Family Relations in Times of Austerity: Reflections from the UK

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Abstract

This chapter examines the ways in which family relationships and everyday practices may be open to change and contestation in times of austerity. While an extant body of literature explores changing familial relations as a result of social and cultural transformations, there remain pertinent questions concerning how such intimate relationships are impacted by economic upheaval. This issue is particularly timely, given the widespread impacts of austerity policies in the UK and across Europe currently. Drawing on insights from literature and supported by family ethnographies in the UK, this chapter sheds light on this very topic. Using the examples of austeritizing welfare and austere consumption, it brings to the fore the inseparability of familial and financial relations, everyday life, and economic change. The conclusion calls for further research into the social geographies of austerity, to extend beyond families and households to include friendships, intimacies, and acquaintanceships.

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1 Introduction

> Kinship, procreation, cohabitation, family, sexual relations, love – indeed all forms of close affective encounter – are as much matters of state as they are matters of the heart. (Oswin and Olund 2010, p. 62)

Families are at the center of austerity politics, entwined together as matters of both the state and the heart. Since 2010 the UK government's main fiscal policy has been austerity – the conditions that result from significant cuts to public expenditure – with few measures to stimulate the economy (Hall 2016b; Oxfam 2013). Austerity is not, of course, only limited to the UK, for austerity politics are practiced in diverse places internationally, in the Minority and Majority worlds, and as a result of varying types of social, economic, and political crises. Such economic changes are felt at a range of spatial scales, from very personal to cross-national affects, although as yet little is known of how austere policies play out in everyday family life (Hall 2016a).

This chapter explores current understandings and literatures about how everyday family relationships and practices might be subject to change in times of austerity and economic upheaval. It advances these discussions by taking a geographical focus on family that accounts for everyday relationalities, spatialities, and temporalities. Rather than discussing family life in austerity in the abstract, the analysis is anchored in a discussion of recent austerity policies proposed and implemented by the UK government. Approaching austerity with a focus on everyday family life, it is argued, enables the study of these significant events and moments by cutting through and across time, space, and relationships.

Recent writings on family geographies have also argued for a more nuanced and in-depth investigation into everyday family relationships and the need to open up the "black box" of intimate family geographies (Hall 2011; Jackson 2009; Morgan 1996). More specifically, it is suggested that "geographers might better understand such complex dynamics by using family ethnographies to explore the active nature of relating within, and beyond, the affective space of the home" (Valentine et al. 2012, p. 791). With this in mind, this chapter draws upon insights from four years of family ethnographies in the North West of England, first in 2007–2009 and later in 2013–2015. Both research projects were focused on everyday family relationships and practices (consumption and living in austerity, respectively), both involved six families from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and applied a similar methodological approach: participant observation supported by taped discussions, photographs, and participatory tasks (for further details, see Hall 2016a, b). Rather than shaping the focus of this chapter, these data are instead used for illustrative purposes, adding color and texture to the discussions within.

The remainder of this chapter takes the following structure. First it charts debates about "the family" in geography and the wider social sciences, including changes to traditional family formations and relationships and the resurgence in talking about family in an academic context. Literatures that speak specifically to the matter of family life in austerity are then unpacked, identifying the need for a more focused approach on understanding everyday family relations in the context of such economic change. From here, the potential and actual impacts of austerity policies on family practices and relationships are explored, using examples of government policies introduced in the UK since 2010. The conclusion notes the value of family geographies in raising important questions about social relationships in times of austerity, and suggests that such discussions would benefit from an expansion of the parameters of enquiry to include other significant social relations.

2 Family Relations and Changing Family Geographies

Valentine (2008, p. 2100) describes how "the family leaked into geography through early feminist research," which argued for greater recognition of the gendered divisions of labor. From the 1980s, feminist activists and scholars have been destabilizing the concept of "the family," with much of this early work having developed from second-wave feminism's critique of the social inequalities borne from patriarchal and capitalist processes. Ideas about the family were being dismantled with changes in paid work and marriage (Bowlby 2011), and feminist geographers were redefining many unquestioned theoretical and methodological traditions within the discipline.

More recent queer and postcolonial critiques, as well as debates around individualization (e.g., Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Weeks et al. 2001), have also called for greater recognition and appreciation of difference and diversity within and between family forms and relations. It is posited that heteronormative ideologies about what families are and should be often overlook (at best) or discriminate against and curtail (at worst) other intimacies and forms of personal life beyond traditional kinship systems (see Smart 2007). As a result of these discussions, there was a general consensus within the social sciences about the decline of "the family," or rather the *nuclear* family, mirrored by a shift away from talking about families in an academic context (Edwards and Gillies 2012).

Although geographers have made significant contributions to family-related topics, Harker and Martin (2012, p. 769) describe family as only "haunting now well-established geographical conceptualisations of gender, sexuality, home, private space, social reproduction, livelihoods, and childhood." Family, it is argued, remains a somewhat "peculiar absent presence in the discipline of geography" (Valentine 2008, p. 2101). However this distancing of geographical writings and research from family is not necessarily reflected in, or is a reflection of, everyday life. Indeed, despite its decline, the image of the nuclear family continues to hold a strong ideological resonance in governance and policy-making (Edwards and Gillies 2012; Jackson 2009), being heavily entrenched in how many governments communicate ideas of citizenship and responsibility and in how welfare and social benefits are distributed (Harker and Martin 2012; Harrison 2013).

Moreover, while family formations, relationships, and living situations might be changing, including that more people are practicing kinships across greater distances (see Holdsworth 2013; Parrenas 2005), this is not to say that family is an antiquated concept or practice. Many nonheterosexual couples also use the term "family" to "emphasise the strength of their kin-like social networks and commitments to their partners" (Jackson 2009, p. 3), as do non-related friends (Bowlby 2011). These significant inter- and intragenerational relations are often referred to as "families of choice" (Weeks et al. 2001; Valentine 2008). Likewise, traditional family relationships remain important in a range of cultural and social contexts. For example, drawing on research in West Africa on young people's responses to parental death, Evans describes (2014, p. 547) how "kinship is lived, remade and displayed through gendered 'family practices'." Finch (2007, p. 66), building upon Morgan's (1996) thesis of "doing family," has proposed "family display" as both an activity and a concept, arguing that "families need to be 'displayed' as well as 'done'" (see also Dermott and Seymour 2011). As Jackson (2009, p. 3) confirms, "the image of the nuclear family remains a powerful, normative social ideal, underpinned by strong institutional forces and capable of exerting considerable moral force."

Within these conceptualizations of family, one important and defining feature is that family is rarely approached as only material or practical; the imaginary elements of family are, it is argued, just as important as the realized (Morgan 1996; Smart 2007). As Gillis (1996, p. xv) explains in this oft-cited passage:

> We not only live with families but depend on them to do the symbolic work that was once assigned to religious and communal institutions: representing ourselves to ourselves as we would like to think we are. To put it another way, we all have two families, one that we live with and another we live by. We would like the two to be the same, but they are not.

Ideologies and normative understandings of family are constructed over time and space and therefore vary across these scales (see also Davies and Christensen, this volume). Family relationships themselves also transcend the spatialities and temporalities of home, household, parenthood, and the present moment, to encompass multiple generations and relations, spaces and distances, memories, and imaginaries (Hall 2016a; Vanderbeck 2007).

While there might have been changes in some cultures and societies with regard to social attitudes, formations, compositions, and cohabitation practices of families, many elements of family remain. One of the most pervasive familial norms is around parental responsibility. As Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2000, p. 800) concur, "the moral imperative around taking responsibility for putting children's needs first may be one of the few remaining unquestionable moral assertions." Parents are tasked with a moral duty for the present and future lives of their children, to ensure they become "good citizens" – but are blamed if they do not (Jensen and Tyler 2012).

Furthermore, a rich literature reveals that despite changes in the role of women in society, particular within waged labor, these responsibilities remain largely gendered. Duncan et al. (2003, p. 310) explain that “when it comes to dependent children, there can be nonnegotiable, and deeply gendered, moral requirements to take responsibility for children’s needs and to place these first,” what they refer to as gendered moral rationalities (see also Evans 2014; McDowell et al. 2005). Based on observations from research with lone mothers, they argue that these responsibilities:

> were gendered because they fundamentally dealt with notions of mothering, they were moral in providing answers about the right thing to do, and they were rationalities in providing a framework for taking decisions about participation in the labour market. (Duncan et al. 2003, p. 313)

While literatures around reimagining family have urged for a recognition of familial difference and diversity, including the role of fathers and fathering practices, these transitions have not been embedded evenly or consistently across space and time. As Aitken (2000, p. 596) explains, reflecting upon research with heterosexual parents in San Diego, USA, “as often as not and even when they are primary caregivers, men position themselves as ‘helpers’.”

Research interests within human geography have also evolved to explore the complex decisions women face about combining paid work and caring responsibilities (Bowlby 2011; Murcott 1983) and the ways in which employment decisions impact on family relationships (Aitken 2000; McDowell et al. 2005). In recent years, these shifts in the private sphere have become increasingly coupled with changes in the public sphere, with cuts to welfare and subsidized care, signifying a broader rolling back of state-provided care (England 2010). Such changes, Popke (2006, p. 506) explains, “have placed the burden of care increasingly onto individuals and families,” particularly inter- and intragenerational care for young, disabled, and elderly kin.

It is economic changes such as these that are of interest in this chapter. For while increasing burdens on female family members in times of austerity have long been noted (Hall 2016a; Harrison 2013), much less discussion has been afforded to how family relationships might be altered or confirmed as a result of such economic change, particularly when, as in the case of austerity in the UK presently, public spending cuts are a moving target. This chapter now turns to discuss literature pertaining to this very topic, on families, relationships, and austerity.

3 Families, Relationships, and Austerity

Within the social sciences an exciting body of literature is emerging that explores how familial relations in times of austerity can be understood and conceptualized. This work comes from and draws upon debates within sociology, social policy, human geography, cultural studies, women’s studies, and further. The accumulation of these discussions can be seen with the publication of numerous special issues, including “Lived Experience Through Economic Downturn in Britain” (Edwards and Irwin 2010) and “Austerity Parenting” (Jensen and Tyler 2012), as well as in a steady stream of journal articles and conference talks.

Within much of this literature it is recognized that families, as a complex, connected group of individuals, are “a key site of change” (Thomson et al. 2010, p. 150), in which everyday economic and social change may play out. Thomson et al. (2010, p. 152) describe how, during times of economic recession, families engage in a “negotiation” of present and past encounters of financial hardship, establishing a dialogue between current and previous generational experiences in order to face the future. From their longitudinal research with first-time mothers, they also found that those from less privileged backgrounds tend to develop “well-honed survival skills necessary for hard times” (p. 152). Indeed, as Smart (2007) argues, the imaginary has an important role to play in how family relationships are understood, envisaged, and replicated, and memories of family practices can likewise shape how we think about family, in past, present, and future tense.

Similarly, Maclean et al. (2010, p. 11), in a study of financial trajectories during the credit crunch, found that family members engaged in “safeguarding” against the future and that having learned from past experience they were more able to weather the recent recession. There is again a temporal element to note here. As Goode (2009, p. 222) also argues in her reflections on qualitative research with financially indebted couples, past family experiences of recession and austerity must be viewed “in the context of time,” of “past and concurrent events, as well as consequences and goals projected into the future” (see also Jensen and Tyler 2012).

Furthermore, Harrison’s (2013) study of economic decline in New Haven, a coastal town in the UK, illustrates how the context of time is important, not only for what it reveals of the moments in which families encounter and are faced with economic change, but because these experiences are also played out *over time*. Interviews with families, residents, and community workers emphasized this point:

> the recent recession was not experienced as a ‘shock’, but was rather ‘more of the same’. Obviously, sudden and unexpected loss of employment was a shock for some, and felt particularly acutely by those who had been in reasonably well-paid jobs. But more commonly, we talked with people who had experienced a gradual attrition and erosion of relative well-being over several years. This was often coupled with low expectations and a sense of continuity over time. (Harrison 2013, p. 105)

Harrison (2013, p. 102) explains that New Haven is a town that is known for its “intergenerational continuity, with many families who can trace back their roots over multiple generations.” This, combined with low levels of educational attainment, forms the basis of derogatory stereotypes which are perpetuated through intergenerational continuity and memory (see also Vanderbeck and Worth 2015). The wider intersecting geographies of family, community, and nation are, therefore, an important context of place, space, and time for thinking through everyday economic change. An interesting twist to the story is Harrison’s “own history of association with the town, in a personal as well as an academic capacity.” Several members of her family lived in New Haven while she carried out the research, and her niece also became a coresearcher on the project (Harrison 2013, p. 101). As in this example, researchers’ social worlds – personal, familial, and professional – can sometimes collide, creating new ways of understanding family relations (Hall 2016b).

Within these examples, there is a sense of the collective and the convivial: that family experiences of austerity and economic change are often experienced *together*. Indeed, in ethnographic research with families before and during the recent financial crisis (Hall 2016a), and later into the current period of austerity (Hall 2016b), everyday financial practices have been shown to be "simultaneously family practices, bound up in the relational and emotional experiences and negotiations of everyday family life, themselves involving a whole set of interpersonal, inter- and intra-generational, gendered, reciprocal and sharing practices" (Hall 2016a, p. 326). It is hard to extrapolate those elements of economic change that are about families and those that are about finance or money, for they are co-constitutive, knotty, and messy.

One of the reasons for this is that family is a key source of economic support. While meanings of and relationships between family may have changed, "kinship relations still hold significance as sources of practical and financial help" (Finch and Mason 1993, p. 1). As Finch and Mason (1993, p. 5–6) illustrate in their reputed study of family responsibilities, there can coexist "very different types of help—money, practical assistance, looking after someone who is ill," in which kin relationships are often the "means through which people receive various types of assistance." Familial support, therefore, brings together different kin combinations and relationships, everyday practices, and ways and means of helping. As such, financial support within families is argued to be inseparable from sentiments of care, love and responsibility, worry, shame, and guilt that are present in sharing, borrowing, lending, and giving within families (Goode 2009; Hall 2016a; Health and Calvert 2008).

The supportive role of family is therefore important when considering the current economic climate, from the global financial crisis and "credit crunch" around 2008 to recent austerity cuts. As Valentine (2008, p. 2106) suggests, contemporary economic systems, and insecurities therein, effectively shape family relationships and responsibilities:

> the rolling back of the welfare state and financial insecurity that characterises contemporary neo-liberal economies mean that many people are increasingly dependent on family or other intimate relations for material and moral support.

There are numerous examples of the ways in which families provide this support in times of economic hardship. Heath and Calvert (2013, p. 1120), for instance, illustrate that "amidst rising housing costs and restricted employment opportunities in the UK, younger generations are increasingly dependent on their families for material and financial support to offset the costs of living independently." Economic insecurity at the personal level has ricocheting impacts, whereby "behind these reported trends lie complex intergenerational negotiations relating to obligations and responsibilities, indebtedness and gratitude, dependency and independence, fairness and equality" (Heath and Calvert 2013, p. 1121). Families are therefore often a source of practical, material, and emotional support, an interrelational space of care, interdependency, and responsibility (England 2010; Popke 2006).

Although contemporary family life is understood to be significant in policy-making, there has been a relative dearth of research that reflects on family relationships in times of austerity (Hall 2015; Hall 2016a). This means that there is scope for a fuller understanding of the impacts of such economic change on the everyday lives of families, and how family relations may change within and because of austerity. In addition, empirical studies of families and economic change have tended to adopt a narrow view of these experiences, restricting their focus to specific social/demographic groups, relationships, or moments in time (see Henwood et al. 2010; MacLean et al. 2010).

Furthermore, and of particular significance to this chapter, there has been very little consideration of how everyday family relationships tie into broader economic changes, such as welfare reforms, tax changes, and other austerity policies, especially as and when they occur. This chapter will now explore the ways in which everyday family life might be subject to change as a result of austerity, taking the UK as an example.

4 Family Relations in Austerity: Reflections on Policy, Insights from Research

This section reflects on the actual and possible impacts of recent austerity policies introduced by the UK government since 2010, and until the time of writing in late 2015, in terms of what they might mean for everyday family relationships and practices. To give a flavor of some of the economic changes made in the present period of austerity, examples of policies related to welfare and consumption are drawn upon. These discussions are peppered with insights from ethnographic research with families in the North West of England, both around the time of the financial crisis (2007–2009; funded by the Economic and Social Research Council), and into the later period of austerity (2013–2015; as part of a Hallsworth Research Fellowship from the University of Manchester).

4.1 Austeritizing Welfare

Welfare reforms in the UK, undertaken as part of a series of government cuts, have provoked much opposition to date, with many civil society organizations campaigning against proposed policies and changes (see Oxfam 2013). In these debates, dualistic discourses have been created between the deserving and the undeserving poor (Jensen and Tyler 2012), strivers and skivers (Valentine and Harris 2014), and families working hard and families that are welfare dependent (MacLeavy 2011). Indeed, at the time of writing this piece, the main landing page on the UK government website for welfare policies prominently features the following statement:

> The benefits system needs to be reformed to be fair, affordable and able to reduce poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency. This will make sure people are helped to move into work while the most vulnerable get the support they need. (Department for Work and Pensions 2015)

On top of £8.1 billion of cuts from changes in personal income tax and social security benefits proposed in June 2010, in 2015 the newly elected Conservative government announced a further £12 billion of cuts to the welfare budget as a means of achieving these reforms (Pearson and Elson 2015). The recent batch of welfare cuts includes reducing the household benefits cap to £20,000 a year (£23,000 a year within Greater London), restricting housing benefit entitlement for those aged 18 to 21, and from April 2017 limiting Child Tax Credits to two children (HM Treasury 2015). These policies are likely to have a huge impact on family relationships and daily practices, falling heaviest on those families already struggling (Hall 2016b; Oxfam 2013).

Perhaps the most controversial austerity policy introduced in the UK since 2010 is what is known as the "bedroom tax." While not technically a tax, the changes involved the removal of what the government calls "the spare room subsidy" from housing benefit. In effect, it means those claiming housing benefit have had their allowance cut because they are deemed to be living in a property that is in excess of their spatial requirements. Under the reformed system, an adult individual or adult couple (married or unmarried) is entitled to one bedroom, two children under 16 of the same sex are expected to share bedrooms, and children under 10 (regardless of sex) are also expected to share bedrooms (see Brown 2015).

There are clear financial implications of this policy change for families, whereby "the imposition of the so-called 'bedroom tax' has inevitably increased the rental cost to social tenants" (Pearson and Elson 2015, p. 20). Government figures show that "those with one spare bedroom will lose 14% of their eligible rent and those with 2 or more spare bedrooms will lose 25%" (Department for Work and Pensions 2014). As well as having impacts on personal and familial financial stability, such welfare policies are also assuming of the spatialities of everyday familial and personal relations, what people do in their shared homes, if and how such spaces are shared, and the rhythms and practices this sharing involves.

By imposing conditions on how domestic spaces should be shared, the "bedroom tax" is an excellent example of the direct impact that welfare policies can have on family relationships and the issues this creates. For example, what do these changes mean for those couples who do not share a bedroom? What about when an individual has a disability or health condition that prohibits them from sharing their sleeping space? What about couples that have terminated their relationship, or are experiencing interpersonal issues, but are still cohabiting?

The questions do not end there. What about parents who have lived in their home for years and only have a "spare" bedroom because their children have moved out? And what if their children have only moved out temporarily? What if your children, all under the age of 10, do not get on but have to share a bedroom? What about children who are reaching puberty and feel they need privacy from their younger sibling(s)? What about the links that people have to their families, neighborhoods, and communities, only to be unable to afford to live there anymore? Huge assumptions are made about inter- and intragenerational relationships and the very intimate everyday practices of families (see also Oswin and Olund 2010). However, as this policy is still in place, for many families these issues are a reality.

The reduction of child tax credits to two children is another controversial policy, which speaks to ideals of the nuclear family (Edwards and Gillies 2012; Weeks et al. 2001), and with additional class-based connotations about the "appropriate" size of families (Valentine and Harris 2014). In a recent ethnographic study in the north of England by the author (see Hall 2016b), four of the six families were recipients of child tax credits. The removal of these benefits has resounding impacts, not least for the welfare of those third, fourth, fifth, etc. children born into families already struggling, but also for those upon whom they are dependent. These participating families told of their careful negotiations between income from employment and income from the state, with constant worries about losing their entitlements, whether because of welfare cuts or changes in personal circumstances.

One example of this comes from the Watson family who took part in ethnographic research from 2013 to 2015. Kerry and Daniel are a couple in their early thirties and got married in early 2014. They have four sons, who at the time of the research were all under six years old. They are financially dependent on Daniel's income, who earns £23,000 a year before tax as a mechanic, and on child tax credits, housing benefit, and child benefits.

Having discussed it at length, Kerry and Daniel decided it made little sense for Kerry to go back to full-time work after having the boys. They figured they would actually be worse off financially, because Kerry would have to earn more than she receives from social security payments and then some extra for childcare. However, a consideration of everyday family relationships and practices sheds light on how these decisions are never purely financial, but incorporate many elements of what it means to live in and with families:

> Kerry: Work's not an option because if I go back to work, we'll be probably worse off, which is absolutely stupid. [. . .] Because of how much Dan earns and how much we get in benefits and stuff, if I earn. . . I think, if I earn or Dan earns, say, five hundred pound more in the year, we're not entitled to any benefits.
>
> Sarah: More than what he gets now, in total?
>
> Kerry: Basically, I could earn about four hundred and fifty pound a year and then we'd lose all our benefits. So I'd need to have a job which then was more than our benefits to be worthwhile going back to work, so I'd have to get a really good job which, I'm only qualified as a nursery nurse, which is not going to get that, and I'd need it between school hours and stuff.
>
> (Kerry Watson, Interview, April 2014)

Here, Kerry relays how the decision-making process for her not to go back to paid work was the result of interpersonal, intra-couple negotiations (Hall 2016a; Jackson 2009), conversations between herself and Dan about what was best for their family. This decision-making involved the consideration of intergenerational responsibilities, an unquestioned parental obligations to the boys (Duncan et al. 2003; Hall 2011;

Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2000), and of how everyday rhythms of this (typically gendered) intergenerational care had to be balanced with paid work (Evans 2014; McDowell et al. 2005). There was an anxiety to note in Kerry's voice as she talked about the possibility of them losing all their entitlements and the impossibilities of making work pay with the responsibility of raising four young children (see Goode 2009; Harrison 2013). This concern therefore manifested itself in imaginaries about their future as a family, as the basis upon which family decisions were made in the present (see Smart 2007; Vanderbeck 2007).

Moral discourses of family relations therefore loom large in discussions of austerity, feeding into changes to the welfare system and with distinct impacts "on the ground." Indeed, in the UK a new system for distributing social security benefits is currently being introduced, known as Universal Credit. Under this new system, state benefits will be paid to recipients using a single monthly payment per household. In effect, this reifies ideas about the nuclear family as a cohesive "unit" (Edwards and Gillies 2012; Smart 2007) and ignores intra-household, intragenerational, and gendered tensions around financial security and autonomy.

It is well known that responsibility for intra-household finances can exacerbate gender inequalities, interdependencies, and inter-relationalities. Women in families and households are often placed with responsibility for managing household budgets and indebtedness but often have little control over spending and saving (Goode 2009; Hall 2016a). The new system is also predominantly operated through an online platform (see GOV.UK 2015a), meaning there are also inequalities in terms of access which arguably affect those who are most in need of state support. While Universal Credit is not an austerity policy per se, because of the timing of its being rolled out, it has the potential to compound the impacts of austerity and reify moral ideas of family.

The introduction of the *Married Couple's Allowance* in a time of austerity also provokes interesting questions and reveals heteronormative assumptions about what families are and should be (see Harker and Martin 2012; Jackson 2009). This is a tax allowance that gives couples who are married or in a civil partnership, or living with their spouse or civil partner, the opportunity to reduce their annual tax bill by up to £835.50. Those living in families with different forms or structures, such as lone parents, divorced couples, cohabiting couples, couples living apart but with dependent children, etc., are excluded. The scheme thus benefits those who conform to particular ideals of the cohabiting family and those who have access to the financial resources to get married or live together. This is another example of how, as Brown (2015, p. 977) accurately observes, "the self-reliant couple is being promoted over households that cannot provide for their own welfare needs."

This is confirmed by further details on the official government website, which states that "for marriages before 5 December 2005, the husband's income is used to work out Married Couple's Allowance. For marriage and civil partnerships after this date, it's the income of the highest earner" (GOV.UK 2015b). Here, the notion of the breadwinning husband still resonates (Duncan et al. 2003; Edwards and Gillies 2012); ideas and assumptions feminist have been challenging for decades (Valentine 2008).

The project of austeritizing welfare is a process by which differences, responsibilities, and inequalities in and between families emerge, such as around class, inter- and intragenerationality, inter-relationality, and gender. These themes are critical in discussions about the everyday impacts of austerity on family relationships and are continued in the discussion below.

4.2 Austere Consumption

The relationship between families and consumption, particularly food consumption, has long been applied as a lens through which to understand everyday familial relationships, practices, decision-making, and inter- and intragenerational responsibilities (Hall 2011; Jackson 2009). Family norms, values, and attitudes are thought to be transmitted through everyday consumption practices and in the shared, proximate, and convivial spaces and moments in which they occur (Hall 2016a; Valentine et al. 2012). Consumption is also an important feature of austerity politics, whereby in the period immediately following the financial crisis, "politicians [were] urging the public to spend more in order to help the economy to recover" (Hinton and Goodman 2010, p. 275). Consumers are again placed center stage in the lived impacts of austerity, if we consider the increased cost of food and perishables, the growth of food banks and the number of families relying on them, and the popularization of World War II "make do and mend" discourses (Hall 2015).

In addition, political campaigning by the elected government about reducing the deficit highlights further implicit links between consumption, austerity, and everyday family life. Claims of the need to cut the deficit and clear national debt, as one of the key drivers behind current austerity policies in the UK (MacLeavy 2011), have often been equated with the need for citizens to manage their own finances effectively. Since the global financial crisis, the notion of "living within one's means" has been regularly applied to both the state and the family, suggesting a simplified and misleading correlation between the budgeting, (mis)spending, and indebtedness of government and families (Graham-Leigh 2015; Hall 2016a).

Furthermore, the metaphor of "belt-tightening" is regularly used within academic and media discussions of austerity (see MacLeavy 2011), symbolizing the need to cut costs and budget accordingly. This phrase also has connotations of austerity as felt, embodied, and corporeal (Hall 2016a), telling us something about the condition and consumption of the "austere body":

> Amidst austerity, comprising cuts to publicly funded health services and social welfare, the "larger public" are routinely extolled to literally exercise greater self-discipline and "tighten their belts". Lean times, we are told, necessitate lean, efficient, healthy bodies and the cutting of unwanted, aberrant flesh that is weighing us all down. (Monaghan 2014, p. 1)

As Graham-Leigh (2015) argues, the ideological associations made between overconsumption, obesity, poverty, and class proliferate everyday life in the UK. It is thought to be a widely held and rarely contested assumption that bodies cannot be financially restricted if they are fat and, by extension, that it is morally unacceptable to be fat if living on state support. To be fat and unemployed is considered feckless, lazy, irresponsible, and an undue burden to the taxpayer (see also Valentine and Harris 2014). Thus, "as with discussions of austerity, it seems that those who have the least are the ones who have the greatest responsibility to be restrained in consuming it" (Graham-Leigh 2015, p. 20).

Given this context, it is interesting that "Change4Life," a flagship policy for the Department of Health, was set up in 2009 to encourage healthier yet affordable eating within families (see also Fairbrother and Ellis, this volume). The scheme undoubtedly reifies traditional ideologies about the structure and function of "the family," particularly the pervasive image of the nuclear family, consisting of heterosexual parents with dependent children (Edwards and Gillies 2012; Weeks et al. 2001). Change4Life might also be said to represent the encroachment of the state into intimate family practices while at the same time retreating from responsibilities for health and social care (England 2010; Oswin and Olund 2010).

These observations are compounded by an examination of the content of the website (see NHS 2015). In terms of imagery, there is the constant presence of the figures of two adults and two children, notably slim and gender distinct by color. These figures also comprise the wording of the logo, contorted to spell "life," accompanied by such text as: "Would you or your family like to be healthier and happier? Would you like loads of ideas, recipes and games to help you do this? Then you already know why you should join Change4Life" (NHS 2015).

Austerity policies concerning consumption speak not only to an ideology of familial relationships, structure, and form but also to notions of "acceptable" family consumption practices. In March 2012 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced in his annual budget detailed plans to extend the taxing of hot takeaway foods (HM Treasury 2012). The plan was considered confusing, because it involved applying 20% value-added tax (VAT) – a policy already applied to most hot takeaway foods – to baked items that may be sold hot or cold, such as pasties, pies, and sausage rolls, hence the colloquialism "pasty tax."

The taxing of these food stuffs, typically bought from bakeries and supermarkets, was seen as having a direct impact on "ordinary people" and their ability to afford "everyday food" (see Malik 2012). It was met with huge public disapproval, as well as being petitioned by bakers across the country and a national newspaper. The pasty tax debate centered around discourses of class, poverty, and everyday consumption. More specifically, the policy was argued to highlight the differences between the political establishment and their often privileged upbringings and those families and communities most affected by austerity policies. As such, the Conservative party were portrayed as "out of touch" with the UK public.

The plan to tax these hot high-street savory snacks was announced between the aforementioned family ethnography projects; however, it provoked memories for the author of a photograph taken by the Robinson family and the accompanying conversation. Like most of the families involved in the ethnographies, Emma and Tom took part in the research for over a year and in three episodes of research (or periods of participation). These episodes usually lasted a few months, with an

Fig. 1 Photograph of Emma sharing a pasty with her children (Taken by Tom Robinson, July 2008)

interval of a month or two between. During one of the intervals, families were asked to take photographs of their day-to-day lives. Then, upon returning for the next episode of research, the photographs were collected (either in the form of a disposable camera or files if taken on a digital camera) and hard copies made. At the next visit, the photographs would be discussed and the conversation recorded.

The Robinsons approached the photography task as a shared responsibility, whereby the taking of photographs and our later discussion were done *together*, parents and children (Bowlby 2011; Dermott and Seymour 2011; Finch 2007; Hall 2016a). The photograph above (Fig. 1) was one of a handful taken during a family trip to the theater in the school summer break. It shows Emma with a pasty in her hand, holding it to Peter's mouth. Beside Peter is his older sister, Mary, with younger brother Ben sat in the foreground.

Emma and Tom were very frugal, with both in receipt of state support. They were also health conscious, for medical reasons, and described an aversion to "fast food" (Hall 2011). This image therefore came as somewhat of a surprise, although it was pleasing that the family had been so candid in their photographing. The initial analysis therefore found it to illustrate the value of ethnography - that what people say and what they do can be mismatched. However, their discussion about the photograph clarified and confirmed family practices that the author had observed, but not fully realized:

Sarah: what about this photo? I'm guessing you took that? [to Tom].
Tom: this is a pasty.
Sarah: what kind of pasty is it? You're eating on this one, Peter.

Emma: cheese.
Tom: it's probably a cheese pasty, yeah.
Peter: and that's baby Ben.
Sarah: so were you eating your mum's then? [to Peter].
Emma: yeah.
Sarah: and do you usually buy food when you go out to town, or do you take your own?
Emma: we mostly buy food don't we, we always think "take it", but we're usually rushing so we end up buying something.
Tom: we'd buy something like that [points at photograph], wouldn't we?
Emma: erm, if it's me I'd probably just get something like that, but if the kids are with me sometimes I end up going to McDonald's, yeah its usually like McDonald's or Pizza Hut or something.

(Robinson, Interview, August 2008)

While healthy eating was important to Emma and Tom, affordability could at times eclipse these priorities, particularly if their children were hungry. This illustrates how "family consumption practices and negotiations that centre on monetary concerns are an example of everyday ethical consumption," in that they involve much moral balancing (Hall 2011, p. 632). Parents from across both ethnographic projects noted the sheer expense of days out with children, particularly the costs of eating out. Ensuring children ate something filling was a priority, but finding foods that were also relatively healthy and inexpensive was difficult. Convenience foods, such as pasties, sausage rolls, or chips, were commonly consumed on these occasions, ticking the "filling" and "inexpensive" boxes, and as foods that children would eat without argument. The photograph also significantly shows Emma feeding her lunch to a hungry Peter, resonating with debates on gender, care, and intergenerational responsibilities (Duncan et al. 2003; McDowell et al. 2005).

Although this photograph and taped discussion predate the pasty tax debacle, the imagery and the explanation of the moment captured are very relevant. They reveal that, as much of the media and petitioning suggested, baked goods like pasties are an effective and convenient way to feed oneself and one's children when money and time are short (Jackson 2009; Murcott 1983). The pasty tax was scrapped in May 2012, a mere two months after it was announced, whereby a change was implemented that meant if baked foods were cooling, then no VAT should be added. Yet, as this vignette reminds us, it remains an excellent example of how a seemingly innocuous policy has the potential to impact on everyday family relationships and practices, impacts that are uneven in their social and spatial distribution (Hall 2015).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has used a range of materials – including literature, policy documents, imagery, media stories, interview extracts, and ethnographic observations – to explore the ways in which family relations may be open to change and conflict during times of austerity. For the most part, it has focused on intergenerationality, intragenerationality, gender, class and interpersonal relations, and the connections between them, in order to flesh out how austerity impacts on and in everyday family life. Indeed, austerity policies such as those recently implemented by the UK government have been shown to be personally and socially affective, situated in familial relationships, practices, and experiences, concerns of both the state and the heart (Oswin and Olund 2010).

The multi-scalar, interpersonal, and socially uneven impacts of austerity on families are not, of course, restricted to the UK, and the findings herein also speak to experiences across Europe, the USA, and to non-Western experiences of austerity. Indeed, austerity might be understood as both a personal and socioeconomic condition, and furthermore the two do not necessarily coincide (Hall 2016b). To be living in austerity does not require one to live in the context of sociopolitical austerity (i.e., with the retreat of state funding for public expenditure), for there are multiple experiences of living in a personal condition of austerity in a range of contexts (Hall 2015). To wit, it is imperative to recognize that everyday family life is not situated within a vacuum, but that economic changes, regardless of scale, are likely to impact familial relationships and practices.

To close, this chapter proposes further avenues for thinking about intimate, personal, and social lives in times of austerity. This includes broadening the scope of inter- and intragenerational relationships, transcending the often imaginary boundaries placed around kin, families, and households (Hall 2016a), to consider other important social relations and how they too might be impacted by austerity. For example, this may include a consideration of friendship, acquaintanceship, everyday encounters, and other intimate relations – such as social workers, hairdressers, or colleagues – and the ways in which these social relationships intersect and blur, including with familial relations (Bowlby 2011; Hall 2016b). The social geographies of austerity are a fruitful space for further social research into the messiness of everyday relationships, whereby the geographies of family relations, as described here, are only part of the story.

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