Abjection Made Manifest: The Grotesque Televisual Construction of the Contemporary British Underclass

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the process of abjection is manifest in the grotesque visual imagery used to depict a configuration of the contemporary underclass: the 'benefits scrounger'. Both the theoretical foundation and the analysis undertaken in this research are based upon the psychoanalytical notion of the abject, as conceived by Kristeva (1982), and the grotesque as a representational mode, as theorised by Bakhtin (1984), considered as mutually constitutive categories that intersect at the evocation of disgust. It is argued that 'poverty porn' programmes perpetuate abject-grotesque imagery and rely on an aesthetics of disgust to construct a figure of the contemporary British poor which coincides with neoliberal ideology, as well as being consistent with historical contempt for the poor.

The overarching research philosophy of this thesis is social constructionism: the aim being to detail how the notion of the 'underclass' has been socially constructed and mediated; along with exploring the potency of this construction and its implications on the public consensus on benefits claimants. Also considered are the ways in which the participants in poverty porn texts construct the Self in relation to the stigma attached to being a benefits claimant, or a 'benefits scrounger'. In contemporary Britain, there has been a return to the notion of a feckless and dangerous underclass, who are blamed for a plethora of social issues such as economic decline, draining NHS resources, and rioting. These narratives, combined with neoliberal governmentality, shift the blame of such issues from structural to individual. Thus, constructing a homogenous group such as the 'underclass' as abject – outside the boundaries of 'normal' society – is necessary to this process: depicting them as a contemporary grotesque leaves them devoid of public sympathy.

This research draws upon qualitative and interpretive methods centred on a critical hermeneutics, which when combined with social constructionism lays the analytical foundations for a framing analysis of televisual texts. The textual analysis of twelve poverty porn texts, all broadcast on Channel 5 between 2014-2017, focuses on two predominant representational categories: the Abject Maternal and Grotesque Embodiment. This thesis presents an explorative and original abject-grotesque framework which is utilised to analyse the visual, ideological, discursive and narrative

elements of poverty porn. Thus, the overall intention of this research is to promote a greater understanding of poverty porn: investigating how it has been instrumental in constructing the abject-grotesque figure of the benefits scrounger; and how this contributes to deepening social inequalities. The scope of this research is to provide an analytical framework for which future representations of the poor can be interpreted against.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview: Context and Key Concepts

At a time when class, gender and racial antagonisms are worsening, when far-right ideology is increasingly filtering into the international political mainstream, when there is a breakdown in the global economy, and a western 'immigration crisis', how do expressions of disgust and hatred manifest? In which cultural forms can the construction of the other and the facilitation of social alienation be recognised? This research has been undertaken over a period of five years and coincides with some major shifts in British politics: in 2015, the Conservative Party formed their first majority government since 1992; in 2016, the Brexit referendum led to Britain's decision to withdraw from the European Union; in 2017, a snap election resulted in a Conservative minority government with the support of the Irish Democratic Unionist Party, a British nationalist party who oppose same-sex marriage and abortion rights; and most recently, in 2019, the resignation of Theresa May (due to her failure to carry out Brexit) and the subsequent election of Boris Johnson who is widely reported for his racist, sexist and homophobic comments (for examples, see Duffy 2019; Sharman and Kentish 2019; Zatat 2019). Against the backdrop of this political disruption, and in the context of neoliberal governmentality, this project explores how poverty has been reframed from a structural issue to an individual one. The poor have been transformed from figures of sympathy to figures of disgust, a contemporary abject-grotesque. This transformation is most recognisable in a contemporary setting in the construction of the 'benefits scrounger' in 'poverty porn' programming.

Contempt for the poor has a longstanding history in Britain. This, combined with a deeply embedded notion of a hierarchical social class system in British culture, has ensured expressions of class disgust in the public sphere, popular culture and political discourse have remained an acceptable form of social prejudice. Discourses on social class, poverty and the welfare state that flow between these arenas are built on myths, stereotypes and commonsense narratives (Jensen 2014; Jensen and Tyler 2015). They are based on supposed understandings that construct the poor as a homogenous group: a social underclass who are dangerous, disgusting, feckless scum. The concept of the British underclass can be traced back to the 19th century where the ideological lens of social Darwinism was used to explain poverty by rendering the poor sub-human (Mann

1992). The legacy of this can be recognised in more recent history with the white working class reduced to pejorative cultural configurations such as doleite, pram-pusher, chav, hoodie, and linked to football hooliganism and casual culture. In the 1980s and 1990s, the underclass narrative – paralleled with Thatcherism – was used to separate working-class communities and promote a dichotomy between the deserving and undeserving poor (Jones 2011). In the noughties, the 'chav' – 'animated' as a 'national abject par excellence' (Tyler 2013: 163) – was utilised as a figure of blame for ASBO culture, complementing the political rhetoric of 'Broken Britain'. In a contemporary setting, the socio-cultural construction of the 'benefits scrounger' (and the 'benefits mum' or 'dole dosser') is the most recent figure of class disgust, centred around the stigmatisation of benefits claimants as lazy, irresponsible, morally redundant, excessive – yet paradoxically 'lacking' – and guilty of causing the country's economic downturn.

With this context in mind, this research investigates how the process of abjection – the physical and psychic reaction to something that threatens the border between subject and object – is manifest in grotesque visual imagery and reliant on an aesthetic of disgust. Furthermore, it considers the abject-grotesque as a mutually constitutive categorisation of the representation of the contemporary British poor, signified in the social construction of the 'benefits scrounger' as a figure of disgust. This research adapts the sociological perspective of abjection employed by Tyler in *Revolting Subjects* (2013) to explore how certain groups are cast to the margins of society; and strips abjection back to its psychoanalytic roots as conceived by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982). The two texts are utilised to understand how repulsion, as part of the abjection process, can be manufactured into disgust towards vulnerable social groups who are (re)constructed as figures of contempt, or 'national abjects'. Another key text in the theoretical basis of the research is *Rabelais and his World* by Bakhtin (1984). Like Kristeva's abject, Bakhtin's grotesque is a literary mode that also compromises borders, in this case the boundaries of normal and abnormal. It is a body without borders, always in flux, protruding and growing as it connects with the outside world. The grotesque as a carnivalesque characteristic is interpreted in various cultural modes such as art and film, and transgresses social and cultural boundaries, symbolising an affront to the status quo. However, in a neoliberal context, in which the production of poverty porn programmes

and the construction of the 'benefits scrounger' are situated, the abject-grotesque is repulsive, depicted as something to be feared and hated. *Grotesque* by Edwards and Graulund (2013) supports an understanding of the concept by situating it in contemporary social and cultural contexts. *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Morris 1993) helps ground the research through its perspective on how the emotion of disgust manifests and how society responds to what is deemed disgusting. A social constructionist perspective, as theorised by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), is employed to explore how the issues of benefits and poverty, and abject-grotesque figures, are constructed; and the implications of this on how stigma is constructed on social and individual levels, as Goffman (1963) theorises in *Stigma*.

1.2 Project Beginnings and Personal Context

The initial inspiration for this project was born out of a longstanding personal interest in social class and a self-prescribed 'confused class-consciousness'. Having moved at a young age out of inner-city Birmingham to a semi-rural village bordering Birmingham, Solihull and Warwickshire, I noticed differences in affluence and lifestyle between the two areas. The differences in my parents' situations also gave me food for thought: my father is from a large working-class family and left school at 15 to join the army before eventually taking on a manual semi-skilled job as a road-sweeper; my mother is from a lower middle-class family and pursued a career as a post-doctorate research fellow, later retraining as a college educator. So, I grew up with an awareness that positioning within the class system was not as clear cut as belonging to the working or middle classes, nor could it be based solely on income or educational attainment. During the initial stages of this research, there were many debates with my parents about which social class we might 'belong' to; and our differing perspectives were tied up in definitions of class relating to income, place of residence, morals and politics, and in the apparent historical/social shift in such definitions.

As well as a changing socio-political landscape that blurred the notion of social class, familial changes shaped the way I considered class-belonging. For instance, my father lost a third of his wages in the space of a year as a result of austerity measures and 'restructuring' in Birmingham City Council, meaning that family life was 'no longer comfortable', as my mother described it. Socio-political shifts undoubtedly affected our

personal/familial sphere in complex ways: having an au pair was a more cost-effective solution to my mother's childcare problems; meals were often bought from the 'reduced' section of the supermarket; and my mother, who had owned her own business, took on low-paid retail work to top up the household income – at one time having three jobs. The boundaries surrounding class consciousness and 'belonging' became even more confused during my time at university where my awareness of such issues increased due to subtle prejudices towards 'Brummies' – the stereotype that people from Birmingham are 'thick' or 'common'. The relationship between accents, regionality (i.e., the north vs. south boundary – where does Birmingham fit?) and social class were apparent as self-definition and identity construction among my peers were based on these boundaries. Upon completing my final year, one lecturer asked whether my family were 'well off' on account of my successful university career. As this project reaches its conclusion, it is interesting to note that the precarity I felt growing up continues to affect my professional life, further illuminating the continually complex nature of these issues. For instance, studying for a doctorate and holding an associate lecturer job title, yet working on a zero-hour contract, which meant a move back to my family home due to a lack of financial stability. It is against this socio-political backdrop that the narrative of a 'something-for-nothing culture' can grip the public consciousness, leading to a resentment of benefits claimants – 'scroungers' – who are seemingly financially 'better off' than hard-working people. In turn, this facilitates the manufacturing of disgust and the process of abjection, as the divide widens between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor.

An interest in British social realist film also sparked a curiosity in how the above complexities were manifest in the representations of social class and gender. It is important to note that the cultural foundations of social realism are in the British social documentary form, which poverty porn might well be the antithesis of although it is marketed as documentary. While early British documentary aimed to depict the lives of the working classes, previously an under-represented social group, poverty porn does so in gratuitous, sensationalist ways for entertainment purposes. As such, poverty porn is more akin to constructed reality television than factual documentary that purports to be 'real' (see Mooney 2011; Jensen 2014; as well the methodology chapter for a detailed definition). Furthermore, reality television can be considered a cultural symptom of

neoliberal governmentality as it centres on the manufacture and monitoring of 'good citizens' who have acquired the right sorts of taste and capital. As Couldry (2008) argues, neoliberalism is a 'system of cruelty' and reality television is its theatre. While I still enjoy watching reality television, the constructions of social class and gender have become evident. As a media studies student, there was an increased cognisance of the types of media that myself, family members and peers were engaging with and the narratives and discourses that were conveyed. For instance, when growing up, the only news sources in our home were the televised evening news and right-wing tabloid newspapers. At university, there was a noticeable trend for broadcasting a new style of documentary focusing on the lives of benefits claimants. While watching *Benefits Street* and *The Jeremy Kyle Show* with peers, the perceptions of, and responses to, benefits claimants and the poor were palpable: utter disgust. This sparked an interest in investigating how these responses of disgust were manufactured by such media formats. It was coupled with a curiosity as to why *Benefits Street* was broadcast on Channel 4, which had a reputation as a sort of anti-establishment broadcaster that championed the voices of the marginalised. The original project intended to investigate the industry reasons for this, but alongside the above curiosities it developed into an interest in the psychodynamic processes involved in watching shows that humiliate people, and the emotions these shows produce.

My fascination with abjection was triggered while reading the work of Tyler in *Revolting Subjects* (a recommendation from my supervisor). Tyler explores how, in a neoliberal context, oppressed groups such as the poor are refigured as objects of disgust, or 'national abjects', who are animated via pejorative labelling and consistently vilified in popular culture. Tyler's use of contemporary cultural texts throughout *Revolting Subjects* – and her other work cited in this thesis – show how insidious these constructions are: the predictable representations that find a place in a range of media formats are evidence of how 'normal' it is to manufacture disgust rather than encourage sympathy. Reading Tyler led to tracing back 'the abject' to its raw concept and a curiosity as to how the social process begins on an individual, human level. Exploring Kristeva (1982) in more depth, there were noticeable comparisons between the abject as a psychoanalytical concept and the contemporary depictions of 'benefits scroungers' that were becoming more frequent. The adoption of Kristeva's work into analysis of art and

film by other scholars prompted a desire to explore these connections further in relation to poverty porn as this was a gap in current literature. Extensive reading around the subject led to an interest in the grotesque, and I recognised that writing on grotesquery and its use as an analytical tool to interpret grotesque depictions could also be interpreted as abject in nature. Furthermore, it was apparent that the relationship between abjection and the grotesque is linked by disgust: abjection is the process of expelling the disgusting other, which is neither subject or object; the grotesque is the visual representation of that.

1.3 Methodology, Sample and Research Questions

This research sees the merging of a strong, in-depth theoretical grounding and an interpretive hermeneutic approach to carry out a detailed analysis of televisual texts, specifically poverty porn programmes. This research brings together the philosophical and critical modes of hermeneutics, and an engagement with social constructionism, to form a framework for a comprehensive textual analysis which centres on theories of abjection, the grotesque and disgust. Further, the research methodology utilises sociological notions such as capital and stigma, and neoliberal ideology, which converge with the above and are enacted into this textual analysis, in particular a frame analysis. A frame analysis is compatible with hermeneutics and social constructionism as it provides a method for interpreting what is happening inside the televisual frame and the implications of this on the construction of knowledge, specifically the construction of the 'benefits scrounger' figure.

Employing the abject and the grotesque as a mutually constitutive representational framework, the analysis examines the 'abject frame' and the 'grotesque frame', interpreting imagery that reflects the theories of Kristeva and Bakhtin. It explores representations of motherhood, manifestations of compromised bodily boundaries, aesthetics of disgust and a visual focus on the lower bodily stratum. These frames form the basis of two overarching representational categories present in the texts: the Abject Maternal and Grotesque Embodiment, which are the focus of the analysis and discussion chapters. Adapting Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-tiered framework for frame analysis, this research interprets how symbolism, narrative and ideology are bound together in the discursive and visual elements of the texts. This frame analysis is

interested in the visual in its pure denotative form onscreen, and how these images can be interpreted as a manifestation of abject and grotesque aesthetics.

The textual sample is 12 poverty porn documentaries, all broadcast by Channel 5 between 2014 and 2017: including eight episodes of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (2014), *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* (2015), *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* (2015) and two episodes of *On Benefits* (2017). It was important to include the three-year broadcasting time frame in the analysis in order to examine whether the representations, rhetoric and ideology were consistent over time. The sample was chosen using thematic selection, leading to an intentional sample that met certain criteria: for example, the sample was initially selected based on buzzwords in the programmes titles such as 'dole' and 'benefits'. The texts were also chosen based on their connection to the three themes that emerged in the interpretation of the literature, and the tabloid coverage and political discourse: Motherhood (pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, oversized families); Disability (obesity, mental health, fraudulent claims); and Deviancy (unemployment, crime, substance abuse).

This research asks and investigates the following questions, grouped together as concerning (i) issues of representation and depiction, (ii) wider social, political and cultural context, and (iii) characteristics of the poverty porn genre:

(i) How are benefits claimants represented, and subsequently constructed as 'benefits scroungers'? How are benefits claimants made other, and/or constructed as outsiders? How have abject and grotesque frames, and aesthetics of disgust, been utilised in these representations?

(ii) How does the construction of benefits claimants as 'benefits scroungers' compare to, and reflect, journalistic depictions of them and the political discourse surrounding the issue? Which cultural myths are most apparent in poverty porn programmes?

(iii) What are the stylistic, ideological, narrative and discursive characteristics of poverty porn programming? What makes poverty porn a definable sub-genre of factual programming? How does poverty porn fuse documentary practices with reality television entertainment modes?

1.4 Chapter Summaries

Following the introduction, the thesis begins with three explorative literature review chapters. The first, 'The Abject and the Grotesque', offers an in-depth exploration of the theories of abjection and the grotesque, and a consideration of them as mutually constitutive concepts that can be used in unison to interpret cultural texts. This chapter draws links between abjection as a psychoanalytical process (which has been adapted by others to analyse cultural artefacts) and the grotesque as a representational form of the abject, bound together in relation to disgust. Thus, this research argues the abject cannot be without the grotesque, and vice versa, because both compromise physical and psychological boundaries and contribute to the construction of the self as opposed to the abject or grotesque other. The chapter traces a socio-cultural history of abjection, the grotesque and disgust by examining some varied and fascinating examples: the notion of monstrous births and 'aberrations', and how this has been translated into a disgust towards both older and teenage mothers; 19th century freak shows and their contemporary counterparts in the form of talk shows; the idea of sin in relation to abjection and how this is portrayed on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*; and depictions of 'fat' and 'ugly'.

The second literature review chapter, 'Social Construction, Stigma and Self', explains the use of social constructionism as the key research philosophy weaved through this thesis. Firstly, the concept of social constructionism as conceived by Berger and Luckmann (1966) is mapped out, with specific reference to the ways in which knowledge is constructed via social interactions and an engagement with popular culture. This is extremely pertinent to this research in understanding the construction of both the 'benefits scrounger' figure and poverty as an individual responsibility. This chapter also explores the concept of stigma and its relationship with social construction. It draws together the theorisation of social stigma by Goffman (1963) and the 'looping effect' by Hacking (1999) to comprehend how pejorative labels stick. Further, the chapter employs a psychosocial approach, as utilised by Frost and Hoggett (2008) to investigate how stigma is internalised and how it contributes to the construction of the self. The chapter concludes there is a paradoxical relationship between resisting and reinforcing stigma: in resisting the pejorative labels assigned to them, often by trying to pass them on to another, individuals reinforce stigma.

The third and final literature review chapter is split into two parts: 'Mapping out Social Class', which explores some key debates around the theorisation of social class; and 'Understanding the Underclass', which brings together sociological definitions and cultural depictions of an underclass. Rather than attempting to define 'social class', which this thesis alone does not have the scope for, this chapter brings together the concepts outlined in the first two literature review chapters and applies them to key debates. The first section begins by providing the neoliberal context in which definitions of social class, the production of poverty porn programmes, and this research are situated. It details the legacy of Thatcherism on contemporary politics, and its effect on working-class communities and the way social class is understood and defined. Ultimately, this research argues the implication of neoliberal governmentality is the facilitation of more readily accepted constructions of disgust. This chapter also explores Bourdieu's concepts of capital, examining how the working class and underclass are depicted as lacking capital and taste; and the symbolic violence in which oppressed groups are considered to be complicit in their own stigmatisation and subsequent oppression.

In understanding the concept of the underclass, the chapter delves into how it falls outside social boundaries, making the concept of the underclass abject in its very nature. The chapter considers the dichotomy between the poor as potentially surplus to requirement or unwilling to work, which fits the constructed narrative of a binary between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. An exploration of Marx's understanding of capitalism and his disdain for the 'lumpenproletariat' is also vital here as the language he uses to describe this underclass is akin to the notion of abjection. Throughout the chapter, comparisons are drawn between historical definitions and depictions of the poor and contemporary portrayals of the underclass. For instance, how the historical figure of the 'sturdy beggar' as analysed by Hughes (2015) is comparable to representations of fraudulent benefits claimants; how Poor Laws are surprisingly similar to contemporary welfare policies; and how Victorian slum tourism, the voyeuristic obsession with the poor, has filtered into poverty porn programmes. The chapter finishes by exploring Charles Murray's (1990; 2001) theorisation of the British underclass which, though widely disputed in academic circles, has a seemingly huge influence on contemporary discourses. Murray's characteristics of an underclass

(illegitimate birth, violent crime and drop-out from the labour force) are certainly evident in poverty porn programmes.

The methodology chapter, as detailed above, draws on the ideas in the literature review chapters and offers a rationale for an interpretive hermeneutical frame analysis to be carried out. As explained, the textual analysis focuses on two representational categories: the Abject Maternal and Grotesque Embodiment.

The Abject Maternal chapter explores how fear and disgust towards the underclass are often bound in gendered representations that reflect a fear over the generative power of lower-class women. The concept of the abject maternal is manifest in the figure of the 'benefits mum' in poverty porn programmes, something the women are routinely labelled. This personifies the constructed excessive nature of underclass women as overtly sexual and dangerously fertile. These ideas are signified in the representations of 'supersized benefits families' found in journalistic and televisual texts, exemplified in the 'Big Families Special' episodes in the *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* series. Within the analysed texts, there is a trend for defining the women by how many children they have and paralleling this with the amount of benefits they receive, reflecting the cultural myth that women who claim benefits have more children in order to make bigger benefits claims. The analysis also compares the figure of the 'benefits mum' with the construction of the 'yummy mummy' as opposing versions of sexuality, femininity and maternity based on varying levels of capital and taste, or lack thereof. This chapter examines in detail a storyline in one of the episodes in which the narrator continually tells the viewer that two of the participants are trying for 'Project Baby', which implies some dastardly planning to claim more benefits. The representation of the couple is extremely pejorative, framing them as stupid and disgusting through the filming and editing methods, and the patronising tone of the narrator. Ultimately, the framing of the women as the abject maternal 'benefits mums' marks them as figures of disgust who are irresponsible and immoral.

The Grotesque Embodiment chapter includes analysis of some of the most visceral and graphic imagery in the sampled texts, and the most literal examples of abjection in the depiction of compromised bodily boundaries. The analysis in this chapter centres on two connected themes: the notion of 'self-inflicted' illness and 'fraudulent' disability, which

are consequences of overeating, drinking or smoking; and how these bodies are considered excessive and abnormal. These bodies are visually hyperbolic and the discursive practices attached to them are exaggerative. This chapter also explores how the participants, constructed as grotesque, are framed as other, examining the discourse used to separate the viewer from the participants. The analysis reveals that poverty porn programmes employ unconventional modes of othering, often referring to an ironic 'we' that excludes the grotesque in its inclusion; the word 'benefits' is also used within the text to describe just about anything, which helps to uphold the distinctions between us/them or taxpayer/benefits scrounger. A large section of this chapter is dedicated to analysing the complex and sometimes paradoxical representations of fat in the texts. The exploration of these depictions focuses on the gendered and sexualised elements of fat representations: the asexual fat woman who blurs boundaries between corporeality and environment, and the boundaries of gender; the fetishized fat woman; the fat man who is emasculated and infantilised, finding pleasure in food rather than in sex; and the relationship between fat and queer. These representations reflect the complexities of disgust and its relationship with desire. The chapter finishes by interpreting representations of the leaking and open body, which corresponds with Bakhtin's grotesque and marks the grotesque as having compromised bodily borders, thus they are abject.

The conclusion explores an overarching theme within the analysis: deviance. All the participants are framed as deviant in some way: morally, criminally, sexually, and corporeally. This final chapter revisits the abject maternal and grotesque embodiment in relation to this. Also, the conclusion reflects on the theme of criminal deviance that runs through the texts, especially the gendered elements of crime: while Murray proposed the underclass was made up of young male criminals (date ref?), the texts portray women as equal in this respect, framing them as affronts to femininity and neoliberal values of good citizenship, i.e. the ultimate figure of deviance. Furthermore, the conclusion explores the notion of whiteness as a characteristic of the underclass and how this is tied to deviance in the form of xenophobia and racism, which frames the underclass as unreflexive and backward. This is an interesting departure as it shows how an oppressed other abjects another other; in this case, the 'benefits scrounger' abjecting the 'immigrant'. This depiction combines two powerful and paradoxical cultural

narratives: ‘benefits scroungers’ do not work because they are lazy but there is no work because ‘immigrants’ have supposedly ‘stolen all of the jobs’. Within the sampled texts, there is a transference of blame from the unemployed to immigrants, which ironically still frames the ‘benefits scrounger’ as irresponsible and unable to admit their own faults. Finally, the conclusion considers how the participants in the texts construct the self in relation to stigma, and how this reflects the abjection of the self. Overall, this research argues that although disgust is an innate human emotion, disgust towards oppressed groups – in this case the white poor – has been manufactured throughout history. The figure of the ‘benefits scrounger’ is an amalgamation of historical contempt and neoliberal ideology that refigures poverty as an individual issue rather than a structural one. The ‘benefits scrounger’ label is the latest pejorative and divisive construction centred on class hatred. The hope for the scope of this research is that it provides a framework for interpreting future problematic representations of the poor.

2 Literature Review I: Exploring Abjection and the Grotesque

2.1 Introduction

This section maps the historicity of theories of abjection and grotesque. Although these theories traverse time and critical fields such as the psychoanalytical and the literary, one can argue they are mutually constitutive. The abject and the grotesque *individually* explore the cultural forms of literature and art as demonstration; yet an amalgamation of the two can be used to investigate the devices employed in the contemporary construction of a social 'underclass'. Imogen Tyler's (2013) conception of social abjection converts Julia Kristeva's (1982) classic abject from a psychic form in which the self expels what it deems other and harmful, placing that which it finds repugnant outside mental borders, to a physical manifestation whereby certain groups of 'wasted' humans, or 'national abjects' are cast to the borders of society. It is important to understand the development of this theory from the psychological to the social and political, as it highlights how the process of abjection becomes manifest. The concept of abjection can be applied to discussions of social and political injustices, particularly in a neoliberal society, which is fundamental to this research. Indeed, Sara Beardsworth argues that recent work on abjection has gone 'straight for a theory of the political significance of abjection in order to figure out the deep forces of oppressive social and political relations' (2004: 80). Beardsworth suggests that in these types of debates, abjection is used to explain how power relations are maintained within society. Theories of grotesquery can also be interpreted in this way, giving them an important contemporary application, which is discussed in detail below. Particular focus is given to the ways in which the abject is manifest in contemporary visual representations of the grotesque.

2.2 Abjection

2.2.1 Kristeva's Abject

An initial exploration of the original theoretical position of Kristeva's abjection is necessary to comprehend the 'translation' from the psychic to social, and the manifestations of the abject within media (especially televisual) representations. In

Powers of Horror (1982), Kristeva details how the human body physically reacts to things that threaten the border between subject and object, self and other. Kristeva uses a range of examples from the macabre of the corpse (reminding us of our own inevitable death) to bodily secretions that evoke disgust such as faeces, vomit, urine and blood, and the more seemingly mundane food items such as the skin on top of milk that supposedly causes a rather dramatic response of vomiting, nausea and shaking. In these instances, the bodily reactions 'protect' the individual. This is suggestive of the psychic borders that protect the self from other, as well as from the horrors of being. However, Kristeva states that 'since the food is not an "other" for "me"…I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*' (1982: 3). This suggests that as the food item does not form part of the individual's physical or psychic makeup, it cannot be truly other; it is too disparate from the self to become other. Thus, the individual must turn to the inner self to seek something to cast aside, and so the physical reaction becomes symbolic of the psychic reaction of disgust, not only towards food items but for everything the individual finds repulsive or threatening.

Reading Kristeva's work, Tyler argues that the,

> practices and experiences of abjection have a cathartic function for the subject, operating as forms of purging which give expression to a continual need to secure a narcissistic hygienic fantasy of a clean, whole and proper self through the performative enactment of self/other and subject/object distinctions (2013: 27-28).

Here, when an individual engages in abjection, they are effectively cleansing the self by getting rid of the dirty parts. Again, this happens on a physical and emotional level. The subject sets up borders between the dirty, the disgusting. We are all aware of our bodily functions, on some level fascinated, but this fascination is paralleled with horror. For example, when an individual expels bodily waste, the waste becomes abject, it is physically ejected from the body and a border is created. At the same time, a psychic border becomes apparent, the subject separates the self from the waste object because it is disgusting. Thus, distinctions are made between the subject (self) and the object (other). Kristeva argues that these 'wastes drop so that I might live, until from loss to

loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver' (1982: 3). Here, waste is a permanent reminder of our own materiality: it 'signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be' (1982: 3). One may argue that individuals abject objects, or even other people, in a process of recalling *where* they are not, and *who* they are not. This is important in understanding how abjection can be applied to the construction of an 'underclass', as it highlights how those 'wasted humans' are cast aside from 'normal' society. They are regarded as outside the class system and outside societal borders. Hence, Tyler (2009) argues that

> abjection can explain the structural and political acts of inclusion/exclusion which establish the foundations of social existence…the abject has a double presence: it is both within 'us' and within 'culture' and it is through both individual and group rituals of exclusion that abjection is 'acted out'. Abjection thus generates the borders of the individual *and* the social body (2009: 79).

Kristeva (1982) proposes that the first time the individual experiences the process of abjection is during birth when they become an autonomous subject. Again, this occurs on two levels: firstly, there is the physical act of giving birth and secondly, there is the psychic trauma this invokes as the subject becomes its own being. Not only does the mother abject the child physically but the child abjects its 'maternal home'. Kristeva suggests this experience sets us up for the rest of our lives, the 'horror' becoming symbolic for all the things we wish to expel; the abjection from the mother's body and the 'borders' it creates becoming the preliminary condition of our reactions to the disgusting. Indeed, as Tyler argues, 'in Kristeva's narrative, all human desires, insecurities, fears and creativity stem from this primary exile from the m/otherland…In crossing the originary border of the mother's body this exilic subject is henceforth compelled to enact abjection tirelessly, through the classification and demarcation of her/his world' (2013: 29). Here, the individual practices abjection to make sense of their world, in order to survive. The notion of the maternal as abject has been the focus of much academic literature, especially in cultural texts where the maternal is placed as monstrous or grotesque. As Tyler argues, what 'characterizes these feminist mobilizations of Kristeva's abject maternal is a concern with theorizing and identifying the maternal (and feminine) body as primary site/sight of cultural disgust' (2009: 82).

For example, Creed (1993) situates the abject maternal, or the 'monstrous-feminine', within horror films. Creed details how, within abject theory, waste (faeces and menstrual blood) is associated with the mother and how this translates to the big screen through images of waste that become culturally symbolic of horror (using *The Exorcist* and *Carrie* films as examples). On a smaller, less 'horrific' scale, the maternal also becomes abject in televisual representations, especially those loaded with semiotic references to working or lower-class women. In relation to the 'monstrous-feminine', Edwards and Graulund argue that within Kristeva's account of the maternal body, there is a fear 'of the mother's generative power' (2013: 33). In a contemporary setting, fear or loathing of the lower classes may come from a fear of the woman's generative power as a producer of more children like herself. Following political and cultural discourse, the 'underclass', particularly benefits claimants, become drains on society, void of the right to produce offspring. Lower or working-class women are often coded as excessive, vulgar and overtly sexual (Skeggs 1997; Tyler 2008). This apparent excessiveness is manifest in representations of their bodies and narratives around the number of children they bear. Hence, a media focus on the parallel issues of pregnancy and reliance on the welfare state to raise their children. Articles such as 'Benefits scrounging mother-of-12 Cheryl Prudham faces jail…' and '"He's living like a king": Fury as "neglected" family-of-10 on £44,000-a-year benefits are moved to £425,000 four-bedroom house', both from the *Daily Mail*, illustrate this growing anxiety. Articles such as these, coupled with televisual representations (analysed and discussed at length in this research), work towards producing a figure of the 'underclass' that is made abject.

Kristeva argues it is 'not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (1982: 4). This apparent 'underclass' disturbs class identity: members of the underclass belong to *no* class, they have breached the borders of the social hierarchy. Also, they do not respect borders in terms of being, yet are paradoxically confined within the borders of wasted areas such as council housing estates. If the underclass want to leave these wasted spaces, they are disrespecting their position in society although paradoxically, under neoliberal ideology, individuals are encouraged to participate in social mobility. Kristeva's abjection is not about cleanliness or health yet social or national abjects (Tyler 2013) are nonetheless deemed disgusting, repulsive and grotesque.

2.2.2 Abjection of the Self

As mentioned earlier, a major paradox is presented within abjection: while the subject abjects that which it finds repulsive or other, the subject is also abject, 'I abject *myself*' (Kristeva 1982: 3). Kimmich (1998) suggests this paradox can be further explored at a base level of etymology,

> Looking to the Latin roots as well as some historical uses of abject, subject, and the related term, object, we can see how their meanings intertwine. Abject comes from the Latin *ab*, from, and *iacere*, to throw. Literally, then, abject means outcast. Subject and object share the same Latin verb, *iacere*, to throw. *Sub* means below, while *ob* means before. As its prefix suggests, the earliest uses of subject refer to a person ruled by a king or prince. So while subject has come to mean a thinking individual and to carry with it the notion of autonomy in modern philosophical terms, it also means to be literally cast below, under the power or authority of others (Kimmich 1998: 224).

Here, the validity of the subject is unstable. Although the subject is the one doing the abject-*ing*, the casting out of the other, they are also subconsciously aware of their own position as possibly abject. Within psychoanalytical critique, the subject is an autonomous being, capable of making decisions. However, as Kimmich (1998) argues, in historical terms, the subject is controlled by the ruling classes and cast below in the social hierarchy. In social abjection, where groups of people are 'obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity' (McClintock 1995: 72, in Tyler 2013: 4), the difference between abject and subject becomes blurred. In a contemporary neoliberal society, individuals may adopt a position of judgment over those deemed the 'underclass', taking on the dominant ideologies promoted by news and television media. However, their position as subjects is also vulnerable as they are ruled by the same neoliberal governmentality. The subject is constantly reminded of their own position, the possibility that they may also be or become abject. The process of othering the 'underclass' (as well as Gypsies, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and chavs, as explored by Tyler, 2013) works by separating society into tangible groups that can be assigned positions outside societal borders. As Kimmich (1998: 224) argues, 'designating

some bodies or groups of bodies as contaminated, irrational, or disorderly allows those who count themselves among the dominant group – the subjects – to think with relief, "That is not me"'. This also works on another level. The individuals engaging with the negative media representations of the 'underclass' are not from the dominant group but are subordinated themselves. By engaging with these texts, these subjects can set up imaginary borders, identifying traits that separate them from the social abjects. Again, as Kimmich (1998: 225) argues, the 'need to repel the abject and to define oneself in opposition to it firmly plants abjection within the self. Should that abjection become the object of another's attention, the former subject will instead be subject to that internal shortcoming'. Thus, the subject is always vulnerable to becoming another subject's abject. Furthermore, as abjection is part of the formation of the human condition, as part of the 'narcissistic crisis', abjection is always placed firmly within the self, hence the argument that 'the abject is the self' (Beardsworth 2004: 88).

Waskul and van der Riet (2002) take an interesting approach to this notion by investigating cancer patients' feelings about themselves as abject beings. The patients in this study discuss how their non-normative bodies during or after cancer treatment have become abject and grotesque. This is considered on three levels. Firstly, their bodies have become violated through treatment, and this can be read in terms of abjection as the borders of their bodies being crossed. Secondly, the patients consider themselves abject because of physical deformities due to their illness such as tumours, facial deformities and one woman with a 'very large fungating breast cancer that protruded from her body and would haemorrhage as she was being showered' (2002: 499). Thirdly (also mentioned above), there are distinct signs of haemorrhage and waste leakage from the bodies. Again, in Kristevan terms, bodily waste becomes abject as it crosses the body border. This is amplified by the involuntary nature of their waste, rendering the patients unable to control their body borders. As Waskul and van der Riet argue, 'the catastrophe of the abject body cannot be contained by the suffering person' (2002: 499). Here, both the body and the waste are abject. Throughout the interviews, the patients consider how others feel about them: 'You are just noticing, some people are recoiling' (quoted in Waskul and van der Riet 2002: 500). The patients feel that others consider them abject, as well as considering themselves abject. Again, there is a paradox here. Because the patients view themselves as abject, they assume other

people consider them abject too. Thus, abjection is rooted in the self. Furthermore, Waskul and van der Riet propose that due to the patients' abjection becoming manifest in the physical expulsion of waste, visitors and healthcare professionals can become abject too,

> When others witness abjection they too become contaminated. This contamination results from the patient's inability to control bodily function (e.g., defecating in bed), or an inability to conceal the abject disfigurement (e.g., ulcerated lips). In either case, like the boundaries of the physical abject body itself, symbolic boundaries may burst and the grotesque stigma extends out, affecting the entire scene of interaction and all participants who interact with "it"' (2002: 499).

Bearing witness to this waste and contamination, the subject engages with the process of abjection and puts up an imaginary border between themselves and the waste object (of the patient). Once again, this abjection reminds them of death and decay, of their own mortality (Kristeva 1982), thus the process comes full circle as the self is made abject. Parallel to this, the patient's feelings about others seeing them as abject become a self-fulfilling prophecy as due to the witnessing of waste and the abjection that ensues, others do indeed deem them abject.

2.3 The Grotesque

2.3.1 Defining the Grotesque

The manifestation of abjection can be identified within the framing of grotesque figures. Abject individuals are portrayed as such through the trope of grotesquery. The 'grotesque' is a literary device which represents distorted figures, from depictions of mythical beasts and monsters to tales of 'freaks' in humanoid form. All these creatures are bound together because they fall outside the norm, in varying degrees. Edwards and Graulund (2013) explore how the grotesque has influenced cultural forms such as literature, visual art and film. However, one may argue that within a contemporary setting, the use of the grotesque has shifted slightly to encompass other popular cultural forms such as televisual texts. This section explores how literary forms of grotesquery have been adapted from the most explicit definitions of 'monsters' and 'freaks' into the

common journalistic and televisual representations of the 'underclass' that saturate contemporary media. It also argues that representing this contemporary grotesque 'underclass' is a legitimate and pervasive method in making them abject.

In their genealogy of the grotesque, Edwards and Graulund pose the question 'what *do* we mean when we speak of the grotesque? Peculiar, odd, absurd, bizarre, macabre, depraved, degenerate, perverse…' (2013: 1). From a literary perspective, the grotesque can refer to all these undesired traits and more. There are no bounds to the grotesqueness of a being. Edwards and Graulund argue that the 'grotesque also manifests itself in the corporeal, material world of the physical body' (2013: 1). For Edwards and Graulund, this manifestation is still very much tied to literary depictions of the grotesque in bodily form rather than a true physical embodiment of grotesque characteristics. Within contemporary culture, however, the grotesque applies not only to individuals who share the qualities stated above, but who are also physically grotesque and represented as such.

The grotesque transgresses boundaries and is presented as, or presents itself as, other. By crossing these boundaries, the grotesque becomes abject. Grotesquery operates through 'binary logic' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 9). More specifically, the grotesque individual can be identified along the binary of abnormal/normal. As Edwards and Graulund argue, grotesquerie in all its forms 'revolves around the categories of inclusion (the norm) and exclusion (the abnormal) in order to preserve marked distinctions between "us" and "them", "self" and "other"' (2013: 9). These marked distinctions employed throughout the process of othering pave the way for abjection, where the individual must set up distinctions (through psychological borders) between the self and other. In modern media texts, demonising discourse often sets out distinctions of 'us' and them', usually targeting Britain's national abjects (Tyler 2013), which in turn facilitates the process of bordering between self and other. In Anglo-Saxon literature and medieval art, Edwards and Graulund argue that 'grotesque bodies are used as demarcation of otherness and difference. Christian artists often invoked grotesque and monstrous imagery to demonise foreigners and those of different religions' (2013: 45). This practice can also be identified in contemporary cultural texts. Foreign asylum seekers attempting to cross actual geographical borders have become wrapped up in discourse that encapsulates both xenophobic and anti-welfare state ideologies. Islam

has been framed as a dangerous religion which breeds terrorist activity. Tyler argues that this 'invasion complex', in which the media frames 'Britain as a "soft touch"', is the product of 'the repeated citation of images and metaphors of national softness', which 'invoked an image of Britain as a feminized and disabled body' (2013: 88). Britain as a soft touch symbolises the continuation of supposed social problems, namely asylum seekers and benefits claimants as drains on society. This sanctions 'public fear, anxiety and disgust' against these groups (Tyler 2013: 88). Again, this feeds into the neoliberal logic that individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy, or outside it, are responsible for their own poor situations. They are blamed for a variety of social problems, thus they fall outside the norm, marking them as other, making them abject. On a metaphorical level, Britain as 'feminized and disabled' also becomes abject, its borders subject to invasion. Again, this notion can be traced back to the maternal abject. Britain as feminized, and therefore maternal, must expel and abject the grotesque other in the form of the social 'underclass'.

The binary between abnormal and normal can be most notably identified within the physical manifestation of the grotesque body. As Edwards and Graulund argue, 'monstrosity and grotesquerie combine in a primarily physical category: in order to be monstrous, one must manifest a clear and usually visible difference from that which is 'normal' (2013: 46). The grotesque being becomes the monstrous other through obvious physical defects or abnormalities. Hence, by marking out physical distinctions between the 'normal' self and the 'abnormal' other, the grotesque is concerned with the abnormal, almost subhuman categorisation of beings. Arguably, certain representations depict the contemporary social 'underclass' as less than human. This focus on the physically grotesque body finds form within popular media texts such as the daytime television programme, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (ITV 2005 - 2019). The show became infamous for its host's sharp-tongued quips and the array of guests who graced its stage over the past 14 years. In particular, the hype and sensationalism around the show often revolves around the physical appearances of the guests. They usually have some sort of physical 'defect', such as missing, rotten or oversized teeth, crossed eyes or short sightedness, or are excessively overweight. Dorrian argues that 'modern biology recognizes two principle categories of monstrosity: those cases in which *members of the body are absent or display excessive growth or malformation,* and those in which the

body is doubled, wholly or partially, along one of its axes' (2000: 310; emphasis added). These supposedly unattractive features are highlighted by close-up shots and through discourse in which Kyle sarcastically questions how his guests have so much sex, which perhaps suggests that no one could find these individuals attractive enough to have sexual intercourse with them. An online editorial by *The Sun* (2015) entitled 'The many faces of Jeremy Kyle…show's 37 most unforgettable guests', explicitly marks out the physical differences of the guests, 'warts and all'. Throughout this article, close-up screenshots of the guests are coupled with scathing, derogatory one-liners, specifically aimed at their physical appearance. The most crass examples include 'let's hope [the baby] gets the father's genes', 'apparently, this is a face even a mother couldn't love', 'who's he looking at?' and 'Am I looking at my finger or nose?' (both underneath photographs of men who appear to be cross-eyed). The virulent and unapologetic nature of the article is suggestive of how embedded this mockery of the 'underclass' has become in British society, turning these individuals into crude caricatures. Thus, the notoriety of the guests and what makes them unforgettable is their supposed unattractiveness. This physicality becomes a symbolic marker for the underclass as monstrously grotesque. Furthermore, it facilitates the process whereby we differentiate between normal and abnormal bodies, determining 'them' and 'us', 'self' and 'other' distinctions. As Cohen (2005) argues, 'People are denounced filthy when they are felt to be unassailably other, whether because perceived attributes of their identities repulse the onlooker or because physical aspects of their bodies (appearance, odor, decrepitude) do… All of these versions of filth have one thing in common: from the point of view of the one making the judgment, they serve to establish distinctions – 'That is not me'" (Cohen 2005 in Tyler 2013: 21-22).

2.3.2 Deviant Behaviour and 'Sin'

Nevertheless, it is not just physical attributes that differentiate the grotesque other from the self. Edwards and Graulund argue that while,

> Physical irregularity is the primary attribute of monstrosity, deviant behaviour can serve to emphasize or exaggerate monstrosity. Abnormal behaviour helps to mark the monster as a cultural as well as physical other. Some such behaviours include habits of eating, grooming, and

> dressing, reactions to human approach, relations to human language, and transgressing gender roles' (2013: 47).

In neoliberal society, the contemporary underclass can be identified in these terms: they are a social, cultural and economic other, marked out by their supposed inability to conform to society's norms. As Tyler suggests, the underclass are 'failed citizens' who fall 'outside the domain of the social proper' (2013: 161). Through the binaries of 'inclusion/exclusion and work/worklessness', the notion of British citizenship was reimagined by New Labour and only 'through work could class abjects find a route back to citizenship and into the bosom of the body politic' (Tyler 2013: 161). Again, these binaries of inclusion/exclusion and work/worklessness can be paralleled with the grotesque binary of abnormal/normal and the abject binary of self/other. Those in work are 'included' in neoliberal society, deemed normal citizens. Those who are out of work, particularly those in receipt of benefits, are 'excluded' as they fail to conform to normal citizenship. They are made other and abject, failed citizens. In a judicial sense, this is most evident in the introduction of numerous criminal offences which target the poor: 'In total, between 1997 and 2008, Labour introduced 3,605 new criminal offences…including the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Parental Orders and Individual Behaviour Orders' (Tyler 2013: 161). These orders, the ASBO in particular, garnered national attention, highlighted the supposed deviant behaviours of the underclass, and became synonymous with the 'chav' figure. The hoodie, an item of clothing strongly associated with the 'chav' and anti-social behaviour, also became a negative focus. *The Guardian* details two cases where two 16-year-old males were banned from wearing hoodies and caps under their ASBO conditions (Andalo 2005; Barkham 2005). From 2004 - the year in which 'disgust and fascination with chavs peaked in the British press' (Tyler 2008: 21 - there was what could be considered a mass crackdown on hoodies, as shopping centres, pubs and other establishments banned individuals wearing this undesired item. The fashion choices of the abject citizen can be associated with the grotesque: habits of grooming and dressing can be considered deviant, abnormal behaviour which exaggerate monstrosity (Edwards and Graulund 2013).

The deviant behaviour of the grotesque is the essential premise of the *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. On the programme's website, a list of issues under the heading 'Do you want to

appear on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*?' invites potential guests to explore whether their personal problem is covered by the remit of the show. The subheadings for these issues include 'break-ups', 'relationships', 'access' (to children), 'DNA', 'bad parents', 'addictions', 'lie detector' and 'stolen'. Each issue poses a question to the potential guest, for example, 'Have you had money or valuables stolen from you? Would a lie detector help you get the answers you need?' (ITV 2016). Interludes on the show, often before or after the ad break, also ask similar rhetorical questions of the audience. Guests on the show are often heavily criticised by the host for their bad behaviour. The 'deviant' behaviour exhibited on the show includes cheating on partners (often resulting in doubt over a child's paternity), violence (often domestic), stealing and excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs and food. All issues are considered under the presumption that the guests avoid work, actively choosing to 'scrounge' off the state to fund their various habits. The deviancy of the guests is amplified by the contrast between them (as the physically grotesque other) and host Jeremy Kyle, psychotherapist Graham Stanier, and a string of occasional aides such as doctors and rehab coordinators. Although Kyle's sanctimonious stance is often rebuked by guests and the tabloids due to his own 'deviant' behavior (for example, he once battled a gambling addiction), Stanier is presented as virtuous and genuine. Their normalcy is in stark contrast to the guests' deviancy. Although their deviant and abnormal behaviour almost becomes the norm within the confines of the show, the guests are still presented as the grotesque and abject other. This is due to Kyle's common-sense discourse, which contains a sense of othering, especially regarding their status as benefits claimants. For example, guests are sometimes lauded for simply having a job and the audience is instructed to give them a round of applause. Again, this works on the binaries of self/other, abnormal/normal and work/worklessness.

Not only do these depictions link to grotesque deviancy but also to Kristeva's conception of abjection within religion, especially through the discourse of Christian sin. As Kristeva argues, abjection 'persists as exclusion or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions…It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness – but always nameable, always totalizeable' (1982: 17). Kristeva suggests that sin is regarded as something other to the self, something to be made abject. However, as sin is of the flesh (of the self), the

subject must also, paradoxically, abject the self as explored above. To Kristeva, one 'could say, in fact, that sin is subjectified abjection' (1982: 128). Thus, sin becomes internalised as part of the subject: to abject sin is to also abject the self. As well as this, the 'various means of purifying the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions' (1982: 17). This purification of the abject being happens by abjecting the sin and self. Kristeva alludes to another binary: the 'pure/impure distinction' (1982: 92), suggesting that the pure self must expel that which is impure. Similar to her discourse on human waste, the self must expel that which it finds repulsive. However, in this instance, it is sin that is impure and threatens the self. Arguably, the deviant behaviours showcased on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* such as adultery and addiction reflect some of the seven deadly sins, namely lust, greed, gluttony and sloth. Although the seven deadly sins are not taken directly from the Bible, they have biblical precursors and can be linked to religiosity. Through the show's lie detector tests and DNA tests (to determine paternity), the abject being is forced to confront and confess their 'sins', thus abjecting their sin as well as the self. On the notion of confession, Beardsworth states that the 'fate of abjection in the Christian religion is its absorption into speech. The symbolization of abjection appears in the phenomenon of spoken sin (2004: 136). When an individual confesses to sin out loud, it becomes abject. Furthermore, there are correlations between sin and the grotesque. Dorrian, who traces the grotesque and the monstrous back to the work of Plato and Aristotle, argues that the 'etymology of "monster" leads to the Latin *monere,* to warn. The monster exists, historically, from the Greek *teras* to the Latin *monere* and beyond, as a sign to be interpreted, a token of sin and divine displeasure, as the lexicon of the divine or the satanic' (2000: 312). Sin and the grotesque have also been interrelated in various literature and cultural texts. Again, Dorrian argues that,

> The monster is bad-born, ill-conceived; it is the fate of defective or transgressive couplings. Writing in the twelfth century, the Anglo-Norman ecclesiastic Gerald of Wales considered that the malformations of the Irish body indicated a people who turn away from God. He thought it unsurprising that nature should contravene her laws when "dealing with a people that is adulterous, incestuous, unlawfully conceived and born, outside the law, and shamefully abusing nature herself in spiteful

and horrible practices" (2000: 313).

Therefore, those who 'turn away from God' to live in sin become a monstrous and grotesque other (one may argue that Gerald of Wales considered the Irish as an abject underclass). Similarly, the grotesque is presented through the paradigm of sin in the artwork of Hieronymus Bosch (Edward and Graulund 2013; Duran 2015). As Duran notes, Bosch 'was internationally celebrated as a painter of surrealistic religious visions that often dealt with sin and the torments of hell' (2015: no page). Edwards and Graulund suggest that Bosch was a 'grotesque artist' whose work featured depictions of 'hybrids of man and monster' (2013: 30), as well as 'potbellied monsters and gargantuan creatures, figures with bodies that are exaggerated, absurd or out of control' (2013: 94). Here, the grotesque finds form metaphorically in the deviancy of sin that Bosch depicts, and in his physical representations of the monstrous.

2.3.3 Bakhtin: Bodies Beyond Borders

As illustrated above, the grotesque is often depicted through the breakdown of borders, primarily bodily ones. Borders mark out that which is considered the norm: the binary code that notions of grotesquery are based upon. As Russo argues, the grotesque, 'particularly as a bodily category, emerges as a deviation from the norm' (1994: 11). Thus, through this deviation, the grotesque signifies the breakdown of what constitutes the norm:

> …the grotesque has the power to eliminate borders: it can reveal how the boundaries between the normal and abnormal are fluid, not fixed, and how the grotesque can lead to an erasure of common distinctions (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 9).

Here, the complexities of defining the grotesque are suggested. Although distinctions between normal and abnormal mark out the grotesque, paradoxically, the grotesque can eliminate the supposed boundaries between normal and abnormal. Furthermore, Edwards and Graulund suggest that grotesquery reveals certain truths surrounding relationships of power and, in turn, social inequalities,

> Grotesque figures can cause the dissolution of the borders separating the normal and abnormal, inside and outside, internal and external. One

> extreme flows into another. Territories will not be bounded as clear cut, divisions are dissolved. This erasure of common distinctions speaks to debates over *stigmatization and normalcy*, what it means to exist outside the norm, and what the norm is. After all, we must remember that *normalization is a powerful discourse for control and institutionalization, for dominant institutions sanction certain forms of 'normalcy', and this always comes at the expense of others, which are constituted by contrast as abnormal, inferior or even shameful* (2013: 9; emphasis added).

This position calls for a consideration of how normalcy is defined and who has the right to define it. One might argue that the notion of normalcy is implemented by those in power to make distinctions between those persons deemed socially acceptable and those regarded as 'other'. As Edwards and Graulund suggest, individuals who don't fit into the 'acceptable' category become stigmatised and ostracised. Within a neoliberal society, these supposed abnormal individuals are the recognisable social abjects, pushed outside the bounds of normality and forced to live on or outside the borders of society. As Tyler argues, the national abjects 'are the border subjects of the neoliberal body politic – those whose lives are deemed worthless or expendable' (2013: 10). The use of grotesque, exaggerated and caricatured representations of the 'other' in popular culture enables this process, allowing for a consensus that they do not belong. Baker (2010) considers this process with specific reference to the queer grotesque or 'Monstrous Queer'. Baker argues that the binaries 'embedded in our culture are infamous: man/woman, human/animals, activity/passivity, life/death, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal. If the normal threatens to become abnormal, or the unnatural natural, the other equal rather than subordinate, the binaries cease to operate in any powerful way and (heteropatriarchal) subjectivity destabilises, or at least seems less "real" than it did before' (2010: 95). Arguably, dominant ideologies in neoliberal society are influenced by a heteropatriarchal worldview, whereby heterosexual man is placed at the top of the social, political and economic hierarchy. Those in power at the top of the hierarchy subordinate others. As discussed in the section above on abjection, subjects are cast below by the 'ruling elites'. Baker suggests that if these subordinated others were to become equal, social hierarchies would cease

to have any validity. Thus, marking others as abject and representing them in popular culture as grotesque becomes a method of gaining and maintaining power.

Russo asserts that the grotesque has been used ‘prominently by Bakhtin, to conceptualize social formations, social conflict, and the realm of the political. In the language of classical political theory, it is a virile category associated with the active, civic world of the public’ (1994: 8). The grotesque becomes a crude way of defining the masses; a metaphor for the subordinated public. To Bakhtin, the grotesque becomes synonymous with individuals who are not part of the ‘bourgeois ego’ and is representative of ‘the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed’ (1984: 19). In his study on the literary works of Rabelais, Bakhtin asserts that Rabelais' writing explores political and social issues through the lenses of grotesque realism and the carnival. Thus, the use of the grotesque body in Rabelais' world was a tool to explore the notion of collectivity at times of social unrest. Bakhtin argues that the body is 'presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal representing all people' (1984: 19). The 'bodily element' is free and open, and is read by Bakhtin as 'deeply positive' (1984: 19). As Stukator argues, 'carnival is fundamentally defined by its rejection of homogeneity. The carnivalesque abolishes hierarchies, prohibitions, and regulations in favour of a view of the world from below, a view that privileges the marginal and excluded over that which is considered sacred and authoritative' (2001: 201). The grotesque and the carnivalesque reveal truths surrounding inequalities. While the grotesque as a literary trope theorised by Bakhtin tends to favour 'the people', the grotesque as an aesthetic category is not so benevolent. One might argue that grotesque images, especially those in contemporary popular culture, work to stigmatise 'the people' and favour hierarchy and supposed normality. Within a contemporary setting, these people are grouped together to create a social underclass, literally growing in number due to unprecedented figures of poverty and homelessness, portrayed in a way that incites fear and hatred. These people are the grotesques of a neoliberal society.

The grotesque body 'is conceived of first and foremost as a social body’ (Russo 1994: 8). In turn, this social body is personified in the grotesque bodies of the monstrous other. Bakhtin states that the grotesque body is mostly identified with the ‘bodily lower stratum’ (1984: 19; also see Russo 1994: 8). Within grotesque realism, 'upward' and

'downward' have an 'absolute and strictly topographical meaning'; these terms are linked to the anatomy of the human body (1984: 21). Grotesque realism utilises the upper parts of 'the face or the head' and the lower parts of the 'genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks' (Bakhtin 1984: 21). Degradation of the characters in Rabelais' work is concerned with 'the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs'; it relates 'to acts of defecation and copulation, pregnancy, and birth' (Bakhtin 1984: 21). Therefore, the aesthetic nature of the grotesque is a saturation of words and associated images involving the formation and giving of life, and the expelling of waste (of course, Bakhtin is mostly analysing the literary content of Rabelais' work, but one cannot deny the images these words conjure up). As Pitts argues, 'the grotesque body is the eating and drinking body, the body of open orifices, the coarse body which yawns, hiccups, nose blows, flatulates, spits, hawks' (1998: 69). Furthermore, 'grotesque imagery can be found in pregnancy, defecation, copulation, dismemberment, sweating, sneezing and so on' (1998: 70). Here, one can identify parallels between the theorisation of the grotesque and abjection. The lower stratum of the body has clear associations with filth and waste, the disgusting objects the subject wishes to abject. Most of the bodily processes mentioned above involve an expelling of bodily substances in some way, be it gas, liquid or solid. The expelling of waste products from the body has abject connotations and the image of the grotesque individual going through these processes becomes abject: they are physically abjecting the disgusting object but are themselves physically abject due to the process. Therefore, the grotesque is, by its very nature, abject (and vice versa).

The aesthetic of the lower bodily stratum is mostly concerned with the open body. As Bakhtin argues,

> Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths (1984: 317 – 318).

The body in all of its outward growth goes beyond the 'normal' body's limited space; it transgresses boundaries. The grotesque body defies the limits of the physical body border and becomes abject. The growth, the sprouts, the buds transcend the body

border and become abject objects, paradoxically considered separate from the 'normal' body, yet attached to the grotesque. As Bakhtin argues, the grotesque body 'is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits' (1984: 26). Particular attention is paid to the grotesque body's openness, especially with regards to the open orifices (mouth, nose, anus, genitalia). Bakhtin proposes, 'The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world' (1984: 26). The world 'entering the body' suggests that the anatomical borders of the grotesque are not solid or complete; the body absorbs the world around it as it goes through the process of abjection. The body that continually experiences these processes and transformations is considered by Cixous as 'the body without beginning and without end' (cited in Russo 1994: 67), thus transgressing boundaries. Hence, the grotesque bodily form can be considered abject on numerous levels: it defies borders through abnormality; bodily growths are abject as they are outside the conventional body border; the openness of the body allows objects in and out of the body border; and the expulsion of waste is the physical abjection of filth.

2.4 Crossovers Between the Abject and the Grotesque

2.4.1 The Monstrous Maternal and Aberrant Birth

Kristeva's abjection pays particular attention to the maternal as symbolic of otherness. A similar theme can be identified in formulations of the grotesque, especially by Bakhtin. As argued throughout this chapter, there is an 'obvious interaction' between the two concepts (Magennis 2010): there is a clear duality as the abject becomes manifest in grotesque imagery. Again, the most prominent form the grotesque aesthetic presents is the lower bodily stratum, 'the life of the belly and the reproductive organs' (Bakhtin 1984: 21). Bakhtin also discusses the lower body in maternal terms, as the 'reproductive lower stratum' (1984: 21). The open and excessive body of grotesque realism can be paralleled with the pregnant body. Bakhtin explores this notion in is his brief discussion of the 'senile pregnant hag',

> In the famous Kerch terracotta collection we find figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and

> very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body (Bakhtin 1984: 25-26).

To Bakhtin, the potent image of the senile pregnant hag symbolises the grotesque form that is contradictory in its own nature (representing birth and death), while simultaneously opposing the 'normal', closed and complete world surrounding it. As Russo argues, 'the image of the pregnant hag is more than ambivalent. It is loaded with all of the connotations of fear and loathing around the biological process of reproduction and aging' (1994: 63). While Bakhtin's reading of the hags provides an important departure point for exploring the monstrous maternal, this research focuses on contemporary examples and the ways in which this fear and loathing is continually presented. In Kristevian terms, the pregnant hag reminds us of our own materiality: abject by nearing death, representative of the 'cadaver' while simultaneously being close to birth and the process of abjecting the other and the self. Magennis argues that the pregnant body is the 'ultimate abject, an Other that contains an Other' (2010: 92). Here, the image of the pregnant body presents a fear of the unknown. In abjection, we fear (and expel) that which is other, different, unknown; in pregnancy, that 'other' is inside of the self. As Betterton asks '…what if that otherness is enclosed inside our bodies, as yet unknown, neither friend nor enemy, growing inside our own flesh and blood?' (2006: 81). Through pregnancy, our fears of the other and the unknown become realised. These can be identified in our anxieties over potential complications with pregnancy and birth, resulting in disability or abnormality. Although perceptions of disability might have changed in recent times (for example, it is celebrated by institutions such as the Paralympics), from a theoretical and conceptual standpoint, abnormality *is* grotesque. Perhaps this is why the senile pregnant hag is still such an ambivalent and interesting example, as it brings to light societal fears over old age, pregnancy and disability. Today, women over a certain age are offered prenatal

screening to test for disabilities such as spina bifida or Down syndrome. Likewise, there is a common trend for women of a certain age to freeze their eggs 'before it's too late'.

From a scientific standpoint, women of an advanced maternal age are statistically more at risk of complications during pregnancy and birth. Yoon et al (1995) found that the risk of birthing a child with Down syndrome increases along with maternal age, with a 'steep increase' at 35 years. Yoon et al argue that 56% of women aged 35 and over go through prenatal testing and 90% of these terminate a foetus with Down syndrome, leading the researchers to suggest that the associated risk may have been higher had these women carried their child to term. Similarly, Hollier et al (2000) confirm the association between advanced maternal age and chromosomal 'aberrations' such as Down syndrome. Their research also indicates that women over 25 had a significantly greater risk of having foetuses with non-chromosomal malformations. Interestingly, the scientific jargon in these studies carries grotesque and abject connotations. For example, Hollier et al argue that 'some of the most devastating adverse outcomes in older pregnant women are anomalies associated with chromosomal aberrations…' (2000: 701). Although this phrasing is biological, the use of the word aberration refers to something abnormal, almost unpleasant, drawing links to the grotesque. Not only is the older maternal subject made abject through her inability to create and carry a 'normal' child, but the foetus itself is abject in its aberrant status. Though there is supporting scientific evidence that older women are at an increased risk of having a disabled child (notwithstanding certain ethnocentric research issues), this supports a societal notion of disgust for older women having sex/children. As Betterton argues, 'the unseemly body of the older pregnant woman…is routinely pathologized in medical and media discourses. In the media, older pregnant women (whether by choice or through fertility treatment) are treated as selfish or abnormal' (2002: 260). Betterton suggests that the two disparate discourses work together to create a version of sexuality/pregnancy/maternity that is abject, occurring outside the boundaries of the 'normative body' (2002: 257). The supposedly excessive sexuality of women is deemed even more problematic when age is a factor. The societal boundaries of acceptable sexuality are pushed as the grotesque maternal transgresses them.

This notion might also be applied to the opposite end of the spectrum: teenage pregnancy. Reefhuis and Honein (2004) found that both advanced maternal age and

young maternal age (14-19 years old) were associated with an increased risk in certain – but different – types of chromosomal birth defects. Teenage pregnancy has been a supposed social issue since the early 2000s, associated with the rise of the chav and archetypally represented in the character of Vicky Pollard (*Little Britain*; BBC 2003-2007). The figure of the teenage mother has become a symbol of the overt sexuality of the female 'underclass', fitting into the political and social rhetoric surrounding welfare support. Such views are reflected in popular culture. Televisual texts such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show* denounce 'kids having kids', especially when the taxpayer is expected to pay for their 'mistakes'. Reality shows *16 and Pregnant* (MTV 2009 – 2014) and *Teen Mom* (MTV 2009 - 2016) tackle the issue of teenage pregnancy head on. However, as Jones and Weber argue, their 'ideological function is more birth control than entertainment, offering a finely tuned pedagogy in governmentality that works to condition viewers to make better choices than those depicted on screen' (2015: 18). Though these programmes don't necessarily frame teenage pregnancy in as negative a light as *Jeremy Kyle*, they adopt a position of judgment, presenting these young women as having made bad life choices, again paralleling a neoliberal ideology where individuals must make 'good choices' and conform to normality; those who don't are deemed outsiders.

In their investigation of malformations, Reefhuis and Honein (2004) argue that maternal body mass is also associated with congenital defects. Again, although there may be some scientific 'truth' to this statement, it adheres to societal discomfort with fatness and sexuality. The relationship between fatness and the grotesque/abjection is explored later in this study, but it is important to note here the ambivalence surrounding pregnancy, sexuality and the female body - be it supposedly too young, too old or too fat. Moreover, this ambivalence becomes more complex when the body in question is disabled as it becomes a distinguishable, physical other bearing another other. In her work on visual representations of the maternal body, Betterton explores certain figurations of pregnancy that are seemingly 'unnatural', including the older pregnant body and the disabled pregnant body. To Betterton, these women 'transgress the codes of fertility' (2002: 262): their physicality represents the limit to which the pregnant body is deemed 'natural' and 'normal'. These bodily forms (as well as teenage and overweight bodies) are made abject in their pregnant/maternal state and can *all* be linked to an apparent risk of an abnormal (disabled) birth. This is a double abjection: the abnormally

pregnant woman is considered socially abject as is the potentially abnormal child who will be made physically abject through the process of birth.

The fear and fascination surrounding the abject mother and the disabled child has historical significance. Throughout the Victorian era and up to the early 20th century, freak shows presented a paying public with oddities and curiosities of the human form. Individuals with congenital defects such as microcephaly (small headedness) and ectrodactyly (split hand malformation) often featured in these shows, categorised as 'natural freaks' (Birmingham 2000). Two of the most renowned 'freaks', Schlitzie the 'pin head' and Grady Stiles Jr, aka the 'Lobster Boy', were born with microcephaly and ecrodactyly, respectively. Schlitzie, along with 'pin heads' Pip and Zip Snow, starred in the cult movie *Freaks* (Browning, 1932). This film can be considered a grotesque cultural artefact, fusing Bakhtian carnivalesque with documentary techniques to present 'real monsters' (Russo 1994). Also, the 2016 series of *American Horror Story: Freak Show* (FX, 2014) brought the figure of the 'freak' back into the public consciousness, with the characters based loosely on famous freak show stars (Pednaud 2014). Interestingly, Birmingham (2000) argues that television talk shows are modern-day versions of the traditional freak show. Although Birmingham considers talk shows in an American context, her arguments can be applied to British talk shows such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. For example, Birmingham suggests that like the freak show, viewers of these television shows, both in the studio audience and at home, take a voyeuristic stance to marvel at an abnormal (lower-class) other. Through the process of belittling and othering the guests, talk shows become a site where neoliberal ideologies can be embedded in the viewing conscience: 'by presenting the guests with whom the viewer wishes to be entirely unable to identify, talk shows are able to cast viewers in the role of voyeurs to reinforce the viewers' feelings of superiority and belief in the system that has made them superior' (Birmingham 2000: 134). Television texts such as these work as affirmation for the viewer, revealing that hard work pays off and individuals (the guests) can be blamed for their own poor circumstances. By taking a superior stance, viewers can distance themselves, ultimately rendering the guests as abject: 'that is not me' (Kimmich 1998). Moreover, talk shows operate as freak shows on a literal level: some episodes aim to educate their audiences on rare diseases or abnormalities in children (Birmingham 2000). The response to disability is complex and as Fordham

argues, the 'extraordinary body is at once a source of awe and shame, a privilege and social anathema' (2007: 210). While the shows' aim may be to 'educate' the viewers, the episodes put 'abnormal' children on display, making them abject through their visibility.

Paralleled with the transition of the freak from 'scientific curiosity' to 'medical flaw' (Fordham 2007: 210), and the rise of the eugenics movement which considered congenital abnormalities as something to be eradicated, fears evolved around 'monstrous births' (Betterton 2006). This gave malformation a maternal focus, attributing blame to the pregnant woman,

> Monstrous births could be linked to women's sexual excess or perversion, the mixing of different sperm or between different races, intercourse during menstruation, eating forbidden food, or demonic possession - and in a modern twist to the theme, to toxic or genetic damage. The maternal imagination was deemed to have the power to kill or deform the fetus merely through an act of illicit looking…Women in their maternal function, therefore, had to be disciplined to control their desires for the well being of the unborn child - a regulatory model that persists in contemporary injunctions on pregnant women not to smoke, drink, or take drugs (Betterton 2006: 83).

Again, the pregnant woman is made abject via a patriarchal ideology that fears her reproductive power, coupled with anxiety about the other she is carrying. In a contemporary context, as Betterton sets out above, there is still a desire to control the outcomes of pregnancy through the creation of boundaries concerning what a pregnant woman can and cannot do. Tyler (2008) explores how the underclass maternal subject, or 'chav mum', 'is produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility and "racial mixing"' (2008: 18). Tyler's exploration of a relatively contemporary figure, the 'chav mum' reflects on the points that Betterton discusses: women, lower-class women in particular, are - and historically have been - a cause for concern due to their apparent excessive sexuality and bountiful fertility. An interesting segment of Tyler's work is her discussion of 'contaminated whiteness' and

how disgust aimed towards the lower/underclass is steeped in racial connotations. For instance, '"[chavs] are almost always white," "the chavettes have…a large 3 seater second hand pushchair, with *3 different coloured children in it*." These figures constitute an unclean "sullied urban" "underclass," "forever placed at the borders of whiteness as the socially excluded, the economically redundant"' (Nayak 2003: 82, 102–103 in Tyler 2008: 25; emphasis added). The reference to 'different coloured children' has clear associations with the historical fear of mixing different races, resulting in 'monstrous birth'. Televisual texts present this through crude stereotypes: Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain*, for example, had a 'multiple pushchair filled with six white and mixed race babies and young children against a bleak council estate backdrop' (Tyler 2008: 28). More recently, in an example of 'poverty porn' programming, the matriarch of *Benefits Street*, Deirdre Kelly, or 'White Dee', is a single mother raising two mixed-race children. The racial/class disgust aimed towards Dee and her family is clear in the *Daily Mirror* article 'Benefits Street's White Dee forced to leave home after mixed race kids called "liquorice allsorts"' (Massey 2014). The brazen wording of the headline highlights the racial abuse in a manner that trivialises the issue, leaning towards sensationalism rather than addressing a serious problem. Given that the *Daily Mirror* is a centre-left news outlet, it seems surprising they would report on the issue in such an apathetic way. However, this indicates how embedded racial/class discrimination has become in a neoliberal society. Moreover, due to Dee's ambiguous status as white and 'contaminated', the abuse against her family is not taken seriously. Dee and her family have been made abject, literally forced to leave the boundaries of their home. Dee is considered abject through her contaminated whiteness and, as the example above indicates, there is nothing to refute her abject status as it has become normalised to target white 'underclass' women in this way. Haylett (2000) explores the notion of abject whiteness, arguing that 1990s New Labour welfare policies considered a 'mass of people, in mass housing, people and places somehow falling out of the nation, losing the material wherewithal and symbolic dignity traditionally associated with their colour and their class, becoming an ugly contradiction: abject and white' (2000: 352). Whiteness is no longer associated with colonial or cultural power; it is a polluted whiteness that carries connotations of bad life choices and welfare dependency. Through political and media representations, the white working class (or underclass) are marked as other. However, this marking is of a contradictory nature. As Haylett argues, the '"others" which have been accorded such

high symbolic status within critical academic theory…are definitely not the white working-class poor. Might they be too ambiguous as victims? Too unfashionably nonexotic? Too white?' (2000: 353). Although the white underclass are abject, 'outside/beyond/beneath the nation' (Haylett 2000: 358), they are not considered victims of exclusion or abuse. One might argue that this unsympathetic view renders those individuals truly abject; they are considered so disgusting that nobody will defend them. As Jones argues, class hatred 'has become an integral, respectable part of modern British culture' (2011: 6). It is a socially acceptable form of bigotry mirrored in televisual representations. Documentaries containing full-frontal racist, sexist or homophobic views are rarely shown on television, for fear of offending oppressed groups, yet programmes presenting the poor in a derogatory light are broadcast weekly.

The white poor are routinely vilified through various forms of popular culture, and social and political discourse. However, patriarchal norms paired with neoliberal ideology mean that working-class women are more frequently targeted, especially when (as discussed earlier) they have maternal status either as a pregnant woman or a (single) mother. The contemporary maternal abject is a classed category steeped in fear surrounding the lower-class reproductive function and its alleged drain on society. In their review of maternal subjectivities, Allen and Osgood (2009) suggest the configuration of the maternal based on social class is a neoliberal project. Maternal categories are based on a representational binary of 'chav mum' and 'yummy mummy', which have become common archetypes in contemporary popular culture (Allen and Osgood, 2009). These categories are based on neoliberal ideology that promotes individualism and self-regulation. The figure of the 'chav mum', or the excessive mother on benefits (as identified in poverty porn programming), is a reflection of lower-class women's apparent inability to self-regulate and have protected intercourse. Again, this is concerned with the boundaries of what is deemed socially acceptable: lower-class maternal subjects are judged for making the wrong life choices and transgressing the boundaries. Allen and Osgood explain,

> Walkerdine et al. (2001) suggest that teenage motherhood must be avoided in order to become the 'I can have everything girl' of neo-liberalism. They explain how young working-class mothers have become discursively constituted through negative discourses, which promote

> constructions of teenage mums as 'welfare scroungers' and carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. Teenage pregnancy is situated not only as incompatible with academic success, ambition and a professional career, as the markers of contemporary idealised femininity, but with unintelligibility (2009: 3).

Allen and Osgood suggest women who do not conform to the neoliberal myth are berated. Teenage pregnancy and single parenting, both strongly associated with lower-class women, are considered wrong as they symbolically disparage the importance of middle-class ideals and the neoliberal ideology of women balancing a successful full-time career and raising a traditional family. Hadfield et al argue that women 'have greater opportunities to "choose" motherhood…issues surrounding choice relate to discourses of the "good mother", and who is fit to parent; namely that she is heterosexual, selfless, fertile (Gillespie, 2000), middle class and aged 25 to 35-years-old' (2007: 256). Here, myths around choice are revealed. While neoliberalism supposedly promotes individualism and open opportunities to 'be who you want to be', the individualised self is only accepted if it conforms to the norms already set by society. Hence, maternal subjects who fall outside the boundaries, as suggested above by Hadfield et al, are considered abnormal. The (classed) maternal subject is made abject through grotesque televisual imagery that consolidates these ideologies.

2.4.2 Excessive Embodiment

As explored above, certain forms of maternal embodiment are considered problematic as they carry connotations of excessive sexuality; revealing truths around disgust aimed at the classed female subject. The 'redoubling' (Young 2005 in Shilling 2012) of the female body during pregnancy is a grotesque manifestation of the abject, transgressing physical boundaries with the visible growth of the baby bump. However, abjection is manifest in another configuration of grotesque embodiment, itself steeped in connotations of excessive consumption: the 'fat' body. Edwards and Graulund (2013) suggest three characteristics commonplace in grotesque depiction: exaggeration, extravagance and excess. Though Edwards and Graulund offer detailed definitions and examples of each trait in practice (such as the literary tendency to exaggerate specific body parts for humorous effect), overall, they are tools to convey an ultimate:

'exceeding the limits' and 'transgressing the norm' (see Edwards and Graulund 2013: 67-74). Further, one might argue that exaggeration and extravagance are facets within the notion of excess, especially when considering 'fat' embodiment. Williams considers 'the nature of human corporeality as a site of transgression', suggesting that the human body is 'excessive' and 'uncontainable', driven by desire (1998: 59). Thus, the *fat* body is a direct reflection of the uncontrollable desire to consume food, and the uncontainable body that consequently spills out of its boundaries. As Braziel and LeBesco argue, 'Fat equals reckless excess, prodigality, indulgence, lack of restraint, violation of order and space, transgression of boundary' (2001: 3). Fat corporeality is grotesque in nature as it opposes the 'classic' and 'closed' body that supposedly represents the norm (Russo 1994). As with representations of the maternal, the fat body brings attention to the bodily orifices and the functions they signify. Owen argues that 'Fat bodies live. They breathe. They sneeze, sweat, menstruate, eat, talk, drink, urinate, vomit, belch, and defecate. In fact, many bodies do every one of these things, but fat, similar to other abject bodies, are more regularly linked to them. Fat bodies are regarded as disgusting in part because they are considered more biological, more tied to their processes, their orifices' (2015: 5). Here, Owen suggests that corpulence has a close relationship with the body in its natural state, insofar as there are strong associations with the bodily processes that are essential for survival. However, the fat body considered in this way is contradictory: it is natural in its processes, yet reflects a body that goes against the societal norm, that fails to adhere to Westernised standards of beauty and slimness (Shilling 2012). The grotesque fat body is an abject manifestation. The corporeal functions (vomiting, defecation, urination etc.) remind the subject of waste being made abject and passing through the body border, as well as the oversized body itself transgressing boundaries in its physically excessive and exaggerated state. Owen continues by exploring the notion of human skin forming 'the tangible boundary between in an out' (2015: 6). Here, a reference to the theories of abjection and the grotesque is insinuated as the skin becomes the physical border through which abject material and the outside world pass. While the skin is a physical barrier that protects the body both figuratively and literally from disease, there is also a psychic level to this notion. Owen argues that skin 'is the stationary boundary between self and world' (2015: 6), which could refer to both the boundary between the physical self and the outside world, or the psychic boundary between the subjective self and the

other. Thus, skin protects the self from the (abject) other. Furthermore, the skin contains the body, whereas fat represents the uncontainable. As Owen proposes,

> Bakhtin (2005) and Kristeva (1982) might argue, our skin, and all the fluids it contains, form the boundaries of our self, our individuality… In stretching the skin in a way different than that of "normal" bodies, fat bodies become grotesque. Fat tummies *push through space*, sometimes ahead of the rest of fat bodies, fat calves drape over ankles, fat underarms *wobble* and *ripple* beneath bones. It is flesh contained, *bodies gone wild* (2015: 6, emphasis added).

The fat body is considered grotesque because there are clear physical markers of abnormality: the stretched skin, and the separate body parts deemed as fat (tummies, calves, arms). The isolation of these body parts renders the fat body as just that, parts; thus dehumanising the fat person, marking them as other and abject. In the above excerpt, Owen highlights the physical movement of the fat body, pushing, wobbling, rippling through space. One might argue this is a grotesque depiction in itself, an 'immeasurable' body coming into contact with the natural, outside world, exceeding limits and boundaries yet never fully complete (Bakhtin 1984). Again, not only does fat transgress boundaries of the 'natural' body; the physical movement of the body and its parts enables it to push spatial boundaries, potentially invading others' space.

Disgust for fatness is inscribed on Western bodies and minds from birth, warning individuals – mostly women – that to be slim is to be beautiful and to be fat is to be other. These standards of beauty, coupled with the pathology of obesity, promote the diet/weight-loss industry (Oliver 2006; Murray 2008; Shilling 2012; Owen 2015), which itself supports the notion that those who can't lose weight, or choose not to, are failed citizens (Owen 2015), furthering the neoliberal ideology of individualisation. It should be noted that while individuals are given a 'choice' in their quest to become the *right* sort of citizen, fat is ultimately considered as the *wrong* choice. Furthermore, Murray (2008) suggests that weight loss or weight control is based on an 'illusion of choice' where the individual must believe that the choice to improve their bodies is an autonomous one. In Foucauldian terms, this is a method of surveillance and control (Murray 2008). Control over individuals is also realised via pathologising discourse,

which states that the fat body is unhealthy, citing research that outlines the risks and diseases associated with being overweight (Shilling 2012). As Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard argue, 'Scientists produce "the facts" which are dramatically relayed by the media, while governments search for relevant policy prescriptions and the dieting and fitness industries promise fantastic weight-loss for a fee' (2010: 38). Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard suggest there are various stakeholders or 'obesity epidemic entrepreneurs' involved in the 'social construction' of the obesity epidemic, and it is in their interest to persistently pathologise fatness. Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard argue the construction of obesity as an epidemic reflects societal notions of non-normativity. Murray (2008) explores the World Health Organization's recognition of obesity as a disease and the implications of this on the self within society. Murray argues that pathologising discourse and the categorisation of obesity as a disease considers fatness 'as a moral failing and as an aesthetic affront' (2008: 8). Fat is more than a health risk, it is offensive to look at and connotes an inability to adhere to social norms and partake in self-regulation. Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard (2010) discuss the notion of 'cultural criminals', where individuals 'who transgress presentational body norms…are discredited… "because they have disregarded so flagrantly people's sense of what is aesthetically and stylistically natural, normal and acceptable" (Shilling and Bunsell, personal communication, 2009)' (2010: 43). By transgressing 'presentational body norms', the fat body is again considered to be transgressing boundaries of the self as well as the aesthetic boundaries inscribed in society. Thus, the fat self is abject in its transgressional state, and this abjection is made manifest in the physically unnatural, abnormal and unacceptable fat body as grotesque.

As in the case of the abject maternal, medicalised discourse is paralleled with societal notions of disgust towards excessive bodies. As Brown (2005) and Weber (2012) explore in their analyses of the tabloid media attention surrounding Anna Nicole Smith and Britney Spears, disgust is aimed at women who are unable to contain their sexual and bodily excessiveness. Weight gain is often linked to a reversion to low-class status, a loss of normative femininity, and mental instability (Brown 2005; Weber 2012). Through these grotesque representations of excess, the media, as an obesity epidemic entrepreneur (Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard 2010), reinforce pathologising discourse, alluding not only to the associated health risks but also to the social stigma,

working to make fat abject. Murray's (2008) work is influenced by Foucault as she explores 'disciplinary medicine', stating that 'In controlling a population, Foucault suggests it is most effective to promote a *tacit* mode of self-surveillance in its citizens' (2008: 12, emphasis in original); subtle control rather than control by force. Murray also argues that medical discourse has 'permeated every aspect of popular culture' to encourage individuals to practise self-regulation to benefit their own health and well-being (2008: 12). This, alongside highly celebritised media narratives that reaffirm the normal feminine body as slim and toned, frame fat as wrong and undesirable.

Modes of self-regulation/self-policing/self-transformation under the guise of autonomy are born out of neoliberal ideology that encourages individuals to be reflexive. Neoliberal ideology promotes individuality and dictates that individuals should follow a lifetime trajectory of trying to perform their best self. Anyone who does not subscribe to this is considered abnormal, a failed citizen. Fat bodies are symbolic of the inability to become a reflexive citizen. Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard (2010) explore Petersen and Lupton's (1996) notion of the 'entrepreneurial self' and state this is 'the person who actively, reflexively and responsibly works on their body as part of the new public health. This complements a focus on elite power groups whose actions are ultimately entwined with the embodied dispositions of everyday life' (2010: 44). The individual has a societal responsibility to look after their body, the methods of which are governed by powerful elites. It is in the interests of so-called entrepreneurs to blame individuals and consider fatness a cause of society's ills. Government policy on obesity (for example, the 2016 report 'Childhood obesity: a plan for action'), details the changes the government want to take to reduce obesity. In the second paragraph, the report details the 'economic costs' of obesity, with the NHS spending '£5.1 billion on overweight and obesity-related ill-health in 2014/2015' (Department of Health, 2016). Though the report considers potential industry changes, there is a particular focus on the impact schools and family life should have on healthy choices, suggesting that obesity is determined by parental (individual) choice. Similarly, the Change4Life campaign (also run by the Department of Health and endorsed by the NHS) advocates healthy eating and exercise within a family setting. Laden with pathologising discourse, the campaign is persuasive and, given the supposed health risks detailed, it is hard not to consider the campaign as positive. However, the campaign lays the blame with

parents and makes individuals accountable for the obesity 'epidemic'. For example, on the Change4Life website, it states that 'Millions of families have already made healthier changes – you can too!' (Change4Life, 2013). This clever use of rhetoric is an exercise in exclusion by inclusion: addressing the reader with the use of the word you aims to other those who aren't yet making these 'healthy changes'. The discourse of these campaigns is circulated throughout popular culture. Television programmes such as *The Kyle Files: Extreme Eaters* (ITV, 2017), presented by daytime TV host Jeremy Kyle, and *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* (Channel 5, 2015) attempt to shed light on Britain's obesity 'problem' and its impact on the NHS. For example, the synopsis of *Benefits and Bypasses* states it is a 'Documentary about how self-inflicted health problems are costing the NHS a fortune' (Channel 5 2017). Framed in this way, the programmes assign political and social problems, such as cuts to the NHS, to those bodies. Visual markers of obesity, such as close-ups of the fat body, become symbolic of the subject's inability to self-regulate, supposedly in every aspect of their lives. Therefore, their poor lifestyles, presented as a strain on society, can be attributed to the self rather than the government.

Poor diet and childhood obesity are inextricably linked to social class: fatness symbolises an inability to self-regulate and so the 'underclass' can be blamed for their own circumstances as they are considered failed citizens. Initiatives such as those highlighted above are aimed at families with a low income (Department of Health, 2016), suggesting that individuals already made abject in their lower-class status, are again made abject in their excessive nature, unable to make the right choices. As Monaghan, Hollands and Pritchard (2010) argue, 'while we have all been targeted as potential "weight deviants" in the UK, it is increasingly clear that the obesity issue could well start to elide into the well-worn territory of the underclass thesis. This is already proceeding through the creation of specific moral panics around "classed" demographics of fatness (location, social background), and concerns about childhood obesity (which has also become a vehicle for blaming working-class mothers)' (2010: 66). This notion is evident in certain televisual representations of obesity. For example, Rich (2011) explores how certain forms of factual television partake in the construction of the obesity epidemic and the pathologisation of the working class. Rich notes that in *Honey, We're Killing the Kids*, parents are presented with graphically enhanced future images of their children: 'Within

an obesity assemblage, their children's bodies become 'hybrid' constructions' (Rich 2011: 8). Here, the hybridisation of the children's future-fat bodies again reduces the excessive body into parts, presenting a grotesque representation of what could be if their parents fail to make changes. In these programmes, self-regulation and the surveillance of others are encouraged via grotesque representations of the fat body. In one excerpt from *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, unemployed mother Natasha exclaims 'I see her being obesed' regarding the future of her five-year-old daughter (Rich 2011: 13). Rich argues that Natasha 'recognizes her child as the "obesed subject"' (2011: 14), reflecting anxieties surrounding fat and excess in society. Natasha, already abject in her position as an 'underclass' unemployed mother, is considering the potential for further ostracisation if she and her child continue their route of bodily excess. Natasha is in the process of abjection of the self, deeming her own body and her child's body as other, separate from society.

2.5 Conclusion: The Abject-Grotesque

Overall, this chapter has revealed the symbiotic nature of abjection and the grotesque in which depictions of the abject are reliant upon the characteristics of the grotesque, and vice versa. The interdisciplinary approach taken in the analysis of this literature has ensured a deep understanding of the different modes in which the abject and the grotesque operate, as well as illuminating how information and representations might be constructed. Whilst the abject is a psychoanalytical concept and the grotesque a literary one, both can be recognised in popular depictions of certain social figures such as teenage mothers, mature mothers, the fat person, the disabled person, and the unemployed. As explored throughout this chapter, these figures are figures of contempt and disgust, constructed as societal others. One might argue, then, that the process of abjection is manifest in grotesque visual imagery, which centres on the aesthetics of disgust. Taking this into consideration, the above examples demonstrate the ways in which abjection and the grotesque are mutually constitutive categories, an amalgamation of which – the abject-grotesque – can be used to investigate the devices used to construct the contemporary British social underclass. Moving forward, this notion is essential to the research as it aims to investigate how the British poor, benefits claimants especially, have been labelled as 'benefits scroungers' and (re)constructed as a figure of disgust. The historical examples used throughout this chapter, and the

contemporary comparisons drawn, suggest a long and ongoing contempt for the poor, especially poor women, and the 'freak' as a grotesque figure. Furthermore, the contempt for these groups has been translated into representations available in contemporary popular culture. These examples are also suggestive of the ways in which contempt and disgust are manufactured over time. Thus, the 'national abjects' (Tyler 2013), or the social groups that are deemed disgustingly other, are always heavily constructed figures; their abjection takes place over time. The range of literature and examples cited in this chapter show the similarities between the abject and the grotesque, both of which centre on borders and boundaries being compromised, especially in the representation of the 'abject maternal' and grotesque, or excessive, embodiment. Thus, in the depiction of pregnancy and obesity as leaking, open, changing and growing bodies, there is a crossover between the abject and the grotesque which will be explored in more detail throughout the analysis chapters. The 'underclass', by definition is abject because it falls outside of the hierarchical boundaries of social class; the abject is beyond the borders of society, which is apparent in the representation of the 'benefits scrounger' within the 'poverty porn' texts. Moving forward, the ways in which the abject-grotesque body is socially constructed will be investigated; as well as how the self is constructed in relation to the stigma of being a benefits claimant.

3 Literature Review II: Social Construction, Stigma and the Self

3.1 Introduction: Defining Social Constructionism

The overarching research philosophy of this thesis is social constructionism: the notion that reality and knowledge are constructed via interactions with the social world, and that popular media formats such as 'poverty porn' are agents in this process. Social constructionism is a key theoretical standpoint of this research, with varying degrees of importance, because it: (i) aids an understanding of how popular culture constructs the social underclass; (ii) aids an understanding of how the supposed underclass constructs the self in relation to these constructions; (iii) informs the research methodology in the hermeneutic interpretation and analysis of these varying constructions. This chapter will introduce and explore the theoretical underpinning of social constructionism, especially in relation to the social construction of stigmatised social groups and abject figures, and the implications of this on the construction of the self, or, the lived effects of stigma on stigmatised groups, such as 'benefits scroungers'. Furthermore, building on the previous chapter, it will consider how the grotesque construction of stigmatised and oppressed groups enables the processes of both social abjection and the abjection of the self. Building on Goffman's (1963) thesis of stigma and a 'psycho-social' approach as utilised by Frost and Hoggett, which is 'concerned with the mechanisms by which social relations become internalized' (2008: 446), the following literature review provides a comprehensive account of how the joint stigmas of poverty and claiming benefits are internalised by individuals in these circumstances.

In *The Social Construction of Reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Berger and Luckmann (1966) offer an exposition of the notion with the aim of understanding the processes by which all forms of knowledge are constructed and disseminated:

> It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'. And in so far as all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a

> taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that *the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality'* (1966: 15).

Social construction offers a paradigm in which 'reality' and what we *know* about reality are not naturally occurring. Rather, reality and knowledge are realised through our engagement with society, our interactions with others and, arguably, our consumption of cultural texts. Berger and Luckmann argue that the construction of reality and knowledge are dependent on the society in which they exist, for example, 'specific agglomerations of "reality" and "knowledge" pertain to specific social contexts' (1966: 15). In other words, what is considered reality in one society may not be the same in another. Further, one might argue that while this occurs on the macro level of societies, it also occurs on the micro level of the individual, thus, what is considered reality to one individual is not the same to another. While Berger and Luckmann maintain that the 'processes' in which knowledge and reality are constructed and transferred take place within social situations, one can argue this also occurs through engaging with popular culture, media texts and political ideology. It stands to reason that if reality is dependent on social interactions, knowledge can be constructed by popular culture, especially in a social world (Western society, in particular) so saturated by media texts.

Berger and Luckmann map out the historical, theoretical development of 'the sociology of knowledge', which they argue has its 'intellectual antecedents' within 'three developments of nineteenth century German thought – the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the historicist' (1966: 17). The term 'sociology of knowledge', was coined by another German philosopher, Max Scheler, whose work, as Berger and Luckmann suggest, was a precursor to the contemporary development of a theory of social constructionism. Berger and Luckmann state that Scheler,

> emphasized that human knowledge is given in society as a priori to individual experience, providing the latter with its order of meaning. This order, although it is relative to a particular socio-historical situation, appears to the individual as the natural way of looking at the world. Scheler called this the "relative-natural world view" (realtivnatürliche Weltanschauung) of a society (1966: 20).

Here, it is suggested that social constructionism is concerned with knowledge about the world that subjects deem as 'naturally occurring' and aims to highlight the constructions behind such systems of knowledge. For example, certain societies are based on hierarchical systems and social categories that divide its subjects; these systems and categories are considered the natural order of things. In turn, the naturalism of these systems works on a level of hegemonic power, whereby subjects accept their place in society because these categorical differences are supposedly ingrained in the fibre of our social world. Indeed, Diaz-Leon argues that social constructionism 'is taken to be a realist account of the nature of a certain category: it is claimed that the category is a real feature of human beings, but it is determined by social, rather than natural or biological properties' (2013: 1137). Thus, categories such as race, gender and social class appear to be naturally occurring, the embodiment of such categories seemingly based on biological difference. However, a social constructionist might argue that differences in race, gender and class have historically been, and continue to be, constructed by hierarchical power.

3.2 Stigma and Narratives of the Self

The oppression of subordinate groups, those 'national abjects', is maintained via the (re)construction of stereotypes and metaphors that deem them disgusting, or 'revolting', and thus work to abject them (Tyler 2013). Certainly, the individuals belonging to these groups have an attached 'stigma'. As Goffman proposes, stigma is 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963: 9) and it is evident this notion can be applied to socially abject groups. For the individuals within these oppressed groups, there are implications of these stigmatising labels for the construction and perception of the self (Goffman 1963). A social constructionist view might be applied to explore how oppressed groups seemingly deviate from societal norms, which ultimately acts as a catalyst or an 'excuse' for their oppression. As Gergen (2011) argues,

> the realities, rationalities and values created within any social enclave have socio-political ramifications…Those who fail to share the local realities and values are thus viewed as misled, ignorant, immoral, and

> possibly evil. In effect, with the process of reality building set in motion, the result is often social division and antagonism (2011: 110).

Here, Gergen is suggestive of the sets of socially constructed values and categories that society is encouraged to adopt. These 'naturally occurring' values relating to society's 'norms', are sometimes politically charged and, certainly within Western society, coincide with neoliberal, conservative ideologies. Individuals who deviate from these values are perceived negatively within society; they hold a certain stigma and are grotesque in their abnormality. Here, a stigma refers to 'an attribute' which makes an individual 'different…and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak'; the individual is 'reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963: 12). Stigmatisation is the precursor to oppression in that all oppressed groups have a stigma of some sort attached to them. However, stigma does not only work on a societal level by impacting on how society perceives a group, it also has serious implications on the way in which a person constructs the self.

Gergen (2011) explores previous literature on the self as social construction and states that, as 'MacIntyre (1984) cogently argued, one's conception of the self, and indeed one's moral integrity, emerges from one's narrative of self. It is the form of this narrative, as shared within an interpretive tradition, that underlies one's sense of self' (2011: 111). The primary thing to consider here is how these narratives of the self are constructed in the first place. A narrative, or a story, insinuates that something is constructed, or 'made up', and both Hacking (1999) and Sparti (2001) refer to the 'making up of people' to describe identity formation. Though not explicitly, Sparti (2001) alludes to social constructionist theory in his discussion on individual identity formation:

> Identity is not so much a cognitive premise or a fact about the individual but the product of a formation process. Shaped in the context of certain collective forms of classification, personal identity is not a fixed and self-contained entity, but is rather acquired through the appropriation of recognition by others… Differently put: identity should not be conceived as an in-built property, say the *inner nature* of an individual, but rather

> as a result of the relative continuity of the re-identifying function bestowed by recognition (2001: 333, emphasis in original).

Sparti notes the relationship between identity formation and a person's recognition of socially constructed categories: a person's identity is an ongoing process determined by their interactions with others (also see Lawler 2013). Thus, social interactions can alter an individual's narrative of the self. Further, if an individual belongs to a certain social group or category and becomes aware of existing narratives and labels attached to that group, it is plausible that this might have an impact on how the individual perceives the self within society. Moreover, if an individual is exposed to narratives, representations and stereotypes in popular culture that construct their group in a certain way, then this too might influence the individual's conception of the self. Rather than recognition, Crocker (1999) refers to responses and reflection when discussing how the self is 'made up' and argues that,

> the self is a social construction and…we develop our sense of who and what we are from our observation and interpretation of the responses we receive from others. Other people provide the looking glass in which we see ourselves reflected. We then incorporate those reflections into our own self-views (1999: 90).

Here, interactions with other people play a more significant role in identity formation and the construction of the self. Rather than being based on a recognition of social classification, the self is constructed in relation to how others apparently perceive the individual. However, as Goffman (1963) suggests, the recognition of belonging to a stigmatised group is paralleled with the reflection of people's perceptions of a stigmatised group. Goffman states that 'society establishes the means of categorizing persons', which are *recognised* by the individual, while the 'routines of social intercourse' (1963: 12), or interactions with others, allow reflection, which influences self/identity formation.

3.3 The 'Power of Naming': A Looping Effect

Hacking's (1999) theory of the 'looping effect' might be employed to understand the implications of the construction of social categories on the narrative of the self. Hacking

argues that people of certain 'kinds' (people belonging to socially constructed groups that are classified as having certain characteristics; these characteristics also being socially constructed), 'become aware that they are classified as such' (1999: 34). Furthermore, these people,

> make tacit or even explicit choices, adapt or adopt ways of living so as to fit or get away from the very classification that may be applied to them. These very choices, adaptations or adoptions have consequences for the very group, for the kind of people that is invoked. The result may be particularly strong interactions. What was known about people of a kind may become false because people of that kind have changed in virtue of what they believe about themselves. I have called this phenomenon the looping effect of human kinds (Hacking 1999: 34).

Here, individuals belonging to a social group become aware, through social interactions and, arguably, engaging with popular culture, of the traits, characteristics and stereotypes that are associated with said group. In turn, Hacking suggests that individuals make a conscious decision to move away from these stereotypes, or to adhere to them; although, arguably, as with notions of surveillance and self-regulation, this might also be a subconscious decision. Consequently, the construction of groups, and the knowledge surrounding those groups within society, might also change. An important point to add here is that if individuals move *towards* the conceptions of the group, this works to *reinforce* stereotypes. Hence, a looping effect is created: conceptions and narratives are either made stronger, thus individuals internalise these stereotypes further; or the societal outlook on the group is changed, so the individual internalises new stereotypes. With regards to welfare claimants and those living in poverty, one might expect that the way in which the individual interacts (by adopting or adapting) with the conceptions of the group is dependent on society's view of those groups, whether that is sympathetic or stigmatising.

For the looping effect to occur, the subject must firstly be conscious of the conceptions of their group, and secondly, interact with the conceptions of their group. Sveinsdottir (2015) argues that Hacking's notion of the looping effect is influenced by Hegel's philosophy of knowledge whereby 'Consciousness forms a conception of itself and

attempts to act out or actualize that conception. In acting as if the conception is true, the conception itself comes to fit better and better, until an internal contradiction in the conception itself comes to the fore' (2015: 885). Following this, 'Consciousness then forms a new conception of itself' (Sveinsdottir 2015: 885) and, if we consider consciousness as an individual's subjectivity, the new conception of the subject is internalised. It is a continuous loop where the subject's conception of the self and their identity is an ongoing process, which changes depending on the available perceptions. Sveinsdottir continues, 'Consciousness does not only form a conception of itself, it also forms conceptions of what isn't itself, whatever Other it encounters. When the Other is an inanimate object, it cannot resist Consciousness' conception of it, but when the Other is itself a consciousness, we have a dynamic relationship between two subjects who form conceptions of themselves and each other and attempt to actualize those conceptions' (2015: 885).

This relationship between Consciousness and the Other has clear similarities to Kristeva's notion of abjection which makes strong distinctions between the self and Other: the subject abjects waste, objects, and people that are deemed harmful to the self. This psychological process of othering people becomes a social process whereby groups are cast to the 'borders'. This can be linked to the looping effect and, as Sparti argues, 'the process of classification and identity formation' that is 'located at the micro-sociological level of recognition, affects society at large by having reflexive consequences on the macro-sociological domain' (2001: 331). On a micro level, the individual recognises and interacts with the conception of their group and, in the case of those in poverty or in receipt of benefits, this might be a stigmatising narrative. If the individual internalises this, it works to reaffirm the negative representations of the group, and so, on a macro level, the group is vulnerable to further abjection and oppression. Conversely, if the individual attempts to deny the negative representation, it is likely that they are still subject to stigma, abjection and oppression as the construction of the group is so pervasive. This is, as Sparti coins it, the 'power of naming' (2001: 332). Labels attached to a group are so potent, and so societally subscribed to, that the stigma cannot be easily erased. The individual is contaminated by their label. Hancock and Mooney cite Wacquant's work on 'advanced marginality' which explores 'the powerful territorial stigma' attached to urban poverty (2013: 52). In Wacquant's

thesis, advanced marginality is located in certain areas that are deemed dangerous, degraded and degrading; there is also 'social fragmentation and symbolic splintering' which means resisting the stigma becomes difficult (Wacquant 2008 in Hancock and Mooney 2013: 52). Hancock and Mooney argue that 'the emphasis Wacquant places on language and the myriad labels to describe the most marginalised populations in this setting is of great importance (new poor, excluded, underclass, yobs etc.). With a focus on what is absent or lacking ("job-less", "worklessness", for example), these markers further undermine the possibility of solidarity' and, this language illustrates 'the "proliferation of labels" used to designate marginalized populations' (2013: 52). One might argue that the stigmatising labels attributed to the underclass, and other oppressed groups, act as a justification of their marginalisation. By marking certain groups as other, efforts to resist oppression are reduced as society deems them bad, dangerous, tainted (Goffman 1963), and thus, unworthy of help (the 'undeserving' poor).

3.4 Internalising Stigma

Refuting this, Sparti argues that 'we live in a society that tends to reclassify and "take care" of individuals who do not respect its classification repertoire, as opposed to excluding them and casting them out' (2001: 333). However, given the discussion regarding (social) abjection, one would argue that Sparti's reasoning is up for debate. Admittedly, Sparti, writing before the global recession of 2007/2008, could not account for the impact this event would have, and is still having, on Britain (and other neoliberal states). Negative economic growth paired with a New Labour government could be the catalyst for negative discourse and representations of certain social groups and a focus on welfare becoming more prevalent; blame can be assigned to individuals rather than to government policy. As Tyler (2013) argues, abject groups become scapegoats for a whole host of the nation's problems. Nevertheless, the stigmas of poverty and worklessness are found long before Sparti's writing, in Goffman (1963). Take, for example, this case study of an unemployed man, written in the first person:

> How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with

> an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. I instinctively avoid meeting anyone. Former acquaintances and friends of better times are no longer so cordial. They greet me indifferently when we meet. They no longer offer me a cigarette and their eyes seem to say, You are not worth it, you don't work (Zawadski and Lazersfeld 1935 in Goffman 1963: 28).

Here, the individual is aware of his apparent stigma. His conception of the self is influenced by his recognition of his position as unemployed, as well as the reflection of the self that he gauges from his friends who no longer treat him as such. The former friends supposedly treat the man differently because of the stigma attached to being unemployed (or so the man assumes); the man internalises this reflection, hence he feels inferior. This process isn't without its complexities: the individual might be right in assuming people are treating him differently because he is unemployed, but perhaps this is instead an internalisation of the stigma that the man is aware exists around that classification within society; perhaps the man is behaving differently because of his stigma and projects this on to his former friends. Indeed, Goffman argues,

> The awareness of inferiority means that one is unable to keep out of consciousness the formulation of some chronic feeling of the worst sort of insecurity, and this means that one suffers anxiety and perhaps even something worse…The fear that others can disrespect a person because of something he shows means that he is always insecure about his contact with other people; and this insecurity arises, not from mysterious and somewhat disguised sources, as a great deal of our anxiety does, but from something which he knows he cannot fix. Now that represents an almost fatal deficiency of the self-system, since the self is unable to disguise or exclude a definite formulation that reads "I am inferior. Therefore people will dislike me and I cannot be secure with them" (1963: 24).

To Goffman, the individual who is aware of the stigma attached to their social group becomes anxious and insecure over their position within society and how others perceive them. Goffman suggests the individual may start to behave differently, almost

like a defence mechanism, presupposing that others will treat them differently. This doesn't necessarily mean that others do treat them differently, but the individual assumes this to be the case as they have recognised the stigma attached to their group and see this reflected in their interactions with others. Thus, the failure of the 'self-system' occurs as the individual's identity formation is reflecting a presumed response from others which hasn't yet occurred. In turn, the individual projects their internalisations of the stigma on to the outside world, their stigma cannot be disguised and becomes more evident. Stigma, then, is embodied, enacted, or projected (Frost and Hoggett 2008: 449).

Frost and Hoggett employ Bourdieu's concept of social suffering and argue this 'draws attention to the lived experience of inhabiting social structures of oppression: and the pain that arises from this' (2008: 441). This 'pain' suggests that oppression (and the stigmas that coincide with it) has real implications for the subject and their construction of the self. Indeed, Frost and Hoggett argue that oppressed subjects endure the psychological effects of 'abjection' and 'the nature of "the self as object"' (2008: 441). Further, Frost and Hoggett give a detailed account of the relationship between social suffering and the process of abjection,

> social suffering refers to the hurt and loss accompanying the abjection that is a consequence of the continued existence of domination in democratic societies. Because the exercise of "power over" others appears natural and legitimate, the hurt that produces shame and humiliation and the losses that lead to grief become detached from the social relations which generate them. The suffering that then results becomes individualized and internalized – built into subjectivity. Secondary damage is experienced when the defences an individual deploys to cope with hurt and loss have destructive consequences for self and others and therefore further separates the person from their sense of relatedness/belonging to the group (Frost and Hoggett 2008: 442).

Frost and Hoggett refer more implicitly to the defence mechanisms the subject employs to cope with the internalisation of their oppression/stigma. Again, this abjects the subject further as they mark their self as different, in foreseeing others will perceive

them as such. To Frost and Hoggett, the oppressed subject (as object) is vulnerable to 'double suffering' whereby the 'individual's response to suffering causes further suffering to the self and others' (2008: 449). As Goffman suggests, stigmatised individuals are unable to properly integrate into society as the 'self-system' sets up psychological boundaries to avoid interactions that may reveal their stigma. As Reutter et al found in their interviews with low-income or unemployed participants, 'feelings of shame and embarrassment led them to withdraw or isolate themselves from others for fear of being judged' (2009: 305). The participants explained that they would avoid certain social situations and public places as they felt like an 'outcast' or a 'burden'. Here, the subjects do not actively repudiate their stigma; they succumb to it, perhaps because they have accepted the available negative constructions of their group.

Citing Goffman, Frost and Hoggett argue that 'the stigmatized individual shares the same belief system as the rest of their culture' (2008: 445), suggesting that the subject has subscribed to the socially constructed knowledge surrounding stigmatised categories. Indeed, Reutter et al found that some participants in their study,

> admitted to holding stereotypical views and negative judgments of low-income people before they experienced poverty themselves and, therefore, projected these beliefs to others. Still others suggested that negative inferences and stereotypes about people living in poverty are evident in the media and promulgated by governments. All of these factors contribute to the development of stigma consciousness (2009: 302).

As discussed above, individuals are aware of the stigmatising labels associated with their group through interactions with others and, especially in the case of benefits claimants, through an engagement with popular culture. Televisual texts that explore the lives of benefits claimants and those living in poverty work to reiterate the stigmatising labels, stereotypes and narratives that are available in the news media and political discourse. Of course, these programmes claim to document the 'real lives' of these people but it might be argued that the participants are performing a reflection of their stigmatised self; they are, in effect, 'enacting' their stigma (Frost and Hoggett 2008). Reutter et al argue that 'experiences of felt stigma confirm that obvious forms

of discrimination are not necessarily required for individuals to experience a stereotype threat…the discourse of blame and responsibility of poverty are deeply engrained' (2009: 307). This suggests that discrimination from other people was not required for the individual to feel as though they were being 'done to' (Frost and Hoggett 2008). Subjects are stigma conscious due to neoliberal ideologies of responsibility in the form of individualism and the dichotomy of the deserving/undeserving poor, paralleled with demonising discourse and stereotypes surrounding poverty and worklessness. Further, participants in Reutter et al. (2009) study claimed to distance themselves from other low-income individuals; hold negative opinions of other people living in poverty; and made distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor. All of this is suggestive of how pervasive the social construction of the issues of poverty, unemployment and benefits has become.

Through an in-depth analysis of literature and case study evidence, Frost and Hoggett surmise that social suffering through oppression and stigma results in personal hurt and pain. It is 'inscribed on the body: the low self-esteem, low status, lack of social capital and lack of power to direct one's life' (2008: 452). Similarly, Reutter et al found the stigma of poverty had implications on mental health as participants described suffering from depression and low self-esteem due to feelings of inadequacy; they had 'internalized the stereotype that they are less worthy than others' (2009: 305). Thus, the stigma of social class and poverty is embodied and has implications for the everyday, lived experience of the subject. Indeed, Busfield argues that the embodied stigma of being unemployed has an effect on the health of the individual: 'the unemployed do not become ill because they cannot feed themselves, but because . . . their sense of self-worth is diminished, and they become more isolated. The mediation is psychosocial, rather than material and bodily' (Busfield 2000 in Frost and Hoggett 2008: 453). So, internalised stigmatisation becomes psychosomatic insofar as it affects both the self and the body. In addition, the effects of the self and the psychological (including mental health issues) may manifest in physical illnesses.

3.5 Resisting or Reinforcing Stigma?

So far, one has explored how marginalised/oppressed individuals internalise their stigmas, and the effects this has on the self, but what about the ways in which subjects

might resist these negative labels? Studies by Batty and Flint (2013), Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) and Fohrbeck et al (2014) aim to find out how stigmatised individuals (living in poverty, low-income circumstances, the unemployed, benefits claimants) positioned themselves within society by conducting interviews with people belonging, in economic terms at least, to those groups. As Hacking argued, the looping effect can also see the individual denying their label, making active attempts to 'get away' from the societal conception of their group. Indeed, Batty and Flint state that 'one process of managing stigma involves the denigration of others or symbolic violence in which families are "complicit in misunderstandings" of poverty… Families on low incomes often suggests that other families conform to various archetypes ("work-shy parents", adults who collect benefit when working cash in hands or families with "out of control" kids or "unable to cope") but reject such labelling of themselves' (2013: 4). So, on one hand, the individual might internalise the stigma of being unemployed or living in poverty, but paradoxically, they distance themselves from stereotypes of the poor. In Shildrick and MacDonald, for example, participants often ascribed notions of responsibility and blame when discussing other people in similar circumstances,

> Poverty in *other people's* lives was usually viewed as a consequence of individual ineptitude or moral failure. Others were blamed particularly for their inability – or unwillingness – 'to manage'. Mary (30) was unemployed and she and her family were experiencing considerable financial difficulties when interviewed: "Over the other side of the estate, yeah. Very poor. Some of the places that are over there are awful. There is crime constantly and they are very poor and the kids haven't got much, but that's because the parents are spending it all on drugs or getting drunk every night".
>
> Dawn was also aged 30, unemployed, a mother of two and had been on benefits for lengthy periods. She held similar views to Mary: "Some people struggle because they are too busy drinking. They don't manage it. They either go out drinking or drinking in the house every day and there's drugs and stuff. That's what makes people so poor" (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013: 292, emphasis in original).

Here, both participants associate poverty and unemployment with personal failure, considering it an individual responsibility and, in these cases, attributed to the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Thus, despite living in similar conditions, Mary and Dawn disassociate themselves as being part of the 'problem'. By retelling the negative stereotypes and discourse that surround the unemployed, the women are participating in the stigmatisation of their own social group.

Similarly, Forhbeck et al (2014) explore how German Hartz IV (a system that Forhbeck et al argue is comparable to the British welfare state, whereby policy influenced by neoliberal ideals considers unemployment an individual responsibility) claimants perceive themselves. In Germany, like Britain, Hartz IV individuals are familiar with largely negative media representations of their category. Two participants, Mrs Schmidt and Mr Eichinger, reference the available 'scrounger' stereotypes in their interviews, albeit in different contexts. Mrs Schmidt discusses how benefits-focused documentaries depict struggling families who claim that they cannot survive on the Hartz IV payment. She argues, 'where they are both sat on such a grimy corner seat – I find those disgusting anyway, corner seats… each of them has two tins in front of them: a tin of tobacco, a tin of filters, and there they were rolling, smoking during the interview… But they don't buy something decent to eat for the kids: that, I condemn' (Forhbeck et al 2014: 4). It is worth noting here that similar scenes are present in British televisual depictions of the same issue. Mrs Schmidt has placed herself in a position of judgment of the on-screen family and, arguably, others 'like them'. Firstly, there is a judgment of taste, or lack of. Within traditional notions of social class, taste has become a marker for one's position in the social hierarchy: 'taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu 1984, see also Skeggs 1997). By classifying the corner seat as disgusting, and so lacking taste, Mrs Schmidt distances herself from other Hartz IV claimants. Secondly, there is a moral judgment taking place as Mrs Schmidt 'condemns' the family for smoking. The judgment of smoking here is symbolic of irresponsibility and bad parenting. Again, Mrs Schmidt distances herself from the stereotype of a welfare claimant: lazy, irresponsible, lacking morals. This also adheres to notions of an undeserving and deserving poor. By condemning the family for their 'bad' behaviour, Mrs Schmidt deems them undeserving; but as a morally responsible individual distancing herself from this behaviour, she is deserving of Hartz IV. In his interview, Mr

Eichinger makes a concerted effort to establish himself as different to televisual representations: 'as I said, the cliché of the jobless person who sits in the pub all day is circulating, but I think there aren't many of those anymore. Hm, there are people who, I know based on heresay, that there are people who really enjoy being unemployed, sleeping in till 11 every day, and doing nothing at all, but I am not one of those' (Fohrbeck et al 2014: 4). There is a contradiction in Mr Eichinger's statement as he doesn't believe the stereotypical lazy unemployed person exists, yet he has heard of individuals who fit this type. Perhaps rumours of individuals who 'enjoy' their unemployment are fabricated by other Hartz IV claimants attempting to distance themselves from that type in social interactions, or perhaps Mr Eichinger 'makes up' these individuals to distance himself. Either way, Mr Eichinger argues these stereotypes don't really exist but if they did, he certainly wouldn't fit into that category. Again, like Mrs Schmidt, Mr Eichinger purposely distances himself from other Hartz IV claimants; he is aware of the stigma attached to being Hartz IV and makes active movements away from it. Shildrick and MacDonald cite a study by MacDonald and Marsh (2005) whereby young adults in Teeside neighbourhoods 'described graphically their own depressing episodes of worklessness and strong commitment to employment', yet 'were often quick to suppose that others around them were "work-shy" and "welfare dependent"' (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013: 291). Shildrick and MacDonald argue this is evidence that discourses of 'Othering' are not always top-down but work on many levels, often within groups of similar social positioning. Shildrick and MacDonald state that subsequent research by MacDonald and Marsh shows 'further accounts which talked about "us" and "them"; "the deserving" and "the undeserving". The "workshy underclass" was a phantom that could not be pinned down in the practice of fieldwork' (2013: 291). Coinciding with this, Forhbeck et al argue 'the "spectre" of the lazy unemployed, rooted in hearsay, cliché and appeals to an assumed commonsense, is hard to pin down and hence becomes difficult to falsify' 2014: 4). Both of these positions suggest the workshy underclass is a phantom category, non-existent outside media representations and political discourse, yet paradoxically, due to the retelling of discourse in society, its non-existence cannot be proved as stereotypes are consistently passed on to 'others'.

Although this distancing appears disparate from cognitive internalisation, the reasoning for it is suggested in Goffman's conception of stigma,

> Whether closely allied with his own kind or not, the stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. The sight may repel him, since after all he supports the norms of wider society, but his social and psychological identification with these offenders hold him to what repels him, transforming repulsion into shame, and then transforming ashamedness itself into something of which he is ashamed. In brief he can neither embrace his group nor let it go (Goffman 1963: 131-132).

Hence, exposure to televisual representations, or performances, of individuals overplaying their stigma might cause the subject (the individual existing within society) to distance themselves from these representations. Similarly, when the subject, through 'hearsay', becomes aware of others who adhere to these stereotypes and are 'acting out the negative attributes' assigned to them, they exhibit their ambivalence in a blatant fashion. Again, this action is determined by the subject subscribing to a neoliberal worldview of poverty and unemployment as issues of individual responsibility, which also makes distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor. In Batty and Flint, for example, a participant named Tracey makes clear distinctions between deserving and undeserving benefits claimants: 'I do believe some people are lazy and the benefits system in this country is absolutely ridiculous because there is people on benefits who don't need benefits or deserve benefits' (2013: 12). Despite being 'on benefits' herself, Tracey still claims the system is 'ridiculous' and displays an awareness of the discourse of the deserving. By claiming the system is ridiculous, Tracey insinuates that she isn't someone who fraudulently claims and she is deserving of state welfare. Tracey argues that other claimants drive 'flashy cars', which is perhaps evidence of them behaving 'flamboyantly', and this might cause psychological ambivalence in Tracey.

Goffman also introduces the notions of passing and covering whereby the stigmatised individual makes attempts to pass as 'normal'. Like an internalisation of stigma, passing

and distancing can have a similar effect on the construction of the self. As Goffman argues, 'the stigma and the effort to conceal it or remedy it become "fixed" as part of personal identity' (1963: 84). So, trying to deny stigma can have just as potent an effect on identity formation as the stigma itself. Goffman argues the information available to society about the individual can be decoded into signs: 'The information, as well as the sign through which it is conveyed, is reflexive and embodied; that is, it is conveyed by the very person it is about, and conveyed through bodily expression in the immediate presence of those who receive the expression' (Goffman 1963: 59). As discussed previously, stigma becomes embodied through a series of signs that are visible, or perceived to be visible to the outsider. Goffman argues, however, that the subject may make claims to certain social positions by presenting different signs: 'the social information conveyed by a symbol can establish a special claim to prestige, honour, or desirable class position… Such a sign is called a "status symbol", although the term "prestige symbol" might be more accurate' (1963: 59). Returning to taste values, material items are coded as prestige symbols. For example, in Batty and Flint, participants repeatedly refer to new washing machines, cookers, 'big' televisions and en suite bathrooms (owned by others) as markers of success. Participants also distinguish between living in council housing and people they know living in a 'lovely cul-de-sac' (2013: 9), which act as markers of working-class status and middle-classness respectively. Also, clothing and appearance might be coded as prestige symbols. Shildrick and MacDonald note that 'Hamilton (2012) describes how low-income mothers in Northern Ireland purchased designer clothing for children so as to avoid the stigma of poverty' (2013: 288). Despite the mothers using clothing as a sign of status, this behaviour further stigmatises them. As Shildrick and MacDonald suggest, on a local level (by people in the same group), designer clothing was valued, yet decoding on a larger societal level led to further stigmatisation due to the association between certain brands and the label 'chav'. Tyler (2008; 2013) notes how in the early noughties, the 'figure' of the chav was animated and became part of the public consciousness. In a contemporary setting, the representations may have shifted from the chav to the figure of the benefits scrounger, but the *word* still has cultural and societal resonance. The most obvious example of a chav-associated brand is Burberry, a label that 'once suggested prestige and wealth' (Mason and Wigley 2013: 174), and so was coded as tasteful. However, Burberry items (mostly fake, 'knock-off' versions), particularly the

checked caps, were adopted by chavs as a way of displaying wealth (Mason and Wigley 2013), arguably to avoid the stigma of being poor. Thus, the infamous Burberry checked pattern became ubiquitous with chav culture (see Hayward and Yar 2006; Jones 2011; Tyler 2008; Tyler 2013). The markers of taste were shifted as almost every representation or 'animation' (Tyler 2008; 2013) of the chav figure displayed or mentioned Burberry. As a result, Burberry discontinued the checked cap in 2004 (Phan, Thomas and Heine 2011) and now incorporates the classic pattern in more subtle ways into their clothing. This shows the potency of the stigma attached to being poor. Firstly, individuals trying to avoid the stigma by exploiting the 'prestige symbol' of the Burberry brand were stigmatised further as the brand became strongly associated with their group; thus, 'chavs' were subject to double stigmatisation. Secondly, the stigma that became attached to the brand was so strong that Burberry had to rebrand to distance itself from the association with the underclass.

3.6 Poverty Denial

Whilst denying the stereotypes assigned to their groups is common in the above studies, some participants in Batty and Flint (2013) and Shildrick and MacDonald (2013), denied the existence of overall poverty in their interviews.

> Informants were not, however, willing to use the language of poverty to describe these adverse circumstances. Several found it difficult even to agree that poverty existed in Britain. Some associated it only with developing countries: 'People in poverty? I mean, I've seen poverty in the Philippines . . . it's terrible in this day and age, it really is . . . there's not a great deal of poverty round here but there's hardship. I think that's a better word for it' (Lennie, 57, unemployed). For many, it was TV images of absolute poverty in Asia and Africa which sprang to mind when we initially asked them about their views on poverty. They were quick to reject the term as having relevance to their own lives' (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013: 289)

Supporting this, Batty and Flint argue that a key explanation for the processes of denial was an *overall denial* 'of the label of poverty or deficits and comparisons being made, where they were made, favourably with others, including populations in the Third

World' (2013: 9). Furthermore, participants in Shildrick and MacDonald emphasised that they 'weren't really poor', despite relying on benefits (2013: 289); and interviewees in Batty and Flint continuously referred to others as being 'worse off' as a way of denying their poor circumstances (2013: 9-10). In both studies, participants seem to equate the label of poverty with poverty happening elsewhere. This suggests the social construction of poverty only allows for an association between poverty and Third World countries. The latest report from the Office of National Statistics shows that 7.3% of the population, or 4.6 million people, in Britain are in 'persistent poverty', meaning they have experienced poverty in the current year as well as two years out of the preceding three years (Wells 2017). In addition, between 2012 and 2015, 30.2% of the population were 'at risk' of poverty for at least a year (Wells 2017). However, an independent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation states that in 2015/16, 22% of the British population were living in poverty (JRF 2017). Furthermore, figures from the Institute of Fiscal Studies show that in 2015/16 the 'relative poverty' rate was 15% and the 'absolute poverty' rate was around 14% (Browne and Hood 2016). One might argue the discrepancies in these reports are reflective of political agenda. The Office of National Statistics is a government department; it might be beneficial for the government to downplay the rates of poverty to justify an increase in austerity measures and the introduction of the Universal Credit system. Given the participants in both Shildrick and MacDonald and Batty and Flint were relying on low-income, precarious jobs or benefits receipt - regardless of attempting to determine the most accurate statistics - it is safe to assume they fit into a poverty category. The participants' denial of poverty in the UK might be indicative of how poverty has been constructed. Provisionally, at least, there is evidence of varying degrees of poverty, depending on which report is analysed. A denial or underestimation of poverty, within the social construction of reality, helps to maintain neoliberal ideologies. The concept of poverty is restricted to Third World countries, as something that only happens to an intangible Other. Thus, in Britain (and other neoliberal states), blame for poor circumstances, unemployment and poverty can be more easily laid on the individual, rather than society.

3.7 Conclusion: The Cyclical Nature of Constructed Stigma

And so, the subject who has subscribed to the ideologies of the neoliberal society must deny poverty exists; deny they live in such circumstances; and deny the stereotypes attached to their group, so as to practice good citizenship. The subject internalises the stigmas of poverty and unemployment and this becomes embodied. As Frost and Hoggett argue, within 'post-industrial, post-collective, consumer [capitalist]' states, 'the realization of the distance between actual experience and the popular delusion that there is no class, that with determination anybody can be anything, is painful to bear' (2008: 443). Further, the reality 'of class and poverty's cruel limitations on, for example, educational attainment, university entrance, job opportunities, and a respected and comfortable life are thus masked. "Not making it" is perceived as one's own failure – in today's culture one becomes a "loser"' (2008: 443). The two contradictory yet coinciding notions (internalisation/denial) cause conflict and ambivalence in the subject's identity formation. Perhaps this is further reasoning for the prominence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression in low-income individuals. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, 'nearly a quarter of adults in the poorest fifth of the population experience depression and anxiety – more than twice the number in the richest two-fifths of the population' (JRF 2017: 4). Supporting this, Wells states that 'over a third (35.8%) of persistently poor individuals expressed high levels of anxiety, compared with a fifth (21.6%) of the population as a whole' (2017: 2). Frost and Hoggett refer to Sennet and Cobb's (1993) notion of the 'hidden injuries of class' and note that 'the search for respect and the damage done to self-esteem by the withholding of recognition were recurring themes of the working class men in their study' (2008: 443). This suggests that by denying their societal position, the men damaged their own psyche, or 'self-system'. To be aware of the negative stereotypes and stigma attached to one's group, yet to deny belonging to that group, leads to double suffering. The subject is a social abject, relegated to the borders of society. Nevertheless, the subject must deny belonging to the group to conform to neoliberal norms. Thus, the subject is abjecting their group and simultaneously abjecting the self, as part of the group. Goffman argues there are three 'grossly different types of stigma': in short these are 'abominations of the body' or physical deformities; 'blemishes of individual character' (including mental disorders); and the

'tribal stigma of race, nation and religion' (1963: 14). It might be argued that a contemporary grotesque underclass can be located in all of the above stigma categories in so far as the underclass is often marked as white (this notion will be explored in the subsequent chapter); and marked as abnormal. Further, one might consider 'physical deformities' and 'mental disorders' under the umbrella term of illness. Mental illness might well be a reflection of the 'injuries' of the internalisation of stigma, and in turn, physical illness might be a manifestation of this. According to Goffman's position, both physical and mental illness might be considered stigmas in their own right. Thus, stigma is a cyclical phenomenon in two concurrent ways. Firstly, the internalisation of one stigma (such as poverty) may result in another (illness). Secondly, stigma isn't merely 'done to' oppressed individuals in a top-down fashion; oppressed individuals do it to themselves and, as this chapter has explored, at times actively participate in the stigmatisation of their own group.

4 Literature Review III: Mapping out Social Class and Understanding the Underclass

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is split into two parts: the first explores the key debates surrounding the theorisation of social class; the second focuses on notions of an underclass, linking historical depictions of the poor with contemporary representations and discourse. Rather than attempt the tricky theoretical terrain of defining 'social class', this section brings together the ideas from the previous chapters, stringently applying them to some of the key debates surrounding the concept of social class. In particular, this chapter will explore more thoroughly how the subordinated classed subject is represented as abject and lacking, and how notions such as this are utilised by proponents of an underclass thesis. The chapter begins with an exploration of the effects of neoliberal policy and ideology on definitions of social class. Then, an investigation of how social mobility and aspiration are used as rhetorical tools to set up distinctions between a normative middle class and a pathologised working class; now lacking and reframed as an underclass. Further, this chapter largely utilises Bourdieu's notions of capital, habitus and symbolic violence to explore how social class is felt and internalised by its subjects, particularly in the social field of education. In the second part of this chapter, the focus shifts to exploring scholarly, political and mediated representations of a social underclass and the mythical narratives of poverty within them. Particular attention is paid to gendered configurations of an underclass: the abject maternal as a display of grotesque, excessive embodiment; and the deviant, criminal male youth. This final chapter of the literature review weaves together all of the previous concepts - abjection, the grotesque, stigma, social constructionism – and their multitude of sub-categories to produce a coherent understanding of why and how configurations of the underclass have been so perpetuated in contemporary Britain.

4.2 The Neoliberal Context

4.2.1 Thatcherism and New Labour

> On the one hand what characterises neoliberal Britain is heightened class antagonisms, while on the other the political vocabulary of class struggle

> was rendered obsolete by the elites. This linguistic turn away from class was epitomised within the rhetoric of the New Labour government and in particular the premiership of Tony Blair (1997-2007) who, on taking office, announced the dawn of a new meritocratic and 'classless' society (Tyler 2013b: 1).

> Social class was abandoned as a category at precisely the point at which the working classes were seen to have sold out to the Right and therefore could no longer be said to have a class consciousness (Reay 2005: 912)

The decline and subsequent return of discourses of social class are situated in a neoliberal context. Social class has been expunged from the political sphere (Tyler 2013); yet, at times of social unrest, discourses coded with classed words are utilised to explain social problems. Harkins and Lugo-Ocando (2016: 82-83) suggest the 'period of neo-liberal hegemony' in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with a 'culture of capitalism', which meant individual success was attributed to the ability to produce wealth. As previously noted, neoliberalism as 'a process rather than an end state' promotes varying ideologies of individualism (May, Cloke and Johnsen 2005: 3). As May, Cloke and Johnsen (2005) suggest through their reading of Ling (2000) and Peck and Tickell (2002), the process of neoliberalism has been marked by a shift from governance to governmentality. Within this shift, there have been ideological changes to the notion of individualism, for example:

> Conservative rhetoric concerned itself mainly with an attack on the idea of state sponsored welfare *per se* (frequently casting welfare recipients as a drain on collective wealth) and pushed instead a creed of individualism, within which any responsibilities the private citizen might have for the welfare of others was cast as a choice rather than an obligation (May, Cloke and Johnsen 2005: 10).

Here, the rhetoric of individualism is at odds with the receipt of welfare: ironically, to be a 'good citizen', the neoliberal individual must only look out for themselves, perhaps reflecting Thatcher's now infamous quote 'there is no such thing as society' (Thatcher 1987 in Moore 2010). Harkins and Lugo-Ocando note that 'the contemporary understanding of welfare is based partly on "the pathology of individual inadequacy as

the cause of poverty" (Golding in Franklin 1999: 146)' (2016: 83). As explored throughout this chapter, this notion forms the crux of the underclass debate. One might argue that in contemporary Britain, social divisions run so deeply because there has been a return to this sort of radical Conservative thought (Jessop 2015); or there has been a continuation of this neoliberal project throughout the subsequent ministries. May, Cloke and Johnsen (2005:12-13) suggest that in subtle contrast to Thatcher, New Labour policies seemingly encouraged a duty of care among 'private citizens', setting out the 'right and proper' ways for this to occur. Nevertheless, both Conservative and New Labour policies relied on concurrent neoliberal ideologies that considered welfare as an individualised issue; the responsibility of the citizen, rather than the state. The Blairite project was not too dissimilar from Thatcherism, there were 'significant continuities' between the two governments (Jessop 2015: 16). While New Labour had to present a façade of reintroducing left-leaning policies under the name of the Labour Party, Jessop notes that 'Margaret Thatcher is widely reputed to have opined, possibly more than once and perhaps mischievously, that her big political legacy was Tony Blair and New Labour' (2015: 16). Hence, New Labour continued the 'neo-liberal regime shift instituted under Mrs Thatcher' (Jessop 2015: 16).

Tony Blair was determined to institute an apparently 'new' ministerial regime called the 'third way': 'a new and distinctive approach has been mapped, one that differs both from the solutions of the old left and those of the Conservative right' (Tony Blair in Powell 2000: 39). Powell (2000) offers a chronology of New Labour's main social policies from 1997-1999, most of which focus on issues of social exclusion, welfare and returning to work. In the White Paper *Modern Public Services for Britain* (1998), Powell notes there was a promise that 'more money [would be spent] on "good welfare" (health, education) compared to "bad welfare" (social security)' (2000: 40). Further, the Labour Party aimed to prevent poverty 'by ensuring that people have the right education, training and support' (DSS 1998 in Powell 2000: 44). Both of these positions work towards an anti-welfare rhetoric where benefits receipt is 'bad' and immoral. They assume that as long as someone has access to education, training, support etc., social mobility is achievable and *should be achieved*. Those who do not achieve it and remain in receipt of benefit can be considered moral failures. As discussed throughout this section, the insistence of the possibility of social mobility via education reaffirms neoliberal ideology and

contributes to the construction of a social underclass. Powell examines the 'third way' by using it as 'an organizing framework to examine changes in the welfare state', exploring 'dimensions' such as citizenship, inclusion and expenditure (2000: 42). Powell concludes that 'New Labour has "out toried the Tories" in areas such as workfare initiatives and student finance' (2000: 54). Further, New Labour's approach to the welfare state bears resemblance to the 19th century Poor Law (Powell 2000), which set in motion the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, which pervades contemporary discourse on the British 'underclass' (Morris 1994). Thus, with regards to its welfare policies, the 'third way' did little to change the demonising rhetoric endorsed by right-wing political ideology.

4.2.2 The Coalition and Beyond: A Return to Thatcherism?

Jessop argues that New Labour left a legacy of its own: ‘the chance it gave the Conservative–Liberal coalition to invoke the spirit of Margaret Thatcher and revive her radical neo-liberal project in another period of austerity' (2015: 16-17). As Lowndes and Gardner state, the Coalition government ‘undertook a radical programme of public spending cuts, representing the most significant reorganisation of public spending since the Second World War’ (2016: 359). Wiggan argues that policy documents published by the Coalition government (in particular, those focusing on workfare/welfare) had to criticise New Labour’s approach ‘without threatening the broader set of neo-liberal assumptions, values and beliefs that the Coalition shares with their New Labour predecessors’ (2012: 390). Jessop (2015) calls this period a ‘Thatcherism redux’: a revival of radical Conservative policies implemented after the 2008 financial crisis. Slater (2012: 963) suggests the discursive tactics employed by David Cameron in his framing of Britain as a 'Broken Society', needing to be fixed by the 'Big Society', seemingly opposed the 'hallmark' of the Thatcher regime: that 'society did not exist'. However, Slater argues this move away from Thatcher rhetoric was 'designed to convince a jaded electorate that this is a "modernized", compassionate Conservative Party, one that would facilitate any benevolence to help vulnerable people' (2012: 963-964). Indeed, the notion of 'Broken Britain' encourages people to view society 'through its behavioural filters of family breakdown, out-of-wedlock childbirth, worklessness, dependency, anti-social behaviour, personal responsibility, addiction and teenage pregnancy' (Slater 2012: 964); all of which echo the sentiments of 'old' Conservative rhetoric.

Wiggan (2012) suggests that during the great recession of 2008/09, there was an increasing public awareness of the role of the failure of the market in unemployment and poverty. Thus, one might argue there was an amplification of neoliberal rhetoric (both in the political discourse and the media) to reinstate the individualization of social problems: blaming unemployment and poverty on a social 'underclass', rather than admitting that the fault lay in wider structural factors (Harkins and Lugo-Ocando 2016). For instance, Wiggan argues that in the Coalition government's White Paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works*, 'the terms that dominate – worklessness and dependency – construct the persistence of poverty and unemployment as originating in the poor choices and behaviour of individuals' (2012: 400). Further, state support is considered to be 'reinforcing social problems by permitting people to make the 'wrong' choices' (Wiggan 2012: 400). The policy documents analysed by Wiggan reflect the demonising and moralising discourse utilised in scholarly representations of a social underclass (Bagguley and Mann 1992), such as the work of Charles Murray (1990) where poverty is supposedly bred in the poor decisions of society's most vulnerable, reframed as delinquents. It has been noted elsewhere that Murray was invited by the *Sunday Times*, a 'Thatcherite newspaper', and the Institute of Economic Affairs, a 'right-wing think-tank', to consider whether a British underclass existed (Roberts 2001: 112). Jones suggests the 'underclass' discourse was employed by Thatcher as a persuasive rhetorical strategy to separate working-class communities: 'old-fashioned divide-and-rule…Those working-class communities that suffered most from Thatcher's ruinous class war were now herded into an 'underclass' whose poverty was supposedly self-inflicted' (2011: 67). The underclass, then, is a carefully constructed category, used in conjunction with neoliberal discourse to alleviate the state of responsibility for social issues. This suggests the potency of Thatcher's ideologies and the influence they continue to have on contemporary policy and discourse.

Arguably, this pattern did not end at the Coalition as the second Cameron ministry, and first Conservative majority government since 1992, commenced in 2015. It would be tautology to argue that Cameron aimed to continue the neoliberal work of the Coalition, with Britain still suffering the effects of the financial crisis. For example, Hayton and McEnhill (2015) analyse cases of gay marriage, poverty and social justice to explore Cameron's attempt at modernising the Conservative party in a socially liberal direction,

suggesting a departure from Thatcherism. Hayton and McEnhill conclude that Cameron's success in this was very limited and that the Conservatives under Cameron can in fact be regarded as 'neo-Thatcherite'. Theresa May became Prime Minister in 2016 as Cameron stood down from his position following the results of the EU Referendum; and in 2017 a snap election resulted in May's second ministry, supported by the Democratic Unionist Party. In 2019, due to her failure to carry out Brexit, Boris Johnson was elected as Prime Minister. Under both successive Conservative governments, there have been unprecedented cuts to the welfare state and public services such as the police force, social care and the NHS. Britain is still in a period of austerity and so the justification of such cuts is again framed through the individualisation of social problems. Lowndes and Gardner discuss the impact Conservative budget cuts have had on local governments, explaining that in 2015, after five years of spending cuts under the Coalition, the UK government 'announced a further 56% reduction in central grant funding to local authorities' (2016: 357-358), meaning that local authorities face measures of 'super-austerity'. These cuts are paralleled with a focus on devolution of power to a local level, creating a 'devolution/austerity paradox' where decision-making is left in the hands of local authorities who are blocked on any real implementation of their decisions by cuts to their budget (Lowndes and Gardner 2016).

Similarly, Hastings et al. (2017) investigate how austerity is 'downloaded' on to the poor and marginalised. Hastings et al. found that while local authorities wanted to protect the most vulnerable, spending cuts in 'deprived councils' meant that 'services were now targeted more narrowly towards those with only the very highest levels of need' (2017: 15); and austerity cuts were disproportionately 'downloaded' 'to poor households and communities' (2017: 29). Cuts to certain services resulted in feelings of isolation in the poorer communities. For example, in one case study, Hastings et al. found the closure of facilities paralleled an increase in public transport costs, meaning some individuals (and their families) could not participate in activities such as swimming and shopping: '(I) go out only when I absolutely have to' (2017: 24). The psychosocial effects of poverty, and the austerity measures that parallel poverty, are evident here. Firstly, the language used by Hastings et al. (2017), the 'downloading' of austerity on to poor families, indicates the negative feelings that can be internalised by those in poverty. In the

example above, the subject has already been made abject via the stigma attached to being poor; they are made further abject, physically so, as they are forced to stay indoors unless they 'absolutely have to' go outside. Thus, there is a double suffering (Frost and Hoggett 2008); they are stigmatised and socially excluded.

As explored in the previous chapter, internalisation of such feelings of stigma can result in psychosomatic effects such as mental and physical illness. In their study of motherhood and social exclusion in Britain, Targosz et al. (2003) found there was a significant increase in psychiatric disorders such as anxiety and depression in lone mothers, many of which were unemployed and/or living in social housing. Targosz et al note that 'economic and social disadvantage was sufficient to explain nearly all the association between lone motherhood and depression' (2003: 721). Similarly, in a comparison of two housing estates in East London, Cattell found that individuals with restricted social networks (i.e. the socially excluded) 'were more likely to express feelings with negative health outcomes...they tended to feel anxious, depressed, suffered from headaches and stomach complaints, as well as a variety of other physical complaints' (2001: 1508). Interestingly, the participants in Cattell's study were 'acutely aware that poverty was having a direct and negative influence on their health, but that '*isolation*', could make it worse' (2001: 1508, emphasis in original). Evidently, poverty and the negative feelings (isolation and stigma) associated with it have an adverse effect on the subjectivity and the corporeality of the individual. All of which are arguably exacerbated by austerity measures implemented on a national and local scale. Ironically, representations of the poor that focus on health and well-being usually portray the issue in terms of the deserving/undeserving poor distinction in which disability and illness are now framed as a method of 'milking' the system.

In 2017, May's government rolled out a policy that cut housing benefit for 18-21 year olds, leaving around 9000 young people at risk of homelessness (Healey 2017). In addition, figures that show homelessness increased by 15% in 2017, with an estimated 4751 people sleeping rough (Ryan 2018). Although, as noted in the previous chapter, these government statistics are often not reflective of the 'real' figure, especially since 'local authorities decide whether to carry out a count or an estimate' (Ryan 2018: 2). Again, responsibility is given to local authorities, which, as discussed above, might not have the resources to count an accurate figure, understand the scale of the problem, or

help vulnerable people, such as the homeless. Moreover, Forster (2017) reports that a range of NHS services are facing £85million cuts, which could result in '150,000 deaths between 2015 and 2020' due to 'lack of funding' (Pickover and de le Mare 2017). Simultaneously, '900,000 children from struggling families will lose their right to free school lunches under a cut unveiled in the Conservative manifesto' (Savage 2017). It is safe to argue there has been an absolute return to, or rather a continuation of, the Thatcherite Conservative rhetoric in contemporary Britain. This is exemplified in political policies such as Universal Credit; the 'Malthusian ideology' evident in British tabloid newspapers, where poverty is individualised using the 'discursive regime' of the underclass (see Harkins and Lugo-Ocando 2016); and the sheer volume of televisual texts which offer representations of the benefits claimant as a grotesque and abject other, as explored in this research. In this time of rapidly growing inequality (Lawler 2005; Reay 2006), there has also been a dramatic rise in public and charity-run food banks and soup kitchens, perhaps suggesting some public resistance to these pejorative representations in the form of community-led support. A 2016-17 report by The Trussell Trust found that 'nationally, foodbanks in areas of full Universal Credit rollout to single people, couples and families, have seen a 16.85% average increase in referrals for emergency food, more than double the national average of 6.64%' (2017: 11), reflecting an increase in demand for these services due to rates of growing inequality. Indeed, Tyler notes that in Britain, 'economic inequalities are reaching nineteenth century levels' (2013b: 1), perhaps also suggesting a return to historical ideologies and a 'Poor Law' that mark distinctions between a deserving and undeserving poor.

4.3 Social Class: The Key Debates

4.3.1 Social Mobility, Aspiration and Lack

One of the ways in which the neoliberal ideologies of individualism and overall success by wealth are propagated within the political/public discourse is through the notion of social mobility. Reay argues that social mobility 'is an extremely generative and productive myth that does an enormous amount of work for neoliberal Capitalism'; and that social mobility 'is a key justification for social inequalities, a crucial lynchpin in neoliberal ideology' (2013: 664). The notion of social mobility is an important facet of neoliberal ideology because it suggests 'success' is achievable for everyone through

education and work. Therefore, individuals who are not successful, often because they don't have access to the same capital as their middle class counterparts (Bourdieu 1984; Reay 2004; Reay 2005; Bullen and Kenway 2005), can be blamed and labelled unenterprising, feckless or lazy. Since the post-war years and Thatcher's ministry, social mobility litters the political rhetoric. As Brown argues, the 'creation of a 'fairer' society through social mobility is high on the political agenda in the United Kingdom' (2013: 678). Further, Themelis suggests an interest in meritocracy and social mobility has been maintained by 'policy-makers and politicians of all persuasions'; and that education is seen as the 'saviour' of these 'ideals' (2008: 427).

As Jones argues, at the 'heart of the Tory strategy' is the aim of 'driving wedges' between better-off and poorer working-class voters while promoting the idea of self-improvement and achievement to gain social mobility (2011: 69). Margaret Thatcher promoted social mobility through the 'right to buy' initiative: council house tenants were given the right to purchase their homes, a symbol of them becoming 'middle class'. As Scott-Samuel et al. explain, the policy 'reflected the ideological belief in the superiority of the market and was popular among many of those it helped move into the housing market' (2014: 59). However, Scott-Samuel et al. suggest that, in the long term, this policy had a devastating impact on the working-class communities the government initially vowed to help. The right to buy scheme 'contributed to growing wealth inequalities' (2014: 59); the oldest and poorest became increasingly 'socially excluded', 'blamed and stigmatized' (2014: 57); and rates of homelessness increased (2014: 59). Arguably, in contemporary Britain, society's most vulnerable are still feeling the repercussions of this, especially those living in social housing.

Allen (2013) and Brown (2013) suggest the notion of social mobility is also coded into political discourse through the rhetoric of 'aspiration'. For example, 'it is our duty to create an age of aspiration...I want to see an expanded middle class' (Gordon Brown 2010 in Allen 2013: 760); and 'the mission for this government is to build an aspiration nation...It's what's always made our hearts beat faster – aspiration; people rising from the bottom to the top' (David Cameron 2012 in Allen 2013: 760). Here we see a continuity of the neoliberal ideology of aspiration, from New Labour to Conservative discourse. Through their use of 'aspiration', both prime ministers clearly allude to the possibility of social mobility. Brown's expansion of the middle classes insinuates the

working classes can become 'successful' and middle class, while Cameron is more explicit in his hopes for individuals 'rising' from the bottom. Both these excerpts present middle-classness as the norm against which individual success should be measured. Lawler explores how middle-class identity is formed via expressions of disgust towards the working class and argues that 'working-classness forms the constitutive outside to middle-class existence' (2005: 431). While there are no explicit expressions of disgust in the two speeches, working-classness is marked as something other, something outside the norm; further, it is marked as something to 'aspire' to leave behind. Lawler argues that 'middle-classness relies on the expulsion and exclusion of (what is held to be) white working-classness' (2005: 430). Here, (white) working-classness is made abject as the middle-class subject expels that which it deems disgusting. Therefore, middle-class identity is formed via the process of abjecting the working class other,

> The issue here is not simply about middle-class people 'looking down on' working-class people. Such understandings work to *produce* working-class people as abhorrent and as foundationally 'other' to a middle-class existence that is silently marked as normal and desirable. But – and more fundamentally for my argument here – they also work to produce *middle-classed* identities that rely on *not* being the repellent and disgusting 'other' (2005: 431, emphasis in original).

The twin notions of social mobility and aspiration contribute to the 'producing' of the working class as other: those who cannot achieve social mobility are pathologised, considered to have something 'wrong' with them. Lawler (2005) argues that representations of the working class are often displayed through 'narratives of lack'. With regards to social mobility, the working class are considered to have a *lack of aspiration*. Hence, social inequalities are blamed on the individual who does not aspire to change their social positioning, rather than on the barriers that stop them from doing so. As Francis and Hey argue,

> The pithy sign of 'aspiration' is, in the discursive context of neoliberalism and socio-economic inequality, overwhelmed by the moral charge of its reviled signified: that of the feckless, parasitic individual who has failed

> to grasp the opportunities open to them (Francis and Hey 2009 in Reay 2013: 668).

Again, 'aspiration' in a neoliberal context separates desirable middle-classness from an underclass of individuals who have not achieved social mobility due to their own faults, or 'lack'. Brown (2013) argues the employment of social mobility within contemporary political rhetoric produces a 'deficit' model of working-class achievement. The working classes are pitted against middle-class subjects with more economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), or 'superior material and cultural assets' (Brown 2013: 682) to exchange in the field of education and work. They are constantly called upon to achieve success and social mobility but are disadvantaged by positional inequalities. Thus, the 'deficit' model is characterised by an overarching narrative of lack (Lawler 2005). It ignores the privileges of the middle classes and instead works to moralise and pathologise the poor, in terms of what they don't have. Skeggs (2011) explores how subjects accrue value (capital) in order to perform proper personhood, and how working-class subjects are considered to be *lacking in value*. Skeggs argues working-class subjects are 'positioned as the constitutive limit to proper personhood: *the abject*, the use-less subject who only consists of *lacks and gaps*, voids and deficiencies, sentimental repositories, sources of labour, negative value that cannot be attached or accrued and may deplete the value of others through *social contagion*' (2011: 8, emphasis added). Here, abjection and lack share a symbiotic relationship: the abject cannot achieve proper personhood and so becomes an object that is lacking. Again, the abject is considered other, something repulsive, a pathology that is 'contagious'. As Tyler argues, the process of abjection is about the 'performative enactment of self/other and subject/object distinctions' (2013: 27-28), distinctions the middle-class subject makes in their identity formation (Lawler 2005) or performance of personhood (Skeggs 2011). If the process of social mobility is based on the ability of the subject to move between spaces and accrue value (Skeggs 2011), then it is impossible for the abject, marked by lack, to accrue any value at all.

4.3.2 Capital and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu's conceptions of social class are essential in exploring the distinctions made between the normative middle class and the pathologised working class. To Bourdieu,

social class 'is conceptualized as dynamic and relative in social space, formed through a complex layering of material, social, cultural and symbolic resources and practices of distinction' (Allen 2013: 763). What Allen refers to as resources, Bourdieu refers to as capital: 'goods' that attribute value to the subject. Although his notion of capital is an 'appropriation of economic metaphor to understand social life', Bourdieu's conception also spans the social, cultural and symbolic arenas (Jenkins 1992: 84). The different types of capital may also have exchange value across other arenas. The positioning of the subject and the relative value of their capital happens within the 'social field'. As Jenkins argues, 'a field is structured internally in terms of power relations'; further, subject positions 'stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence (homology) to each other by virtue of the access they afford to the goods or resources (capital) which are at stake in the field' (1992: 85). Hence, social class is based on the amount of capital that individuals and groups have access to, and dominant classes have access to more capital than subordinate classes.

This is an unequal relationship where the dominant class determines how much capital the subordinate can access, and attributes value to it. As Allen notes, via Skeggs, 'capitals are better conceptualized as class resources whereby these operate only as a form of capital that can be exchanged within certain arenas and when they are carried by certain bodies' (2013: 763). To Skeggs, capital is only worth something if it is embodied by the normative, middle-class subject. She argues that 'bodies are produced as expressions of value: as embodied value or lack of value. This is the classed bio-politics of human as capital' (2011: 8). Here, 'narratives of lack' (Lawler 2005) are inscribed on the body, displayed (or not) through the lack of capital the subject has access to. In neoliberal terms, the working-class subject 'cannot perform the good self because they do not have the cultural resources to do so' (Skeggs 2005: 974). Thus, lack of capital means the subject cannot practise good citizenship, and again becomes abject.

Bourdieu is concerned with how relationships of dominance and subordination are maintained within social space: for Bourdieu, 'the notion of symbolic violence is central to understanding how social class inequalities are reproduced' (Connolly and Healy 2004: 15). Forms of symbolic violence affect how classed subjects construct and perform their personhood:

> In essence it represents the way in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them. It is an act of violence precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also symbolic in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion (Connolly and Healy 2004: 15).

Here, the subject is complicit in their subordination. As argued in the previous chapter, stigma and abjection are internalised by subordinated subjects, creating ambivalence within the self when the subject tries to separate from the stigmatised group: stigma towards the group and the self is reproduced. The notion of symbolic violence sees the process of abjection and stigma on a societal scale: it is enveloped in cultural practices and is institutionalised, it is an 'organic process' (Connolly and Healy 2004: 16). Forms of symbolic violence become naturalised, which explains how stigma sticks to socially constructed groups, because the subjects either internalise or project on to others in the group.

With regards to symbolic violence, the lack of value assigned to working-class capital paralleled with the stigma attached to certain class positions is internalised and reproduced by the subject. Reay (2004) draws on the concept of emotional capital developed by Helga Nowotny. Reading Nowotny, Reay argues that emotional capital is 'a variant of social capital, but characteristic of the private, rather than the public sphere'; and 'is generally confined within the bounds of affective relationships of family and friends and encompasses the emotional resources you hand on to those you care about' (Reay 2004: 60). In her study, Reay found that working-class women with negative experiences of education found it difficult to generate emotional capital when their children were struggling at school. For example, one woman, Marie, describes feelings of 'doubting myself, thinking I'm stupid' and 'all the embarrassment and humiliation' of her own experience with education (Reay 2004: 62-63). Marie displays a lack of emotional capital, i.e. the ability to properly engage with her son's problems and offer him emotional support, and the internalisation of years of embarrassment and humiliation in her own school life. Marie's internalisation of her 'stupidity' is evidence of the symbolic violence reproduced via education. Because of these 'petty mundane

humiliations' (Reay 2005: 917), Marie not only lacks emotional capital, she also lacks the cultural/academic capital for her son Leigh to inherit; she is the 'wrong person' to help him with his reading as she does not have the resources, or capital, to 'transmit'. As Reay argues, 'working-class women found it more difficult to supply their children with resources of emotional capital than their middle-class counterparts because they were frequently hampered by poverty, negative personal experiences of schooling, insufficient educational knowledge and lack of confidence' (2004: 65). Further, working-class women 'were often caught up in a spiral in which low levels of dominant cultural capital, economic capital and social capital all made it relatively difficult to provide their children with the benefits of emotional capital' (2004: 65). One might argue that as well as internalising negative experiences of school, the women are also internalising the stigma attached to being poor, reproducing their subordination. Again, the way the women navigate the social field is defined in comparison to middle-class normativity (Reay 2004).

As Connolly and Healy suggest, the working-class women (and children) in Reay's research are internalising and accepting 'those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them' (2004: 15). In this case, the expectations put on working-class children become prophecy, highlighted in the adult anxieties displayed by Leigh's mother Marie. As an adult, she continues to feel like a failure. Reay argues that 'ironically, the working classes have moved from a position of educational outsiders to a marginalised position of outsiders within' (2006: 295). The working classes who used to occupy an abject space outside the educational borders now occupy an ambivalent space where they are made abject from the inside. They are included in the education system but are excluded because of their lack of appropriate capital. They are 'outcasts on the inside' (Bourdieu and Champagne 1999 in Reay 2006: 295).

4.4 Understanding the Underclass

4.4.1 Surplus to Requirement or Unwilling to Work?

The above studies explore symbolic violence in terms of the relationship between dominance and subordination, middle-class normativity and working-class pathology. One might consider the question, where do notions of a social underclass fit into this relationship? A social underclass, its sociological existence debated (Bagguley and Mann

1992), is the most subordinated social class: it is the lowest stratum of society. In *Dangerous Classes*, Morris (1994) investigates the historical development of theories of the underclass and their contemporary application. Morris argues that rising levels of male unemployment and an increase in female led single-parent families throughout the 1980s/1990s caused doubt in 'the stability of key social institutions' (1994: 1). Due to this, Morris argues, sociologists have been tasked with determining the causes of such social changes, and questioning previous models constructed to make sense of the social world. In response to these twin issues, the underclass thesis is borne: one response 'which has promised to deal with both problems has been the creation of a residual category which falls outside of the social structure as it is conventionally understood; the underclass' (Morris 1994: 1). However, rather than simply resolve 'the problem', Morris argues the underclass has 'acquired a sense both pejorative and threatening' (1994: 1). Thus, the underclass becomes something to be despised and feared. The underclass, in the very notion of its existence, is abject: it appears beyond the borders of normativity, both metaphorically and spatially. Members of this class live on the 'margins of society'. Implying the underclass' status as abject, Morris argues that 'those to whom the label is applied not only stand outside of mainstream society and its central institutions, they reject its underlying norms and values' (1994: 1-2). As well as abjectly standing outside mainstream society and culture by rejecting or deviating from society's norms and values, the underclass is also grotesque (Edwards and Grauland 2013). Reinforcing this, Morris argues the notion of the underclass 'has been adopted or resurrected, to capture the sense of a group which is excluded, or has withdrawn, from mainstream society, in terms of both style of life and the dominant system of morality' (1994: 4). One of the most common characteristics in defining an underclass is their immorality, which renders them monstrous (Edwards and Grauland 2013).

Economically and culturally, the underclass falls outside the borders of the class hierarchy. For instance, members of the underclass supposedly *choose* not to participate in the labour market: 'the guarantee of social citizenship carries with it the requirement of being willing and available for employment' (Morris 1994: 3). A dichotomy is implied here between *willingness* and *availability* insofar as anyone can be available, health/age permitting, but this position becomes moralised based on whether the individual is willing to take on work. *Willing* participants are framed as a hard-working, deserving

poor; a working class out of work, surplus unless they are needed. The *unwilling* are the feckless and lazy underclass who choose benefit dependency; they are the undeserving poor. As Wiggan argues, drawing distinctions 'between the deserving and undeserving poor and popular and elite discourses of an underclass have long been present in social policy' (2012: 384). For example, at the 2010 Conservative Party conference, the then Prime Minister David Cameron addressed his party members with a speech centred on the notion of 'fairness'. At this time, the Coalition government were implementing a 'discursive strategy' through their policy documents, the aim of which was to cultivate a common sense ideology that a 'culture of dependency' existed in Britain (Wiggan 2012: 385). Cameron's speech reflected these claims:

> Fairness isn't just about who gets help from the state. The other part of the equation is who gives that help, through their taxes. Taking more money from the man who goes out to work long hours each day so the family next door can go on living a life on benefits without working – is that fair? *Fairness means giving people what they deserve – and what people deserve depends on how they behave*. If you really cannot work, we'll look after you. But if you can work, but *refuse* to work, we will not let you *live off the hard work of others*' (Cameron 2010, emphasis added).

Here, Cameron takes on the role of an authoritative parent-like figure telling off a naughty child. In referencing behaviour, worklessness becomes an issue of choice and morals. The individual who refuses to work is marked as immoral; in the words of Cameron, they 'live off' other people, they become a 'parasitical drain' on society (Tyler 2013: 9). This rhetoric continues to be utilised in contemporary political correspondence. Lehtonen (2018) examines the Department of Work and Pensions policy paper, *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*. Lehtonen's analysis highlights that the phrase 'for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the norm' is repeated three times in the paper. Lehtonen argues that in 'contrasting "worklessness" – not unemployment – with "employment", a tidy dichotomy is created between the two, suggestive of a society neatly divided into whose who work and those who do not, regardless of the reason' (2018: 88). One might argue, however, that the reason is clear: those who do not work are available but not willing. Lehtonen argues further that,

> In addition to the discursive work done by the category 'workless' itself, the phrase "for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the norm" suggests that both worklessness and its counterpart, paid employment, can become norms. Another dichotomy is, thus, created between those for whom having a paid job is the norm, and those for whom worklessness is the norm, again suggestive of a population neatly divided into these two categories (2018: 88).

Again, there is a distinction between the willing surplus of workers and the unwilling underclass. For the unwilling, as Lehtonen suggests, worklessness becomes the norm, a cycle they cannot, or will not, break. The formation of this dichotomy also works to overstate that participating in paid employment is the norm to which people should adhere.

In Marxist terms, the population of surplus workers performs 'a vital function in capitalist society' (Morris 1994: 13). To Marx, Morris argues, the surplus are 'an industrial reserve army' that 'serve not only to support expansions in production, but also through the threat of competition, to exert a pressure on the working population which spurs them on to overwork' (1994: 13-14). Marx highlights the inequality and subordination on which capitalist society is based: the 'accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole' (1867/1887: 451). Poverty is a by-product of capitalism or, as Bird (2012) argues, it 'is the backbone to contemporary capitalism'. The conditions of poverty are essential for capitalist society because it helps to sustain the subordination of the people. Hence, the surplus or reserve army of workers are *willing and available* but are unemployed because capitalism produces and maintains the conditions for a certain level of unemployment. To maintain this status quo, a neoliberal rhetoric blaming the individual for these conditions pervades in political discourse and popular culture.

4.4.2 **Dangerous Classes and the Lumpenproletariat**

Marx infamously champions the working classes and is sympathetic towards the plight of the proletariat, calling on 'working men of all countries' to unite against the capitalist system (Marx and Engels 1848/1992: 39). In the view of history as being marked by

constant class struggles, Marx regarded 'the growing industrial working class as the key to the revolutionary transformation of society' (McLellan 1992: xii). Also, 'Marx offers an account of unemployment, underemployment and poverty in terms of the dynamic of capitalism, rather than individual morality' (Morris 1994: 15). However, Marx's conception of a 'lumpenproletariat' tells of a dangerous class (Morris 1994) that is instantaneously moralised in the discourse Marx uses to describe them:

> The lumpenproletariat, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue (Marx and Engels 1848/1992: 14).

In his 'treatment of the lumpenproletariat', Marx 'sharply distinguishes from the reserve army or surplus' (Morris 1994: 15). Marx has a clear distaste for the lumpenproletariat because he considers them an impediment to the communist uprising: not only were they incapable of class consciousness but they could potentially be exploited by the bourgeoisie. Further, Marx uses the concept of the lumpenproletariat to vilify the sub-section of the proletariat that supported Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte throughout the class struggles in France during the 19th century (Cowling 2002). For instance, Marx argues that Bonaparte 'recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class in which he can base himself unconditionally' (Marx 1852 in Tyler 2013: 185). As Tyler argues, the 'paradox here is that in order to explain the failure of the political efforts of the urban proletariat and their bourgeois supporters to effect a revolution Marx found himself compelled to invent a new abject "classless class"' (Tyler 2013b: 4). Tyler's position is suggestive of Marx's reference to a 'passively rotting mass', which undoubtedly has abject connotations. One might argue this phrasing conjures images of rotting flesh and disease, reminiscent of the corpse that invokes disgust and reminds the subject of their own mortality (Kristeva 1982). Further, in corporeal terms, a rotting mass would be something separating from the normative body; falling outside the bodily border and, in turn, the psychic border, as it becomes a repulsive other. Indeed, Marx's notion of this 'scum of the depraved elements of all classes' (Marx and Engels 1951 in Morris 1994: 15) has lingered in contemporary ideas of what an underclass is: deviant, immoral scum who fall outside normative class boundaries. As Stratton argues, the

underclass 'is a reworking of the idea of the Other best described as the lumpenproletariat in the context of the neoliberal reconstruction of the social order in terms of the economic' (2017: 539). In an ironic twist of Marx's concept of the lumpenproletariat, the political support of the lower classes is supposedly garnered using populist rhetoric that appeals to 'the people'. This notion was most notable during the lead up to the 2016 British EU referendum in the support of Nigel Farage and UKIP. It results in representations of a racist, xenophobic underclass, often accompanied by images of mass crowds wielding flags emblazoned with the Union flag or St. George's Cross, as seen, for example, in the documentary *Professor Green: Working Class White Men* (Channel 4, 2018). Here, as in other texts, whiteness becomes a 'class signifier' where the lower classes are characterised to be 'more racist and more hostile to immigration' than the progressive middle classes (Lawler 2012: 412-413).

4.4.3 **Pejorative Labelling: The Figure of the 'Chav'**

Ironically, it seems at times of economic, social and civil unrest, where class struggles can be found, that labels for the underclass circulate and dominate political and media discourse. Over the last 40 years in Britain, there have been several social upheavals of note where this (re)turn to pejorative labelling has occurred: deindustrialisation as a consequence of Thatcher's ministry throughout the 1980s (Jones 2011); the double-dip recession Britain faced between 2008-2012, and the consequential periods of austerity (Harkins and Lugo-Ocando 2016); and the 2011 English riots (Tyler 2013b; Garrett 2017). At times like these, interchangeable terms for an 'underclass' have been used to blame societal issues on society's most vulnerable. Hayward and Yar argue that '15 or so years after its first dramatic rise to prominence', during the Thatcher years, 'the underclass concept is conspicuous largely by its absence from mainstream media representations and political debates' (2006: 10). However, they state that at the time of writing, there was the 'rapid rise of a new terminology in which socially marginal groups are characterized, classified and understood – the concept of the "chav"' (2006: 10). Further, Hayward and Yar argue that 'the decline of the underclass discourse, and the rise of the "chav", are not unconnected' (2006: 10), suggesting that both terms follow a trajectory of pathologising certain class positions. Thus the chav,

> as a recent and distinctive class-cultural phenomenon can be seen as both a media construction and a reconfiguration of enduring class-based social divisions fuelled by conceptualisation of an "undeserving poor" and a social "underclass" whose life-choices place them beyond the pale of working-class respectability (Nayak and Kehily 2014: 1330).

Tyler suggests the expunging of social class discourse from the political imaginary during Blair's New Labour ministry enabled the construct of poverty as a 'self-induced pathological condition' (2013: 162). Thus, no longer could marginalisation and disadvantage be blamed on structural or systemic failures. Just as Hayward and Yar explain the rise of chav as more than mere coincidence, Tyler suggests the figure of the chav was constructed as a tangible vessel of class hatred and blame:

> It was undoubtedly the mediating agencies of popular culture newspaper journalism, television and the Internet which transformed New Labour's symbolic abjection of class into the figure of the chav. The cumulative effects of many hundreds of thousands of newspaper articles, photographs and online commentaries about chavs constituted this figure as a national abject par excellence (Tyler 2013: 163).

As Tyler highlights above, representations of the chav and commentaries on their supposed lifestyle choices were relentless, reflecting neoliberal and New Labour ideology in an overly accessible way: the label was potent and the British public could not escape the chav discourse. One of the most successful characterisations of the chav was Vicky Pollard in the series *Little Britain* (BBC 2003-2006) (see Tyler 2013: 164-167). Vicky encapsulates public anxiety surrounding teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency. Her hoard of multi-ethnic children establishes her as a visual manifestation of the abject maternal. Further, Vicky is grotesque in her excessive embodiment both as a 'woman' stretched by her births and in her obesity, accentuated by her tight tracksuit. Moreover, the character of Vicky is enacted by a man in drag who camps up a grotesque performance of a lower-class woman, made obvious in the purposely amateurish application of makeup.

Nayak and Kehily (2014) examine the construction of the 'pramface girl' as a gendered extension of the chav figure:

> chavs and pramface girls are relational constructs emerging within the context of social change and the growing cleavage between rich and poor in Western late modernity. The figure of the chav and the teen mother exists in the representational sphere as 'abject others', a repository for fear and anxieties concerning the corrosion of white respectability and social class mobility. As figures of abjection, chavs and pramface girls are enabling devices from which it becomes possible to speak the 'unspeakable'. As such, they serve to maintain the boundaries of the 'normative', holding in place otherwise fragile configurations of class, ethnicity and gender (2014: 1335).

By falling outside the boundaries and thus being made abject, Nayak and Kehily argue figures such as the chav and pramface girl further distinguish the boundaries of social class. As discussed earlier, the normative middle class can construct the self against the chav as other: 'that is not me'. Indeed, Lawler argues that middle-class disgust at the poor can be read as a long-standing project of attempting to distinguish the middle-class self: 'working class-ness forms the constitutive outside to middle-class existence' (2005: 431). Further, Lawler states that 'disgust is one manifestation of a bourgeois project to distinguish the middle class from it others, a means of self-constitution' (2005: 443). Thus, underclass figures such as the chav are constructed in such a grotesque way (like that of Vicky Pollard) to invoke disgust reactions that allow the middle-class subject to simultaneously consign the underclass to the borders and distinguish the self. Or, as Tyler (2013) suggests, to enact the narcissistic cleansing of the self.

In recent years, there has been a transition from the widespread usage of the morally potent word 'chav' as representative of the underclass to a discourse surrounding 'benefits Britain' and benefits scroungers. In a sense, the benefits scrounger, dole dosser or fraudulent benefits claimant is a symbolic extension of the abject figure of the chav: both are marked by similar representational cues such as their clothing and appearance, antisocial behaviour and motifs such as excessive smoking and drinking. Moreover, the construction of the 'pramface girl' is still evident in contemporary representations of the underclass, as single parenthood and multiple children reflect anxieties surrounding the notion of women getting pregnant in order to claim benefits. However, whereas the chav figure is dangerous in its anti-social behaviour – 'chav' is thought to be an acronym

of council housed and violent - the benefits scrounger is a potential danger to everyone, putting society in jeopardy. Put simply, the benefits scrounger takes advantage of the hard-working, honest taxpayer, threatens the economy and plunges Britain even further into austerity measures. As Morris argues, the underclass as 'social outsiders' are 'doubly dangerous, posing not only a threat to social organisations, but also a challenge to our models for portraying and understanding social structure' (1994: 2). Further, through 'the construction of a category of "outsiders", this threat is located outside of society, which may then be perceived as internally cohesive and free from significant challenge' (1994: 2). In a contemporary setting, the figure of the benefits scrounger is the perfect candidate for this outsider-as-scapegoat.

4.4.4 Historical Depictions and Contemporary Comparisons

Like the chav, the figure of the benefits scrounger has been grotesquely 'animated' (Tyler 2013) to become a manifestation of abjection. One of the most significant ways this has happened is the seemingly constant broadcasting of 'poverty porn' programmes, produced with increasing frequency since 2014. However, there are historical antecedents to these contemporary animations and it is important, and interesting, to note the striking similarities between depictions of the Victorian poor and representations of a modern-day underclass. Morris (1994: 10) notes that in the 18th century, population theorist T.R. Malthus was concerned by a 'redundant population' and the resulting over population of England. Malthus believed the way to overcome this social issue lay in self-restraint of the poor: they should stop having children. For Malthus, Morris states, 'the problems of the poor follow directly from their giving in to natural passions which require regulation and direction, and it is the containment of these desires which holds the key to the elimination of poverty and disease' (1994: 10). Through sex and reproduction the poor have the potential to contaminate society with their disease, reflecting the pathologisation of the poor. In their inability to 'contain' their desires, Malthus' redundant population is abject: they surpass the boundaries of their own desire, it is uncontainable, and they infiltrate the corporeal borders of others with their filth and disease. Further, the focus on sexual desire is reminiscent of the grotesque aesthetic of the reproductive organs and the lower bodily stratum. The grotesque, by Bakhtin's definition, do not withhold their passions and all bodily functions are uninhibited. This suggests a lack of control, which can be judged by the

bourgeoise as moral failure. Parallel to the notions of poverty in contemporary Britain, in the 18th century 'morality is seen as the basis of a good society, and moral failure the cause of poverty and distress' (Morris 1994: 11). However, this is a cyclical phenomenon, as implied by Porter who argues that during the Edwardian era poverty was considered to '[breed] bad moral habits such as poor child care and intemperance' (1991: 168). So the poor are doubly condemned for their moral failings: poverty is caused by immorality but poverty causes immoral behaviours. The cycle of poverty and immorality is inescapable and the poor are continuous victims of moral condemnation. Furthermore, historical depictions centre on exaggerating the unattractive appearance of the poor. The social commentator Henry Mayhew considered society to be divided into vagrants and citizens: the 'former group shares: "a greater development of the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature", "high cheekbones and protruding jaws", "slag language"… "love of cruelty", "pugnacity"… "extreme animal fondness for the opposite sex"' (Morris 1994: 17). Thus, the poor 'are described as socially, morally and perhaps even physically distinct; a race apart' (Morris: 1994: 17). Further, the Victorian poor were 'stunted, scrawny, potbellied, rickety, scarred by sores, scrofulous lumps, and other stigmata of sickness. The "great unwashed" were indifferent to the filth and stenches in which they lived'; these were 'the ghastly impressions recorded by a host of mid-Victorian commentators' (Porter 1991: 159). As highlighted in a previous section discussing *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, contemporary representations of the poor reflect this dehumanising discourse, which ultimately serves to render the poor as utterly other: abject in their abnormality.

4.4.5 **Poor Laws and Policy**

Just as historical depictions of the poor hold similarities to contemporary representations, historical laws and legislation are strikingly similar to contemporary policy on work and welfare. Morris notes that Malthus' position on the behaviour of the poor was that 'without the spur of scarcity the will to work would disappear' (1994: 12), suggesting a dichotomy where those in poverty do not want to work, rather than cannot work. Hence, this 'fragile will to work he also felt to be threatened by assistance for the poor, so that the Poor Laws perpetuate rather than resolve the problem of poverty' (1994: 12). Malthus is concerned that providing the poor with monetary hand-outs will give them even more reason to avoid work, cultivating dependency; a similar outlook to

contemporary notions. Morris argues that a 'common view asserts that the transition into the twentieth century' (and arguably through the subsequent transition into the 21st century), 'saw the incremental development of social responsibility for the poor, but detail of the legislation shows a perpetuation of the deserving/undeserving distinction of the nineteenth century-thought, and even its exacerbation' (1994: 33). Indeed, the deserving/undeserving distinction is still common in discourses on the poor. Morris states that in the debate about the Poor Law, Malthus believed 'man needed the spur of want to shake him from his natural idleness'. More extreme views of the time argued 'those who could not support themselves should be allowed to perish, and certainly not to reproduce' (1994: 33-34). Of course, no such views would be outrightly stated in contemporary Britain but rising homelessness, an increase in austerity measures and pejorative representations of working-class pregnancy all hint at a notion of social cleansing. Previously mentioned political discourse and policy documents suggest that all the workless subject lacks is motivation and aspiration, a contemporary revision of Malthus' 'spur of want'. One of the main focuses of the Poor Laws was to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor. However, 'nothing is so difficult to distinguish as the nuances which separate unmerited misfortune from an adversity produced by vice' (de Tocqueville 1833 in Morris 1994: 35). One might argue the best course of action is to assume everyone is in the latter category: able but not willing to work. This is a common theme across time, and in a contemporary setting there is an assumption that most benefits claimants are fraudulent, especially those claiming disability benefit. As Hughes argues, 'disabled people in the United Kingdom have been tipped into an abyss of counterfeit citizenship and smeared as "false mendicants" – an old trick well documented in the historical archives of ableism' (2015: 992). Hughes explores how disability and crime are historically linked through the figures of the 'sturdy beggar' and witches, and argues that disabled benefits claimants are the contemporary equivalent, their claims automatically assumed to be fraudulent and criminal. Woodbridge discusses similar abject figures depicted in Renaissance 'Rogue Literature' such as 'dummerers who feign dumbness as an aid to soliciting alms, counterfeit cranks who feign epilepsy, and jarkmen who forge begging licenses' (2003: 203). However, 'this professionalized system of criminal specializations stands in stark contrast to the improvisational, hand-to-mouth subsistence of real vagrants' (2003: 203). One might argue this is similar to contemporary representations of benefits

claimants insofar as they are often exaggerated and do not reflect facts and statistics. Further, Woodbridge notes that after the popularity of Rogue Literature, vagrants were branded with an "R" for rogue, 'suggesting that English legislators had been reading rogue literature, and even though it was primarily entertaining, its categories remained to structure policy toward real life vagrants' (2003: 208-209). Again, comparisons can be made with contemporary policy on the poor where there is an active engagement with poverty porn texts in political discourse. For example, when *Benefits Street* was first broadcast in 2014, Conservative back-bencher Simon Hart declared, referring directly to the programme, that 'sadly there is a street like this in every constituency in the land' and arguing that the welfare system should not be a 'lifestyle choice' (Hart 2014). Similarly in his speech marking the tenth anniversary of the Centre for Social Justice, Ian Duncan-Smith stated that 'people are shocked when they are confronted with a TV programme such as Benefits Street – the reality is that our welfare system has become distorted, no longer the safety net it was once intended to be' (Duncan-Smith 2014).

One of the attempts to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving, between the 'genuinely destitute and the idler', came in the form of Poor Law Guardians (Morris 1994: 34). In her retelling of the Poor Law, Morris notes 'there was punishment for the absconders', those who were physically able to work, but chose not to (1994: 34). In the 1830s, legislators agreed the impotent poor should receive help. By contrast, the able-bodied poor were treated as less eligible, again reflecting the binary between deserving and undeserving. Just short of a century later, in 1921, a 'genuinely seeking work test' was introduced to separate the two groups. As Morris (1994: 38) suggests, despite an expected change in attitudes towards the poor during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, from 'moral blame' to 'social responsibility', 20th century policy still held on to the values historically attributed to the poor.

> Applicants for uncovenanted benefit were thus required to prove that they were "genuinely seeking whole-time employment but unable to obtain such employment", and soon after the requirement was extended to those claiming covenanted benefit but having paid less than twenty contributions in the year preceding their claim…there was an insufficient safeguard against the malingerer. Documentary evidence of job search by claimants offered a solution (Morris 1994: 39).

The above has certain similarities to contemporary benefits claiming. Applicants for Jobseeker's Allowance are required to attend fortnightly meetings and prove they are applying for jobs, or face sanctions; disabled applicants must go through vigorous points-based testing to ensure they are entitled to benefits; and many disabled people deemed unfit for work by specialists are deemed fit for work by the DWP, and enter into a cycle of appeals and tribunals. As Dugan (2015) reports, 'Almost a quarter of all people applying for disability benefits to help them live independently are encountering serious difficulties, including delays, unfair dismissal of claims and confusion over eligibility'. Here, eligibility is the issue, determining whether claimants are deserving, and the assumption is that most applicants are not. Reeve argues that in 2012, the Coalition Government 'introduced the harshest regime of conditionality and benefit sanctions in the history of the UK benefits system, significantly increasing the level of conditionality placed on some benefit claimants and the severity of sanctions for failing to comply' (2017: 65). Implementing conditionality means that access and eligibility for benefits 'is dependent upon adhering to specified behavioural obligations' (Reeve 2017: 65). Thus, the claiming and receiving of benefits becomes moralised and the focus is on the behaviour of applicants rather than their need for help and support. Again, attitudes towards benefits claimants, visible and accessible in popular culture and political discourse, mean the applicant is already judged on immorality and presumed to be fraudulent. As Chunn and Gavigan suggest, 'welfare fraud became welfare as fraud. Thus, poverty, welfare and crime were linked' (2004: 220). The twin notions of fraud by welfare cheats and the criminalisation of poverty have culminated in the figuration of a 'never deserving poor': 'virtually no one is considered "deserving"; even those who do receive social assistance are viewed as temporary recipients who must demonstrate their willingness to work for welfare' (Chunn and Gavigan 2004: 231).

Reeve's (2017) study investigates the difficulties faced by homeless people attempting to claim benefits, subject to conditionality. In this study, 63% of participants found the conditionality requirements difficult to meet. The most common barriers include not having enough money to travel to appointments; being asked to apply for too many jobs each week; having important appointments that clashed with job centre appointments; and needing, and not having, regular access to the internet (see Reeve 2017 for a more detailed discussion). A case study in Dugan's report reveals the difficulties faced by a

disabled applicant for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). After being advised by a neurological specialist, Ronny applied for PIP, having lost the function of her arms and legs: "At the first PIP assessment I was given six points and needed eight. I appealed, and the second time they came back and gave me seven. They never spoke to the specialist who told me I should be eligible. Now I've had to take my case to a tribunal" (in Dugan 2015). The homeless participants in Reeve's study were enthusiastic and motivated to find work or training programmes but found it difficult to achieve this goal because of the conditionality requirements they were subject to. And so, due to the difficulty in meeting certain requirements, 39% of Reeve's participants had been sanctioned in the past year (2017: 72). The implementing of sanctions display the incongruous nature of the benefits system: a system that is there to help those in need yet punishes them; a system that encourages work but does not give the individual the appropriate resources to find it. For example, Reeve notes some participants were sanctioned because 'they lacked proof of compliance or were seeking work in different ways from those specified' (2017: 74). One participant 'knew the best way to secure work in his trade was to deliver a CV in person but his Work Coach' (a contemporary equivalent to the Poor Law Guardian, perhaps) 'insisted he applied for jobs online. The time he spent seeking work in person was 'discounted', he fell short of his target and was sanctioned' (2017: 74). Ryan (2018) tells of the tragic case of David Clapson,

> A former solider and carer for his mum [who] had his benefits sanctioned after missing one meeting at the jobcentre. He was diabetic, and without the £71.70 a week from his Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) he couldn't afford to eat or put credit on his electricity card to keep the fridge working where he stored his insulin. Three week later, after suffering a severe lack of insulin, Clapson was found dead with a pile of CVs next to his body (Ryan 2018).

Since the implementation of the Coalition's severe regime (Reeve 2017), sanctions against disabled claimants increased by 580% between 2013-2014 (Donnison and Whitehead 2014). A feature published by *The Independent* (2017) illustrates the most 'ridiculous' reasons people had their benefits sanctioned. For example, 'a man with heart problems who was on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) had a heart attack during a work capability assessment. He was then sanctioned for failing to

complete the assessment'; 'Mother-of-three Angie Goodwin, 27, said her benefits were sanctioned after she applied for a role job centre staff said was beyond her'; and 'Ceri Padley, 26, had her benefits sanctioned after she missed an appointment at the job centre – because she was at a job interview' (in Dearden 2016). Aside from being 'ridiculous', these examples show the frankly harsh and inconceivable nature of the benefits system. Further, they refute the 'common-sense' notion that individuals *choose* an 'easy' life on benefits.

4.4.6 **Slum Tourism and Disgust**

Throughout history there has been an abject fascination with the poor, a dichotomous interest/disgust in their defected character, immoral behaviour and vices. Their appearance is often depicted in grotesque and exaggerated ways, and they are blamed for societal issues. In the Victorian era, this twinned fascination and disgust was encapsulated in the popular trend of slum tourism or 'slumming'. The rich middle classes would often visit the slums of Victorian London, sometimes as a philanthropic activity, but often out of a fascination with the ways in which the poor lived. For some, 'slumming was a peculiar form of tourism motivated by curiosity, excitement and thrill' (Diniejko 2013). Indeed, Steinbrink argues it is little wonder 'that the slums, in the eyes of London's society, which was shaped by rigid moral expectations and inflexible social rules, were areas of both gloomy threat and erotic curiosity: slums were places of moral decay and libidinal liberty' (2012: 222). In the act of slumming, disgust and the paradox of desire met:

> In fact, for a considerable number of Victorian gentlemen and ladies slumming was a form of illicit urban tourism. They visited the most deprived streets of the East End in pursuit of the 'guilty pleasures' associated with the immoral slum dwellers. Upper-class slummers sometimes spent in disguise a night or more in poor boarding houses seeking to experience taboo intimacies with the members of the lower classes (Diniejko 2013).

As Miller argues, disgust and desire, though seemingly opposite emotions, are intrinsically linked and one might see them 'as necessary to each other, part of one complex syndrome' (1997: 113). Miller asks the reader, are 'there no simple, purely

disgusting things that do not involve us in "a vortex of summons and repulsion" as Kristeva puts it, that do not implicate attraction, desire, fascination, or allure either unconsciously, as in disgust as reaction formation, or consciously, as in disgust as the consequence of surfeit? (1997: 112). Miller suggests the most disgusting of objects evoke parallel/paradoxical reactions of fascination and desire. In the same vein, desirable objects become disgusting when they have been 'consumed' in excess. The Victorian slum dwellers were deemed disgusting and to be intimate with them was taboo, which paradoxically made sexual relationships with them desirable. Miller (1997) suggests that people get a thrill out of the disgusting and being disgusted. This might be a thrill to comedic effect (e.g. making toilet jokes), a characteristic of grotesque realism; or a sexual thrill (e.g. fetishes for taboo objects of desire/disgust). One might argue that because of this close emotional relationship between desire and disgust, the subject enjoys being disgusted. Thus, disgust with the poor not only maintains the social order but is 'pleasurable' for the subject who makes them abject.

The slum has always been constructed as 'the place of the "unknown Other"' (Steinbrink 2012: 221). The slum, home to the abject other, is an abject space at the edges of society. Just as council housing estates today are conceived as abject, ghettoised spaces (Haylett 2001; Hancock and Mooney 2013). However, the slum is not just spatially abject but connotatively so,

> It can be shown that 'slum' and 'poverty' have experienced a semantic coupling resulting from the talk about the 'omnipresence of filth and dirt' (Linder 2004: 20)…The words 'filth' and 'dirt' lie at the point where two chains of association deriving from slum and poverty intersect. Both chains of association lead directly into corporeality – in particular, into *the lower zones of the body: through cholera, a serious form of diarrhoea, into the anus, and through lust, into the genitals*. The Victorian era was a period in which corporeality was denied and concealed in the bourgeois milieu. It thus becomes clear that 'dirt' indeed is by no means only a hygienic category and that it was always been a moral category, too, which refers to something indecent and repugnant (Steinbrink 2012: 221-222, emphasis added).

Here, the associations with dirt and filth have a direct link to the process of abjection and the aesthetic category of the grotesque. Cholera is an infectious disease that can lead to death and, as noted previously, death and its tangible corpse are a manifestation of abjection. As Kristeva argues, the 'corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject.' (1982: 4). Death, as the total antithesis to life, is the extreme and total Other to the subject: it disturbs the boundaries of the self and life itself. Diarrhoea is an extreme form of bodily excrement in that it signifies illness and disease: in its abnormal liquid form it disturbs the bodily boundaries, leaving the body out of control as it expels the waste, spasming and in pain. Through its connotations of illness and abnormality, diarrhoea symbolises the subject who is suffering with it as other: 'Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death' (Kristeva 1982: 71). Here, excrement is paralleled with death, and arguably diarrhoea/cholera satisfy the link from waste to disease to death. It might be argued that the body is threatened as it is left vulnerable by the open orifice from which the waste is abjected. As Miller argues, 'the body's seal is already broken at various orifices, and these orifices must bear the bulk of the weight of the opposition between inside and outside because they are where the danger of unclarity and disorder is' (1997: 58). Further, orifices 'are the holes that allow contaminants in to pollute the soul, and they are the passageways through which substances pass that can defile ourselves and others too' (1997: 58-59). To Miller, the 'inside' of the subject is 'polluting because it is a mess of gooey, oozy, slimy, smelly things'; excrement which the subject only sees when it is outside of the body, comes to 'stand as the appropriate symbol for all the stuff within' (1997: 58). So could it be then, that if excrement is symbolic of 'the stuff within', diarrhoea associated with the poor becomes indicative of their character? By this proposition, the filth, dirt and waste associated with the slum is a substitute for the immoral character of the poor: the poor are waste personified. Furthermore, the 'lower zones of the body', the anus and genitals, are grotesque in their depiction, reminiscent of Bakhtin's bodily lower stratum; objects leave and enter these corporeal zones, destabilising the bodily boundaries. As Miller notes, not all 'parts of the outer body are of equal moral and ritual value. Some parts are easily contaminated and contaminating, like the sexual organs' (1997: 58). Hence, the supposedly uncontrollable sexual urges of the poor are moralised

because their sexual organs have the power to contaminate others with moral indecency and defilement. However, with slumming came a paradoxical lust for the poor, a taboo which could disturb societal boundaries via the physical mixing of classed subjects. Overall, the slum is an abject space full of waste and filth, sexual vice and disease where the boundaries between the self and other are threatened.

In what Steinbrink calls a 'socio-voyeuristic thrill', contemporary poverty tourism is 'driven by a lust for angst' rather than a lust for the other (2012: 218). This contemporary 'poverty tourism' often involves middle-class westerners visiting impoverished towns or cities in Third World countries in the Global South. One might suggest that an alternative type of poverty tourism is beginning to take shape in the form of 'poverty porn' programming, arguably another contemporary variation on the slumming theme. However, in this twist on the Victorian slum tour, the voyeur/viewer gets access to the poor through heavily mediated and edited texts. Thus, the voyeur/viewer does not have a 'real life' experience of the contemporary abject space but a disassociated one through a television screen. Jensen notes 2013 as the year when 'public debate about the welfare state apparently exploded', in the form of 'poverty porn' (2014: 1). Jensen argues that in the broadcasting of *We Pay Your Benefits* (BBC 2013) and *Benefits Britain 1949* (Channel 4 2013), poverty 'was rendered as a challenge, an experiment or an opportunity for voyeuristic tourism. Life on the breadline was transformed from a profound social injustice to an opportunity to scrutinise the habits of the poor and how deserving they are' (2014: 1). Here, parallels are suggested between the representational workings of poverty porn and the voyeuristic nature of slumming.

> … the label of 'poverty porn' does not simply refer to the obscenity of poverty; it also refers to the practices of directors. Such programming is 'porn' in the sense that it aims to arouse and stimulate the viewer, to provoke an emotional sensation through a repetitive and affective encounter with the television screen. Poverty porn is an all-surface, no-depth visual culture of immediacy and its semiotic cues - its red flags of moral outrage - require no interpretative work from the viewers (Jensen 2014: 4).

The directors of these texts produce sensationalist tabloid-like programmes that are profitable. Repetitive representational cues that are familiar to the audience (via tabloid newspapers, political and public discourses) are used in the programmes. However, the emotional response they evoke is arguably disgust. While Jensen rightly argues the genre is not porn in the orthodox sense, one might argue that, like in Victorian slumming, there is a minor fixation on the libidinous habits of the poor. In the contemporary twist, lower-class sexuality is often explored through the narrative of an excessive number of children, positioning the female subject as abject maternal.

4.4.7 **Charles Murray's Underclass**

> By "underclass" I refer not to poor people, but to a subset of poor people who chronically live off mainstream society (directly through welfare or indirectly through crime) without participating in it (Murray 1990: 5).

One of the most recounted articulations of the underclass thesis, Charles Murray's categorisation of a feckless lazy poor still has a place in contemporary political and popular discourse. By the late 1980s Murray was already recognised in America for his conception of a black 'urban population that seems mired at the bottom of society, disorganized and demoralized' (1990: 4), and was commissioned to publish his musings on the possible existence of a British underclass. For Murray, 'the underclass is distinguished by a distinctive set of *cultural* dispositions that inform behavioural patterns and choices' (Hayward and Yar 2006: 11, emphasis in original). Further, Hayward and Yar note this 'distinctive cultural milieu, at odds with society as a whole, is deemed to exhibit pathological dispositions towards two key social responsibilities: the need and obligation to engage in paid employment, and the need and obligation to provide a stable, nuclear family environment in which children can be raised' (2006: 11). To Hayward and Yar, Murray's work follows a common trajectory of pathologising the poor. In this instance, the underclass are criticised for choosing not to engage in these key social responsibilities. Yet, paradoxically, 'pathological dispositions' implies there is something fundamentally *wrong* with the underclass which stops them wanting to engage in these 'normal' citizen responsibilities. Indeed, Murray goes so far as to ask of the underclass, how 'contagious is this disease?' (1990: 20), framing the poor as a problem to be eradicated lest they should have an adverse effect on the remaining

British society. This ideological paradox has been common throughout history (e.g. eugenics movement/social Darwinism) and still holds weight now: the poor are demonised for not conforming to society or to 'the norm' but framed as biologically/psychologically abnormal, thus reflecting the subhuman categorisation of the underclass as grotesque and monstrous. Moreover, these two key responsibilities also reflect the neoliberal project of practicing good citizenship; however, the underclass cannot meet these obligations. In his work, Murray focuses on 'three phenomena' that characterise the underclass: 'illegitimacy, violent crime and dropout from the labour force' (1999: 7), all of which form an antithesis to the neoliberal project.

Bagguley and Mann argue that in Murray's conception of an underclass 'a subtle shift occurs from the problems faced by the "underclass" to the problem of the "underclass"' (1992: 114). Firstly, Murray argues that illegitimacy 'is the best predictor of an underclass in the making' (1990: 7). Murray directly links illegitimacy to social class: 'the increase in illegitimate births is strikingly concentrated among the lowest social class' (1990: 8); 'the relationship between illegitimacy and social class…is so obvious' (1990: 9). In drawing these links, Murray makes a statement about the irresponsible nature and bad behaviour of the underclass, implying that only members of an underclass would have unprotected sex outside of a relationship: 'illegitimacy bespeaks an attitude on the part of one or both of the parents' (1990: 7). To Murray, bearing a child 'without intending to support it, or…without knowing one can take care of it, constitute an excellent proxy measure of the sort of irresponsibility that is a hallmark of the underclass' (1990: 7). Here, Murray equates single parenthood with moral irresponsibility; bearing illegitimate children is telling of underclass subjects' inability to perform proper citizenship. Further, in his discussion of illegitimacy, Murray suggests that the 'problem of the underclass' is really a problem of the female underclass, that sexually active women are responsible for the perpetuation of underclass culture through their literal reproduction of it. One might argue that Murray's position is reflective of a fear of the abject maternal and a fear of female reproductive power. As Kristeva argues, 'Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing' (1982: 77). Further, Tyler reading Federici and Foucault, suggests that 'maternal bodies have historically been constituted as abject' because women as the

'producers and reproducers of labour power' are 'targets for the institution of the bio-political regimes of control' (see Tyler 2013: 112-113). Thus, Murray suggests that single women should be controlled, and the family unit contained, within the institution of marriage to avoid the reproduction of a class that cannot fulfil its role as a reserve labour force (Marx 1994). Murray paints an archaic view that single women cannot successfully rear children without a male partner: their relationships are 'transient and chaotic' and 'kids tend to run wild in communities without fathers' (1990: 12). In this, Murray implies the solution to the problem of the underclass is marriage and the continuation of the nuclear family. Elsewhere, Murray is more explicit in this solution: 'No alternative family structure comes close to the merits of two married parents' (2001: 32); 'No human institution has deeper roots than marriage' (2001: 36); the family 'is the indispensably building block of society' (2001: 36). Overall, Murray believes that 'the problems of the underclass are driven by the breakdown of socialization of the young, which in turn is driven by the breakdown of the family' (2001: 34). The breakdown of the family is always centred around illegitimacy and single mothers, focusing on sexually excessive women as the cause and creators of the underclass. As Prideaux argues, 'the implication is that a single mother of a male child in particular would perpetuate the growth of an irresponsible, inter-generational "underclass"' (2010: 300). It is the men these boys will grow up to be that are the concern of Murray's other two phenomena: violent crime and drop out from the labour force.

Murray states that 'the habitual criminal is the classic member of an underclass, living off mainstream society and preying on it' (1990: 13). Murray argues that crime leads to fragmentation of the community and an altering of the norms of society 'as different kinds of men are idolized by the boys and the standards of morality in general collapse' (1990: 13). Linked to this, insofar as young men choose crime over legitimate work, 'the definitive proof that an underclass has arrived is that large numbers of young, healthy, low-income males choose not to take jobs (1990: 17). Again, the underclass is framed as an able but unwilling participant in the labour market. Three interesting propositions occur here: crime is gendered; work is gendered (Murray also disregards the emotional labour involved in rearing a child); and crime is paralleled with welfare dependency. It seems Murray feels comfortable separating men and women into rather deterministic categories, discounting female workers, female criminals, stay-at-home fathers, and any

circumstances that might have led to illegitimacy and crime. Further, although not explicitly, Murray equates preying on society with sponging off it: the male underclass prey on society through crime; the female underclass sponge off society by claiming benefits. Both the male and female underclass are grotesquely framed as excessive, deviant parasites who make victims of the society around them, rather than being framed as victims of systemic problems. In a contemporary setting, these ideas about the underclass are persistent and have been perpetuated since the 2000s. As Prideaux (2010) suggests, narratives around gun and gang crime, welfare dependency and lone parenthood echo Murray's sentiments. Prideaux cites two sources that reproduce Murray's ideas. Firstly, Rupert Murdoch's newspapers have 'continued to call for cuts in public welfare' and have repeatedly identified feckless fathers and lone mothers as those responsible for an increase in crime, moral decline and welfare dependency' (2010: 299). Secondly, the New Deal for Lone Parents, proposed by the New Labour government with 'their concomitant proposals for strengthening traditional family forms' (2010: 300). One might argue that the three characteristics underpinning Murray's notion of the underclass are not only still prevalent today, but also form the categories of representation in which the underclass are depicted in popular culture, *especially* within poverty porn programming. Illegitimacy is mirrored in the category of the abject maternal; violent behaviour and drop out from the labour force are still prevalent in depictions of a male underclass. All three are framed in a grotesque representation of the underclass as engaging in bad and excessive choices and leading immoral lives.

4.5 Conclusion: Constructing Social Class; Inequality as a Consequence

This chapter has bought together some key sociological scholars such as Bourdieu, Marx, Reay and Skeggs, in order to better understand the complexities of social class; as well as the effects of inequality and having awareness of class consciousness. Rather than focus on sociological definitions of social class as such, this chapter has mapped out the social, cultural and political factors that might have an impact on an individual's life chances and/or opportunities. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that whilst there are certain systems for categorising social class; discourses on, and representations of, social class are largely constructed. This is especially apparent in a contemporary

neoliberal setting whereby the boundaries of social class are becoming increasingly blurred by the promise of social mobility paralleled with severe austerity measures and high levels of unemployment and homelessness. These precarious times allow for increasingly pejorative constructions of an underclass, who can be blamed for social problems, to take shape. Though social class is a construct, the boundaries between 'classes' have very real and felt consequences for people, in the form of social inequality. The inequalities felt by the poor are often tied to this neoliberal context in which they can be blamed for their circumstances, transforming poverty from a structural issue into an individual one. Framed in this way, benefits claimants are depicted as lacking taste, capital and most of all, morals. Popular culture, in particular reality television formats, becomes a device for neoliberal governmentality in which good and bad citizenship, especially in relation to class and gender, are performed. Benefits claimants are portrayed as neoliberal failures who are simultaneously irresponsible in their 'choice' to claim benefits and responsible for economic downturn. The poverty porn texts analysed in this research are situated in this neoliberal context but are also reliant on historical depictions of a 'dangerous' underclass. They also reflect Murray's (1990; 2001) notion of an underclass characterised by illegitimacy, violent crime and drop-out from unemployment. By constructing a grotesque figure, the 'benefits scrounger', inequality in the form of poverty and austerity, is legitimised and justified. The hyperbolic depictions of benefits claimants as scroungers that are available in poverty porn texts and tabloid newspapers become the mainstream representation of benefits claimants; reconfiguring them as objects of hate and disgust, rather than as people deserving of sympathy. The ways in which structural inequality is reconfigured into an individual issue and how the benefits claimants featured in the poverty porn texts navigate this, will be explored in the analysis.

5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction: The Importance of Textual Analysis

The following chapter details the fundamental theoretical and epistemological paradigms that inform and underpin the design of this research project; the research methods implemented; and the textual, televisual sample obtained. The term 'design' refers to this research being both qualitative and interpretive, meaning there is an intentional distancing from the more scientific methodological approaches that form the basis of quantitative research studies. While quantitative research is predominantly guided by positivism (Holliday 2007), based on logic and the need for scientific or mathematical proof, or even an objective 'truth', the emphasis in qualitative research 'is on understanding and interpretation as opposed to explanation and verification' (Kinsella 2006). Despite this focus on interpretation, which might be considered subjective, Holliday argues 'there is the potential for considerable rigour and discipline in qualitative research, that there *is* science within its complex nature' (2007: 1, emphasis in original).

This qualitative 'science' that Holliday alludes to might be achieved by enacting a *thorough* textual analysis, a 'method of data analysis that *closely examines* either the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse' (Lockyer 2012: 2, emphasis added). In textual analysis, texts are 'deconstructed to examine how they operate, the manner in which they are constructed, the ways in which meanings are produced, and the nature of those meanings' (Lockyer 2012: 2). The validity in this textual method can be explained by 'one of the quintessential assumptions of cultural studies. . . that popular culture is a site of struggle over meaning' (Fürsich 2009: 244). Moreover, Fürsich argues that '*only* independent textual analysis can elucidate the narrative structure, symbolic arrangements and ideological potential of media content' (2009: 239, emphasis added).

The production of (and struggle for) meaning that textual analysis aims to unravel is imperative to this study in which the dominant research interest is the abject way in which benefits claimants are represented via grotesque imagery. Thus, the methodology has a grounding in hermeneutics, which is concerned with the 'concept of culture as "signifying practices" of meaning-production' (Fornäs 2012: 492). When

used as a foundation for textual analysis, hermeneutics 'emphasizes the sociocultural and historical influences of qualitative interpretation' and 'exposes hidden meanings' (Byrne 2001: 968). In other words, hermeneutics can be considered the rationale behind interpretation. The exploration of philosophical and critical hermeneutics in this research is also informed by social constructionism: in turn, hermeneutics and social constructionism can be converted into a framework for a textual analysis. Further, this research design employs theoretical approaches such as abjection, the grotesque and disgust; sociological notions such as capital and stigma; and neoliberal ideology. These converge and are enacted into the textual analysis, in particular a framing analysis.

5.2 Hermeneutics

5.2.1 Hermeneutics as an Analytical Framework

Hermeneutics is the 'art or technique of interpretation, especially of texts' (Chandler and Munday 2016); the 'leitmotif of hermeneutics is the irremedially mediated processes of human understanding and interpretation' (Kinsella 2006). These two constitutive definitions support the notion that contemporary hermeneutic thought can be traced back to philosophical hermeneutics – the study of human behaviour, language and being – in which it has its theoretical roots, and the development of critical hermeneutics which is concerned with text, context and ideology. Highlighting the importance of a hermeneutic approach, Freeman argues that 'understanding can be manipulated, mistaken, and misguided', thus, 'hermeneutic theories of understanding take into account the social, cultural, and political contexts, past and present, in which understanding and misunderstanding take shape' (2012: 2). The constructed and mediated nature of texts that inform understanding on social, cultural and political issues (such as poverty, obesity and immigration) must be scrutinised and interpreted to understand how such issues are socially constructed, and the implications of those constructions on individual and collective understandings. As Fürsich argues, since 'media are such significant institutions for creating meaning in our societies one of the central tasks of media scholars should be to analyse and interpret what spectrum of reality media allow for' (2009: 246). Thus, a theory and practice of understanding, such as hermeneutics, is crucial to an interpretation of these constructed, 'mediated realities' (Fürsich 2009). Kinsella's reference to the irremedial

nature of hermeneutics in the definition above also hints at a distancing from attempts to assign one fixed meaning to a text, and from attempts at claiming one true interpretation in the analysis (Fornäs 2012). Textual analysis and its hermeneutical underpinning are subjective by nature and rely on the seemingly solipsistic view of the interpreter or reader, but hermeneutics 'works' because it does not try to make claims on an absolute 'truth'. Rather, *contextualised* interpretations are made. As Fürsich suggests, texts have moments of "deep play" that other methods do not have the scope to analyse; it is 'in these moments when the text takes on a life on its own. . . where the textual critic finds crucial insights' (2009: 245).

Kinsella (2006) suggests five characteristics of a hermeneutic approach: '(a) seeks understanding rather than explanation; (b) acknowledges the situated location of interpretation; (c) recognizes the role of language and historicity in interpretation; (d) views inquiry as conversation; and (e) is comfortable with ambiguity'. Kinsella's framework highlights the importance of understanding, interpretation *and* context, as well as the open-ended nature of hermeneutic analysis. This provides a good basis for the textual analysis implemented in this study: an understanding and interpretation of the representations, themes and discourses in the texts; an understanding of 'poverty porn' as a televisual format and an interpretation of its imagery through the lens of abjection/grotesque; consideration of the context of the development of 'poverty porn' as a 'factual' sub-genre; and consideration of the wider neoliberal ideology and the historical representation of the poor (in particular, white, female and/or obese categories) in popular culture. Fornäs argues that 'texts never walk alone, but are intertextually and intermedially linked to other texts, genres, modes and media forms' (2012: 512). Similarly, as asserted by Kinsella (2006), Bontekoe (1996) 'acknowledges the integrative nature of hermeneutic understanding, pointing out that understanding occurs only when the interpreter recognizes the significance of the various items that she or he notices, and recognizes the way in which those items relate to each other'. Both these positions suggest a hermeneutically guided textual analysis does not happen in a vacuum; external theoretical context and understanding are imperative to a well-rounded analysis, as well as a consideration of internal, interrelated themes and elements. Hermeneutics is understood as a 'rereading' of texts and a 'construction of the new, its results never merely the effect of the text' (Wilson 1993: 47). As such, it

highlights the importance of external factors in the analysis, and allows a more creative and personal interpretative process.

5.2.2 Philosophical Context

In *Critical Hermeneutics*, Thompson (1981) traces the historicity of modern hermeneutics as a synthesis of hermeneutic phenomenology and critical social theory, in particular focusing on the philosophical works of Ricœur and Habermas, and drawing on Heidegger and Gadamer. Just as Thompson does not have the scope to elaborate fully on the depth of these theoretical connections, this methodology does not have the scope to offer a detailed understanding of the philosophy of social sciences. However, a brief overview is needed to highlight the importance of hermeneutics and its connections to social constructionism. Thompson posits, via Heidegger, that there is a fundamental difference between being in the world and being as an understanding of the self: 'Understanding is the Being of such potentiality-for-Being' (Heidegger 1967 in Thompson 1981: 40); 'interpretation is the subsequent development of such potentiality' (Thompson 1981: 40). Thompson suggests the basis of understanding is the relationship between being and language or, as Gadamer argues, 'Being that can be understood *is* language' (1975 in Thompson 1981: 41, emphasis added). Thus, language is the tool that enables interaction with the social, and understanding of the self. In turn, language forms the basis of all construction, hence the hermeneutic focus on the interpretation of language. As Thompson argues, 'there remains a prior and primitive form of understanding which is constituted within language, and through which the truth of being is disclosed' (1981: 41).

This has explicit links with a theory of social constructionism in which 'all discourse contributes to what can be described loosely as the social construction of reality' (Schiappa 2003: xi). Furthermore, Schiappa proposes that definitive discourse relies upon social interaction, as per Berger and Luckmann's (1966) notion of social constructionism: language, discourse and definitions are 'human-made' (Schiappa 2003) and as such require interpretation to understand how they contribute to social constructionism. Byrne argues that 'Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes the embeddedness of language in our understanding of our world' (2001: 968). Moreover, the totality of being and understanding in relation to language can be compared with

the social construction of the self in relation to discourse, labelling (Hacking 1999) and stigma (Goffman 1963), as explored in the literature review.

Due to the emphasis on language, traditional hermeneutics tends to focus on the literary 'text' or spoken word (Thompson 1981; Heywood and Sandywell 1999). Within media and cultural studies, a 'text' is anything that can be interpreted and analysed. As Fürsich explains, 'cultural studies stressed that not only written material but every cultural practice or product can be analysed as text' (2009: 240). In their schematic map of hermeneutics in *Interpreting Visual Culture*, Heywood and Sandywell argue the emphasis on 'language' in hermeneutics 'should also be expanded to embrace the vast array of sense-making practices involved in constructing social worlds. In other words, the life-world that informed the operative theme of classical phenomenology is understood to be irreducibly linguistic and symbolically mediated' (1999: 241). Thus, from a social constructionist perspective, it is not just language that informs understanding; other types of visual culture such as art and popular culture – including television – contribute to sense-making practices. Popular culture is, as Fürsich argues, a site of struggle over 'making sense' of the social. Certainly, semiotics as the interpretation of signs and symbols might be considered as the study of 'visual language' or 'visual discourse'. Hence, hermeneutics can encompass an analytical media approach, one with a deep understanding of semiotics *and* discourse. This research aims to interpret the relationship between what is said and what is enacted, between the narration and the image.

5.2.3 Critique of Hermeneutics: The Development of a 'Critical Hermeneutics'

Hermeneutics has been criticised for its 'conceptually elusive nature' (Kinsella 2006) and its apparent abandonment of ideology. As Fornäs states, anti-hermeneutical theorists 'have distanced themselves from interpretation, arguing that some kind of materiality or structure should provide focus instead' (2012: 490). Fornäs suggests these criticisms are 'worth taking seriously, as they illuminate weak points that demand classical hermeneutics to be qualified, updated and revised' (2012: 490). Thus, attention should be drawn 'to a new hermeneutics that adopts a critical attitude' (Kinsella 2006). The textual analysis in this research is based on a *critical hermeneutics* that integrates interpretation and ideology (Roberge 2011; Fornäs 2012). This section

outlines some key criticisms of hermeneutics, and addresses how critical hermeneutics overcomes those challenges, and the implications on current research.

Regarding the lack of ideological underpinning, Gardiner argues that 'Gadamer's hermeneutics ignores the crucial dimensions of power, and the specifically ideological deformation of language use' (1992 in Kinsella 2006). This suggests the typical hermeneutic emphasis on the understanding of being through language does not have the capacity to encapsulate how meaning and sense-making can be skewed by the use of ideological discourse. It also supposedly discounts the potency of ideology and rhetoric on the social construction of knowledge. However, Fornäs argues this 'romantic' hermeneutics has 'actually been radically rethought precisely by Ricœur' (2012: 502) who offers a (re)focus on the meaning within the work. Here, the aim is to understand the ideological context of the work, or text, as well as the social, cultural, political, and creative industry context; and the wealth of interpretations this might reveal. As Byrne states, one purpose of critical hermeneutics 'is to expose hidden power imbalances and challenge the status quo' (2001: 968). Grossberg contends that rather than 'asking what texts mean or what people do with texts, cultural studies should be concerned with what discursive practices do in the world' (1998 in Fornäs 2012: 499). But one might argue that to understand what texts and discourses 'do in the world', one must first be able to interpret their aesthetic and ideological meaning and the implications of this meaning on the construction of knowledge. Fornäs argues that critics such as Grossberg 'tend to forget that the discursive practices that weave culture have their specific effects in precisely making meanings, which defines signifying practices as cultural, in relation to all other kinds of practices' (2012: 508-509). This is an important point to consider throughout this research. Analysing the abject and grotesque imagery in the texts, and the ideological context in which they are situated, will ultimately aid understanding of how 'poverty porn' texts operate and the implications of this on the social construction of the poor, and on poverty as an individual issue rather than a structural one.

This position does not concede to the criticism that 'hermeneutics is always looking for one single and fixed meaning in each work' (Fornäs 2012: 503). On the contrary, hermeneutics leaves analysis and interpretation open to the reader who builds an understanding based on the 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1979) between themselves

and the text, utilising their own unique perspective in the context of theory and ideology. Hence, 'reading' or interpretation 'always generates a new meaning from a text' (Wilson 1993: 46). As Fornäs suggests, Ricœur 'always stressed the open-ended plurality of meanings and interpretation that compete in a kind of conflict of interpretations of "love fight" around texts (2012: 503). Supporting this, Roberge states there 'is not one but many ideologies in competition, and Ricœur even talks about a "battlefield of ideologies"' (2011: 9). Ricœur's suggestion of a 'love fight' taking place on a 'battlefield' implies the relationship between hermeneutics and the interpretation of popular culture is a 'struggle over meaning' (Fürsich 2009). Further, it suggests there might be conflict between competing ideologies, the interpretation of which will depend on the context (theoretical, social, political) in which the text and the interpreter are situated. In this research, the televisual texts will be analysed in the theoretical context of abjection and the grotesque, and in the socio-political context of contemporary Britain as a capitalist, neoliberal state. Here, a hermeneutic approach is beneficial because 'the plurality of interpretation, or even their conflict does not constitute a flaw, a vice, but a privilege of comprehension as such at the heart of interpretation' (Ricœur 1991 in Roberge 2011: 9).

The 'critical' facet of critical hermeneutics can be viewed 'in the sense that Eisner (1998) talks about, as "an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events so that others. . . can see and understand what they did not see and understand before"' (Kinsella 2006). This is the ultimate goal of this research, to illuminate a new perspective on 'poverty porn' programming by analysing the ways in which the process of abjection, as an abstract psychoanalytical notion, is manifest in the grotesque imagery in these televisual texts. While the intention is not to argue that the programme producers are conscious of 'the abject' as such, utilising a critical hermeneutic perspective in the textual analysis allows interpretation of how the aesthetics of grotesque/disgust have become a pop cultural trope, especially in representations of the poor. This is in line with Fürsich's notion that it is 'the task of textual analysts to establish how current ostensibly innocuous representations can reverberate problematic historic discourses' (2009: 246). Thus, this research is not claiming the manifestation of abjection is 'conscious' but that it is situated in a context of historical disgust towards the poor combined with neoliberal ideology that

individualises poverty and attempts to justify social inequality. Critical hermeneutics will 'uncover the shaping presence of history, power, and ideology evident in the author's expression as well as in the reader's interpretations' (Freeman 2012: 3). In the context of this research and cultural studies in general, 'the author' might refer to the creator or producer of media content. Thus, critical hermeneutics offers a framework to interpret the creator's intentions in the wider socio-political context. On the other hand, hermeneutics is concerned with understanding, rather than explanation; meaning should not be derived from 'the intentions of the author' (Fornäs 2012: 504). Instead, 'textual analysis has to evaluate media content in its own right as a creative (and often collaboratively produced) moment in the circuit of culture often beyond the intentions of the actual producers' (Fürsich 2009: 244). As such, interviews with the creators of these texts would not be appropriate for a hermeneutic approach that assumes meaning lives within the text but is created in a wider context. Supporting this notion, Fürsich argues that 'interviews with producers (journalists, writers, etc.) may reflect a momentary situation only – relying on psychological and individual attitudes but lacking long-term evaluations and applications' (2009: 242).

5.3 Frame Analysis

5.3.1 Interpreting Selection and Omission

The notion of the frame is 'deeply compatible with critical hermeneutics' (Roberge 2011: 11). One can interpret a text by engaging with an in-depth analysis of the 'frames' within it, interpreting what is happening inside the frame. As Roberge explains,

> A frame is what delineates a parcel of reality by distinguishing an interior from an exterior, and by insisting on the relevance of this "inside". Moreover, this internal relevance is enhanced by the frame's capacity to link and provide coherence to the diverse parts it contains. In other words, what this refers to is the production of an interpretation that builds its own world by reinterpreting the world (2011: 11).

Looking inside the frame is important as it illustrates the information and the ideologies the creator of the text wants to portray. But what is omitted from the frame is just as vital; televisual texts are heavily constructed and mediated with certain information

and imagery included and omitted to create a narrative. Reese (2007: 150) defines frames as 'structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some ideas as out and others as in'. So frames illustrate the elements that are important to the narrative. This is especially true in 'poverty porn' where unsympathetic narratives are constructed around participants by editing footage and soundbites out of context, or using certain 'trigger' shots that evoke the viewer's anger.

Discussing the relationship between hermeneutics and ideology, Roberge employs the phrase '*camera obscura*, or the inverted image of reality' (2011: 9, emphasis in original) in reference to Marx's contribution to the subject. One might argue that poverty porn, as a sub-genre of factual television, portrays an inverted image of reality, especially in its representation of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice', and frame examination allows analysis of this inversion. Indeed, textual analysis 'allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text' (Fürsich 2009: 241). Supporting this, Raisborough, Ogden and Stone de Guzman argue frame analysis 'demands attention to patterns, selection and omission because frames often reproduce moral judgements when they identify who is responsible for a social problem and who is affected by it' (2019: 280).

Interestingly, Gadamer 'compares the interpretation of a text to the art of translation, pointing out that in both instances if we as interpreter want to emphasize a feature that is important to us, then we can do so only by playing down or entirely suppressing other features' (Kinsella 2006). This suggests interpreters might omit information in their interpretations, which 'presents a limitation within this and all interpretive study' (Kinsella 2006). To combat this, a preliminary analysis of the sample texts was undertaken to pick out key themes and scenes to be analysed in further detail. An open mind and an inductive approach was essential in these initial viewings to allow an open-ended interpretation, to see if elements of sympathy could be found in the texts. However, the preliminary analysis showed any lines of narrative enquiry that might allow sympathy (such as legitimate reasons for needing state support, for example, caring for a disabled child) were omitted from the predominant 'storylines'.

5.3.2 Frames as Symbolic Tools of Social Constructionism

Visual, symbolic and discursive elements make up a frame, and these elements can be deconstructed and interpreted using a hermeneutic approach. Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) suggest frames are symbolically significant because they build upon previous 'knowledge' of an issue, event, or group.

> According to Hertog and McLeod (2001) frames derive power from their symbolic significance as they use recognizable myths and metaphors in their narratives. They also carry "excess meaning" as they activate some related ideas of thoughts, and they have an accepted shared meaning within a culture as they resonate with its members. Images are powerful framing tools because they are less intrusive than words and as such require less cognitive load (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011: 50).

Here, the visual imagery in a frame supports discursive practices such as the use of rhetoric and ideology to ensure the frame 'sticks'. The above can also be linked to a hermeneutic approach where texts have a "surplus of meaning" (Fornäs 2012; Ricœur in Roberge 2011). As such, meaning is not constructed from only one place but from the creator, the context in which it is situated, its relationship to other texts, and the audiences' previous understanding in relation to these elements. This analysis will investigate the 'recognizable myths and metaphors' used in poverty porn programming, in particular focusing on Murray's conception of the social underclass and the undeserving/deserving poor in relation to neoliberal ideology. It will analyse common symbolic motifs associated with the underclass. As Reese argues, it is 'precisely the way that certain attributes come to be associated with particular issues that should concern framing analysis' (2007: 152). For further context, the analysis also engages with newspaper articles to understand where the representation of welfare claimants is situated in the wider media sphere, and the construction of both *Benefits Britain* and the figure of the benefits scrounger.

Through the 'application of devices' such as visuals, symbols and discourse, 'a salient idea becomes easier to understand and remember than other ideas' (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011: 51). The notion that frames 'are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the

social world' (Reese 2001 in Reese 2007: 150) has clear implications on the social construction of issues, events and social groups. This notion has an important application in this research regarding how grotesque imagery is used to portray welfare claimants and construct knowledge of poverty. Frame analysis is useful here 'because it allows us to make links between cultural representations and their wider socio-economic contexts' (Raisborough, Ogden and Stone de Guzman 2019: 280). The frame analysis in this research is informed by social constructionist theory and takes a hermeneutic approach, a methodology supported by Carter (2013) who links the three modalities. As Carter argues, Berger and Luckmann's work on social constructionism 'provides the underpinnings for frame analysis' (2013: 2), particularly when analysing how meaning is distorted – and constructed – using tools such as rhetoric, ideology, symbolism and historical context.

Understanding how visual frames are implemented is clearly essential when analysing televisual texts 'because images are more natural and closely related to reality than words, they make it possible for viewers to overlook the fact that they can also be "artificial" constructions' (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011: 52). Supporting this, Carter argues that television 'shapes perceptions in a way unique to the medium' and that a social constructionist view helps one to 'understand how television frames segments of reality by producing images and messages that are seemingly complete' (2013: 2). This notion of a constructed visual 'reality' is something Wilson (1993) calls 'veridical sequencing' in his hermeneutic analysis of television. This is 'an audience's horizon of visual expectations which (when confirmed by a text) produces the effect of a 'veridical' sequence of images, and apparently unmediated and reliable presentation of how things are' (Wilson 1993: 106). The audience's expectations are not only bound to common ideology, as argued above, but also to their 'awareness of genre' (Wilson 1993: 106). Thus, if the audience has a genre-specific expectation of reality, the images – and framing – will appear to be more reliable and will be interpreted as such.

This has implications for this research as poverty porn programming presents itself as a documentary, which carries a certain amount of truth claims. While documentaries also follow a narrative format and structure information in a certain way, their aim is 'to inform viewers of events or occurrences by offering a convincing and balanced account of them' (Casey et al 2008: 83). As Wilson (1993: 118) argues, documentary

'foregrounds a space and time employed in mimesis, a copying of the pre-textual', thus the 'veridical images' of documentary are mimetic. In other words, documentary attempts to recreate reality. This notion does not hold true for poverty porn, which offers only one heavily mediated view of life on benefits – the 'common sense' ideology that people receiving welfare support are lazy, feckless, criminal, fraudulent or undeserving. Indeed, Deirdre 'White Dee' Kelly claims she and the other participants in Channel 4's *Benefits Street* were lied to about the producers' intentions:

> They said they wanted to film for a TV show about how great community spirit is in the street and how we all help each other on a daily basis. . . But this programme has nothing to do with community, which you can tell from the title. . . They lied to us from the very beginning. We opened our doors and hearts to them and they violated us and abused our trust (Kelly in Suart: 2014).

Twelve months of footage of the residents of James Turner Street in Birmingham was condensed into a six-part series. Therefore, the 'veridical sequencing', the 'realistic' imagery the audience expects, is a heavily edited and constructed narrative that emphasises crime, drug taking and laziness; it 'makes people out as complete scum' (Kelly in Suart 2014).

5.3.3 Conducting Frame Analysis

The dominant focus of the textual analysis in this research is the way in which the texts (a) frame the issue of benefits receipt and (b) frame the participants, or the benefits claimants. This takes a similar approach to Raisborough, Ogden and Stone de Guzman's small-scale analysis, which focuses on 'how poverty documentaries 'frame' welfare, claimants and their entitlements in the context of UK austerity with attention to what values and norms are constituting the frame itself' (2019: 280). Adhering to a hermeneutic approach, the frame analysis in this research interprets narrative patterns: stylistic choices (camera shots, music, etc.), dialogue and discourse (from participants and the narrator), semiotics (symbols and motifs), and ideology; and then examines how these elements operate as part of the frame. Supporting this method, Matthes and Kohring 'posit that single frame elements group together in a systematic

way, thereby forming unique patterns' (2008: 274). Thus, this analysis considers how the above elements work together to frame the participants as 'benefits scroungers'.

Two characteristics are key to the framing and the frame analysis: the narration and position of the narrator; and imagery or symbolism that is abject or grotesque. Firstly, the narration is key because when 'a voiceover occurs, sound takes precedence: the mimetic function of the documentary is discharged through what is heard, with the text's images providing corroborative visual evidence' (Wilson 1993: 121). Narration frames what is happening in each scene or segment of the documentary, facilitating the veridical image. In the sampled texts, this is especially prevalent as narration is used as an ideological function often pertaining to pre-established media, political and socially constructed 'knowledge' around benefits claimants, i.e. the participants being liars, criminals or fraudsters. Secondly, the analysis examines the abject frame and the grotesque frame, interpreting imagery that reflects the theories of Kristeva and Bakhtin, exploring representations of motherhood, manifestations of compromised bodily boundaries, aesthetics of disgust and visual focus on the lower bodily stratum. These frames form the basis of two overarching representational categories present in the texts: the abject maternal and grotesque embodiment.

Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) suggest a 'four-tiered model for identifying and analysing visual frames' which is adapted in this analysis: visuals as denotative systems; stylistic-semiotic systems; connotative systems; ideological representations. Though Rodriguez and Dimitrova are referring to the visual frames of news, the tenets of their framework can be applied to an analysis of televisual texts. Indeed, they assert their framework can be applied 'regardless of type of visual and type of medium' (2011: 61). Also, the adaptation of this framework adheres to a hermeneutic approach and considers the relationship between visual *and* discursive frames. Therefore, Rodriguez and Dimitrova's work provides a good basis for a frame analysis. The following section separates Rodriguez and Dimitrova's levels into descriptive and analytical elements.

At the *denotative level*, frames are identified by 'enumerating the objects and discrete elements actually shown in the visual'; 'recognizing design elements'; organising visuals into themes. Thus, visuals 'at this level are basically described' (2011: 53). Themes were identified in the analysis of the sampled texts, especially regarding the representational

categories, as well as themes of immorality, irresponsibility and deviance. This method is supported by Raisborough, Ogden and Stone de Guzman who conduct their analysis 'through multiple viewings to identify patterns and repetitions in representations' (2019: 280). Rodriguez and Dimitrova explain that denotative frames can also be derived from 'textual descriptions that accompany the visual' (2011: 53). In the context of a televisual analysis, the denotation is the narration that accompanies the footage, and the diegetic and non-diegetic participant dialogue. To help visualise these elements in the process of interpretation, a character chart (see Table 1.) was created based on notes taken during viewings of the texts. The coding AM (abject maternal), GE (grotesque embodiment) and VD (violence and deviant behaviour) was used to indicate how each participant was framed, with notes on their representation, description (by the narrator) and some key quotes relating to them. The relevant scenes, shots and frames are described in detail in the analysis. This process of description relates to the *stylistic-semiotic level* of the frame analysis, where the use of sound, music, camera shots, camera angles and the overall visual style are described and interpreted. To aid both these descriptive levels (denotative and stylistic-semiotic), a collection of screenshots of each 'frame' (every camera shot per relevant scene i.e. a frame-by-frame analysis) has been included for reference, labelled as numerical frames in the appendices.

At the *connotative* level, the visual and discursive elements in the frame do not simply denote what they portray; they reflect the attached ideas and concepts (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011). Visuals 'are analysed as signs, and their relationships with other signs within the sign system are assessed'; they are examined 'for their more complex, often culture-bound interpretations' (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011: 56). Thus, a semiotic analysis has been undertaken in line with this level of framing; extra attention has been given to the symbolic meanings behind the images, determining that these connotations intentionally frame participants as objects of disgust. This level is where the notions of the abject and grotesque are most important to the analysis, as these abstract concepts are applied to factual programming in an original and creative interpretation. The final level of visuals, *ideological representations,* is linked to these connotations. This level 'draws together the symbols and stylistic features of an image into a coherent interpretation which provides the "why" behind the representations

being analyzed' (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011: 57). This level of analysis considers the texts in a wider social, political, ideological context at a time when the figure of the 'benefits scrounger' was constructed and animated to take the blame for the issue of poverty.

This study will adapt Rodriguez and Dimitrova's framework for the analysis of televisual texts by tackling the four levels concurrently rather than one at a time. The descriptive and analytical levels of framing are considered together in the analysis chapters, interpreting how symbolism, narrative and ideology are bound together in the discursive and visual elements. Rodriguez and Dimitrova conclude their framework takes into account 'tangible elements' as well as 'latent meanings' (2011: 61). This frame analysis is interested in the on-screen visual, in its pure denotative form, and how these images can be interpreted as a manifestation of abject and grotesque aesthetics.

5.4 The Textual Sample

5.4.1 Broadcasting Benefits; Defining Poverty Porn

The textual analysis sample comprises a variety of British benefits documentaries, or 'poverty porn' programmes, first broadcast between 2014-2017. All the sampled television programmes were broadcast on Channel 5, either as part of a larger series (such as *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* and *On Benefits*, both of which broadcast multiple series overall) or as one-off documentaries. Some programmes were part of Channel 5's 'Benefits Week' when these episodes were aired every night for a week. The broadcast of these programmes reflects a period of time when both political and media debate of welfare had reached a crescendo. A unique documentary format exploring 'benefits culture' was firmly planted in the public imaginary after *Benefits Street* was broadcast on Channel 4 at the start of 2014. This trajectory seems quite ironic, given Channel 4's historical inclusion of radical, anti-establishment content and its apparent contemporary commitment to 'stand up for diversity' and 'champion unheard voices' (Channel 4 2019). *Benefits Street* was preceded by poverty porn-type programmes such as *The Scheme* (BBC Scotland 2010), *Skint* (Channel 4, 2013), and *On Benefits and Proud* (Channel 5 2013), which all explored similar themes of unemployment, crime and drug and alcohol abuse under the guise of 'portraying

community'. But the first episode of the aptly titled *Benefits Street* drew 4.3 million viewers, more than any Channel 4 programme in 2013, as it locked into the now-familiar political (and tabloid) objective of the time – justifying severe welfare reform and budget cuts by raising public anxiety over 'skivers' and 'scroungers'. *Benefits Street* became a visual manifestation of these ideologies, a hyperbolic portrayal of people 'abusing' the welfare system to the detriment of the hard-working taxpayer. It soon paved the way for a flood of similar programmes, which all relied on the same themes, ideologies and visual motifs. The portrayal of welfare claimants as irresponsible, immoral and lazy 'benefit scroungers' became the only available mainstream representation of this group.

As Jensen argues via Clarke and Newman (2012), these benefit documentaries undertake the ideological work of the 'alchemy of austerity' in which 'the social problems of deepening poverty, social immobility and profound economic inequalities are magically transformed into problems of 'welfare dependence', 'cultures of entitlement' and 'irresponsibility'' (Jensen 2014: 2). After the ratings success of *Benefits Street*, Channel 5 followed suit with hundreds of documentaries focusing on benefits. This is not an exaggeration – by 2017, a search for 'benefits' on Channel 5's website produced 12 results (most of these being full series): *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients*; *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*; *Benefits By The Sea: Jaywick* – a spin-off of *Benefits Britain* focusing on the Essex community; *12 Years Old and On Benefits*; *Gypsies On Benefits and Proud* – which Jensen argues signals a 'clash of several fantasies in the politics of welfare disgust' (2014: 1); *On Benefits*; *On Benefits and Proud*; *The Benefits Estate*; *The Big Benefits Row: Live* – Channel 5's attempt to cash in on the viewing figures from *Benefits Street*; *The Great British Benefits Handout*; and *The Great British Benefits Handout Changed My Life*. For instance, by 2017, four series of *On Benefits* had been broadcast, and the first series alone comprised 33 episodes. It was this incessant tabloid 'documentary' coverage of benefits that prompted this research with the aim of investigating whether representations of benefits claimants are as persistent as the broadcasting of such programmes, and the potential psychoanalytical basis of such representations. The choice to focus on the outputs of Channel 5 when selecting the textual sample coincides with the majority of 'poverty porn' programmes being broadcast by the channel – especially between 2014-2017.

Due to the sheer volume of benefits-focused programmes being broadcast on Channel 5 (as outlined above), it made sense to focus on Channel 5 specifically; and there was a subsequent interest in how these types of programmes, all broadcast on the same platform, might become a recognisable (sub)genre, of which its symbolic, ideological, visual and narrative elements might be analysed.

The explosion of this type of programming has illuminated public and academic debates that attempt to deconstruct the ideologies of such texts. This documentary format has been called 'poverty porn' by some (see Mooney 2011; Jensen 2013; Jensen 2014; Beresford 2016), a term also used to describe any type of material (such as charity leaflets and adverts) that exploits the poor, usually in Third World countries. In a televisual context, these poverty porn documentaries as defined by Mooney (2011) and Jensen (2014) – dubbed 'austerity porn' by Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis (2013) – follow the conventions of reality television with a focus on public entertainment rather than factual information. These programmes fuse the 'trash TV' aspect of reality television with documentary techniques such as 'the use of hand-held cameras, "fly-on-the-wall" camera angles, the employment of non-actors and an improvised, unscripted, low-budget "authenticity"' in order to 'justify exploitation (of unpaid participants) and voyeurism through an implied association with "documentary realism"' (Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis 2014: 2). In an important work on the then-new sub-genre, Jensen (2014) offers a concise understanding of the characteristics of poverty porn, suggesting such programming does the ideological work of neoliberalism by individualising poverty in order to justify welfare reform and a strict austerity regime. Jensen argues that,

> In order for such discourses to move off of the pages of policy reports and into public discussion, and to generate wider legitimacy for notions of 'welfare dependency', welfare reform enthusiasts need a populist language in which to articulate this story of state and personal welfare failure. It is through the explosion of 'poverty porn' television that welfare discourses of political elites have become translated into authoritarian vocabularies. Poverty porn television is not simply voyeurism, but performs and ideological function; it generates a new

> ‘commonsense’ around an unquestionable need for welfare reform; it makes a neoliberal welfare ‘doxa’ (Jensen 2014: 2).

Supporting this, Beresford deems poverty porn as the ‘visible expression’ of welfare reform (2016: 421). Thus, the ‘benefits scrounger’ becomes a new national abject (Tyler 2013), a scapegoated figure who can be blamed for the country’s economic problems. Within these programmes, ‘life on the breadline’ is ‘transformed from a profound social injustice to an opportunity to scrutinise the habits of the poor and assess how deserving they are’ (Jensen 2014: 1). Rather than offering a sympathetic portrayal of low-income, or no-income families, poverty porn programmes ‘repeat imagined connections between welfare recipients and moral laxity, greed, and even criminality’ (Jensen 2014: 1). These connections manifest in imagery that is ‘designed to invoke disgust reactions’ (Allen, Tyler and De Benedictis 2013: 2). This notion is the crux of this research: analysing how abjection is manifest in grotesque imagery that aims to evoke feelings of disgust. Jensen argues that poverty porn is ‘porn’ in the sense ‘that it aims to arouse and stimulate the viewer to provoke and emotional sensation through a repetitive and affective encounter with the television screen’ (2014: 3).

5.4.2 Sample Selection

The sample of 12 poverty porn documentaries, all aired on Channel 5, was chosen by thematic selection, producing an intentional sample which met certain textual criteria. Selection was initially based on buzzwords in programme titles such as ‘dole’ and ‘benefits’. All the sampled texts contain the word ‘benefits’ in the programme title, which includes episodes from the series *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (2014) and *On Benefits* (2017); as well as one-off documentaries *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* (2015) and *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* (2015). The texts were also chosen for their relation to certain themes which emerged from the literature and the tabloid newspaper coverage discussed in the literature review chapters:

(i) Motherhood: pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, oversized families;

(ii) Disability: obesity, mental health, fraudulent claims;

(iii) Deviancy: unemployment, crime, substance abuse.

The synopses of the texts, which were available on the Channel 5 website, were read to determine the prevalent themes. This was especially important when choosing episodes from *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* and *On Benefits* as each episode in the series focused on different issues, families and communities. It should be noted that the two episodes chosen from *On Benefits* had sub-titles that further aided selection: *100 Stone and on the Dole*; and *From Job Centre to Catwalk*. Two episodes from *Benefits Britain* were also part of a 'Big Families Special' which had clear links to the theme of oversized families, or 'benefits broods' (Jensen and Tyler 2015), and so were included in the sample. Overall, eight episodes from *Benefits Britain* were chosen, four from each of the two series. Episodes from the fourth series of *On Benefits*, aired in 2017, were chosen to see if the representations, rhetoric and ideology were consistent with the older texts, three years on.

Although the textual sample was intentional and as such reflects the themes and categories garnered from the literature review, it should be noted that the selected texts are not 'over-the-top', hyperbolic or extreme examples, insofar as they have not been chosen for the sole purpose of fitting with hypothesised interpretations. When selecting the sample, all of the programmes that were watched provisionally included the themes of motherhood, disability and deviance (as outlined above) in some way. Indeed, there was an awareness of the presence of these themes prior to delving into the theoretical backdrop of the abject-grotesque, proper. This research did not have the scope to allow for an analysis of *all* available poverty porn programmes and so the selected 12 do include some of the most fitting depictions of the abject-grotesque, but they are by no means novel, or unusual, representations. One would go so far as to argue that the format itself is 'extreme' and relies on extreme, visceral imagery of benefits claimants in order to construct the 'benefits scrounger' as a figure of disgust. Thus, although the sample is intentionally centred on the key representational categories, this research argues that all poverty porn programmes rely on abject-grotesque imagery; hyper-neoliberal ideology; and disgust evocations; all of which have become typical in the depiction of British benefits claimants.

The 12 poverty porn texts in this analysis sample are as follows:

- ***Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*** **(2014-2015)** [Abbr. as BB:LOTD]

Series 1 (2014): Episode 2; Episode 3; Episode 4; Episode 6

Series 2 (2015): Episode 5; Episode 6; Episode 10; Episode 11

- ***Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* (2015)** [Abbr. as BB:BPP]
- ***Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* (2015)** [Abbr. as BTFTW]
- ***On Benefits* (2017)** [Abbr. as OB]

  Series 4: Episode 7 (100 Stone and on the Dole); Episode 9 (From Job Centre to Catwalk)

Also, a small sample of documentaries provided a pre-analysis comparison with poverty porn programmes to determine whether the portrayal of low-income, worklessness, poverty and social class was comparable across different channels and in texts with a slightly divergent focus. Although these four programmes - *Professor Green: Working Class White Men* (Channel 4 2018); *Britain's Forgotten Men* (BBC 2017, 2018); and *Tower Block Kids* (Channel 5 2018) - offer a more sympathetic view of contemporary class antagonisms and social inequality, they still rely on comparisons between a hard-labouring working class and a feckless underclass, and so support the stigmatising rhetoric in poverty porn programmes.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

The aim of this chapter was to explore the links between hermeneutics and social constructionism as philosophical and research paradigms that emphasise interpretative practices; and demonstrate textual analysis as a valid qualitative method that focuses on the researcher-text relationship. By using frame analysis, which draws on a critical hermeneutic approach and explores how discourse, symbolism and ideology work together in representation, this research will illuminate a new perspective on how poverty porn documentaries frame welfare claimants, via the lens of the abject grotesque. The following analysis chapters are separated into two representational categories: The Abject Maternal and Grotesque Embodiment. Following Kristeva (1982), explorations of abjection identify the feminine and maternal body as a primary site of disgust (Tyler 2013), which is reflected in the sample. The Abject Maternal is a vital category to this research as it illustrates a continuous fear of

the reproductive power of lower-class women, which manifests in disgust when these women (and their children) are reliant on welfare. Grotesque Embodiment encapsulates representations of excessive embodiment such as obesity, the physically 'monstrous', and sexuality that is paradoxically excessive and absent. In the textual sample, excessive eating, drinking and smoking are catalysts of 'self-inflicted' disability, employing the ideology that benefits claimants are irresponsible and framing them as a drain on the state and the NHS. The lower bodily stratum and the leaking open body, as conceived by Bakhtin (1984), lend themselves to the analysis of some extremely visceral and graphic imagery, which arguably aims to evoke disgust reactions. The analysis of the sampled texts explores the representational manifestations of grotesquery and the abject, how they work in tandem to construct a figure that cannot be sympathised with, framed as the ultimate other. The overarching theme of deviancy is present throughout all the texts, as well as in the analysis, and is discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter. Overall, the sampled and analysed texts have been previously underexplored, meaning this research has the potential to determine the representational and ideological characteristics unique to poverty porn programming, including how it utilises contempt for the poor, paralleled with neoliberal ideology and the aesthetics of disgust.

6 Analysis and Discussion I: Abject Maternal

6.1 Introduction and Context

6.1.1 'Mega-broods', 'Supersized Families' and Matriarchs

The analysis of the abject maternal as a representational category is extremely important to this research as it reveals how contemporary contempt for the poor, and fears of a 'feral underclass', are often bound in gendered representations. In particular, these gendered representations centre on the matriarchs of benefits families and underclass communities. The figure of the abject maternal, crudely labelled as 'benefits mum' in poverty porn programming, personify the apparently immoral and excessive nature of the underclass, and symbolise rampant sexuality and fertility. Underclass women's ability to reproduce and their excessive reproduction rates seem to evoke much fear and disgust, which is reflected in contemporary journalistic and televisual representations of the 'supersized benefits family'. For instance, a recent online article published by *The Sun*, features the headline 'Families Claim Big: Super-sized families are costing taxpayers £118million a year in housing benefits' (Hamilton 2018). The article refers to these large families as 'mega-broods' and 'jumbo-sized', phrasing that not only sensationalises the issue but also mocks and dehumanises the families (brood is a term typically used to describe a group of young animals). Elsewhere, the *Mail Online* (the *Daily Mail* website) ran the article 'Supersize benefits family claims £50,000 in handouts every year and spend cash on designer trainers and mopeds – but mother claims it isn't enough to live on' (Gillman 2015). The publication of this article was timed to coincide with the broadcast of the documentary *My Big Benefits Family* (Channel 5, 2015). Both the article and the programme focus on the lives and, seemingly more importantly, the spending habits of the Kerrigan family. In the *Mail Online* article, family matriarch Rose Kerrigan denounces the benefits they receive as 'pathetic', while simultaneously detailing how the family 'blow their cash on designer trainers and mopeds' (Gillman 2015), suggesting the family lead a lavish lifestyle, rather than one of poverty. The article also alludes to the problem of intergenerational cultures of worklessness: the 'extended family of three generations live between three houses in Sheffield but spend most of their time together, with many claiming they are too sick to work' (Gillman 2015). Indeed, Rose is quoted as saying that she simply does 'nowt'.

Interestingly, the synopsis of *My Big Benefits Family* states that Rose and her sister Annette volunteer at a local food bank, which would generally be considered a noble activity, and it suggests Rose does more than 'nowt'. However, within the *Mail Online* article, the virtuous nature of Rose's volunteer work is subverted as Gillman writes that 'with none of the family working, their days appear to be spent caring for their children, doing weekly volunteer work at a food bank, and drinking' (2015). When attached in this way to 'drinking', childcare and volunteer work are framed as wasteful leisure activities, undertaken instead of legitimate paid work, which ultimately undermines their value. Similarly, in *Benefits Street*, the matriarchal figure Deirdre Kelly, nicknamed 'White Dee', is depicted as 'the mam of the street', who offers emotional support and non-paid care for her friends and neighbours (Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015: 646). The care work and support provided by Dee are 'not only depicted as acts of kindness, they are also offered as evidence of her capacity to work, and evidence that she is, in fact, a malingerer. Dee is portrayed as a woman who could work if only she wanted to' (Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015: 646). Likewise, it is implied that Rose, who 'has not held down a full-time job in decades' (Gillman 2015), is undeserving of the benefits she claims, choosing benefits as a luxurious lifestyle rather than claiming out of necessity or disability. Like Dee, Rose could work if she wanted to. Matriarchs like Rose and Dee are simultaneously criticised for claiming benefits when they are 'able to work' and undermined for their emotional labour and care work. Further, these mothers are blamed for their children's laziness, which pivots on two oppositional causes: it is a genetic trait inherited by their children; and it is the result of them not raising their children correctly and instilling a work ethic. On the Channel 5 website, the programme synopsis describes the Kerrigans as 'a super-sized family who claim together and stay together' (Channel 5, 2015). Here, claiming benefits is treated as a family ritual, an activity that bonds them, and an alternative to finding legitimate paid work.

Visual representations of benefit-claiming parents, or more commonly single women, tend to centre on the dichotomy between an 'average' and above 'average' amount of children, as highlighted above in the discourse of 'supersized' families. Based on research by the National Office for Statistics, at the time of writing, the average amount of children per family in Britain is 1.9 (Cary 2017; Silver 2017) with an average household size of 2.4 people (Knipe 2017). On one hand, these statistics dampen the veracity of the

tabloid claims insofar as the average number of children is at an all-time low, and conception rates are continuing 'a long-term downward trend' (Silver 2017), suggesting the issue of large families is not a legitimate one. On the other hand, these statistics offer a normative against which benefits families can be measured. As explored previously, the categorisation of the grotesque is based on a binary of normality and abnormality. Here, the number of children conceived, average or otherwise, is comparable to the distinction between normal and abnormal, and the language in *The Sun* article ('mega-broods' and 'jumbo-sized') present these benefit-claiming parents as grotesque and excessive. The matriarchs of these families, the abject maternal, become the targets of media criticism and symbolic of the 'problem'. Ultimately, representations and discourses like these combine anxieties about female sexuality, reproduction and benefit-claiming families being parasitic drains on the nation's economy. The apparently overt sexual nature of working-class women has been historically coded (Skeggs 1997) and downloaded to contemporary underclass women; their sexuality is insinuated in the number of children they have conceived, and the often 'illegitimate' ways these children were conceived. However, the Office for National Statistics reports that only 2.7 million British households comprise a lone parent and children, out of a total of 27.2 million households (Knipe 2017). Throughout the analysis of the poverty porn programmes, it became apparent that representations of mothers are the most virulent, almost framing these women as the cause of the nation's collapse, the reason Britain is 'broken', because they are the (re)producers of a feral underclass.

6.1.2 Notorious Representations: Fame and Fortune?

Arguably, these representations of women are ones that stick in the public consciousness. Certain female 'characters' have been able to forge television personas for themselves as a result of participating in a poverty porn programme. For instance, Deirdre Kelly (White Dee) from *Benefits Street* went on to be a *Celebrity Big Brother* contestant and had appearances on talk shows such as *This Morning* and *Loose Women.* Also, Julie King from *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* and *On Benefits and Proud* has been a guest on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* four times. Kelly appears to have been more economically successful than King, having reportedly earned tens of thousands of pounds since *Benefits Street* was broadcast (although Kelly refutes the claims she has earned 'millions') (Knox 2017; Richardson 2018). Kelly has also been cast in artist Richard

Billingham's recent feature film, *Ray and Liz*, which documents his early years growing up in the West Midlands (Seymour 2018). However, King has been more successful in terms of infamy, repeatedly labelled *Jeremy Kyle*'s 'most notorious guest' (Minn 2016; Harris 2017). These women demonstrate television producers' desire to represent a certain type of female who reflects a historical working-class stereotype bound in contemporary fears of an underclass. They are loud, brash, obese mothers of multiple illegitimate children. They personify abject and grotesque embodiment.

As these women seek fame and fortune and attempt to 'better' themselves via numerous television appearances, they become commodified pawns in the neoliberal theatre of cruelty that is reality television (Couldry 2008). On one hand, the women have found fame to some degree (Kelly has management and an agent who book her for television appearances), but they are continually used as symbolic figures of benefits culture. Kelly and King epitomise everything that is supposedly 'wrong' in society, that is 'broken' in Britain, benefiting from the 'something for nothing' culture (Duncan-Smith 2011; Cameron 2012). This is exacerbated in the realm of reality television where 'celebrities' are mass produced, having little or no talent (Turner 2006); essentially reflecting a *famous for nothing* culture. The women are paradoxically 'successful' and 'famous', yet hated by the nation. Some online tabloid articles have reported how fame and money have 'changed' Dee (Lazarus 2018), and so she is labelled a 'sell-out' (Stacey 2016) and ostracised by her community. These women inhabit a space where seeking economic security and a better life - pillars of a neoliberal state - has rendered them unwanted by their communities and by society at large. Thus, they are wasted humans, truly abject: cast to the borders of society and community. They are commodified for entertainment purposes, then disposed of (Giroux 2008). As Giroux argues, 'the neoliberal economy with its relentless pursuit of market values now encompasses the entirety of human relations' (2008: 590); human life can now be sold and disposed of (Giroux 2008). One might argue human life is sold via the production of reality television. No matter what these abject mothers do, they are ostracised. Their attempts to accrue economic capital and inhabit a normative space only highlight their lack of cultural and symbolic capital and their non-belonging to society. Furthermore, the personas of White Dee and Julie King indicate a growing trend in poverty porn for featuring the same women in a variety of texts. This analysis found the women became increasingly loud,

vulgar and more opinionated the more they were featured, perhaps reflecting producers' input or evidence of the participants 'playing up to the cameras'.

6.2 Configurations of Motherhood: 'Benefits Mum' vs. 'Yummy Mummy'

The crude labelling of women by the number of children they have is consistent throughout the analysed texts. The women in these programmes are characterised first and foremost by their role as a mother, or their potential to be a mother: the majority of the women in the analysed texts are mothers, pregnant, or trying to conceive. This is highlighted regardless of whether maternal status is relevant to the wider narrative of the text. Thus, women do not operate within the texts without the connotation of maternity/pregnancy. No matter what maternal state the women are in (mother, pregnant, conceiving), they are always positioned as abject maternal. The narrators of the programmes primarily introduce the women by stating how many children they have conceived. This figure is often presented simultaneously with their status as a benefits claimant, the amount of benefits they receive, or the number of years they have been on benefits:

> She's a single mum of two claiming £330 a week in benefits, that's way more than she'd get on the minimum wage (BB:LOTD S1E3);
>
> This is 37-year-old Heather Frost, a mum who gets around 900 quid a week in benefits for her and her kids. There are eleven of them in all – two boys and nine girls (BB:LOTD, S1E6);
>
> Meet 29-year-old Claire Fitzpatrick, mum of three and on the dole (BB:LOTD, S2E5);
>
> Mandy is 49 and a single mum from Hastings who has been on benefits for more than 30 years (BB:LOTD, S2E10);
>
> But daughter Crystal and the others are always dropping in. She's 24 and already has four kids of her own, and really knows how to max out her benefits (BB:LOTD, S2E10).

Here, the notion of motherhood coincides with benefit culture. These women represent the constitutive limit to normative middle-class motherhood and as such are reconfigured as 'benefits mums': 'benefits mum Steph Cocker' (BB:LOTD, S1E3); 'benefits foster mum' (BB:LOTD, S1E4); 'Becca has put college behind her. Now it's all about her new life as a benefits mum' (BB:LOTD, S1E4); 'until then, Stephanie will just have to put up with being a benefits mum on the equivalent of a 20-grand-a-year salary' (BB:LOTD, S2E6). The narrator continually reduces the women to this pejorative label, which is loaded with crude assumptions and an implication these women cannot amount to anything other than 'benefits mums'. While it might be fair to assume this label is simply reflective of sensationalist tabloid discourse, one can argue the 'benefits mum' label dehumanises and degrades the women, reducing them to their status as a benefits claimant. Thus, their emotional and physical labour as mothers - including the physical act of labour - comes second to their status as benefits claimants. In the continual restating of the 'benefits mum' label, the narrator reminds the viewer these women are reproducing at the expense of the taxpayer and to the detriment of society.

The 'benefits mum' is a contemporary reconfiguration of the 'chav mum' (Tyler 2008) or 'pramface' (Nayak and Kehily 2014): misogynistic labels that are bound in disgust towards lower-class women, and represent 'failed femininity' (McRobbie 2007). As Tyler argues, the 'chav mum' is 'produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility' (2008: 18). While 'chav mum' and 'pramface' are emblematic of 2000s discourse on anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy, 'benefits mum' elaborates on these issues by blaming mothers for social issues such as poverty and austerity. As Allen and Taylor argue, working-class mothers are 'positioned as deficits, responsible for social, cultural and economic crisis' (2012: 1). As such, figures of working-class or underclass motherhood such as 'chav mum' or 'benefits mum' are the symbolic other to another configuration of motherhood: the 'yummy mummy'. This is 'celebrated as a desirable identity; one that embodies female choice, autonomy, consumerism and aesthetic perfection' (Allen and Osgood 2009: 6). Arguably, the figure of the 'yummy mummy' is an embodiment of the 'post-feminist sexual contract' where patriarchal and conservative ideologies are re-established through seemingly progressive socio-political changes (McRobbie 2007). The 'yummy mummy' reflects a heteronormative ideology

that favours women staying at home to look after their children while men remain the main 'breadwinners' (Orgad and Benedictis 2015). Simultaneously, 'yummy mummies' are expected to participate in the labour market in order to consumer and perform as proper neoliberal citizens (McRobbie 2007). On the contrary, 'benefits mums' are berated for staying at home because they do not participate in the labour market, which again denies the extent of caregiving labour within the home. Thus, single 'benefits mums' are binary to 'yummy mummies' in what Allen and Taylor phrase as 'placed parenthood', which '(self)locates in the right moral and material terrain' (2012: 1). Here, the benefits mum, outside the labour market and lacking capital, cannot occupy the proper terrain, marking her as abject: she does not respect 'borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982: 4).

In *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S2E10), the notions of 'yummy mummy' and 'benefits mum' are diametrically opposed, both symbolically and visually. At the start of the programme (see Frame 1), the narrator explains that 'In Benefits Britain one and a half million kids live in households where nobody works…' Simultaneously, there is an establishing long shot of a row of three houses in varying shades of dull beige. All the houses are in need of attention, one has a chunk missing from the window lintel, cracked render and a large damp patch above the front door. The shot narrows to a close-up of this house while we hear off-screen shouting, presumably from the owner: 'Hit my dog again and I'll slap you!' Here, the use of a sound bridge imparts a connection between the two scenes (Ivey 2018). By editing the scene so the house and the shouting are paralleled, the decaying outside of the house is symbolic of the unruly family who live inside. This also gives the viewer a taste of their chaotic family life and unorthodox methods of discipline. As the scene cuts to the inside of the house, the narrator continues with her point: '…and ten of them have been brought up by Mandy Cowie', positioning Mandy as the matriarch of a 'supersized family' and framing her as 'part of the problem' of worklessness, which implies she cannot raise her children 'properly' or instil a 'proper' work ethic. In this scene, shots of 'normal' home life such as Mandy folding her children's washing are interspersed with her shouting profanities at her children: 'Don't be smoking in that fucking bedroom!' The following shot juxtaposes this environment with a close-up of a white ornamental plaque of the word 'HOME', fashioned with a heart as the 'O' and a dove sitting on top. The heart and the dove signify

peace and love, which jars with the way Mandy talks to her children. The ‘E’ is bent and chipped, which might connote a lack of love and care in the home. Mandy is filmed wearing a leopard-print dressing gown, which works in tandem with close-ups of her tattoos to mark her lack of taste. Animal prints such as leopard and zebra are a common marker in these programmes, and symbolise incorrect consumer choices and the ‘benefits mum’s’ lack of taste. The women might attempt to follow fashion or use animal print to evoke ‘class’ and ‘glamour’, but their lack of symbolic capital prevents them achieving this. Animal print is coded as trashy and vulgar without the appropriate embodiment of femininity to go with it.

In the next scene, Mandy is filmed in her kitchen shouting more expletives at her children: ‘You look a right tramp mate’; ‘Fucking move it!’ Also, Mandy directs verbal abuse at the cameraman and uses him as a conduit to express her opinions to the viewer: ‘Ten kids, full of tattoos mate, yeah? So what I’m on the fucking dole, mate? Don’t like it, fuck off. Do you know what I mean?’ (See Frame 2). This seemingly aggressive dialogue not only reaffirms Mandy’s status as a rude, loud and vulgar ‘benefits mum’, but also reveals her awareness of how people perceive her. This suggests Mandy is aware of the stigma attached to being a ‘benefits mum’ and has constructed a self in relation to how her and her family are categorised. As Hacking's (1999) 'looping effect' suggests, Mandy is aware of her categorisation and takes on the socially constructed conception of 'benefits mums' as feckless scroungers or dole dossers. In doing so, Mandy reinforces this stereotype. Immediately after Mandy's dialogue is a close-up of a black framed printed image with a white and pink checked border, showing the words "Yummy Mummy" in bright fuchsia pink with a pink lips kiss mark. This shot, overlaid with Mandy shouting at the camera, implies Mandy is absolutely *not* a yummy mummy: she could never appropriate the middle-class femininity that defines the term. It is unlikely that a *real* yummy mummy would need, or would purchase, a plaque to say so. Thus, like the leopard print dressing gown, the yummy mummy plaque reads tacky and tasteless, the opposite to what the yummy mummy represents: glamour and desirability. Again, by attempting to appropriate middle-class motherhood, Mandy is classified by her lack of taste. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, she is distinguished by the distinctions she makes: her taste, or lack of, betrays her class position as a 'benefits mum'. The irony in this scene is palpable: Mandy is

overweight, middle-aged and, as she exclaims, 'full of tattoos' so it becomes almost impossible to comprehend that she would consider herself a 'yummy mummy'. The overlaying of dialogue alters the semiotics of the shot; the symbolic meaning of the term 'yummy mummy' inhabits an entirely different space, paradoxically representing everything it opposes. This is reiterated in the following narration, still overlaying the shot of the plaque: 'Mandy started young and just kept on going'. This reflects anxieties surrounding teenage pregnancy, as exemplified in the pejorative labelling of the 'pramface' in popular discourse. Moreover, it frames Mandy as a woman who lacks self-restraint and upholds the problematic ideology that she 'kept on' procreating in order to make more substantial benefit claims. Waiting until *'the right time'* to have a child, i.e. being financially stable, emotionally mature and in a partnership, is valued. As McRobbie argues,

> Young motherhood, across the boundaries of class and ethnicity now carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity and with disregard for the wellbeing of the child. Middle class respectable status requires the refusal of early motherhood and much effort is invested in ensuring that this norm is adhered to. If the young woman is now envisaged as an assemblage of productivity, then she is also now more harshly judged for inappropriate reproductive activity (2007: 231-232).

The appropriateness of motherhood is marked by physical maturity: being the 'right' age to conceive has symbolic value. However, the appropriate age to conceive is a contentious issue. As explored in the literature review, the notion of 'mature motherhood' holds a set of anxieties and assumptions reminiscent of depictions of Bakhtin's 'senile pregnant hag' (1984: 25-26). Like 'pramfaces', mature mothers are stigmatised and pathologised; these figures facilitate debate around foetal development and abnormalities, and reflect anxieties surrounding female sexuality. Mature mothers and 'pramfaces' are both configurations of the abject maternal. Mandy Cowie inhabits both of these undesirable spaces: the viewer is aware of her teenage pregnancy, "I had my first one at 18", and that she continued having children into her mid-30s, "He was the last one at 36" (BB:LOTD, S2E10). Although attitudes to geriatric mums are shifting slightly, partly because the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, conceived at 37, these

sympathies are not afforded to women like Mandy Cowie. At 36, Mandy was a year younger than Markle when she conceived. However, at 49, Cowie still represents a 'senile hag' who is unruly and does not adhere to convention, rules or boundaries, which is exemplified in her rude speech and behaviour.

6.3 Depicting 'Anti-Welfare Commonsense' and Illegitimate Births

These symbols of abject motherhood are compounded as a reflection of Murray's (1990) concept of illegitimacy: women conceiving children out of wedlock without the proper economic means to take care of the child. It is presumed these unmarried women claim benefits to raise their children as there is no dominant male breadwinner in the family home. This notion is perfectly condensed in the narrated statement that Mandy 'has had five partners producing those 10 kids who, in turn, have raised 16 grandchildren and counting…' Firstly, this implies Mandy is promiscuous: she has had multiple partners who presumably do not contribute financially. Secondly, when paralleled with the knowledge that Mandy has not been employed for more than 30 years, it insinuates women conceive to claim more benefits. Thirdly, an intergenerational culture of welfare dependency is suggested as Mandy's daughter Crystal is also in receipt of benefits for her four children. These inferences constitute what Jensen and Tyler (2015) call 'anti-welfare commonsense', which can be understood as a set of stigmatising narratives and ideologies that circulate within political and cultural discourse, and ultimately legitimise severe welfare reform. Jensen and Tyler build on the work of Stuart Hall and argue that 'commonsense of public opinion is tacit knowledge – hard to pin down in the moment of its formation, often leaving no inventory once it has dissipated – but nonetheless the formation of such commonsense is central to hegemonic power' (2015: 473). Jensen and Tyler investigate how anti-welfare commonsense is 'mediated, reproduced and legitimated' and examine 'forms of "sense-making" that anti-welfarism enables and produces' (2015: 473-474). Arguably, poverty porn programmes are a type of mediated 'sense-making': the representations are based on anti-welfare commonsense ideology, they reproduce these narratives and myths, and contribute to the prevailing anti-welfare discourse. Due to these commonsense narratives, the irony is palpable when Mandy states 'You couldn't pay me to have more kids!'. However, when the narrator explains that Mandy receives £1400 a month, plus the rent for her four-bedroomed

house, which brings the total to £2000 a month 'from the taxpayer', it might be contended that Mandy has already 'been paid' to have children. The essential premise of the narrative here, and the anti-welfare commonsense narrative, is that 'the taxpayer' has provided the financial support to raise Mandy's children and has allowed her to continue to have children without having to earn a living.

> But illegitimacy bespeaks an attitude on the part of one or both of the parents. If one stipulates that bearing (and keeping) a child is one of the most profoundly important human acts, then siring a child without intending to support it, or bearing and keeping a child without knowing one can take care of it, constitute an excellent proxy measure of the sort of irresponsibility that is a hallmark of the underclass (Murray 1990: 7).

> But what's life like really like when everything depends on welfare?... When you have to count every penny to feed the kids and pay the rent… If you can't get a job before planning a baby… And life on the dole could be your only option (BB:LOTD, S1E4; opening sequence narration).

While Murray's position seems to attribute blame equally to the mothers and fathers of illegitimate children, there is a suggestion it is a woman's responsibility to seek out a respectable, hardworking father for her prospective children, rather than a workshy layabout. Furthermore, because fathers are largely absent in these televisual representations, the blame is attributed to the mothers, especially given their grotesque depiction as promiscuous and excessive. In the narrated segment above, Murray's position is implied: these women are planning to conceive without a stable income, and being dependent on welfare is regarded as an unfeasible option, leaving mothers 'counting every penny', which infers a troublesome upbringing for the children. However, this somewhat sympathetic view in the opening sequence is at odds with narrator's continuous reiteration of the amount of benefits each family receives, a common thread throughout the texts. Anita Claxton, a 'benefits foster mum' in this episode, is a particularly interesting example of illegitimacy. Anita did not biologically conceive her children, choosing to foster four teenagers in later life, which can be considered noble as there is a foster family shortage crisis (Barrow 2017) and 97 percent of fostering services need carers for teenagers (The Fostering Network 2017). However,

the programme implies Anita chose to foster because of the benefits bonus. The narrator explains Anita needs two of her children to 'sign on' because 'if they don't, the family won't get their full whack of benefits. Their £360 a week is crucial because the jewel in Anita's benefits crown is her four-bed house. And everyone has to claim as much as they possibly can' (BB:LOTD, S1E4). Here, claiming benefits becomes a family operation: the assertion the family need to claim 'as much as they possibly can' implies they can work together to fiddle the system out of more money than they are entitled to. Moreover, paralleling the amount the family claim with the phrase 'the jewel in the crown' suggests Anita's benefits are of great value. £360 a week is not an excessive amount of money for a family of five to live on but describing it in this way suggests Anita and her family have a lavish lifestyle at the expense of the taxpayer.

Representations of illegitimacy are extremely common in the analysed texts. Of the 32 main female participants in the programmes, 13 are single parents and 12 are in a relationship. Seven women are coded as not applicable as their relationship status is either not mentioned or not relevant to the storyline. Moreover, five of the 12 women in a relationship are with men who are not the biological fathers of their children, and four of the 12 are trying for a baby or have already conceived with men who are also reliant on benefits. Thus, both the single mothers and the women who are not in a relationship with the biological father of their children represent a breakdown in the family unit: a hallmark of the underclass, in opposition to the nuclear, two-parent family that Murray (1990) advocates. Even in the cases where the women are in a relationship with the biological father of their (future) children, these men are also reliant on benefits, which represents illegitimacy as the couples plan to conceive without being able to provide 'legitimate' financial support. For instance, in *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E4), one of Anita's foster children, Becca, is pregnant at 16 by her boyfriend Sonny. The narrator explains that Becca wants to move into her own place and claim her own benefits, which will leave Anita's household budget 'with a 150 quid shortfall'. Throughout the episode we see tension between Becca wanting to find her feet and claim her own benefits and Anita's anxiety over not having enough 'income' to keep her house. This scenario illustrates that the potential amount of benefits to be claimed by either party is the most important thing at stake, rather than what is best for the unborn child. Becca and Sonny are filmed on the swings at a local park, discussing the

implications of moving out and having a child at a young age. The weight of the conversation against the backdrop of the park creates a paradox: the two teenagers nonchalantly swinging connotes a youthfulness and immaturity not conducive to bringing up a child (see Frame 3).

> Becca: I do feel bad for it but I need the money to provide for a baby, so... she's just gonna have to deal with it.
>
> Narrator: So, Becca's not fussed if mum ends up in dire financial straits.

The long shot of the pair on the swings cuts to a narrower shot of Becca framed against a graffitied wall topped with barbed wire, which highlights her frailty as a young girl; and her sporadically spotty teenage skin and limp black hair remind the viewer she is still a child. There is irony in Becca's argument that she needs to 'provide' for the baby as the narrative of the text is centred around her foster family, herself and her boyfriend claiming benefits. Becca is 'providing' for the child in a financially illegitimate way, and her indifference followed by the narrator's quip implies she is not only irresponsible but selfish too. The narrator appears to sympathise with Anita's potential financial situation, but it could be argued this sympathy works to vilify Becca and represent her as egocentric. She is selfish for relying on the welfare system and leaving her foster mother in a precarious financial situation. Thus, the benefits mum 'problem' is personified in Becca.

> Narrator: In fact, she's not much bothered what anyone thinks.
>
> Becca: I don't care what people say about me being 16 and pregnant because I wanted it and it's not their lives. And anyone can look after a baby. It's not hard to do.
>
> Narrator: Her boyfriend, Sonny Smith, is the dad.
>
> Sonny: I was really shocked due to, obviously, me being really young. Only just in college and not really being able to provide for a child. Obviously, thanks to the benefits system, it's gonna be a lot easier.

In this exchange, Becca's opinion that it is easy to raise a child highlights her naivety and immaturity. Further, Sonny concedes they are not able to provide for a child so he is

'siring a child without intending to support it' (Murray 1990: 7). Sonny's comments suggest individuals might choose a life on benefits because it is easier than earning an honest living. Moreover, Becca and Sonny's attitudes support 'the popular and enduring myth that teenage pregnancy is a cynical ploy to access social housing and welfare benefits' (Ellis-Sloan 2014: 2). The scene finishes with a shot from behind Becca and Sonny on the swings, overlaid with non-diegetic, light-hearted music. The establishing shot of the next scene, a washing line full of children's socks in Anita's garden, provides a juxtaposition: the reality of raising a family versus Becca and Sonny's dreamy optimistic outlook on how easy it will be. Foster mother Anita offers a moralistic stance on the teenage pregnancy: "I believe that kids shouldn't have kids, and I told that to Becca before she got pregnant. And I don't think it is right." Anita's position reflects socio-political anxieties surrounding teenage pregnancy. 'Kids having kids' has become a pop cultural talking point, exemplified in televisual texts such as *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant,* and on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* where it is almost a catchphrase of the host. For instance, a clip featured on the *The Jeremy Kyle Show* YouTube channel, is named 'Jeremy Slams Two Kids Having Kids' (2018).

6.4 "When I was Bigger": Fat, Fertility and Femininity as a Comedic Tool

The other narrative in this episode of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E4) features Gordon Higginbotham, his daughter Rose and her husband, Mark. Marital bliss is an underrepresented theme in the analysed texts and offers an alternative perspective to single motherhood. Rose and Mark are depicted in a happy and loving relationship; they are trying to conceive in wedlock, a positive goal by traditionalist, conservative standards. However, this does not spare Rose and Mark from pejorative representation. Throughout the show, the pair are used as comedic relief, their scenes are overlaid with jolly, almost slapstick, music. Despite Mark having a degree and a teaching qualification, he is framed as slow and naïve; Rose is 24 yet is almost childlike in the way she behaves and talks.

In one particularly long, awkward scene, Rose and Mark are exercising in their living room (see Frame 4). Mark explains, "You have to be as healthy as possible to conceive. We want to give our child the best possible start" and "We might not be able to get jobs

but we can control how healthy we are." These two statements appear as contradictory: to give their child the best possible start, Rose and Mark *should* have jobs. Despite Rose and Mark making a concerted effort to keep fit, it seems they are not taking it seriously as Mark is training in jeans and a jumper while Rose is still in her pyjamas. Mark and Rose's discussion of their health is interspersed with mid shots of them working out individually or as a pair: Rose is filmed inelegantly performing some overhead shoulder stretches, followed by an exercise with a resistance band and another with dumbbells; Mark is filmed attempting upright rows with a light barbell, or standing around while Rose talks, and the non-diegetic lightly slapstick music illustrates their amateurishness. Rose explains she has lost six stone without the aid of the gym, and while this should be applauded given the focus on the grotesque nature of obesity in these texts, Rose's workout is used for comedic effect. This is especially evident as Rose performs a step-up exercise: the camera firstly frames the shot around her stomach and thighs, and then from an unflattering low angle that frames her face, breasts and double chin. Despite Rose's weight loss, unflattering angles have been used to frame her in a grotesque way, and there is a focus on the bodily lower stratum (Bakhtin 1984).

Although Rose expresses her desire for a 'healthy' body, the framing of the scene renders her abnormal. Rose asks Mark, 'when I was bigger, we didn't know when I even ovulated, did we?' When Rose was bigger, she did not have a 'normal' body that ovulated, her feminine body did not perform like it should as she was unable to conceive. Indeed, both are still unsure of Rose's fertility as Mark states "Hopefully you'll be fertile enough now to get pregnant". The framing of the shot of her bodily lower stratum, her ovulating parts, depicts Rose as a former fat person who has lost weight but still embodies the abnormality and awkwardness of fatness. As Owen argues, fat bodies 'are scary and repulsive precisely because they throw cause and effect into question, blur supposedly sharp lines between seeming opposites (think im/moral, over/consumption, a/sexuality), and encourage us to rethink the divisions between the scary and monstrous Other and the safe and socially appropriate Self' (2015: 2). Rose's sexuality and reproductive capacity are brought into question as she reveals her former issues with ovulation. Thus, Rose defies the boundaries of normal femininity, further symbolised by her short, cropped hair and boyish looks. Ironically, Rose looked more 'feminine' when she was bigger; old photographs show her in her wedding dress as

curvaceous and buxom with longer black hair, fashioned in a bun. Again, Rose's former size versus her now smaller frame blurs the boundaries between a/sexuality, un/desirability and un/femininity.

6.5 "Project Baby": Pregnancy as an Alternative to Employment

Throughout the text, the main focus of Rose and Mark's relationship is not their happiness but that they are claiming benefits and, more importantly, that they are hoping to raise a family on benefits. This is reiterated several times by the narrator:

> But signing on does get these guys a flat, 114 quid a week and the chance to start 'Project Baby'.
>
> After two years trying to get a job, Mark and Rose have got a new priority: following the family tradition and having a baby on the dole.
>
> Rose has grown up on benefits, so she's used to sniffing out a bargain.
>
> But not working hasn't stopped Mark and Rose Snowdon starting 'Project Baby'. They've just moved into a bigger flat that's got room for a nursery. And it's all paid for by benefits.

Several ideologies coexist here. Firstly, 'signing on' and claiming benefits is represented as a lucrative lifestyle choice. By stating that Rose and Mark are 'following the family tradition', the commonsense myth of an intergenerational culture of worklessness is implied (MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong 2013; Jensen and Tyler 2015). The phrase 'Project Baby', used only by the narrator, not coined by Rose and Mark, insinuates something that will take rigorous planning to achieve. Arguably, the 'project' implies some sort of swindle, i.e. the careful planning of conception in order to claim more benefits. Rose and Mark have been given a new flat at a time when house prices are increasing and available social housing is decreasing; this might position the couple as getting 'something for nothing' when many young families cannot afford a new flat with a nursery. This representation ignores structural inequalities and individualises the issue, making Rose and Mark, and others like them, the sources of blame.

Rose and Mark have allegedly been searching for work for two years prior to their plans to raise a family. However, the ideological standpoint of the text is clear: finding work should be prioritised above conceiving. As the couple have supposedly given up on finding employment and now have a 'new priority', they and their prospective 'Project Baby' are framed as undeserving of sympathy and help from the state. Garthwaite argues that workless people are considered undeserving 'if they do not at least seek paid employment, regardless of the quality and calibre of the work available'; the deserving poor 'are those who are making an effort to find work and see this as their responsibility to society regardless of how fruitless their search might be' (2011: 370). In *Benefits Britain*, the demoralisation and degradation of not being able to find work, and the impact on the subject, is ignored. In a neoliberal context, humiliations like these are reworked as entertainment. As Giroux argues, there is 'a pedagogical apparatus and mode of seduction that in the name of entertainment invites spectators to watch an unfolding "theatre of cruelty" expanding across the globe to laugh at exclusion and humiliation rather than be moved to challenge it' (2008: 611).

For instance, research shows unemployment is linked to poor mental health: 29% of unemployed people and 33% of economically inactive people have common mental health problems, compared to 14% of those in full-time employment and 16% in part-time employment (Baker 2018: 6; Mental Health Foundation 2016: 60). Of course, it is hard to determine cause and effect in these statistics as some people may be unemployed or claiming disability benefits because they have mental health issues; and the stigma attached to mental health diagnoses may result in not being able to secure employment. Nevertheless, if one assumes there is a cycle of mental health problems and unemployment, then unemployment is likely to exacerbate poor mental (and physical) health. However, in poverty porn texts, the 'exclusion and humiliation' associated with long-term worklessness are flipped and used as an ideological tool to shame the unemployed. As Jensen argues, poverty porn aims to 'arouse and stimulate the viewer, to provoke an emotional sensation' (2014). Here, the intended primary emotional provocation is anger and disgust rather than compassion and sympathy.

6.6 Internalising 'Scrounger' Stigma

Despite presumptions of low intelligence, Rose is acutely aware of the stigma attached to having a baby while claiming benefits. In one scene, Rose and her father Gordon discuss their anxieties about how her motivations for having a child will be perceived:

> Narrator: Gordon has raised all his kids on benefits so he knows only too well what Rose will be in for.
>
> Gordon: Tell ya summat. Do you know what people will think? They'll think you're just doing it to get extra bloody child benefit, more money ya know, more money off the dole, that sort of thing.
>
> Rose: What if people are nasty to us and say "oh you're scroungers" and that?
>
> Gordon: If people think you're having a bairn to get more benefits, then fuck 'em.
>
> Narrator: With a baby they *will* get an extra 73 quid a week in benefits.

In a longitudinal study, Patrick (2016) demonstrates that over time, benefits claimants internalise the stigmas attached to benefits receipt, especially the 'scrounger narrative'. For instance, 'jobseeker Sam showed a particular replication of dominant narratives', repeatedly describing herself as a 'scrounger' (Patrick 2016: 252). Further, participants 'sometimes appropriated the derogatory words associated with benefit reliance to describe themselves, perhaps indicating an internalisation and partial acceptance of processes of stigmatisation' (Patrick 2016: 251). As Patrick argues, the participants 'demonstrated the extent to which the stigma associated with benefits receipt is affecting how people see themselves, imagine they are seen by others, and experience the processes associated with benefits receipt' (2016: 253). In the exchange above, Gordon and Rose are clearly aware of the stigma attached to benefit receipt, they are conscious of how 'they are seen by others'. While attempting to reject the dominant scrounger narrative, Gordon and Rose illustrate their internalisation of this ideology: Gordon assumes what 'people will think', perhaps because of personal experience of raising a family on benefits and/or an awareness of the dominant media and political rhetoric (Fohrbeck, Hirseland and Ramos Lobato 2014; Patrick 2016). Baumberg

distinguishes between *personal stigma* as 'a person's own feeling that claiming benefits conveys a devalued identity'; and *stigmatisation* as 'the perception that other people will devalue your identity' (2016: 183). Here, Gordon and Rose are both engaging with the notion of stigmatisation by making assumptions or, in Rose's case, displaying anxiety and fear over other people's value judgments of them. However, one might argue personal stigma and stigmatisation are symbiotic: to have an awareness of stigmatisation, there must be an element of personal stigma, a coexistence of anxiety and awareness. Supporting this, Patrick argues that 'processes of stigmatisation and experiences of claims stigma often feed into, and directly contribute towards, personal stigma' (2016: 247). Furthermore, if the subject is aware of the stigma attached to them, they are also aware they are other. As Frost and Hoggett argue, 'the stigmatized individual shares the same belief system as the rest of their culture' (2008: 445). Therefore, stigma is a form of symbolic violence: the subject becomes 'self as object', aware they are the stigmatised other, they are abject (Frost and Hoggett 2008: 441). Similar to Mandy Cowie, Gordon doesn't have the means to articulate a response to this stigmatisation other than the use of a profanity. Indeed, neither Gordon nor Rose can offer a counter argument to the stigmatisation. Unsurprisingly, Gordon and Rose's attempts at managing stigmatisation are rebuffed by the narrator who legitimises the stigma by implying that Rose *is* having a child to secure more benefits.

6.7 The 'Big Families Special' and Single Motherhood

Reflecting the tabloid coverage highlighted in the introduction, there are several 'supersized families' represented in the texts: two episodes of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* make up a 'Big Families Special' (S2E10-11) although this theme traverses several episodes across the texts. In most cases, there is a focus on single motherhood, which frames the women as abject maternal by highlighting their excessive fecundity. For instance, the aforementioned Mandy Cowie has 10 children (BB:LOTD, S2E10); Marie Buchan has eight children (BB:LOTD, S1E2); Sarah Bellinger has seven children (BB:LOTD, S2E10); Vanessa Byford has five children (OB: S4E9); and Heather Frost, labelled "dole queen" and "shameless super scrounger", has 11 children by three fathers and is in a relationship with a man who is not the father of any of her children (BB:LOTD, S1E6). It should be noted there are storylines that focus on married couples such as Tim and Mandy Fiske who have 14 children (BB:LOTD, S1E2), and Tom and Stacey Shaw who

also have 14 children (BB:LOTD, S2E11). One early episode of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E2), which features Marie Buchan and Tim and Mandy Fiske, also features an androcentric narrative depicting the lifestyle of Peter Rolfe who has fathered 26 children by 15 women. It is fair to assume this episode, the second to be broadcast, mediates and reproduces anti-welfare commonsense narratives such as the 'supersized' family. Synopses of the episodes include 'Meet some of Britain's *largest families*, whose accommodation problems are proving a headache for the families, the councils and the neighbours' (S1E2); 'South Yorkshire has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK, some of the highest rates of *single-parent households* and a great number of *long-term unemployed* than many other areas in Britain' (S1E3); 'In Hull, as a *jobless teenage couple await their first baby*, the girl's foster mother worries that her benefits will change when her children move out; the arrival of a baby will herald the third generation of *another family* to depend solely on benefits' (S1E4) (Emphasis added). Unsurprisingly, these synopses situate deprivation and poverty as individual issues via the notion of undeserved benefits receipt and through the lens of commonsense narratives such as 'supersized' families, single motherhood, long-term unemployment and teenage pregnancy (Jensen and Tyler 2015).

Most problematic is the suggestion that an unborn baby will contribute to 'the problem', and the deterministic and unhelpful assumption that the child will grow up to depend on benefits. This implies the participants represent 'three generations of families of where no-one has ever worked', an ideology which has become one of the 'dominant ideas of UK politics' (MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong 2013). Similarly, in Rose and Mark's storyline detailed earlier, the narrator refers to their unborn (and unconceived) child as a 'benefits baby', raising the question of how appropriate, or helpful, it is to reduce a baby or child to this status. Here, there is a move beyond disgust at 'scrounger' parents to disgust at children: they are also undeserving of sympathy because they will grow up to contribute to the problem. Further, the analysed texts and the above synopses present benefits families as categorised by 'narratives of lack' (Lawler 2005): deprived, unemployed, jobless. These families are lacking in symbolic value (Skeggs 2011) and this embodiment is the abject. This is illustrated in the assumption children from these families will 'amount to nothing', will be dependent on benefits, and so will not be able to accrue symbolic value. Representations of benefit-claiming families depict

them as lacking aspiration, which allows blame to be attributed to them, again individualising the issue. Paradoxically, as discussed later, in some cases the women's aspirations (for instance, to be a lawyer or a model) are used in the texts to highlight their lack of symbolic capital and value. Hence, refusing families certain opportunities under the guise of austerity, and not valuing their personhood, is legitimised through the commonsense narrative that all they lack is aspiration.

The representation of large families constitutes another abject configuration of welfare, which Jensen and Tyler (2015) call 'benefits broods'. Like the 'benefits mum', 'benefits broods' are a cultural articulation of anti-welfare commonsense. Borrowing from Tyler's *Revolting Subjects* (2013), Jensen and Tyler consider the 'benefits brood' to be a national abject (2015: 479):

> 'Benefits Broods' is a cultural figuration of disgust aimed at families that are deemed to have become 'excessively' large as a result of over-generous welfare entitlements; "benefits brood" parents are regarded as almost pathologically fertile in their desire to secure greater amounts of welfare payments by having more and more children (Jensen and Tyler 2015: 478-479).

It is through this 'excessive' nature that these families, especially the mothers, are represented as grotesque. Their excess is depicted in three key ways: the physical excess of the female body in its enlarged form, obese or pregnant; the figurative excess of female sexuality and reproductivity; and the literal excess of the family size. In *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E2; S1E6), the families are depicted as inhabiting too much space. For example, Marie Buchan requests a bigger council house for her family (S1E2) as the narrator explains that Marie and her eight young children are 'crammed into a three-bed council semi but they want the welfare state to provide somewhere bigger to live'. This statement is an oxymoron of sorts, potentially evoking both sympathy and anger towards the family. Tim and Mandy Fiske (S1E2) have been granted council permission to knock through their house and the neighbouring house to create a bigger, seven-bedroomed house for them and their 14 children - work that is worth £60,000. However, Tim and Mandy are represented as ungrateful, framed by the narrator arguing that 'some people are never happy'. Heather Frost already has a two-house conversion

for her 11 children but has also been granted a new council house, apparently worth half a million pounds (S1E6). In their excessive nature, these families take up too much space and defy the boundaries of a normative family unit. Symbolically speaking, in the cases of Heather Frost and the Fiske family, the boundaries between houses have been compromised to make room for the families. The families are physically abject in their size and spatially abject in the space they occupy. In this context, everyday family rituals are framed as excessive. For instance, in the two 'Big Families Special' episodes (BB:LOTD, S2E10-11), scenes show Sarah Bellinger and Tom Shaw cooking healthy meals with fresh ingredients for their respective families. Given the pathological representations of obesity in the texts, coupled with social and political anxiety about obesity in working-class families, one might expect this to be celebrated. However, the omnipotent spectre of the benefits claim ensure home-cooked meals are interpreted through the lens of anti-welfare reasoning. This is exemplified in the narration which accompanies the scenes: for example, explaining that Tom Shaw's cooking 'costs the taxpayer' £300 a week, and that 'Sarah also has a recipe for cooking up her benefits'. Here, using fresh ingredients is considered an unnecessary expenditure for a family dependent on benefits (although Sarah works night shifts as a care assistant); their health and wellbeing are seemingly another cost for the hard-working taxpayer. It seems that within these texts, every choice a benefit claimant makes is coded as the *wrong* choice.

The abject status of the families is embodied by the matriarchs, with anti-welfare myths and disgust perpetuated via certain scenes. For example, Heather explains how her family unit became so 'excessive':

> Heather: Some of them were planned, some of them weren't but you know it's just one of those things. If it's put there, you should keep it shouldn't you? I don't believe in abortions, never have. You know, you make mistakes then you learn by it, don't you? (BB:LOTD, S1E6).

The implication here is that, judging by the size of Heather's family, she has not learned her lesson. The shot cuts immediately to an image of Heather's heavily pregnant dog lying on the floor, its enlarged stomach and teats taking over the frame (see Frame 5). The visual parallel between Heather and the dog connotes the animalistic nature of

Heather's rampant sexuality and excessive reproductive capacity. Here, 'benefits brood' is denoted in both Heather's supersized family, and in her dog's unborn litter. Further, this shot frames Heather as irresponsible for allowing her dog to get pregnant, for not getting her spayed, which is ultimately another expense for the taxpayer. Jensen and Tyler argue 'benefits broods' encapsulate the 'ideologies around deficient parenting, welfare dependency and abject fertility' (2015: 479). Arguably, Heather reflects all three of these: she is irresponsible, receives benefits of £60,000 a year (allegedly) and is the maternal other.

6.8 Embodied Abjection: Pregnancy, Tattoos and Addiction

For the maternal subjects in the analysed texts, their irresponsibility and bad choices are tenfold: their biological right/gift/ability to bear children is coded as wrong. The bad choices these women make are usually reflective of their supposedly excessive and/or addictive nature. Within the texts, the process of reproduction and the subsequent bearing of life is framed as just another one of these excesses. The dichotomy between pregnancy and excess is most obviously portrayed in the representation of the aforementioned Marie Buchan. Marie is introduced in an early episode of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E2) with a focus on 'Britain's largest families' (Channel 5, 2018). It should be noted that Marie also features on another episode of the series (S2E4), and makes several appearances on the prime-time magazine show *This Morning* (ITV, 1988 -), which demonstrates how producers present the same female participants, and how Marie attempts to carve out her own television persona. On *This Morning*, Marie attempts to defend her position as a benefits claimant but ultimately gets 'shut down' (The Daily Mail, 2018). In the introductory scene of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E1), the initial shots show a backdrop of Birmingham, shifting from an industrial setting to a street view. An establishing bird's eye view of housing rows and the Saltley Gas Towers in the foreground is followed by a mid shot of the tops of terraced houses and the satellite dishes on each one; then a front view of another row of terraces on another street. These shots are accompanied by the narration: 'More than 1.3 million UK families get some sort of out-of-work benefit'. The narrow framing of the terraces in the shot (see Frame 6) may connote the high-density population of British working classes that these houses were originally designed for. This is in contrast to the modernity of the satellite dishes and suggests a shift from a traditional working-class

street or community to an underclass reliant on benefits. Following this, there are three quick surveillance-type shots of various women with a child in a pushchair as the narrator states 'most just have one or two kids but very few have as many as Marie Buchan, a single mum from Birmingham with seven girls and one boy'. Here, varying levels of irresponsibility and bad decision making are implied. There is a distinction between the women (or families) on benefits and those women who are raising 'benefits broods'. This implies that 1.3 million workless families are irresponsible but they are not *as* irresponsible as Marie Buchan, and other mothers who have produced an excessive amount of children *and* claim benefits. The quick editing between the shots of single women with one child, coupled with the overlaid narration comparing these mothers with Marie, followed by an introductory shot of Marie ironing a school uniform (see Frame 6), immediately pits Marie against a *slightly* more normative, responsible and acceptable figuration of motherhood. This highlights her abnormal, irresponsible and excessive nature.

> Marie: People know me by the amount of children and my tattoos. A lot of people spot that tattoo and wonder what it means, what is the reason for all the numbers? And I just let them know it's the dates of births of all my children (BB:LOTD, S1E2).

This dialogue is followed by a jump cut to a close-up of a faded tattoo of the children's birth dates on the back of Marie's neck. Another faded tattoo of a rose sits above it, and Marie's back is sunburnt and peeling (see Frame 7). Here, Marie has been reduced from subject to object. She is defined by the embodiment of abject maternity within her tattoos and, as she explains above, this is how people know her. Marie continues to show off her tattoos; each contains the name of one of her children, and each is framed in a close-up as Marie points at them with a pink, chipped nail-varnished finger. Similarly, Heather Frost has a tattoo along the length of her arm, which contains all the names of her 14 children (BB:LOTD, S1E6; see Frame 8). As the women's tattoos are a representation of their children, their status as abject maternal is permanently inscribed on their bodies. Marie's faded tattoos, her chipped nail varnish and ill-fitting clothes are coded as distasteful and a marker of abject class status. The narrator quips 'But eight might not be enough… Marie wouldn't mind having yet another tattoo'. Again, Marie's children become a physical sign of abjection on her body with the prospect of having another child flippantly equated with getting a tattoo. Here, the conception of a child,

pregnancy and the embodiment of motherhood are not considered positive but simply another excuse for a tattoo. The 'bad choice' to have unprotected sex is equated with the 'bad choice' to have another tattoo, and both are classified as excesses. In the next jump cut, these bad choices are illustrated as the focus shifts back to pregnancy:

> Marie: I am addicted to pregnancy. I'm addicted to birth. And feeding, I'm addicted to that (BB:LOTD, S1E2; see Frame 9).

Here, the grotesque nature of excess takes on a more severe form: addiction. Through the notion of addiction, pregnancy and motherhood become moralised. Discourses of addiction consider it to be both a disease or psychological affliction, and an example of immoral, irresponsible behaviour. Being addicted to pregnancy suggests it is something Marie has no control over, or perhaps, in an 'anti-welfare' context, something she does not want to control or take responsibility for. Being addicted suggests this is something Marie should, but cannot, refrain from; it is the ultimate bad choice. The notion of addiction works to pathologise Marie, and so the gift of birth becomes pathologised. Here, Marie's status as abject maternal is considered through the paradoxical lens of addiction and excessive sexuality: pregnancy is something she cannot help yet something she wrongly chooses. Further, grotesque excess and abjection coexist here: in effect, Marie claims she is addicted to the state of being the 'ultimate abject'; her body containing an other; her body giving birth to an other; and her body feeding an other. As explored earlier, in Kristevan terms, birth is the initial experience of abjection for the newborn autonomous subject; the mother abjects the child while the child simultaneously abjects its maternal home. In Marie's addiction to this experience and process, Marie is abjecting the self.

6.9 Excessive Consumption and Irresponsible Spending

Bad choices coded by excesses and addictions are a common motif in the texts. While none of the other women's excesses are as extreme as Marie's addiction to pregnancy, their bad choices are represented in their tattoos, cigarettes, alcohol and food consumption, the way they raise their children, and their choice of partner (or lack of). The representational theme of bad choices confirms these women are part of the undeserving poor: they are dependent on benefits because they are irresponsible. Again, this situates poverty and reliance on the welfare state as an individualised issue

rather than a structural one. As seen above, tattoos are a common theme in the texts. Often when the women are introduced, there are various close-ups of their tattoos as well as other markers of class status such as heavy gold jewellery, ill-fitting clothing and badly dyed hair. The abject figure of the 'benefits mum' is animated and becomes recognisable via these representational cues. In effect, these representational cues constitute a visual anti-welfare commonsense: the viewer is familiar with these cues as they are present in other cultural forms. Steph Cocker, for example, is continuously marked by her bad choices throughout the text: she smokes, she is overweight, her partner is in prison, she owns a Staffordshire bull terrier named Giro, and she appears to have little control over her children (on a trip to Sheffield shopping centre Meadowhall, Steph and her friend Zara lose Giro and Steph's son) (BB:LOTD, S1E3). In one scene, Steph goes to the tattoo parlour to get her sleeve finished. As the shot frames a close-up of Steph's new tattoo being inked on to her forearm, the narrator states this tattoo 'will cost her roughly half of what she needs to pay her gas and leccy bills this week' (see Frame 10). Here, the narration frames Steph as irresponsible: in choosing to get her tattoo finished, she is making a bad choice and should be spending her money more wisely. The next jump cut frames Steph in a mid shot, still sitting in the tattooist's chair, being filmed from an unflattering angle; it is almost a worms-eye view from Steph's breasts upwards (very similar to the framing of Rose in the workout scene detailed earlier). In a broad Sheffield accent and clearly frustrated tone, Steph ineloquently argues that she can spend her money however she sees fit:

> Steph: It's my money what I got for my birthday and my Christmas. I am allowed to do what I want with it. Obviously if I didn't get benefits, obviously I'd be spending that on food and stuff like that but seeing as it's my money, I can do what I want with it. If I want to piss it up t'wall I will (see Frame 11).

The editing of the shots positions Steph as counteracting the narrator's point as if they are in conversation. This creates a binary between the responsible narrator in a position of judgment and Steph as irresponsible. Steph is not only getting her abject class status inscribed on her skin, but she is doing it to the detriment of her own and her children's wellbeing by not providing the necessities of electricity, gas and food. It is interesting to note that throughout the *BB:LOTD* series, the female narrator has a strong northern

accent and often uses colloquialisms and slang. Arguably, the use of a 'well-spoken' southern accent would have created a not-too-subtle air of authoritarian judgement, as if berating the participants in the show. The use of a more 'common' accent means the narrator sounds like 'one of them', making the vilification of the participants less obvious.

6.10 Taste and Capital; Excess and Lack

Within the texts, tattoos, alcohol, cigarettes and junk food are framed as luxuries and, like tattoos, smoking is a common motif that marks the women's class status. For instance, in an episode of *On Benefits* crudely titled 'From Job Centre to Catwalk' (S4E9), Vanessa, a single 'mother of five children to four different fathers', has aspirations to become a model. Vanessa's narrative explores her attempts to secure the £195 entrance fee for a national beauty pageant by producing a 'pin-up' calendar to sell to her online fans. When Vanessa or the narrator discuss her modelling hopes, the dialogue is accompanied by varying shots of Vanessa smoking cigarettes, often in a close-up of her hand (see Frame 12). Thus, the glamour Vanessa is trying to embody and convey through her aspirations of modelling is juxtaposed with her reality as a rundown 'benefits mum'. Also, the shots are interspersed with other visual markers of bad taste such as the zebra print luggage she takes to her photoshoot and the large leopard print sticker in her home that says 'diva'. In this extract, Vanessa discusses her 'look':

> Vanessa: My idol originally is Audrey Hepburn, but I think that's because we have some similar looks. She were a very class lady. She were very sexy but classy.
>
> Narrator: She might be reaching for the stars but for now Vanessa's modelling dreams will have to wait as it's back to being a carer and a mum.

In 'reaching for the stars', Vanessa's comparison between herself and Audrey Hepburn is considered unrealistic; throughout the narrative, the narrator scoffs at the comparison and Vanessa's aspirations. Audrey Hepburn is a pop-culture icon known as one of the most beautiful women in history. The dialogue above highlights that some women, like Hepburn, can embody the right amounts of 'sexy' and 'classy' but only if

they have the capital to so, which Vanessa does not. Skeggs suggests working-class women attempt to 'avoid being positioned by the vulgar, pathological, tasteless and sexual' to prove their respectability (1997: 100). To do so, they must make 'investments in femininity' by literally spending money on hair, makeup and clothing. Further, through the symbolic coding of glamour, the women in Skeggs' study try to embody the right amounts of 'sexy' and 'classy'. Despite sometimes lacking in cultural or symbolic capital, the working-class women in Skeggs' study had some economic capital to invest in their femininity. However, Vanessa, like some of the other women in the texts, attempts to inhabit a zone that she does not have the economic, cultural or symbolic capital to be part of. The 'benefits mum' is absolutely coded by a lack of overall capital and so cannot make the correct investments. Vanessa is defined by her lack of taste and resources; she does not lack ambition but has seemingly unrealistic goals. Elsewhere in *BB:LOTD* (S1E3), the narrator explains that Joanne is 'so desperate for cash that she's been applying for all kinds of vacancies, including one which is hardly her dream job'. While Joanne explains it is a cleaning job, there are jump cuts to various shots of rubbish and clutter all over her house (see Frame 13). In the next episode, Anita's foster daughter Charlotte explains she finds it hard to secure employment as she does not have basic GCSEs such as maths and English. In response to this, Anita says she thinks Charlotte could be a solicitor or a barrister (BB:LOTD, S1E4). As explored earlier, in a neoliberal context, women are chastised for not having any aspirations or ambitions. However, in the analysed texts, aspirations and ambitions are used as comedic subplots that mock the women and position them as stupid.

6.11 Conclusion: The 'Benefits Mum' as Abject Maternal

The women in the analysed texts constitute a visual representation of Kristeva's abject maternal. This abjection is manifest in grotesque imagery that focuses on the women's lower bodily strata, and in the framing of their reproductive parts. Thematically, these texts explore the notion of maternity in ways that predominantly mark it as problematic, through a lens of excessive sexuality and abundant fertility. The representational configuration of the abject maternal, the 'benefits mum' (including the 'benefits brood'), encapsulates these anxieties and binds them with fears of an abused welfare state. The grotesque nature of excess is coded through narratives of addiction or over indulgence. The bad choices these women make facilitate these excesses, and reflect a neoliberal

ideology that promotes notions of individualism and responsibility. In turn, the women form part of the undeserving poor: undeserving of help from the state *and* undeserving of public sympathy. Instead, the women and their families are represented in a way that renders them disgusting. Nonetheless, these representations do not happen in a pop-cultural vacuum, rather they reflect tabloid fodder, political discourse and prime-time television debates. As in Jensen and Tyler's findings on 'benefits broods', '*the same families* are constantly circulating through a cultural economy of disgust; from magazine expose, to newspaper articles, to television production and back again' (2015: 479, emphasis in original). Within the televisual texts, this 'cultural economy' becomes a sort of meta sub-narrative as many of the participants read and discuss the newspaper articles that berate and demonise their families:

> Sarah: There's lot of comments on the Birmingham, the Mail, website: "If you can't feed them, don't breed them".
>
> Marie: I think it was the one about the kids: "Half inhumane half ape, let them all burn at the stake". Erm "she looks like a dirty heroin addict"; "I have no issues with big families, just get off your arse and pay for them, it should be capped at four children. I have seven children and my husband works long hours to support us". It was just, it was crazy weren't it? It was like I was a murderer or summat. It's benefits! (BB:LOTD, S1E2).
>
> Heather: Fred West or someone who murdered someone wouldn't have got as much shit in the press as what I got. The amount of hate and name-calling we got – if it was someone that suffered with depression, they'd have gone jumped off a cliff and killed themselves probably (BB:LOTD, S1E6).

By referencing murderers, Marie and Heather suggest benefits claimants evoke as much disgust as those in the most hated and stigmatised group. Arguably, for Marie and Heather, discussing the articles is an attempt to counteract the negative representations they are subject to, and to evoke sympathy for their position. However, the representation of anti-welfare commonsense, and the grotesque imagery throughout the rest of the televisual texts, reiterate the extremely negative depictions of benefits claimants. One way anti-welfare commonsense is illustrated in the texts is via the notion

of illegitimacy: both in illegitimate birth and illegitimate, or fraudulent, benefit claims. As explored in the introduction of this chapter (in the discussion of Deirdre Kelly and Julie King), some of the women, such as Marie and Vanessa, attempt to carve out a persona as a television personality or as a model. In doing so, they face even more derogatory tabloid articles and public opinion. Some are consumed by the producers of poverty porn programming and spat back out again. Several of the women make appearances in more than one benefits-focused text. It might be argued they are repeatedly featured because they produce perfect soundbites: they say, or appear to say (thanks to the editing process), what the producers and the viewers (who are already familiar with anti-welfare ideology) want to hear. In this context, dialogue that presents ungrateful tendencies, laziness and a bad work ethic easily render the women as subjects of disgust.

7 Analysis and Discussion II: Grotesque Embodiment

7.1 Introduction and Context

7.1.1 Exploring the Lens of 'Self-inflicted' and 'Fraudulent' Disability

This discussion investigates the representation of grotesque embodiment along two principal axes: disability and fatness. Throughout the chapter, these representational categories are treated as separate intersectional configurations of the grotesque. These separate categories are an important departure from previous literature that explores the grotesque in relation to representations of fatness or disability. This research has the scope to investigate the interplay between fatness and disability or, in other words, the grotesque representation of fatness *as* disability.

This positioning of fatness as a disability is a result of the preliminary analysis of the texts, which revealed that in this context disability is most likely framed through the lens of self-infliction: a disability or impairment caused by excessive eating, excessive drinking or smoking, or a combination of these vices. For instance, severe health issues within the texts are a consequence of obesity and so are the fault of the individual. Kathleen is said to be suffering from 'weight-related health issues' such as diabetes (OB:100S); Sarah has developed sleep apnoea 'because of her weight' (OB:100S); Stephen has diabetes and hypertension 'caused by his weight' (BB:TFTW) and suffered a stroke 'when he was 27 stone', implying the stroke was caused by obesity. In these narratives, health issues are depicted as self-inflicted and used as a moralising technique which frames the individual as workless because of their weight, and a strain on the NHS and the welfare system because of their bad choices.

The texts often juxtapose participants' claims of trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle or lose weight with imagery of them eating huge portions of food. For example, Sarah (OB:100S) explains 'we haven't really eaten a great deal this week' which is accompanied by a close-up shot of her husband Anthony grating cheese over a lasagne (see Frame 14a). Sarah continues, 'but cos we got a bit of money today, we thought bugger it, we'll have something nice and filling'. As Sarah takes the lasagne out of the oven, the narrator states 'Sarah is keen to lose weight and *claims* she prefers home-cooked food to ready meals and takeaways'. Sarah then puts half the lasagne (from a large Perspex dish) on

to her plate (see Frame 14b). Anthony says 'more than enough for two people', to which Sarah giggles and coyly replies 'I didn't think it would'. Throughout the scene it is inferred that despite preferring home-cooked food, Sarah's choice of food is unhealthy and infamously full of fat (minced meat, white sauce, cheese), and that she does not have portion control. All of this attributes to the notion that her obesity and weight-induced disability are self-inflicted. This 'claim-making' is present throughout the episode: 'Having just made Kelly her lunch, at 31 stone, James *claims* to be watching what he eats' (OB:100S); 'Kathleen *claims* she's trying to lose weight in order to improve her health' (OB:100S). In *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work*, the visual representation of self-inflicted illness/obesity culminate. Stephen and Michelle attend their weekly weight management class, and the shot of the measuring tape around Stephen's stomach depicts just how big he is (see Frame 15a). Stephen loses a pound to which he exclaims 'I'm keeping off the fatty stuff' and Michelle receives the Slimmer of the Week award. When the couple get home they ring their local takeaway and order kebabs: Stephen explains 'we kind of treat ourselves every time we do lose weight!'. When the food arrives, the focus is on Stephen and Michelle eating, using close-up shots. (see Frame 15b). Again, attempts/claims of losing weight are portrayed as flawed, which ensures the onus is on the participants, hence they can be blamed for 'choosing' to be fat and 'choosing' to be on benefits.

One might argue there are ideological and representational distinctions between 'self-inflicted' disability and 'genuine' disability for which the individual cannot be held accountable. Briant, Watson and Philo (2013) highlight the journalistic use of phrases such as 'genuinely ill' and 'genuinely unable to work' to distinguish between people who are deserving of disability support benefits and those who are fraudulent claimers. However, within the texts, even 'genuine' disabilities are treated unsympathetically. For example, Bryan has suffered with multiple sclerosis since he was 16, meaning he cannot physically work (OB:100S), but the narrative is concerned with Bryan's weight, how much of his benefits he spends on junk food, and his failed attempts at losing weight. Kevin, on the other hand, has worked most of his life and, at 60, has arthritis of the spine (BBLOTD:S2E11), yet he is still represented as irresponsible as he spends his time playing Xbox and has plans to 'get meself a bigger telly soon – spoil meself!". The implication is

that he should spend his 'earnings' more carefully, and the text ignores the irony that 60 is near retirement age.

As examined in the previous chapters, attitudes towards the poor throughout British history have been considered along a binary of the deserving and undeserving poor. There has been a seismic shift in how disabled people are represented as being (un)deserving of state support in both journalistic and political discourse. Sympathetic portrayals of disability have been replaced with historical narratives of 'false mendicancy' in what Hughes (2015) deems as contemporary reconfigurations of the 'sturdy beggar'. In tabloid journalism especially, benefits fraud and disability are discursively linked, criminalising disabled benefits claimants and justifying government cuts (Briant, Watson and Philo 2013; Hughes 2015; see also Garthwaite 2011; McEnhill and Byrne 2014), and inciting disability hate crime (Tyler 2013). This move towards the criminalisation of disabled benefits claimants is an echoed sentiment in the televisual texts. For instance, the approach of *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E2) to Peter's application for disability benefit,

> Narrator: But with little chance of a job, [Peter] has a plan to deal with the benefits cap shortfall. He's trying to claim a disability allowance which will bring in hundreds more in benefits every week.
>
> Narrator: Peter's disability has been agreed . . . Peter may not have the home he wants but now with about £300 a week extra topping up their total to 800, the family is definitely quids in!

The phrasing here blatantly implies that claiming benefits under the guise of disability is a lucrative choice, as opposed to legitimate paid work; claiming disability allowance is a calculated and dastardly 'plan' to 'top up' benefits receipt. It is asserted that Peter's family has benefited from his supposed fraudulent claims, despite him relying on a walking stick for the entirety of the episode. The discursive framing of disability allowance and crime as symbiotic has been common throughout the last decade both in poverty porn and right-wing journalism. Online tabloid articles such as '75% of incapacity claimants are fit to work: Tough new benefits test weeds out the workshy' (Peev 2010) and '"Too sick to work" but not too sick to riot: One in eight defendants were on incapacity or disability benefit' (Doyle 2011) illustrate the insidious links drawn

between claiming incapacity or disability benefits and fraud, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and looting, with the aim to weed out those who are 'cheating the benefits system' (Doyle 2011). Peter, nicknamed 'The Wadfather' (Crick 2015a) and 'The Dodgefather' (Crick 2015b; Spillett 2015) by *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* respectively, has also been subjected to this ongoing fraudulent claims discourse, exemplified in tabloid articles which 'out him' as a 'career criminal' (Drewett 2015; Spillett 2015). More recently, 'Benefits scrounger faked being paralysed for 15 years – swindling taxpayer of £500,000' (Andrews 2018); 'ZIP-A-DEE-DUPED-YA: £20k benefit cheat who said he was unable to walk filmed whizzing down a zip wire' (Pattinson 2018); and 'KICKING OFF: Mum who claimed she needed a wheelchair and received £20k in disability benefits won KICKBOXING medals' (Pattinson 2019) suggest this rhetoric is ongoing and still just as pervasive. This is despite a trend in the last year or so for more sympathetic portrayals of the effects of Universal Credit.

7.1.2 Obesity, Mental Health and Defining Disability

In the same vein, mental health issues are often disregarded as serious impairments and framed as false disabilities or an excuse for the participant not to find suitable work. Contradictory narration and imagery are important here as the juxtaposition works to connote laziness rather than mental health issues. For instance, while Josh, Danielle and Titch are said to be 'suffering from anxiety and depression which is why they're signed off from working' (BBLOTD:S2E6), the 'three musketeers' are filmed play fighting and rolling around in the street, implying they are not 'suffering' but having fun. The narration continues, 'but that doesn't stop Josh and Titch getting up to their old tricks' as the three friends talk about their criminal past, again linking benefits and disability to crime. Tasha was 'forced to give up a career in catering 13 months ago because of mental health problems…she's been denied long-term sickness benefits, or PIP…' (OB:JCCW), and the shot cuts to a close-up of a mug with the slogan "Do I look like a morning person!". This juxtaposition between the narration and imagery connotes that Tasha is not too sick to work, rather she is too lazy to work because she does not like mornings. Further, the narrative follows Tasha attempting to become a full-time carer to her mother but again this is framed as a 'plan' to 'boost her benefits' (OB:JCCW). The narration 'while Tasha says she's still too ill to go back to work, she thinks she can balance being a single mum and a carer' implies that Tasha is duping the system: if she

is well enough to care for her mother, she is well enough to work. In other texts, the narrative focus is on the participants' excessive weight in relation to being 'on the dole', rather than their mental health problems. Although Rochelle implies she suffers from social anxiety (BB:BPP) and Kathleen explains that some days she 'feels really depressed' (OB:100S), these issues are not explored in depth. Thus, the texts only explore the causal relationship between obesity and worklessness, rather than the potential causal relationship between mental health problems and obesity. Similarly, James is agoraphobic and suffers from anxiety-based IBS, and he is a full-time carer to his friend Kelly who has physical and mental health problems (OB:100S). However, the text bypasses Kelly's 'genuine' disabilities, which might provoke a more sympathetic response, in favour of James' weight.

In policy terms, the British Equality Act (2010) defines disability as 'a physical or mental impairment' that 'has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [the person's] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. Within the texts, extreme obesity or extreme addiction can certainly have these debilitating effects: many participants are filmed struggling to carry out basic tasks such as walking up the stairs, showering, or leaving the house on their own. According to the policy definition above, the participants in the texts are considered disabled and, as such, should be treated with equality and respect. But adding the extra symbolic layer of benefits receipt (by focusing the narrative on their weight or afflictions in relation to worklessness) ensures the participants are treated with contempt and disgust. Thus, these texts skew the notion of obesity and addiction as genuine health concerns by framing the participants as grotesque caricatures. Like the depiction of the abject maternal in the figure of the benefits mum, these grotesque representations become another extension of the benefits scrounger. Here, fat grotesque embodiment becomes a corporeal representation of benefits scroungers' perceived excesses and irresponsibility. As Winch argues,

> The abjectified working classes are also signified by fat in the governmental promotional material warning against 'benefits scroungers' or 'unhealthy' habits. The stigmatized 'losers' of the neoliberal market game are blamed for their failure, and this failure is corporeally marked (2016: 902)

Overall Winch is more concerned with how female fat is feared because of its relationship with working-class sexuality and the post-feminist failed body, but the extract above demonstrates the political interplay between anti-fat rhetoric and anti-welfare rhetoric. It also suggests how both of these failures are inscribed on the abject and grotesque underclass body. As Edwards and Graulund suggest, each 'generation and each cultural formation has its own grotesque' (2013: 136), and this research argues the abject figure of the benefits scrounger is a contemporary grotesque coded by maternal and bodily excesses, and deviant behaviour.

There is a long-standing cultural rhetoric that pathologises obesity, marking fatness as unhealthy, undesirable and unwanted. A multitude of factual British programming such as *You Are What You Eat* (Channel 4 2004-2007), *Honey, We're Killing the Kids* (BBC 2005), *Three Fat Brides, One Thin Dress* (Channel 4 2007), *Jamie's Ministry of Food* (Channel 4 2008), *Supersize vs Superskinny* (Channel 4 2008-2014), *The Biggest Loser* (LivingTV 2005-2006; ITV 2009-2012), *Embarrassing Fat Bodies* (Channel 4 2011-2012), *How to Lose Weight Well* (Channel 4 2016-2019) and *Celebrity Fat Fighters* (TLC 2017) stigmatises fat embodiment by portraying it as something that evokes feelings of shame, fear and disgust in both the hosts and participants of the shows. Further, in some cases these texts depict obesity as a problem that not only affects the individual but their families too, linking obesity to notions of bad parenting and maternal neglect. In some ways, poverty porn programmes regurgitate these well-known discourses on obesity, illustrating an insidious link between social class and obesity. They frame obesity as the result of an excessive lifestyle choice rather than exploring the reasons *why* some poor people are malnourished. Poverty porn texts take obesity beyond the boundaries of a personal or familial problem by depicting the adverse effects it has on society. These depictions pair the well-known 'obesity epidemic' discourse with anti-welfare common-sense rhetoric, and highlight how obesity is 'pushing the NHS to breaking point' as narrated in *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients*.

As a representational category, the grotesque lends itself to visceral and sometimes uncomfortable imagery, which is reflected in the texts and throughout the following visual analysis. In particular, this chapter focuses on how the texts portray certain forms of embodiment that depict Bakhtin's (1984) conception of the lower bodily stratum and the leaking open body. For instance, there are graphic scenes of amputated limbs, and

bodies bloated from alcohol abuse or obesity opened up in surgery. The analysis investigates the binary of grotesque ab/normality, the methods used to other the grotesque, and the paradoxical ways fat sexuality and gendered embodiment are depicted. All these categories centre on the subject crossing the boundaries of normality, and so are considered through the lens of abjection.

7.2 Ab/normality: Deviation, Exaggeration and Visual Hyperbole

> Because the grotesque in itself is a departure from the norm, it is frequently used in satire to expose the immediate and identifiable vices and follies of human beings (Krzychylkiewicz 2003: 206).
>
> Smoking, drinking and overeating are making us all ill and pushing the NHS to breaking point . . . These are the people whose habits are ruining their health and costing us a fortune (Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients).
>
> The illnesses caused by smoking, drinking and obesity run up a whopping £25billion NHS bill every year. Together, the people being treated because of these issues are the billion pound patients (Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients).

As the above excerpt from Krzychylkiewicz (2003) suggests, the grotesque, as a representational category, illustrates a departure or a *deviation* from the norm; 'a vital component of grotesque representations are the distinctions between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 8). The notion of deviation as a form of departure, as characterised by deviancy, is important here. The etymology of both deviate and deviant is the Latin *deviare*: to turn away from the road, to stray or divert. So deviation and deviancy both denote a turn from the 'right way', away from the norm. Deviant or abnormal behaviour is characteristic of the monstrous grotesque and helps 'to mark the monster as a cultural as well as physical other' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 47). In the opening narration of *Benefits and Bypasses*, the participants are immediately marked as exhibiting deviant behaviour in their smoking, drinking and overeating. Of course, these vices are not uncommon or abnormal but in this context,

smoking, drinking and overeating are pathologised and marked as deviant because of the cost to the NHS. Further, the 'billion pound patients' are physically other, portrayed as 'the primary attribute of monstrosity' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 47). For example, Rochelle is labelled as 'one of the fattest women in Britain'; Julie has liver damage so severe that she is yellow with jaundice; diabetic Danny is awaiting weight loss surgery and is on medication with 17 prescriptions; Dean's smoking 'hobby' (Dean labels it as such because he 'enjoys it') has resulted in a daily medication of 11 tablets; and Barry is recovering from an amputation to the groin, also as a consequence of smoking. As well as 'pushing the NHS to breaking point', this group are pushing the physical boundaries of their bodies to the limit. As such, Rochelle, Julie, Danny, Dean and Barry represent the grotesque body that 'is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits' (Bakhtin 1984: 26); their corporeality extends beyond the 'normal' human body. Discussing the symbiotic relationship between the grotesque body and the outside world, Bakhtin argues that,

> The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose (Bakhtin 1984: 26).

Here, the grotesque body defies boundaries: it 'exceeds its own limits' (Bakhtin 1984: 26), it is ever expanding and open to the outside world. Perhaps this is why the grotesque body is met with such disgust; the normative subject is closed off to the other, or the abject, unlike the grotesque representation. In contrast, the grotesque body seems to have no subject/object distinctions. That which is deemed harmful or other can easily invade the open borders of the grotesque body. The apertures of the body are the corporeal points of entry for the harmful substances (cigarettes, alcohol and food) of the groups' vices. Consequently, it is the swollen 'potbellies' of Danny and Julie that have to be opened up to expel the waste products of these vices (in graphic scenes analysed below). As the group bear the physical markers of the consequences of their vices, or addictions, it is clear they are not the self-regulating, reflexive subjects of

neoliberalism. This is exemplified as Danny candidly describes his relationship with food: 'I love me food like nothing else in this world . . . it got to a stage where a just couldn't stop meself'. Thus, by allowing the other to pass through the corporeal boundaries, the grotesque becomes other to the normative, neoliberal subject/self. Furthermore, by continuing to exhibit a lack of self-regulation and control over their vices, the group display their 'follies' as Krzychylkiewicz (2003) suggests. The joviality of foolishness transgresses into something more potent: irresponsibility and deviance.

In exceeding the limits of the norm as well as the limits of itself, the grotesque body becomes an exaggeration of the human form. As Bakhtin states, 'exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style' (1984: 303). While Bakhtin is referencing Rabelais' literary style of grotesque realism here, hyperbolism and exaggeration are arguably characteristics of the grotesque body too. *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* adheres to the hyperbolic conventions of the grotesque in its discourse and its title. Labelling participants 'billion pound patients' is hyperbole; an exaggeration that lays blame for the slow collapse of the NHS in the laps of a few individuals who 'abuse' the health service, rather than addressing systemic problems such as austerity and consequential budget cuts. Similarly, one episode of *On Benefits* is subtitled *100 Stone and on the Dole*, which inflates the severity of the issue, and conjures up extreme images of individuals. The 'reality' is that the people featured in the text do not even weigh this much collectively. Interestingly, the opening narration to *On Benefits: 100 Stone and on the Dole* states that obesity is 'costing the country around £47 billion a year' - a far cry from the £25 billion cost of illnesses related to smoking, drinking *and* obesity cited in *Benefits and Bypasses*. The inconsistency of the two statements and their figures hint at further exaggeration, and work towards pathologising these vices, especially obesity. Perhaps more importantly, the bodies of the people on *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients*, *On Benefits: 100 Stone and on the Dole* and *Benefits: Too Fat to Work* (stylized as *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work*) serve as visual hyperbole. Their bloated, discoloured and immobile bodies are exaggerated caricatures of the perils of their vices: they are distortions of the human form.

7.3 Eliminating Borders: Negotiating ab/normality

One of the most poignant examples of the ab/normal distinction is the depiction of Julie who suffered from alcoholism for a decade, causing severe liver damage and two strokes. Julie is introduced as the camera tracks her walking across the hospital car park, panning from left to right until Julie is almost centre of the shot (see Frame 16). Her jaundiced face with an green-yellow tinge is in stark contrast to the neon fuchsia scarf that envelops it, and is accentuated by her messy bun hairstyle with her hair scraped back off her face. As Julie enters the hospital, an over-the-shoulder shot focuses on the back of her head and neck. Again, her unusual skin tone contrasts with the scarf and her platinum blonde highlighted hair. The shot cuts to a mid close-up of Julie's bloated, jaundiced face; she looks stony faced, which suggests this hospital visit is not out of the ordinary for her. Non-diegetic, solemn music accompanies the shot, which is noticeably more serious in tone compared with the jovial country-style music played in the previous scene as Danny gave details of his diabetes medication. This choice of music might signify Danny's position as an obese diabetic with a bubbly, larger-than-life personality, reflecting the pop-cultural trope of the 'fat funny one'. For instance, Danny's playful nature is highlighted when he is asked what food he would like after his gastric bypass surgery and he jokingly retorts 'bacon sandwich if I'm allowed'. In contrast, the music in Julie's introductory scene might suggest alcoholism is a more serious affliction than obesity, or that it is 'not just obesity threatening to bankrupt the NHS; alcohol is costing the health service almost £10million every day' (BB:BPP). The camera tracks Julie as she walks into the nurse's office where a short exchange takes place:

> **Nurse:** And how much was you consuming at that time before you came into hospital?
>
> **Julie:** A bottle of wine . . . I say only but . . .
>
> **Nurse:** A day?
>
> **Julie:** Yeah

This short conversation conveys the alcoholic excesses that Julie has been subjecting her body to. Not being certain of how much she has been drinking might imply she has drunk so much that she cannot remember. Or it might suggest Julie is embarrassed and does

not want to admit how much alcohol she has drunk while under the scrutiny of the nurse, the person behind the camera, and the viewers. Julie's excesses and irresponsibility, coupled with her jaundiced face and body, mark her as abnormal. She is a physical and cultural other (Edwards and Graulund 2013). This is reinforced by the nurse's response of "A day?" which suggests a bottle of wine (or potentially more) is not a normal amount of alcohol. The shot cuts to the nurse speaking directly to the camera stating that 'every hospital in this country will have wards full of patients who are as *sick* as Julie'. The emphasis on 'sick' pathologises Julie: she is not just ill, she is deviant, she has indulged in excesses with consequences that cost the NHS and the taxpayer millions of pounds.

Following the nurse's piece to camera, the scene cuts to a transitionary image before the ad break. This mid shot is taken from a low angle in line with Julie's hospital bed. The camera focuses on her exposed, swollen, jaundiced stomach. Julie winces in pain as an unidentified (their face is not in the shot due to the low angle) latex-gloved assistant inserts tubes into her stomach (see Frame 17). This shot is purposeful: the quick transition is intended to shock the viewer and evoke a disgusted response. The image represents what is to come for Julie throughout the documentary and illustrates the consequences of her excessive actions, serving as a moralising narrative function. It evokes disgust and incites curiosity, acting as a grotesque cliffhanger to the narrative: the viewer knows this will be the outcome for Julie, and might be more inclined to watch the events unfold. As Hanich suggests in his exploration of disgust in a cinematic context, while 'we are strongly repelled by the intentional object (up to the point of vomiting), it often involves some degree of attraction, fascination, and even somatic pleasure' (2009: 304). This dichotomy between disgust and fascination happens because 'the disgusting is rarely part of our everyday experience – and precisely because it is rare and unusual it may raise an ambivalent curiosity' (2009: 304). This transitionary image of Julie is disgusting because she looks pregnant; she is doubly grotesque and doubly other. However, whereas the pregnant body is abject because it is 'an Other that contains an Other' (Magennis 2010: 92), Julie's swollen belly is host to a rotting liver. It is the bearer of abject death, not abject life. In a wicked twist on Bakhtin's senile pregnant hag, Julie's swollen stomach resembles a 'pregnant death' (1984: 25). Furthermore, the shot bears an uncanny resemblance to popular culture pregnancy scenes that depict pregnant

women at their scans. Here, the transducer probe of the ultrasound machine is replaced by the plastic tubing apparatus that pierces Julie's stomach, creating another aperture (Bakhtin 1984).

Edwards and Graulund argue the grotesque 'can cause the dissolution of the borders separating the normal and abnormal, inside and outside, internal and external' (2013: 9). Certainly, the above transitionary scene illustrates this as Julie's internal organs are opened up to the external. However, beyond her corporeality, Julie's subjectivity also dissolves the borders between normal and abnormal. In a later scene, Julie is filmed in her flat following hospitalisation after an alcohol relapse and resulting coma. In the establishing long shot, Julie is standing in her kitchen-living room looking at a large white multi-picture frame on the wall. The shot cuts to a close-up of one of the framed images, a photograph of Julie and two of her children, as the narrator states 'Ten years of alcoholism have robbed Julie of a *normal* family life and left her on benefits. . .' (see Frame 18a). Here, there is a distinct visual binary between Julie the sombre alcoholic whose body is bloated, swollen and jaundiced, and Julie the smiling 'normal' mother pre-alcoholism. Alcoholism has not only 'robbed' Julie of a 'normal family life' but has also robbed her of a 'normal' body. Julie is then framed in a tighter shot looking at the photographs as contemplative music plays over the scene. This is followed by an even tighter shot of Julie's side profile in direct juxtaposition to another old photograph of her. Her jaundiced skin is again framed in contrast to her complexion on the old photograph, and the white picture frame. The visual juxtapositions in this scene eliminate the borders between the normal and the abnormal as the viewer can see Julie's subjectivity on either side of the ab/normal boundary. As Edwards and Graulund suggest, the grotesque 'has the power to eliminate borders: it can reveal how the boundaries between the "normal" and "abnormal" are fluid, not fixed, and how grotesquerie can lead to an erasure of common distinctions' (2013: 9). This scene exemplifies how Julie has not always been grotesque; her abnormality, both corporeal and subjective, is self-inflicted. The connotation here is that alcoholism has not so much 'robbed' Julie of a normal family life, rather Julie has chosen to give up her normal family life in favour of alcohol. The camera pans as it follows Julie into the kitchen, and the shot cuts to a close-up on Julie washing up some mugs. Julie goes into a monologue piece to camera, explaining how she became alcohol dependent:

> I think me son was about 18 months old when I first started drinking – it wasn't heavy then but that's the start of it. The kids'd go to bed and I'd sit and have a drink. Like I just thought I was getting on with things – coping – and then I had a bit of a hard time coping – found it hard. Well they said "one more drop'll kill me" cus me liver won't tolerate it. . . so . . . it's just life or death isn't it? Picking that drink up.

This monologue is interspersed with shots of Julie speaking to the camera, close ups of her hands in the washing-up bowl, and of other old photographs, both of which show a younger Julie in a bikini (see Frame 18b). Julie is tanned, slim and toned: she had been an attractive young woman by normative western standards. Again, the contrast between shots communicates how Julie has transgressed the boundaries of ab/normality by becoming alcohol dependent. The above dialogue also suggests Julie might have suffered post-natal depression, hence her reliance on alcohol to 'cope', but this is not explored in the text beyond this short excerpt. Julie's candid recital of doctors' warnings reveal her materiality, her body 'falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver' (Kristeva 1982: 3): 'it's just life or death'. However, unlike Kristeva's abject, Julie's body (liver) can no longer fulfil the function of filtering and expelling waste. She has pushed her body beyond normal limits, so much so that her liver becomes waste. Thus, there are no longer any boundary distinctions between Julie's grotesque embodiment and her external waste: 'One extreme flows into the other' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 9).

7.4 Othering the Grotesque

7.4.1 Us and Them; Self and Other

The sample texts very cleverly employ an othering discourse that separates the participants, or benefits claimants, from the (presumed) normative audience and good citizens of neoliberalism. Othering language helps establish the binary of ab/normality, demarcating that, or whom, which falls outside the boundaries of the norm. Edwards and Graulund argue that 'grotesquerie revolves around the categories of inclusion (the norm) and exclusion (the abnormal) in order to preserve marked distinctions between 'us' and 'them', 'self' and 'other'' (2013: 9). These distinctions centre on feelings of disgust towards the other, as the emotion of disgust 'recognizes and maintains difference' and, 'helps to define boundaries between us and them and me and you'

(Miller 1997: 50). Othering is the process of separating the self from the other, and in the process of abjection, this other becomes an object (Kristeva 1982). As Kristeva suggests, the subject creates psychological and physical borders between the self and other. Othering discourse that establishes distinctions between us/them and we/they is a mechanism that (re)creates these borders. Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005) describe the relationship between the psychoanalytical, discursive and representational elements of othering:

> The concept of the "Other" (and its verbal noun form "Othering") recasts classic sociological notions such as "exclusion", "discrimination", and "marginalisation", by adding a psychoanalytic/linguistic dimension to them. The Self is, in part, constituted vis-à-vis the Other – somebody not "us", somebody whom one cannot identify with. The Other is often represented in images that are "degraded", "mystified", "romanticised", "exoticised", or "glorified", and may be composed of a domestic marginalised group (internal Other) or it can be a particular foreign nation or the rest of the world as a whole (external Other). In any case, talking about the Other through representation (language or visual images) is crucial in the construction of one's identity (Coward and Ellies 1977). Othering, in this sense, is the way a power works to construct particular subject positions for "us" by designating a certain category of people as "them" (the Other) (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005: 62-63).

Here, the self is partly constructed in relation to the other, which suggests the process of abjection (creating borders between the self and other) is inherent to the formation of the subject. Feeling disgust for the other and subsequently labelling or representing them as such maintains these boundary positions and constitutes the self. Abjection recalls 'the place where I am not and which permits me to be' (Kristeva 1982: 3). As Lawler argues, middle-class identities rely 'on the expulsion and exclusion of (what is held to be) white working-classness'; 'on *not* being the repellent and disgusting 'other''; and, 'part of who we are relies on *not* being (or liking) the disgusting object' (2005: 430-431; 438, all emphasis in original). Lawler suggests the construction of the working class as the disgusting, abject underclass informs the construction of the normative middle-class subject. Furthermore, the construction of the other as objects of disgust helps

construct a stigmatised subject position for the other's self, which facilitates the (re)oppression of the other. The grotesque imagery that depicts the benefits claimants as disgusting, coupled with an othering discourse, feeds into a wider neoliberal rhetoric of irresponsibility and blame. This reflects a contemporary snapshot of historically documented disgust towards the poor. In the texts, the omnipotent narrator bridges the gap between the viewer (self) and the participant (other), and ultimately guides the (disgusted) emotions of the viewer. The narrator speaks down to the participants in a condescending manner, continually contradicting their outlook on their personal circumstances, and labelling them in ways that mark them as abnormal, irresponsible, immoral and stupid: other.

The narration of the texts employs a typical othering discourse which uses us/them distinctions, as exemplified in the aforementioned opening narration of *Benefits and Bypasses*: the habits affecting 'their health' are 'costing us a fortune'. Distinctions are set up throughout *Benefits and Bypasses* between 'the doctors and nurses trying to deal with the consequences' and the 'billion pound patients'. This is often stylistically achieved by editing patient dialogue adjacent to the doctor's moralising discourse, and framing the patient/doctor binary in a split shot where each subject takes up half the frame. Regarding the grotesque, the patient/doctor binary is a reflection of the ab/normality binary.

Elsewhere in the texts, the narrator separates 'some' people from the 'norm':

> For *some* being overweight means a lifetime on benefits (OB: 100 Stone)
>
> Whilst *some people* commit to diet and exercise, Rachael believes the gastric bypass is the only way to get her weight down (OB: 100 Stone)

The phrasing here suggests an assumption that the viewers do not belong to the other group, which maintains the boundary between the normal and abnormal. It is also indicative of separations within the texts, providing a litmus test as to how 'bad' the participants are, and how harshly they are to be judged. For instance, *100 Stone and on the Dole* makes distinctions between overweight people who go to work and those on benefits: the latter are doubly stigmatised. Paradoxically, there is also an implied judgment of Rachael, who is 'on benefits' and feels she must lose weight to gain

employment (she describes her anxiety over her looks and her weight when applying for jobs, which suggests internalised stigma), for taking 'drastic measures, paid for by the state'. Here, Rachael is condemned for not working, for being fat *and* for not making attempts to lose weight the 'right way', through diet and exercise. However, as explored in the previous chapter, attempts to lose weight the 'right way' are utilised in the texts for comedic purposes, to humiliate the abject. Rachael is also condemned for being one of the 'some' who are reliant on taxpayers' money for treatment. Weight-loss surgery is presented as something extraordinary, alluding to preferential treatment for benefits claimants, when in reality weight-loss surgery is a common treatment carried out by the NHS.

This framing is also apparent in the explanation of Danny's diabetes treatment in relation to his status as a benefits claimant: Danny 'hasn't worked for twenty years' but 'like every other diabetes patient, he gets his prescriptions for free'. Once again, the narrator is in a position of judgment with an implication that Danny should not receive free prescriptions because he is on benefits. In addition, there is another layer of judgement because his illness is self-inflicted (diabetes through weight gain). This position is consolidated by the narration that 'being overweight has made Danny ill and landed the NHS a big fat bill'; the NHS is funded by the taxpayer and Danny has not contributed to this, which is indicative of an us/them, taxpayer/benefits binary. Also, Danny keeps his medication in a large Stork margarine tub, which serves as an amusing visual irony satirising the context of his condition (see Frame 19); the fatty margarine has hypothetically contributed to his obesity, and ultimately his diabetes. This is grotesque in nature: Danny unintentionally flips the narrative of fat guilt (common in other 'factual' depictions of obesity and weight loss) as he does not appear to be fazed by diabetes, or his upcoming weight-loss surgery, or how much money his treatment has cost. Rather, his main concern is his 'love' of food and how this might be affected post-surgery. The image of the margarine tub holding his medication, paired with the judgmental narration, contributes to the framing of Danny as irresponsible and immoral: he has no remorse for being a benefits claimant. It is exactly this lack of guilty feeling that makes him a perfect candidate for portrayal in the text. Danny becomes a grotesque send-up of himself, a satirical version of a diabetes patient.

7.4.2 Unconventional Othering

Asides from the traditional othering discourse outlined above, the writers of the narrations employ a novel othering technique: the ironic us/we juxtaposed with the other. For instance, the opening narration of *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* uses collective pronouns at the start and end of the sequence:

> Britain is getting fatter and as *our* waistline grows so does the burden on the benefits system. . . a growing number of overweight and obese people have been signed off, on the sick. . . dealing with obesity costs the state billions. . . *some* want to work. . . *others* say they simply can't. . . and *some* claim they are only getting what they are entitled too. . .Britain is changing and *we are all* paying the price. . . are *we* fast becoming a nation that is simply too fat to work?

Here, the use of the collective *our* and *we* separates the other by subtly prompting the viewer to think 'that is not me' (Kimmich 1998) thus separating themselves as subject from the object. The collective pronouns are juxtaposed with statements regarding the benefits lifestyles of *some* people: for instance, 'our waistline' versus the 'burden on the benefits system', which arguably reminds the viewer of the taxpayer/benefits, us/them, ab/normal distinctions. There is further complexity between the collective *we* in 'we are all paying the price' and *we* as a nation. The *we* who are paying the price evidently does not refer to the participants in the texts as they do not pay tax, which again suggests the taxpayer/benefits distinction. On the other hand, the national *we* includes the doubly stigmatised people on benefits who are allegedly 'too fat to work' and excludes the normative subject. Similarly, the aforementioned opening of *Benefits and Bypasses* states that smoking, drinking and overeating are 'making us all ill', employing the ironic collective *us*. However, the next line about how it is also 'costing us a fortune' makes it explicit that 'billion pound patients' are not part of the normative *us*. By employing this othering technique, both *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* and *Benefits and Bypasses* set up insidious distinctions between the working class and an 'underclass' made up of benefits claimants, and benefits claimants who are disabled, overweight, or who 'abuse' the NHS. All of these categories are other but the texts make distinctions between them by implying that *some* are worse, or more other. This allows the other to engage in

othering, thus these already oppressed groups abject a similar other, or abject the self. This is evident in scenes where participants attempt to distance themselves from the stigma attached to benefits receipt by making distinctions between themselves and *other* benefits claimants. Furthermore, one can assume some viewers of the texts are likely to be part of an othered group so the othering discourse in the texts allows them to think 'that is not me', reinforcing the above distinctions. The grotesque imagery that depicts the corporeality of the participants as abnormal makes the process of abjection easier as they have already transgressed the boundaries of the subject to become an object of disgust.

As explored in the previous chapter, the 'benefits mum' label marks the women in the texts as other because they are lacking the morals, responsibility and finances to legitimately care for their children. However, it is not just the abject mother who is associated with the benefits label; the term is employed throughout the texts to describe just about anything. For instance, in *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, the narrator describes home and family life using phrases such as 'benefits bungalow', 'bigger and better benefits home' (S2E5), 'tiny benefits bedsit', 'big benefits pad', 'new benefits life' (S2E6), 'benefits flat' (S2E11), 'big benefits families' (S1E2), 'benefits baby' (S1E4) and 'benefits hubby number two' (S2E11). Food and alcohol consumption is described as 'cooking up a feast, benefits style' (S2E5), 'big benefits bender' (S2E6), and 'benefits diet' (OB: 100 Stone). The continuous use of 'benefits' as an adjective confirms what the texts set out to do: centre the narrative around benefits and frame 'life on benefits' as a nonchalant choice, rather than depict life in poverty. More importantly, it helps to (re)create us/them distinctions, specifically taxpayer/benefits distinctions. The common use of 'benefits' to describe home and family life connotes that the essential things most people 'work for' (such as a family home in which to bring up children), people on benefits have received from the state. Further, these depictions of benefits claimants imply their finances stretch beyond these essentials and they can afford 'luxuries' such as bigger and better homes, drinking benders, weddings, pets and cable television packages. Overall, this discursive technique reminds *us*, the taxpayers, that *we* are funding *their* lifestyle.

7.5 Fat Failures of Neoliberalism

The portrayal of the obese other is unashamedly demonstrated in shows such as *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work* and *On Benefits: 100 Stone and on the Dole*. Fat embodiment represents failure: the inability to be a self-regulating, neoliberal citizen. Thus, in the context of poverty porn texts, fat is symbolic of a culturally constructed underclass characterised by excess and laziness. The varying degrees to which the fat body, as a symbol of 'the failed self' (Murray 2004: 239), is a gendered and sexualised category is explored in the next three sections on representations of the unsexed and undesirable fat woman; the fetishised fat woman; and the emasculated and infantilised fat man.

In Bakhtinian terms, fat is bound to sexuality because both notions relate to the lower bodily stratum: 'the life of the belly and the reproductive organs' (1984: 21). The grotesque body 'discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, child-birth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation' (1984: 26). In its unlimited growth, the grotesque represents a cycle of life and death, which, in its abject form, reminds the subject of their own mortality. The acts of sex and (over)eating facilitate the growth of the grotesque body, and can be attributed to the fetishisation of fat. In representations of the 'benefits scrounger', there are clear symbolic relationships between life, sex, food and death: in this context, the continual referral to 'morbid obesity' connotes a death sentence at the expense of the taxpayer.

7.5.1 Unsexed and Undesirable

With regards to femininity and sexuality, fat is at once a symbol of abject fecundity and undesirability. Fat women are paradoxically considered overtly sexual, yet evoke feelings of fear and disgust. They are 'represented as threatening, because hunger has always been a cultural metaphor for female sexuality, desire, and power' (Stukator 2001: 199). The fat woman presents a paradox: she is 'supposed to be asexual', yet 'her body is seen as one of gluttonous obsessions and unchecked desires' (Murray 2004: 239-241). Because the 'fat woman appears as an uncared for, unmanaged, excessive body' who 'does not fulfil feminine expectations of beauty and submission' (Murray 2004: 241-243), she is an affront to normative female sexuality. As part of the capitalist neoliberal project, subjects have become commodities: their worth is based on their

exchangeable 'value' or, as Bourdieu suggests, on their varying degrees of capital. However, as Murray argues, 'in the mainstream sexual marketplace, fat bodies are not marketable commodities' (2004: 239). One might argue further that fat bodies on benefits have even less symbolic and marketable value. This construction of fat female embodiment has rendered it undesirable, and the female's assumed voracious appetite for desire takes place in the form of food, rather than sex. Of course, in grotesquery, sex and food are symbolically linked. The majority of the female participants in the texts are represented as unsexed insofar as sex and romantic relationships are off limits: (un)sexuality is present in its absence. Various depictions of the women as 'uncared for, 'unmanaged' and 'uncontained' (Murray 2004) represent fat female embodiment as undesirable.

In the texts there is a visual relationship between embodiment and environment, both being 'uncared for, unmanaged' (Murray 2004). In one scene of *Benefits and Bypasses*, Rochelle struggles to get out of her messy bed in her unkempt bedroom, and in another it looks as if the bed is collapsing beneath her weight. These scenes are paralleled with close-up shots of her eating a big portion of curry, drinking a large bottle of full-fat Coca-Cola, taking sugar in her tea and chain smoking, despite obviously struggling to breathe (see Frame 20). Observed together, this collection of images suggest Rochelle makes little investment in her health or appearance. This lack of care for herself and her mother's home are signified by her oral vices: eating, drinking, smoking. The biggest signifier of Rochelle's ill health is illustrated in close-up shots of her rotting, scabby foot and fungal-infected toenails. Rochelle does not mention her feet as a health issue, and this imagery is used to evoke disgust and repulsion, and remind the viewer that Rochelle cannot care for herself.

Similarly, in *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work*, Rachael 'fills her time' looking after her pet rats which, when paralleled with shots of her house covered in clutter, signifies dirt, smell, plague and an unclean living space. Rachael makes attempts to be feminine by wearing green eyeshadow and dying her hair (see Frame 21a) but this is in contrast to her unruly eyebrows and double-chin. Her 'uncontained' facial hair (and flesh) are a symbol of masculinity and a failure to conform to normative beauty standards where women have hairless faces and bodies. In one scene, Rachael appears to use her stomach as a table for her cup of tea, which combines object with embodiment (see Frame 21b). In *Ben£its:*

Too Fat to Work, Amy is very 'butch' in appearance: she wears male-gendered clothing such as oversized sportswear and football tops and has a short, mullet-esque hairstyle (see Frame 22). Harker suggests that fat *male* embodiment 'threatens the coherence of gender' (2016: 989) as the 'softened contours' of the body 'masquerade' as feminine hips and breasts (2016: 986). However, Amy also blurs the boundaries of gender by wearing oversized clothing and making no apparent attempts to feminise her appearance or capitalise on her femininity, as her own 'softened contours' are unrecognisable as hips or breasts. In one scene, Amy and her mother are filmed struggling to both fit in their bathroom (see Frame 23). The tight shot exaggerates the size of the two women as they can barely fit in the bathroom or the frame: they 'take up too much space' (Murray 2004: 243). Their excessive embodiment in contrast to the bathroom connotes the potential uncleanliness and poor hygiene of the women as they cannot use the bathroom facilities properly.

In *100 Stone and on the Dole*, 30-stone Kathleen, who is perhaps the woman most debilitated by her weight, spends the majority of her time on the sofa as she struggles to do basic household tasks (for example, she has to sit awkwardly on a computer chair to do the washing up). Wrapped in blankets and enveloped by her oversized frame, Kathleen's embodiment and environment seem engulfed in each other as she sinks into the sofa (see Frame 24). Kathleen is at once a 'monster of excess' and a 'hybrid monster' (Edwards and Graulund 2013). The visual relationship between embodiment and environment highlighted in all these scenes depict the women as unruly, unhygienic and undesirable partners (or mothers, or daughters). In the relationship between Kathleen and her husband James, he takes on an almost parental role as her feeder, rather than a romantic partner. Kathleen's son, Steven, also spends most of his time cooking for his mother (he too is unemployed). The woman who is so fat that she cannot care for herself is undesirable, yet the debilitation of fat women is a key characteristic and a point of arousal in feeder porn (Murray 2004; Kyrölä 2011). In feeder porn, the fat woman is fed 'to the point where she is completely immobilized, so fat she can no longer move, clean herself or leave the house' (Murray 2004: 244). While the women in these texts are not necessarily being force fed for someone else's sexual gratification, their partners, parents, and/or children are complicit in their overeating, facilitating their desire for food. Although poverty porn does not intend to arouse the viewer in a sexual sense like

feeder porn, it does aim 'to arouse and stimulate the viewer, to provoke an emotional sensation through a repetitive and affective encounter with the television screen' (Jensen 2014: 4). The emotional sensation here is disgust and, as explored previously, disgust and desire share a complex emotional relationship, which is especially true in the case of fetish. Thus, the texts depict an embodiment that can be paradoxically the site of disgust and fetishised desire. As Kyrölä argues, the tendency to equate obesity with self-destruction in mainstream media 'makes fat bodies often appear distant if not absent as persons, but overly close as matter without depth: dehumanized fetish objects' (2011: 142). However, although a lot of scenes in these texts take place in the women's bedrooms, an obvious environment for arousal in porn, the women's struggle to get out of bed is used to humiliating effect rather than to titillate.

7.5.2 Capital and Fetishization

The analysed texts fail to explore the prospect that some women enjoy being fat. While the texts make it abundantly clear that being fat is a choice, this choice is a pathological one, not a desirable one. However, research into online erotic content and webcam play featuring BBW (big beautiful women) suggests some women reclaim the stigma of being fat and actively use it in exchange for sexual and economic capital. For instance, Lavis argues the term BBW online 'is employed to assert desirability, rather than abjection, of a fat female body' (2015: 1), and by 'establishing a fat female – and indeed eating – body as desirable, these videos instead denote themselves as spaces of fat acceptance' (2015: 2). Supporting this, Jones asserts that BBW 'who perform online as erotic webcam performers use their bodies, not just their words, to challenge anti-fat culture' (2018: 2). Indeed, by labelling themselves BBW, these women 'challenge anti-fat discourses' (2018: 2). In these online performances, these women utilise the very thing that determines their 'failed' citizenship and supposed undesirability - eating to excess - to establish their sexuality and desirability for financial gain. This is carnivalesque in nature as the BBW content intentionally challenges existing oppressive systems. The intention to challenge is perfectly illustrated by Madeline, a BBW performer who asserts that BBW get 'paid to be fat when the world tells me I'm invisible and simultaneously a drain on the system' (Jones 2018: 8). In *100 Stone and on the Dole*, Sarah aspires to be a plus-sized model and is building an online portfolio under her alter ego, Baby Jane. Having not received any paid modelling work, her husband Anthony sets up an account on a

live webcam site where 'fans' of Sarah can pay to 'chat' to her. Sarah/Baby Jane might be considered a BBW, as Lavis and Jones suggest; she is embarking on a 'camming' career as a means of financial (and sexual) empowerment and to provide for her family. However, the narrative of empowerment is not employed in the text. Rather, her status as an erotic performer is used to ridicule Sarah as the narrator describes Baby Jane as 'her *surprising* alter ego', reflecting the persistent anti-fat discourse that deems fat unattractive. Further, the narrative suggests that despite her attempts to use her sexuality to become economically secure, Sarah/Baby Jane is still a 'drain on the system' because she is 'on the dole'.

In the text, plus-size modelling or live webcam chat is not a legitimate career choice for Sarah because she lacks symbolic capital: as a morbidly obese benefits claimant, she does not have the right to perform her sexuality or profit from it. This is illustrated in scenes that juxtapose discussions of Sarah's weight, morbidity and unemployment with imagery of her modelling, or posing provocatively in lingerie or outfits typically marketed for sexual role play. When we are introduced to 'unemployed 30-year-old Sarah', a range of establishing character shots are used such as a giggling Sarah walking down the street alone, and Sarah and her husband walking hand-in-hand through the town centre. In these shots there are two concurrent and related actions: the camera dollies out, moving backwards as Sarah gets closer to the lens while struggling to walk (see Frame 25a). The use of the dolly helps to illustrate how Sarah's size is disabling her, as it moves in reverse slow motion, dictated by her pace. This method also maintains a space, or void, between Sarah and the viewer, creating a visual boundary between ab/normality. In the following shot, the camera is set up outside a local supermarket and fixes on Sarah as she and her family exit. Sarah walks past the camera until the shot is a close-up of her breasts and stomach (see Frame 25b). Here, Sarah becomes a 'Headless Fatty', a phenomenon in which fat people are 'reduced and dehumanised as symbols of cultural fear: the body, the belly, the arse, food' (Cooper 2007), a grotesque manifestation that focuses on the lower bodily stratum. As the scene transitions into Sarah's family home, the narrator explains that 'Sarah is 5ft 1ins and weighs 27 stone, which is around 17 stone heavier than the average healthy weight for her height'. This plays over a shot of Sarah pulling out a pink role-play outfit from her wardrobe, holding the material against her body (as one might when purchasing new clothes), then

returning it to her wardrobe (see Frame 26). The view into her wardrobe reveals other role-play outfits such as sailor and nurse costumes. As this early scene does not provide the context of Sarah's part-time profession (her modelling career is revealed later in the programme), this glimpse into her personal and sexual life, juxtaposed with the narration of her abnormal weight, presents a mutual exclusivity between obesity and sexuality.

As Sarah closes her wardrobe, a non-diegetic audio clip accompanies the visual in which Sarah starts to explain, 'My doctor told me "this time next year you're gonna be dead". I ate because I was depressed. I was bored. And the only thing that was my comfort was food.' Here, talk of her own morbidity edited to supplement the above scene might symbolise Sarah closing the door on her life, as her obesity takes her closer to death. This method of audio-visual editing provides a stark contrast between sex and death, which affirms sexuality and obesity (as the precursor to death) as mutually exclusive. The shot cuts to Sarah sitting on her sofa, and the audio becomes diegetic as a piece to camera (see Frame 27). The camera is positioned in line with the sofa, focusing on her stomach, arms, breasts and face; Sarah has to look down into the camera, creating an unflattering framing of her body and face. Spatially, this shot is interesting as Sarah is positioned in the middle of the frame, exaggerating how much space she takes up, perhaps serving as visual hyperbole. A close-up of Sarah's head and shoulders follows, highlighting the excess weight around her face. In this excerpt, Sarah divulges that poor mental health and consequential comfort eating are the cause of her weight gain, but the text does little else to address the reasons for her diet, such as the use of food as a psychological crutch, or the cost of fresh food, which might be at odds with a benefits 'income'.

> The doctor would like me to be a size 12, 'cus that's what I should be for my ideal weight. I think you should be the size that you want to be. As long as you're comfortable and happy, then you be what you wanna be.

The above piece to camera follows another transitionary clip of Sarah struggling to walk down the street (See Frame 28). The scene changes and Sarah is sitting in front of a fuchsia-red wall hanging that fills the background of the shot; the camera is directly facing her in a mid-shot of her breasts, shoulders and face. The mise-en-scène resembles

a confession booth or diary-room style typical of reality television, potentially encouraging Sarah to talk more freely and provide more scintillating soundbites. Here, Sarah confesses her weight-related transgressions and implies she has ignored her doctor's advice by visibly refusing to conform to the ideal, or 'normal', weight. Her attempts at autonomy, to be 'what you wanna be', are rebuked through the ideological implication that only subjects with economic and symbolic capital, who have contributed to society, have the right to choose. Sarah represents the failed, un-regulated grotesque body: choice, or the neoliberal myth of choice, is not available to her. As (un)employment and (over)weight are in a symbolic and symbiotic relationship here, Sarah can only accrue capital and subject value when she loses weight and gains proper employment.

Lavis (2015) and Jones (2018) explore the ways BBW negotiate fetishisation, pleasure, and the power dynamics between producer and viewer. One might argue fetishisation contributes to the oppression of a minority group by sexually objectifying them. Jones suggests 'racism, sexism, cissexism, fatphobia, homophobia and other social factors motivate people who fetishize other people's bodies' (2018: 16). However, within the world of BBW content and consumption, fetishisation also reflects a more complex relationship between power and pleasure. Some women find pleasure in the role of a fetishised object because it contradicts the societal view that fat women are unattractive (Jones 2018). Lavis' analysis illustrates that while the women assert 'the pleasures of becoming fat' (2015: 2) in their videos, the viewer who tells them what to consume has a level of power and control. This is demonstrated in *100 Stone and on the Dole* as Sarah (Baby Jane) recounts a live chat session with one of her fans:

> I basically sat here, had a little bit of cleavage showing. One guy says "can you stand up and show me your figure?" So I basically had to stand up and show my figure.

Baby Jane is an object of fetishisation who must be responsive to the requests of her fans/customers. Despite Baby Jane offering a live chat service, the fans are more interested in her body than her conversation. Further, there appears to be a subtle power dynamic between Sarah and her husband Anthony, especially as he set up the live chat page for Baby Jane. As Anthony explains, 'I'm very proud of Sarah for what she

does. It's a bit of – erm – a ego boost – it can be – when you've got guys saying how good looking your wife is', it is apparent that he too has something to gain from Sarah's endeavours. While Sarah feels empowered by pursuing a modelling career, Anthony, although supportive, is encouraging Sarah to engage in erotic webcam play to boost his own ego.

Throughout the episode, Sarah/Baby Jane attempts to exert her sexual autonomy and power by posing provocatively for the camera. In one scene, Sarah wears black lacy lingerie and bends over, flashing her cleavage, showing off paw print tattoos on her breasts (see Frame 29a). The setting is her bedroom, decorated with red, white and black *Playboy* motif curtains and a matching clock. The narrator states that as 'an amateur plus-sized model, Sarah is determined to build a career and a brand for herself'. However, Sarah's provocatively placed tattoos combined with the décor connote a lack of taste. The infamous bunny logo of the internationally renowned pornography magazine *Playboy* has been appropriated by Sarah who does not have the conventional sexuality of a typical *Playboy* 'bunny'. In this context, Sarah does not have the symbolic capital to 'pull off' glamorous female sexuality. The shot transitions to footage of Sarah posing in the pink role-play outfit she took out of her wardrobe in the earlier scene (see Frame 29b). By posing in outfits that are hyper-typical of pop-cultural references to erotica and 'spicing up' one's sex life, Baby Jane becomes a parody of a porn star; she embodies different fetishes in these 'roles'. Throughout the episode, the camera focuses on Sarah's computer screen and the images of her online Baby Jane portfolio (see Frame 30). This allows the viewer to see Baby Jane through the fetishising gaze of her 'fans', or customers. However, because of the added symbolic layer of disgust that poverty porn texts reflect, this gaze takes place among fat-phobic, anti-welfare ideology, presenting a paradox of obesity as both arousing and repulsive. Sarah is figuratively and literally excessive: her overt sexuality is paradoxically embodied in her morbidly obese frame. As Bakhtin (1984) suggests, life and death flow together within the lower bodily stratum. Jones (2018) argues that fetishisation can encourage feelings of empowerment, self-love and a positive 'self-concept' for some BBW. Sarah's reflections on her amateur modelling career support this position:

> Modelling makes me feel good about myself, it makes me feel sexy and just brings my personality out; and I like the two sides of me, I like the

> Sarah and I like the Baby Jane but I enjoy Baby Jane because she's just so much fun.

However, one might argue that *100 Stone and on the Dole* does not properly portray the positive aspects of modelling or camming because of the continual reiteration of Sarah's size in relation to her status as a benefits claimant. This is especially apparent in the narration 'with Sarah's modelling not yet bringing in any cash, she's decided to apply for more state help to top up the family's £2700-a-year benefits'. Sarah's worth is relational to her 'benefits lifestyle' so, despite her feelings of positive self-worth, the key difference between Sarah and the BBW in Jones' and Lavis' research, is capital.

7.5.3 Emasculation and Infantilism

While fat female embodiment is a symbolic site of disgust, desire and fetishisation, this section argues that fat male embodiment is represented as an emasculated, workless other. In most cases, the fat man is demasculinised and infantilised, and becomes a sort of comical figure, void of sexuality. Like fat female sexuality (as outlined above), Harker (2016) argues that fat male sexuality is represented in paradoxical ways: monstrous/destructive or infantile/presexual.

> Paradoxically, fat male sex doesn't exist and in existing, pollutes. In the culture-marking/reinforcing work of representation, fat men are most typically asexual – represented as presexual child-men still gratified by the orality of ingestion…or physical incapables, their desire and capacity sublimated to cerebral accomplishment…Yet simultaneous with such non-representation, fat masculinity is also hyper-sexualised…fat male desire is both of these things at once: unrestrained, all-consuming self-indulgence and simultaneously a wholesale failed physicality of which sexual impotence is both sign and signifier (Harker 2016: 981).

One might argue that within the analysed texts, the depiction of fat male sexual desire is eradicated altogether, there only remains the oral desire for food. There is no room for hyper-sexualisation here. It should be noted that like the filmic examples Harker references (Baron Harkonnen, Jabba the Hut and Fat Bastard), the men featured in the analysis are coded as monstrous because their embodiment has been taken to the

extremes of exaggeration. However, unlike Harker's examples, there is no 'active sexual desire' (2016: 987), or at least it is not depicted on screen. Like Kathleen and James' marriage (outlined earlier), in *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work*, Stephen (who has appeared several times on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*) and his fiancée Michelle appear to have a carer-patient, mother-child relationship rather than a romantic one, despite their forthcoming wedding . Love and romance (and sex) subside here as the overarching narrative is their unsuccessful attempts to lose weight and the cost of their 'benefits wedding'. When Stephen is rushed to hospital during their wedding reception, Michelle reveals her concerns: 'I reckon Stephen will be on benefits most of his life because of his weight and stuff like that. I'm going to have to be his carer for basically the rest of his life probably'. Since the show was broadcast, there have several sensationalist tabloid articles published about the pair such as 'Couple who had their £3,000 wedding paid for by the tax-payer because they are "too fat to work" celebrate their first wedding anniversary with a KFC'. This article includes unflattering and invasive paparazzi-esque photographs of 'Britain's fattest benefits scroungers' eating a 'bargain bucket' (Glanfield 2015). YouTube clips of the couple's joint appearance on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (deleted due to the axing of the ITV show) were captioned 'Stephen and Michelle Beer from "Too Fat to Work"' (2016a), '"Too Fat to Work" Couple Clash with Transgender Love Rival' (2016b) and 'Obese Couple Exposed by Lie Detector Test' (2016c). The surrounding tabloid coverage read 'Too Fat to Work benefits scrounger who failed Jeremy Kyle lie detector "cheated on his wife with transgender taxi driver' (Gordon and Wyke 2016), and 'PULL YOUR WEIGHT: "Fat scrounger" Steve Beer asks transgender Lotto winner for thousands of pounds for weight loss surgery after claims he had affair with her' (Birchall 2018). Stephen's apparent desire to take the 'transgender virginity' of Melissa (Allen 2017) marks him as perversely sexual: 'fat may signify the diversion of "normal" desires into illegitimate and perverse channels' (Forth 2013: 391). However, when it is revealed by Jeremy Kyle's lie detector that Stephen and Melissa did not have an affair – Stephen apparently created the story to make Michelle jealous – his failed and potentially impotent sexuality is signified (Harker 2016) and Jeremy tells Michelle 'you and your disgusting husband. . . you are as bad as each other!' (The Jeremy Kyle Show 2016c).

When Stephen is first introduced in *Ben£its: Too Fat to Work*, the framing and imagery reduces him to a grotesque sum of his parts by progressively focusing on various bits of

his swollen, excessive body. The scene opens with a long shot of Stephen and Michelle on their sofa, presenting familiar poverty porn imagery as the sofa sinks under Stephen's weight; his flesh and the sage-green leatherette of the sofa engulf each other, made even more visually hyperbolic due to the tight framing of the shots (see Frame 31a). As the narrator states Stephen and Michelle's respective weights (31 stone and 23 stone) the shot cuts to a close-up of Stephen's stomach as he gets up off the sofa, then to his oversized arms and chest. Stephen proudly shows off his stomach, pulling up his t-shirt and patting it. This is quickly followed by close-up shots of his swollen, scabby and sore ankles, and Stephen explains he has cellulitis (see Frame 31b), which might be considered a grotesque 'bodily mutation' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 2). Throughout the episode, there are continuous unflattering shots of Stephen: shoulder shots and close-ups that show his heavy jowls, spit in the corner of his mouth, perhaps some visual impairment (see Frame 32a), and a mid-shot of his trousers slipping, slightly revealing his backside as he sits down (see Frame 32b). As Bakhtin notes, the grotesque is 'ugly, monstrous, hideous' (1984: 25) and the imagery of Stephen's face in such close quarters aims to depict Stephen as just that. Further, the image of his buttocks, common in grotesque realism, is used for comedic effect to humiliate and ridicule the subject (Bakhtin 1984; Edwards and Graulund 2013).

> Stephen: Can't get in the shower, you know else I'd get stuck in the shower wouldn't I? So I've got a carer to come in and they kind of like wash me and dress me and sort me out and everything.

Stephen struggles to move through the house as he shows the camera crew around, the tight frame tracking shows him barely fitting through a door frame. As the camera tracks into the bathroom, the dialogue above conjures a grotesque and comical image that reveals Stephen's severe inability to care for himself: like an infant, he cannot wash or dress himself. This image is realised in a later scene when Stephen's carer, Ruth, comes to wash him, a service that 'costs the taxpayer £8000 a year'. Stephen is in focus, sitting on the sofa getting washed, physically lifting up his stomach so Ruth can wash underneath it with a cloth (see Frame 33). The degrading scene culminates in Ruth pulling up Stephen's trousers like a mother would after changing a baby's nappy. Not only is Stephen reduced to his body parts here as his face is out of shot, his body signifies a failed man, emasculated and infantilised. Furthermore, Michelle has to accompany

Stephen on a shopping trip for new clothes. Michelle recounts how Stephen, for whom size 6XL is a struggle, 'has trouble with the buttons because his fingers are too fat', creating a symbolic apposition between the extremely excessive embodiment of a man and a child that cannot dress itself.

Leisure activities also convey the infantile behaviours of the men. In *On Benefits: 100 Stone and on the Dole*, both Bryan and James (in unrelated narratives) have taken up childish hobbies. For different reasons, both men struggle to leave their respective homes: Bryan has multiple sclerosis and James has agoraphobia, although as narrated, 'Bryan says he feels trapped in his third-floor council flat – going out for lunch affords him the opportunity to break up his day', and 'to supplement his £8000 benefits, James has a part-time door-to-door sales job'. Due to their health issues, both have 'indoor' hobbies playing with various 'toys'. James shows off one of his collectible model cars, which cost him £70, as his 'little pride and joy' while Bryan calls one of his crossbows his 'little toy'. The narrator states Bryan 'saved up his benefits to kit himself out' and this is followed by a scene of Bryan proudly showing off his 'hits' on a makeshift target. Both men are also shown spending a lot of time browsing social media and watching television. Thus, 49-year-old Bryan and 35-year-old James seem to have regressed: both their fat embodiment and their hobbies reflect their status as 'child-men' (Harker 2016). As Kyrölä argues, fat 'as it is habitually represented in western mainstream media, has become a readily available sign of adult regression into infantilism or inability to develop "past" it' (2011: 128).

Fat is culturally coded as favouring oral pleasure over sexual pleasure, or as Kyrölä continues, 'fat signals assumed greed for immediate gratification, lack of autonomous and sustainable moderation, preference for narcissistic and oral autoerotic pleasure over "more mature" genital and partner-oriented pleasure' (2013: 128). This signals a Freudian notion where challenges to the development of a child might explain 'obesity and overeating as a fixation of the personality at the early oral stage of psychosexual development' (Bray 1997: 154). While Kyrölä (2011) suggests that in feeder porn, women are infantilised and men are sexualised (one can argue this is dependent on the textual examples she uses and the relationships of power and autonomy depicted), in poverty porn, it is men who are infantilised by their oral desires. There is a visual symmetry between Bryan (OB:100S) and Stephen (BTFTW) in scenes where Bryan

struggles to reverse out of a fast-food shop after picking up his regular lunch order (Frame 34) and Stephen rides on his mobility scooter – as Michelle trails behind – past Iceland, a well-known budget frozen food supermarket (Frame 35). Furthermore, there is a visual focus on their food intake and the way they eat, recorded in close-up. As Bryan takes his burger out of its wrapper, he makes a groaning sound, proclaiming 'Look at that crème-de-la-crème, that's like heaven, I think I've even started salivating before I've eaten it'. This is followed by a close-up of Bryan shoving the burger into his mouth (see Frame 36). Bryan groans again as he eats the burger then states 'oh absolutely gorgeous! Out of all the burgers I have eaten over the years. . . if it was marked out of 10, it would be 15 because it is absolutely the best'. Comical music accompanies the scene, which portrays a grotesque and humorous relationship between Bryan and his burger as he describes it as if it was a sexual partner. In a scene of Stephen eating, the camera is in close-up as he sloppily consumes an enormous portion of what Michelle calls 'basgeti bolognese' as a mother might say to their child (in BBLOTD:S2E5 Claire says this to her children), which is made out of two packets of minced meat. Stephen is childlike in the way he eats, slobbering over his meal as he asks Michelle's permission to eat the whole tub of ice-cream (see Frame 37). As Harker argues, 'gormandize is a doubled signifier: it both reinforces the traditional belief that fat people are synonymously gluttons and presents an embodiment in which an adult body seems safely arrested in an infantile, supposedly presexual state' (2016: 985). Here, both of the men's desire is for food rather than sex: Bryan treats his consumption as if it were a sexual encounter while Stephen reflects an infantile pre-sexual stage focused on immediate oral gratification. Both representations show the men as emasculated and infantilised.

7.5.4 Fat, Camp and Queer

Unlike male heteronormative fatness – which is depicted as infantile – in the analysed texts, queer fat identity has a sexualised element. In *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S2E6), Dean is the epitome of excess: he is overweight, over-the-top camp, and extremely vain about his self-perceived attractiveness, which portrays his sexuality. For instance, in his introductory scene, Dean poses in bed with provocative facial expressions such as pouting and biting his bottom lip as he exclaims 'I like taking selfies because I'm a vain bitch!' (see Frame 38). Dean uses the word 'bitch', usually a derogatory term for a woman, to portray his comfort with the queering of gender

norms. As Mann argues, 'gay men have adopted and ameliorated bitch and use it as a form of address for other gay men' (2011: 807). Dean talks about himself as a 'bitch' to display his homosexuality. However, while Dean poses for a selfie, the shot cuts to a close-up of his hairy, bloated stomach hanging out under his t-shirt. This creates a juxtaposition as Dean tries to assert his attractiveness and sexuality, while the framing of the shot conveys his grotesqueness.

In another scene, Dean and his two friends take Dean's benefits from an ATM. As the close-up shot focuses on Dean counting out the notes in his hand, he says 'Job Centre's Job Centre at the end of the day, it's basically free money!'. The shot cuts to Dean and his friends walking and, in a camp, high-pitched put-on voice, Dean exclaims 'Let's go shopping!' as he performs a 'jazz hands' movement. He continues 'I feel rich, literally feel rich – it's not much but it's money to me' as he lights a cigarette. His friend Jordan says 'that ain't gunna last him an hour' to which Dean retorts 'give it a half hour!' Here, Dean's campness betrays his irresponsibility: his effeminate performance of gender for the entertainment of his friends is based on his excessive spending habits. Later, Dean and his friends go on a night out, and the narrator explains 'Dean and his mates have been on the lash for hours and it's already turning into a big benefits bender' as Dean sticks up two fingers and pouts at the camera. His friend grabs hold of Dean's shirt, and Dean says 'ooh, you touched my boobie'. Again, Dean insinuates a blurring of gendered boundaries, which in this context might relate to his fat embodiment that mimics a female body (Harker 2016) as 'monsters of hybridity may be gender hybrids' (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 47). While his friends and other punters debate whether Dean can afford to buy another drink with his benefits, Dean shouts at one of his friends: 'Do I pay for booze?! No! People buy it for me cos I'm worth it! . . . You're not worth it. I am. So, screw you!' The dialogue is accompanied by a hand on the hip and a fake flick of the hair. Dean's exclamation of 'cos I'm worth it' might be a reference to cosmetics brand L'Oréal's famous slogan while the intonation on 'so screw you' is a nod to Matt Lucas' *Little Britain* character Marjory Dawes, the leader of a local Fat Fighters group and a character Lucas performed in drag. Both these pop cultural references again suggest a queer performance of the gender boundaries. Dean's flamboyant speech and actions, and his sexuality indications – 'I need some hot men to flirt with' – are enacted by his obese frame and mark a grotesque relationship between fat, camp and sex.

7.6 The Leaking, Open Body

The abject body is one which is leaking and polluted. As Waskul and van der Riet argue, abject embodiment 'is a state in which coherent bodily boundaries erode and the self has little control over the leaking of blood, urine, feces, vomit, bile, pus and various other hideous bodily fluids' (202: 487). Similarly, the grotesque body 'is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple and changing' (Russo 1994: 8). Leakage, secretions and spillage are also associated with the disabled body, which has to be ideologically 'contained' at the 'micro-individual level, such as learning to contain one's own bodily fluids, but also at the macro level through, for example, processes of incarceration and categorization' (Liddiard and Slater 2018: 320). In its openness to 'the outside world', grotesque embodiment is concerned with 'the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it' (Bakhtin 1984: 26). One might assume this openness allows for leakage in and out of the body. Within the texts, the participants have 'allowed' different substances – food, alcohol and cigarettes – to enter their bodies in excess, and these substances have changed the composition of their bodies, leaving their borders open, compromised and, in some cases, corroded. The open and leaking body of the grotesque is always abject because it breaches symbolic, aesthetic and physical boundaries. As Edwards and Graulund summarise, abjection 'is a state of flux, where "meaning collapses", and the body is open and irregular, sprouting or protruding internal and external forms to link abjection to grotesquerie' (2013: 33). This section will focus on the open and leaking parts of Barry, Danny and Julie, participants in *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients* who are depicted in such visceral ways that they can only evoke disgust and blame rather than sympathy.

The narrator introduces Barry as he lights a cigarette: 'In Manchester, 57-year-old Barry is in no doubt that smoking 30 a day has seriously affected his health, but he's still smoking' (BB:BPP). The shot cuts to a close-up of the half-smoked cigarette in Barry's fingers, then to a shot behind Barry's head as he shakes it and candidly states 'I don't know why I still smoke to be honest . . . well if ya like something, why give it up if ya like it?'. As Barry stands up from his wheelchair and 'ouches' in pain, the camera pans from his upright position in line with his torso to a close-up of his clothed amputated leg (see Frame 39a). The precursory dialogue builds up this visual 'reveal', which frames Barry's amputated limb as something to marvel at. This 'freakish' alteration to his body is a

direct consequence of his continued smoking. Thus, the intention is to shock the viewer as Barry's nonchalant, even ignorant, attitude towards smoking has cost him his leg. A wider shot cuts to Barry standing upright, leaning against his wheelchair and the kitchen table, and the severity of his amputation is clear in comparison to his other leg. Non-diegetic solemn music plays over the scene to emphasise the direness of Barry's situation; this parallels a close-up of Barry's side profile as he stares longingly into the distance. Next, the shot cuts to four different angles of Barry lighting a cigarette: one extreme close-up in side profile; one over-the-shoulder shot; one from the front; and another close-up from Barry's ear (see Frame 39b). The quick succession of these different shots connotes Barry is a chain smoker and his irresponsibility is implied as the narrator explains how smoking 'has slowly killed off the tissue in Barry's legs – he's ignored all the doctors' advice and carried on smoking'. Accompanying this is a final extreme close-up of Barry putting a cigarette between his lips.

> Barry: They warned me, they worked on me, they warned me, they worked on me, they warned me, if I didn't stop "you know you're gonna lose your leg". I didn't stop, hence what happened. I lost me leg.

This admission suggests Barry had several chances to save his leg from amputation and again, his ignorance of doctors' advice. This portrayal of Barry might be considered through a lens of self-inflicted disability: his candid admissions combined with the narration and continual shots of him smoking ensure Barry is framed as irresponsible.

In his living room, when prompted by his health advisor, Barry reveals he has not cut down his cigarette intake: 'if I said yes, I'd be lying'. Barry then explains to his health advisor, 'I know it sounds silly but for what smoking's done to me, it's helped me through what I've been through if you know what I mean'. While briefly touching on the potential psychological implications of addiction (for instance, the nurse responds 'yeah it's like a crutch isn't it'), the text does not fully explore why Barry relies on cigarettes, similar to the non-depiction of such issues in relation to the overweight participants. Delving into such reasons might encourage a more sympathetic portrayal of the participants, and their omission allows the blame to be placed on the individual. Barry's health advisor wants to check on his amputation wound so Barry pulls down one side of his trousers to reveal a fleshy stump. It is alien-like in appearance, almost like a prosthetic; bulbous

with a sore red hole in the middle. The shot zooms in as Barry pulls at the skin with his nicotine-stained fingers, and then pushes the two parts of the stump together (see Frame 40a). A sort of monologue from Barry considering the cost to the NHS plays over the image, and the grotesque imagery of the stump symbolises the abuse of the NHS and state support. The shot cuts to the nurse prodding at the fleshy stump as she states 'it's lovely and healed – it's just this tiny bit in the middle' as she positions her fingers around the hole, indicating some of the wound is still open. In a later scene, Barry goes to the hospital to have another check-up. The camera focuses on the fleshy stump in close-up: this framing creates a visual disconnect from the rest of Barry's body, making the stump appear like an inanimate object on the bed, separated from Barry (see Frame 40b). The 'tiny bit in the middle' is more clearly visible than in the previous scene, and the stump appears to be in three lumps which are joined by the hole. Barry states 'oh it's a lot better, it's just the little bit there' as he points at the hole. Here, Barry is reduced to a freakish body part: we do not see his face as he converses with the doctor – the camera stays focused on his leg all the time. The total length of this shot is eight seconds, an extremely drawn out (and purposeful) shot compared to the rest of the scenes, and an admittedly uncomfortable amount of time to be confronted with the open wound. Edwards and Graulund suggest 'grotesque bodies are, at times, incomplete, lacking in vital parts, as they sometimes have pieces cut out of them: limbs are missing . . . and bodily mutations become dominant traits' (2013: 2). Barry's narrative centres on his bodily mutation, a missing limb, and the healing of the wound, which connotes its incompleteness. Further, Barry's amputated leg leaves him with another orifice: a gaping hole that provokes anxieties around infection and the associated leaky substances. The aim of the unnecessary detail in the shots, always in close-up, is to inspire disgust, fascination and repulsion; to gaze upon the self-inflicted 'freak'.

Both Danny and Julie are filmed having medical procedures: weight-loss surgery and biliary drainage, respectively. Scenes of Danny's surgery are shot in close proximity and show a multitude of apparatus, such as needles and tubes, inserted into his body (see Frame 41a). These processes, especially the tubing, make his body open and leaking, his 'coherent bodily boundaries erode' (Waskul and van der Riet), which marks Danny as abject. On the surgery table, Danny's bloated stomach protrudes from the blue sheets that cover the rest of his body, and he is surrounded by blue-clothed surgeons, only their

torsos and latex-gloved hands in sight (see Frame 41b). Like Barry, Danny is disconnected from his parts: the viewer is only privy to his stomach with four large holes punched into the flesh, kept open with various tubing and surgical 'grabbers'. The shot cuts continually between images of Danny's apparently lifeless (and headless) opened-up body, the screens on which the surgeons are looking *inside* his body, and the lead surgeon's moralising piece to camera about how much money patients such as Danny cost the NHS (see Frame 42). This culminates in an extreme close-up of 'grabbers' being inserted into the stomach and a final long shot of the surgeons gathered around Danny as they finish the surgery. Overall, the scene depicts a 'body envelope violation' of Danny: the visual detail of his surgery and the opening up of his body elicits disgust (Haidt, Rozin, McCauley and Imada 1997). Haidt, Rozin, McCauley and Imada (1997) suggest certain feelings of disgust evolve from the human need to be distinguished from animals, a need contradicted by bodily functions such as eating, excreting, sex and bleeding, which are common to humans and animals. Disgust and abjection are felt in relation to the polluting qualities of these things (Kristeva 1982; Miller 1997). The detail of Danny's surgery shown in such close proximity *dehumanises* him, illustrating his 'monstrous' embodiment so he is disgusting. Further, the on-screen images of the inside of his stomach (the lead surgeon explains 'all that yellow stuff is fat') reminds the viewer of the pollution inside Danny's body. Furthermore, the act of reducing the 'two-litre bag', as the surgeon calls Danny's stomach, to 50 millilitres is a modification that will remove a part of his body, which is a manifestation of the grotesque created by a surgical procedure. The attempts to make Danny's body 'normal' (the surgeon states he will lose two thirds of his body fat as a result of the procedure) ironically make him grotesque with monstrous surgically enhanced changes to his body.

The narrative surrounding Julie follows her in and out of hospital as she struggles with the effects of addiction and relapse. In one scene, Julie returns to hospital with a stomach complaint: 'me stomach's gone hard'. The nurse explains that 'it seems to have swollen more from when we've seen ya last week. Yeah, it's increased in size'. This is reminiscent of the grotesque body that is continuously growing and protruding; as Bakhtin argues, 'it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits' (1984: 26). Here, the excessive consumption of alcohol has breached and transformed Julie's bodily boundaries, her swollen stomach continuously expanding. A month later, Julie is

admitted into hospital again as the narrator explains 'more liquid is leaking into her belly'; she has no control over this leakage inside her body. Julie has to have the excess liquid in her liver drained in a treatment that yields extremely visceral imagery: a close-up of a scalpel, then a tube inserted into the side of her stomach are paralleled with shots of Julie's jaundiced face in obvious pain and a close-up of blood oozing from the incision (see Frame 43a). In the most literal depiction of the abject grotesque, the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of yellow bile flowing out of the tube inserted into Julie's stomach, followed by a close-up of a plastic bag filling up with the liquid, and a close-up of her swollen stomach protruding from her t-shirt (see Frame 43b). Regarding the relationship between the abject and the grotesque, Edwards and Graulund argue 'the leakages of the inside and the outside indicate fluid boundaries that inspire repugnance of abhorrence' (2013: 34). In this scene, Julie's body experiences leakages inside and outside, the close-ups of which arguably 'inspire repugnance'. Further, 'the creation of the subject comes out of a body that is porous, open and in flux, and thus there is always an anxiety, even a terror, that reincorporation into that body threatens the loss of self and the negation of a clearly defined subjectivity (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 34). Due to the polluted waste, or bile, leaking between her organs, Julie is lacking a clearly defined subjectivity.

> Julie: I can't blame anyone for me drinking – no one's liked forced me to drink – I've done it all meself. I have, erm, a lot of people who say to me, you know, "just don't have a drink". If it was that easy! Don't you think I would have done that instead of, like, putting meself by the pearly gates. I'm so grateful for what they've given me and what they've done for me. Cus many a times I've thought they're just gonna give up on me and they haven't. I owe everything to the hospital.

As Julie talks to the camera and the nurse, the shot is interspersed with another mid-shot of the bag as it fills with liquid, a stark reminder of the consequences of alcoholism. Closing off the monologue, the shot cuts to a close-up of Julie with her head in her hands, and a tear rolling down her cheek (see Frame 43c). This might be used as a visual parallel to the other liquid being drained from her body, with connotations of bodily waste. On the other hand, Haidt, Rozin, McCauley and Imada (1997) argue tears are the only 'body product' that do not inspire feelings of disgust because they are a secretion that

distinguishes humans from animals. Perhaps this scene does offer a glimpse of sympathy for Julie, especially as she implies she has been, or is, near death and doesn't deserve all the support she has been given. In an earlier scene, Julie talks of her ambivalence at the prospect of a liver transplant because there are other people who 'deserve it a bit more'. However, despite the potential sympathy the scene evokes, the following shot is a close-up of the bile being poured from the plastic bag into a bucket. Then the camera dollies in as it tracks the nurse carrying the bucket into a different room. After the nurse explains the perils of 'binge culture' to the camera, the shot cuts to a close-up of the bucket of bile being poured down the toilet and the toilet flushing (see Frame 44). The symbolism here is extremely potent: Julie is the incarnation of Kristeva's position that 'wastes drop so that I might live' (1982: 3). In quite literal terms, the polluted substance, the bile, would kill Julie if it was not expunged from her body. This might also serve as a visual metaphor of the 'waste' of NHS resources as 'abused' by Julie. Furthermore, the disposal of the waste signifies Julie's abject status: her body is contaminated by waste; moreover, her body *is* waste and she is, in effect, a wasted human. Depicted here is the tangible result of alcoholism, being forcibly abjected through manmade bodily borders, a surgically created orifice, which is a grotesque manifestation.

7.7 Conclusion: The Grotesque Manifestation of Abjection

Edwards and Graulund argue that 'monstrosity and grotesquerie merge in the hybrid forms that disrupt the borders separating what is acceptable within the categories of "human" and "non-human"' (2013: 40). One might argue that the participants in the above texts blur what it means to be human: they are depicted as pushing corporeal boundaries to the extreme. Furthermore, the grotesque, monstrous and sometimes debilitating transformation of their bodies is self-inflicted through excessive consumption of various polluting substances. As such, their consequential disabilities do not inspire sympathy, but disgust. Eating, drinking and smoking to excess signifies an inability to be reflexive, self-regulating neoliberal citizens. They are failures. The people in these texts are at once disgusting and repugnant, yet fetishised and fascinating. As such, they also blur what it means to be treated as human. Throughout the texts, at the participants' discretion, there are subtle suggestions of depression, post-natal depression, anxiety, trauma and learning difficulties (addiction is dealt with in a more overt manner), which under other circumstances would presumably be dealt with in a

much more compassionate way. Addressing these issues in the narrative would allow for a more sympathetic view and, to some extent, a justification of their reliance on addictive substances, and on benefits. Yet, these severe mental health issues fall by the wayside in the grand narrative of benefits fraud and abuse of 'the system', which is symbolised in the abuse of their bodies. As Edwards and Graulund suggest, 'Neither subject, nor object, the abject, or state of abjection, is articulated in, and through, grotesque language and imagery' (2013: 33). The manifestation of grotesque imagery, illustrated in the portrayal of the abnormal body, focuses on the lower bodily stratum, and the open and leaking body used in the programmes dehumanises the participants and questions their subjectivity. The participants in these texts are portrayed as embodying waste and pollution, they are the ultimate abjects.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Framing Deviance: Immorality and Irresponsibility

8.1.1 Revisiting the Abject Maternal and Grotesque Embodiment

Throughout the analysed texts, an overarching theme occurs: deviance, as both representational and symbolic. These televisual portrayals of the benefits claimants as sexually promiscuous, criminals, addicts, violent, racist and lazy contribute to their framing as pathologically immoral and irresponsible; practising 'bad' citizenship rather than the controlled and self-reflexive behaviour of neoliberalism. They also correlate with historical modes of representing a dangerous and feral criminal underclass. The in-depth analysis of the abject maternal and grotesque embodiment, on which this research is based, explores how the textual participants are framed as monstrously deviant, indulging in various excesses and pushing their bodily boundaries to the limits, portrayed in visual hyperbole and graphic imagery. This happens on a corporeal level as the participants' embodiment is pushed to the extremes by overeating, drinking and smoking to excess, and by pregnancy in the cases of Mandy Cowie's (BB:LOTD, S2E10) and Marie Buchan's (BB:LOTD, S1E2) 'supersized' families, with Marie even claiming to be addicted to pregnancy.

Representations of the grotesque and sexually deviant are also featured in the fetishisation and infantilisation of obese women and men, relating to a more psychodynamic notion of deviance as perverse. In the context of poverty porn, this deviance is represented in the participants' perverse love of food rather than sex, as in the cases of Sarah, Kathleen and Bryan (OB); Stephen and Michelle (BTFTW); and Rochelle (BB:BPP). Thus, the depiction of the participants as part of the abject maternal or grotesque embodiment fit into a categorisation of 'deviant bodies' (Staels 2016) as they transgress and compromise boundaries. It can be argued the concept of deviance is at the very crux of the abject-grotesque as a representational mode; that is, a deviation from socially, culturally, and politically inscribed 'norms', in their appearance as morals and behaviour. As such, the underclass fall outside classed boundaries as a national abject (Tyler 2013), portrayed here as the wasted figure of the 'benefits scrounger'.

Furthermore, the female participants are symbolically coded as figures of class excess while paradoxically framed as figures of lack. Interestingly, both excess and lack are coded in the capital and relational taste values of the participants: their excessive and vulgar choices of décor and clothing connote their lack of symbolic capital while simultaneously demonstrating their reckless, excessive spending on 'luxuries' such as satellite television, tattoos, cigarettes and pets. For example, Claire Fitzpatrick (BB:LOTD, S2E5) feeds her children junk food and 'basgetti spiders' (spaghetti with cut-up hotdog sausages) while feeding her guinea pigs fresh fruit and vegetables, signifying a lack of maternal know-how paralleled with the economic means to buy pet food.

Claire is also represented as unable to discipline her children properly, exclaiming "I swear I'm gonna knock you out" to her misbehaving child. The trope of deviant mothers who cannot discipline their children is common in the analysed texts. For instance, Mandy Cowie threatens to punch her daughter Charlie in the mouth for misbehaving while in other scenes her young son Jack proudly says 'twat', 'cunt' and 'fuck you', and teaches Mandy's grandchildren to say 'dyke' and 'poof', all with no reproofs from Mandy (BB:LOTD, S2E10); and Steph Cocker stifles her laughter as she attempts to tell off her son Corbin for shouting 'fuck off' down the street (BB:LOTD, S1E3).

Elsewhere, in a visually poetic (and ironic) twist of fate, Julie Bienvenue-King and her cousin try to secure a new satellite television package (they already have Sky and Virgin installed) while a charity advert for poverty aid in Africa flickers across the widescreen television as Julie stands by it smoking a cigarette (BB:LOTD, S1E6), her excessive frame in stark contrast to the frail body of the child in the advert. While it would be a leap to claim this scene is intentional rather than a brilliant visual coincidence (a case of the camera being 'in the right place at the right time'), the scene is nonetheless a powerful indictment on the excessive lifestyles of the British poor. It clearly juxtaposes the British poor, who supposedly struggle to make ends meet but can afford to buy food, cigarettes and satellite television packages, against the starving populations in Third World countries. Here, Julie is framed as deviant because she traverses the boundaries mapped out for the poor who should only live within their means. Of course, this ignores the fact that benefits claimants like Julie are part of a thriving capitalist system centred around consumerism and materialism.

The deviant behaviours depicted in poverty porn texts adhere to Murray's (1990; 2001) conception of a social underclass characterised by illegitimacy, violent crime, and voluntary dropout from the labour force, feeding into the myth of a 'Broken Britain' (Slater 2012). Arguably, in a contemporary context, the idea of illegitimacy is the central and most important tenet of Murray's underclass. He suggests illegitimacy and 'broken families' are the precursors to crime and dropout from the labour force: 'I believe that the problems of the underclass are driven by the breakdown in socialization of the young, which in turn is driven by the breakdown of the family' (Murray 2001: 35). This notion has been widely filtered through political discourse. For example, in 2011, Iain Duncan-Smith (then the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions) attributed a number of social problems – the British riots, the kidnapping of Shannon Matthews, the murder of Rhys Jones, and the abuse and subsequent death of Baby P – to the 'steady rise of an underclass in Britain – a group too often characterised by chaos and dysfunctionality, and governed by a perverse set of values'. Duncan-Smith cites 'widespread family breakdown', high teenage pregnancy rates and 'poor parenting transmitting dysfunctionality from one generation to another' as the cause of these issues. In the cases of Shannon Matthews and Baby P especially, the mothers became symbolic of an underclass, represented as 'merely the tip of an iceberg of depravity' (Gillborn 2012: 12). Blaming an array of social problems on illegitimate births, families and mothers is reflected in the analysed texts. Abject mothers are blamed for creating the next generation of benefits claimants while anxieties around increased crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, rioting, hooliganism and 'scrounging' weave a narrative of fear around the 'benefits mum'. So, while violent crime and dropout from the labour force are mostly attributed to young men, class hatred is symbolically aimed at lower-class women. Thus, the abject maternal and the fear of her generative power to produce more grotesque deviants is the root of the overall 'problem'.

8.1.2 'More than a Bad Girl': Violent Crime and Gender

Crime is another mode of deviance represented in the analysed texts. Murray alludes to the parasitical and deviant nature of the criminal by stating 'the habitual criminal is the classic member of an underclass, living off mainstream society by preying on it' (1990: 13). In his later work, Murray reiterates this position by arguing a definition of the underclass does not 'mean people who are merely poor, but rather *people at the*

margins of society, unsocialized and often violent. The chronic criminal is part of the underclass, especially the violent chronic criminal' (2001: 26, emphasis added). His reference to the 'margins of society' alludes to the abject status of the underclass, cast aside to social and cultural border zones (Tyler 2013). Further, the 'chronic' criminal connotes the pathology of the poor, the 'disease', and the social dis-ease and anxiety they spread. This phrasing suggests these people are not cast to the margins of society by the rest of society, but by their deviant nature and immoral choices. Certainly, a cognitive perspective on crime/deviance indicates those with little self-control are more likely to commit deviant acts, and that self-control is learned during early childhood socialisation (for in-depth literature reviews on the theorisation of self-control, see Tittle, Ward and Grasmick 2003; Nofziger 2010). Murray argues that impulsive behaviour is 'part of a general lack of socialization' and 'a hallmark of the underclass', and that most violent crime pertains to this (2001: 31). In the analysed poverty porn texts, the claimants, especially the 'criminal' ones, exemplify a type of person with little self-control in most areas of their lives. Furthermore, 'mothers who are low in self-control tend to supervise and punish their children in ways that produce lower self-control' (Nofziger 2010: 30), correlating with the notion that the abject mother is the source of crime, deviance and, ultimately, the underclass. Overall, the abject and the grotesque are both characteristic of an other that is 'out of control'.

To Murray, there is a gendered element to the criminal underclass with the 'most frequent offenders' being young men (1990: 15). However, female criminals also feature in the analysed texts, often with a wider narrative arc than their male counterparts, portraying an amalgam of crime, deviance and anti-femininity. For instance, the majority of the overall narrative in *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S2E5) is about Michelle who the narrator describes as 'more than a bad girl'. Michelle is butch in appearance with tightly cropped hair, facial piercings, heavy jewellery and hand tattoos; she is also overweight and wears ill-fitting baggy hoodies and tracksuits. While tattoos, piercings and sports clothing are a common motif in representations of the lower classes – especially 'chav' culture – it is evident Michelle does not make the 'appropriate' investments in her appearance/femininity. As explored in Chapter Seven, women who blur the boundaries of gender, especially those who are overweight, are deemed grotesque. As a benefits claimant, Michelle is a failed citizen and, as someone who

presents themselves as butch (as well as aggressive and violent), she also displays failed femininity. The narrator reveals that Michelle hit a firefighter 'whilst on a bender'; is 'someone who often keeps the cops on their toes'; 'first got into trouble when she was 12'; and 'had a long holiday at her Majesty's pleasure'. Michelle also explains she has been given another fine for assaulting a police officer. Additionally, she is on tag but breaks her bail conditions later in the episode by getting a friend to remove the tag.

Michelle's delinquency and prison sentences mean she has lost custody of her 10-year-old son; she reportedly attacked the father of her son because he refused her access, which resulted in a two-year prison sentence. Michelle's story suggests a cycle of unemployment and crime that is hard to break: she is long-term unemployed, has lost access to her only child, and is a persistent reoffender – yet she has been given no apparent support. These issues are framed against the familiar ideology of individualism, rather than considering structural and cyclical factors such as the effects of poverty and unemployment on crime rates. Furthermore, not only is Michelle framed as a 'violent criminal' but she can also be categorised as the abject maternal: her 'deviance' and status as a bad mother combining as a site of disgust (Tyler 2013).

A similar plotline develops in *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1:E2) when Zara reveals her criminal past, which has stopped her getting a job and resulted in her three-month-old son being taken away from her after she had given birth to him in prison. Both Michelle and Zara have been forcibly abjected from their sons' lives, which plays out as an ironic twist on Kristeva's notion of the infant becoming 'estranged from (abjects) its original 'maternal home'' (Tyler 2013: 29). In what might otherwise be a heartwarming scene, Steph Cocker (Zara's best friend) explains that Zara is like 'a dad to my kids', then exclaims 'another mum, should I say, you ain't got a penis!' Zara's response is to perform a hand gesture imitating female oral sex, and both girls burst into a fit of giggles. Throughout the rest of the episode both Steph and Zara present themselves as crass, rude and overtly sexual, even implying they are engaged in a sexual relationship. In doing so, the two women (and Michelle) flip, or even queer, post-feminist ideologies that women 'can have it all': the sexual and criminal markets are as open to them as they are to men. Not only are these women the producers of a generation of violent criminals, they are also criminals themselves. Thus, as 'bad girls' and 'bad mothers', Zara and Michelle are an affront to femininity and neoliberal societal values.

8.1.3 Xenophobia, Racism and the White Underclass

The majority of the participants in the analysed programmes are Caucasian, reflecting a heavily constructed and symbolically loaded configuration of the working classes as *white* (Gillborn 2012; Lawler 2012); or, in the context of the construction of the 'benefits scrounger', an abject white underclass (Haylett 2001). There has been a shift from whiteness as a marker of privilege linked to imperial power (Bonnett 1998) to whiteness associated with working-class decline and English nationalism, both of which carry connotations of xenophobia, albeit imagined in different ways. When associated with social class in this way, being white becomes an 'intensification of a newly problematic whiteness', an 'extreme whiteness, or hyper-whiteness', framed as an 'unreflexive, axiomatically racist whiteness' (Lawler 2012: 410). The white working class has become emblematic of a homogenous group of people who are paradoxically envisioned as victims and degenerates (Gillborn 2012). Gillborn argues that while accounting for the 'very real material and symbolic violence that White working class people experience', it is also important to recognise 'the existence of poor Whites is not only consistent with White supremacy, they are actually an essential part of the processes that sustain it' (2012: 1). Furthermore, when framed as victims, the 'white working class are beneficiaries of Whiteness', but also 'at times in a liminal position, where they can be demonized when necessary or useful'. Thus, the white working classes 'provide a buffer, a safety zone that protects the white middle classes' (Gillborn 2012: 17).

Arguably, the discourses of victimhood and degeneracy work together to frame the white working classes as falling foul of multiculturalism (Lawler 2012) while also being the face of anti-immigration and racist ideologies that act as a buffer for middle-class right-wing xenophobia. As Gillborn (2012) explains, a framework in which the white working classes are victims of supposed racial disadvantage in the job market or in the education system provides an ideological catalyst for them to blame their economic situation on immigration rates. For instance, in his Brexit campaign, UKIP leader Nigel Farage claimed 'the white working class was in danger of becoming an underclass' because of immigration (Farage in Virdee and McGeever 2018: 1814). Thus, the white working class has become politicised, blamed for a plethora of social issues under interchangeable labels such as 'underclass', 'chav', 'doleite', 'dole dosser', or 'benefits scrounger', and used as a scapegoat for racist ideologies. The narrative that immigrants

are ‘taking’ jobs that British nationals deserve is weaved throughout the right-wing press and political ideology alongside a seemingly contradictory narrative blaming the growing white underclass for not finding legitimate employment. Here, popular culture and populist rhetoric have constructed and negotiated hostility between two disenfranchised groups – migrants and the unemployed – and transformed them into abjects.

Within the texts, the above manifests itself in a depiction of the underclass as non-progressive, narrow minded and racist as they blame high unemployment rates on the rising immigration levels. The result of the carefully crafted discourses of victimhood and degeneracy is a transference of blame exemplified in dialogue such as ‘we’ve gotta suffer for what, a load of jibberdejukes coming over and taking all the blimmin’ work’ and ‘you shouldn’t give jobs away to obviously foreigners you should give ‘em to the English people that were actually born here, bred here, you know what I mean? We’ve got a right more than them to live here’ (Brian, BB:LOTD, S2E5). Brian exhibits frustration at not being able to find employment and blames his struggle on immigrants, or ‘foreigners’, ‘coming over and taking jobs’ that English people have more ‘rights’ to. This position transfers the blame on to another other, rather than on to the structural issues at play (which could potentially unite both disenfranchised groups). It also illustrates a ‘that is not me’ response (Kimmich 1998) allowing Brian to refute the ‘scrounger’ stigma because it is not his fault he cannot find work. On the other hand, the narrator’s sarcastic treatment of Brian frames him and Sarah as ‘backwards’ (Haylett 2001), signifying ‘a lack of progress, a belonging in a past time’ (Lawler 2012: 410); they are unable to adapt to multiculturalism.

Elsewhere, semiotic cues indicate the racist identity of the white working classes. In *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S1E4), Gordon Higginbotham is filmed walking down the street in Doc Martens, acid-wash jeans and a green bomber jacket with ‘SKINHEADS FOREVER – ROMPER STOMPER’ emblazoned on the back (Romper Stomper refers to a 1992 Australian film about a group of young neo-Nazis). Skinheads were established in the 1960s as a working-class inclusive subculture associated with black music genres like ska and reggae. However, after being appropriated by neo-Nazis and far-right nationalists, skinhead subculture is now more often linked to racism, violence and hooliganism. The narrator states that ‘Gordon’s been on the dole for about as long as

he's been a skinhead', which subtly equates claiming benefits with his subcultural lifestyle. It also hints at his backwardness, a 'longing for a lost time', and firmly roots him as a part of the white working classes, or as an abject white. Gordon explains, 'I love dressing like this. . . I like anyone, to be honest, you know – as long as they're English', which reaffirms his xenophobic identity. Interestingly, Gordon also says that if he was to attend a job interview, he would not dress as a skinhead in case he was labelled a 'fucking hooligan'. Here, Gordon displays an understanding of the societal perception of skinheads as racist or xenophobic, and the stigma attached to that.

Gordon also attempts to bribe his daughter Rose and her partner Mark into voting for UKIP by offering them money. This coincides with the notion that the UKIP vote, and the British vote to leave the European Union in 2016, were cast by a majority of people at the margins of society. It also reiterates the narrative that the people who voted to leave are racist and xenophobic as most of UKIP and Farage's campaign material focused on the issue of immigration, encapsulated by the 'Breaking Point' campaign poster. As Virdee and McGeever argue, 'the prospect (and reality) of downward mobility has produced class injuries and collective experiences that have been recast through the politics of *ressentiment*', facilitated by neoliberal ideology and perpetuated by the far right. It is against this socio-political backdrop that 'decline, though necessarily a multi-ethnic process, is experienced in a racialized frame and is increasingly responded to by some sections of the working class through the politics of resentful English nationalism' (Virdee and McGeever 2018: 1811). This is articulated in representations of a white underclass as racist, framing them as not taking responsibility for their situations, which fits with the individualistic neoliberal portrayal of them as unreflexive and unable to self-regulate. It also coincides with a 'Powellite' discourse that constructs migrants as an economic threat (Virdee and McGeever 2018). The narrative that the white working classes are the 'principal losers' of globalisation (Virdee and McGeever 2018: 1814) works to solidify support for populist right-wing rhetoric. Alongside this narrative, far-right extremists are now represented as a new abject figure, a violent underclass, in documentaries such as *Angry, White and Proud* (Channel 4, 2015), *Britain's Forgotten Men* (BBC 2017-2018), and *Hate Thy Neighbour* (Vice 2017-2018), and in a recent drama, *The Left Behind* (BBC 2019). These programmes are full of the visual motifs that accompany representations of the white working classes such as St George's crosses,

sportswear and tattoos, which place them as class outsiders. The individuals in these programmes are simultaneously represented as disenfranchised victims of decline, and violent racist hooligans who do not 'belong' in a contemporary multicultural Britain: they fall outside the boundaries of a civilised state.

8.2 Stigma, Blame and the Abject

8.2.1 'They Need a Kick up the Arse': The Transference of Blame and Stigma

As illustrated above, there is some evidence of participants internalising, or at least recognising, the stigma attached to their status as benefits claimants. Across the wider sample of analysed texts, the participants display an awareness of how the public might perceive them and the stigma attached to these perceptions. Stigma is defined by Goffman as 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963: 9). Certainly, the televisual, journalistic, social media and political artefacts cited in this research indicate that benefits claimants are constructed as a homogenous underclass and refused social acceptance; they are figures of hate and disgust. Arguably, the participants in these poverty porn texts are aware of this, and they attempt to negotiate social acceptance in different ways. For instance, Mandy Cowie explains '. . .I've been judged mate. They expect me to have a dirty house and everything, do you know what I mean? I'm sick of people, you know, judging the book - don't they - by its cover' (BB:LOTD, S2E10). Despite being loud, vulgar and nonchalant throughout the episode, this shows Mandy is self-conscious and anxious about other people's perceptions of her, and she wants to be socially accepted. Mandy's plea for people to stop 'judging the book by its cover' suggests she has internalised some of the stigma associated with claiming benefits such as being 'dirty'. Mandy's felt stigma might be based on social interactions, or engagement with popular culture formats and/or political rhetoric that have contributed to the construction of the 'benefits scrounger' figure. While elsewhere in the episode, Mandy declares 'So what I'm on the fucking dole mate! Don't like it? Fuck off!', the above signifies some desire on her part not be associated with the 'dirty' stigma of claiming benefits.

Elsewhere, the internalisation of stigma is manifest as participants try to transfer the blame for their situations on to immigrants (as illustrated above), or on to other benefits

claimants by denouncing the 'scrounger' label, and comparing themselves to other benefits claimants who are 'scroungers'. In *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (S2E10), Sarah is eager to differentiate herself from other benefits claimants by describing herself as having 'that little bit of pride' to 'not scrounge off the benefits system'. Sarah argues that while she relies on a 'certain amount of benefits', other people 'rely fully on it' and should be questioned over this. Sarah's position is reflective of the constructed dichotomy between the undeserving and deserving poor: she refutes the 'scrounger' label and insinuates it should be reserved for people who 'rely fully' on benefits. It indicates that Sarah feels pride where others should feel shame due to the amount of their benefit claims. Again, this suggests Sarah is aware of the stigma attached to the 'benefits scrounger' figure and is keen to detach herself from it. As Goffman argues, during contact with 'normals' (i.e. non-stigmatised subjects), 'the stigmatized individual is likely to feel that he is "on", having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making, to a degree and in areas of conduct which he assumes others are not' (1963: 25). During the filming of the programme, Sarah is in contact with the audience via the camera, and with the camera crew and perhaps a producer. Thus, she attempts to conduct herself in a way that is more palatable to the audience, and might allow her to negotiate social acceptance by transferring the stigmatising label on to another other.

Within the texts, and in wider popular culture, benefits claimants are often associated with other stigmatised groups in the underclass such as addicts, and this produces another particular set of connotations. Addicts highlight another level of scapegoat, referred to as a group who are 'worse' than benefits claimants. For instance, Marie Buchan's friend, Sarah, defends the amount of benefits Marie claims compared to other people: 'If they've got the ability to lift a can of lager to their mouth, then they've got ability to go to work. . .' (BB:LOTD, S1E2). Rather ironically, Sarah seems to be regurgitating the common narratives and discourses found in anti-welfare political rhetoric and tabloid journalism. Heather Frost's friend and neighbour, Laura, takes a similar position, asking: 'What about alcoholics?. . . it's not like she goes out on the fucking piss every night, is it?' (BB:LOTD, S1E6). These positions of defence from Sarah and Laura, on behalf of Marie and Heather, suggest they want to detach their friends from this stigma, and themselves by proxy. As the identity of the stigmatised individual

is a 'tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963: 12), Sarah and Laura attempt to avoid this by differentiating between the deserving poor – for example, a mother with a large family to 'feed and clothe', and the undeserving poor – alcoholics who are 'on the fucking piss every night'.

The internalisation of stigma and the subsequent attempts to reject the 'scrounger' label is a complex process. For example, Emma and Sophie (BB:LOTD, S1E6) refute that people 'sponge' while simultaneously chastising other 'scroungers' and benefits claimants who try to transfer blame on to immigrants. Emma argues: 'There are people though that are genuinely like, they're quick to moan saying "Oh all these immigrants taking our jobs" but yet they ain't quick to get off their arse and get a job'. Later on in the episode Emma also argues that '. . . the people who are just doing nothing and just lazing around, then they need a kick up the arse, do you know what I mean?' In these excerpts, Emma and Sophie rely on a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, and the neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility. In contrast, they are also aware that immigrants have been (wrongly) blamed for the lack of jobs and rising unemployment levels, suggesting they refute xenophobic ideologies, and have some understanding of the structural issues at play. Furthermore, Emma and Sophie attempt to move away from the stigma attached to claiming benefits, maintaining they need it for childcare purposes while simultaneously condemning 'lazy' scroungers.

8.2.2 Symbolic Violence and Abjection of the Self

The above participants and their friends, as stigmatised benefits claimants, exhibit signs of 'identity ambivalence' in relation to people like them 'behaving in a stereotyped way. . . acting out the negative attributes imputed to them' (Goffman 1963: 131). As Goffman argues, these attributes – in this case 'laziness', 'dirtiness' and 'scrounging' off the system – 'repel' the stigmatised individual since they still 'support the norms of wider society' (Goffman 1963: 131). As evidenced above, although stigmatised, the benefits claimants still adhere to the neoliberal ideologies of individualism and responsibility. They criticise others for not performing as 'good' citizens by making comparisons between themselves and others on a binary of the un/deserving poor. In other words, the benefits claimants in these texts collude in the social construction of

the ‘benefits scrounger’ and the stigma attached to this label and, in turn, to themselves. As such, the construction of the self is always relational to the social construction of the ‘benefits scrounger’. These constructions reveal the cyclical nature of stigma: by attempting to move away from this labelling, they frame themselves as shying away from responsibility, which makes them further abject. Furthermore, the relationship between stigma, social construction and abjection reflects Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence, or the ways people ‘play a role in reproducing their own subordination’ (Connolly and Healy 2004: 15). By internalising stigma and attempting to transfer it on to others, they reproduce the ideologies, labels and constructions already attached to them.

In distancing themselves from the ‘scrounger’ label, the participants manifest a ‘that is not me’ (Kimmich 1998) response of disgust towards other benefits claimants, setting up psychic borders between themselves and another other, and abjecting the ‘benefits scrounger’. In doing so, they also abject the self. As Goffman continues, the stigmatised individual’s ‘social and psychological identification with these offenders holds him to what repels him, transforming repulsion into shame, and then transforming ashamedness itself into something of which he is ashamed’ (1963: 132). Arguably, this process of repulsion and shame can be linked to the process of abjection where ‘I spit myself out’ (Kristeva 1982). The participants paradoxically internalise the stigma attached to them, yet try to refute it by attaching stigma to their own ‘kind’ (Hacking 1999). In doing so, they set up psychological boundaries between themselves and the other, who is, paradoxically, themselves. However, the construction of the self is always in relation to the other so the participants have to abject an other in order to make up the self. In other words, the abject must exist so that the self may exist. The abject simultaneously repulses and fascinates – it crosses the boundary of desire and disgust because it is a part of the self. As well as this, the psychological basis of abjection, or responding to that which the subject finds disgusting, centres on a fear of becoming abject, or the thing the subject finds repulsive. Again, in the texts, this construction of the self is always in relation to the stigma attached to the ‘benefits scrounger’; in repelling this stigma, the participants are abjecting the self.

8.3 Final Thoughts: A Shift in the Objects of Hate and Disgust?

This research argues that poverty porn programmes reflect the cultural and political zeitgeist in Britain between 2014-2018: they capture a snapshot of disgust towards the poor, bringing together neoliberal ideologies perpetuated throughout history. In other words, poverty porn is another mode of exhibiting contempt for the poor that sustains the myth of a feral underclass but frames it under a new label - the 'benefits scrounger'. These texts reflect a period of time when it was deemed necessary to blame benefits claimants for certain social problems - the rise of 'Benefits Britain' and the fall of the economy - in order to justify severe austerity measures. Blaming the abject spectre of the 'benefits scrounger' for these issues has been a way to justify severe benefits sanctions, welfare cuts and the introduction of Universal Credit. By individualising poverty through media formats such as poverty porn, which coincide with right-wing rhetoric, the state is held unaccountable. However, at the time of writing, there have been noticeably fewer broadcasts of poverty porn programmes. Re-runs of programmes such as *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* are broadcast on occasion (with some episodes still available on Channel 5's online catch-up service) but there is no evidence of any new forthcoming series. Nevertheless, the stereotypes and grotesque depictions of the working classes in poverty porn programmes are still visible in other formats. For example, a recent BBC series, *Big in the Valleys* (2019), explores the high obesity rates in the Welsh valleys and is reliant on the portrayal of excessive embodiment as illustrated in the analysed poverty porn texts. Also, *Rich House, Poor House* (Channel 5, 2017 – 2019) depicts the disparity between middle and working-class families; and *Broke* (BBC 2019) portrays the hardships felt by the British working, or just out-of-work, poor. While slightly more sympathetic, these programmes still rely on heavily constructed depictions of social class, especially the working class, or underclass, as other.

It would be safe to assume, given the traceable history of contempt towards the poor, that another constructed figure of hate and disgust will come to the fore with new (or perhaps the same) methods of representing them. Over the past couple of years, there has been an increased journalistic interest in 'spice zombies' with news stories containing disturbing images and narratives about homeless people intoxicated on 'spice', a type of synthetic cannabinoid with psychoactive effects. Although it is unlikely

the size or scale of contempt towards this group will ever match the 'benefits scroungers', the 'spice zombie' is another contemporary figure of class disgust: an amalgam of unemployment, dirtiness and addiction. As Alexandrescu argues in his research on news coverage of 'spice zombies', the visual depictions of such 'unproductive bodies' are 'understood as channelling condemnation of the abject and 'undeserving' poor and aiding to legitimise anti-welfare measures as political common sense and cultural consensus' (2019: 3). As such, the construction of the 'spice zombie' is reliant on grotesque imagery and aesthetics of disgust like the 'animations' (Tyler 2013) of the 'benefits scrounger' figure. Also, referring to them as 'zombies' signifies their 'near-death' abject status. Future research might pay attention to the continued construction of the 'spice zombie' and other figures of class disgust.

On the other hand, there has also been a paradigm shift in these types of representations, exemplified by the axing of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (and the removal of all previously published online content including YouTube clips) because guest Steve Dymond took his life after appearing on the show. This was a poignant moment for British popular culture: *The Jeremy Kyle Show* was broadcast continuously for 14 years, it provided a cultural talking point and tabloid fodder, and was arguably the precursor to poverty porn-style programmes. Kyle's direct, and often patronising, presenting style honed in on the cultural narratives of teenage pregnancy, 'dole dossers', and addiction; and produced infamous one-liners such as guests putting 'something on the end of it' if they could not afford to raise a child on legitimate income, and exclamations that he, as a taxpayer, should not have to pay for the children of someone on benefits. However, the tabloids that perpetuated anti-welfare narratives by reporting on the show's participants (usually based on their appearance, as per the articles cited in the literature review) now use Kyle's 'lack of care' as a gossip point. It could be argued the tabloids have taken this position to distance themselves from the narrative of disgust that produced such tragic consequences. Nonetheless, there is an unmistakeable irony in Jeremy Kyle becoming a figure of televisual and tabloid hate as his participants once were.

This event, along with two suicides by cast members of *Love Island* (ITV 2015-), resulted in an inquiry led by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee into the after care provided by reality TV productions, focusing on ITV in particular. This is a complex issue

in which *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, for all its faults, has arguably been used as a scapegoat so that *Love Island,* a more lucrative reality television show, can continue to be aired. And perhaps *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is now a tired, unpalatable format (despite continuous wins at the National Television Awards), or perhaps the berating of working-class people is no longer *en vogue*. However, there have already been reports that ITV are casting for a similar type of show about relationship breakdowns and 'serial cheaters' (Baker 2019). It seems that since the introduction of Universal Credit, there has been a shift towards more sympathetic depictions of benefits claimants, especially on news programmes. Again, as new types of programming and/or representations emerge, further research could explore where depictions of the British poor are heading post poverty porn, following the removal of Jeremy Kyle's show.

The original intention of this thesis was to carry out an in-depth investigation into a noticeable trend in the broadcasting of programmes about the lives of benefits claimants that coincided with right-wing tabloid narratives of 'dole dossers', 'benefits scroungers' and fraudulent claimers. What emerged was the very specific ways in which benefits claimants were depicted in these poverty porn programmes: as exaggerations, caricatures, and intentionally repulsive, through an overall visually grotesque lens. It developed into a piece of research that highlights the visual, discursive and ideological practices specific to poverty porn documentaries: the sarcastic, judgmental narrator; the lingering shots on body parts such as the stomach and breasts; the claustrophobic close-up framing of the participants; the visceral and graphic imagery; and the repeated use of the same participants who offer 'juicy soundbites'. Thus, the hope is that this research has enough scope to provide a framework for analysing future representations of the abject poor. This thesis has analysed a contemporary televisual format and the setting in which the programme participants are situated, and traced a historicity of contempt towards the British poor. Throughout this research, it has been important to consider the neoliberal context in which these texts have been produced with the aesthetics of disgust ultimately aiding an ideology of individual blame. What remains interesting are the comparisons that can be drawn between historical and contemporary depictions, as it would be safe to assume the same comparisons will be drawn in the future.

This research has detailed how the process of abjection – feelings of disgust and repulsion felt towards the other – is manifest in the grotesque imagery of poverty porn programming. These feelings of disgust (and the abject nature in which they occur) are evident on social media and tabloid follow-ups about the participants which suggests that this runs deeper than televisual portrayals. While these representations are reflective of neoliberal ideology, and characteristic of a format that 'cashes in' on the humiliations of the poor for entertainment purposes, one would argue there is something more sinister happening. Abjection, as Kristeva conceived it, is a psychodynamic process in which the subject negotiates disgust; but disgust can be socially constructed. The social construction of the 'benefits scrounger' figure as disgusting and grotesque elucidates its status as abject: belonging to the margins of society. While disgust is an emotional response that all human beings experience, it is vitally important (and the crux of this research) to acknowledge that disgust of the poor has been manufactured for centuries; and that the 'benefits scrounger', as depicted in poverty porn programming, is the latest configuration of class disgust in a long line of divisive social constructions.

9 Appendices

9.1 Frame-by-Frame Analysis I: Abject Maternal

Frame 1. Introduction to Mandy Cowie
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 2 Episode 10. Screenshots by author.

Frame 2. Mandy Cowie 'Yummy Mummy'
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 2 Episode 10. Screenshots by author.

Frame 3. Becca and Sonny on the Swings

Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 4. Screenshots by author.


Obviously thanks to the benefits
system, it's gonna be a lot easier.


Obviously thanks to the benefits
system, it's gonna be a lot easier.

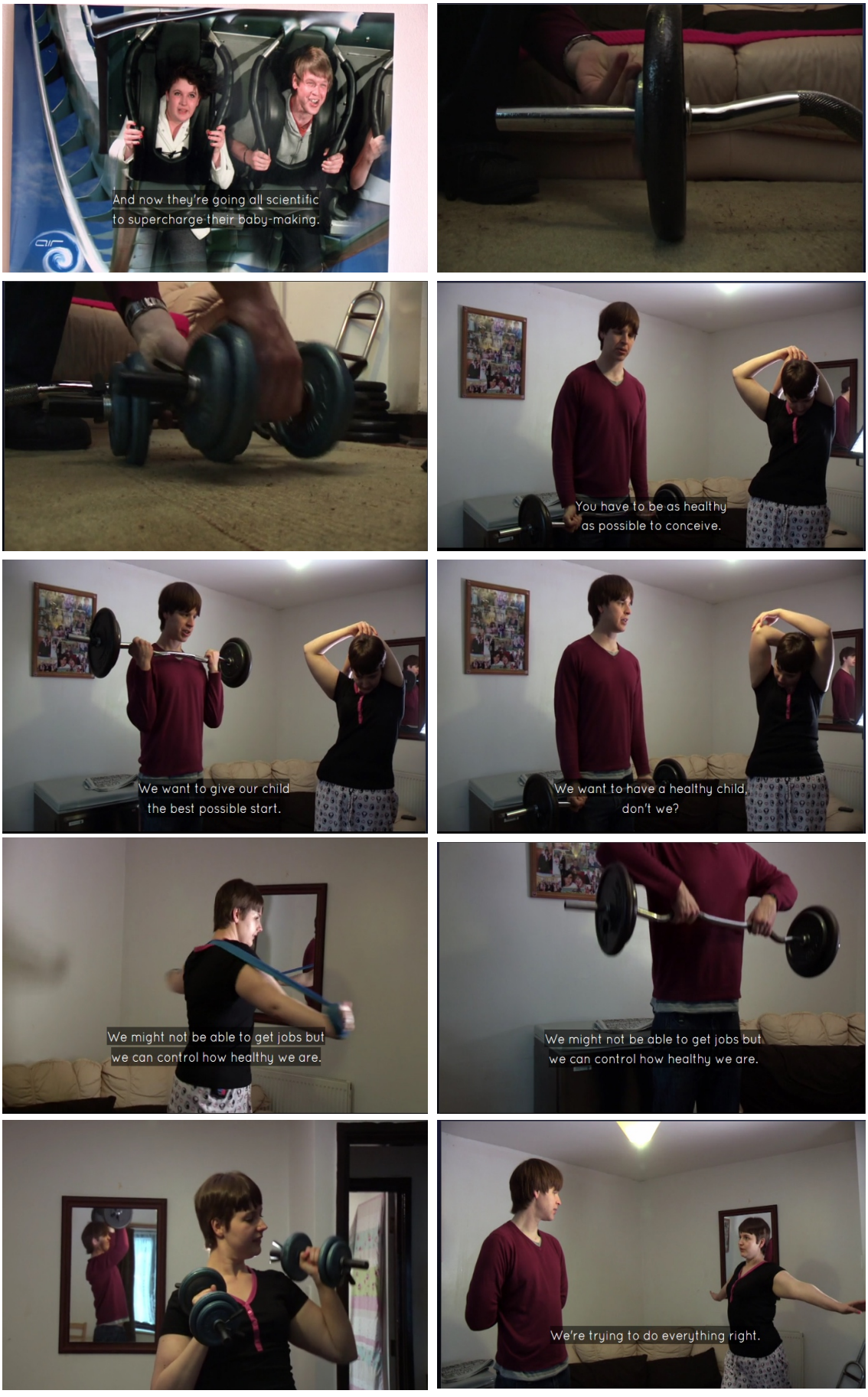

I believe that kids shouldn't have
kids, and I told that to Becca...

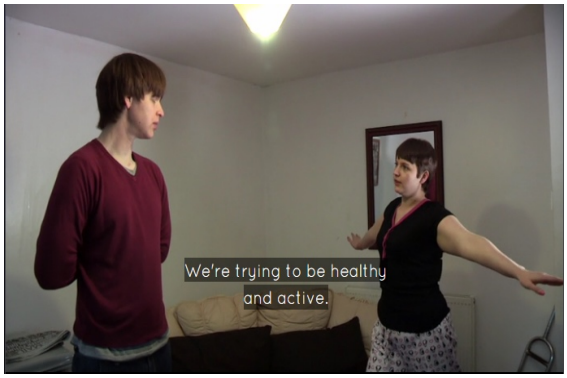

...before she got pregnant.


And I don't think it IS right.

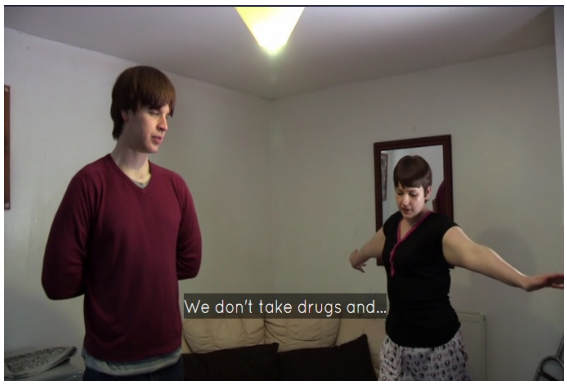
Frame 4. Rose and Mark Exercising

Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 4. Screenshots by author.



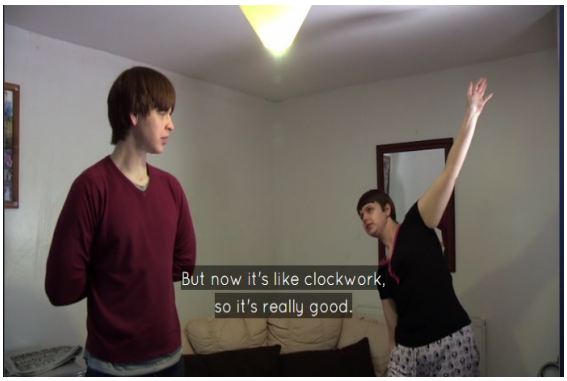

We're trying to be healthy
and active.

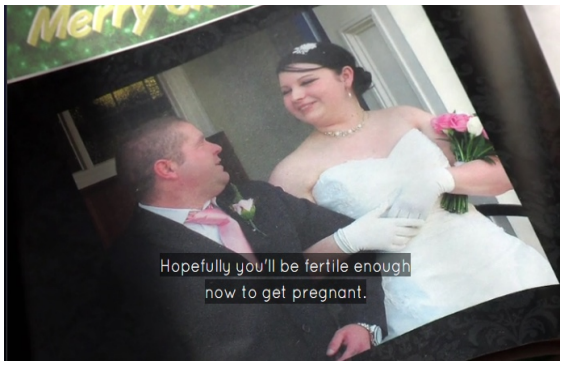

Trying to eat the right foods.
We don't drink, we don't smoke.


We don't take drugs and...


...when I was bigger...


...we didn't know when
I even ovulated, did we? No.

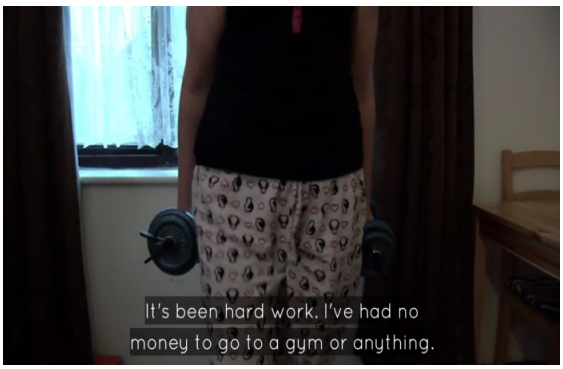

But now it's like clockwork,
so it's really good.

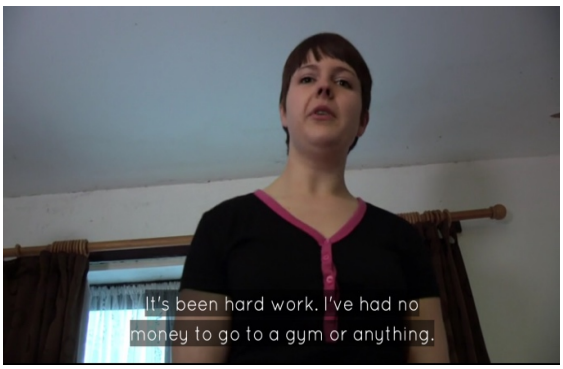

Hopefully you'll be fertile enough
now to get pregnant.

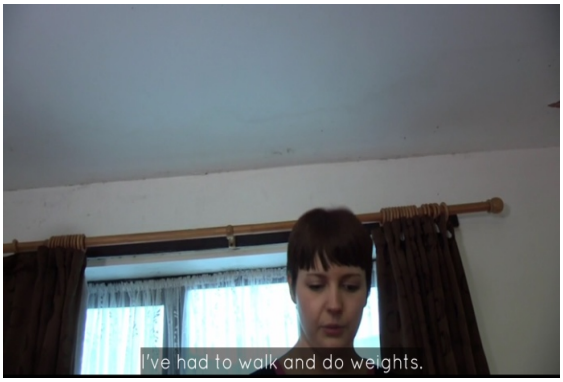

I was 18 stone.
And I've gone down to 12 stone.


From a size 22 to, like, a 12 to 14.

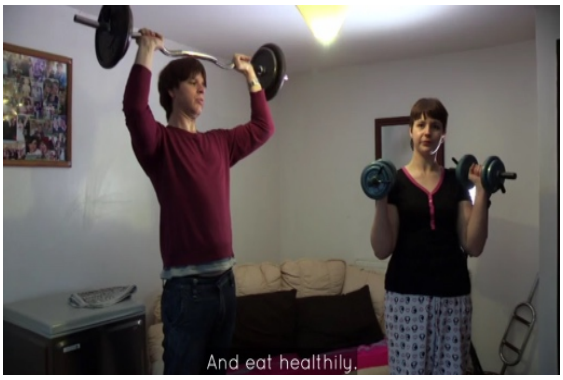

From a size 22 to, like, a 12 to 14.


It's been hard work. I've had no
money to go to a gym or anything.


It's been hard work. I've had no
money to go to a gym or anything.

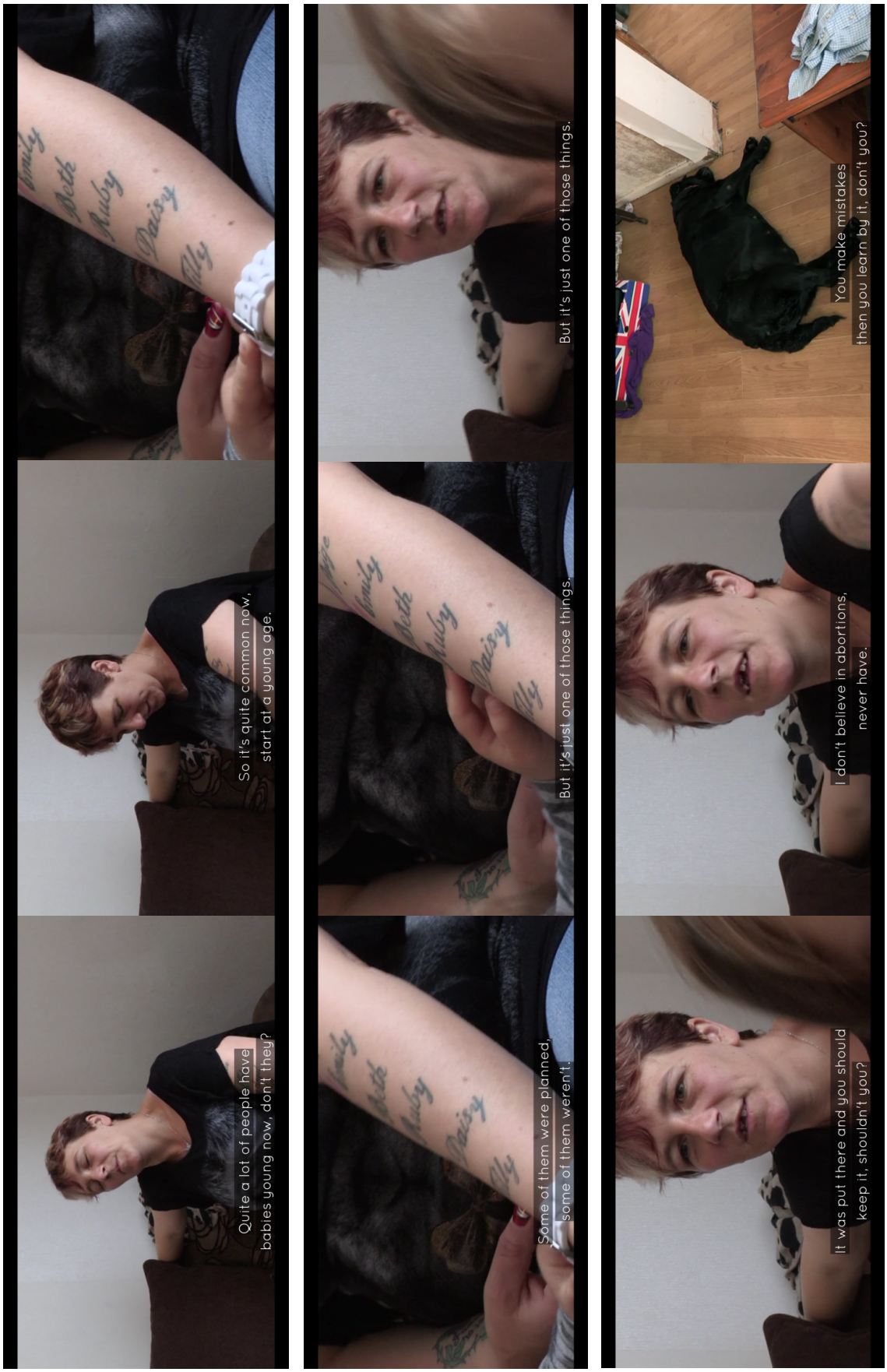

I've had to walk and do weights.


I've had to walk and do weights.


And eat healthily.

Frame 5. Heather Frost / Pregnant Dog

Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 6. Screenshots by author.



Frame 6. Introduction to Marie Buchan

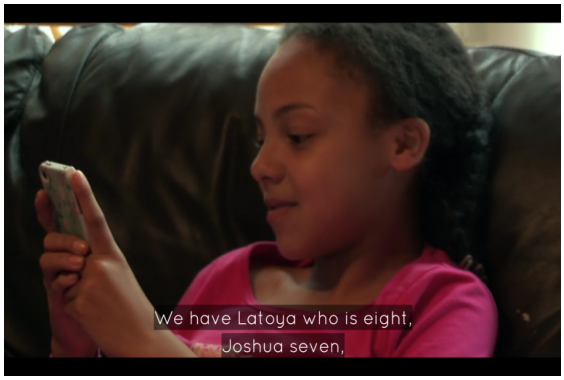
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 2. Screenshots by author.


a single mum from Birmingham with
seven girls and one boy.


a single mum from Birmingham with
seven girls and one boy.


We have Tia who's 12,
Leah who is 11.


We have Tia who's 12,
Leah who is 11.


We have Latoya who is eight,
Joshua seven,


We have Latoya who is eight,
Joshua seven,


Alesha five, Michaela three, Amelia
two, and Olivia six months.

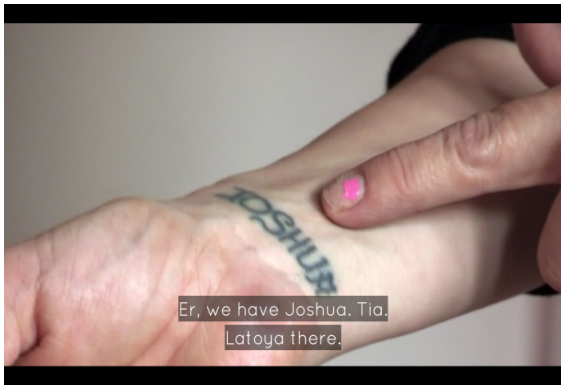

Alesha five, Michaela three, Amelia
two, and Olivia six months.

Frame 7. Marie Buchan's Tattoos

Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 2. Screenshots by author.


SUGAR
SPICE
NICE
Er...we struggle now!


SUGAR
SPICE
NICE
(LAUGHS) Don't ask me
the full names.


Er, we have Joshua. Tia.
Latoya there.

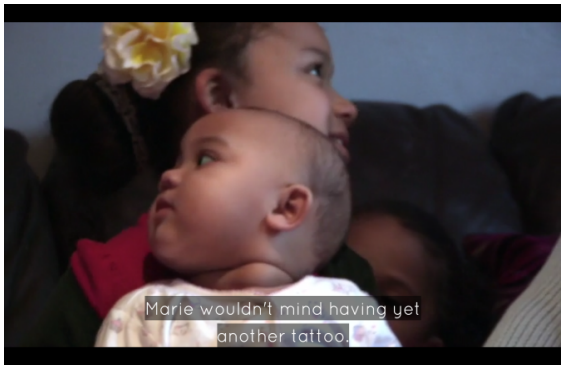

TIA
Er, we have Joshua. Tia.
Latoya there.

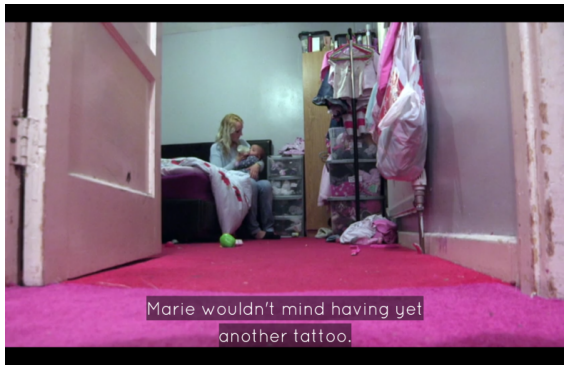

Er, we have Joshua. Tia.
Latoya there.


We've got one on my back. That one.


Aptamil
Can't show you the rest.


But eight might not be enough.

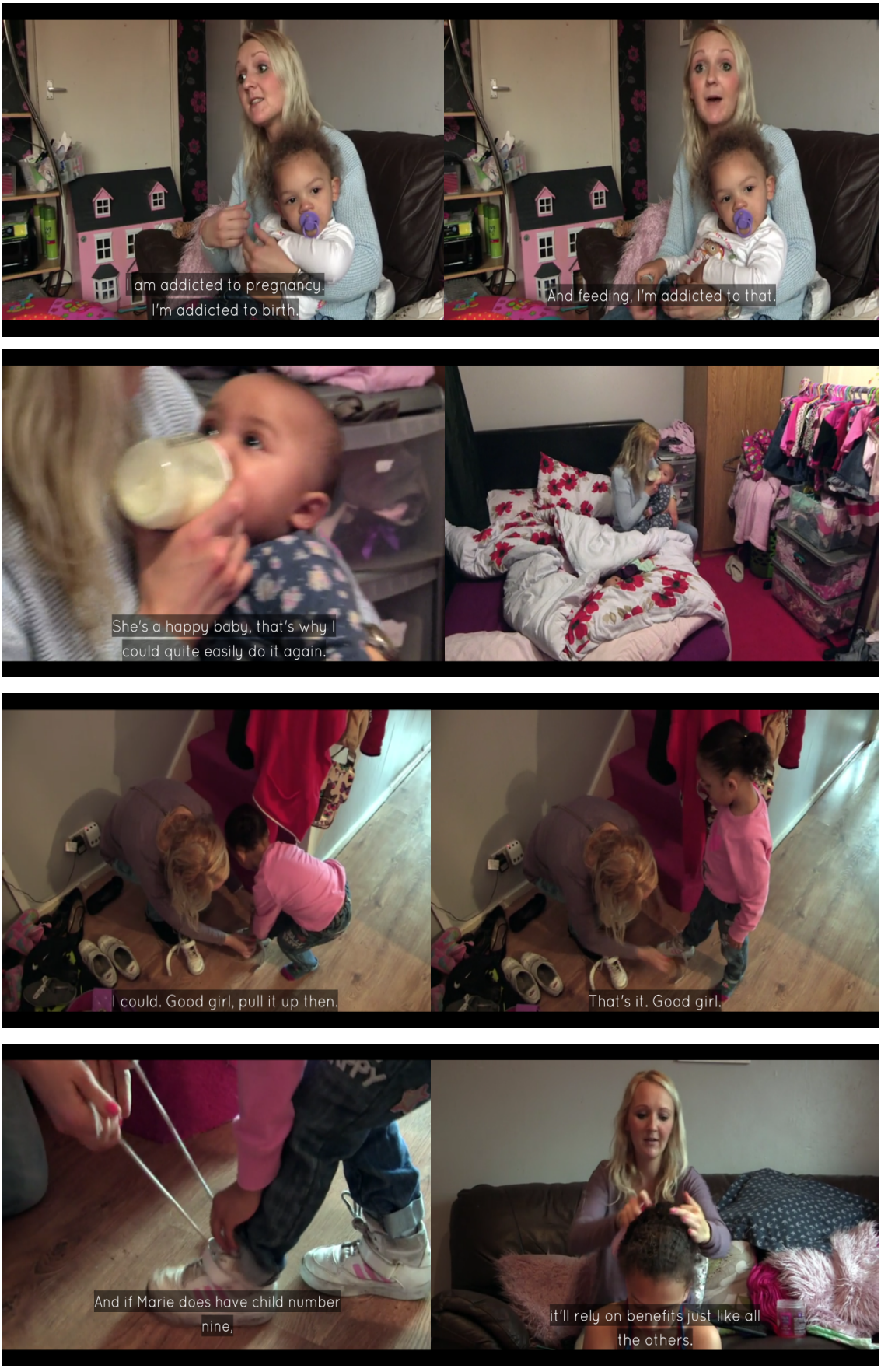

Marie wouldn't mind having yet
another tattoo.


Marie wouldn't mind having yet
another tattoo.

Frame 8. Heather Frost's Tattoos

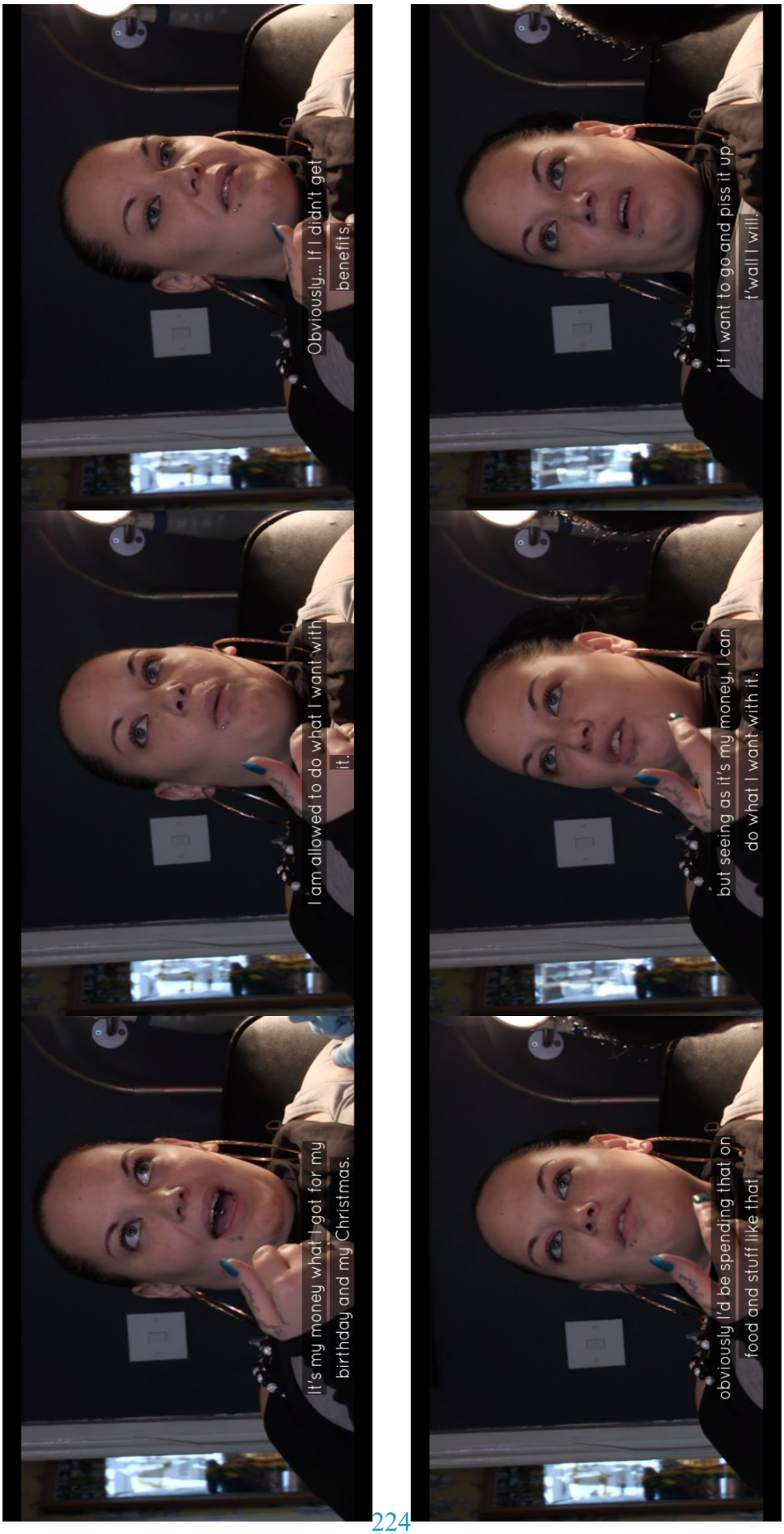
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 6. Screenshots by author.

Frame 9. Marie Buchan “Addicted to Pregnancy”
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 2. Screenshots by author.

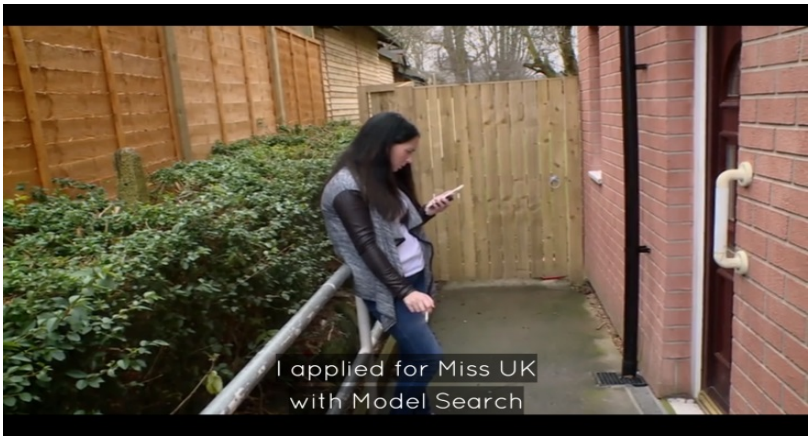


Frame 10. Steph Cocker's Tattoo
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 3. Screenshots by author.

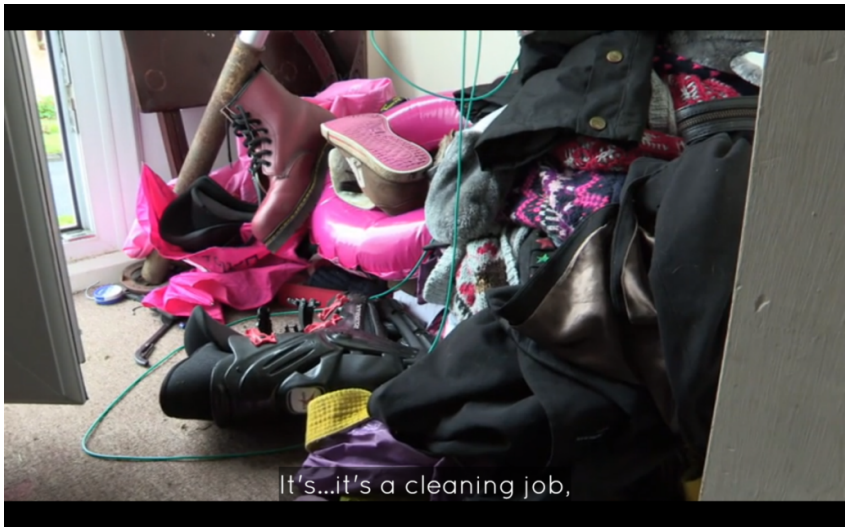
Frame 11. Steph Cocker's Spending Habits
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 3. Screenshots by author.



Frame 12. Vanessa – Modelling and Smoking (Various Scenes)
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits,* Series 4 Episode 9: 'From Job Centre to Catwalk'. Screenshots by author.



Frame 13. Joanne – Mess
Channel 5 (2014). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 1 Episode 3. Screenshots by author.



9.2 Frame-by-Frame Analysis II: Grotesque Embodiment

Frame 14a. Cooking Lasagne – Cheese Close Up
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits,* Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 14b. Cooking Lasagne – Portion Size

Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits,* Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 15a. Stephen and Michelle – Weight Loss Class
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

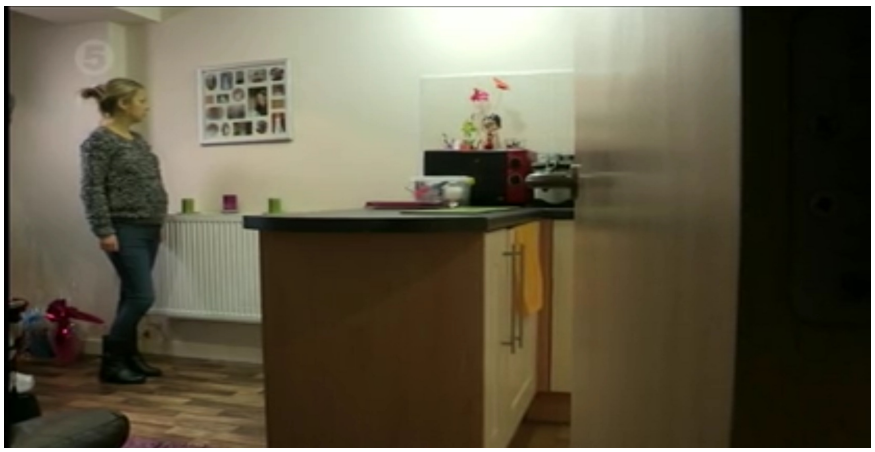
Frame 15b. Stephen and Michelle – Eating Kebabs
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 16. Introduction to Julie
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

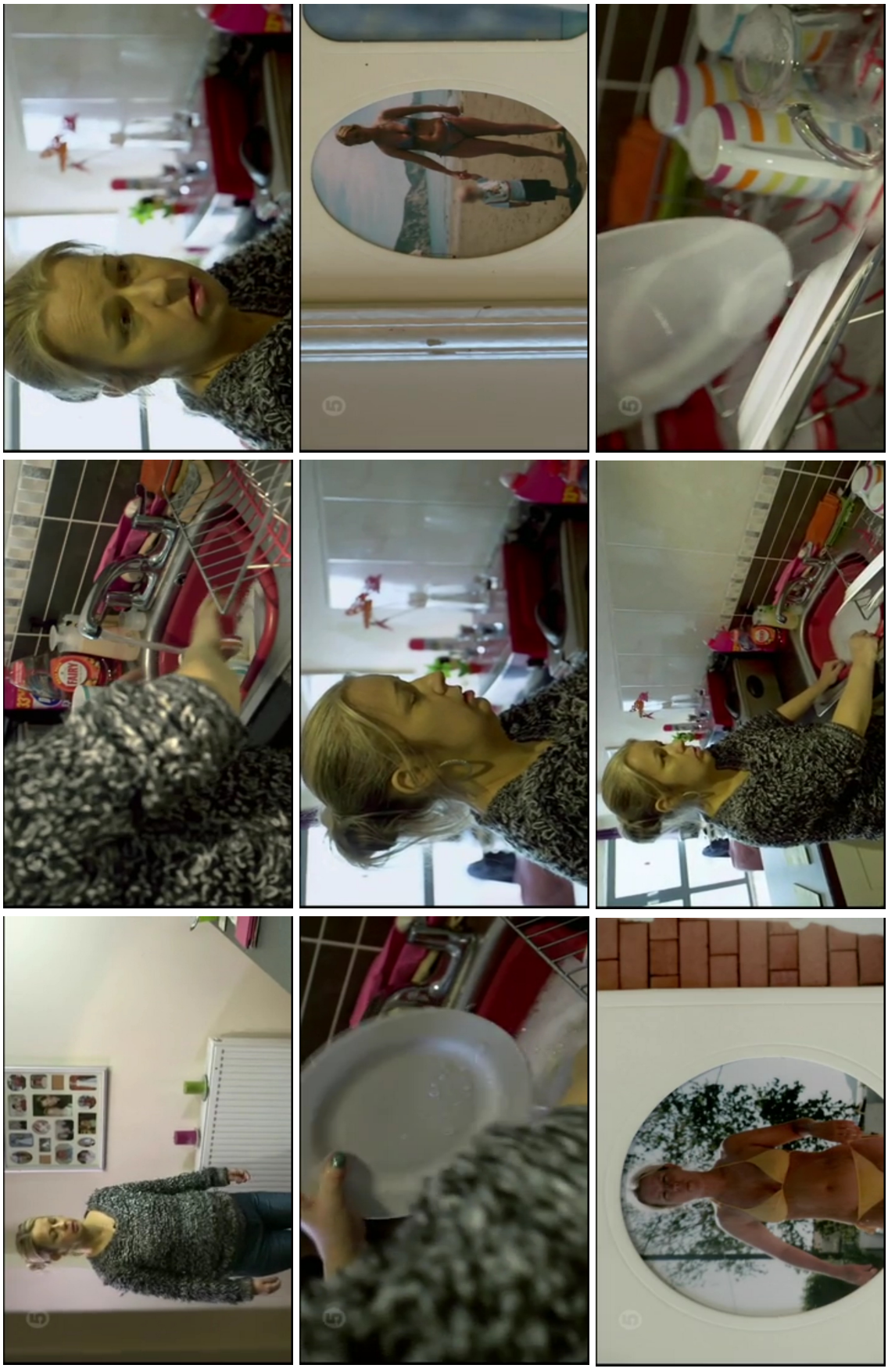
Frame 17. Transitionary Shot to Ad-Break (Julie's Stomach)
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 18a. Julie as Ab/Normal

Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.



Frame 18b. Julie's Monologue and Old Photos
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.



Frame 19. Danny – Stork Margarine Tub and Medication
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 20. Rochelle (Various Shots)
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 21a. Close Ups of Rachel's Face / Clutter (Various Shots)
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 21b. Rachel Using Stomach as a 'Table'
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 22. Amy (Various Shots)
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 23. Amy and Sharon in the Bathroom
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too Fat to Work.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 24. Kathleen on the Sofa (Various Scenes)
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 25a. Introduction to Sarah

Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 25b. Supermarket Exit

Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 26. Sarah's Wardrobe

Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 27. Sarah's Piece-to-Camera 1
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 28. Sarah's Piece-to-Camera 2

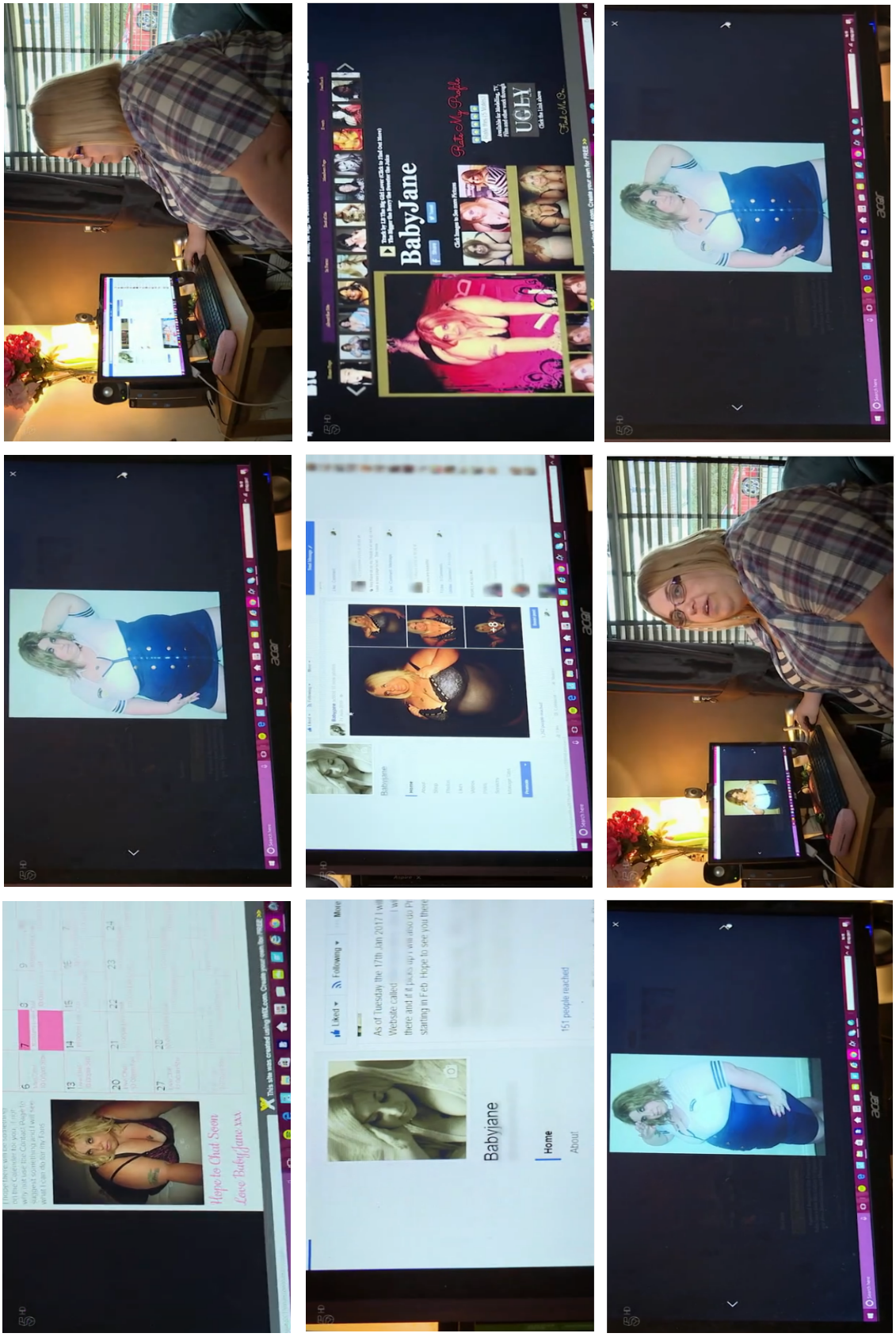
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 29a. Sarah in Black Lingerie
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 29b. Sarah In Pink Roleplay Outfit
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 30. ‘Baby Jane’ Computer Images

Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: ‘100 Stone and on the Dole’. Screenshots by author.



Frame 31a. Stephen on the Sofa
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 31b. Close Ups of Stephen's Stomach and Cellulitis
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 32a. Close-ups of Stephen's Face
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 32b. Close-ups of Stephen's Backside
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 33. Ruth Washing Stephen
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 34. Bryan's Mobility Scooter

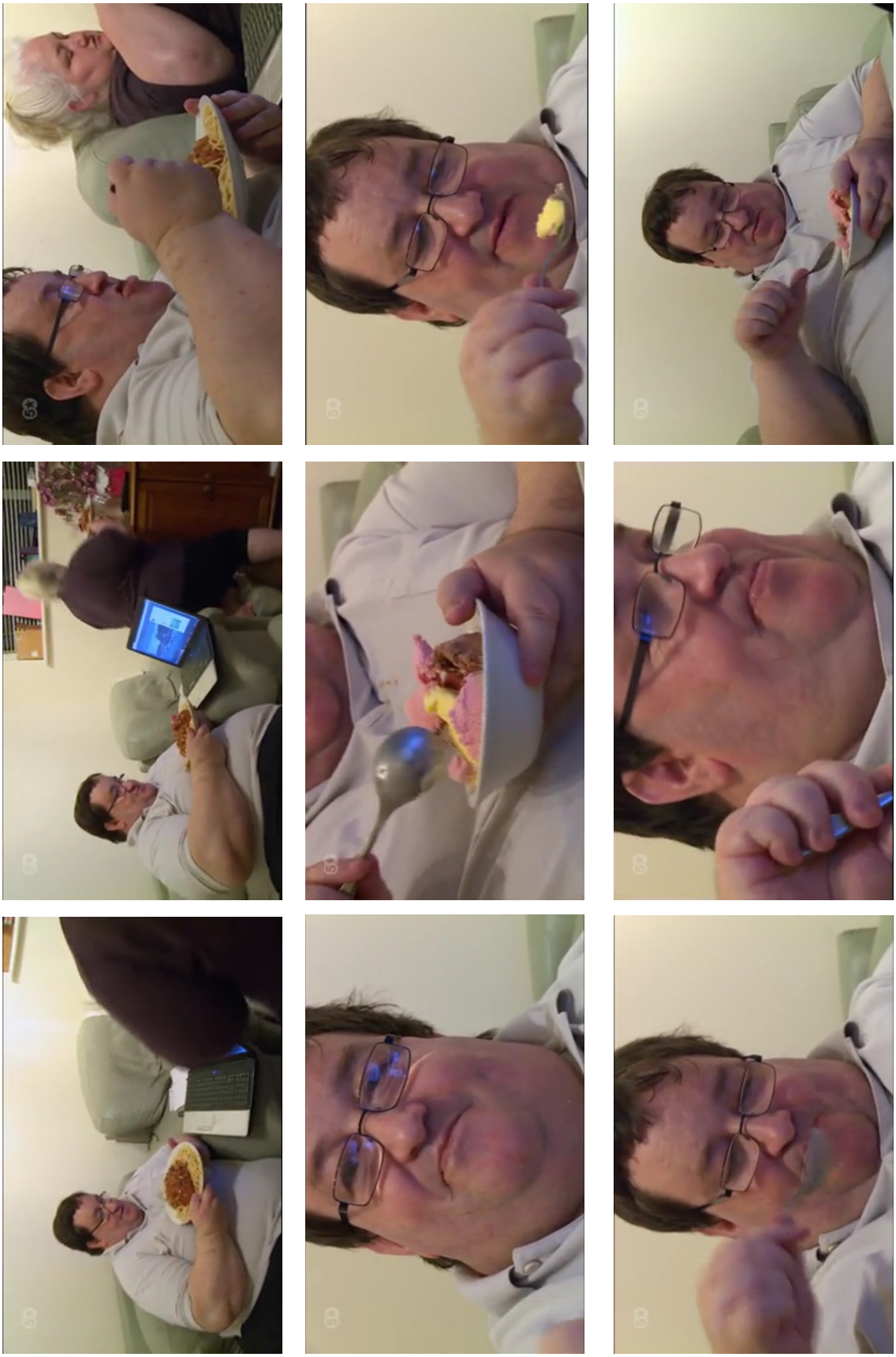
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 35. Stephen's Mobility Scooter

Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.

Frame 36. Bryan Eating a Burger
Channel 5 (2017). *On Benefits*, Series 4 Episode 7: '100 Stone and on the Dole'. Screenshots by author.

Frame 37. Stephen Eating his Dinner
Channel 5 (2015). *Bene£its: Too fat to Work*. Screenshots by author.



Frame 38. Introduction to Dean / Dean taking 'Selfies'
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, Series 2 Episode 6. Screenshots by author.

Frame 39a. Introduction to Barry / Shot of the Amputation
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 39b. Shots of Barry Smoking
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 40a. Stump Check-up with Health Visitor (Close-up)
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.


Frame 40b. Stump Check-up at the Hospital
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

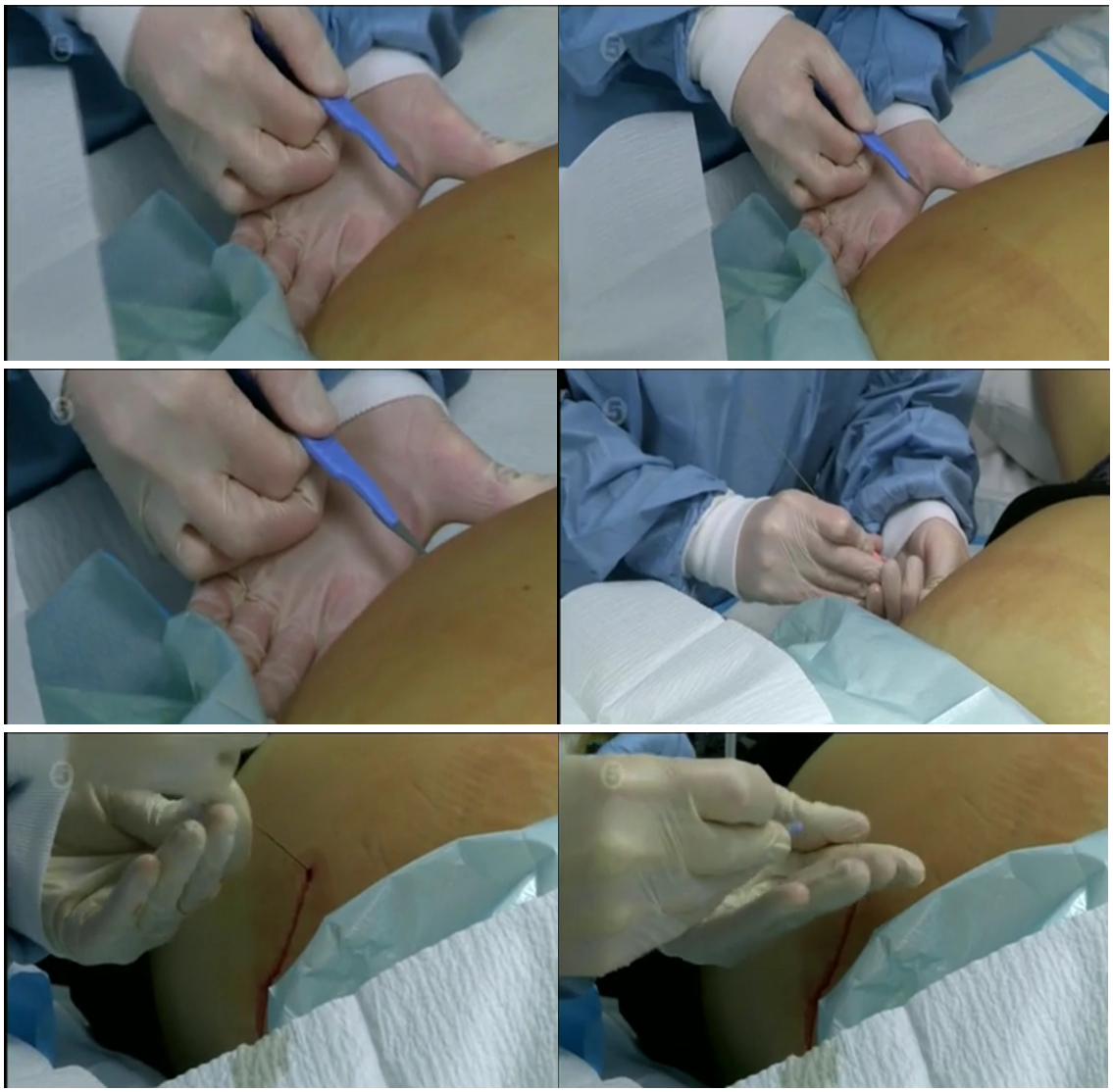


Frame 41a. Surgical Apparatus
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 41b. Danny's Stomach in Surgery
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

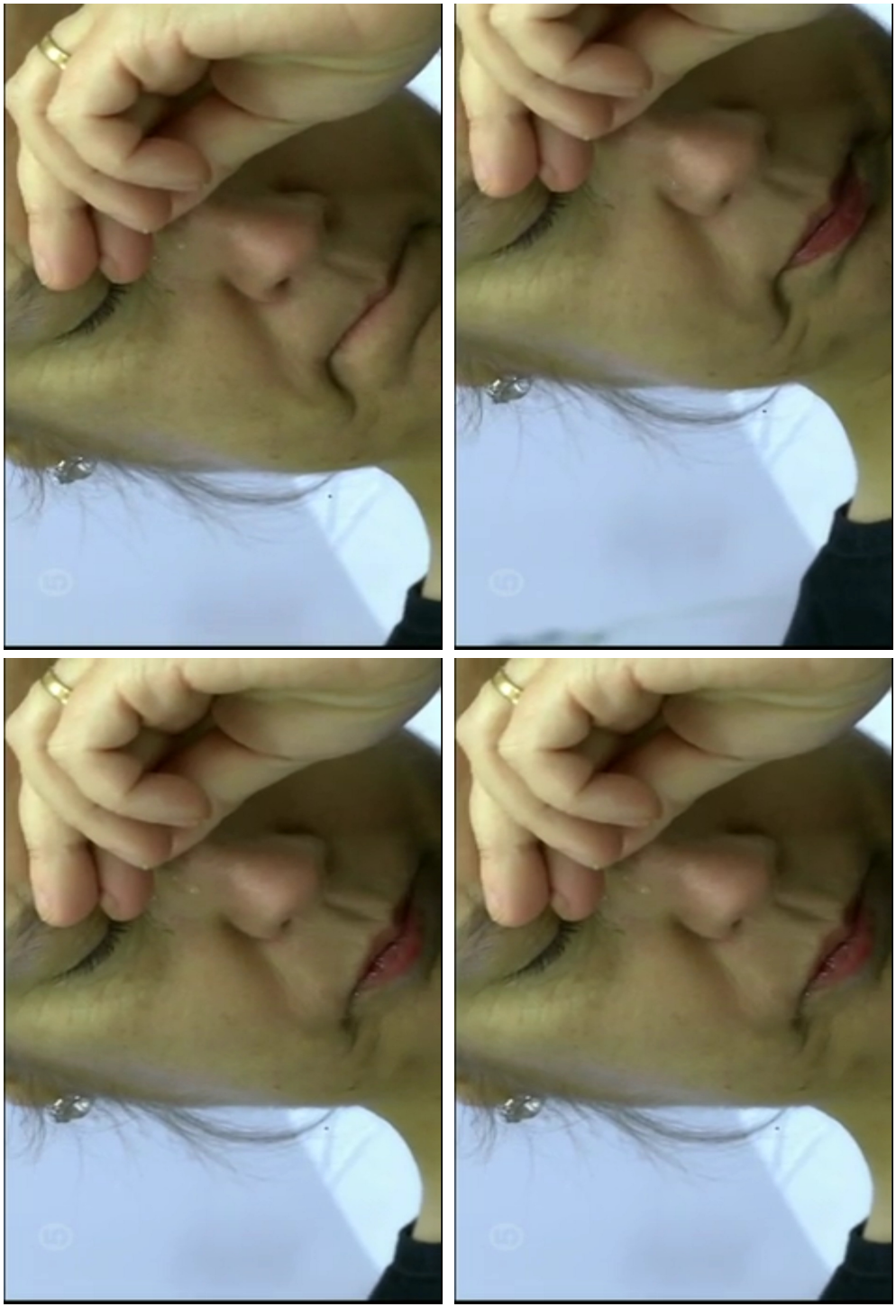
Frame 42. Danny in Surgery / Surgeons and Screens
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 43a. Scalpel and Tubing (Julie in surgery)
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.



Frame 43b. Bile Drainage
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

Frame 43c. Julie Crying (Close-up)
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.



Frame 44. Disposing of Julie's Waste
Channel 5 (2015). *Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients.* Screenshots by author.

9.3 Character Chart

Thematic Key:
AM (Abject Maternal);
GE (Grotesque Embodiment);
VD (Violence and Deviant behaviour)

Programme Title	Series: Episode	Characters	Representational Categories; Themes; Key points
Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole Channel 5	S1 E2	Peter Rolf and family (26 children)	• GE – Mobility Scooter – Suggests a fraudulent claim– 'Peter has a *plan*' • Intergenerational drop out • Illegitimacy? – he has had 26 children by 15 women – but he seems to look after most of them • Engages with tabloid articles written about himself
		Tim and Mandy (14 children)	• Abject space – they are knocking the wall through on their house to make 6 bedrooms • Excess/Extravagance – Koi Carp • The family have a disabled son
		Marie Buchan (8 children) + friend Sarah	• AM – single parent, "addicted to pregnancy", connotes a lack of taste and capital • Tattoos – Marie is abjection embodied – she is mostly known for the number of children or tattoos that she has • 'That is not me' – "there are people out there having children for money" / Stigma – "a lot of people see me as trash" • Engages with tabloid articles about herself
	S1 E3	Steph Cocker + friend Zara	• AM – single parent – suggested that her and Zara are more than friend –

			depicted as crass and vulgar – imitate oral sex • Making bad choices – tattoos and facial piercings (gets her sleeve finished instead of paying bills), partner in prison • Unable to discipline children • VD – Zara has been to prison – she got her child taken off her – Staffordshire Bull Terrier is a common motif
		Joanne	• DO – Hope of cleaning job at odds with her unclean house
	S1 E4	Gordon Higginbotham	• Capital/Taste – plastic fruit – spending above his means on household appliances? • VD – Skinhead "Romper Stomper" jacket, Gordon states his racist views "I like anyone…as long as they're English", offers Rose and Mark money to vote for UKIP • Intergenerational drop out – "I've raised my kids brilliant" • Juxtaposed with Mark's middle class mother
		Rose + husband Mark	• Intergenerational drop out and AM – trying to start 'Project Baby' – 'the perfect way to become unstuck' implies that they are having a baby to claim more • GE – Weight loss scenes used for comedic effect
		Anita and family	• AM – 'Benefits Foster Mum' • Believes her son will probably end up on social – Becca is 16 and pregnant and doesn't have a job

			• Stigma – gets a job but lacks self-confidence – self doubt • Anita has a disabled son
		- Charlotte	• Aspiration – has no qualifications but wants to be a barrister; doesn't know how to dress herself for an interview - Becca says her first impression is 'chav'
		- Becca + bf Sonny	• Teenage pregnancy – only 16 years old: benefits claiming regarded as the 'easy option' • Extravagance/Excess – wanting to buy a top of the range pram
		Danny	• VD – would turn to crime to pay for stuff for his children
	S1 E6	Heather Frost (11 children)	• AM – 11 children by 3 fathers – tattoos – named "dole queen" and "shameless super scrounger" • Getting a brand new half-a-million pound house • "Some of them were planned…don't believe in abortions…you make mistakes and learn by it…" – image of heavily pregnant dog • VD – buys stuff from shoplifters, presumes everyone else does so • Friend Laura has a go at alcoholics for wasting their money • Heather has a disabled child
		Emma and Sophie	• AM – Emma had children at a young age – taste/capital – trying to emulate a cosmopolitan lifestyle with trips to nail bars and shopping sprees • Excessive drinking

			• On benefits because she wants to watch her children grow up • Distancing themselves from racist people and scroungers 'Emma and Sophie know they could be called scroungers…' • Emma won't sign off unless she gets £30000 a year salary • Suggested that Emma and her partner don't live together so they can get more benefits for the children
		Julie B-K and Vinnie + daughter Charlotte	• 'experts on life on the dole' 'only hard graft is working the system' • Extravagance/luxury – installed 3 cable TV packages in the home – poverty commercial • Tells her daughter she needs to put on weight • Julie won't take a job for less than £500 after bills/tax etc.
	S2 E2	Julie B-K	• VD – Barred from the jobcentre for assaulting a member of staff
	S2 E5	Claire Fitzpatrick and Luke + mother Sarah	• Abject space – Jaywick – 'looks like a shanty town' • AM – Mother of three – 2 fathers – Luke went to jail • Teeth missing, overweight, tattoos • VD – Luke can't get work because he's an ex-con "don't label people!" • Can't control children – grabs child's face – discipline • Unhealthy food for children – pets get fresh fruit and veg • Staffordshire Bull Terrier

			• Claire's mum explains the importance of having one loaf and beans – Claire has various bottles of coke and junk food hidden around the house • Claire has a disabled child
		Tony Scrap	• DO – physicality – mental health seems to have detiorated
		Michelle	• 'Butch' in appearance – facial piercings, overweight, dresses in tracksuits, hand tattoos • VD – Tony shocked that her bike is legal; she is currently on tag for assaulting a firefighter – she has also assaulted police in the past – can't see her son because of her behaviour • VD – always has a drink in her hand – aggressive and loud conduct – broaches the conditions of her tag
		Sarah and partner Brian	• VD – Sarah has just done 6 months inside for drugs • Brian and Sarah share some racist views about immigrants • AM – Brian and Sarah are hoping for a baby "the big man always shoots his load straight up there" – irresponsible
	S2 E6	Josh and Danielle	• GE – mental health – suggestive that they are fraudulently claiming • Excess/luxury – big benefits breakfast • Danielle has to go to food bank – comical music • "benefits life" "benefits pad" "benefits baby" – family isn't something to be rewarded when on benefits

			• Danielle smoking despite being pregnant
		Titch	• VD – can't get a job because of criminal record – make's his money by 'hustling' – robs a pair of gloves for Danielle – they group look out for each other (camaraderie) but this is overshadowed by crime
		Dean	• GE – obese, excessive sexuality at odds with his size • Irresponsible with his money
		Steph and Zara	• Narrator uses her as contrast to the trio – congratulates her for not turning to crime but berates her for being on benefits • Wants to go to college • Her and Zara make suggestive actions - sexuality
		Travis	• Aspiration – "we're unique" "we want a top job" • Mocks Steph when she suggests she will be a taxpayer • Attempts to get a job for door to door charity work but walks out of the interview • Applies for Big Brother
	S2 E10	Mandy Cowie (10 children)	• AM – epitome of AM – representational cues – overweight, smokes, drinks, covered in tattoos "ten kids full of tattoos mate, yeah?" "Yummy mummy" plaque – bad taste – lacks the capital to be a yummy mummy • Fights with her children – can't discipline them – child calls grandchild a

			"poof" "I'll punch you in your mouth mate" • Daughter Crystal is also on benefits • Lack of taste – decorating the walls with leopard print wallpaper • Stigma - Sick of people judging her – knows she will get judged for being on the programme • Spent over £4000 on tattoos • Jack takes a moralistic stance on Charlie not going to school
		Sarah (7 children)	• AM – single mother – works part time – this isn't celebrated 'Sarah has a recipe for cooking up her benefits' • Cooks using fresh ingredients – parents attempting to show that they are good parents • "I've always had pride…not to scrounge off the benefits system"
	S2 E11	Tom Shaw and family (14 children)	• Hesitant to give a figure of how much benefits they receive • Tom takes on an effeminized role as main carer for the children – barely hear from his wife – this is used as comedic not celebrated • They make healthy meals but this is frowned upon by narrator because it costs so much money • They have a disabled son • DO – Intergenerational – Wants his children to work – 19 y/o Shannon has flew the nest and is a single mother on benefits
		Sarah and Robert	• Robert is 'homeless and Polish' – been together 2

			weeks, Sarah wants to get married (to claim more benefits) – Robert would rather work – Sarah is both naïve and cunning • Sarah's son Bryan dreams of being an actor – Bryan is disabled
		Kevin	• 60 worked most of his life – arthritis – still frames him in a bad light – xbox, wide screen TV
On Benefits Channel 5	S4 E7	Sarah / 'Baby Jane'	• GE – 27 stone – paradox of sexuality and obesity – Sarah is a plus sized model – lingerie, paw print tattoos – fetishization • Weight induced sleep apnoea • Struggles to walk • Focus on bodily lower stratum • Can't stick to her diet
	S4 E9	Vanessa	• AM – Mother of 5 children, had her first child at 19 – can't control them • Wants to become a model – trying to inhabit a space she never can as she lacks taste and capital • Bad taste – leopard print graffiti 'Diva' • Whenever she talks about her aspirations of being a model this is at odds with her smoking a cigarette
		Hannah	• Aspires to be an artist – unrealistic – the show mocks her
		Tasha	• GE – disability – wants to become her mother's carer – show frames it as if she is doing it to get more benefits • Forced to give up career in catering because of mental health problems – imagery of mug "do I look like a morning person" suggests

			she doesn't have mental health problems
Benefits and Bypasses: Billion Pound Patients Channel 5	E1	Rochelle and mother Linda	• GE – Rochelle is 30 stone – struggles to breath yet smokes • Close ups of her body parts – reduced to them – dehumanised – close ups of her eating • "Don't you think I know I'm fat already"
		Danny	• GE – Keeps medication in a huge Stork margarine tub – fitting metaphor • Needs a gastric band fitting • Danny has diabetes so get his prescriptions free – implication that he shouldn't because it is his fault for being fat • Open leaking body – tubes in his stomach
		Julie	• GE – truly grotesque – green with jaundice – bloated she looks pregnant • Contrast between the old Julie as normative and the new Julie as abnormal/grotesque • Open and leaking – has to have the fluid drained from her liver
		Dean	• Won't stop smoking even though he is on 11 types of medication, wonders what is wrong with him although it is obvious
		Barry	• GE – has an amputated leg and an open stump – in effect gives him another orifice – disgust
Bene£its: Too Fat to Work Channel 5	E1	Steven and Michelle	• GE – Steven is 31 stone; Michelle is 23 stone • Close ups of Steven's stomach – he has a nurse that comes to wash him – comical thought of him getting stuck in shower

			• S and M are getting married using their benefits money • Weight loss class followed by takeaway order • "basgeti Bolognese" – huge portion – costs £16 for ingredients • 6XL doesn't fit – "his fingers are too fat" • Diabetes and hypertension • Steven gets taken to the hospital during his wedding
		Rachael	• GE – overweight – keeps rats which connotes dirt and filth • Getting gastric band surgery • Stigma – she believes people don't like her because of her weight
		Amy and mother Sharon	• GE – Amy is 18 and 32 stone – 'butch in appearance' • Mother also overweight and unemployed • Barely fit in the bathroom • Amy's mom has to check on her in the night because she can't breathe • Sharon can't afford to buy healthy food – Amy on 2 bottles of coke a day – all they eat is sandwiches

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