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## **Class, Trust and Confessional Media in Austerity Britain**

*The Jeremy Kyle Show* first aired in the UK in 2005. Scheduled in the daytime television slot previously occupied by *Trisha* on ITV between 9.25 and 10.30 in the morning, although repeated across ITV's portfolio of channels at various times, day and night, it adopts a confrontational talk show format that would be familiar to a global audience; although there are some notable dissimilarities (to be discussed), the show is comparable to *Oprah*, *Ricki Lake*, *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Trisha* and numerous others. Rather than (explicitly) focusing on broad social issues – as did the earlier UK talk show, *Kilroy* – *The Jeremy Kyle Show* sees guests air their personal issues and conflicts in front of a live studio audience, often to controversial effect. Commonly, participants on the show will present their strained romantic relationships, voice accusations of infidelity, seek resolutions to disputed paternity, and relate the stresses of marriage or family life where drug use or alcohol abuse is involved. So, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* deals with personal issues at times of distress or in difficult interpersonal scenarios in a public setting. These are worked through on stage by the eponymous host, who, we are told, 'is not afraid to speak his mind, and believes the only way to solve a problem is to get it out in the open' (ITV, 2013), and supplemented by a back-stage team. To facilitate this "openness", the show makes use of lie detectors (polygraph machines), DNA profiling for paternity, and drugs testing.

As well as reproducing the tried-and-tested formula of the television talk show, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* sits within the broader medium of reality television, understood as a (purportedly) unmediated and voyeuristic presentation of authentic people and scenarios (Murray and Ouellette, 2004: 4). If reality television is best understood as possessing a voyeuristic appeal, coupled with the authenticating mechanism of being seen (Andrejevic, 2004: 173; 189), then

the talk show also emphasises the process of being heard. The very premise of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* hinges on participants' willingness to confess domestic and emotional failures or conflicts in front of an audience, and so is indicative of relaxing attitudes towards discussing private matters in public (Mills, 2008: 56), in what might be called a 'confessional culture' (Couldry, 2003: 115) or 'confessional society' (Bauman, 2011: 84; Beer, 2008). As such, early talk shows such as *Oprah* were seen to play an important political role in giving air-time to previously marginalised, and unheard, groups and their everyday experiences (Shattuc, 1997; Mills, 2008: 63). Not only were these narratives given a media prominence, but participants were encouraged to use talk as a kind of therapy for dealing with personal issues that were related to wider social problems (White, 1992; Abt and Seesholtz, 1994; Peck, 1995; Tolson, 2001; Illouz, 2003). It is important to note, however, that the talk show evolved from this personal-as-political therapeutic talk (or the political as psychological [Tolson 2001]) to a more confrontational style, with shows such as *Ricki Lake* and *The Jerry Springer Show* marking a movement away from social injustice towards 'social shock with therapeutic overtones' (Shattuc, 1997: 48). This, it has been argued, moves the format away from emancipatory visibility and towards normative discipline (Palmer, 2003: 132), as shocking dysfunctionality is brought into line by the talking therapy marshalled by the host. The sort of dysfunction that is presented on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* might be understood here as a moral failure to adhere to middle-class cultural norms (Skeggs and Wood, 2008), with such shows submitting working-class impropriety to surveillance in order that it might be simultaneously entertaining and policed (Wood and Skeggs, 2008).

In this article it is argued that the function of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is inextricably bound up in a neoliberal agenda towards rolling-back state apparatuses and expenditure, whilst simultaneously shaming those who depend on it or have refused, for whatever reason, the

mantra of self-help, in what has come to be called Austerity Britain – predating the financial crisis and yet prefiguring responses to it. In response to the global recession of 2008-2009, the British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (in power since 2010) has pursued neoliberal economic policies, reducing the national deficit by cutting public spending, shrinking – perhaps even beginning to dismantle – the welfare system, and ushering in an age of austerity. In the first section it is argued that technologies of confession are used on participants in *The Jeremy Kyle Show* who are deemed, by virtue of class position, to be untrustworthy, undermining the very basis of therapeutic talk by deferring to scientific measurement of the body in order to derive truths. In the second section it is argued that this measurement does not simply identify bodily truths, but locates bodies that lack the discipline to contribute efficiently to the austerity agenda. As such, this measurement also determines the value of the participants, and, in closing this section, it is argued that the identification of low value individuals provides a platform for shaming that amounts to an attack on the principles of welfarism. In the concluding remarks, it is argued that *austerity television*, by presenting a kind of *austerity realism* where there are no alternatives to cuts and self-reliance, is an important area of study – even as we face our own conditions of austerity in the academy. The focus of this article, then, is on the use of technologies of confession and how they situate the show in narratives of austerity (for analyses of Kyle’s discourse see Fitzgerald [2012] and Lunt and Livingston [2013]).

## **1. Technologies of Confession**

As Skeggs (2009: 628) argues, reality television equates ordinariness with working-class life and working-class people. With talk shows we have seen ‘the general spread of the languages

of confession and therapy' (Couldry, 2003: 116), where seemingly there is no problem that cannot be addressed by a talking therapeutic intervention (Peck, 1995), such that what emerges is 'therapy as entertainment' (Abt and Seesholtz, 1994: 178). The television talk show gives a platform for people to 'talk about the ways in which they make themselves and others miserable' (Illouz, 2003: 80), and since the object of the show is ordinariness, and the ordinary is equated with working-class people and their lives, it offers a spectacle of 'failed selves' (Illouz, 2003: 164) whose failure, and misery, is judged from a classed position. The predominantly working-class participants on these shows are held up to middle-class standards of propriety (Wilson, 2005: 160), and found lacking – and in need of transformation (Skeggs and Wood, 2008).

The problem is that therapeutic talk is an instrument of middle-class culture, and working-class people are perceived to be lacking in the ability to fix "failed selves" by their own volition (Skeggs, 2009: 633). As such, on television talk shows, "ordinary" participants are submitted to a 'basic therapeutic creed that we are perfectible and that identity can and perhaps ought to be shaped by wilful self-management and introspection' (Illouz, 2003: 164), despite an absence of trust that they are capable of doing so. It is not only that they are judged to be engaging in improper behaviour, but also that their (supposed) inability to narrate their selves in the talk format is indicative in itself of a lack of responsibility and self-governance (Skeggs, 2005: 974). Thus, the participants are seen as "lacking"; they lack propriety; they lack knowledge of how to display their selves properly; and they lack the means to engage in the corrective – self-help through talk (Skeggs, 2005: 973-974). So, Wood and Skeggs (2008) argue that reality television operates as a kind of training course in middle-class culture, and in the case of talk shows this can be understood as training in the talking cure. However, we can observe that through the prominent and repeated use of technological interventions on

*The Jeremy Kyle Show*, participants are subjected to self-help through talk, but instead of being trained in the culture of confession, are instead not trusted to be able to adequately participate. Hence we see the use of technologies of confession, primarily: the lie detector, the paternity test, and drug or alcohol testing.

### *1.1 The Lie Detector*

Over half of the guests on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* request a lie detector (or polygraph test) (ITV, 2013). The test is used most frequently for accusations of infidelity, either at the request of a partner who suspects unfaithfulness or one who wants to prove that such suspicions are unfounded, although it is used less commonly in other contexts, for example, to resolve intra-family disputes over missing money or valuable items. In the case of infidelity, the audience usually sees Kyle reading through three set questions, the answer given by the participant, and then the judgment of the polygraph operator on the validity of this answer. These three questions are: Have you kissed anyone else whilst in a relationship with  $x$ ? Have you had sexual contact with anyone else whilst in a relationship with  $x$ ? Have you had sexual intercourse with anyone else whilst in a relationship with  $x$ ? With the truth in the open, Kyle can then offer his own value judgments on the situation and dispense advice to the couple.

However, the audience does not get to see the operation of the lie detector itself, which takes place behind the scenes, under the authority of the show's polygrapher. Whilst the show's website states that polygraph practitioners claim a high degree of accuracy for the procedure, we are also informed that this latter claim is disputed, and that the test is not admissible as evidence in UK courts of law (ITV, 2013). However, the nature of the disputation of the

accuracy of the test is not clearly outlined, nor is the supposed science behind it – rather than simply the procedure – explained. Lie detectors work by measuring blood pressure, pulse, respiration and skin conductivity (sweat), and it is these measurements taken during the answer that the polygrapher analyses in order to detect deception. Put simply, the polygraph machine does not detect lies – that is an interpretation on the behalf of the operator. There are three criticisms raised by The National Academy of Sciences (US): that the test is unscientific; that it is unreliable; and that it is biased (Committee to Review the Scientific Evidence on the Polygraph *et al*, 2003). The hypothesis that deception can be detected by such measurements is insufficiently evidenced, since the test yields accurate results at rates above chance but that are insufficiently high. In addition to this unsatisfactory rate of success, there is insufficient evidence that accuracy is stable across, for example, different socio-demographic groups, psychological or medical conditions, or personality types. As well as the potential for false results for certain groups or individuals, the role of the polygrapher in interpreting the results potentially biases the procedure – especially given that (as with *The Jeremy Kyle Show*), they will be in contact with the participant, which may influence the interpretation of the measurements. So, despite the gloss of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, this is a test considered dubious in both legal and scientific contexts.

As Palmer (2003: 153) observes, the lie detector 'is a cold and dramatic device to bring into the glossy world of daytime television'. This incongruity may in part be explained by a desire for producers of such shows to offer realism amidst accusations of fakery (Palmer, 2003: 153); for example, in the UK, the use of actors on *The Vanessa Show* (Wilson, 2005: 163). In order to instil confidence in the audience, the participants are forced to pay a price: as Palmer (2003: 153) notes, at least one of them will be shamed, either as a liar or as the maker of false allegations, and this shame is apportioned by allegedly scientific means. This passage from

science to shame, we should add, is facilitated by an erosion of trust in a self-help-through-talk context. If talking through one's issues in a public forum is to be understood as of any use, then it would need to rest on the idea that through talk we can gain self-knowledge and through self-knowledge we can mend damaged selves. However, the imposition of the lie detector subordinates knowledge to truth statements, and so the therapeutic process is derailed by supplication to science. As Lyotard (2005) famously argued, there is more to knowledge than truth, and more forms of knowledge than science alone. Yet the lie detector here denies the participant the opportunity to narrate what is perceived to be their failing, and privileges scientific measurement of bodily responses over alternative ways that the guest might know themselves. By disempowering the guest, by placing legitimation of their statements in the hands of the polygrapher, the lie detector bars admission to self-knowledge and self-help through talk alone – and the whole premise of therapeutic talk on reality television collapses. Lyotard's rhetorical question, 'who will know?' (2005: 6), is apposite here. For Lyotard, the problem with over-privileging scientific knowledge is not just who has access to what has been determined as true, but who gets to determine what is true and how this determination is made. In the case of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, it is the polygrapher. Rather than a process of mending, there is simply the presentation of a broken self. Thus, that the participants on the show cannot be trusted to engage in therapeutic talk by virtue of their lowly class position, undermines the very foundation of self-help-through-talk since they are not allowed to narrate or heal for themselves their broken self – and leads to the public shaming of individuals judged failures by middle-class norms.

### *1.2 The Paternity Test*



This 'obedience [...] to the dictates of science' (Palmer, 2003: 153) is continued with the paternity test, although here the science itself is far more trust-worthy. The determination of paternity is achieved through DNA profiling. This requires the collection of reference samples, such as skin cells from inside the cheek, saliva, blood or semen, from the putative parent and offspring. These samples are compared and a determination of paternity can be made to a degree of 99.9% certainty (ITV, 2013). On *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, uncertainty over paternity usually centres on newborns, and tests are undertaken when the mother does not know who the father is, or when the individual she identifies as the father has reason to doubt their claim to paternity. Less frequently, the paternity test is performed at the behest of an adult guest whose heredity is uncertain, for whatever reason. Palmer (2003: 153) argues that the paternity test has a similar function to that of the lie detector. However, it ought to be recognised that whilst infidelity is once more at the centre, the moral and social issues surrounding paternity heighten the stakes. Since the DNA sampling is considered to be a near-infallible scientific corrective to heredity doubt, Jeremy Kyle, once he has the results, gains permission to shame the transgressive participants – and where there is doubt about paternity, all parties are in shame. Like polygraphs, the use of the paternity test on talk shows demonstrates 'how "the truth" is located in bodily responses and is therefore measurable, quantifiable' (Palmer, 2003: 153). Once more, the trust is in techno-science and not in the participants – or between participants.

However, the impact of the paternity test on trust might be seen as of a different order of magnitude to that of the lie detector; that is, whilst both lie detector and paternity test are employed on untrustworthy subjects, the paternity test is further corrosive of trust. As Žižek observes, '[p]aternal authority is irreducibly based on faith, on trust as to the identity of the father [...] because we do not directly *know* who our father is, we have to take him *at his*

*word* and *trust* him' (2009: 32-33). That is, since it is the mother who bears the child, her identity is as close to a certainty as to make it a fact, yet there is always the possibility that the assumption of fatherhood is incorrect, given that their role (biologically) is limited to conception. For Žižek, this plays an important formative function in the grounding of trust in society, with fatherhood as a foundational symbol. The paternity test, he argues, by introducing scientific certainty, displaces this symbolic function of the father; 'truth can be established through DNA analysis', cementing '[t]he hegemony of scientific discourse' and establishing an authority based on biopolitics (2009: 33). This, Žižek argues, is an attack on the entire edifice of trust in society, executed in the name of science. This undermining of trust ought to be considered alongside the class position of the participants and, especially, the public perception of their reproductive activities. Tyler (2008) has demonstrated the role of media presentation of working-class mothers in sustaining and furthering their vilification. In particular, she notes the perpetuation of an image of working-class mothers as sexually irresponsible, observing the demonisation of teenage mothers, women with children by multiple partners, and mothers of mixed-race children. Piecing together criticism of the working-class mother from a variety of media sources, Tyler argues that she is presented as 'the quintessential sexually excessive, single mother: an immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore' (2008: 26). Thus, the working-class mother is doubly untrustworthy: she cannot be trusted to act with sexual decorum; and, as a result, she cannot be trusted to know who the father of her children are. Tyler does not examine the public perception or media presentation of the working-class father, but, from the image she presents of working-class subjects in general, we can say that, simply by virtue of being working-class, they are similarly seen as sexually irresponsible, as well as feckless. The father, then, is also twice distrusted: they cannot be trusted to take self-responsibility over their sexual activity; and they cannot be trusted to take responsibility – understood primarily

in financial terms – for the product of that activity. So, on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, both parents are subjected to the paternity test as a corrective to the perceived irresponsibility that undermines faith in their determination of fatherhood. Whilst we need not agree with Žižek that the entire social edifice of trust is here under attack, we can say that this subordination to the discourse of science perpetuates the image of untrustworthy working-class subjects, and, what is more, legitimates the idea that submission to testing is the only grounding for trust in *or between* them. The very fact of their testing submits them to public shaming for their sexual irresponsibility; the results then allow Kyle to shame the participants for their irresponsibility as parents.

### *1.3 The Drugs Test*

The final technology of confession to be discussed here is the drugs test. This is less common than use of the lie detector or paternity test, but it is no less indicative of the relationship between class and trust on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. The drugs test is usually employed where conflict has arisen between partners or within families due to one of the participants' drug use or alcohol consumption. Samples of blood, urine, hair, sweat or saliva are taken in order to test for the presence of a specific substance or substances. Occasionally, this is coupled with a medical examination of the guest's internal organ functionally, undertaken by a doctor, in order to ascertain the impact of substance abuse. Whilst the drugs testing is undertaken on both men and women, the most striking example for the present study is its use on expectant mothers, since this speaks eloquently to the correspondence of class and trust, and the scrutiny of the body in order to assuage the lack of the latter.

Balsamo (1997) has argued that surveillance of the maternal body has migrated from a clinical setting into society in general. With this, she sees a move from private responsibility for foetal health to public interference, and the normalisation of what she calls 'public pregnancies' (1997: 80). For Balsamo (1997: 99), this shift is inseparable from media narratives of outrage against irresponsible mothers, for example, the "Crack Baby" media event of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the US, which centred around foetal damage or death resulting from mothers' use of crack cocaine. In this instance, the behaviour – and bodies – of predominantly poor women, or, 'welfare mothers' (1997: 108), were seen to be in need of external disciplining. In the "Crack Babies" case, this resulted in the drugs-testing of at risk (read: poor, often non-white) pregnant women, such that the mother's body was used against her because she was not considered a reliable source of the truth (Balsamo 1997: 101). Similarly, we can understand the drug-testing of pregnant women on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* as a public interference into the pregnancy of those deemed incapable of taking bodily responsibility for themselves or the foetus. This is consonant with Skeggs' argument that reality television presents 'working-class families, especially mothers, as incapable of *knowing how* to look after themselves and others' (2005: 697), that is, as being irreparably irresponsible. This lack of trust can be extended to non-pregnant women and men alike, whose class position dictates that they lack the capacity for self-responsibility, and who cannot be trusted to engage in talk alone in order to address problems resulting from substance abuse. Once more, without the opportunity for the self-restorative nature of therapeutic talk, since scientific measurement of the body circumvents this, the effect is to shame participants' for their own irresponsibility.

## **2. Technologies of Austerity**

If Jeremy Kyle is committed to resolving conflict through openness and honesty (ITV, 2013), then this openness is facilitated, and the honesty underwritten, by technologies of confession. The effect is that truth, in this context, is recast as a measurement of the bodily functions or responses of the participants, which in turn short-circuits talking as a tool for self-betterment, resulting in a display of shame. As such, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* ultimately works to place working-class people in the stocks (Jones, 2012: 127). In what follows, it is argued that the technologies of confession addressed above ought to be understood as commensurate with neoliberal processes of both roll-out and roll-back, whereby regulatory incursions go hand-in-hand with the withdrawal of state institutions and cuts to government expenditure (Peck, 2010: 22-23). Thus, the technological production of shame on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* might be understood as contributing to the normalisation and reinforcement of austerity measures.

### *2.1 Confession, Measure and Value*

Jensen and Tyler (2012) understand austerity 'as a discourse which produces accounts of waste and inefficiencies, moral conduct and lifestyle, work, worth and labour' in order to legitimise emergency measures in the wake of economic crisis, namely, 'to shrink the state, to compact and condense public spending, to become lean, pursue "efficiency" and to eliminate "waste"'. However, this sort of crash diet for the state requires careful monitoring and so we see an increasing culture of measurement and audit, the intervention of the state, emerging during the financial crisis (Gane, 2011: 168; Gane, 2012: 628-629). As Gane argues, this means that neoliberalism, within which the austerity discourse sits, 'does not simply involve the devolution of state or institutional powers but also the emergence of particular forms of governance' (2012: 625). Neoliberalism is not the absence of the state, but rather 'an

argument for the state to be marketized to its core' (Gane, 2012: 627), that is, to instantiate the principles of market freedom in its own exercise of power and to work tirelessly to regulate, not the market but people, such that the market can operate unhindered. Gane's argument here is built on a detailed reading of Foucault's biopolitics lectures, where the role of the state is understood as facilitating the 'general regulation of society by the market' (Foucault, 2010: 145). The harmful impact of the market, as Bauman (2011: 53-54) argues, is no longer the concern of the state, which turns its attentions instead to personal safety – most notably here threats to the body, for example, by policing poor health or lifestyle choices. The result is an intensification of surveillance of people and their behaviours, to such a degree that Fisher terms it, with a rhetorical flourish, 'market Stalinism' (2009: 42).

Analyses of the act of confession on talk shows and reality television in general have often drawn on the work of Foucault (see, for example, White [1992]; Tolson [2001]; Couldry [2003]; Palmer [2003]). There is not the space here for a full exegesis, but, in a nutshell, we can say that for Foucault: confession necessitates a relationship of power, since it involves the presence of an authority who judges, forgives, punishes or consoles (Foucault, 1998); confession is inextricably linked to the body, since it uncovers the secret truth of sexuality (Foucault, 1990); and the authority during confession was originally a role taken by the Church but is now performed by the state (Foucault, 1990). Palmer uses this account of confession in order to understand surveillance of the body as 'the calculated directing of human conduct, the means by which behaviour is shaped to various ends by the expertise of the many agencies of the state' (2003: 182). In times of austerity, then, the state has an added impetus for regulating human behaviours that are deemed improper in so far as they require government expenditure, and in so doing can employ audits that seek to identify inefficient bodily conduct. As such, economic crisis is projected onto working-class bodies. The

supposed irresponsible sexual activity of working-class people – promiscuity, for example, but especially sex without contraception – represents a cost to national resources insofar as the National Health Service might be required for the treatment of sexually transmitted infections, or state support in the form of benefits might be needed for low- or no-income families. Similarly, the consumption of drugs or alcohol represents a drain on resources in terms of treatment for addiction or related disease, whilst the policing of drug use and alcohol-related crime, including the cost of trials and incarceration, is a further expenditure. If there is a perception of working-class corporeality as 'a body beyond governance' (Skeggs, 2005: 965), then, in austere times, it is seen to be a body that we can no longer afford not to attempt to govern. Policing the body, then, is intimately bound-up with reducing the national deficit – as evidenced by the use of that quintessential *Jeremy Kyle Show* technology of confession, the lie detector, to assess the veracity of benefits claims (Quinn, 2013).

Under conditions of neoliberalism, there is no longer a question of what is touched by the market – only how things are touched (Foucault, 2010: 133). Hallin (2008) has similarly argued that the market is touching parts of the social that were previously beyond its remit, as we have seen with the regulation of profligate bodies, adding that the media is the most important of the social institutions that are now subjected to neoliberal logic. However, it is perhaps how media have been touched that is most important, for present purposes, the way that reality television shows have begun to parallel neoliberal forms of governance (Wood and Skeggs, 2008). For example, Ouellette has argued that the use of drug testing on *Judge Judy* 'both duplicates and extends the surveillance of the poor and working class carried out by welfare offices, unemployment centers, and other social services' (2004: 237). The use of technologies of confession on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* – and this show in particular has made these technologies routine in a way unprecedented on UK television screens – exemplifies the

way that reality television shares in the role of the state in the measurement of human value. The lie detector, paternity test, and drug testing are all doubly efficient: they allow for the location of truth in the bodies of subjects who cannot be trusted to speak it; and they locate bodies that are perceived as inefficient in austere times. Put another way, the technologies of confession *represent value*: technological efficiency is value for money, whatever the human cost; human bodies can be measured for value for money towards meeting the demands of austerity; and those that represent poor value for money are marked as falling short of the values of Austerity Britain. Wilson (2005: 166-167) has argued that Kyle's predecessor in the ITV talk show slot, Trisha Goddard, provided a way for people to negotiate personal difficulties away from a welfare state that was straining to the point of collapse, going so far as to classify *Trisha* as public service broadcasting. *The Jeremy Kyle Show* might be seen as the logical extension here: with the welfare system now deemed largely unaffordable and in need of dismantling (Bauman, 2011: 53), and volunteerism and private enterprise seen as part of the solution (Jensen and Tyler, 2012), this commercial television production can be read as a sort of perverse public service, auditing fiscally unviable bodies in order to shame them for their burden on the nation.

## 2.2 Austerity Court

Whilst the connection between television talk shows and the conditions of neoliberalism has been made explicit (see, for example, Peck, 2008), it is through the personality of the host that these shows are differentiated (Wilson, 2003) – and so each different host will illuminate different and specific connections. Marsh and Bishop (2014) argue that Kyle's approach to hosting his show is almost that of a judge in a people's court – which is both perceptive and in need of further attention. On other talk shows the audience is permitted, often encouraged, to



intervene in the narration of personal troubles between participants and host, applauding and booing, volunteering advice or opprobrium, to the extent that Palmer argues that 'the power of the norm is vested in the audience' (2003: 132). On *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, however, whilst the audience claps or jeers they can find themselves rebuked by the host for doing so; Kyle rarely goes into the audience to solicit their opinions, and those that call out or try to intervene in the discussion find themselves censured. This has the effect of casting Kyle as the sole authority on stage, a judge in front of a public gallery, such that the host more closely resembles that of *Judge Judy* than any other talk show.

Guests participate on *Judge Judy* in order to resolve legal matters that might otherwise go through the court system. Whilst the host, Judge Judith Sheindlin, is a real judge, *Judge Judy* is a television show in the style of a court of law rather than televised court proceedings, which gives her the leeway to inject her opinion at various stages, introducing her own prejudices. As such, Sheindlin is able to use the show as a platform for castigating people who have failed to govern themselves, as well as for voicing her guiding ethos, that everyone can be successful if they take responsibility for themselves (Ouellette, 2004: 241; 245). That people have fallen so short of success, to the extent that they find themselves in front of her in a mocked-up court, is "evidence" for Sheindlin that they are either foolish or stupid (or both) (Kohm, 2006: 715). This, then, obscures any other cause for the problems that participants find themselves in, such as economic inequality. This promotion of self-responsibility – and the tongue-lashings that befall those who have not embraced it in the name of personal change (Kohm, 2006: 716) – cannot be separated from Sheindlin's (real) position as a judge. By presenting conflicts between participants as petty disputes that arise from personal failings, the show narrates them as being an unnecessary drain on the legal system; the show then acts as a litigation sluice, diverting supposedly undeserving legal

subjects away from the actual courts (Kohm, 2006: 722-723). The overall message is that if you cannot look after yourself, you cannot expect the state and its apparatuses to help. As such, *Judge Judy*, by setting itself up as a private alternative to public courts, 'draws from the symbolic authority of the state to promote both the outsourcing of its governmental functions and the subjective requirements of the transition to a neoliberal society' (Ouellette, 2004: 232). The show, then, advances 'a neoliberal agenda of cuts to social programs and the dismantling of the final vestiges of the welfare state' (Kohm, 2006: 716).

Much the same can be observed of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. In the first section it was argued that technologies of confession are used on people deemed untrustworthy by virtue of their class position, undermining the talking therapy that would allow for the healing of wounded selves and resulting in only the presentation of those wounds; and we saw above that these technologies act to audit the value of bodies in terms of their efficiency in conditions of austerity. The first of these functions provides the platform, and the second the authority, for Kyle to shame his guests. As with Sheindlin, Kyle delivers tongue-lashings, berating his guests for their personal irresponsibility, 'pointing fingers and offering scathing judgements' (Marsh and Bishop, 2014: 18) and delivering acerbic "common sense". Like other talk show hosts, then, Kyle is presented as a moral authority (Shattuc, 1997: 7), who espouses the mantra of self-responsibility that is prevalent across reality television, a dictate especially directed at working-class people (Skeggs, 2005: 972). So, after lie detectors and paternity tests have audited and revealed sexually irresponsible bodies, Kyle will admonish the male guest for their failure to use contraception with what has now become something of a catchphrase: *Why didn't you put something on the end of it?* He inquires into guests' employment status in order to determine their ability to provide for a child (an actually existing child or the potential child that might result from participants' sexual impropriety).

Similarly, Kyle will ask after the employment status of guests revealed to be consuming drugs or large levels of alcohol, and add to this his most telling catchphrase: *Who's paying for x?* This demand for the origins of the means to afford things – including cigarettes, scratch cards, even nappies – is a rhetorical question that nonetheless Kyle demands his guests answer; the insinuation is that Kyle himself, his studio audience and everyone who makes National Insurance contributions is funding the fiscal and bodily irresponsibility of the guest in question. The shaming of guests who have turned to the welfare state to support their children, or who require benefits due to unemployment, moves *The Jeremy Kyle Show* away from the personal development narrative of talk shows like *Oprah* and more closely resembles the austerity rhetoric of those in government against welfare claimants. Indeed, it chimes with a report from the *Guardian* that consumption of cigarettes and alcohol is being used as a factor in determining discretionary housing benefits (Ryan, 2013). It plays to stereotypes of unemployment, alcohol or drug consumption, and pregnancy as lifestyle choices for "feckless chavs" who are ripping off Britain via the welfare system (Tyler, 2008; Jensen and Tyler, 2012; Skeggs, 2009: 630), and to the idea that it is the welfare system itself that encourages such behaviours (Jensen, 2012). Kyle does not just elide the connection of his guests' problems to the wider socio-economic situation, as observable in many reality television depictions of working-class people (Wood and Skeggs, 2008), he attacks the very principles of welfarism itself whilst eliding an economic crisis that creates the socio-economic situation of his guests. As with *Judge Judy*, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* acts to 'construct templates that complement the privatization of public life, the collapse of the welfare state, and most important, the discourse of individual choice and personal responsibility' (Ouellette, 2004: 232). But even *Judge Judy* presented a narrative where people could make successes for themselves if they would just stop relying on the state and assume self-responsibility; *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is simply about fire-fighting failure, where

the narrative is not so much that everyone can be a success, but simply that everyone can and should be less of a financial burden to the state. The show, then, adopts state practices of roll-out, measuring the value of individuals, in order to promote the roll-back of state expenditure and apparatuses. So it is that Kyle presents as an austere judge in a court of austerity.

### **Concluding Remarks on Austerity Television**

As Raphael (2004) and Kleinhas and Morris (2004) demonstrate, the television talk show, court television and reality television in general, were products of austere times, appearing in the late 1980s as a cheap way to fill air time when television network budgets were straitened. *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is an example of how austerity television has evolved to become a technology of austerity itself. Andrejevic (2004: 204-205) has argued that reality television presents capitalism as a social construct, but one that uncannily lies outside of human control. Couldry and Littler (2011) have argued that reality television – their example is *The Apprentice* – acts to reify the rules of neoliberalism. Austerity television, then, presents austerity measures as a social construct – performed, on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, by the host – but one whose norms and values have an unquestionable, concrete existence. This acts to promote austerity as the only option for dealing with economic crisis, such that we might talk here, drawing on Fisher's (2009) idea of capitalist realism – where capitalism is promoted as natural such that there are no apparent alternatives – of austerity realism. This is not to claim that the producers or the host intend for *The Jeremy Kyle Show* to function in this way (although they might), but rather that the show produces a narrative that normalises austerity measures, including fatal cuts to the welfare state. At this point, we should remember that the show has been broadcast since 2005 – before the recent economic crisis took hold. However,

we might understand this temporal precedence in terms akin to those famously evoked by the neoliberal economist Milton Friedman:

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable (2002: xiv).

This is not say that *The Jeremy Kyle Show* operated as a blueprint for austerity, but that it has a longer history of narrating human value in terms of the relative efficiency of the poorest subsection of British society, in determining that value through technologies of confession, and in shaming those who do not represent value for money. That is, the ideas behind austerity were not just lying around before the economic crisis, but already legitimated through austerity television.

*The Jeremy Kyle Show* is but one example of the austerity television genre. For instance, two shows presented by Kirstie Allsopp, *Kirstie's Homemade Home* and *Kirstie's Handmade Britain*, broadcast on Channel 4 in 2009 and 2013 respectively, inform viewers how to maintain middle-class lifestyles despite austerity measures, so presenting austerity as a natural state that one has to work around to maintain class belonging. This promotes what Jensen (2012) calls 'austerity chic', a genre to which she adds such shows as *Economy Gastronomy*, *Superscrimpers* and *The Ultimate Guide to Penny-Pinching*, all broadcast in Britain after the global recession and during the ongoing austerity measures. Different forms of austerity television will operate in different ways, and not necessarily as full-frontal attacks on the principles of the welfare state as with *The Jeremy Kyle Show* or *We All Pay Your*

*Benefits* (broadcast in 2013 on BBC One), but they share in the promotion of austerity realism. More research is needed into these kinds of shows. With the increasing infiltration of neoliberal market competition and measurement into the academy, it has been argued (Beer, 2013), value is placed in certain kinds of academic activity, with some research areas being seen to have more value than others – something particularly acute with the financial restrictions since the recession. 'Glossy topics' (Beer and Penfold-Mounce, 2010), such as reality television, may be seen as of lesser value, 'deemed to be frivolous, unimportant or perhaps even a luxury that cannot be afforded in more "austere" times' (Beer, 2013: 300). Yet by studying something like *The Jeremy Kyle Show* we can understand the ways that austerity measures are reinforced, and the same submission to measurement and value that occurs in the academy legitimated, on television screens across Austerity Britain.

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