# Everyday austerity

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# Everyday Austerity: Towards Relational Geographies of Family, Friendship and Intimate Relations

**Abstract**: This paper advances ideas about relational geographies to explore 'everyday austerity'. Whilst geographers have analysed the causes and aftermath of the recent financial crisis, the focus largely remains on problems within economic systems and urban governance, rather than austerity as lived experience. I outline how focusing on everyday relationships and relational spaces - family, friendship and intimate relations - provides exciting opportunities for thinking geographically about everyday life in austerity. Using examples of care and support and mundane mobilities, I demonstrate how a relational approach extends current understandings of how austerity cuts through, across and between spaces.

**Keywords***: austerity, everyday, relational space, family, friendship, intimacy

## I. Introduction

With this paper I advance and bring into conversation key contemporary interests within human geography; those of everyday life, austerity and relational geographies of family, friendship and intimacy. In 2008 the global financial economy entered into a financial crisis, emerging in 2009 to widespread economic damage and a series of austerity policies, especially in the Anglo-American societies of the UK, USA, Republic of Ireland and parts of Southern Europe. Here, austerity remains an economic and political norm, despite recent - and seemingly premature - claims that austerity is 'over' (Watts 2017, White 2017). Geographers have been at the forefront of analysis and debates about the causes and aftermath of the recent financial crisis, impacts on cities and regions, and problems of broader economic systems and governance thereof (Aalbers 2009, Kitson *et al.* 2011, Martin 2011). This work has been influential in revealing the geographically disparate and multi-scalar nature of austerity as a set of socially and spatially uneven measures and processes, accelerating instabilities and at times creating new ones.

However, it is the everyday geographical implications of austerity, what I herein term 'everyday austerity', that provide the focus of this paper. By this, I mean the impact that contemporary conditions of austerity - personal and societal, resulting from measures imposed by government to reduce state deficit (Hall 2017) - have in and on everyday life.[1] Imposed is the operative term here; austerity is not an inevitability, but a political and economic agenda, carrying with it a romanticised, nostalgic discourse that tempers public mood and shifts responsibilities from state to citizens (Hall and Jayne 2016). The prosaic elements of living in and through austerity have potential to enhance and extend geographical understandings - across sub-disciplinary divides - as to the contextualised and multi-scalar experience of austerity (Pimlott-Wilson and Hall 2017). Austerity measures, implemented by the state, involve a rolling-back of public spending on housing, welfare, local government, education and cultural institutions, to name but a few (Hall 2015). These policies bleed into the very fabric of everyday geographies - the spaces in which people live, meet, work, play - in different ways and at a range of magnitudes.

I posit that key to unlocking the complexity of lived austerity is understanding everyday relationships, intimacies and social interactions; the relational spaces within which and across austerity takes place. Geographers have long been interested in the realm of the 'everyday', as a 'largely taken-for-granted world that remains clandestine', and the routine, mundane and unremarkable elements of human (and non-human) activity (Gardiner 2000, p.2). For Pain and Smith (2008, p.2), the everyday represents 'the feelings, experiences, practices and actions of people outside the realm of formal politics'. Everyday life encompasses 'affect and emotions, bodily experience and practical knowledges, the role played by "lived" time and space in the constitution of social experience, language and intersubjectivity, and interpersonal ethics' (Gardiner 2000, p.3). The

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[1] This is not to suggest that austerity is a contemporary phenomenon, since previous experiences of austerity - what some call 'austerities' (see Horton 2017) - are also manifest in everyday life (Hall 2017). Nor is it to overlook the interconnections between austerity and neoliberalism, whereby cuts to public services and welfare reform are associated with neoliberal socio-economic restructuring (see Pimlott-Wilson 2017). Rather, the term 'everyday austerity' encompasses the lived, prosaic elements of contemporary austerity, recognising that time, place and context are important in shaping what austerity means in different spaces and moments.

everyday is often implicitly taken to refer to geographical scale, a 'microscale' that it sits beneath - rather than alongside or part of - 'global' concerns (Pain and Smith 2008, p.6). Studying the everyday can often seem an overwhelming task since it refers to a vast terrain, characterised by difference and diversity (Askins 2015, Horton and Kraftl 2009), including households, workplaces, leisure spaces and community spaces (Jupp 2013, McDowell 2012, Smith and Stenning 2006), and a host of relationships and relational interconnections.

Indeed, as Massey (1991) argues, social relations are central to geographical understandings of the world, and how identities, experiences and relationships can create, subvert and move through and across space. To consider space as relational is to recognise that spaces, like identities, are made through interactions with others, ongoing possibilities that are unbounded and ever-changing (Massey 2004). Building on this, I argue that a closer inspection of relational geographies - particularly family, friendships and other intimate relations - offers interesting possibilities for understanding austerity in everyday life, in that together they represent the core of significant everyday social relationships. I show how a relational approach to 'everyday austerity' therefore involves paying close attention to both geographies *of* everyday life, by attend to questions of difference through, across and between spaces (see Massey 2004); and geographies *in* everyday life, by addressing the interactions, relationships and spatial practices that configure and are configured by the everyday.

The remainder of the paper maps out this agenda in further detail. I firstly outline current geographical literatures on austerity, with leanings toward economic, financial and urban accounts. I then review literature on geographies of family, friendships and intimate relations - the core of everyday social relationships - drawing from work within geography and the wider social sciences. Taking forward a relational approach, I identify two broad themes - care and support, and mundane mobilities - to unpick geographies of everyday austerity. I conclude that when taken together, a

focus on family, friends and intimate relations can further develop relational and multiscalar understanding of austerity and everyday life.

**II. Geographies of austerity: economic, financial, urban**

Austerity is often characterised foremost as an economic condition. Economic geographers, perhaps unsurprisingly, have provided valuable insights, particularly around the governance, regulation and structure of global financial markets (Hall 2010, Hughes 2012, Lee *et al.* 2009), and their role in the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (Martin 2011). A key contributions of this work has been to frame economic crises as representative of the growing interconnectedness of the so-called 'real' economy, the financial economy and everyday life (Aalbers 2009, Hall 2011). Much of this work draws upon and develops the financialisation thesis, the growing power and influence wielded by financial systems (Christophers 2015, French *et al.* 2011, Langley 2008), in which economic geographers have played a pivotal role.

Following the GFC of 2007-2009, concerns were raised that economic and financial geography was on the cusp of its own crisis. Engelen and Falconbridge (2009, p.588), taking from Dicken (2004), suggested the financial crisis was beginning to look like 'geography's "next missed boat"'. In more recent years, as the GFC evolved into a protracted period of austerity, economic geographers have undertaken analysis of, for instance, austerity policies deployed in city, regional and national governance (Ballas *et al.* 2017, MacLeavy 2011, Pike *et al.* 2016), the gendered nature of capital (Pollard 2013), and the impact of spending cuts on academic institutions (Christopherson *et al.* 2014). In short, the financial crisis has been embraced as 'a highly geographical crisis', one that 'evolved and impacted unevenly in part because it occurred against the ineluctable backdrop of – indeed, was surely in part a result of – a long history of uneven geographical development' (Christophers 2015, p.206). The prominence and incisiveness of critical writing on austerity by economic geographers, when compared to social and cultural analysis, may also be the result of

relevance and timescale. The instigation of policy or the fall-out of an economic crisis can occur within a moment - such as a budget announcement or a stocks crash - but their effects on social and cultural life can take time to 'hit' and be felt on the ground (Pimlott-Wilson and Hall 2017).

Attending to questions regarding the socio-spatial unevenness of austerity, urban and regional concerns have been forefront, what Peck (2012) coined 'austerity urbanism': the challenges faced by cities and urban regions in the current economic climate. Contributions have sought to conceptualise austerity as 'a particularly urban phenomenon' (Donald *et al.* 2014, p.12), with analysis levelled at the regional and city scale (Davidson and Ward 2014, Kitson *et al.* 2011), as the main stage upon which the impacts of austerity - wealth and power, inequality and impoverishment - are thought to play out (Hall 2015). This work has been particularly influential in shaping current geographical debates on austerity, wherein 'the urban' has become a significant frame of reference for the contemporary context of austerity, ostensibly removed from everyday, personal and lived experiences. Bringing these elements into dialogue has enormous potential to ground economic, financial and urban geographies in the 'messiness of everyday life', encouraging intra-disciplinary links between 'the economy' and 'culture' (Hall 2016, p.326).

As emerging research shows, the quotidian spaces of austerity *matter*, as do the day-to-day rhythms, routines and relations in and upon which austerity is placed (Hall 2017). For instance, in work on post-crisis youth identities, McDowell (2012, p.580) contends that 'the new era of austerity' brought with it 'material inequalities in the labour market and... discourses of disadvantage'. The service industry, she argues, is a more competitive and precarious workplace than ever, with high unemployment levels pitching graduates and non-graduates against one another for the same, temporary, low paid, body-intensive labour. Jupp's (2013, p.173) study of 'UK Sure Start Children's Centres... as particular kinds of spaces' similarly identifies heightened social and spatial unevenness in the impact of welfare cuts. Horton's (2016) work on cuts to public services also focuses on a

particular sphere, this time youth groups, revealing that anticipation and anxieties surrounding austerity are potentially more devastating than the reality.

Geographical literature on foodbanks in the UK, USA and across Europe has likewise typically identified these as spaces of austerity, and of emotion, ethics and encounter (Cloke *et al.* 2016, Lambie-Mumford and Green 2015, Garthwaite 2016). Such studies focus on foodbanks as liminal spaces of institutional and structured responses (by communities, third-sector organisations and faith groups), rather than informal spaces and practices with which they, and austerity, are bound up (Hall 2015). Similarly, studies of community services facing closure have considered libraries as therapeutic spaces (Brewster 2014), and have noted the strain placed on non-government organisations of support, such as Citizens Advice Bureau's (Kirwan *et al.* 2016). Spaces of austerity, in these examples, are institutionalised and formalised - workplaces, childcare centres, youth groups, foodbanks, libraries, citizens' advice bureaus - where connections are founded foremost on geographical grouping and physical proximity, with relational consequences.

Research on austerity is not necessarily a new field of geographical interest, for a rich pocket of literature has explored austere post-soviet states and everyday socio-economic relations therein. This includes studies of everyday tactics used by poor households in urban Ukraine in response to economic marginalisation (Round *et al*. 2008); simultaneous transitions to adulthood and post-socialism for young people (Burrell 2011); and inter-relationships between housing, mobility, leisure and consumption for everyday geographies in Poland (Stenning 2005). In the capitalist development of post-socialist societies, when formal and informal economies were acquiring new meaning and place, Smith and Stenning (2006, p.197) identify the role of 'family, friends and acquaintances in the formal economy', as a means by which ordinary people sought to overcome state-imposed austerity and access goods, services and information. They argue for households as an entry point, 'a networked space, "nested" with other geographies including other homes, workplaces, community

venues, the housing block, the street, the familial home, perhaps in a distant location, sites of work abroad, and so on' (ibid, p.202).

Current literatures have started to use 'spaces' of austerity (households, youth groups, workplaces) to think about how everyday experiences 'talk up' to economic policy. This work can be further developed with attention to social relations and relational geographies, to address the ways in which everyday life cuts through, across and between spaces (Hall 2016, Massey 2004). While current literature on everyday geographies speaks to these ideas of relational space - such as Waters' (2002) work on doing transnational family life across places and scales, Blunt (2005) on the home and home-making as relationally-constituted space, and Conradson (2003) on emerging relational practices of care within therapeutic practice - I argue for further exploration and application of relational thinking.

In this paper, the term 'relational' is deployed to connect two key ideas. Firstly, in the literal sense of social relations and how relational geographies are being reworked by and through austerity. For Morrison *et al.* (2012, p.513), relational space refers to 'relations and spaces *between* and among individuals, groups and objects'; the spaces created by and through relationships. Secondly, and taking from Massey (1991, p.24), relational space also refers to politics and spaces created by the 'geographical stretching-out of social relations', the spaces produced (and power, inequality and difference therein) as a result of the changing socio-material constitution of everyday life (technology, mobility, communication). This paper therefore builds upon geographical literature that argues for an understanding of the everyday that is not place-bound, but which conceives of everyday life as relational space (Massey 2004). This can also be seen in geographical work on family life, in the move away from considering 'the family' as defined by the time or scale of the household, but instead as a relational space of memories, emotions and finance (Hall 2016). These themes are continued below.

**III. Everyday geographies of family, friendship and intimate relations**

I suggest that relational geographies - of family, friendship and intimate relations - are a useful starting point to conceptualise everyday austerity. Together they represent the core of everyday social relationships; the many obligations, practices, emotions, etc. that shape how austerity is experienced and encountered through, across and between everyday spaces: what Massey (2004, p.5) describes as 'think[ing] space relationally'. Developing this tri-part framework, I outline in turn geographical literatures on family, friendship and intimate relations, before illustrating how a cohesive conceptual approach to social relations can reveal relational geographies of everyday austerity.

*1. Family geographies*

The notion of family is deeply rooted in how most governments convey messages of responsibility and distribute social benefits to citizens (Edwards and Weller 2010, Harker and Martin 2012, Oswin and Olund 2010), and of key importance in the context of cuts to public expenditure. As Edwards and Gillies (2012, p.63) note, 'it would be hard to find any aspects of family life and relationships that stand outside of "culture" and are not "political" in some shape or form'. Despite the centrality of kinship to socio-political life, family has been described as an 'absent presence' within the geographical discipline (Valentine 2008, p.2098). Where earlier writings focused on 'geographies of social reproduction' (Valentine *et al.* 2012, p.777), recent years have seen renewed interest in geographies of familial relations, or at least a recognition that family, including the challenges faced in austere times, has been 'rather unrepresented' (Harker and Martin 2012, p.769). In giving further attention to routine, unspectacular elements of everyday family life (Valentine *et al.* 2012), geographers should also take heed of warnings about romanticising familial relationships, defined as much by emotional closeness as tension, unhappiness or abuse, which may become exacerbated by/in tumultuous economic and political contexts (Morrison *et al.* 2012, Pinkerton and Dolan 2007).

There are, however, some recent attempts of redress. Using the concept of caringscapes, or the time-space dimensions of care, Bowlby (2012) interrogates social relationships within familial and intergenerational caring practices, and the ways caring responsibilities/needs change across the lifecourse, with recognition that policy landscapes also shape everyday relationships. Evans (2012) also explores multiple dimensions of family relationships, specifically siblings relationships in youth-headed households in Tanzania and Uganda. And in research on intergenerationality and grandparenthood, Tarrant (2010, p.190) describes 'how the transition to the identity of a grandparent is intersected by space, place and intergenerational relations'. Much of this work around family geographies speaks to sociological debates on family practices and intimate lives (Morgan 2011, Smart 2007), where there has been a notable shift away from 'the family' and associated heternormative prescriptions (Aitken 1998).

A growing number of scholars have, nevertheless, argued for a defence and retention of 'family' as an important conceptual tool for grasping everyday social realities and relationalities (Edwards and Gillies 2004, Morgan 2011). Such calls do not necessarily mark a move away from personal life, intimacy or kinship. Nor is it to dismiss changing family formations, obligations and living arrangements that may counter traditional ideas of family (Aitken 1998, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Rather, it is to recognise that despite social and demographic variations family still matters and has 'public political' resonance, particularly when family is at the centre of (austere) policy-making (Edwards and Gillies 2012, p.64, Pimlott-Wilson and Hall 2017). Many non-traditional families or 'families of choice' (Weeks *et al.* 2001) use the term 'family' to 'emphasise the strength of their kin-like social networks and commitments to their partners' (Jackson 2009, p.3), representing 'a range and mix of blood, partner and friendship ties and commitments that stretch beyond the conventional couple' (Edwards and Gillies 2012, p.65; Valentine 2008, Wilkinson and Ortega Alcazar 2017). Hence, there are ways of 'doing' family that might not subscribe to the 'heterosexual, cohabiting, two-point-four-children family' model, but for which the notion of family is still significant in everyday practice and parlance.

Furthermore, while socio-spatial dynamics of family are changing, this is not to say that the concept of family has become redundant; familial relations are practiced over increasingly distant scales, bending and stretching relational spaces (Massey 2004). However, there is often an assumption, Holdsworth (2013, p.1) argues, 'about the intensification of mobility at the expense of family', that people are moving further away from family. But this is not the same as dispersal; 'we cannot all be moving away from each other, as at the same time this mobility will mean we are moving closer to others' (ibid, p.2). Broadbent (2009) similarly rejects claims that the process of individualisation is deteriorating the importance of contemporary family life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), arguing that people now have more contact with their family than ever before, largely due to personal communication technologies. Relational geographies of family are shown here to operate on multiple scales.

Geographical literature on migrant workers also reveals the obstacles created by spatial distance to maintaining familial relationships (Pessar and Mahler 2003, Pratt 1997). Parrenas (2005, p.317) shows how Filipino migrant mothers living abroad engage in a variety of intergenerational transnational communications, including 'flow of ideas, information, goods, money and emotions', allowing the transgression of spatial (and relational) barriers in gendered care practices. As Popke (2006, p.506) describes, care responsibilities 'may stretch across both territorial boundaries and familial generations'; imagined and practiced over various time-space configurations (Bowlby 2012, Dyck 2005). Waters' (2002) work on 'astronaut' families and lone mothers in Vancouver likewise reveals the flexibility of familial relations, enacted across great distances by exchanging material things and developing new kin-like relations.

In these and other examples it is common for authors to refer not only to family members (i.e. those related by blood, marriage or adoption), but to 'friends and family', or what is sometimes called 'kin and kith', as a distinct set of social relations. Spencer and Pahl (2006, 213-4) describe this as a 'suffusion of roles', building on Wellman's (1990) earlier work on 'kinfolk', and the fuzzy boundaries

between kin and personal communities. This coupling is applied so often that it is rendered a given and rarely troubled. So while family has geographical significance, it is part of broader relational geographies of austerity.

*2. Friendship*

Despite occupying a central position in contemporary society, friendship has tended to remain the reserve of sociological and anthropological study (see Bowlby 2011, Bunnell *et al.* 2012, Coakley 2002). Here, friendships have been understood as a form of 'social glue' (Spencer and Pahl 2006, p.213), providing 'social and emotional support and a sense of collectivity' (Edwards and Gillies 2004, p.631). With overlaps in relational networks of family and friends, or 'friends as family' and 'family as friends' (Allan 1989, Pahl 2000, Powdermaker 1966, Smart 2007, Wellman 1990), these relationships are assumedly also part of the fabric of everyday austerity.

Focused attention on geographies of friendship is a relatively recent but necessary consideration, since 'friendship is a means through which people across the world maintain intimate social relations both proximate and at distance' (Bunnell *et al.* 2012, p.490; Conradson and Latham 2005). There have, of late, been murmurings within geography about the overlapping relational possibilities with kinship, and sexual relationships, whether/how friendship may be distinguished (Bunnell *et al.* 2012, Valentine 1993, Valentine 2008), and how these various relationalities work against heteronormative assumptions that underpin family-centric state welfare policies (Brown 2015, Pimlott-Wilson and Hall 2017, Wilkinson and Ortega Alcazar 2017).

However, the ties that bind friendship are arguably discernable from kinship, based not on consanguinity or law, but choice, entered into voluntarily, and founded upon shared values or experiences (Bowlby 2011, Morrison *et al.* 2012, Weeks *et al.* 2001). Within friendships it is usual to witness interdependency and reciprocity, and 'some degree of emotional involvement', which are

typically absent in acquaintanceships (Bowlby 2011, p.608; Morgan 2009). Where geographers have considered friendship, it is largely as a result of examining other spatial-temporal practices.

For instance, work on the geographies of care-giving illustrates that 'social networks of friends and relatives [are] involved in informal care relationships', which are in turn 'influenced by social relationships beyond those spaces' (Bowlby 2012, p.2103). Jupp (2013, p.182) argues that people actively seek out caring relationships, with children's centre as the locus of where friendships were nurtured in her research. Regarding transnational friendships, Conradson and Latham (2005, p.301) show that friendships have a certain temporal and spatial resilience, which 'shape and give form' to people's mobility. And regarding local childcare, an increasingly politicised issue during austerity (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014, Jupp 2013), Holloway (1998, p.39) identifies gendered and classed geographies of friendship, whereby mothers gravitated towards those with whom they shared similar social characteristics. Valentine (1993, p.110) likewise found that intersections of gender and sexuality are formative in shaping how and where friendships are made, with lesbian women resorting to 'looking for clues in dress or body language' to ascertain similarities and differences.

On geographies of social difference, Askins' (2015) study of a befriending scheme for asylum seekers in North East England reveals how close physical proximities are part of the spatialities from which friendships flourish, albeit with positionalities and identities to navigate in the process. On spatialities of crafting, Hall and Jayne (2016) examine how practices of dressmaking simultaneously create convivial spaces for friendships to develop. Social similarities and differences act as surfaces upon which friendships (or tensions) are built (Browne 2003, Hall 2017, Wilson 2013). Mirroring warnings about familial relations, friendships may also be contested, involving arguments, bullying, exclusion, or dissolution, as well as pleasure, comfort and companionship (Bowlby 2011, Bunnell *et al.* 2012, Morris-Roberts 2001, Morris-Roberts 2004, Newman *et al.* 2006, Valentine 1993).

There is also a clustering of research on friendships within children's geographies (Andrews and Chen 2006, Neal and Vincent 2013). Examples span global and socio-political contexts, from street children in Accra, Ghana for whom friendship is a 'survival strategy' (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010, p.441; Hörschelmann and van Blerk 2012, van Blerk 2011) to teenage girls in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales, UK, who 'use the streets as places of leisure', a relational space of togetherness (Skelton 2000, p.69). Spaces of friendship have been a particular concern for children's geographers - bedrooms, beaches, schools, streets or parks - as part of befriending processes and developing personal and relational identities (Bartos 2013, Morris-Roberts 2001, Morris-Roberts 2004). Moreover, children's friendship may intersect with and create opportunities for friendships between parents (and vice-versa), such as encounters in playgrounds (Wilson 2013), schools (Neal and Vincent 2013), parenting classes (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014), Sure Start centres (Jupp 2013), mother and baby groups (Holloway 1998), or virtual parenting in chat rooms, blogs and forums (Madge and O'Connor 2006). As will be discussed, austerity can reshape the significance of these relational spaces, and other spaces and relations may emerge during testing times.

The time taken to build up friendships, including rapport, familiarity and sharing intimate details, has also been reflected upon in geographical writings on fieldwork (Blake 2007). As Browne (2003, p.133) describes, friendships alter the space of the field, which 'incorporate more than spaces where information is gathered/formed'. Fieldwork friendships can also lead to researchers inadvertently caring for research subjects through acts of gratitude and by their very presence, particularly during austere times (Hall 2017). Extending Spencer and Pahl's (2006) 'social glue' metaphor, then, friendships have different consistencies and adherences depending on the people, places, distances and temporalities in question; social, political and economic context matters. Relational geographies of friendships, and how they extend, bend and map onto familial relations and other intimate relations, are also of interest (Bowlby 2011, Morgan 2009, Valentine 2008), particularly in periods of political and economic turbulence, such as austerity (Smith and Stenning 2006). It is to this that I now turn.

*3. Intimate Relations*

Writings on intimate geographies have applied 'key spatial concepts like proximity and distance' (Harker and Martin 2012, p.770), reflecting on the complex interplay between proximity and propinquity (Oswin and Olund 2010). Foundational work within the discipline, influenced by feminist scholars, concentrated on spaces of intimacy such as the home as domestic, gendered space (Blunt 2005, Milligan 2003) and the body (Johnson and Longhurst 2010, Longhurst 2008), shaping preceding geographical enquiry (Price 2012). For Morgan (2009, p.2) there are three key manifestations of intimacy; physical/embodied intimacy, emotional intimacy, and intimate knowledge, which 'do not necessarily co-exist in all interpersonal relationships'. So it follows, 'intimacy' not only refers to placed or material entities, but is also a social metaphor, describing multiple relationships to and with *others*. Intimacy, then, may be a result as well as a catalyst, a cause and an outcome, in the production, maintenance or disassembly of relational spaces of austerity.

Questions about framing intimacy within geography, and the need for relational thinking, have been raised. Valentine *et al.* (2012, p.790), for instance, emphasise the need 'for geographers to pay more attention to the spatial concepts of proximity and distance'. In such discussions, ideas about 'intimate relations' continue to assume a certain level of closeness, founded on love or mutuality - which is at best romanticised, and at worst ignorant. As Valentine (2008, p.2015) concurs, there is a real need to pluralise geographical understandings of intimate relations: 'by focusing only on relationships in the domestic, we miss out on the complex web of intimate relationships that span different spaces and scales'. Recent conceptual discussions about intimacy have worked to 'unfix' the scale of intimate relations, broadening understandings of relational space. It is argued that 'intimate relations cannot be considered synonymous with the body or the household, locations which then simply mirror larger social relations through their capacity to oppress or liberate at closer physical proximity' (Oswin and Olund 2010, p.60).

Intimacy and intimate relations are also not necessarily bound by family or friendship, nor are there set ways for intimacy to develop; familiarity is not a prerequisite. Geographical research on domestic workers illustrates this very point. For example, in Cox and Narula's (2003, p.333) study of au pairing in London, relationships between employers and domestic workers - cleaners, housekeepers, nannies, au pairs, and ironing 'ladies' - may develop into 'false kin relations', which are neither 'of equal benefits nor one constructed by both parties'. In similar work exploring differences between British and Filipina nannies, Pratt (1997, p.165) describes these intimate others as 'someone who might be folded into one's own family for a period of time'. Notwithstanding, intimacy is not always reciprocal, meaning intimate relations can be founded on unidirectional propinquities. Moreover, intimacy does not always equate to pseudo-familial relations resulting from domestic practices, whereby the spatial and relational dimensions of being or feeling close to others may result from unfamiliarity.

Indeed, the centrality of the body in service work (as a form of gendered, racialised, classed, low-waged and undervalued labour) has been widely acknowledged within the social sciences as an example of intimate corporeal practice that is not preceded (or necessarily succeeded) by prior relations (Hall 2018, Zelizer 2005). Recent, notable examples include Jayne and Leung's (2014, p.265) work on massage in urban China, wherein 'massage allows suspension of social norms of "closeness" and interaction' in the 'encounters between customer and practitioner'. Similarly Holmes (2015, p.479), investigating the materialities of hairdressing, describes the hair salon as a space of 'intimate service encounter' [...] which may be somewhat prolonged: where you feel obliged to talk, to break the uncomfortable silence with the person working upon your body'. While relations may bloom and friendships strike up over time, such relations are initiated (and sometimes purely based) on monetary exchanges, as examples of where intimacy is not always reciprocal (Cohen 2010, Morgan 2009). Finally, and in the context of austerity cuts and reduced employment opportunities, McDowell's (2012, p.578) research on classed and gendered youth identities in the service economy identifies how 'service provider and the purchaser are co-present'. Understandings of intimate

relations are herein reconfigured, for such (often precarious) labour is deeply entrenched in close corporeality and 'acceptable' bodily politics, performance and display (Crang 1994).

These examples each speak to a different type of interpersonal service engagement through which social relations - whether friendship, acquaintanceship, corporeal closeness, and undefined sorts of intimacy - develop at different rates and tempos, in turn shaping possibilities of/for relational space. Thus, and connected to the key purpose of this paper, non-familial and non-friendship, yet intimate and significant relationships and everyday spatial practices are 'embedded in wider social and political formations' (Bunnell *et al.* 2012, p.492). To segregate them is to offer an artificial representation of everyday life. Crucially, the possibilities, capacities and spatialities of such relations are at risk of change, transformation and reinstatement in times of austerity. By giving due attention to family, friendship and intimate relations, and the connections between, I now show how nuanced geographical understandings of everyday austerity and relational geographies can be developed.

**IV. Everyday austerity: relational spaces of family, friendship and intimacy**

Taking a relational approach to everyday austerity, I suggest, offers further opportunities for exploring austerity as a lived and personal condition, as it relates not only to relationships within and between individuals, but also according to the politics and spaces created by and through these relations (Massey 2004, Morrison *et al.* 2012). To demonstrate, the discussion below is grouped into two themes according to their cross-spatial and inter-relational properties; care and support, and mundane mobilities. I illustrate that by focusing on social relations and relational geographies of family, friendship and intimate relations that cut through, across and between spaces, scales and practices, everyday geographies of austerity can be seen anew.

*1. Care and support*

The provision of care and support is a messy endeavour, entangled within intra-personal relationships and responsibilities. Changes to household and family structures, alongside an increase in women's workforce participation and intensified mobility (Holdsworth 2013, McDowell *et al.* 2005, Smith 2011), have reshaped everyday care provision towards formal institutions. However, research shows that family and kinship still matter with regard to everyday support (Finch and Mason 1993, Valentine 2008), and as much as ever during times of austerity (Hall 2016). As Heath and Calvert (2013, p.1121) demonstrate, the role of family in providing material and financial support entails 'complex intergenerational negotiations relating to obligations and responsibilities, indebtedness and gratitude, dependency and independence, fairness and equality'.

Indeed, there are various kinds of support and care beyond material and financial that are required (given or received) in austerity: when local services have been cut, social care and welfare budgets slashed, and personal spending and lending curbed (England 2010, Hall 2015). This includes everyday practical support, such as child-minding, help carrying bags from bulk shopping, lifts to appointments because local transport services have been axed; and emotional support, such as providing comfort and counsel, as well as a 'loving' environment to see through these changes (Edwards and Gillies 2004, Pinkerton and Dolan 2007, Morrison *et al.* 2012, Thomson *et al.* 2010). These practices and interactions involve particular, and often embodied, inter-corporeal spatial practices; 'small acts, words and gestures which can instigate and reciprocate/reproduce such care' (Horton and Kraftl 2009, p.14). They are also spatially diverse (across home, workplaces, towns, cities), involve multiple relationships (familial, friendship and other intimate relations), and have the capacity to reshape relational spaces of care.

To explain, care-work, paid or unpaid, is a significant part of how everyday relationships are understood and maintained (Hall 2018). As Conradson (2003, p.453) puts it, 'care is woven into the fabric of particular social spaces and communities, at times supporting individuals and facilitating their well-being; at times breaking down and leaving significant gaps; and often requiring very

significant amounts of effort'. The current context of austerity has raised pertinent concerns about *how* and *by whom* care and support are administered, enacted and received (the relational politics of care) when both public and personal expenditure are curtailed (Hall 2016). As the well-known feminist mantra goes, the personal is political (Hall 2018).

Families, especially female members, are often responsible for enacting day-to-day care-giving for young, elderly and disabled kin; a responsibility commonly juggled with paid employment and domestic tasks (Evans 2012, Gillies 2005). In austerity, the sustainability of this care comes under intense threat, as seen in the UK with cuts of £6.3bn (or 23%) to the social care budget alone (Pearson and Elson 2015). This creates a growing care gap (England 2010) - with funding for elderly day-care activities, children's groups, and community centres slashed - typically filled by unpaid, female labour, across generational divides. The social unevenness of this care provision becomes even more stark when considering that 'care work (especially cleaning, food and laundry, when waged) is gendered, classed and racialised' (Hall 2018, p.4). Pearson and Elson (2015) likewise demonstrate that women are hit harder by austerity, namely due to public services, benefits and social care cuts where women form the majority of employees, recipients and benefactors. Recent research also reveals that austerity cuts to care services have the greatest impact on Black and minority ethnic women in the UK (Hall et al. 2017).

Current literatures that identify the uneven impacts of austerity as multiscalar (Davidson and Ward 2014, Kitson *et al.* 2011, MacLeavy 2011) may be developed with a relational approach. For Massey's (2004) conceptualisation of relational space is founded on the premise that identities are formed in and through social relations, of various kinds, which make way for political responsibilities to others. A (re)consideration of relational geographies in times of austerity raises questions about whether and how care needs of/for parents and adult children, in-laws, grandparents and grandchildren can reshape everyday, gendered care responsibilities. Exploring grandfathering, Tarrant (2013, p.193) notes that 'increasingly grandparents are playing significant caring roles in contemporary families

and are responding to care demand'. When everyday caring responsibilities expand due to financial curtailments, such as in austerity (Hall 2016), 'wider familial networks' (Valentine 2008, p.2101) - siblings, step-siblings, aunties ,uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins etc. - may  also enter to provide support. In their study of Internet gambling within families, Valentine and Hughes (2012) describe how both vertical (parents, children, grandparents) and horizontal kin relations (partners, siblings) are commonly relied-upon mechanisms of practical, financial and emotional support.

However, the significance placed on family and kin for care and support during times of hardship (both in academic writing and policy-making) means far less attention has been paid to friendships and other intimate relations in everyday geographies of austerity. And yet, it is well recognised that friendships are central to social networks, financial stability and personal wellbeing (Harrison 2013, Spencer and Pahl 2006), shaped by 'differential social positioning regarding gender, class and ethnicity' (Edwards and Gillies 2004, p.627). In their study of young people's support networks, Pinkerton and Dolan (2007, p.219-220) refer to 'internal emotional worlds' such as 'social support network membership' as channels through which support for 'troubled or troublesome' young people is best provided. Stenning (2005, p.122), writing on research in post-soviet Poland, also identifies 'networks of acquaintance and support... as a relatively undocumented part of the complex social and economic relationships which are increasingly recognized as important for managing lives under socialism and post-socialism'. Meanwhile, the current economic climate has the potential to 'reconfigure the dependencies within the family' (Thomson *et al.* 2010, p.155), as well as how much people rely on or contribute support to friends and other 'kinfolk' (Wellman 1990).

Herein lie possibilities for extending ideas about the relational geographies of austerity, at a time when heavier leanings on long-standing kinship ties and friendships, reconnecting with old kin and friends, or constructing new affective links, are necessary. The extension of caring-cared, supporting-supportive roles to wider familial, friendship and other intimate relations has the potential to shift

the temporalities and spatialities of social relationships (Bowlby 2012); whether by bring people emotionally or physically closer, in more regular contact, or enhancing proximities and propinquities of care. Notwithstanding, with such changes in inter-personal interactions come the possibility of added tensions and strain on familial and friend relationships, particularly if excessive or uncharacteristic support is sought (Hall 2016, Heath and Calvert 2013). After all, care-giving regularly takes place in the context of already-intimate relationships, defined as much by love, trust and compassion as power, dominance and oppression (Cox and Narula 2003, Morrison *et al.* 2012).

Research following the recent financial crisis in Europe shows that 'informal loans from friends and families are one of the ways for families to cover their debts, but many families (especially those out of work) find it hard to pay these back' (Eurofound 2014, p.30). Moreover, the provision of and responsibility to enact care is not necessarily reciprocal in nature, and nor are family and friends always in a position to provide support. Relational geographies of austerity are then shaped by factors such as class, social mobility, and employment status (Horton 2017, Pimlott-Wilson 2017). As Bowlby (2011, p.608) explains, 'caring between friends involves both giving and receiving and the expectation of some sort of reciprocation. [...] Nevertheless, persistent inequalities in the exchange of care between friends may lead to the loss of the friendship'.

The current context of austerity - as backdrop, mechanism and affective environment - therefore provides additional layers to the already gendered and culturally contingent values and norms that encircle everyday caring relations (McDowell *et al.* 2005). If the personal and political condition of austerity has the potential to redefine kin and familial relationships (Hall 2018), this can ricochet to other social and intimate relations; neighbours, care workers, health and social care professionals, nannies, childcare and child-minders, workmates and colleagues, and community members (Cox and Narula 2003, Emmel and Hughes 2010, Harrison 2013, McDowell *et al.* 2005, Valentine 2008, Wellman 1990). Such relationships, whilst not necessarily based on familial or friendship ties, may still be intimate, often involving close or sustained engagement in everyday routines and practices.

With cuts to welfare, increasing rents, loss of and added pressure on public services, increasing unemployment and precarious working conditions, the care and support offered by such other intimate relations signals a change in everyday relational geographies. Where care is performed, and who by, transcends everyday geographies of home, workplace, community or leisure spaces, intersecting with everyday relationalities, as well as social identities and difference.

In the face of austerity, new care-full relationships and opportunities for sociability emerge, giving form to and possibilities for relational space. Users and providers at foodbanks or Citizens Advice Bureaus may develop intimacies and relationships that extend the physical and social boundaries (and expectations) of institutionalised spaces (Cloke *et al.* 2016, Kirwan *et al.* 2016). Shoppers at 'nearly-new' sales (selling heavily discounted children's clothes) may meet other new parents in their local area (Waight 2018). While not all can or may become friendships, due to norms and regulations around client/service provider associations, these relations can still be intimate (Jayne and Leung 2014, Holmes forthcoming), involving the sharing of private details, personal moments and material things. They can also offer a sense of belonging or conviviality, be emotionally and affectively charged (Askins 2015, Massey 2004), and offer an example of relational spaces of care in the everyday geographies of austerity. Albeit, these possibilities should not be romanticised, emerging from difficult and painful situations.

In the context of austerity opportunities for sociability and intimacy might also, conversely, become agitated or limited; because of funding cuts and closures of relied-upon community services like Sure Start centres, libraries, sports centres and youth groups. They may also be strengthened by rallying efforts to save these and similar amenities (Horton 2016, Jupp 2013). Additionally, leisure activities, hobbies and provision of self-care, and relationships with those encountered as a result, are also likely to be implicated. Pleasures, treats, pamperings - of whatever scale or frequency, from a haircut or massage, to holidays - are typically 'cut back' in austere times (Hall 2015). Relational spaces of

care can also contract, dissolve and reshape during austerity. As Massey (2004, p.6) notes, 'propinquity needs to be negotiated'.

Considering everyday relational spaces of austerity requires thinking about emerging intimate relationships with the potential for friendship, as well as the breaking down of kin relations, friendships and other intimate relations. These examples of everyday geographies of care in austerity cut through, across and between 'nested' spaces and scales (see Smith and Stenning 2006), whether because of changing living or working circumstances, service closure, or the inaccessibility of certain activities. In what follows, I reflect more on these mundane mobilities and how they too can be reconsidered in light of a relational approach to everyday austerity.

*2. Mundane mobilities*

If conceptualising everyday austerity, as I situate it, requires understanding the relational nature of space, then mundane mobilities - the 'everyday voyages' of 'commonplace and regular occurrence not generally conceived as extraordinary or special trips through time and space but enmeshed with the familiar worlds we inhabit, constituting part of the unreflexive, habitual practice of everyday life' (Binnie *et al.* 2007, p.165) - are important to this discussion. I suggest that changing mundane mobilities - where people live, who they live with or near, how far they have to travel for work, logistics of leisure, relaxation and socialising - as a result of austerity cuts are in turn (re)shaping familial, extra-familial, friendship and other intimate relations. Where people live and who they live near are also pivotal to everyday care and support (Holdsworth 2013). As Smith (1999, p.26) argues, 'the strength of obligation as well as desire to care for others may depend on where as well as who they are': a combination of geographical proximity *and* propinquity. The impacts of economic downturns on mobility, spatial and social, have been noted, albeit typically foregrounding family rather than friendships and intimate relations.

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In a longitudinal study of motherhood during the recent UK recession, Thomson *et al.* (2010, p.152) found that '"moving" was a common subject of conversation... involving projections into the future in terms of finding areas with good public services [and] proximity to family support'. While economic upheaval may produce shifts in emotional and physical proximities of social relations, these are not always shared experiences (Hall 2017). An example comes from Edwards and Gillies (2004 p.638), who identify that 'differential lived experience of parenting' are significantly shaped by social class, 'with middle-class parents experiencing less close-knit, more geographically dispersed, families'. In a protracted period of austerity, there are likely further repercussions to mundane mobilities that shape, or are shaped by, familial, friend and intimate relations, and the social identities and differences (such as gender, race, disability, sexuality) with which they are bound.

A resounding feature of mundane mobilities in contemporary austerity, for instance, is the precariousness of the housing market. Private rental prices are increasing, homeownership is the reserve of older generations, and strict cuts levelled at housing benefits restrict the type of property and with whom claimants can live (Hall 2016, Wilkinson and Ortega Alcazar 2017). These austere conditions limit where and whom people can live near, move to or even move away from. Individuals and families might be forced to stay living where they once had hoped to sell their home, or continue renting when they had hoped to buy. Tensions between fixity and mobility in the housing market have very real, knock-on effects, shaping job opportunities, education and childcare options (Aalbers 2009, Holloway 1998, McDowell *et al.* 2005, Smith 2011). These effects are also multiscalar (Davidson and Ward 2014, Kitson *et al.* 2011, Peck 2012), impacting on certain sections of society and geographical regions (Christophers 2015, Pearson and Elson 2015, Pollard 2013).

Such mundane mobilities have a geography of their own, and may in turn be shaped by the social and economic characteristics of an area; 'residents living in disinvested parts of cities fall back on what they know and what they have - each other' (Slater 2013, p.376). In Poland, where social relationships are central features of coping in post-socialism, Stenning (2005, p.122) likewise

observes that 'low levels of housing mobility and the association of housing tenure with the workplace have meant that networks of acquaintance and friendship tend to be long-standing and stable'. Class dynamics are important here, whereby a close sense of working-class 'community' is often accentuated by 'intergenerational continuity, with many families who can trace back their roots over multiple generations' (Harrison 2013, p.102; Pahl 1984, Wellman 1990). Uprooting homes and lives as a result of austerity has differently felt impacts according to various social groups, and an austere economy is inextricably tied up with a sense of place and social 'locatedness' (Hall 2017, Skeggs 2004).

Connected to this, the precarious and ever-changing austere job market (Harrison 2013, Pimlott-Wilson 2015), including increased unemployment, rising self-employment, extensions of working-age, and the proliferation of fixed and zero-hours contracts, also shapes the rhythms of relationalities in everyday life. Such conditions result in people commuting over longer distances, adapting to different working practices, environments or forms of transport, or changing caring duties and patterns (Henwood *et al.* 2010, Holdsworth 2013, Smith 2011), with repercussions for relational geographies. An example of how these interweaving impacts of austerity play out in and through relational space can be seen in the case of younger generations reporting increasing financial dependence on their parents. Resulting from a toxic mix of soaring youth unemployment rates in Europe following the GFC, rising personal debt and everyday living costs (Heath and Calvert 2013), research by Eurofound (2014) found that almost half of young European adults aged 18-35 were living with their parents. The same report also notes a distinct trend of lone parents and their children moving in with relatives due to unemployment, albeit neglects to mention the role of friends and other intimate relations. Prolonged or returned living with parents and family serves to entrench aforementioned processes of (gendered and intergenerational) responsibilisation and familialisation (Heath and Calvert 2013, Wilkinson and Ortega Alcazar 2017), with the potential to strain or strengthen these and other relations, impacting on relational spaces of home, work and leisure. Meetings with friends, intimates and sexual partners may be altered by these revised living

arrangements, whereby the home may not offer suitable privacy (Morrison *et al.* 2012, Robinson *et al.* 2004).

In the UK, these impacts on mundane mobilities, particularly related to housing and employment, have been compounded by cuts to welfare. As part of a suite of austerity politics, individuals who are single and under the age of 35 are only entitled to financial support for housing in bed-sit accommodation or a single room in shared accommodation (Brown 2015). The removal of the spare room subsidy, colloquially known as the 'bedroom tax' - whereby housing benefit allowance has been reassessed according to 'spatial requirements' - has resulted in changing living and personal circumstances, with occupants forced to either pay the difference out of their social security payments, or be placed in alternative housing (Brown 2015, Wilkinson and Ortega Alcazar 2017). Austerity cuts have also been especially sharp for vulnerable groups dependent on social care (England 2010), once again highlighting the uneven, intersectional impacts of austere policy-making (Hall et al. 2017). Changes in monetary allowances and access to resources/support likewise expose relational spaces of austerity to alteration; with individuals requiring further support from family, experiencing a reduction in contact with paid care providers, even moving to new care facilities and leaving behind friendships or intimate relations formed with staff and fellow residents.

Austerity policies therefore have a direct impact on mundane mobilities, whether in residency, neighbourhoods, commuting, practical logistics, or daily movement for socialising, which then affect how these relations are reconstituted in and through austerity. Relational geographies of austerity are revealed; the spaces through, across and between which these relationships are enacted, maintained or usurped; stretching, bending, twisting and shrinking the spatialities and relationalities of family, friendship and intimacy.

**V. Conclusions**

New approaches to understanding everyday life in austerity are more important than ever; with concerns about financial crises in the UK and Europe resulting from Brexit, the extension of austerity regimes by European states, and ongoing economic and political fluxes across the world. With this paper I demonstrate the value of a relational approach to unpacking everyday austerity, as it is lived, felt and experienced. Taken together, a focus on family, friends and intimate relations - representing the core of everyday social relationships - can bring forth geographically-sensitive understandings of everyday austerity, advancing intra-disciplinary connections between economy and culture. This involves paying close attention not only to geographies *of* everyday life, by attending to questions of difference through, across and between spaces; but to geographies *in* everyday life, by addressing the interactions, relationships and spatial practices that configure and are configured by the everyday. What this focus reveals is the capacity for austerity to sharpen, fuzz or refract the boundaries of kinship, friendship, and a whole range of 'intimate others', as the everyday context in which economic change plays out. This exercise also exposes the value of developing geographical work on family, friend and intimate relationships, and crucially the links between them.

While my key aim in this paper is to advance understandings of everyday life in austerity, developing for new ways of thinking geographically about austerity and bringing disparate geographical discussions - economic, financial and urban, lived, felt and personal - into conversation (Hall 2016), so too have I provided a framework for conceptual and empirical work on 'the everyday'. It is, no doubt, an impossible task to cover all elements of everyday life, and my intention is not to provide a one-size-fits-all 'major theory' (Katz 1996). Rather, to interrogate and push the boundaries of relational thinking (Massey 1991, Massey 2004). Through discussions of relational geographies of care and support, and mundane mobilities , everyday life is shown to not be tethered to particular spaces, but a terrain that cuts across various and overlapping spaces, relationships and practices.

One way to advance a relational approach, as I illustrate, is to consider how social relationships are configured through and across space. Such an approach illustrates how austerity is manifest in

everyday life, developed in and through interaction, engagement and relationality; creating spaces

of mobility, fixity, care, support, tension, difference and similarity. Emphasis on relational

geographies of everyday life, the ways in which austerity is experienced through everyday relations

of family, friends and intimacy, also brings to light how these relations are themselves reconstituted

in and through austerity. Going forwards, adopting a relational approach to everyday austerity can

also help to unpick the inter-relational and intersectional unevenness of austerity cuts, as a

resounding concern requiring critical reflection. As geographers we cannot afford to be complacent

about everyday austerity, or the tools we currently possess to comprehend it; but must strive for

more nuanced and conceptually considerate approaches, couched in everyday lives as they are lived,

told and experienced, to more sensitively appreciate and address the injustices it produces.

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