Fat Scrounger, Lean Times: A Tale of Two Bodies in Austerity Britain

Dr. Amelia Morris
Lecturer of Communications
Department of Communications, Drama and Film
University of Exeter
Office 7, White House, Stocker Road, EX4 4PZ
Email address: a.morris4@exeter.ac.uk

Dr. Nicola Smith
Associate Professor in Political Science
Department of Political Science and International Studies
University of Birmingham
Muirhead Tower, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT
Email address: n.j.smith.1@bham.ac.uk

Abstract

In this article we explore the relationship between media discourses of the fat/lean body and austerity politics in Britain, focusing on constructions of the fat scrounger and its counterpart, the lean citizen. Although scholars have highlighted the centrality of distinctions between "responsible" and "irresponsible" citizens to the austerity agenda, relatively little attention has been devoted to the fat/lean body in shaping these distinctions. Taking up the case of *Supersize vs Superskinny* – a hugely successful reality television show that aired between 2008 and 2014 – we offer an original analysis of the duality and disciplining of the fat and thin gendered body, which, we argue, is closely entwined with broader understandings of hardworking vs. un(re)productive citizens. In so doing, we advance the study of both austerity politics and anti-fat politics by shining a light on how discourses of fatness and leanness have helped to constitute the gendered body as a vessel for legitimating neoliberal austerity more widely.

Keywords

Austerity; body politics; undeserving poor; body weight; reality television

Introduction

In October 2022, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak took office in Downing Street, on the same day that a BBC correspondent announced that "the economic backdrop has changed: Mr Sunak is going to have to agree to spending cuts, and to tax rises," bracing the country for what has been nicknamed "austerity 2.0" (Jones, 2022). Yet, as Hall (2023) notes, austerity did not simply stop and start again but rather has become deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life in Britain, even as it has been presented as a set of discrete policy responses to economic necessity. And, as a number of scholars have shown, this ideological experiment could not have been achieved without media depictions of an over-extended welfare state, not least on reality television (see for instance Gilligan, 2013; Barton and Davis, 2018). Throughout the 2000s, shows like *Britain on the Fiddle*, *Undercover Benefits Cheat*, and *Council House Crackdown* presented benefit claimants as living luxurious lifestyles at the expense of their hardworking, tax-paying neighbours, all made possible by a supposedly over-generous welfare state. Taken together, these shows worked to generate consent for austerity through the targeting of marginalised groups as irresponsible and so undeserving of support, thus justifying welfare cuts to such groups as well as the austerity agenda more broadly (Hamad, 2013; Day et al. 2018; Barton and Davis, 2018).

Yet, while there is now a substantial literature on austerity and the (un)deserving poor (e.g. Cameron *et al*, 2016; Romano, 2017; Shilliam, 2018; Tihelková, 2023), comparatively little attention has been paid to one of the most prominent ways in which responsible and irresponsible citizens were marked out from each other: the politics of the fat/lean body, and especially conflations between fatness and scrounging, on the one hand, and leanness and citizenship, on

the other.[1] This is a notable oversight given the centrality of fatness/leanness to feminist understandings of the body more broadly, with the shape and size of bodies not simply a marginal concern but rather a critical location for interrogating gendered power relations (Morris 2019; Kyrölä and Harjunen, 2017). In this article, we contribute to the British politics literature on austerity and the feminist literature on the body by shining a light on the intersections between the politics of neoliberal austerity and the politics of anti-fatness over recent years. As we seek to show, body weight is a particularly interesting site to interrogate gendered narratives of the deserving/moral and undeserving/immoral subject as both constituted by, and constitutive of, neoliberal austerity more widely. Indeed, we argue that the reproduction of both fatphobia and the lean ideal have formed an important part of the cultural logics on which austerity relies, not least by reinforcing broader notions that working-class women (and especially working-class mothers) are lazy, unproductive, and hence undeserving of welfare or public support.

To interrogate these themes empirically, we focus on one particularly popular British reality television programme, *Supersize vs Superskinny* (henceforth *SVS*), that ran on Channel 4 between 2008 and 2014 – a critical period when consent for austerity was being forged. The show followed the style of other reality weight-loss programmes such as *You Are What You Eat, Fat Families,* and *The Biggest Loser* in which fat people's lives were presented not only as entertainment but also as a warning for audiences of the "dangers" of "unhealthy" living (see also Weber, 2012; Raisborough 2013; Throsby, 2008; Sender and Sullivan, 2008). Unlike other

[1] Although there are some excellent exceptions, with work that connects the fat body to austerity and/or neoliberalism including Mollow and McRuer (2015), Glaze and Richardson (2017), Raisborough et al. (2019), and Harjunen (2023).

weight-loss shows, though, *SVS* did not just focus on fatness alone but instead sought to compare fat and lean bodies by swapping the diets of fat ("Supersize") and thin ("Superskinny") contestants. It therefore offers an ideal location on which to examine the dual disciplining of fat and thin women's bodies in the context of wider austerity discourses. Utilising a post-structuralist feminist discourse analysis, we offer an original analysis of how *SVS* deployed gendered narratives of (in)appropriate femininity to provoke disgust at fat women and sympathy with lean ones, thus helping to constitute the binary categorization between undeserving scroungers and deserving citizens around which austerity discourses were organized more broadly.

The Politics of the Fat/Lean Body

Over recent years, questions of body size, weight, dieting, fatphobia, and the thin ideal have generated an ever-growing literature across the social sciences and humanities, especially in gender and queer studies (see for instance Murray, 2008; Strings 2020; Farrell 2023; Mavrović 2024). These works have powerfully shown how body weight is not a marginal concern but instead a pivotal site on which gendered power relations are inscribed, produced, and performed in ways that are also inextricably sexualised, racialised, ableized, and classed. The narrative that leanness equates not only to beauty but also to health and morality proliferates in policy, scientific, and media discourses, with fatness conflated with over-indulgence, excess, irresponsibility, and illness (LeBesco, 2009; Tischner and Malson, 2010; Harjunen, 2023). Representations of fatness as morally "wrong" thus cannot be removed from understandings of thinness as morally superior (Saguy, 2013, p.41) for, as Strings (2020) notes, the demonisation of fatness has long been entwined with the disciplining of normative femininity through the valorisation of leanness, which is also deeply rooted in colonial histories. As feminists have also

observed, an especially influential mechanism through which such cultural narratives have been circulated is the mass media, which has played a central role in producing and disseminating discourses surrounding both fat stigma and the lean ideal (see inter alia Covino, 2012; Harris-Moore, 2016; Kyrölä, 2021). Weight-loss/makeover reality television shows, for example, have framed weight-loss as a transition not only to a "better" physique but also to a "better" personality and lifestyle (Throsby, 2008), with women's fat bodies conflated with "lost" selfhood such that the revealing of the slimmer body represents the moment when "order is established" (Weber, 2012, p.346) and women can be freed from the trap of fatness and undisciplined femininity (Throsby, 2008).

While numerous scholars have pointed to distinctions between fatness and leanness in shaping gender (in)justice, there has not been a great deal of scholarly interest in one particular articulation of fatphobia and its attendant cultural, political, and economic effects: that of the "fat scrounger" that emerged in the twenty-first century in austerity Britain. To be sure, a substantial literature quickly sprang up on the pivotal role that neoliberal discourses played in (re)creating the politics of austerity within and outside of the UK: Hay (2013), for instance, explored how the language of debt has been pivotal to the austerity imperative from the outset, enabling the fundamental contradictions of the Anglo-liberal model that led to economic crisis to be obscured; and Blyth (2013, p.10) described austerity as a "dangerous idea" that mistakenly attributed the global financial crisis to public indebtedness and overspending. As part of this, scholars have also pointed to how, after the 2008 economic crisis, an "anti-welfare commonsense" was crafted by politicians and the media, wherein an over-extended welfare state was positioned as *causing* poverty due to recipients' lack of "incentive" in finding employment, thus reaffirming the

perceived division between the deserving and undeserving poor (Jensen and Tyler, 2015, p.470). As this literature has also shown, such discourses were not only classed but also gendered, sexualised, racialised, and ableised, with single mothers (Jensen and Tyler, 2015), Muslims (Ali and Whitham, 2021), disabled people (Ryan, 2019), and other marginalised groups all pitted against the "hardworking" British people in an effort to blame the effects of austerity on the individual immorality of the poor rather than on the government's own agenda.

Although scholars have thus highlighted the centrality of distinctions between workshy "scroungers" and hardworking citizens to the austerity agenda (see e.g. Romano 2018; Marsden 2024), less research has been undertaken into gendered dichotomies between the fat/lean body in shaping these distinctions – an occlusion that no doubt reflects how the politics of body weight has far from been treated as central in the study of British politics more broadly.[2] To address this gap, we take up feminist calls to regard the fat/lean body as integral to wider political, economic, and cultural power relations – for, as feminists have shown, leanness is not only synonymous with feminine beauty and desirability in Western discourse but is also read as an outward expression of moral superiority, whereas fatness is "routinely discredited as abject, abhorrent, ugly and despised" and so epitomises un-deservedness (Monaghan and Malson, 2013, p.305; see also Farrell, 2011; Strings, 2020; Mavrović 2024). By harnessing feminist insights on anti-fat politics to the study of austerity politics, we aim in this article to advance both literatures by illuminating how gendered appeals to fatness as abnormal/immoral and leanness as normal/moral are bound up with the cultural logics underpinning neoliberal austerity. To this end, we analyse how gendered discourses of body weight have intersected with class as well as sexuality, race,

[2] As can also be said for the body itself (Smith and Lee, 2015).

and disability to mark out individuals as fundamentally (un)deserving, thus helping to legitimate the reproduction of structural injustice under austerity. Since the disproportionate impact of the welfare spending cuts on poor and marginalised women is already well documented (see for instance Smith, 2020), our focus is rather on the cultural mechanisms that helped to make these cuts thinkable in the first place – and especially the (often taken-for-granted, but always significant) ways that poor, marginalised women have been cast as "morally bankrupt" (Hong, 2012, p.94) both in their own right and in direct opposition to moral, worthy citizens. We argue that this has *both* involved the marking-out of the fat body as a symbol of selfish fecklessness *and* the positioning of the lean body as a hardworking, productive body. In this way, the fat/lean body has been implicated in the production of the wider social ontology of austerity under which individuals are expected either to adhere to the disciplining strictures of neoliberalism or to be blamed for its failings.

Methodology

To explore the relationship between anti-fat politics and austerity politics in Britain, we take up a particularly interesting case study – that of *Supersize vs Superskinny* (henceforth *SVS*). As a variety of scholars have shown, reality television was an essential tool for driving the austerity agenda in that it actively perpetuated harmful stereotypes of poor people as workshy and lazy and, in so doing, directly helped to legitimise welfare spending cuts (Gilligan, 2013; Hamad, 2013; Allen et al, 2014). Through a combination of participants' own words, selective editing, and props, reality television shows were able to construct sensationalist narratives under the guise of authenticity, thus offering a particularly powerful mode of cultural production for stigma, shame, and responsibilisation (Inthorn and Boyce, 2010). *SVS* aired in the years leading

up to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat austerity programme in which astronomical cuts were made to the public sector to "balance the books" after the global economic crash of 2008 (Blyth, 2013). It differed from other forms of "makeover" television in that – whilst weight-loss was the goal – it was "less about representing the ideal body" than it was about "representing an ideal society expressed and contained by the ethical body" (Bradley 2014, p.60). Throughout the experiment, participants were supervised under the watchful eye of Dr. Christian Jessen, who provided support, guidance, and information on the medical "dangers" of their eating habits and body sizes. His presence, moreover, provided a means to explain to viewers the science behind the potential impact of living within an "extreme" body together with the necessary steps that might be taken to improve one's diet and lifestyle. His role as an overseer of the experiment implicitly situated him as the eyes not only of society but also – due to his positionality as medical expert – as the eyes of the state, with the show's panoptic view therefore extending to the dynamics not only between participants but to the audience watching from home.[3] *SVS* thus offers an ideal site on which to interrogate the (re)production of cultural narratives surrounding the fat/lean body as a vessel for wider anxieties about deservedness and un-deservedness in austere times.

In examining the case of *SVS*, our research builds on the work of poststructuralist feminists who are critical of "truth" seeking and instead see knowledge as produced through discourse, meaning that the language and images that surround us are co-constitutive of webs of power (Baxter, 2003). Methodologically, feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis encourages researchers to critically analyse gendered dichotomies (in our case, between fatness and leanness) and to attend

[3] On weight, media, and the Panoptican, see Morris (2019).

to the complex ways that gender intersects with other discourses of identity such as class and race (Baxter, 2003; Shepherd, 2006). With this in mind, we approach discourses with a fluid understanding of how knowledge is constructed, aiming to look *at* and *beyond* specific visual sources and so situate them within wider political, economic, and cultural systems (Waitt 2005). By discourses we mean systems of knowledge-production that "'fix' meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world" (Shepherd 2006, p.20). We understand discourses of the fat/lean body, then, not as neutral descriptors of a transparent material reality but as mutually constitutive of discursive norms, social hierarchies, and power relations more broadly (Harvey 2005; Metzl 2010). Thus, while we do not wish to dismiss the importance of wider feminist debates about the ontology of the body, our own interest lies with how the fat/lean body is "politically, culturally, and economically constructed" (Braziel and LeBesco 2001, p.16), including through audio-visual means as in the case of reality television.

In more practical terms, and in line with our poststructuralist approach, our empirical research focused in-depth on specific discursive "moments" on *SVS* to capture how knowledge-production surrounding the fat/lean body is "fixed", however temporarily. While, between us, we had already watched much of SVS's seven seasons as casual viewers when they first aired, our analysis focused on six episodes in particular as "exemplars" of the (fairly repetitious) narratives that were articulated by the show across its 63 episodes. All the episodes were sourced from the official *Supersize vs Superskinny* and *All Real* channels on YouTube, and aired either in the immediate build-up to austerity (early 2010 for Season 3) or once austerity was getting under way (2011-14 for Seasons 4-7). When watching the show, we noted down the themes that arose from the framing of the participants, examining the interaction between language and images

(such as the camera shots that were used to accompany the words) and situating them within their wider political, economic, and cultural context including in dialogue with the feminist literature. Given the length of each episode (60 minutes) and large amount of textual and visual analysis they yielded, it is sadly only feasible to reproduce snippets of dialogue for the purposes of this article, so we have selected quotations that we believe best epitomise the overarching themes of the show – and, with this in mind, we now turn to our analysis of scrounging, citizenship, and the fat/lean body on *SVS*.

Fat Scrounger

In May 2010, the newly-elected Prime Minister, David Cameron, set out his vision for transforming the British economy by means of austerity measures that would not only tackle the nation's debt but would also address how "mass worklessness" was being "accepted as a fact of life" in Britain such that it needed to "restore discipline," become "dynamic," and promote "effective competition" (Cameron 2010). As the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, similarly explained, his commitment to ongoing welfare cuts in Britain reflected how he was:

> [O]n the side of anyone who wants to work hard and get on … I have in mind the person … who is leaving now for work, who's going to work all day, and as they walk out their door, maybe they look across to the neighbor's house, and the blinds are down and that family is living off benefits (Osborne 2012).

From the outset, obesity was identified as a central cause of worklessness – as Cameron put it, "people have problems with their weight that could be addressed, but instead a life on benefits

rather than work becomes the choice" (cited in *Guardian*, February 14, 2015).[4] Such discourses were not only articulated by politicians but were also actively endorsed by the media: the *Daily Telegraph* (26 June 2010), for instance, welcomed the coalition government's first budget of June 2010 with an article entitled "People too fat to work share in £150m benefits" in which it praised the Chancellor's pledge to "reduce Britain's record deficit" by slashing the country's "£7.4 billion bill for disability and incapacity benefits".[5]

Yet what was also required was what Shugart (2010, p. 106) calls the "spectacularization" of the fat body to make the "truth" of obesity both more visible and more visceral. Reality television, more specifically, offered a powerful tool to deploy fatness as a spectacle and so constitute it as a site on which wider anxieties about individual (ir)responsibility could be made material (see also Raisborough et al., 2019) – and such was the case with *Supersize vs Superskinny*. Beginning each episode with a montage of what Cooper (2007) terms "headless fatties" accompanied by dramatic music and the occasional close-up of a thin body, *SVS* both put "problematic" bodies on display and warned audiences about the risks that such bodies posed to the public sector. As the opening of Season 4 Episode 1 (S4E1) declares:

> Obesity and eating disorders are now the biggest cost to this country's health service since the Second World War with 12 million obese people and an equal number suffering from some sort of disordered eating. The UK's relationship with food is worse than ever. It's time to find out why.

[4] See also Glaze and Richardson (2017) for a helpful discussion of the Conservative government's discourses of obesity and austerity.

[5] On "too fat to work" discourses in the British media, see Raisborough et al. (2019).

Like other weight-loss shows, *SVS* did so by explicitly depicting the fat body as freakish and excessive (Leadley 2015; Raisborough 2013): in S4E1, for instance, the "Supersizer" is described as "foodaholic" Louise, who is accompanied by a series of carefully-edited "judgement shots" designed to elicit condemnation from the audience (Skeggs and Wood 2012, p.95; see also Allen et al. 2014) such as images of her eating oily food (e.g. takeaways and other deep-fried items) punctuated by sound effects that emphasise its "grossness" (e.g. a loud squelch as she squeezes mayonnaise onto a kebab). These shots are not unique to this episode but follow the same formula across the series, including close-up after close-up of greasy foods dripping down participants' chins, mouths chewing, "problem areas" of the body, and purposefully unflattering lighting.

These audio-visual techniques work together throughout the series to frame the bodies of the participants as (literally) extra-ordinary – a message that is repeatedly underscored by the show's dialogue too. In E1S5, Elaine and Helen are partnered as "opposites" in terms of their eating habits and lifestyle, with Dr. Christian Jessen noting that "by pairing them up, I'm hoping that these two will learn how extreme their eating habits really are." While the show does not comment explicitly on the social identities (e.g., class, race) of the participants, they are nevertheless encoded as members of the White working class: for example, Elaine is shown going for a night-out at a local working-men's pub; and shots of their everyday lives, such as the chipped paint in Helen's kitchen and the broken concrete slabs in her garden, communicate that they are not wealthy. As the narrator introduces Helen as the week's "Supersizer," the scene cuts to the image of a dimly-lit house, accompanied by the following voiceover:

> Narrator: It's the middle of the night and, while most of us are asleep, something is stirring in Loughborough. It's thirty-seven-year-old Helen Simpkin.

Throughout these scenes, Helen is barely visible except for the light of the fridge, which casts a shadow over her body as she makes snacks (e.g. cereal doused in cream, toast with brown sauce). Next, the camera zooms in on her eating chocolate biscuits on the sofa, purposefully utilising an extremely close-up image of her face as she puts the food in her mouth. These images, accompanied by tonally creepy music, invite the audience to view fatness as abnormal and excessive: indeed, as Leadley (2015) observes, such constructions of the fat body bear echoes of the Victorian freak show in which audiences are encouraged to gasp, gawp and wonder how a person could ever exist like *that*. These depictions of fat subjects – often immobile in bed or struggling to perform "normal" daily tasks – proliferate throughout the series and, as Raisborough writes, the fat "zombie body" is a visual symbol of unproductivity (and hence immorality) in the neoliberal economy since "the threat of stillness fuels a contempt and fear for bodies that are purportedly slow, undiscerning, flawed consumers". Since autonomy and mobility are essential components of neoliberal governmentality, the fat body can thus be framed as antithetical to good citizenship itself (2013, pp.25-6; see also Harjunen, 2023).

Rather than "going to work all day" (as George Osborne put it), then, Helen is depicted as spending her time doing something rather less productive: eating. As the narrator relays, "For Helen, eating is a round-the-clock activity which is why she weighs in at just over 25 stone". As Helen unpacks crisps, cakes and cans of soda from a plastic bag on her bed, she describes this process as allowing her to "focus on the job in hand". The centring of Helen's use of the word

"job" alludes to a contrast with the "real" jobs that the audience are presumed to have. While hardworking citizens (i.e. those who do not have their "blinds down") are at work, she is indulging in foods that are reserved as "treats" for "normal" sized people only *after* they have finished their days' work, thus speaking to wider themes of fecklessness and idle consumption (see also Raisborough 2013; Eli and Lavis 2018).

Yet this is not simply a story of economic unproductivity, for Helen's status as a mother is also quickly brought into the narrative. This is reflected in the following dialogue:

> Narrator: Overlooking the small fact that she gets through over 5,000 calories a day, Helen has another reason why she's the size she is.
>
> Helen: I know I'm extremely overweight, I put it down to having five children in four years. But it's not just that and I know it's not just that.

To underscore this latter point, shot after shot of Helen eating in different locations insinuate that she does so consistently throughout the day, and testimonies from her children are juxtaposed with a montage of her food intake. Rather than performing the reproductive labour of the "good" mother when her children are at school (e.g. by cooking nutritious meals and cleaning the house), Helen is thus exposed to the audience as embodying a "culture of sloth" (Boero 2009, p.115) by spending her time eating pre-packaged foods. This plays into cultural stereotypes that fat femininity is "transgressive and selfish ... feeding the (indulgent, narcissistic) self rather than the (innocent, dependent) other" (Eli and Lavis 2018, p.134). Helen's irresponsibility and self-indulgence are also implied by the narrator's comment that "nothing comes between Helen and her breakfast," thus enabling a narrative arc to be forged that Helen is putting her desire to

overeat before her desire to look after her children and hence her duties as a good socially reproductive subject.

Moreover, as Tyler explores, the eliciting of "disgust reactions" towards White working-class mothers – including through comedic representation – offers a means to channel wider anxieties about mothering, reproduction, and sexuality whilst also excluding the poor from full citizenship (2008, p.18). It is notable that, when Helen is shown methodically unpacking food items on to her bed, her voiceover is accompanied by a classic show-tune style of music. There is an underlying and comedic sense of irony in the sound, encouraging the audience to mentally contrast her "unglamorous" body and lifestyle with the svelte bodies of the flapper girls and the glitzy glamour of old Hollywood, thus further distancing her from ideal femininity. There is also a sexualised undertone to the scenes, with tight shots of Helen slowly putting chocolate and cakes in her mouth. These clips of Helen within the context of the bedroom hint that, for her, eating is intertwined with sexual desire. They subtly frame her sexuality as part of the broader "joke" about her body, implying that she falls short of the beauty standard of thinness and the expected norms of motherhood—both of which are linked to perceptions of her lacking a work ethic and failing to embody proper femininity.

A similar depiction of un(re)productive motherhood appears in S7E5 as Lauren is introduced as "our heaviest female" by Jessen and "our heaviest Supersizer" by the narrator. As the audience peers into Lauren's lifestyle, a clip shows her sitting on her sofa eating chocolate. The sequence is speeded up to demonstrate the passage of time and to convey that, while her partner performs domestic labour around her, Lauren is stationary and indulging in "junk food" over extended periods. Like Helen and Elaine, Lauren can be read as a White working-class woman, with shots

of her largely-bare living room suggesting that she does not have a lot of money; and, from the images of her sitting on the sofa throughout the day, the audience can deduce that she is neither in paid work nor fulfilling the domestic and caring duties of a stay-at-home mother. To render this more explicit, the narrator reports that "whilst Lauren struggles to carry her own weight around all day, she relies on the help of her partner Elliot to cook, clean up and run around with her daughter Josie". While Elliot plays with their daughter in the park, Lauren is shown sitting away from the fun, her body symbolically blocking her from discharging her motherly responsibilities. The subversion of traditional gender roles in Lauren and Elliot's dynamic immediately places Lauren in opposition to idealised images of motherhood and domestic labour, with women who remain in the home expected to adhere to patriarchal norms by maintaining beauty standards (i.e. their figure), cooking and cleaning for their family, and performing the majority of caring labour (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2014).

Such discourses are not only gendered and classed but speak to themes of (dis)ability too. When Lauren travels to the US to meet 24-year-old "American Supersizer", Betty-Jo, we are told that – although Betty-Jo is "18-stone heavier than Lauren" – there are "already distressing similarities" between the two women since both are "reliant upon the support of [their] partner." As the narrator explains that Betty-Jo's husband not only does the domestic labour but also takes care of her hygiene, the scene cuts to him washing her and we see the typically unflattering angles and lighting that are deployed throughout the series to expose and shame fat bodies, and which create the illusion that Betty-Jo is the exceptionalised Other that Lauren could become if she does not "take control" of her body. In other episodes, too, American "Supersizers" are displayed as a warning for participants, such as in the case of "41-stone Karen Ferguson" from Texas whose inability to "care for herself independently" is presented to Louise as a "glimpse into her future"

(S4E1) – thus playing into anxieties about the undisciplined feminine body as a body that can become incapacitated by its own lack of restraint. Nor is this a message about Louise's future alone, for it also comes in the context of the episode's earlier warning to viewers about the costs to the nation of obesity ("the biggest … since the Second World War"). It thus serves the function of what Bhattacharyya (2015, p.93) terms the "performative punishment" of disabled people that constitutes a core element of the wider austerity agenda, with vulnerability – once *the* key marker of deservedness – now the very embodiment of public sector excess. By conflating obesity with disability, these constructions can (re)cast the figure of the disabled person as irresponsible and hence blameworthy not only for their own fate but for socio-economic decline more widely (see also Raisborough et al., 2019).

The participants' trips to America are also interesting in terms of race because – as Sanders observes – fatness has long been racialised as Black in America in ways that contribute to the normativity of Whiteness and the pathologisation of non-Whiteness. The figure of the "welfare queen" in particular is associated with both Blackness and fatness in the US (2019, p.287) and yet, notably, its UK counterpart – the "fat scrounger" – has often been coded as a specifically *White* working-class mother (most famously exemplified by the television character Vicki Pollard from the noughties show *Little Britain*[6]). As such, it is notable that the UK-based "Supersizers" to be featured on SVS are predominantly White, even as they visit several Black "Supersizers" in the US (such as "34-stone" Stephanie (S6E3) and "34 stone 9, Mum-of-two" Holly in (S6E5)) as part of the show's attempts to warn the participants (and audience) of the dangers of fatness. Although *SVS* does not reflect explicitly on questions of race, such narratives

[6] For an in-depth discussion of Pollard, see Tyler (2008).

should not be misconstrued as unracialized since they feed into wider constructions of the poor White mother as "racialized non-subject" (Motta, 2016, p.105) who, through her fatness, threatens the health of the social body. For, as Tyler argues, the figure of the White working-class mother does important political work by offering a focal point for fears about "contaminated whiteness", thus acting as a vector for middle-class anxieties about the excesses of the lower classes whilst also excluding the poor from the domain of White privilege (Tyler, 2008, p.26). Indeed, as Bhattacharya (2015) argues, it is by alluding (rather than appealing openly) to racialised logics that the significance of race and racism to the austerity agenda can be obscured, i.e. by allowing hierarchies of entitlement and exclusion to be blamed on individual immorality whilst erasing their structural underpinnings.

Cumulatively, such representations enable an overall picture to be painted of the "Supersizers" as deviant figures whom the audience should regard as self-indulgent and un(re)productive – a picture that is further enhanced by the contrasts that are drawn with the "Superskinny" participants, as we discuss in the next section.

Lean Times

If fat participants are figured as symbolic of selfishness and worklessness in *SVS*, then thin participants are constructed in rather more sympathetic terms. Although there are some segments that present the "Superskinny" lifestyle as out-of-the-ordinary – such as displaying the high quantity of sugar in the multiple energy drinks that Jake (S7E6) drinks every day instead of eating – the audience is generally encouraged to empathise with, rather than revile, the "Superskinny" participants. This is not least apparent during the "feeding clinic" experiment – an exercise that requires the "Supersize" and "Superskinny" contestants to swap diets for a week,

thus meaning that in practice the "Supersizer" must go without food for long periods of time whilst the "Superskinny" must eat much more than usual. This set-up allows a binary opposition to be cultivated between the perceived indulgence of the "Supersizer" and the minimal diet of the "Superskinny" through which the shameful excess of the former can be accentuated. In S6E1, for instance, "Superskinny" Katie's breakfast of "two slices of toast and a cup of tea" is juxtaposed with the description of "Supersizer" LJ's breakfast as "mammoth, with two eggs, two sausages, three hash browns, beans, fried mushrooms, tomato sauce, two slices of toast, two slices of bread and butter, a pint of squash and a cup of tea". And, although there are some moralised discussions of the "Superskinnies" diets throughout the series (including segments dedicated to their nutritional deficiencies and impact on their body), these are not encoded with the same undertones of disgust as for those of the "Supersizer". In S7E1, for example, "Superskinny" Jake eats similarly highly processed foods to "Supersizer" Laura (e.g. a cherry bakewell slice), and yet the focus of the shots and the narration is on the supposed excesses of Laura's diet and body. When Laura does not finish her meal in the feeding clinic, she is chastised for not "try[ing] a bit harder" – even though the ostensible purpose of the exercise is for her to learn to eat less – thus reinforcing the show's underlying message that fatness is synonymous with a poor work ethic. Again, the show does not specifically state the pair's class status but they are signified as members of the White working class, including, notably, through shots of Laura eating junk-food on a bench on a tired high-street during the day from which viewers can infer that that she lives in a deprived area and is out of work.

Significantly, and in contrast to the positioning of the "Supersizers" as feckless and excessive, the "Superskinny" participants are typically framed as being "too busy to eat" (e.g. as rushing

out the door to work or to pick up their kids from school) – a big part of the "Superskinny" diet, for instance, is caffeine, with contestants replacing food with tea, coffee and/or fizzy drinks to "keep going" throughout the day. This message is reinforced by Jessen, who explains in E1S5 why he placed Helen and Elaine together: "Helen eats around the clock, whereas for Elaine, food is just an inconvenience." Although, on the surface, Jessen rewards neither diet, the implication is that Helen has the available time to eat constantly (read: lazy), but that Elaine is too busy to do so (read: hardworking). Likewise, Carly's introduction in S3E7 notes that she does not "see the need" to eat food due to her hectic work schedule:

> Narrator: Working as a Promotions Manager, Carly's career has taken over her life, leaving her too busy to eat.
>
> Carly: I'm jumping in and out of my car, I'm grabbing something if I'm near a shop, then I'm on the go…and that's that, I haven't got time to just sit down and just eat a meal.

This segment is in stark contrast to the "Supersizer" Louise's introduction, which frames her as constantly eating and struggling to properly perform her work as a mother. Carly, though, is presented as being extremely productive – much in accordance with the neoliberal "superwoman" trope (Mavrović, 2024) – with food simply a hassle that stops her from working. Although there are interviews with Carly's concerned relatives about her body weight and health, the tone is notably less condemnatory than for Louise: for example, Carly's clip includes soft and slow background music set to snippets of her worried family describing her frail body ("when you see her in a bikini, she looks really skinny"); whereas upbeat dance music accompanies shots of Louise eating chicken nuggets and chips as her mother tells the camera that "the time to change has come." Here, we see the ways that Carly's thinness is presented as an issue that is

happening *to* her, whereas Louise's circumstances are presented as a consequence of her own bad choices and lazy attitude. And both are depicted as entangled with their work ethic (or lack thereof): whereas Carly is shown rushing around at work, Louise is filmed on the sofa, indulging in various junk foods throughout the day. Thus, Carly is not tethered to the sofa like her "Supersize" counterpart – to echo George Osborne's rhetoric, her blinds are not "down" – and instead displays mobility and self-reliance. This is demonstrated in the following scene in which both participants play in football match, with the goal of getting Louise to exercise:

> Narrator: While Carly is active with her busy working life and used to dance throughout her teenage years, Louise lazes around the house on the sofa, but she used to be the captain of her school football team, so maybe a kick about could see the end of the excuses.
>
> Louise: I just ... I do not want to do it, at all.
>
> Carly: It will be good for you though, trust me. It will be good for you.

This reinforces a binary between the busy and productive lifestyle of the "Superskinny" and the seemingly undisciplined and feckless lifestyle of the "Supersizer", with Carly's "busy working life" contrasted with Louise as she "lazes around the house on the sofa". Carly is, moreover, positioned as the voice of reason who challenges Louise's "excuses" by promoting the benefits of exercise, whereas Louise's reluctance to engage fuels the notion that fat people are choosing immobility and unproductivity. In contrast to the fat body on *SVS*, which is presented as immoral and indecent, the extremely thin body can thus be figured as encompassing neoliberal values of motivation and independence and hence proper neoliberal citizenship.

This is not to suggest that the "Superskinny" participants are valorised or glamorised: after all, the very premise of the show is to spectacularise and so pathologise extremely fat and extremely thin bodies alike. Yet, whereas the "Supersize" contestants are presented in such a way as to provoke disgust and outrage, their "Superskinny" counterparts are framed through a rather different lens – one that is paternalistic, even infantalising (Malson, 2003), and so encourages concern rather than condemnation from the audience. In S4E1, for example, Helen and Elaine are first introduced in their underwear, and the camera focuses on Elaine's small frame, with close-up shots of her protruding collarbones and ribs – a frailty that is emphasised both by the juxtaposing with Helen's body and by Elaine's apparent disgust ("I don't want to be rude, but I've never seen anyone like that until today. You could have a baby in there and you wouldn't know, would you?"). Helen, for her part, remarks "god you're so tiny," and then notes to the camera, "Elaine's tiny and I'm really big so ... worlds apart" – thus giving a metaphorical nod to both the show and its audience, suggesting that her and Elaine's body types are symbolic of their personalities. This message plays out across the episodes, such as when "Superskinny" Charlotte is tasked with replicating "Supersizer" Heather's night-time snacking habit – or what the narrator terms her "midnight microwave madness" – in the feeding clinic:

> Heather: It is a bit weird to see somebody eating at this time of night, but in my house it's just the norm. I really did think there was enough space in your little body to actually store all of that.
>
> Narrator: Heather heads off to bed, leaving Charlotte to digest her day's worth of supersize servings.
>
> Jessen: Charlotte is being bombarded with food on Heather's diet and she's finding it a real ordeal.

Here, the descriptions of Charlotte as having a "little" body and finding food "a real ordeal" seem to infantilise her by implying that she is unable to cope with the sheer excess of the

"Supersized" diet. As Malson (2003) highlights, thin women are disciplined differently to fat women in ways that reflect society's desire to look after rather than punish them. Seen through this lens, the descriptions of Charlotte locate her as childlike and speak to the ways that – whilst thinness is widely recognised as desirable – it is also embodies the "fragility" of femininity. That is, whilst leanness demonstrates "appropriate" femininity, extreme thinness pushes the limits of this acceptability and invites paternalistic concern.

Moreover, although Charlotte's self-starvation is presented as worrisome, the combination of wider anti-fatness discourses ("madness," "bombarded") and judgement shots of the fat body nevertheless encourage the viewer to feel disgust over the "Supersizer" diet, thereby positioning the "Superskinny" as having a normal reaction to the abnormality of the "Supersizer" lifestyle that she is being forced to withstand. In this sense, the "Superskinny" is established as the eyes through which the viewer gazes upon the "Supersized" diet, thus framing the "Superskinny" participant as the enforcer of societal narratives about fatness. Notably, in S3E1, Jessen begins the experiment by revealing his suspicions that "Supersizer" Julie has not been truthful when submitting her food diary for the experiment ("The calorie count from Julie's food diary says that she ought to be losing weight, but I know that she's 24 stone and she's still piling on the pounds"). During the food swap, "Superskinny" Jade confronts Julie about the amount of food, stating "you don't live off what I've been given so far ... Julie, I'm not being funny, but you're 24-stone ... have you lied? Have you cut your food diary down?" By locating Jade as the voice of reason in this exchange, the audience recognises her as speaking the "truth," therefore confirming Jessen's earlier suspicions about the food diary.

Indeed, even as the audience is warned about the dangers of anorexia in a separate section of *SVS*, this is juxtaposed with a segment on the "obesity crisis" that emphasises the impact of excess weight on people's lives and public services alike. As for the introductory segments for each participant, the fat body is framed moralistically as burdensome and wasteful, whereas the very thin body is viewed through a more compassionate lens. The audience are told in S6E1, for instance (albeit at different points in the episode):

> Narrator: Obesity levels worldwide have more than doubled in the last thirty years, claiming more than three million lives every year, while British experts estimate that by 2050 obesity will cost us 50 billion pounds a year, crippling the NHS.
>
> Narrator: For those struggling with an eating disorder, every meal is a struggle. Eating disorders devastate lives, they have the highest mortality of all mental illnesses: twenty per cent of sufferers will die of medical complications or from suicide.

Whereas obesity is framed in terms of its costs for society and state, the anorexic body causes concern because of the individual's traumatic experiences. As for Carly and Louise, this language locates the anorexic person as a victim of an illness beyond their control, and there is no mention here of NHS costs or that one can be fat and suffer from an eating disorder (Leigh, 2019), nor of the role that the intense surveillance/disciplining of women's diets and appearance might play including via the media scrutiny of their bodies in shows such as *SVS*. Furthermore, in other episodes, the case study of anorexia is contextualised within cultural narratives of the working body: for example, in S07E6, ex-ballerina Ally describes the pressure to be "the right weight to be a dancer" since "it's almost part of the culture that you don't eat". Although the show presents concern for Ally and the other recovering anorexic participants, these segments are significant in reading thinness as inherently positive so long as it is not excessive, whereas

fatness is presented as problematic *per se*. Moreover, as Ferris rightly argues, although both the anorexic and "obese" woman are marginalised and disciplined, the recovering anorexic can be imagined as an active body on the path to success, whereas the "obese" woman is figured as "weak and unhealthy for … craving and bingeing on food" (2003, p.269). Even as anorexia is framed in terms of the trauma caused by unrealistic standards of beauty, then, the "Superskinny" lifestyle is – to some extent – fulfilling its gendered duty to be productive since smallness is the key to idealised femininity.

Discussion

Taken together, these cultural narratives work to locate body weight as an outward expression of individuals' inner (im)morality, with the fat body depicted as the very epitome of "self-indulgence and moral failure" (Fahs, 2017, p.85) that is marked out, in turn, against the worthy and hardworking lean body. As our analysis of *SVS* reveals, moreover, such constructions of feckless versus hardworking individuals are specifically gendered and organised around long-standing framings of "good" and "bad" women, as displayed both by the size of their bodies and their eating habits. At the same time, our research illuminates how gendered constructions of body weight also intersect with other embodied social hierarchies including class, disability, race, and sexuality – indeed, the case of *SVS* shows how the fat/lean body represents an important vector for other modes of exclusion and disentitlement, including by providing a logic through which working-class and disabled women can be blamed not only for their own circumstances but for the state of Britain's public sector more broadly.

Thus, while our article has focused on cultural narratives of the fat/lean body, this is not to reduce body weight to a "merely cultural" (Butler 1997, p.265) matter for, on the contrary, we

have sought to show how such narratives of the gendered body are entwined with – rather than being separable from – the wider politics of neoliberal austerity. That is, by reinforcing neoliberal notions of deservedness as inherently tied to self-discipline and restraint, fat stigma feeds into welfare stigma more broadly, thereby "advancing the assumption that poor people make poor choices" (Glaze and Richardson 2017, p.129) and enabling poor and working-class women to be rendered accountable for the material effects of the government's own policies. Through the careful construction and popular dissemination of narratives of poor (and) and fat people as unproductive, media discourses have been directly implicated in the wider project of austerity that, as Mollow and McRuer (2015) remind us, could not have been thinkable without such blaming and shaming tactics to justify such a massive assault on the welfare state and public sector.

Yet, as our analysis of *SVS* also shows, this is not simply a story of economic (un)productivity, for narratives of fatness and leanness also feed into wider constructions of the socially (un)reproductive body, and especially those surrounding motherhood and domestic labour. What this highlights, in turn, is how the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state requires *both* the demonisation of marginalised groups *and* the production of the normative family to pick up the slack of caring labour (e.g. for children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled) that had previously been undertaken by the state.[7] To be sure, the effects of such logics have not been felt equally since it is poor and marginalized women who have been disproportionately impacted by the austerity measures including cuts to welfare benefits and social care (Jensen and Tyler 2015). But underpinning these dynamics are nevertheless deep-rooted and often hidden presumptions

[7] For a detailed history of these inter-connected mechanisms in Britain, see Smith (2020).

about gender and the family – ones that assume that the burden of such care should be shouldered primarily by individual families, and especially women, rather than the state (Akhtar et al., 2022). Thus, while women have traditionally been expected to perform "good" femininity in the home (cooking, cleaning, caring, and maintaining their appearance), this takes on new connotations in the context of the rolling-back of the welfare state – and, as our discussion of *SVS* has highlighted, portrayals of the fat/lean body have represented an important way of constituting proper femininity in opposition to the "bad" socially unreproductive subject. For example, it is by displaying "Supersizers" such as Helen and Lauren as continually eating that *SVS* can frame them as neglectful of their wifely and motherly duties by rejecting the unpaid labour associated with normative femininity and, by implication, the production of the normative family on which neoliberalism relies.

Thus, although our research for this article has centred on the specific site of *SVS*, our findings have broader significance for the study of British politics, not least by pointing to the need to connect this more to feminist work on body politics including via intersectional analyses of the fat/lean body. Given the recent election of the Labour government in July 2024, for instance, it would be fruitful to examine if and how their emphasis on "hardworking people" (Starmer, 2024) will appeal implicitly or explicitly to dichotomies between lean/productive and fat/unproductive citizens, and if these represent an extension of, or rupture with, prior gendered, classed, racialised, sexualised, and ableised discourses. Likewise, future research could interrogate if and how Labour will attempt to legitimise their newly-announced programme of spending cuts (HM Treasury 2024) by connecting public sector crisis to the "obesity crisis" in a similar manner to their Conservative predecessors. Scholars might also wish to extend our

findings to other country contexts to help understand if and how cultural, political, and economic constructions of fat/lean individuals, families, or populations are being deployed in service of austerity, neoliberalism, and/or right-wing populism including via reality television and other modes of popular culture. More widely, scholars could draw on our insights into the duality and disciplining of fatness and leanness to interrogate other dichotomies between the (re)productive and un(re)productive body, including but not limited to those surrounding motherhood, while also exploring how such dichotomies are constitutive of the neoliberal social order in Britain and beyond.

Conclusion

In sum, we have explored how neoliberal constructions of scrounging and citizenship play out in representations of fatness and leanness. Focusing on the case of *Supersize vs Superskinny*, we have examined how the fat body has been positioned as a drain on the economy and a symbol of moral failings in society, whereas the lean body is constructed as an active and productive body that fuels itself through caffeine and hard work. Thus, while "Supersize" participants are represented through the familiar, shaming registers of weight-loss reality television, the "Superskinny" contestants are represented as good neoliberal citizens, and indeed as the eyes of society and state through which the viewer can gaze upon the fecklessness and sloth of the fat scrounger. Such discourses are, moreover, embroiled with gendered, classed, racialised, sexualised, and ableised assumptions including those surrounding motherhood, with the "Supersize" mother blamed for failing to fulfil her socially reproductive duties whilst her husband and "Superskinny" counterpart are busily at work. As we have shown, these discourses intersect to reinforce and reproduce normative assumptions about the relationship between

austerity, excess, and the gendered body and so to reaffirm the demonisation of the poor on which austerity relies.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their invaluable feedback, and to our colleagues at the University of Exeter and the University of Birmingham for their support throughout the research process.

References

Akhter, S., J. Elias, and S.M Rai. (2022) Being cared for in the context of crisis: Austerity, Covid-19, and racialized politics, Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society (advance online publication).

Allen, K., Tyler, I. and De Benedictis, S. (2014) Thinking with "White Dee": The gender politics of "austerity porn". Sociological Research Online, 19(3): 256-62.

Barton, A. and Davis, H. (2018) From empowering the shameful to shaming the empowered: Shifting depictions of the poor in 'reality TV'. Crime, Media, Culture, 14(2): 191-211.

Baxter, J.A. (2003) Positioning Gender in Discourse. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Bhattacharyya, G. (2015) *Crisis, Austerity, and Everyday Life: Living in a Time of Diminishing Expectations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Blyth, M. (2013) *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Boero, N. (2009) Fat kids, working moms, and the "epidemic of obesity". In: E. Rothblum and S. Solovay (eds.) The Fat Studies Reader. New York: NYU Press, pp.113-19.

Bradley, P. (2014) The good, the bad, and the healthy: The transforming body and narratives of health and beauty in reality TV. In: B. Thomas and J. Round (eds.) Real Lives, Celebrity Stories: Narratives of Ordinary and Extraordinary People Across Media. London: Bloomsbury, pp.59-78.

Cameron, D. (2010) Transforming the British economy: coalition strategy for economic growth. Gov UK. May 28, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/transforming-the-british-economy-coalition-strategy-for-economic-growth

Cameron, A., Smith, N. and Tepe-Belfrage, D. (2016) Household wastes: Disciplining the family in the name of austerity. British Politics, 11(4): 396–417.

Covino, D.C. (2012) Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture. New York: State University of New York Press.

Day, K., R. Sandle, and T. Muskett (2018) Working to feel better or feeling better to work? Discourse of wellbeing in austerity reality TV. Review of Disability Studies, 14 (2): 1-19.

Eli, K. and Lavis, A. (2018) Becoming Fit to be a mother: Class, learning, and redemption in Supersize vs Superskinny. Journal of Gender Studies 27(2): 129-140.

Fahs, B. (2017) Mapping "gross" bodies: The regulatory politics of disgust. In: Elias, A.S., Gill, R., and Scharff, C. (eds.) Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp.83-100.

Farrell, A.E. (2011) Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture. New York: NYU Press.

Farrell, A.E. (ed.) (2023) The Contemporary Reader of Gender and Fat Studies. London: Routledge.

Ferris, J.E. (2003) Parallel discourses and "appropriate" bodies: Media constructions of anorexia and obesity in the cases of Tracey Gold and Carnie Wilson. Journal of Communication Inquiry 27(3): 56-273.

Gilligan, P. (2013) "Harsh Realism": Gender, Reality Television, and the Politics of the "Sink" Housing Estate in Austerity Britain. Television & New Media 14(3): 244-260.

Glaze, S., and Richardson, B. (2017) Poor choice? Smith, Hayek and the moral economy of food consumption. Economy and Society 46(1): 128-51.

Graham, L. J. (2011) The product of text and "other" statements: Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault. Educational Philosophy and Theory 43(6): 663-674.

Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, E. (2014) The precarity of feminisation: on domestic work, heteronormativity and the coloniality of labour. International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 27(2): 191-202.

Hall, S.M. (2023) Austerity has its own life – here's how it lives on in future generations. The Conversation, https://theconversation.com/austerity-has-its-own-life-heres-how-it-lives-on-in-future-generations-195794

Hamad, H. (2013) Age of austerity celebrity expertise in UK reality television. Celebrity Studies, 4(2): 245-248.

Harjunen, H. (2023) Gendered fat bodies as neoliberal bodies. In: A.E. Farrell (ed.) The Contemporary Reader of Gender and Fat Studies. London: Routledge., pp. 30-40).

Harris-Moore, D. (2016) Media and the Rhetoric of Body Rerfection: Cosmetic Surgery, Weight Loss and Beauty in Popular Culture. London: Routledge.

Harvey, K. (2005) Sexuality and the body. In: Barker, H., and E. Chalus (eds.) Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction. London: Routledge, pp.78-99.

Hay, C. (2013) The Failure of Anglo-Liberal Capitalism. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Hester, H. and Walters, C. (2016) Fat Sex: New Directions in Theory and Activism. London: Routledge.

HM Treasury (2024) Chancellor: I will Take the Difficult Decisions to Restore Economic Stability, 29 July, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-i-will-take-the-difficult-decisions-to-restore-economic-stability

Hong, G.K. (2012) Existentially surplus: women of color feminism and the new crises of capitalism GLQ 18(1): 87-106.

Inthorn, S. and Boyce, T. 2010. 'It's disgusting how much salt you eat!' Television discourses of obesity, health and morality. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *13*(1), pp.83-100.

Jensen, T. and Tyler, I. (2015) "Benefits broods": The cultural and political crafting of anti-welfare commonsense. *Critical Social Policy*, 35(4): 470-491.

Jones, O. (2022) Austerity 2.0 is not a necessity – it's a choice. Why won't the media say so? The Guardian, 15 November.

Kyrölä, K. (2021) Fat in the media. In: Pausé, C. and S.R. Taylor (eds.) The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies. London: Routledge, pp.105-116.

Kyrölä, K. and Harjunen, H. (2017) Phantom/liminal fat and feminist theories of the body. Feminist Theory 18(2): 99-117.

Leadley, A. (2015) Supersize vs Superskinny: (Re)framing the freak show in contemporary popular culture. The Journal of Popular Television 3(2): 213-28.

LeBesco, K. (2009) Weight management, good health and the will to normality. In: H. Malson and M. Burns (eds) Critical Feminist Approaches to Eating Dis/orders. London: Routledge: pp.146-56.

Leigh, S. (2019) Anorexia nervosa comes in all sizes, including plus size, UCSF, 6 November https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2019/11/415871/anorexia-nervosa-comes-all-sizes-including-plus-size

Malson, H. (2003) The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa. London: Routledge.

Marsden, L. (2024) Economic martyrs and moralised others: The construction of social class in UK media during the "age of austerity". European Journal of Cultural Studies, 27(1): 70-86.

Mavrović, J.B. (2024) Eating Disorders in a Capitalist World: Super Woman or Super Failure? Leeds: Emerald Publishing.

Metzl, J M. (2010) Introduction: why against health? In: Metzl, J.M., and A. Kirkland (eds.) Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality. New York: New York University Press, pp.1-11.

Mollow, A, and McRuer, R. (2015) Fattening austerity. Body Politics, 3(5): 51-74.

Monaghan, L.F. and H. Malson (2013) "It's worse for women and girls": negotiating embodied masculinities through weight-related talk. Critical Public Health 23(3): 304-19.

Morris, A. (2019) The Politics of Weight: Feminist Dichotomies of Power in Dieting. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Motta, S.C. (2016) Decolonizing Australia's body politics: Contesting the coloniality of violence of child removal," Journal of Resistance Studies 2(2): 100-133.

Murray, S. (2008) The "Fat" Female Body. New York: Palgrave.

Osborne, G. (2012) Austerity May Last until 2018 The Guardian, 8 October.

Raisborough, J. (2013) Transforming fat bodies: lifestyle media and corporeal responsibility. In: C. Ogden (ed.) Corporeality: The Body and Society. Chester: University of Chester Press, pp.12-29.

Raisborough, J., Ogden, C. and de Guzman, V.S. (2019) When fat meets disability in poverty porn: exploring the cultural mechanisms of suspicion in Too Fat to Work. Disability & Society 34(2): 276-295.

Romano, S. (2017) Moralising Poverty: The 'Undeserving' Poor in the Public Gaze. London: Routledge.

Ryan, F. (2019) Crippled: Austerity and the Demonization of Disabled People. London: Verso.

Saguy, A. (2013) What's Wrong with Fat? Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sanders, R. (2019) The color of fat: Racializing obesity, recuperating whiteness, and reproducing injustice. Politics, Groups, and Identities 7(2): 287-304.

Sender, K. and Sullivan, M. (2008) Epidemics of will, failures of self-esteem: Responding to fat bodies in The Biggest Loser and What Not to Wear. Continuum 22(4): 573-584.

Shepherd, L.J. (2006) Veiled references: Constructions of gender in the Bush administration discourse on the attacks on Afghanistan post-9/11. International Feminist Journal of Politics 8(1): 19-41.

Shilliam, R. (2018) Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit. Newcastle: Agenda.

Shugart, H.A. (2010) Consuming citizen: neoliberating the obese body. Communication, Culture & Critique 3(1): 105-26.

Skeggs, B. and H. Wood (2012) Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value. London: Routledge.

Smith, N. and D. Lee (2015) What's queer about political science? British Journal of Politics and International Relations 17(1): 49-63.

Smith, N. (2020) Capitalism's Sexual History. New York: Oxford University Press.

Starmer, K. (2024) New Year's Speech, 4 January, https://labourlist.org/2024/01/keir-starmer-new-year-speech-read-transcript-watch/

Strings, S. (2019) Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia. New York. New York University Press.

Supersize vs Superskinny (television series) (2008-2014) Channel 4.

Tihelková, A. (2023) Selling austerity to the public: Analysing the rhetoric of the UK government on its welfare cuts. American and British Studies Annual 16: 47-58.

Throsby, K. (2008) Happy re-birthday: Weight loss surgery and the new me. Body & Society 14(1): 117-133.

Tischner, I. and Malson, H. (2010) "You can't be supersized?" Exploring femininities, body size and control within the obesity terrain. In: E. Rich, L.F. Monaghan and L. Aphramor (eds.) Debating Obesity: Critical perspectives. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.90-114.

Tyler, I. (2008) "Chav Mum chav scum": Class disgust in contemporary Britain. Feminist Media Studies 8(1): 17-34.

Waitt, G.R. (2005) Doing discourse analysis. In: I. Hay (eds.) Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.163-191.

Weber, B.R. (2012) Stark raving fat: Celebrity, cellulite, and the sliding scale of sanity. Feminism & Psychology 22(3): 344-359.