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Chapter 3. Analysing orders of discourse of neoliberal rule: health 'nudges' and the rise of psychological governance

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I want to argue that the recent enthusiasm among policy practitioners for behavioural economics is best understood in relation to the neoliberal governance practices with which it is linked. I illustrate my arguments with findings from a case study investigating the use of 'nudge' in the UK government's 'Change4Life' (C4L) anti-obesity social marketing campaign. Combining the text analytical methods of critical discourse analysis with the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, I show how it textures together the practices, ideas, values, power relations and subjectivities fitted to an individualising, neoliberal response to this complex social problem.

Behavioural economics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) combines economics with psychology to posit the idea that people's decision-making behaviours are not as rational as hitherto believed. In their 2009 book Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness, Thaler and Sunstein attribute such 'wicked' social problems as retirement poverty, personal debt, obesity, and environmental pollution to individuals' 'hard-wired' tendency to make irrational choices. Consequently, they encourage governments to act as 'choice architects', using policy to steer citizens towards better decisions. In the ensuing decade the global appetite for nudge has spread exponentially, and in various guises has been taken up by governments and NGOs across the globe. Ideologically defended in the name of libertarian paternalism, proponents of nudge claim it offers a 'Third Way' out of the problems of neoliberalism, arguing 'we should design policies that help the least sophisticated people in society while imposing the smallest possible costs on the most sophisticated' (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009, p. 252). The approach has attracted considerable critical interest from scholars across the social and political sciences (Bovens, 2013; Wilkins, 2013, Pykett, 2013), yet none uses the fine detail of linguistic analysis to assess how and why it has come to prominence. This chapter fills that gap, using a transdisciplinary, textually oriented analytical framework to explore its realisation, and to assess the political significance of its use in health policy.

The chapter is organised as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of the particular **policy problem** which this behaviour change intervention seeks to address, namely the increasing prevalence of obesity and its concentration among the poorest sections of society. I then situate this problem within the **context** of neoliberal capitalism and the emergence of nudge as a policy tactic, briefly outlining its key assumptions about the political subject and the responsibilities of the state. I then present my **discourse analytical approach**, involving a transdisciplinary dialogue between Foucault's theoretical work on governmentality and critical discourse analysis. The **findings** present three main insights: 1) the family, and the discursive representation of its 'dysfunctional' behaviours, is an important instrument in governing the

health of the population, 2) targeting children, this policy disrupts traditional parent-child power relations as means of invoking self-disciplinary behaviours. 3) through a pervasive discourse of dietary and consumer 'smartness', this health campaign attempts to instil more resilient, risk-prepared subjectivities. In doing so it reveals the continued importance of the rational, responsible consumer-citizen in the governance of public health, which is entirely consistent with neoliberalism. I argue that this is premised on an impoverished (neoliberal) view of individual agency in which it is assumed that the wider social environment is essentially beyond our control. Thus, to manage the risks it poses, we must change ourselves, rather than it, and in ways which align with the market values of neoliberalism.

2. The Policy Problem: childhood obesity and rising social inequality

The World Health Organisation characterises childhood obesity as 'one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century', with the number of overweight children under the age of five estimated at over 41 million globally (WHO, 2016). Since 1975 there has been a global increase in prevalence of 8% for boys and 5% for girls (Abarca-Gómez et al., 2017). In England trends have been monitored since 2006 through the National Child Measurement Programme, measuring the height and weight of children aged 4-5 and 10-11. According to figures from Public Health England (2018), during the last decade there has been an overall increase of 1.3% in obesity levels, with one in five children aged 10 to 11 now obese (boys 21.8%; girls 18.1%). Mirroring global patterns, obesity is closely linked with social inequality, particularly in poorer urban areas. The deprivation gap has also widened since 2007 by 3.5%, with children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds now more than twice as likely (26%) to be obese as the least deprived (11.7%) (Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, 2018).

This health policy problem reflects widening forms of social inequality in the UK, as indexed through income inequality and wealth distribution. The UK ranks seventh out of the 30 OECD countries for income inequality, with the poorest fifth of households receiving 8% of total national income and the top fifth receiving 40%. Income inequality rose most dramatically in the Thatcher government of the 1980s and has continued to rise since, with the financial crisis having only a small effect and the top fifth continuing to take almost half the income (Equality Trust, 2018). In the context of a post-crisis political programme of austerity and a renewed wave of welfare reforms, a further expression of the day to day impact of inequality is food poverty, which is linked to obesity. Unlike Canada and the US, the UK does not currently have a national system for identifying food poverty. One indicator is the use of food banks, which has increased steadily since the financial crisis, with 1,332, 952 people accessing emergency food supplies in the last year, with low income and inadequate benefits cited as the two most prominent reasons for referral (The Trussell Trust, 2018). A recent study (Smith et al., 2018) used census data to map regions most at risk of food poverty. Their findings correlate closely with the starkly unequal distribution of childhood obesity. For instance, within the London borough of Southwark, 1 in 3 children are obese in Camberwell Green, compared with 1 in 10 just two miles away in Dulwich Village (where the average household income is double that of Camberwell Green). There is thus a complex and deepening relationship between obesity and inequality. Since 2009 the UK government's flagship policy intervention has been the Change4Life social marketing campaign. To understand this policy decision to focus on individual behaviour change (as opposed to, say, regulatory intervention), we must turn to the political context out of which the problem has emerged.

3. Context: neoliberalism and the rise of behavioural economics

The popularity of nudge and its perceived usefulness in anti-obesity policy, must be understood

in relation to the wider political economic conditions to which it claims to be a response; namely a broad cross-party consensus on neoliberal modes of governance, which in various forms has been maintained since the 1980s. The Thatcher administration (1979-1990) laid the foundations for this, changing the balance of power from a regulatory and paternalistic welfare state towards a liberalised, market-driven economy and workfare state. The ensuing Labour governments (1997-2010) left this neoliberal rationality largely unchallenged, instead attempting to 'soften' it through a 'Third Way' political ideology (Giddens, 1998) of free markets and competitiveness alongside a discourse of responsibility, opportunity and social inclusion (Fairclough, 2000). This 'advanced liberal' mode of governmentality (Miller & Rose, 1990) necessarily involved a reconfiguration of power relations. As the unit of governance shifted from society towards the individual citizen-consumer, the locus of responsibility for wellbeing moved with it. As a result, self-governance took on increasing importance, with questions like ill-health, unemployment, poverty, and old age recast as forms of social risk against which the individual has a duty of 'self-care' (Lemke, 2012). Neoliberalism thus attempts to reconcile the liberal freedoms of the rational, entrepreneurial consumer-citizen, with the potential costs to self and society of those freedoms. Consequently, governments develop various forms of intervention designed to steer individuals towards 'appropriate' or 'desirable' outcomes, and in doing so to diagnose social problems as a problem of self-government rather than of capitalism, racism, inequality, and so on. In short, liberal political power involves governing individuals through their freedoms (Rose, 1999).

During what Pykett (2013, p. 846) terms 'the decade of the brain', there was a redefinition of the nature, limits, and possibilities of the individual's capacities of acting and thinking, as alternative psychology-based theories entered political thinking. Chief among them was behavioural economics (or 'nudge'), which advances the idea of 'bounded rationality' (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). This model of the 'post-rational' citizen argues that subjective biases play a key role in decision-making and, due to their reliance on inaccurate or partial information, tend to misrepresent the likely consequences of choices. In short, nudge is thus premised on a model of the psychologically flawed individual who is prone to making poor decisions. This theory is underpinned by a cognitive model comprising the 'slow-thinking' rational System 2 and the 'fast-thinking' automatic System 1. Thaler and Sunstein (2009) take this rather problematic dualism a step further, personifying it through Star Trek's Mr Spock representing the System 2 brain, while the cartoon character Homer Simpson represents System 1. The latter is primarily responsible for decision-making and much more likely to base those decisions on instinct, emotion, habit, and other forms of information bias, leading to 'hyperbolic discounting' in making decisions, favouring immediate gratification over longer term rewards. Applied to political rationality, nudge construes the cognitively flawed political subject as an object of governance. As a policy strategy it involves designing 'choice environments' which exploit the automatic mind and thereby subtly coax individuals into making better choices, for instance in health policy 'changing social norms and default options so that healthier choices are easier' (Dolan et al., 2010, p. 30), in effect saving individuals from the consequences of their irrational, emotionally-driven choices.

The UK government was an early and enthusiastic adopter of nudge, with behavioural economist David Halpern acting as advisor since 2001, and in 2010 appointed head of the newly-created government 'Nudge Unit' (Behavioural Insights Team). One of the earliest policy interventions which drew inspiration from this pre-emptive, psychology-inspired approach was the ongoing Change4Life (C4L) anti-obesity social marketing campaign; the object of analysis in this paper. First launched in 2009, it carried an explicit behaviour change remit to 'nudge people along the behaviour-change journey and track their behaviours over time ' (DOH, 2009, p. 28). In a press release accompanying the release of the C4L 'Smart

Swaps' advert, the marketing director of Public Health England framed it quite explicitly as a nudge:

> 'We've been working with Kantar Worldwide to look at shopper behaviour… people have a relatively small shopping pattern… The other part of it is the behavioural insight that it is much easier for us to get people to swap within categories… if you're going to buy X, then buy the healthier or the lower-cal variant' (Mitchell, 2014).

This statement illustrates the libertarian paternalist principles underlying the use of nudge in public life, wherein governments use a range of techniques to manage others' actions in a way that emphasises freedom of choice. In essence it is a form of 'soft power' involving persuasion and attraction rather than coercion and uses more subtle and distanced forms of governmental control (Mulderrig, 2011). Smart Swaps seeks to persuade viewers to exercise choice but within restricted parameters (by swapping within categories). A danger, of course, is that children are steered towards so-called benign alternatives like diet drinks, which unfortunately contain artificial sweeteners that are potentially just as harmful as sugar. Presumably, the commercial partners (for example Pepsico) have a vested interest in promoting swaps within categories and thus within their product range, rather than say promoting water.

4. Discourse Analytical Approach: a transdisciplinary dialogue between CDA and governmentality

My research is premised on the assumption that analysing the fine detail of texts can make an important contribution to the critical understanding of public policy. As Dean (2010, p. 20) puts it, 'to analyse government is to analyse those practices that try to shape, sculpt, mobilise, and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, means, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups'. Thus analysis of government as the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 2007) must work from the 'bottom up', exploring the microphysics of power (Jessop, 2007). C4L is a policy which aims to nudge the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. This chapter thus uses a theoretically informed model of textual analysis to investigate, from the bottom up, how it works through the choices, desires, and lifestyles of its targets to operate as a technique of governmentality.

4.1 Conceptual Framework: a dialectical view of the social world

CDA is not a fixed methodology but a framework and set of principles for operationalising, in the investigation of social problems, a dialectical theory of discourse that recognises its socially constitutive potential without reducing social practices to 'mere signification' (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011). Fairclough's discourse-dialectical approach (Fairclough, 2003) develops a set of conceptual categories which remind us that texts do not exist in a social vacuum but instead form part of a process through which discourse structures and enables social life. CDA analyses **social practices** (the more or less stable, conventionalised forms of social activity that shape institutions and organisations) in their discursive dimension, namely **discourse practices.** These can be seen as a kind of 'filtration device', mediating and (re)producing through distinctive semiotic forms, the ideas, beliefs, values, forms of knowledge, actions, identities and power relations of a particular social practice. In short, they provide the conventionalised (and always contestable) resources for doing, thinking, and being in a manner appropriate to participation in a particular institution or organisation. They can be analysed along three main dimensions: **genres** (conventionalised ways of acting and interacting), **discourses** (ways of talking and thinking about the world from a particular perspective), and **styles** (ways of being or self-identifying). These are instantiated and 'textured' in specific **texts**. A given text may be simultaneously analysed in terms of all three

categories (indeed, they are analytical distinctions; in reality they intersect), to reveal its distinctive configuration of genres, discourses and styles, or its **interdiscursivity** (see Introduction chapter on this concept)**.** This concept allows us to capture the 'porous' nature of discourse through which it incorporates diverse elements of its wider social context and thereby the role of discursive change in driving social change (Fairclough, 2003; 2005). Investigating social change (for instance, the emergence of new governance technologies) is therefore partly about mapping changes in the configuration of genres, discourses and styles in the social practice under investigation. Foucault used the term **orders of discourse** to conceptualise this constitutive and regulatory power of discourse; its role in producing the forms of knowledge and rules of social engagement which shape social practices: 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed through a certain number of procedures', the most fundamental of which is to grant or prohibit speech (Foucault, 1981, p. 52). Fairclough's approach, analysing discourse practices as a distinctive configuration of genres, discourses, and styles, offers a text analytical means of investigating the linguistic detail of how these actually operate in real contexts.

4.2 The Importance of Transdisciplinary Dialogue

The version of CDA I work with (Fairclough, 2003; 2005) is characterised by its commitment to a 'transdisciplinary' engagement with other disciplines and theories relevant to the object of research (Jessop and Sum, 2001); not simply appropriating or borrowing ideas from these disciplines but working with their logic and categories when developing one's own analytical framework (see transdisciplinary framework in box below). Thus, CDA's analytical methods are always formulated afresh in order to arrive at an adequate explanatory account of the particular (policy) problem under investigation. Moreover, this account is normative, driven by an explicitly emancipatory agenda which goes beyond the analysis of texts to offer a critical explanation of the socio-political conditions of their creation. The result is a multi-layered, iterative methodology involving a continual movement between, and critical reflection upon, the different stages and levels of the research.

Here, I argue that the concept of governmentality offers a useful framework to formulate a critique of C4L, highlighting the political rationalities and specific constitution of social subjects which underpin this 'behaviour change' approach to health policy. In his lectures on governmentality, Foucault traced the emergence of distinctive forms of state power in the 18th and 19th centuries. While incorporating some elements of previous forms of government (sovereignty associated with the medieval state, and the disciplinary power of the administrative state embodied in institutions like asylums, hospitals, prisons and schools), governmentality is characterised by changes in the primary focus and operation of power. This form of government is chiefly concerned with the management of a national economy and takes the wellbeing of the population as its chief target. Thus, the population, with its own distinctive patterns, cycles, and regularities, displaces the family as the central problem of government. However, in order to manage this one needs a technical means of intervention: 'When one wants to obtain something from the population concerning sexual behaviour, demography, the birth rate, or consumption, then one has to utilise the family' (Foucault, 2007, p. 205). As a result, the family becomes 'a privileged instrument for the government of the population' (ibid., p. 100). This privileged role of the family is, as we shall see, both symbolically and materially evident in C4L. This new 'liberal' mode of governing is thus centrally concerned with understanding the nature of individuals' freedoms and capacities for acting, thinking, and choice-making, because it is through these capacities that governing operates. Foucault (1991, p. 103) also observes that 'it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the

public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality'. It is in this sense that the tactics of governmentality, and how these define the limits of government, also become the key space for political struggle, critique, and contestation.

Therefore, governmentality is both a means of understanding the unique characteristics of advanced liberal rule (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999), and a means of formulating a critique of neoliberal practices (Joseph, 2013; Lemke, 2012). It points to the interdependence of political economic forces (e.g. corporate power, under-regulation, income inequality, capital flight) and ideological-discursive forces (e.g. concepts like choice, risk, resilience, smartness), and reminds us that at the heart of this form of political rule is the self-governing free subject: 'power is exercised only over free subjects and only in so far are as they are free' (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). A governmentality view of neoliberalism sees it as more than an ideology and political economic reality. It also sees it as a political project which endeavours to continually shape social reality in ways which align with its ideological imaginary. In this chapter I propose a critical analytical framework which operationalises this theory of advanced liberal rule within the textually oriented categories of CDA, and from which further, more specific text analytical questions can be explored. In doing so it aims to provide a textually specific, critical framework for investigating the **order of discourse** of C4L, as well as to offer a transdisciplinary model amenable to the investigation of other aspects of neoliberal political practice. The model draws on Fairclough's approach to CDA (Fairclough, 2003; 2005) and Lemke's (2012) governmentality-framed critique of neoliberalism as a distinctive technique of power, political rationality, and form(s) of subjectivity. Following the latter, neoliberalism is understood as: 1) a set of tactics of government and assembly of societal power relations whereby the boundaries of the state and the economy are continually (re)defined; 2) a form of knowledge-power which posits and circulates a market liberal political rationality which inscribes governance regimes; and 3) distinctive forms of subjectivity or 'technologies of the self' which inscribe a continuum of power relations from political government through to self-regulation. These are operationalised as text analytical inquiries through the following **framework for critical discourse analysis of neoliberal governance**:

1. The state-economy: By what tactics of government are the boundaries of state and market continually (re)defined? Through what practices and agencies are the economy, society and politics configured? In its discursive aspect, this is a matter of asking what distinctive forms of action and interaction help realise neoliberalism.

- This suggests the analysis of **genres** and their role in configuring social practices.

2. Knowledge-power: How does a neoliberal rationality function as a politics of truth? How does it produce new forms of knowledge and invent new concepts? In its discursive aspect, this is a matter of asking what distinctive forms of ideation help realise neoliberalism.

- This suggests the analysis of **discourse** representation.

3. The political subject: Through what forms of subjectivity and relations of power does neoliberal governance operate? What forms of self-identification and rationality does this involve? In its discursive aspect, this is a matter of asking what distinctive forms of identification help realise neoliberalism.

- This suggests the analysis of **styles** and their role in shaping forms of self-identification.

Box 1. Framework for critical discourse analysis of neoliberal governance

This transdisciplinary framework offers a socially grounded means of organising discursive analysis. It was used in this project to map the **order of discourse** of C4L and assess its status as a technology of neoliberal governance. Having selected suitable texts for analysis, the framework must then be operationalised through detailed text analytical procedures suited to the specific object of research (the diversity of such methods is illustrated in the chapters of this volume). Here, I drew on frameworks derived from social semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Van Leeuwen, 2008) since these offer a set of text analytical categories which highlight the social functions which language (and other forms of meaning-signifier) has evolved to perform. In the next two sections I describe the methodological process involved.

4.3 Selection of Data

C4L is a ten-year, ongoing, policy campaign which was first launched in 2009. It comprises multiple texts and is informed by a wide range of social practices. The project involved two main stages, with movement back and forth between the two. Stage 1 involved mapping the C4L policy intervention as a discourse practice, identifying the primary texts which comprise the campaign itself, as well as the range of other texts with which it intersects. Both procedures drew on a combination of documentary analysis (of government reports, policy statements, expert scientific reports) and intertextual analysis (in order to identify the range of source texts which inform the campaign). This stage resulted in two corpora of texts for further analysis.

Primary Corpus (C4L campaign materials): 30 short video adverts (designed for TV, schools, and social media); a website; posters and billboards; e-mails; flyers; recipes and leaflets; teaching materials for schools. The adverts feature brightly coloured 2D artwork, and animated plasticine figures making up a typical nuclear family whose activities take place in an ordinary-looking family home. The adverts typically last between 40 and 90 seconds and involve a first-person narrative in which one of the characters (usually the child) 'confesses' their unhealthy lifestyles, evaluates the health risks this brings, and describes a 'Change4Life' they have made. The language throughout the campaign is childlike and informal.

Secondary Corpus (intertextually linked to C4L): (Department of Health policy consultations, Change4Life official reports; Scientific publications on obesity and behavioural economics; Reports by market research, marketing, and other private sector organisations involved in the creation and funding of the campaign (section 5.1)).

Together, these corpora enabled me to map the key discourse practices which fed into this policy intervention, schematically outlined in section 5.1 (Figure 2) below. This more macro-level analysis was important to understand the shifting of boundaries between state and economic practices which lie behind this type of policy strategy. Stage 2 involved micro textual analysis of the primary corpus, mapping out the distinctive genres (section 5.1), discourses (section 5.2), and styles (section 5.3) through which it seeks to work on its target audience as a lifestyle nudge. The findings presented in this chapter derive from the corpus of 30 TV adverts. Figure 1 below depicts a montage of images from the corpus of adverts, each of which is referred to in the findings.

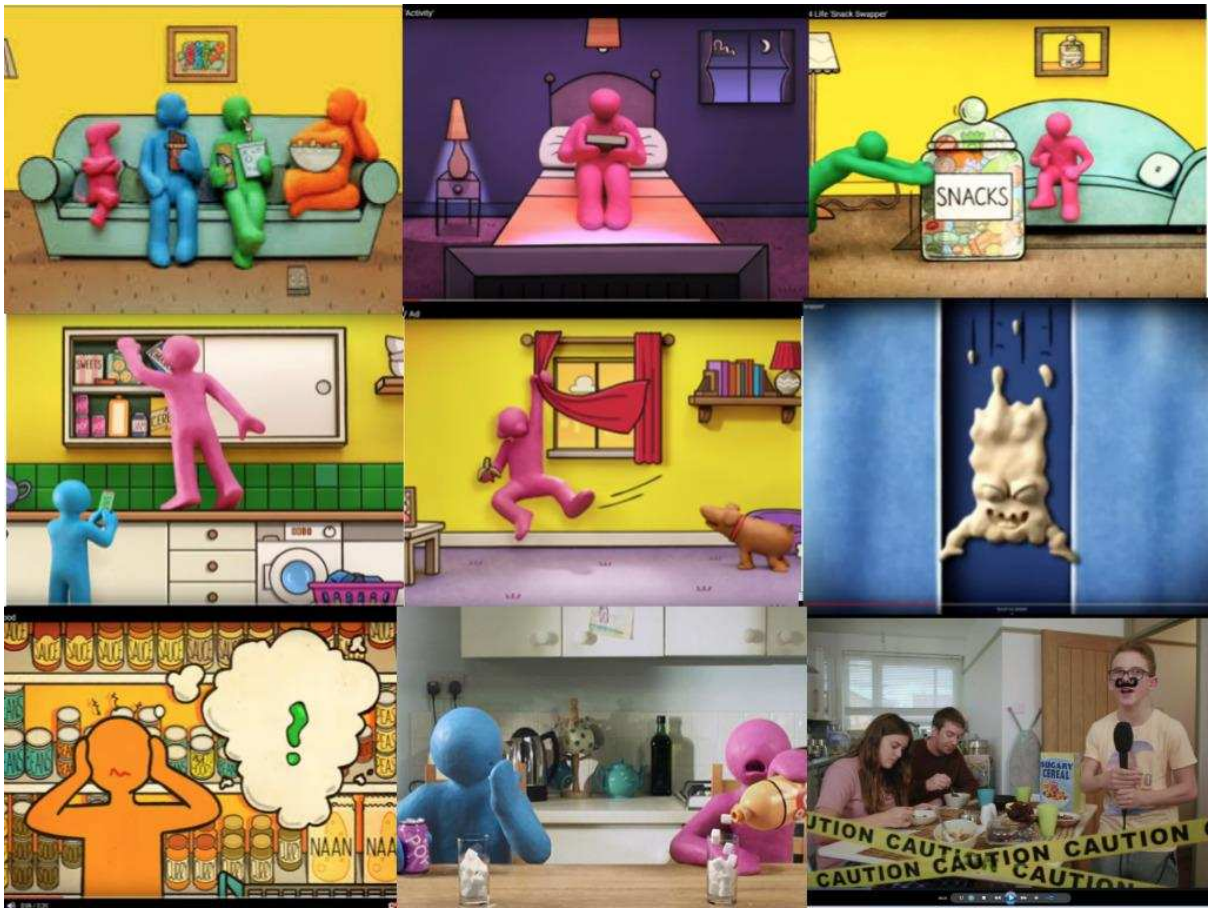

Figure 1. Screen shot images from the C4L campaign adverts

4.5 Multimodal Text Analytical Instruments

The next step was to operationalise semiotic analysis by assembling text analytical instruments suited to the chosen data and analytical framework. A **genre** can be seen as a linguistic vehicle for organising a specific type of social activity. Its semiotic features thus reflect its social function (Swales, 1990) by realising (inter)actional meanings. Characterising a text in terms of genre, thus means identifying its communicative purpose; the setting and audience; the form of text organisation or sequential structure; the particular register and style of language (formal/informal; serious/humorous); and distinctive types of speech act (warning, advising, promising, asking, and so on) which establish particular social relations between the text's participants. However, these features are never entirely fixed, nor is a given text exclusively 'in' a particular genre and may 'hybridize' semiotic elements from other social practices (along with their values and logics). Analysis of C4L thus examined the conventionalised patterns through which the texts enact a particular social activity, while also attending to the way they textured elements from other social practices. A **discourse** is a distinctive way of representing some aspect of the world from a particular point of view. In cases where one's primary interest is in social actors and the representation of their actions and relations, Van Leeuwen's sociosemantic frameworks offer a useful means of identifying salient patterns in the data. They ask: do actors have agency and power ('activated' or 'passivated'); what kinds of actions do they perform; and how are they referred to – as named individuals and/or classified in terms of their social role, function, relations with others, and so forth? **Styles** are textual processes of identification and may be realised through a range of semiotic devices, including those which permit the conveyor of the message to comment on it. In the analysis, I therefore focus on

lexical choice and metaphor; modality and evaluation; accent and dialect; gesture and body language.

C4L is a multimodal corpus, comprising language (spoken narratives, written slogans), visuals (logos, 2D cartoons and 3D animated characters, visual design), and audio (speakers' voices, accents, music, gestures). To analyse them I also needed to work with sociologically grounded frameworks for analysing multimodal texts. Here, I drew on Kress and Van Leeuwen's model of visual design and modality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). This posits scalar parameters to analyse how visual images can be made more or less salient and realistic: thus, at one end of the spectrum a photo is a form of representation which is very close to the depicted reality, whereas by contrast a 2D cartoon of the kind used in C4L is highly abstracted and more associated with fantasy than reality. These semiotic choices can be seen as differing degrees of commitment to the 'truth values' of the ideas conveyed. Where social actors are visually depicted, this analytical framework also allows the analyst to infer, by means of camera angles and gaze, the type of power relationship construed between the actors and the viewer. In the next section I draw on these text analytical instruments in discussing C4L from the perspective of genre, discourse, and style.

5. Findings: disciplining working-class, unhealthy subjectivities

5.1 Interdiscursivity: social marketing as neoliberal policy strategy

I begin with a macro-level summary of the key social practices which were found to intersect with C4L and ask how they contribute to the neoliberal (re)definition of the boundaries between state and market. In their discourse dimension these can be seen as the interdiscursive resources for formulating this health policy strategy.

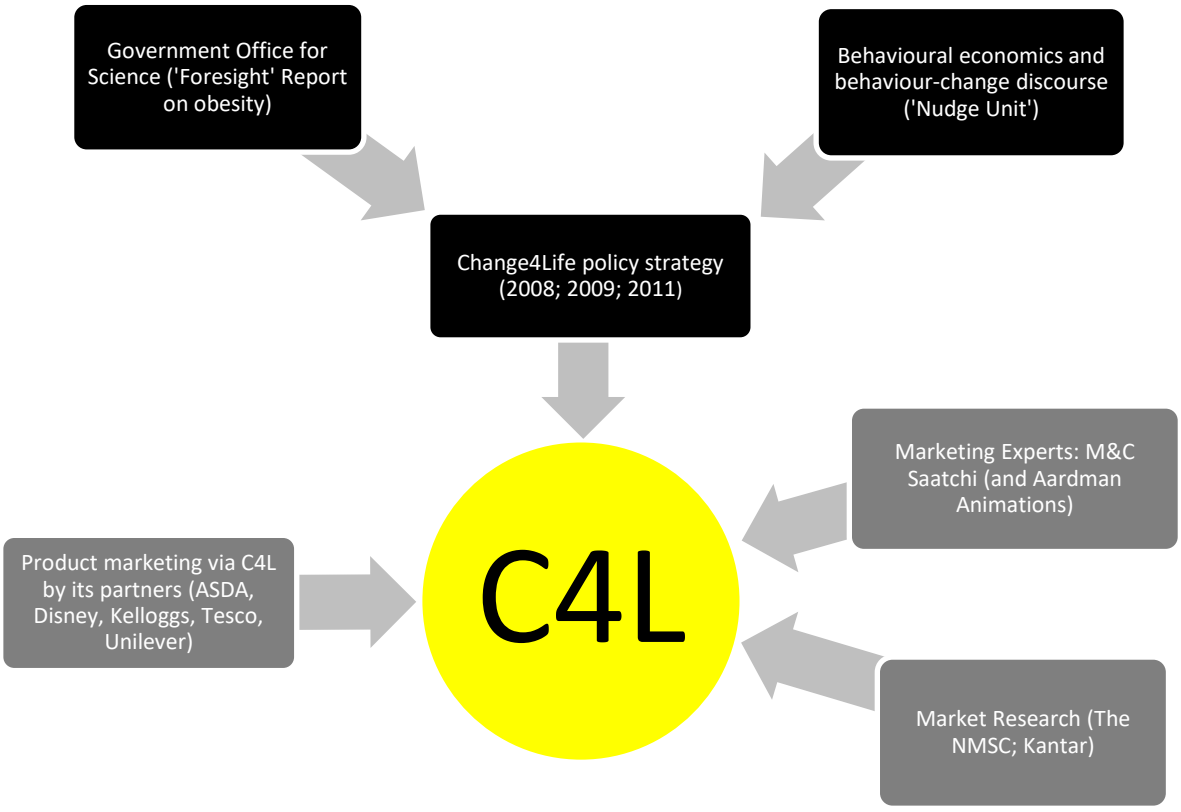

Figure 2. Social practices intersecting with C4L

This necessarily schematic diagram indicates the key practices which interdiscursively shaped C4L. Of course, these must also be contextualised within a wider neoliberal political economic landscape of global food governance. This is dominated by profit orientations that encourage the production of cheap, fatty, sugar-laden foods; a bias which is sustained through regimes of corporate control and political influence, creating countervailing forces in policy.

The top of the diagram describes the key **governance practices** which informed UK anti-obesity policy at the time of C4L's creation. Since obesity was first recognised as a key issue for health policy in 1992, policies have been dominated by the assumption that obesity is fundamentally a matter of individual willpower (Ulijaszek and Mclennan 2016). Despite the creation of numerous task forces and targets, little progress was made in reducing obesity. Faced with increasingly vocal political pressures to address the issue, in 2005 the Labour government commissioned the Foresight scientific committee to develop 'a sustainable policy response to obesity over the next 40 years' (Butland et al., 2007, p. 1). Their report, published in 2007, formed the key scientific basis for obesity policies which followed in the next few years. Foresight's predictions about future obesity prevalence and warnings about the disease risks are recontextualised in subsequent policy (DOH, 2008; 2009) and the C4L campaign, as is its framing of the causal complexities of obesity, which they characterise as our 'obesogenic environment' (for a detailed analysis, see Mulderrig, 2016). Nevertheless, biomedical expertise dominates at the expense of social science, thereby squeezing out space for a serious treatment of the links between obesity and social inequality. Indeed, the only social scientific primary research cited is from the field of psychology, thus lending weight to the behaviour change policy solution ultimately chosen by government. Despite its attempts to embrace the complexity of obesity, this report thus provides the legitimatory grounds for an individualistic solution to a collective policy problem. Around the same time, behavioural economics was beginning to exert influence in policy circles (Halpern et al., 2004) as a softer (and cheaper) way of emphasising individual responsibility for social policy problems, and the main policy documents introducing C4L (DOH 2009; 2011) explicitly acknowledge the influence of this approach. In addition to these public sector discourse practices (expert scientific reports; committees; policy consultations), C4L also draws on practices from the commercial sector.

The bottom of the diagram shows the key **economic practices** which helped shape C4L. The strategy enlists commercial sector organisations as partners, including leading supermarkets and the manufacturers Pepsico, Unilever, and Kelloggs, major producers of 'junk' food, as well as many of the healthier 'diet' alternatives promoted by C4L. In exchange for their support, these companies are granted the right to promote a certain range of product categories. For example, C4L adverts from 2014-15 feature promotions for 'healthy' food products on sale at partner supermarkets, as well as co-branded Disney merchandise. These commercial practices comprise a further important source of interdiscursivity in C4L, in addition to epidemiological obesity science and nudge. This transaction with the commercial sector forms part of the explicit public-private governance strategy it draws on. Termed social marketing, the approach involves 'the systematic use of marketing concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals, for a social or public good' (French, 2009: 2). In effect it is a vehicle for incorporating in public policy the discourse practices, values, and social relations of the commercial sector. Market research was also used to identify target demographics (most in need of behaviour change) and the marketing company M&C Saatchi was commissioned to design the campaign and its 'brand assets' (logo and 'Change4Life' slogan).

5.2 Genre: texturing scientific and commercial practices

I this section I examine the multimodal construal of interactional meanings, asking how the C4L adverts achieve a distinctive form of persuasive communication between government and the public - in particular, children. I also ask how this contributes to the blurring of boundaries between government discourse practices (for example, public health information) and those of the market (for example, branding and selling merchandise). The stated aim of the C4L adverts is to 'nudge people along the behaviour change journey' (DOH, 2008, p.28). Like commercial adverts, their communicative purpose is both informative and exhortative, which is reflected in their setting, broadcast during the commercial breaks of popular TV shows. The adverts adopt an informal and simple register, often using a combination of cartoon images and upbeat music to create a humorous style. Each involves a narrative (delivered in most cases by a child) which follows a problem-solution structural pattern: a confession about unhealthy lifestyle behaviours (overeating, junk food, inactivity) is negatively evaluated in terms of the health risks they pose, followed by a behaviour change solution. The generic structure of the adverts reveals their **interdiscursivity**, as they draw on discourse practices from health policy and commercial advertising. This is summarised below:

1. Lifeworld Discourse depicting problematized lifestyle (we love pop!; *we don't stuff* ourselves with snacks and things, or do we?; if they gave out gold medals for sitting around *doing nothing then I'd win one*)

2. Scientific Discourse describing disease risk and harmful food content (that could mean heart disease, cancer, or type 2 diabetes; too many hidden nasties can create dangerous levels of fat in your body)

3. Moral or affective reaction (ugh, nasty!, yuk!)

4. Behaviour Change Discourse indicating good behaviour benchmarks (we turn the dial and swap some of our *snacks for healthier stuff we like; we're making one of Change4 Life's* smart swaps)

5. Marketing Discourse carrying policy exhortation (join change4life now for your free meal mixer and special offers; get your snack swapper NOW; download the sugar smart app)

Box 2. Summary of interdiscursivity in C4L adverts

The adverts begin by describing problem lifestyles in simple present tense, implying a habitual state of affairs. A logical connection is then drawn between these habits and their harmful consequences by drawing on a biomedical discourse of disease risk. The narrator then returns to an informal register in order to describe a behaviour change they have adopted. The adverts typically end with a government voiceover exhorting the viewer to take action (sign up to the website; claim free merchandise; download an app). This closing move is typical of commercial adverts in which a command speech act establishes a direct relationship with the viewer, drawing her into the text world of the advert. It also reinforces the solicitation of a response by offering incentives in the form of 'freebies'.

The source of this biomedical discourse is the Foresight report (2007, p.5) 'Being overweight or obese increases the risk of a wide range of chronic diseases, principally type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease including stroke, as well as cancer.' When recontextualised in C4L it is then simplified, and accompanied by explanatory cartoon metaphors:

< Text: fat can cause serious diseases as we grow older including type two diabetes, some cancers, and even heart disease >

< Images: sugar cubes form a flatlining ECG readout; sugar cubes 'pour' out from a soft drinks bottle >

This is rather esoteric scientific discourse for a child, so it is explicitly marked as stemming from an external authority using direct speech: 'mum says…; my teacher says… ', while the emotional impact of the message is strengthened through childlike reactions (ugh, nasty!) and visual design. For example, when children receive a 'reality check' about the amounts of sugar in soft drinks, this is symbolically echoed in the background artwork, switching to complex, unsaturated 'calm' colours (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002) and a more modulated use of subtle tints and shadows to convey a much more realistic-looking kitchen setting (Figure 1, bottom centre). This conveys stronger epistemic modal meaning (commitment to truth values) as the text world shifts from fantasy (carefree consumption of junk food) to reality (the biomedical consequences). In this way the ads encourage children to internalise the government's risk-laden policy messages, while giving them a scientific vocabulary with which to articulate the policy problem.

The advert ends with the government voiceover instructing us to sign up for the campaign and claim a free 'smart swapper' (suggesting alternative snacks). Such quasi-commercial incentives are frequently used in C4L. The genre hybridity of C4L thus permits considerable slippage between the health policy messages and paternalistic relations of the state, and commercial messages and exchange values of the market. By making the viewing child the protagonist and chief agent of behaviour change, it uses the language and logic of the market to steer them towards self-disciplinary governance of their lifestyles. In short, C4L offers a policy intervention which reinforces, rather than challenges, the neoliberal practices which created the problem in the first place.

5.3 Discourse: the representation of risk, (ir)responsibility, and consumer smartness

In this section I examine the multimodal construal of ideational meanings in C4L and ask to what extent they function as a politics of truth about obesity (see further Mulderrig, 2018). The analysis of representation can be operationalised by looking at patterns of transitivity in the text, by asking of the text 'who does what to whom and in what circumstances?'.

The social actors represented in the adverts are members of the cartoon family, whose generic representation (featureless and identified only in terms of their kinship relations), invites maximal viewer engagement and identification. They also typically also look at the viewer, at a horizontal angle implying equality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996), and in several cases we are symbolically invited into their lifeworld as they watch TV while snacking on junk food (Figure 1, top left). (Lack of) discipline and self-control are prominent themes among the actions they perform, which fall into four main categories: unhealthy behaviours, unruly behaviours, discovering the health risks, and adopting the advocated 'change for life'. In short, they model the C4L 'behaviour change journey'. The most frequently represented actions thus depict risky lifestyles: overeating, snacking on junk food, watching TV, playing video games, and displaying a lack of discipline by raiding the kitchen cupboards for food, swinging on the curtains, and pestering mum for snacks (Figure 1 top right and middle).

However, these are not the only participants in the adverts. Visual metaphor is used to personify inanimate entities (a bottle of beer, wearing boxing gloves, punches a terrified-looking heart;

an evil-eyed globule of fat hurtles down the esophagus (Figure 1 middle right); an arterial roller coaster is derailed by a blockage of fat). In each case, these images are used to simplify a biomedical discourse of disease risk. In assuming agency in the representation, these animated images encourage viewers to conceptualise the body as a site of battle and invoking an emotive 'disgust response' through childlike reactions ('*ugh! yuk!'*). This heavy emphasis on internal bodily processes further compounds the framing of obesity as an individual rather than societal problem. Each advert ends by proposing a specific, branded behaviour change, for example 'smart restart' (doing more exercise in the new year); 'smart swaps' (within product categories); and 'sugar smart' (monitoring sugar intake). Indeed, the discourse of smartness is particularly prominent ('smart' is the 5th highest ranking keyword in the corpus) and links to a consumerist pedagogic discourse which encourages the audience to make more rational, risk-averse choices. C4L thus capitalises on, rather than challenges, the market conditions which produce our 'obesogenic' lifestyles.

5.4 Styles: working-class dispositions and parent-child role reversal

In this section I examine interpersonal meanings and ask how these contribute to the linguistic realisation of identities, relations, and subjectivities which are amenable to a neoliberal rationality of self-regulation and resilience. C4L presents a fictional cartoon family whose children address us as social agents and individual personalities, as they move through a behaviour change journey. The function of the campaign is to encourage viewers to mirror the characters' processes of identification and thereby inculcate this discourse of risk and reform. I therefore examine textual patterns of style and identification as a discursive window into the forms of subjectivity and rationality through which this policy instrument operates.

Firstly, C4L construes a **working-class social identity** for its characters and, by extension, target audience. Each of the child narrators in C4L has a Lancashire accent and dialect; a working-class region associated with pockets of social deprivation and higher than average levels of obesity. These adverts were also originally aired during episodes of a TV soap opera which is set in working-class Lancashire. The representation construes domestic conditions where a lack of discipline and emotional manipulation are intertwined with unhealthy diet. This is done both visually (Figure 1) and verbally (*we're right little monkeys; we're always hunting* down the sweet stuff; I know how to get around her [mum]). These patterns align with the findings from government-commissioned 'audience segmentation' research carried out prior to the campaign. This produced a typology of 'at risk' family types (including working class, single parent, and minority ethnic households) who 'exhibited behaviours and held attitudes with regard to diet and activity that suggested their children were at risk of becoming obese' (DOH, 2009, p.19). Significantly, these problematic attitudes intersect closely with the cognitive flaws of the nudgee (Thaler and Sunstein 2009), who tends to be unreflective ('recognises childhood obesity as a problem but does not believe their own child is overweight'), short-termist ('prioritises their child's immediate gratification over their long term health') and influenced by social stereotypes ('perceives healthy living to be a middle class aspiration'). In sum, the C4L characters perform stereotyped working-class social identities whose dietary lifestyles are determined by an impoverished rationality, lack of proper parental control, and nutritional ignorance (Figure 1, top right and bottom left). This creates a logical opening for a 'smart' behavioural solution, encouraging the working classes to become more rational and resilient consumers.

Secondly, a paternalistic discourse of risk and responsibility is inculcated through a **slippage in parent-child role relations**. C4L is directed at an audience of children and it is the child protagonists who adopt a paternalistic role in their dialogue with the audience, drawing on

esoteric biomedical discourse to evaluate their lifestyles as risky through a range of semantic devices. These include factive verbs which strengthen the truth claims (one day we woke up and realised; it turns out that the stuff I like is bad for me); simple present tense expressing inexorable biomedical processes (food gets stored as fat in your body; too much sugar causes harmful fat) and shocking habitual behaviours or consequences (every morning us kids eat half of all the sugar we should have; over a year us kids eat a whopping 5543 sugar cubes; thousands of us end up in hospital having teeth out). Over its ten-year lifespan, C4L has relied heavily on visual modality and metaphor to appeal to children, simplify and evaluate its core health warning, and to construct a generic (albeit subtly working class) social identity with which viewers can identify. This policy nudge thus targets children as agents of behaviour change. This strategy is perhaps most explicit in a campaign advert produced for schools (Figure 1, bottom right). It features a mock news broadcast in which a child, wearing fake moustache, acts as a reporter bringing news '*live, on the scene'* from a 'real' kitchen in which two adults are seated eating breakfast. The language of the advert draws on the genre of news reporting (we interrupt this assembly to bring you some breakfast news; reports coming in that many breakfast foods contain a lot of sugar). It also inverts the traditional parent-child power relations; it is the child who advises on the nutritional facts and instructs the adults to swap their cereals and yoghurts, while the adults adopt child-like behaviours and language (am I gonna be on the telly?; *mmm, it's yummy!*).

C4L thus instrumentalises parental guilt and responsibilises children as agents of behaviour change within the family, through adult-like identities, actions, and power relations. In essence, this is a politics of futurity requiring self-disciplinary children's subjectivities to take control of their family's risky lifestyle. As Pykett (2013) reminds us, the child is becoming an increasingly important political subject in contexts where psychological explanations of human behaviour (including nudge) increase their influence on political thinking. The logical conclusion to policy problems which are perceived to be inexorably linked to the brain and the formation of habits and behaviours, is that interventions must be as early as possible.

6. Discussion: reflections on the transdisciplinary approach

This chapter has presented a transdisciplinary approach to critical discourse analysis as a method for critically interrogating the government's policy response to the problem of obesity. We have seen how C4L targets ordinary families and offers consumerised solutions to their unhealthy lifestyles. Its highly generic, colourful, and child-oriented adverts offer a window into the family home and, through these semiotic 'powers of attraction', invite the viewer to scrutinise her own lifestyle. C4L is a policy strategy which draws on behavioural economics and subtle semiotic techniques in order to penetrate the lifeworld and address, at the level of individual psychology, a policy problem which is deeply embedded in complex political economic conditions and patterns of social inequality. The policy at once acknowledges the systemically embedded 'obesogenic' aetiology (Butland et al., 2007), while at the same time constructing an individualised solution which ignores this very complexity. Indeed, we have seen how the campaign subtly targets a working-class subset of the population, implicitly blaming their more irrational, riskier, ill-disciplined lifestyle choices. To the extent that certain policy texts construe or position us in particular ways (for instance, as working class and a victim of our poor choices), our ability to challenge these positioned subjectivities and to question the real causal mechanisms behind complex problems like obesity, depends in part on the kind of critical reflexivity which CDA encourages through its close attention to the fine detail of textual practices. This becomes all the more important as government places increasing emphasis on using insights from behavioural economics to shape its communications with the public.

Proponents of nudge defend it as libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003), which defends individual freedoms in a market economy, while at the same time assigning the state a role in promoting individual and collective wellbeing. The analytical framework used in this research permits a more nuanced and critical understanding of why nudge is a good fit with its neoliberal governance context and why it was chosen as a policy response to obesity, while at the same time highlighting the subtle linguistic mechanisms through which disciplinary power is realised in practice. The C4L cartoon family in their home are a symbolic reminder of the dynamics of state power which governmentality entails. For Foucault (2007) this is a form of pastoral power which takes the population as its object of governance. It is fundamentally beneficent and individualising, using the family as an important conduit through which to exercise 'a constant, zealous, active, and always benevolent prescriptive activity' (2007: 122). The beneficent motives behind C4L (and, indeed nudge) are readily apparent; there is much to welcome in efforts to educate children about nutrition and physical health. But it should also be seen as a technology of governance fitted to the exigencies of neoliberalism.

The transdisciplinary framework used in this research, operationalised the key dimensions of neoliberal governance (the state's relationship with the economy; the dominant political rationality; forms of subjectivity) through the analysis of genres, discourses, and styles and their overall configuration, constituting the order of discourse of C4L.

The analysis of **genre** showed how hybridity permitted penetration of this health policy strategy by market practices and values, which were used to activate self-disciplinary capacities by incentivising 'smarter' consumer behaviours. In essence, C4L offers market solutions to social problems which ultimately derive from the market. This points to a paradox within governmentality and, indeed, nudge. Through the tactics of governmentality there is a continual definition of what should or should not fall within the state's competence; what is public and what is private (Foucault, 2007). Nudge, and particularly C4L, involves interventions by the state into hitherto private domains, although in order to reduce, rather than increase what is within the state's competence. In the words of then Health Secretary Andrew Lansley, 'We have to make Change4Life less a government campaign, more a social movement. Less paid for by government, more backed by business' (Sweney, 2010). It thus redefines the limits of state interest, while also reminding us of the limits of politics in the face of neoliberal economics.

The analysis of **discourse** revealed a consistent message of disease risk, whose emotional impact is strengthened through cartoon metaphors and childlike reactions of disgust and horror. This is causally linked to confessional narratives about 'our bad habits'. C4L thus reinforces the core premise of nudge that our choices (or those of 'the least sophisticated') are governed by irrational cognitive impulses which should be corrected in order to manage risk. This is in keeping with neoliberal governmentality and the construction of moral, self-regulating citizens (Rose, 1999). Where risk is conceptualised as an individual matter, any behaviour which 'deviates' from the virtuous and risk-averse is readily treated as a personal moral failure. In turn this helps legitimate state-sponsored punitive measures like denying medical care to obese people. The sociocultural conditions (structural inequalities) in which those risky choices are made remain unaccounted for.

The analysis of **styles** revealed the highly subtle, but pervasive, positioning of C4L addressees as working-class and prone to dysfunctional behaviours which extend beyond dietary control to the power relations between parent and child. C4L thus displays considerable slippage in the roles and relations of adult and child, culminating in a complete reversal of parental roles. This has quite important implications for nudge as a governance technique. It is significant because

of its assumptions not only about the irrationality of the political subject, but also how and when intervention is needed. It is inherently pre-emptive in nature and closely tied to the management of risk. Nudge helps create not only a politics of (ir)rationality but also a politics of futurity, foregrounding the child as an increasingly important political subject of neoliberal governmentality.

This section has examined some of the insights produced by integrating the close textual methods of CDA and Foucault's theory on governmentality, as applied to contemporary neoliberal politics (Lemke, 2012). The chapter thereby seeks to offer not only a normative critique of the discourse of nudge, but also a governmentality-informed explanation of the increasing popularity of nudge and a critical account of its wider political significance. At the same time, the transdisciplinary framework proposed in this chapter remains sufficiently flexible to permit the critical discursive investigation of other aspects of neoliberal political practice.

7. Conclusion: nudging us into more resilient subjectivities?

Despite its apparent break with the classic political economic discourse of neoliberalism, nudge offers continuity with the neoliberal regime by positing a correlation between individual irrationality and social problems like obesity, thereby reinforcing narratives of blame and personal responsibility. In the case of the specific case study examined, C4L demonstrates ample awareness that certain groups have worse health outcomes, and in this respect introduces inequality to the policy discourse. However, these are then reduced to demographically determined 'risk factors' which are to be addressed through individual behaviour change. The policy literature acknowledges the broader power structures which underpin health inequalities, but then depoliticizes them as 'just too complex', instead focusing on nudging us out of deviant behaviours in the name of (classed) cognitive deficiency. Nudge thus helps sustain neoliberalism by depoliticizing risk and its causes, putting it outside the limits of the state's competence (Foucault, 2007). In this sense it is comparable to the prominent political concept of 'resilience', which exhorts preparedness and adaptability to a world which is essentially perceived to be beyond our control (Joseph, 2013). Both resilience and nudge thus posit an impoverished view of agency, which is limited to reflexive agency; acting upon ourselves rather than upon our social environment. This raises the question, for future research, whether wellbeing in advanced liberal society is increasingly a matter of individual resilience and the extent to which brain-based policy 'solutions' like nudge help perpetuate this.

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