Bauman, 2005; Ehrenreich, 2005) have explored how such changes have resulted in a situation where people no longer work with the possibility of long-term planning and without consideration for the directed construction of a future (Martins Jr, 2014: 143). This is reflected by the formation of a contemporary moral code that is linked to the increase of individualism, the laxity of social bonds, the creation of a culture of narcissism, the prospect of a society of uncertainty, extreme competition and the dismantlement of the guarantees of stability. This moment has therefore been marked by the idea that people are living in the 'permanent present' (Bauman, 2001).

The 2008 global financial crisis provides fertile ground to further examine the discussion of the 'permanent present' since scholars have emphasised the impact of austerity on the future. In this sense, concern has been directed to the futures that austerity has begun to install: in which there has been a focus on 'both the material constraints that fiscal tightening grants the future and the ways in which people living with austerity have begun to imagine their own and others' futures' (Bramall, 2016a: 1). Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler (2013) note, for instance, that there is an understanding that austerity 'will effectively mark the end of the [post-war] social contract' (no pagination), and as a result, also mark the end of the better future that the social contract delivered. In a similar vein, Lauren Berlant (2011) states that despite the limitations of the fantasy of the 'good life', the idea, made possible by the post-war social contract, no longer seems possible or sustainable. This fantasy, she argues, is 'fraying' (2011: 3), since the promise of upward mobility has been replaced with an on-going sense of crisis – a 'precarious present' (3). Therefore, as Berlant suggests, 'as the possibility of the good life at a social, cultural, economic and political level seems to become more distant, the fantasy as a collectively invested form of life has become *more* fantasmatic' (2011: 11 in Coleman, 2012: 2).

However, it is important to unpack, as Skeggs (2012b) has argued, the classed assumptions of the argument that the fantasies of the 'good life' are 'fraying' and the 'possibility of the good life is becoming more distant'. Skeggs highlights that, for working-class people, the fantasy has always been unstable (as demonstrated throughout Chapter 4). It is therefore, middle-class people, she notes, who are currently most affected by the destabilising of social mobility and aspiration (also see Coleman, 2012: 147).

Scholars have begun to focus on the austerity-induced unravelling of promises for the future, and the new expectations that have been offered and embraced in their place (Newman, 2015; Bramall, 2016a; Forkert, 2016; Pitcher, 2016). Yet, insecurities, risks and uncertainties of the 'permanent present' have not been equally felt (Bourdieu, 2000; Atkinson, 2013; Adkins, 2015) and therefore differentially affect how people (can) imagine their future (Coleman, 2012, 2016b; Roberts and Evans, 2013; Bradley and Ingram, 2013; Hitchen, 2016; Allen, 2016). As can be seen from the introductory quotes above from Celia, Rose and Scarlett, young women discuss their futures in different ways. This is since, my data shows, discussions of the future are dependent upon differences of class and 'race', which not only affect the diversity of women's lived experiences and the ways in which austerity manifests and materialises itself in their lives (discussed in Chapter 5, 6 and 7), but, also affects their ability to imagine and plan their futures.

Since theoretical discussions about the interaction of class and 'race' in shaping young women's experiences of austerity has already been made throughout this thesis, this chapter focuses upon interview quotes to illustrate how these social markers interact with discussions of the future. I present in this chapter a nuanced analysis of how young women's diverse capital – economic, cultural, social and symbolic – differently shape the ways in which they can imagine but also plan their future. To attend to the points raised above, this chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, focusing on empirical data, I demonstrate how class differently shapes how young women (can) imagine their

futures – focusing on the themes of retirement and pensions; employment and housing; the day-to-day and the figure of the child. In the second section, I discuss the ways in which these young women anticipate and pre-empt the future⁵⁸.

Austerity Shaping the Future

In this section, I use my empirical data to demonstrate the different ways in which young women are imagining and speaking about their futures. I argue that the level of material and symbolic constraint that austerity produces in young women's lives (previously discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8) shapes their future imaginings. It is therefore important to recognise that the different types, volumes and the overall trajectory of capital and resources these young women possess, which are tied to forms of domination and power, differently construct the topics around which their anxiety is framed (pensions, property, employment, welfare and debt). At the same time, their capital and resources also impact on the time frames that the future can be built around: the long-term future, the permanent present, or, as Lisa Adkins notes, 'a time in which presents, pasts and futures, and crucially their relations to each other, are open to a constant state of revision: they may be drawn and redrawn, assembled and disassembled, set and reset' (2017: 11-12).

⁵⁸Anticipation and pre-emption are two specific modes of orienting towards the future. Anticipation is where the future is anticipated and worked towards. Pre-emption is where the future is brought into the present to prevent or forestall an action happening (Coleman, 2016b). Both modes, identified and discussed in recent social, cultural and feminist theory, are important for understanding contemporary temporalities and power relations. Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy and Adele E. Clarke (2007: 247) argue that anticipation involves the present being directed towards a 'contingent' and 'ever-changing' future. While what may happen in the future is a potentiality, it 'must be acted on'. Therefore, events that may or may not happen in the future come to shape the present. Despite their connections, anticipatory and pre-emptive regimes can helpfully be understood in terms of whether temporality is conceived as linear, in which anticipation often operates through prevention. As Brian Massumi notes, prevention is underpinned by a linear temporality; it is rooted in the present and seeks to prevent an event happening in the future (2005: 8). In contrast, linear temporality is disturbed or disrupted through pre-emption. For Massumi (2005) the present is not concerned with preventing an event in the future, but rather the future is brought into the present by pre-emptive measures.

Retirement and Pensions

For some middle-class women, the future and the idea of the 'good life' were easily imagined. Celia, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class woman who worked full-time in an architecture firm as a HR manager, voiced optimism about her future with little consideration of possible hardships ahead. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, Celia possessed a high volume, and different types, of capital and resources, and noted that the austerity programme had barely affected her. Having recently moved onto the property ladder by buying a flat with her partner in North London (Zone 2), Celia felt even more stable in her career and her personal life. Summing up she said, 'I think the world is my oyster. I'm of the mindset that I can do whatever I want if I set my mind to it. No, I'm not worried at all at the future'. Kiran, a 28-year-old, Indian, middle-class woman, who worked and owned a property in London (Zone 4), also said she felt extremely optimistic about her long-term future. Elaborating, she said she felt secure in her job (in the construction industry) and had recently invested in a property in London, so had increased stability. She joked that her only future concern was a lack of available midwives in the NHS. Laughing, she said, 'yeah, hopefully there are still midwives happy to work when it's my turn [to have a baby]'. Likewise, Pippa, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class woman, who also owned a house in South London (Zone 2) and who worked in publishing, described the future in positive terms:

Senior management has told me that I'm one of the special ones. I'm being medium tracked up. My goal is to head up a business unit or something ... make the big bucks, just move up in the corporation ... yeah, I don't know, just use my brains and get somewhere, maybe write a book, my company benefits are amazing, my pension packet is incredible, so as long as they keep me, I will stay. I've had three approaches in the last year but I don't see the point in leaving. Babies, all that side, I'm fine.

Having been told she was one of 'the special ones' who was being tracked up the management ladder, Pippa discussed her future in terms of her long-term career goals. Describing the company benefits and pension packet as 'amazing', she hoped to remain

in her current job in the private sector. Following this, Pippa did discuss the potential problems she might face when reaching a certain stage of her career, and spoke about the possibility of redundancy when entering a mid-tier management level if the situation in her industry did not improve. However, she felt she would be able to overcome obstacles if these were thrown at her – she knew that having a property (economic capital), qualifications (cultural capital), a large social network (social capital), and many years of experience would stand her in good stead for any such changes. In the words of Bourdieu (1983: 317), the variety and volume of her capital made her a desired professional and therefore provided her with a great 'space of possibilities' to act within in the field.

Despite Pippa's discussion of her 'incredible pension packet', retirement was a bone of contention for other middle-class young women. Worry surrounding the future manifested itself around the issue of pensions and retirement. For instance, Tiffany, a 27-year-old white, middle-class marketing manager, who owned a house with her partner in an affluent area of Leeds, commented that despite feeling general calmness about her future, retirement was, as she put it, 'the only thing I am really worried about at the moment'. She went on to explain:

The idea of working until I'm seventy-five terrifies me and I'm willing to accept that there won't be a state pension by the time I retire. I can accept that right now. We will be expected as individuals to support ourselves and as much as they [the government] wouldn't admit that right now, that's exactly the way it's going ... Eventually there won't be such a thing as a retirement age. This really worries me.

Similar to other young middle-class women's discussions, with the assumption that there would be no 'such a thing as a retirement age' and 'no state pension by the time I retire', Tiffany discussed the expectation that individuals will have to support themselves without any help or incentives from the state - a prospect which was worrying for her. For Tiffany and other middle-class women who discussed pensions as the main worry for their future, despite eliciting apprehension, the future was described through a linear

model of time (decades that inevitably follow on from each other). In such discussions, they looked to their retirement, forty years in advance, as something that was necessary to plan for. Therefore, what can be seen here is a distinct classed relationship to time, built around a long-term future.

Employment and Housing

Despite Tiffany's anxiety surrounding the future being attached to her pension and retirement, for other women, this was in addition to more pressing concerns, such as employment issues. The increasing trend towards casualisation (discussed in Chapter 5 and 6) caused some young women to imagine their futures in increasingly negative terms. For instance, Ruth, a white, middle-class, 23-year-old, PhD student studying in Brighton, (discussed in Chapter 5), had less capital than the women above. Ruth was currently renting and in the process of completing her doctorate, living on a university stipend (£1,100 per month). She did not have a secure job, access to company benefits, or a pension packet, unlike the women in the previous section. When discussing her worries about the future, Ruth spoke of her career mobility and promotional prospects. She was apprehensive that she would not be able to progress past an early career post to eventually become a Professor, because of the changing nature of Higher Education. She said:

I'm not worried in terms of not being able to pay my rent. I will be OK in terms of everyday things and I will manage to get a job somewhere. But maybe in this field I won't be able to get past early career and work my way up the ladder. I'm afraid of getting stuck somewhere, or not being able to keep being in Academia and just having to do something else, which is the position most of the people who I did my Master's degree with have faced. They are doing admin work and everyone is miserable and waiting for the next thing to happen. I'm not worried in terms of not being able to pay my rent, I will manage to get a job but I won't be passionate about it. It will just be a job, not something I really want to do and am passionate about.

Despite Ruth's arguments about the precarious present, in which she describes her friends as 'miserable and waiting for the next thing to happen', Ruth has a sense of confidence about her situation. This is narrated through her discussion she will be able to maintain her standard of living and pay her rent – 'I will be OK with the everyday things'. Her concerns and worries are instead directed towards the future. In the first instance, this is manifested in the short-term future, she fears that she 'won't be able to get past early career and not be able to work my way up the ladder'. These fears then affect how she imagines her long-term future. She worries that she might have to work in 'a job' that she isn't passionate about. She compares her situation to that of her father, who is a Professor at a UK university, and notes how the inheritance of precarity in the labour market, and the insecure education-to-work transition, has had an effect on her future career prospects.

The casualisation of the labour market affected young women's imagined futures in a different way: in terms of their ability to get onto the property market. Especially those women who were working in the public sector (discussed in Chapter 5 and 6) since contracts were given on a short-term rather than a permanent basis, the ability to be eligible to buy a property was diminished. Rebecca, a 28-year-old white, middle-class woman, who was working in debt advice in Brighton, said:

I can't ever conceive to be able to own my own home really, particularly given the industry I'm in, it's all short-term contracts. I've just been offered a year's contract which is the holy grail of contracts, but a lot of people are existing on month-to-month, or three-month contracts and you can't make commitments with that. It's very difficult to plan for the future when you have no idea where you going to be in nine months.

This type of short-term contract is becoming the norm in certain industries where contracts are based on project funding. This situation affects employees – they are not able to plan for the future. As discussed in Chapter 5, Rebecca told me that her lack of a permanent contract would count against her, even if she had a deposit for a mortgage. She felt she was being made to live 'project by project' which impacted her ability make

long term decisions in other aspects of her life. Knowing this, she said, 'I'm certainly not going to be able to have one of those Saga-holiday-type retirements, where you swan off on holiday every six months'.

Similarly, Emma, a 25-year-old, white, middle-class woman who had recently been made redundant from her job in the charity sector in London, discussed her future in terms of her ability to get on the property market. She said, 'I do worry that I will be renting, well the immediate fear, the terror is I am going to be living with my parents until I'm forty (laughs) ... I don't think I'm going to be able to buy a house, I'm not going to be in the same position as my parents were at forty'. She compared herself to her parents, who, at her age, owned their own home. She described how her transition to adulthood had been affected by her current situation. The 'good life' was not materialising for her as it had done for her parents. This, she argued, had affected the sort of future she could envisage and her ability to plan for a long-term future had become more difficult. Unlike Tiffany in the section above, whose anxiety was built around her pension and retirement age, Rebecca, Ruth and Emma had less stability in their sectors, which made it harder for them to look forty years ahead.

Despite current constraints, some young middle-class women were able to look further ahead. Emma, for instance, after stating that it would be hard for her to get on the property ladder due to the sector she was in, said:

I had a similar conversation with my mum the other day and I was like, 'I'm never going to be able to buy a house, never. I just want to buy a house. I want to have that security'. But my mum calmed me down and said, 'it's ok, don't worry about it, you will'. She said, 'all of us in this family, we buy houses, all of your aunts and uncles, they all own their houses, we don't have the culture of renting'. So, she said 'don't worry, you will have a house, it will be ok, we have money to help you, don't worry'.

For Emma, her family's economic support (in the form of inheritance) and her cultural capital allow her to be able to look to the longer-term future, even without present job

security. Although her future imagining is being closed down by her experience in the present, she is still able to look towards her long-term future, since she has the 'cushions' (social and economic capital) to do so. In contrast, Rebecca said that she would not be in a position to get help from her family. Her parents had lost their business and home ten years ago, moved to social housing and now had 'less material security' than when she was a child. She knew that her parents wouldn't be able to 'help their children onto the property ladder'. She continued, 'if I was homeless and I needed to move home to live with my parents, of course I could. But help with getting a house, it's just not possible for them because they don't have financial security themselves'. Without the 'cushion' of financial family support, her likelihood of getting on the property market in the near future was reduced because of her short-term contracts. Her parents could offer some form of protection (if she were in material necessity), but could not help her to accumulate economic capital. For Rebecca, Ruth, and Emma, their experiences of the unstable present (job and economic insecurity) affect their expectations of what the future holds in terms of their career trajectory and home ownership. Even in similar sectors, with similar experiences, some women could better navigate expectations because of the trajectory of their social and economic capital.

Living in the Moment

For those who were yet to enter the labour market having recently finished Higher Education, the future was discussed in 'anxious' terms. Young women described themselves as having to 'just live in the moment' or not being able to think 'too far ahead'. For instance, Hannah, a white, working-class, 23-year-old woman living in London, had graduated from Cardiff University in the summer of 2014 and had been looking for a full-time job with no success. As discussed in previous Chapters (5 and 6), she was now working three zero-hour contract jobs and living back home with her parents. Trying to describe her future, she said, 'I don't know, I'm not one that looks to the future, I'm one that takes it as it comes, that's all I can do'. She continued, 'since finishing uni, it's the only thing that I can do because you never know, you never know

what's going to happen'. For Hannah, the anxious future she had described had shortened her ability to imagine it and made her 'live in the moment'. Likewise, Alice, a white, middle-class, 23-year-old woman from London, had graduated from university at the same time and was also unable to find permanent work. She said, 'it makes me anxious to think about the immediate future'. For these young women, the future was closed down and discussed in terms of a 'precarious present' (Berlant, 2011). However, Alice, unlike Hannah, was able to look towards the long-term future, as she had economic capital in the form of inheritance. She said:

I am able to be in a position where I'm not worried about if I will have a house or whatever, because I have inheritance, so I can think that I don't want to have a house or settle down now and not be worried about it, which actually is a really great thing to be able to say (laughs) ... I think, I guess I take it for granted that it's going to work out ... So I guess I don't think about it in the long term, but the short term, yeah that worries me.

Alice could comfortably imagine the long-term future, as she would use her inheritance to buy a house and have an increased level of security. However, she found it difficult to imagine her short-term future. Hannah, in comparison, found it difficult to imagine either. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, Hannah was partly responsible for the family's finances – her parent's jobs were low-paid, making it difficult to pay the rent and utilities each month. Due to her 'cushions', Alice spoke of the short-term with a level of anxiety – 'it makes me anxious to think about the immediate future' – but also with excitement, 'I suppose you just need to think of it as being a bit exciting not knowing what will happen'. In contrast, Hannah's concept of 'having to live in the moment' was 'all she could do'. On the surface, both women describe their 'anxiety' of the short-term future, in which they cannot 'look far ahead'. However, the 'unknown' is very different for those with less resources and types, volumes, and trajectory of capital. As a result, the present and future figure differently.

Therefore, as these discussions above suggest, and as argued by Bourdieu (1983, 1986), the greater amount of capital that these young women possess and their differing

distance from economic necessity provide these women with differing degrees of security to navigate the impacts of austerity. Their social, cultural and economic capital provides them with differing abilities to be able to take for granted what they have in the present, and use it as a base for projecting themselves further into the future. The precarious present is therefore ongoing for those with lower volumes of capital, whereas for others with higher volumes capital, such a precarious present becomes only a temporary state.

The Day-to-Day

For those women who were heavily reliant on the welfare system, owning a property was not seen as possible nor an expectation that the future was built around. For instance, Heather, a 26-year-old, black, working-class single mother from London, said:

Listen we aren't going to get our own house, there's no way, I'm going to have to die and come back again to do that (laughs), unless I win the lottery, but I don't play. Unless somebody leaves me a fortune, that isn't on my radar (laughs).

Similarly, Leoni, a 26-year-old black, working-class single mother living in London, and solely reliant on state support, described owning a property as 'a wish'. She said, 'I wish I could say that I had money to buy a house but it's never going to happen'. Instead imagining the future through properties, employment and pensions, these young women's futures were built upon the constant changes to welfare reform. Lucy a 21-year-old, white, working-class single mother living in Brighton, relying on Income Support, spoke of her constant worry about the impact of the changes on her life. She described this in terms of 'the brown envelope coming through the door' every few months, telling her that her claim had been reassessed. Elaine, a 27-year-old, white, middle-class woman from Brighton, who was registered as disabled, and reliant on receiving DLA, also spoke of the 'brown letter':

You always worry about that brown letter ... it keeps you in a very unsafe feeling, the perpetual feeling that everything is about to come crashing down around you because somebody, some faceless person can just take away your support systems, it's very stressful.

Elaine associated the 'brown letter' with 'the perpetual feeling that everything is about to come crashing down around you.' Elaine's future imagining was shaped around anticipating for these (supposed) changes affecting her support systems. Likewise, Louise, a 35-year-old, working class woman, also reliant on DLA, noted that the changes to the NHS and the reassessment of her claim made her feel 'stuck in limbo'. Joe Deville's article on consumer credit default and collections (2014, also see Deville, 2015) discussed the panic and state of alertness that debt collection letters generate – a parallel with these brown letters. Drawing on an extract from one of his interviewees who is struggling with debt repayments, he discusses how a diffuse, embodied sense of worry coalesces into a moment of attention, through the materiality of the 'letter'. The panic elicited by the letter, he argues, is not necessarily 'as a result of the precise contents of the particular letter in hand, but in anticipation [...] of a yet to be unveiled future' (16). For Elaine, Louise and Lucy, it is therefore not only the anticipation of the letter from the DWP, but also its arrival and materiality, that elicits 'anticipation of a yet to be unveiled future'.

Enmeshed within systems that perpetuate instability, these young women live their lives in the day-to-day, with no guarantees in their immediate futures. The 'stress' Elaine feels reinforces the idea of seeing the future as not something far away, in the long-term, but rather reduces it to a short period directly in front of her. Elaine went on to say: 'I need the NHS because of my health, and the changes affect me because my whole existence is around that, so yeah, my future is kind of dependent on these cuts'. This dependence therefore forecloses the privilege to imagine a long-term future. For Elaine, Louise and Lucy, the future was 'not able to be spoken about', or it had to be 'put off'. When I asked Lucy about her future, she replied, 'ask me in two years and see where I am, I can't think too far ahead'. Similarly, Louise said; 'I don't know about tomorrow or next week. Just a day at a time is enough for me'. Their attention is thus trapped in the present.

For Scarlett, a 23-year-old white, working-class single mother, the future was even less uncertain – she was solely reliant on welfare and heavily in debt. As Joe Deville and Gregory Seigworth note, in the current context 'debt has been seen as a generalised phenomenon, with the power to seep into "everywhere" and affect "everyone"' (2015:619). Continuing they argue that this 'occludes not just a plethora of quite distinct financial circumstances and cultural/national regulatory practices and proclivities, but also the innumerable ways in which different financial instruments are organised, encountered and come to resonate with daily life' (ibid). The normalisation of indebtedness has affected some social groups more than others, and has affected the ways in which they encounter credit or experience debt (Pitcher, 2015; Coleman, 2016b). One such group consists of women reliant on state support. Scarlett described how she had got into debt (as also explained in Chapter 5):

I went to a loan shark, and my first one was £100 ... then he [loan shark] come to me and said would you like a bigger one [loan] so I'm like you know what, yeah ... so he said right your next one is £250, you have to pay £450 back, so because I needed it, I took it. I didn't listen to the repayments so I ended up taking out another loan to pay him everything back. Now they both come knocking at my door asking for more money, sometimes they give me a few weeks, sometimes they don't.

Being in debt made Scarlett feel unsure of whether she was 'coming or going', as everything was constantly changing. She explained, 'I don't know whether I'm coming or going ... I can't keep up with them [debt collectors], I don't know what I'm paying or when, plans keep changing, it's a mess'. Scarlett's discussion demonstrates how she lives day-to-day, and that being in debt means that her future does not 'unfold from the present, but the present is remediated by futures which have not yet – and may never – arrive' (Adkins, 2017: 9). For example, being in debt makes Scarlett feel unsure whether she is 'coming or going' since her payment plans 'keep changing', 'sometimes they give me a week, sometimes they don't', resulting in increasing interest. She describes her experience of debt as a 'mess'. Both her present and future are 'being drawn and

redrawn, assembled and disassembled, set and reset' (Adkins, 2017: 11-12). Scarlett's 'present, past and future (and their relations to each other) are open to a constant state of revision' (Adkins, 2014, in Coleman, 2016b: 94). These discussions suggest that women with fewer amounts of capital and resources, who are closer to economic necessity, experience differing degrees of insecurity. Women who rely on support systems that perpetuate instability may not be able to project themselves in the long-term future – their present and immediate future is unstable, precarious or in a constant state of revision. Much of these young women's thinking was framed through the present, since their experiences of austerity 'trap' their attention on the present.

The Figure of the Child

Regardless of how women worried about the future for themselves, when mothers spoke about their children, they spoke about the long-term. Women without children also discussed how the future would be 'when they have kids'. They often felt that the future would be 'harder', using illustrating examples, the rise in university fees, the lack of graduate jobs and the rise in the cost of living. Heather, a 26-year-old, black, working-class single mother from London, directed much of her attention at the present, but thought about the long-term in the context of her children. She said:

Can you imagine when my kids go to get a bag of chips when they're older? A can of coke used to be 30p, now it's 99p ... chips will be a fiver. Remember when a Big Mac used to be a Big Mac? (Laughs). A Big Mac used to be big, now it's like a cheeseburger with an extra bit of bread (laughs). Can you imagine the size of a Big Mac when my kids get older?

She framed her discussion around everyday consumption practices, about the foods that she and her children consume. Heather describes the shrinking size of the Big Mac and the increasing cost of a bag of chips, indirectly suggesting a tougher future. Other women shared this view – they expected their children's future to be 'hard'. Ila, a 34-year-old, Bangladeshi, working-class woman from Leeds, anticipated financial hardship, 'for our children when they grow up, I think their life is going to be harder. We have all these

things that have got easier, like we don't have to wash nappies anymore and stuff like that, but their life is going to be harder financially'. Similarly, Trisha, a 35-year-old white, middle-class woman working and living in Brighton, called her son's trajectory and future a 'shame'. She explained, 'it's a shame, because I think his experience of his twenties will be different from others before him. It's getting a lot harder, even to move in with his mates and experience growing up in that way. What a brilliant thing to leave home and live with a bunch of mates and grow up'. Marie, a 28-year-old, black, working-class woman working part-time at a library café, described how she felt 'a bit scared' for her son's future. She said, 'I sit down and I think to myself what's it going to be like in ten years for him? How is he going to be living? I couldn't bear to bring up another child, I'm actually scared for their future, and it feels like it's getting worse and worse every year'.

For Heather, Marie, Ila and Trisha, despite their children's futures being discussed through different objects, they all described their futures in negative ways: through being 'worried', 'a bit scared' or 'it being a shame'. However, this uncertainty was tempered with better hopes and expectations. Ila, Heather and Leoni (lower volumes and types of capital), while 'worried' or 'a bit scared' about their children's future, also described their hopes for their children – often focused on education. Leoni, discussing her hopes for her son's future said, 'when my son leaves school, I hope he goes to college and university, that's what I hope. I'm going to try give him the best future I can'. In a similar vein, Marie said:

I hope my son will go university, but I hope I will be able to help him as well. I have no savings for him at the moment. I don't want him to end up a bit like me. I never had anyone to put money in the bank for me but I would like to do that for him. I would hope so; I hope he can be that little bit better than I was. I would love him to go to university and socialise and meet new different people. I hope the future will be better for him but with the whole spending on tuition fees and stuff ... yeah, I hope it will work out for him.

Marie's narrative contains the word 'hope' six times. She 'hopes' that her son will not only go to university, but that she will be able to help him, that he will 'be a little bit better

that she was', that he will have a 'better future' and that it will 'work out for him'. The future is therefore discussed through the 'hopes' that her son's future will entail. As Coleman states, drawing on the 'Family Matters' research project undertaken by Ipsos Mori (2013), for women significantly affected by austerity 'the future does not become irrelevant or wiped out [...] but rather the future was regarded more in hope than expectation' (2016b: 101). The use of 'hope' in Marie's narrative therefore demonstrates that the way in which the future can and is spoken about, is figured differently.

Trisha describes her son's future in a different way, not through hope, but rather, expectation:

I do think about that a lot [his future], I don't know that he will go to uni at this point. He might go a bit later, or not at all. When he was younger and uni fees came in, that did worry me. I didn't want him to not have that opportunity and obviously as I don't earn a lot of money, I'm still paying my own student loan and I'm on my own, it's more difficult. But it's again a shame because you kind of expect that your children will get a degree, get the same qualifications that I did, but it seems these expectations are changing a lot. If he wants to go, he will, but it's funny how you need to be prepared for things like this these days. It's not a given.

Unlike the women above, Trisha used the words 'expect' and 'expectation' when discussing the future of her son. Other middle-class women also reflected on the changing nature of these middle-class expectations and the effects this would have on their children or younger relatives. Trisha did not expect a great future for her son; but the words she used demonstrated a clear difference from the women above. Trisha's initial expectation that her son would 'get the same qualification as I did' is uncertain because of the increase in university fees. She felt that 'these expectations are changing a lot,' suggesting that the middle-class lifestyle and the option of the 'good life' is in flux and is 'not a given'. However, she says that 'if he wants to go, he will' (alluding to her possessing the differing amounts of capital that will allow for/ help such a decision), but she also comments that 'it is funny that you need to be prepared for things like this these days'. Her expectations for her son are changing in the current context – demonstrating

there are cracks in the idea of generational improvement and mobility.

The relationship between capital, hope and expectation is important when thinking about futures within the context of austerity. On the one hand, women with a high volume and different types of capital can still discuss their expectations for their children's futures, despite the inherent difficulties and closing down of certain possibilities. Women like Marie, Heather and Ila, who have less capital and who are closer to material necessity on the other hand, do not have the luxury of expectation – they can only hope. Thus, when young women are discussing their futures, their imaginings are shaped by the level of constraint of austerity on their lives. In this sense, anxieties, entitlements and expectations are being changed. Different types of capital and resources affect how young women frame anxiety about their futures (around pensions, property, employment, welfare, debt). They also affect the temporality of the future itself (the long-term future, the precarious present, the permanent present, or the past, present and future in a state of constant revision). Austerity therefore shapes the future for different women in different ways and thus, affects their ability to navigate their futures in such a context.

Adapting to the Imagined Future

As the above demonstrates, 'austerity is an apparatus that can be understood to work on the future' (Bramall, 2016a: 9). I have argued that it both shapes and organises the present and the future. In this section, drawing on the above discussion, I argue that the varied amount of capital also impacts the ways in which young women plan the future, and differently conditions present everyday practices. In this sense, borrowing from Bourdieu (2000), my data shows how 'the real ambition to control the future varies with the real power to control that future' (221). The ways in which young women imagine and (attempt to) plan their future depend upon the resources that they possess to do so.

Responding to the Imagined Future

Just as young women use strategies to try to navigate the present (see Chapter 6), they also use strategies to circumnavigate the future. As Coleman argues, drawing on the work of Adkins, 'in the context of a concern with the gendering of debt, the relations between past, present and future are in constant revision, which require women to be alert in and to the present' (2016b: 100). However, this 'alertness' differs depending on their imaginations of the future and the types and amounts of capital they possess.

Pippa, a 27-year-old, middle-class, white woman living in London, as discussed above, described her 'pension packet' as 'incredible', but she also discussed how she was 'driven by making her own pension'. She said:

I'm quite driven by making my own pension and not relying on, say, working in a company to rely on retiring and having an income of £12,000 a year. So I'm very much in the mind-set of I go out and I make it for myself, so I'm quite driven in that respect and I'm not going to sit and wait for someone to give it to me. That's how I feel about the end of my career and I honestly don't think I am the kind of person who, at retirement age I don't think I would stop doing things. I've got a passion for development property, turn properties over, renovate them, that would keep my brains cells ticking I think.

'Not relying on working in a company to rely on retiring', Pippa described herself as being in the mind-set of 'making it for herself'. This, she voiced, would be materialised through 'property development' in which she would 'turn properties over and renovate them'. Not explicitly stating that her 'passion for property development' would be necessary to undertake when reaching retirement age, using a neoliberal individualised outlook, she reasoned that she 'wouldn't sit and wait for someone to give it [pension] to me' and therefore wanted to remain 'active' and 'keep her brain cells ticking over'. However, she thought she might need an additional income for her retirement, because 'many things were changing'. This changing context can be seen to make Pippa more 'alert' to the fact that she might need that 'additional income' when she reaches her retirement age. Property development therefore becomes as strategy for not only 'keeping her brain

cells ticking over' but also providing an 'additional income' which she states will be 'needed'.

Nadia showed this 'alertness' to the present in a different way. A 32-year-old, middle-class, mixed other, high-school teacher from Leeds, Nadia, as discussed in Chapter 6, was worried about her future in education having witnessed cuts to support staff roles and had had her pay frozen for several years. Nadia became worried about the state of her pension when she came to retire. She said, 'I have to invest in me now for the future so I don't need to rely on pensions when I get to that stage'. She was anxious about not having a 'good enough pension', so was undertaking a master's degree in a different field. This was to enable her to make more money in the future and either become self-employed, or work for a company in the private sector. In a similar vein, Nina, a 28-year-old, white, middle-class teacher living in Brighton, navigated her future by moving to London, so that her pay would accelerate and she would be able to save for a property. She said, 'if I stay in Brighton, my pay accelerates at like £1000 a year, but for a job in London, we are talking £8000 more'. She continued, 'the rent in London and Brighton are pretty much the same, so to even think about home ownership in the future, I need to move'.

Women who were yet to enter the job market navigated their immediate future using short-term solutions of further study or travel. Alice, a 22-year-old, middle-class woman, discussed above, had graduated from university and lived at home with her parents while looking for full-time employment. In the current context, she was struggling to find suitable employment. She had decided to bypass the current context by either continuing in further Higher Education in the form of a master's degree, in the hope that 'by the time I finish things will be a bit better', or by going abroad to work as a nanny or to travel and learn a language. Travel and further study represent what David Cairns (2014) calls a 'respite from austerity'. There is an acknowledgment that things would 'get better' once acquiring additional capital.

As Coleman (2012) notes, pre-emption of the future is, in part, a gendered process, so that the future is felt by women who are responsible for others (especially children), and/or whose presents are difficult and who aspire to change. Therefore, for those mothers who described their futures in more precarious terms, some of these women invested in their children's futures, with the use of savings accounts and paying into life insurance policies in anticipation for their children's future. Although it is important to note that this is not something brought about by austerity, of those who discussed such tactics, they described how the current context made them feel the increased need to take such action. Leoni, a 26-year-old, black, working-class, single mother living in London said:

I've had life insurance for the last five years. I think I need it with all this stuff going on, so if anything does happen to me there will be something left for them. It's like £10 a month for the next forty years I get like £80,000 pay out for them. So, I'm lucky it's an old one because the new ones it isn't good now, I've been paying it for five years, I'm quite happy but it's so I know they have something because they will be left with nothing, do you know what I mean? I just hope they have the best.

For Leoni, taking out life insurance was necessary 'with all this stuff going on'. She used her small amount of economic capital to pay £10 per month into a life insurance bond to invest money for her children and their futures. Likewise, Lucy a 21-year-old, white, working-class single mother living in Brighton, had opened a savings account for her daughter. She said, 'I got Olive [her daughter] a savings account ... so if I have anything spare, like other people, I put it in there, but let's just hope it doesn't change again for now anyway because I won't be able to put anything away ... it's quite scary actually isn't it'. Leoni and Lucy are reliant on systems that perpetuate their instability, but still try to save for their children's long-term future. For these women to be able to think and prepare for a longer future, either their immediate future and the present had to either stay the same, or they needed 'cushions' to protect them from the changes. Although austerity made some young women 'alert' in the present through different strategies (savings, change of jobs, learning a language or returning to higher education), their

ability to plan and pre-empt the future was dependent upon the present and the 'cushions' (capital, specifically inheritance) that they possessed.

Living through the Precarious Permanent Present

While some women are animated by, alert to, or mobilised by their fears or worries for the future, others have futures eclipsed or overshadowed by problems in the present. Helga Nowotny (1994) calls this 'the extended present', in which, she argues: 'mapped out in linear terms', the future 'draws dangerously close to the present' (49-50):

[The future] is increasingly overshadowed by the problems which are opening up in the present. The future no longer offers that projection space into which all desires, hopes and fears could be projected without many inhibitions, because it seemed sufficiently remote to be able to absorb everything which had no place or was unwelcome in the present. The future has become more realistic, not least because the horizon of planning has been extended (50).

Yet, young women's narrative demonstrate that instead of thinking of the future as drawing 'dangerously close to the present', it is the need for women to plan in, or for the present, that actually discourages or even halts certain women's plans for the future. This was the case for middle-class women who had recently entered the job market, earned less than the average graduate salary⁵⁹ and lived independently. For instance, Madeline, a 25-year-old middle-class woman, who was working in the charity sector in Brighton, had just entered the job market after finishing her master's degree in 2014. She struggled monthly because her salary was less than the average graduate salary and she had to pay off her student loan⁶⁰, live independently and pay into her pension. She had decided to opt out of her pension to be able to afford to live in the present. She told me that, left with the choice of 'living in the present or saving for the future', she needed to 'live in the present'. Emma also described the choice between 'living in the present or saving for the

⁵⁹The average graduate starting salary is between £19,000 to £22,000 according to graduatejob.com

⁶⁰For graduates earning £17,495 per year or above, repayments of the student loan are 9 percent of £17,495 before tax per year.

future'. Explaining how one of her colleagues had decided to opt out of her pension, she said:

Pensions, I mean, I had a pension at my last job, I don't know what's in it, and I was talking to my colleague and she was like ... I think she cancelled it, she opted out of it, she's twenty-nine, she was like, the thing is, we are going to be working until we drop dead, like we aren't going to enjoy our pension, there is no point, I might as well have that money now so I can pay off my credit card, it's just something that's so far away and the retirement age keeps creeping up and unless you are loaded, which not many people are, you're just not going to be able to do it.

Emma felt that a pension was unnecessary, because retirement age was 'so far away' and 'keeps creeping up'. Similarly, Rebecca discussed how the implementation of a mandatory pension by the government, which would theoretically help those on precarious contracts, would affect her in the short term. She said:

At the moment, we don't get a pension but the government is bringing that thing in where they have to at least offer you a pension. And I was looking at it and thinking well how much is that going to take out of what I am getting already because already a big bit is going out from my student loan and tax and national insurance ... it is hard because you are living, just getting by on the money that you have and now there might be some more money coming out, which you need to think about but if you're not getting enough in the first place it doesn't seem worth it to think and prepare for your future if you can't afford things now.

Rebecca felt that paying into a pension at this stage of her career would hinder rather than help her. It would merely add to the 'big bit going out' for her student loan, tax and national insurance. Rebecca thought that, as 'there might be more money coming out' it 'doesn't seem worth it to think and prepare for your future if you can't afford things now'. These narratives show is that it is not only the future that is uncertain, but also the precarious present. This discourages, or even halts, certain plans for the future. Austerity closes down certain possibilities to invest or navigate the future – the present becomes equally as unstable and necessary to navigate *through*. This experience contrasts with that of other middle-class women who have more stability (in the form of properties),

more established careers and higher incomes.

This section demonstrates that the varied amount of capital that allows young women to imagine their future differently also affects how they plan for, anticipate or pre-empt the future, and therefore differently conditions their present everyday practices. Some can invest in the future, some have to invest in the present, and others are trapped in the present.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how class affects women's ability to access different kinds of imagined and real futures (Coleman, 2014a, 2014b) in the context of austerity. Class plays an important role in how futures are imagined, the time frames in which the future is spoken about, and the abilities of young women to adapt and plan for the future. In this sense, there is a classed relationship to time. Some have more space to be able to think about and plan their future, while, for others, the scope of future is often circumscribed to a short time scale. Typically, those with great amounts of and types of capital, generally imagine their futures through longer-term frameworks. They can look ahead and have the ability to plan for any issues that they might encounter. For those with a lower amount of, and fewer types of, capital, their experience of imagining the future is different. Their future imaginings are more related to everyday basic needs. The future imaginings are reduced or halted in the present. Adapting and planning for the future becomes increasingly hard, or even impossible. For those who have always lived with such precarity and insecurity constraining their futures, their futures are now further restricted in a context of austerity.

Yet, as shown above, this relationship to time is not straightforward. It is overly simplistic to say that only middle-class young women can imagine their futures, while working-class women only live in the permanent present. My data showed a much more complex situation. The possibility of thinking and investing in the future is different in terms of

class, but this has also differently affected women within class fractions. The way in which the middle-class think of, and plan for, their futures, is differently shaped by the ways in which they are able to play with their capital according to their circumstance and trajectory. The analysis shows that insecurity is penetrating the lives of women, in areas which, pre-crisis, might not have created such apprehension (such as employment and access to property). However, despite varying levels of anxiety, for some women, this is 'cushioned' by their access to different forms of capital. Their ability and expectation of living 'the good life' is therefore easier to imagine. For others, their expectations become harder without the access to these 'cushions'.

Chapter 10

In Conclusion: The State We Are Now In

Britain is weary after *seven years of hard slog* repairing the damage of the great recession ... but [the government] will remain committed to the fiscal rules set out at the Autumn Statement which will guide us, via interim targets in 2020, to a balanced budget by the middle of the next decade.

(Phillip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, June 2017, italics my emphasis)

What's happening now is shit, sorry, but it's too much, it really is too much. How can we keep going on like this? That's why everyone's voice needs to be heard. Everyone has a story to tell. We need to share our stories and hear other people's stories. What did you think when you heard my story? No one ever hears a story like mine, from my view.

(Scarlett, 23, white, working-class, on Income Support, Leeds, 2014)

As I write this conclusion, in September 2017, there has been approximately £90.8bn of cuts made to public spending since the implementation of austerity in 2010 (Cracknel and Keen, 2016). A further 3bn of cuts to public spending are in the pipeline, with a new autumn budget on its way. Phillip Hammond describes this period of austerity as 'seven years of hard slog', which will continue into 'the middle of the next decade'. This 'hard slog' has caused increased homelessness (Bloomer, 2017), food poverty (Garthwaite, 2016a; Oxfam, 2015), mental illness (Broomfield, 2017), and, in some cases, has even death (Daily Mirror Inquest, 2012). Alongside this, through the political justification for austerity policies, there has been the targeting, vilification, humiliation and scapegoating of certain groups ('national objects' (Tyler, 2015)), unfairly blamed for the crisis of financial capitalism. Women, this thesis has shown, are one

particular group that have both been affected by, and blamed for, the 'seven years of hard slog'.

Through a careful analysis, this thesis has attempted to understand the symbiotic relationship between austerity, as a gendered state project, and its gendered social effects. I have unpacked the multiple ways in which austerity is produced and legitimised by the state, and situated austerity within its historical context. This approach was crucial to understand the nuances of the gendered austerity project, and the way in which it (re)produces economic and symbolic violence. Supplementing this understanding with an empirical analysis with sixty-one young women from different class and 'racial' backgrounds, in Leeds, London, and Brighton during 2014 and 2015, I then explored how austerity was experienced and articulated in women's everyday lives. This empirical analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of the multifarious ways in which difference affects how young women navigate, negotiate, speak about, question, reproduce, and resist the austerity programme. By studying austerity as a gendered state project that has gendered social effects, I was able to provide an overall understanding of the particular configurations of gender, class and 'race' relations which are being produced in this current period of UK austerity.

In this concluding chapter, I gather the main themes and arguments of my research in relation to my original research questions, and outline the empirical findings of the study. I then point to some pathways for future research, before reaching an overall conclusion.

Understanding the Role of the State in Shaping Young Women's Experiences of Austerity

Chapter 2 described how I had to shape, restructure and adjust my research methodology because of the complexity of austerity, and the multiple ways in which it affects women's everyday lives. Despite the messy and untidy process, I argued that this

did not impinge on the research, and indeed became necessary to effectively research austerity and its impacts. Throughout this process, I remained mindful that knowledge-making through research is not only tied to earlier histories of 'telling the self', but also the creation of the categories and representations that I wanted to avoid and disarm. By listening to, interpreting and describing women's experiences with care and caution, I hope to have provided diverse, yet fragmented stories that highlight women's different experience of austerity, and which work against, and trouble the representations and discourses circulating within the socio-political arena.

Chapter 4 focussed on the historical legacies underpinning the present context of austerity. I argued that austerity, as a gendered state project, builds on histories which (re)produce and legitimate inequality and material and symbolic violence. This chapter gave a detailed analysis of the ways in which austerity is produced and legitimised by the state in the present. I demonstrated that state discourses justify changes to the welfare system and produce and reinforce gendered, classed and 'racial' relations/divisions within the population. It is partly these discourses that make austerity present in the lives of young women, and have implications for how austerity is differently lived and felt in everyday life. It was thus crucial to situate austerity within its historical context to understand the production and legitimisation of austerity in the present, and how and why difference comes to matter in women's experiences.

This understanding made it possible to empirically analyse the social effects of austerity on young women's lives. *Chapter 5* examined the effects of austerity on a material level through general living standards and employment. Alert in the knowledge that different social markers shape women's experience and intensify and extend existing social and economic inequalities, I used Bourdieu's (1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) metaphors of capital to examine how difference and processes of differentiation interact with, and further shape these experiences. The chapter revealed that austerity is materialised in young women's everyday lives in different ways, and to differing degrees. However, the degree to which these changes impact women's lives were experienced as minimal, significant or

extreme. This, I argued, depended on the volume, composition and trajectory of women's capitals and resources. Women with a higher volume of capital and resources for example, had relative distance from material necessity, since they possessed multiple forms of legitimate capital that enabled protection, security and distance from such effects. In some cases, young women could accrue capital because of their various amounts and types of economic, cultural and social capital. The trend to casualisation, changes to 'back to work' policies, and the rise in living costs had a greater effect on BAME and white working-class women – these women possessed less capital, or found it harder to legitimise or convert their capital. These women's experiences of the material effects of austerity were therefore more significant, which placed them closer to necessity and economic dispossession. With a lack of protection, security and legitimate capital and resources, for women who were solely reliant on state support and who had dependent children, their experiences of austerity were the most extreme.

Building on this argument, *Chapter 6* then revealed that such differences also affect how young women *respond to and navigate through* the effects of austerity. Unlike previous empirical research that has largely focused on how *specific groups* 'weather the storm', this chapter highlighted the commonalities in women's navigation strategies between different groups, but also where and how these approaches diverged. Women used a variety of strategies, including reskilling, gaining further qualifications, cutting back, discount shopping and receiving help from family, partners and outside agencies. However, there were complexities within these different practices. As explained within the chapter, the act of 'cutting back' or buying 'essentials' had a different meaning depending on women's experiences of austerity. For some, 'cutting back' meant making the effort to drive further to frequent a low-cost supermarket. For others, 'cutting back' meant discount shopping in the reduced aisle, buying in bulk or skipping meals.

There were also divergences in women's navigation strategies. Re-skilling and travelling abroad, for example, were strategies undertaken by those with a high volume and composition of capital and resources, typically cultural and social capital. Women who

used foodbanks, charity organisations and payday loans were usually largely or solely dependent on state support and had dependent children. These women had a lower volume and composition of capital and resources. I argued that the type of strategies that could be used depended on the volume, composition and trajectory of women's capitals and resources.

My thesis also unpacked the symbolic campaign of austerity, showing the contradictory ways in which young women talk to and against dominant austerity discourse. In *Chapter 7*, I highlighted that women's discussions were layered with contradictions, intricacies, and complexities. I argued that women not only legitimised and reproduced the austerity agenda, but also, at times, fractured and ruptured the discourse. In this sense, when dialoguing with austerity discourse, women often reproduced moral narratives aimed at creating divisions within the population. The 'undeserving rich' and 'undeserving poor' were held up as 'bad citizens'. Yet, when demonstrating their own moral worth, women were more likely to distance themselves from the 'undeserving poor'. For middle-class women, this was through the discussion of 'worklessness' and 'moral failing', which fostered consent for welfare reform by blaming the individual for their own poverty and insecurity. Women who were closer to the stigmatised position of the 'bad citizen' (working-class, sick or disabled, single mothers, and BAME women), dialogued with such representations. Their dialogue depended on the resources and capitals they had available to mobilise (economic productivity, morality, motherhood). These women distinguished themselves from others seen to be less deserving of the right to receive help from the state, reinforcing divisions within these groups. Women did, however, draw on values that countered the predominant moralistic narratives of economic productivity and aspiration, such as care and empathy. These values complicated the ideas of individualism and meritocracy.

Chapter 8 highlighted another key contribution of this thesis. Feminism appeared a productive site to further understand austerity's moral project and the formation of gendered, classed and 'race' relations. I highlighted how a certain type of middle-class

feminism, which I termed 'austerity–bourgeois feminism', converged with austerity policies, discourses and sensibilities. I argued that this convergence helped to legitimate austerity measures and further reproduce inequality. I analysed how seventeen middle-class women understood, affiliated with and positioned themselves within feminism, and used this to illustrate how their narratives of morality, culture, distance, distinction and blame converged. Connected in various way to 'neoliberal' and 'bourgeois feminism', 'austerity–bourgeois feminists' used the neoliberal language of individualism, independence, self-love, and self-care to characterise their identification. They emphasised the need for self-responsibility to deal with forms of inequality and labelled those who were suffering within the current crisis as failures of self-governance or victims of culture. Their labelling thus reinforced classed and racialised distinctions between themselves (the 'good citizen') and others (the 'bad citizen'), through a position of 'indifference'. This distancing, I argued, is crucial to the maintenance of the austerity project. Instead of helping to put an end to gender inequality, this form of feminism legitimises hierarchical relationships and gendered socio-economic inequalities. It therefore precludes any kind of solidarity across gender, class, or 'race'.

Chapter 9 revealed the ways in which austerity affects young women's access to different kinds of imagined and real futures (Coleman, 2014a, 2014b). This chapter highlighted how the majority of women imagined an increasingly insecure and precarious future. However, once again, class positioning affected how they imagined their future, the timescales that they thought about, and how they could actually adapt and plan for the future. The volume, composition, and trajectory of capital affected women's abilities to think about and plan for their future. Typically, those with larger amounts and types of capital imagined their futures through topics that were further away. They could afford to look ahead as they had the ability to try to plan for different future scenarios. This allowed their expectations for the future to remain intact. For those with a lower amount and different types of capital, their experience of imagining the future was different. It was more related to everyday basic needs. The future was therefore more likely to be reduced or halted in the present and, adapting and planning for the future became

increasing more difficult.

The above gave an overview of the important contributions that each specific chapter has made to this study. In what follows, I detail the overarching key themes that have emerged from the study, and highlight potential pathways for future research.

Living Historical Legacies with Vengeance

This thesis explored how the particular configurations of gender, 'race' and class relations are being produced in the specific context of UK austerity. Austerity reproduces difference and inequality – it does not exist in a vacuum, and neither do the configurations that it produces. Rather, they build on a previous history. This thesis traced this history through the mutual crafting and shaping of the categories of gender, 'race', and class in different times of crisis and state formations. These relations have been configured and reconfigured by the state to suit the needs of the particular moment. Categorisations and representations change and shift, doing different work at different times. However, certain central features remain. Particular inscriptions and labels circulate and repeat over time and space.

This thesis has shown that both black and white working-class women have been interchangeably used (seen as the solution), and/or blamed (labelled as the problem), in the interests of the state and capitalism. Used as the solution to social order, working-class women have been put to use by being moved into the home, educated to 'civilise', made to shoulder the impact of austerity and government reform, or take on the dual role of an 'active citizen worker' and 'good mother' by juggling paid employment and childcare, as state services are withdrawn. The same working-class figure has also been repeatedly blamed and shamed for the lack of social order and problems of the nation through a politics of difference. These women have come to be recognised through morality as carriers of immorality, degeneracy, and danger, as witches, as the 'undeserving poor', the 'anti-citizen', and as the black and/or (dirty) white welfare

mother. In all these configurations, they come to be known as figures which deplete, or are undeserving of, national resources (welfare), and which are in need of confinement, regulation, or moral reform. In different forms, at different times, and through particular configurations, the state has not only controlled and penalised women for the things that they have 'done', but also has used and mobilised them in the interests of capital.

These historical legacies survive, reproduce, and live with vengeance in the current context. These configurations have been invested in by people with power and access to the dominant symbolic 'to claim the moral high ground and legitimate their privilege in a world of blatant inequality' (Skeggs, 2014b: no pagination). In the absence and silencing of alternative knowledge in the context of austerity, it is these inscriptions and representations that are reused and violently played out by the state, as a way to blame and shame black and white working-class women for the crisis of capitalism, and legitimise their unequal punishment, through subsequent punitive policies of welfare reform. These representations are subsequently used to vilify and condemn those women, who, due to the material deprivation and moral stigmatisation exacerbated by austerity, find it impossible to 'successfully' navigate through the context in the preferred way of the government. It is this long history that makes these current configurations so powerful, and equally, so toxic.

Moral Condemnation through an Accident of Birth

Austerity has had the greatest effect on the lives of white and BAME working-class women. This is because conditions of existence have not been undermined, but 'exacerbated in the current context, reconfiguring the value of one's capital, the range of possibilities open and, ultimately, the degree to which economic necessity presses on the senses' (Atkinson, 2013: 14). The lower volume, composition, and trajectory of working-class women's capitals and resources (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1991) thus decreases their 'space of possibilities' (Bourdieu, 2014) and draws them closer to necessity. Austerity makes it harder for these women to navigate within the context and

to accumulate, convert, and legitimise their already meagre capitals. This is in spite of the multiple strategies employed, and the hard work and time taken to keep their heads above water.

Yet, the disavowal of the continuing structuring force of the configurations of gender, class, and 'race' makes it difficult for women to discuss how these differences and processes of inequality continue to be reproduced. The moral project of austerity both decontextualises and individualises the conditions of deepening poverty and inequality. Morality and lifestyle are also used to produce, legitimate, and sustain the austerity programme and the rollback of welfare through the enactment of the binaries of 'work'/'workless', 'striver'/'skiver', 'good citizen'/'bad citizen'. These binaries are 'polarising, designed to censure, accuse and condemn' (Jensen, 2013b: no pagination) specific groups for taking advantage of the hard work of the majority. The 'skiving welfare mother' is constructed as the antithesis of 'the hard-working family', and is represented as morally lacking. Their differing experiences of austerity is due to their different morals and values, instead of the inequality execrated by austerity. It is because of this accident of birth that working-class women are morally condemned and blamed for the crisis of capitalism and/or for not being able to weather the storm correctly. Thus, lifestyle and morality work as important markers in reproducing solidarity, and division through symbolic violence.

These discourses have therefore resulted in the reinforcement and production of social divisions, processes of discrimination, stigmatisation, prejudice, exclusion, and blame in the everyday. The blaming of particular people for the crisis, for instance, has a consequence – women draw classed and 'racialised' divisions, between, and within groups. This does not mean, as my thesis has shown, that women do not resist or contest these valuations. Yet, such moral condemnation strongly constrains their space of possibilities, in the ways in which they are able to live and construct their lives. Often this condemnation results in processes of differentiation, through blame and distancing towards others who are also morally condemned. Such processes reinforce the notion that inequality is the result of moral values, instead of unequal austerity policies.

Drawing Differences through Feminism

Despite gender inequality being further entrenched by the austerity programme, feminism, this thesis has argued, has become a key site through which austerity discourse is legitimised and a way through which these moral classed, gendered, and racialised differences have been further reproduced. Feminism, can therefore assist forms of 'social inequality that support and sustain gender inequality' (Evans, 2017: 76). 'Austerity–bourgeois feminism', does just that. Previous forms of feminism have converged with wider cultural, political, and economic frames and contexts – this one is no different. This feminist subject becomes an active force field to reinforce current political values and discourses, since resilience, hard work, and responsibility are framed as necessary feminist traits. Austerity–bourgeois feminism has connections to previous forms of feminism, but also has distinctive qualities. This feminist position helps to displace the current social, cultural and economic forces producing inequality – especially in relation to gender, classed and 'racial' differences – by placing an individual's misfortunes into their own hands.

Yet it is not just its focus on individualism and responsibility, but the production of the feminist through a moral hierarchy, which makes this form of feminism particularly dangerous. The 'proper/good feminist' and the 'woman in need of feminism' become the binaries through which classed and racialised differences are drawn. Narratives of morality and culture thereby reproduce and reinforce inequality – it is women's morals and culture (their lack of education, traditions, values), not their experiences of the austerity programme, which limit their ability to cope and be an individuated, responsible feminist. Adoption of this form of feminism is a way to obvert inequality. These feminists blame and vilify those who cannot 'manage' such changes, becoming indifferent their situation, which precludes any kind of solidarity across gender, class or 'race'. This form of feminism becomes a means through which inequality is exacerbated, not reduced.

Pathways for Future Research

My research developed a specific case study to understand the experiences of a particular group of women in the context of UK austerity. Yet it provides some important insights for the study of austerity more broadly, and illuminates several potential areas for research in a wider context. In the section below, I outline some of the ways in which the insights from my study could be taken further.

Whilst my research gave an understanding into the discursive production and legitimisation of austerity, as well as how it is lived in everyday life, the particularity of the research cannot be ignored. My data is specific to young women from particular cities, analysing the impact of the traditional classifications of class and 'race' on their experiences. As illustrated throughout this research, young women do not experience austerity in the same way – the uneven distribution of spending cuts means that it is lived and felt differently. During my fieldwork, I found that markers of documental status and disability intersected with traditional classifications – these may explain some of the variability. These social markers deserve further in-depth research and analysis, to further illuminate the multiple impacts of the vulnerable.

This research has focused upon austerity in Britain (specifically three cities), yet austerity has been used throughout Northern Europe and the United States following the 2008 financial crisis. Many young women in different countries will have had different experiences. Austerity may also be produced and legitimised in distinctive ways. Therefore, a cross-national study of austerity would expand the understanding of how austerity varies across different countries and impacts the lives of young women at both a symbolic and material level.

In Conclusion

The state we are in is therefore a punishing state. It unfairly targets the most vulnerable and disregards inherited positions that leave social positions firmly entrenched. The state we are in determines 'the value of life adjudicating on who is expendable and who is of worth' (Tyler, 2013a: 46). If you have no value for capital, the state makes it harder for you to live. It is not surprising then, that we hear so little about the amounts of corporate welfare⁶¹ payments that go to private companies. Yet, at the same time, we are exposed to multiple reports on the 'vast' amounts lavished on the 'skivers' or 'undeserving poor'. As Kevin Farnsworth (2015: no pagination) notes, 'unemployed citizens on benefits are told they have "no rights without responsibilities" and face financial and other penalties if they deviate from their contract with the state whereas corporations, in contrast, are provided with financial support without strings'. Corporate profit, in this present context, seems to be more valuable than that of human life.

Those of us who have access to the bigger picture and comprehend the workings of capitalism in its cunning forms (Skeggs, 2014b) need to question, challenge, and resist the delegitimisation of those who have no value for capital. This thesis has therefore attempted to do just that: delegitimise the 'legitimate', unpack how alternatives are silenced, reveal how unjust policies are produced and legitimised, and expose how women are used and/or blamed. I also hope to have laid bare the ways in which women are navigating through this punishing, punitive context, highlighting the divergence with which austerity affects and shapes women's lives.

⁶¹Corporate welfare is made up of the various benefits and services that are provided by governments in order to service the needs and/or interests of private businesses (Farnsworth, 2015).

Appendix A

Short biography of interviews in London (October 2014 – March 2015)

Name	Age	Class Background	'Race'/Ethnic background	Nationality	Occupation	Children
Molly	26	Middle-class	Black	Nigerian	Payroll Trainer	No
Anna	27	Middle-class	White	British	Physiotherapist	No
Mia	27	Middle-class	Anglo-Indian	British	General Practitioner (GP)	No
Erica	25	Middle-class	Black	British	Account Manager	No
Uzma	27	Middle-class	Pakistani	Pakistan	Recruitment Consultant	No
Cherry	35	Middle-class	Black	Sierra Leone	Part-time Shop Assistant	Single parent 4 children
Jane	31	Working-class	Black	British	On Income Support	Single parent 2 children
Pippa	27	Middle-class	White	British	Content Producer	No
Celia	27	Middle-class	White	British	HR Manager	No
Kiran	28	Middle-class	Indian	British	Head of Training Operations	No
Emma	25	Middle-class	White	British	Unemployed – No State Support	No
Alice	23	Middle-class	White	British	Unemployed – No State Support	No
Marie	28	Working-class	Black	British	Part-time Waitress/ Receives State Benefit	Single parent 1 child
Heather	26	Working-class	Black	British	On Income Support	Single parent 4 children

Dominique	32	Working-class	Black	Benin	Cleaner	Single parent 2 children
Hannah	23	Working-class	White	British	Stewardess	No
Fiona	23	Working-class	White	British	Part-time Nursery Nurse (currently on Maternity Leave)/ State Benefit	Single parent with child
Julie	34	Middle-class	White	British	Events Assistant	No
Leoni	26	Working-class	Black	British	On Income Support	Yes

Short biography of interviews in Leeds (June – October 2014)

Name	Age	Class background	'Race'/Ethnic Background	Nationality	Occupation	Children
Polly	27	Middle-class	White	British	Occupational Therapist	No
Tiffany	27	Middle-class	White	British	Marketing Manager	No
Kate	30	Middle-class	White	British	Teacher (High School)	No
Nadia	32	Middle-class	Mixed other	British	Part-time teacher (High school) / part-time MA Student	No
Ivy	20	Middle-class	White	British	BA Student	No
Sophie	25	Middle-class	White	British	Marketing Officer for the NHS	No
Sarah	25	Middle-class	White	British	Occupational Therapist	No
Amira	25	Working-class	Black-African	Ethiopia	Factory Worker	No
Adele	23	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother with 1 child
Faye	23	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother with 2 children
Lauren	33	Working-class	White	British	On JSA	Single mother with 1 child
Louise	35	Working-class	White	British	On DLA	No
Natalie	18	Working-class	Black	British	BA Student	No
Francesca	28	Middle-class	Indian	British	Accountant	No

Short biography of interviews in Brighton (January – May 2015)

Name	Age	Class Background	'Race'/Ethnic background	Nationality	Occupation	Children
Nicola	34	Middle-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother with 1 child
Lucy	21	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother with 1 child
Elaine	27	Middle-class	White	British	Part-time Welfare Support Officer at a High School / DLA	No
Madeline	24	Middle-class	White	British	Complaints Mediation Officer in Charity Sector	No
Nina	27	Middle-class	White	British	Teacher (Primary School)	No
Ruth	25	Middle-class	White	British	PhD at University of Sussex (fully-funded)	No
Rebecca	28	Middle-class	White	British	Debt and Benefit Advisor	No
Priya	35	Middle-class	Pakistani	British	On DLA	1 child
Trisha	34	Middle-class	White	British	Part-time Advocacy Support Worker /Part-time Dog Walker	Single mother 1 child
Marta	35	Working-class	White	Romanian	Volunteer	1 child with husband
Carla	24	Middle-class	White	British	Teacher (High School)	No

Susan	30	Middle-class	White	British	Account Manager	No
Jill	33	Middle-class	White	British	Doctor	No
Rose	26	Middle-class	White	British	BA Student	No
Daniella	22	Working-class	White	British	BA Student	No

Short biography of focus group 1 participants in Leeds (August 2014)

Name	Age (all aged above 18)	Class background	'Race'/Ethnic background	Nationality	Occupation	Children
Sonia	35	Working-class	Bangladeshi	British	Volunteer	2 children with husband
Jaya	24	Working-class	Bangladeshi	British	On JSA/ Volunteer	No
Zareen	34	Working-class	Bangladeshi	British	On JSA/ Volunteer	No
Ava	28	Working-class	Bangladeshi	British	On Income Support/ Volunteer	Didn't say
Layla	35	Middle-class	Bangladeshi	British	Project Coordinator at a Charity	2 children with husband
Ila	35	Working-class	Bangladeshi	British	On JSA/ Volunteer	Single parent 2 children

Short biography of focus group 2 participants in Leeds (September 2014)

Name	Age	Class background	'Race'/Ethnic background	Nationality	Occupation	Children
Rita	35	Working-class	White	British	Receives State Benefits	2 independent children
Scarlett	23	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother 2 children
Lydia	Early 20's	Working-class	White	British	On JSA	No
Charlotte	20's	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	Single mother 1 child
Shannon	20's	Working-class	White	British	On Income Support	1
Morgan	21	Working-class	White	British	On JSA	1 child

Appendix B

Consent form

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this project about young women's lived experiences of austerity. The study is conducted in the context of my PhD research and is supported by Goldsmiths College, University of London. The project aims to explore young women's views about austerity measures and welfare reform in both Leeds, London and Brighton and how this in turn affects their understanding of justice, equality and fairness.

The interview you are about to take part in is concerned to explore a variety of aspects of your experience, organised around the following themes:

1. Background
2. Current situation
3. Future aspirations
4. Views on the impact of the cuts
5. Personal lived experience of the cuts
6. Ideas surrounding injustice/inequality and unfairness

Participation: The participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time during the course of the research. There will be no adverse consequences if you decide not to participate. If you have any queries or problems after the interview, you can contact me via email (vdabrowski@live.co.uk).

Confidentiality: Everything you say in the interview will be treated with strictest confidence. I will be the only person who has direct access to the transcript of the interview and all research materials will be stored in a secure environment. My academic supervisors are the only people I would allow to look at the interview transcript. In any written reports arising from the research, steps will be taken to protect your anonymity, including using pseudonyms, and altering information that might potentially identify you to others (except where you make it explicit that you have no objection to this being known).

Thank you again for your time and valuable input to the research.

Please sign below to give your consent to being interviewed for this study.

Name:

Signature:

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