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# The language of ‘nudge’ in health policy: pre-empting working class obesity through ‘biopedagogy’

Focusing on a long-running health campaign, this paper examines the UK government’s use of a policy technique known as ‘nudge’, which draws on behavioural economics in order to shape civic behaviours towards more desirable ends. Public health campaigns tend to be immune to critique because of assumptions that their goals are laudable and that they are ‘unproblematically’ educational. Here I argue that the use of ‘nudge’ tactics helps legitimate a narrowing of the sphere of governmental responsibility for this complex and classed social problem by pathologising working class lifestyles as inherently ‘irrational’. I use critical discourse analysis to explore the textual strategies through which a corpus of TV cartoon adverts enacts a ‘biopedagogic’ discourse and shapes ‘self-disciplinary’ subjectivities, targeting children in particular. Through subtle semiotic markers (register and regional accent) these adverts target a northern English, working class demographic, and shift responsibility onto certain individuals while glossing over the deeply entrenched and escalating forms of social inequality which lie behind the problem. In light of the increasing prominence of ‘soft’ governance techniques like nudge, I argue for a close dialogue between detailed linguistic analytical methods and a Foucauldian analytics of power.

## Introduction

This paper critically examines the linguistic strategies used to enact the UK government’s ongoing anti-obesity social marketing campaign ‘Change4Life’ (hereafter C4L) and assesses its status as an increasingly popular policy technique known as ‘nudge’. This approach argues that many of our decisions are governed by unconscious cognitive impulses like habit, fear, and bias. Nudge strategically exploits this by making subtle interventions in our decision-making environment, known as ‘choice architecture’, in order to voluntarily induce behaviour change ‘for the social good’ (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). It thus makes adjustments to how

messages are *communicated,* whether verbally or visually, in order to influence our choices by manipulating our limited rationality. In this paper I thus contextualise my analysis of anti-obesity policy in relation to the increasing use of nudge in public policy over the last decade. I argue that the increasing salience of 'soft' governance techniques calls for the kind of discourse-dialectical analytical framework proposed in this paper, bringing close text analytical methods into dialogue with a Foucauldian analytics of power.

The centre-piece of the C4L campaign is a series of cartoon adverts broadcast on prime time TV since 2009. The impetus for this anti-obesity policy intervention is a growing consensus across governments on the need to address the perceived threat to society and risks to individual health posed by escalating obesity prevalence. Indeed, a central preoccupation of the advanced liberal state is the identification, calibration, and management of risk; predicting and preventing environmental, geopolitical, and biopolitical threats (Beck 1992; Lupton 1999). The 'felt reality' (Massumi, 2010) of this future *possible* threat is then used to mobilise a preemptive form of politics which places primary responsibility on individuals for securing their own wellbeing. Foucault's concept of 'biopower'(1978, pp.139–45) is useful in conceptualising governance responses to the perceived threat of health risks in particular, since it is a form of power which takes life as its explicit target. It highlights the way citizens are encouraged to internalise knowledge about what is 'normal' (vis a vis sexuality, criminality, reproduction etc.) then monitor and control their behaviours accordingly (Foucault 1991). According to Foucault biopower has both disciplinary and regulatory poles, attending respectively to the control of individual bodies, and the 'calculated management' of the population and its birth, mortality and longevity. These work together, making 'knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life' (Foucault, 1978 p143) and giving rise to new forms of political struggle in which life itself is the primary object (Rabinow and Rose, 2006, p196). Rose (2001) argues that in advanced liberal society the

focus of biopower is primarily on the avoidance of illness and the self-management of healthy lifestyles. This involves the production of expert knowledge about health and strategies of intervention in the name of life and health. Indeed, Rabinow and Rose (2006, p.197) argue that the concept of biopower retains considerable analytical relevance and comprises (at least) the following dimensions: 1) forms and sources of expert knowledge/truth; 2) strategies of intervention; 3) modes of subjectification wherein individuals inculcate this knowledge 'by means of practices of the self, in the name of their own life, health, and that of their family'. Building on this, Harwood (2009: 21) proposes the concept of 'biopedagogy' as a means of conceptualising and critically analysing (inter alia) anti-obesity governance strategies, which involve a proliferation of instructions on how to live, eat, and be healthy (see also Wright and Halse 2013; Wright 2009). Harwood's approach is 'a means to formulate an empirical analytic to interrogate the concealed pedagogic practices of biopower' (2009: 21). By mapping the concept onto Rabinow and Rose's framework, she thus offers a way of highlighting the inherently pedagogical character of biopolitical practices (e.g health promotion).

Biopedagogy is necessarily discursive; it recontextualises health knowledge by semiotically representing it in a discourse which has a normative, socially regulative and reproductive function. As Bernstein observes, however, critiques of cultural reproduction often lack any detailed, internal analysis of such pedagogic discourse (Bernstein 1990). I therefore use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) to uncover the textual strategies that underpin C4L and 'interrogate the concealed pedagogic practices' whereby it seeks to discipline and regulate 'at risk' lifestyles. In a companion paper (author citation) I demonstrated the intertextual processes through which source knowledge about obesity and health from 'trusted experts' is distilled and reframed in the campaign launch. Building on that paper and examining the entire campaign, I now ask:

1. How is expert obesity knowledge *realised* as biopedagogic discourse?
2. What are the textual strategies through which specific individuals are *targeted*?
3. How is their *agency activated* and brought to work on their own lifestyles?

**The policy problem: obesity as contested knowledge**

In order to critically engage with the C4L policy intervention (to assess its aetiology and potential impact) it is necessary to examine the contested terrain of obesity knowledge that shapes the 'landscape of assumptions' which underpin governmental and public perceptions of obesity as a societal problem. A measure of the degree of consensus on the risks to society posed by obesity is that it is now commonplace for governments, health organisations, and the media to talk about 'the obesity epidemic'. The emotive disease metaphor invokes causal links with so-called 'lifestyle diseases' but also treats excess weight not just as a disease risk factor but as a disease in itself, while the existential presupposition asserts this proposition as known fact. The extent of its 'grip' in public discourse can be illustrated by a simple Google search for the exact phrase 'the obesity epidemic', which at the time of writing returns 498,000 hits. Moreover corpus searches suggest this idea has entered public discourse within the last decade: whereas a search for 'obesity' in the British National Corpus (2007) returns no collocations with 'epidemic', in the English Web 2013 corpus it is the highest ranking collocate. So what exactly is the evidence for the 'obesity epidemic'?

According to the World Health Organisation childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health issues of the current century. Moreover, it is closely linked to social inequality. The UK is ranked 8th among the OECD countries for prevalence of overweight (including obesity) among the adult population, where the problem correlates with social class and deprivation. Manual workers are 25% more likely to be obese than those in professional occupations (Public Health England 2014). The most deprived 10% of children are twice as

likely to be obese as their least deprived counterparts. The problem is also 'on the move': by 2034 70% of adults are predicted to be overweight or obese (HM Government 2016). For this reason, obesity is routinely construed in official policy as a 'public health crisis' (see Evans et al. 2003b and Gard 2011 for an extensive critique of the 'facts' behind this).

Given the emotive language with which it is discussed, and the highly personal nature of the phenomenon, it is not surprising that the issue of obesity attracts considerable public debate in the media. It is variously the object of stigmatisation, outrage, and moral panic. As Kwauk (2012) argues, by constructing what is 'normal', 'acceptable', 'like us', this discourse risks positioning communities and individuals on a hierarchy of those who are successful, valued, citizens and those who are not. In turn this provides the legitimatory grounds for denying healthcare to obese people; a decision which has already been taken by some local health authorities in the UK (Rawlinson & Johnston 2016).

There is an extensive literature on the subject of obesity, broadly divisible into realist (biomedical) and critical sociological approaches. The former strongly informs policy by means of 'expert' epidemiological evidence on obesity prevalence and disease risk (Butland et al. 2007). My critique of current UK policy, on the other hand, draws inspiration from the latter. I thus argue that behaviour change interventions help legitimate neoliberal policy 'imaginaries' (Jessop, 2002) by framing the problem as an individual, rather than structural one. This obscures the macro systemic and historical causes of obesity (Winston, 2004), like the fact that the governance of the global food economy is strongly influenced by regimes of corporate control and profit maximisation which lead to the over-production of cheap, unhealthy foods (Friedmann 2005; Paarlberg 2010). Moreover, health promotion strategies inevitably intersect with hegemonic 'norms' of health and beauty (Evans, Evans, and Rich 2003; Evans 2010; Gard and Wright 2001), and (in C4L) are accompanied by demographic profiling of 'at risk' sub populations and a school weighing programme to monitor

individuals. These processes serve as mechanisms of 'segregation and social hierarchization…guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony' (Foucault 1978, p.141). Nevertheless, successful inculcation rests in large measure on the ability of 'modes of subjectification' to penetrate and influence individual psychology. Nudge, I argue, offers policy-makers a subtle apparatus for achieving this.

**Nudge and pre-emptive policy**

Nudge is the popular label under which 'softer' forms of governance have become prominent in the last couple of decades, and most particularly since the 2008 financial crisis. The UK government has been a pioneer of this approach and even has its own part-privatised Behavioural Insights Team. The work of Chicago academics Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, the approach is based on, and popularises, behavioural economics (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Its theory of 'bounded rationality' is a critique of the classical economic model of rational choice which, it argues, is inconsistent with human psychology. The theory maintains that we operate with two cognitive systems: the (rational) Reflective and the (intuitive) Automatic[1] with the latter being the dominant force shaping decision-making processes and, being driven by associative memory, tends to base decisions on bias, habit, or laziness. This mental division of labour, argues Kahneman (2011), explains the heuristics of (bad) judgment. Nudge then applies this cognitive model to public policy, advocating the use of subtle adjustments to our decision-making environment (e.g. by changing the way options are framed) so as to make better choices (as prescribed by policy experts) easier or more attractive. Thus a nudge, rather like consumer advertising, is designed to strategically exploit our supposed limited rationality.

In elaborating its problematic emotion-reason dualism, nudge offers a psychological basis for hierarchizing people based on their supposed rational capabilities. Linguistically, the authors

of nudge practice what they preach, translating ‘dry’ academic concepts into an easy-to-read, entertaining narrative which is presumably designed to appeal to the reader’s ‘inner lizard’. In contrast with the rational ‘Econ’ (whom they liken to sci-fi’s relentlessly logical Mr Spock), the political subject and target of nudges, is the irrational ‘Human’ (who is more like the loveably feckless Homer Simpson). Rather than seeking more rational deliberation their approach capitalises on Homer’s flaws: ‘If people can rely on their Automatic Systems without getting into terrible trouble, their lives should be easier, better and longer’ (2009: 22). Their version of ‘one-click’ paternalism is acceptable, they argue, so long as the intervention is easy to opt out of. They defend this approach in ideological terms: ‘welcome to our new movement: *libertarian paternalism’* (2009: 5), whose ‘guiding principle is that we should design policies that help the least sophisticated people in society while imposing the smallest possible costs on the most sophisticated’ (2009: 252). The ‘most sophisticated’ are policy makers (‘expert’ arbiters of the rational), while the ‘least sophisticated’ are the ‘Homers among us’ (2009: 22) who require a nudge towards the ‘rational’. This formulation is problematic on several levels. Firstly, it raises questions about the status of ‘expert knowledge’, secondly its assumes that rationality is something which can be isolated from its historically embedded social relations and normatively judged, and thirdly it gives government licence to pathologise the behaviours of *certain* sections of society. In short, nudge can be viewed as a biopolitical technique which generates expert knowledge about wellbeing, segregates and appraises (and potentially stigmatises), and then devises strategies of intervention designed to shape more compliant citizens.

Thaler and Susntein characterise nudge as the ‘real Third Way’, capable of mitigating some of the cultural, social and economic problems of the neoliberal state (e.g. obesity, petty crime, pensions), while retaining the liberal principle of individual freedom. However, I argue it simply offers a politically attractive (because cheap) way of reproducing neoliberalism and

legitimating austerity policies. It allows governments to be seen to take action, using strategies from the marketplace to co-opt 'risky' individuals into the processes of policy by encouraging them to regulate their own behaviours. In effect, it diagnoses widespread social problems (obesity, ill-health, poverty, criminality) as being in large measure a matter of individuals' irrationality and inability to make decisions which are in their own and society's best interests, thereby effectively posing a risk to the (social and economic) security of nations. In doing so it allows governments to reframe widening health inequalities as a matter of 'poor lifestyle choices' to be remedied by the ongoing manufacture of 'individual freedom' through technologies of self-governance (Foucault 2007). The C4L campaign draws quite explicitly on behavioural economics in order to 'nudge people along the behaviour-change journey' (Department of Health 2009, p.5). Moreover the strategy uses persuasive governmental messages to encourage 'enhanced personal responsibility', 'helping [targeted individuals] to help themselves' (Halpern et al. 2004). This particular policy nudge thus provides the framework in which to pedagogically construe more 'healthy' subjectivities in the exercise of free choice. The discursive production of these subjectivities can be critically examined in terms of the social identities, relations and practices they comprise.

**Critical discourse analytical approach**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is ideally suited to a critical analysis of public policy since it begins with the assumption of a mutually constitutive relationship between discourse and the non-discursive elements that comprise any object of social research. It is this dialectical approach which leads CDA to bring close textual analysis into dialogue with social scientific theory in order to illuminate the role of language in structuring social practices. Given the increasing salience of softer, self-regulatory techniques of political power, I bring the Foucauldian concept of biopedagogy into dialogue with the detailed text analytical methods of CDA (Fairclough, 2003). As Rabinow and Rose (2006, p.215) argue,

biopower and the governance of 'healthy populations' requires active, not passive forms of citizenship. Its analysis involves exploring how individuals are 'brought to work on themselves in relation to truth discourses, by means of practices of the self, in the name of their own life and health' (ibid., p.197). Thus a textually-oriented critical discourse analysis logically implies a focus on how such 'active citizenship' is enacted in text.

In the following analysis I approach this question by examining a corpus of twenty four C4L adverts broadcast since 2009 in terms of the range of social meanings they construe. I follow Fairclough (2003) in using the general analytical categories of genre (ways of (inter)acting), discourse (ways of representing), and style (ways of being or self-identifying), as a means of conceptualising the different ways in which language (or more broadly semiosis) figures in social practices. Viewing the adverts as discourse I ask: How is the policy problem (normatively) represented? What solution is proposed? Who are construed as the relevant actors and agents in this? Viewing the adverts from the perspective of genre I ask: How is the communication organised? How do the adverts engage (particular) viewers? Who is speaking to whom? Finally, style involves the discursive construction and fusing of social and personal identity (Fairclough 2003). This can be realised through a range of linguistic features including phonological aspects (voice style, accent, intonation etc.), lexis (register/sociolinguistic code, metaphor), paralinguistic aspects (gesture, stance), as well as resources for conveying ideational or interpersonal stance (e.g. personal pronouns, modality, evaluation). The analysis will also include discussion of the role of style in targeting specific 'at risk' groups in C4L.

The C4L adverts bring together visual images, animated cartoons, and an accompanying spoken narrative. Here I focus primarily on linguistic features of the narrative, although I also consider the *acoustic voice style* (notably regional accent) of the characters who deliver this narrative. The TV adverts were accessed through YouTube and transcribed, producing a

digital corpus which was also analysed using corpus linguistic software (Rayson, 2011) to identify prominent textual patterns in the data. For example, 'keywords' are those words which are unusually frequent in the data when compared with a reference corpus. They can be further investigated by producing 'concordance lines' listing every instance of the word (in a central column) as it appears in the data[2]. The presentation of findings begins with overall patterns of genre, discourse, and style across the corpus. These preliminary observations were then used to direct a more detailed, thematic analysis.

## C4L as discourse practice

Close textual analysis in this paper focuses on one specific aspect of the C4L discourse practice, namely the cartoon TV adverts. However, these can only be understood in relation to the wider context of 'networked' policy-making (involving multi-sectoral partners and corporate sponsors) within which this social marketing campaign was developed. Here I briefly outline the processes whereby this campaign was researched and designed, since it offers some insights into the discourses and ideological assumptions that inform C4L as well as the way particular sections of the population are being targeted in these adverts.

C4L is an innovative genre of public health policy: it is the UK's first ever anti-obesity social marketing campaign. Social marketing involves 'the application of commercial marketing technologies to … programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences' (Andreason 1995, p.7). This has ideological implications since it recontextualises the discourses, relations, and values of the commercial sector in the governance of public health, while the emphasis on influencing individual behaviour makes social marketing highly compatible with nudge. It also acts as an effective mechanism for a softer form of neoliberalism designed to protect core liberal values while enabling greater scrutiny of individual behaviours.

Biopolitics involves an array of forms of observation, notably the collection of statistical data and interventions to match. C4L looked to the market for such calculative techniques: in 2006 the government created the National Social Marketing Centre, an organisation dedicated to carrying out social marketing and behaviour change research, with a primary focus on public health issues. It was highly influential in shaping the contours of the C4L policy intervention. Prior to the launch of C4L, it carried out 'audience segmentation' research in order to identify and characterise the riskiest types of family which 'exhibited behaviours and held attitudes with regard to diet and activity that suggested their children were at risk of becoming obese' (Department of Health 2009, p.19). In turn this was used as the basis for identifying a set of behaviours and attitudes that would be targeted in C4L. In each case these were low income (often single parent) families (Department of Health 2008), while quotes from parents used to illustrate their risky attitudes indicate they are located in urban areas around the middle and north of England.

C4L is a partnership between government, NGOs, and commercial sector organisations. Together they comprise the wider discourse practices that intersect with and inflect C4L and its attempt to shape 'healthy subjectivities'. Corporate partners include the supermarkets Asda and Tesco, and manufacturers Pepsico, Kelloggs, and Unilever (all of whom have a very large stake in producing some of the unhealthy products censured in this campaign). The marketing company M&C Saatchi was commissioned to produce the campaign, including the 'Change4Life' brand logo, textured through primary colour artwork involving simple cartoon figures. The adverts were created by children's cartoon-makers Aardman Animations and feature animated plasticine figures in a family setting, engaged in various domestic activities (mostly eating, drinking, and watching TV). Each short advert contains a message problematizing certain lifestyles and then gives scientific advice on health and nutrition,

advocating a healthier 'Change4life'. The adverts were broadcast before and during popular TV programmes including The Simpsons and Coronation Street.

It is interesting to note that the healthy eating messages in these C4L ads are competing directly with other very similar ads produced through the same commercial collaboration. For instance in an annual deal worth £10m, Cadbury's chocolate commissioned M&C Saatchi to create an advertising campaign (also featuring Aardman animations) for use in its sponsorship of Coronation Street. Thus, with respect to the first and second research questions posed at the start of this paper, C4L uses demographic profiling techniques to target a specific (urban, northern, working class) audience by recontextualising the semiotic and material practices of consumer marketing: market research, audience segmentation, branding, product placement, and interdiscursive borrowings from scientific discourse. Harwood (2009) reminds us that biopedagogy spreads beyond clinics and classrooms to political sites in which identities are formed and desires mobilised. C4L brings together the practices, values, and discourses of government and commerce. This helps disseminate its pedagogic message widely and through market-based forms of identification and interrelation.

**C4L as textual event**

I begin with a schematic characterisation of the advert series in terms of genre, discourse and style. This first order examination of the corpus yielded initial observations in response to the three main research questions (the enactment of pedagogic discourse, the targeting of specific individuals, and the activation of their agency), which suggested fruitful avenues for more detailed textual probes (e.g. narrative voice, style, move structure, intertextuality) applied to the entire corpus (see Table 3 in Appendix).

**General patterns across the corpus: genre, discourse and style**

Firstly, genre and discourse: each ad depicts the unhealthy actions of ordinary people in an everyday ('lifeworld') setting. These people are represented as nameless, faceless, plasticine figures, identified only by means of their kinship ties (gender and age are implied through the colour and size of the characters). Throughout these adverts there is considerable slippage between different speaking voices, point of view (1st or 2nd person), and participant roles (speaker/addressee/audience[3]), such that it is often unclear exactly who is speaking to us. This is significant because it allows the government to merge its voice and identity with that of cartoon characters who simultaneously demonstrate 'risky' lifestyles. This ambiguity in terms of the real source of the policy message intersects in complex ways with the construction of a colourful, cartoon fantasy world and the delivery of a problem-solution policy narrative. The narrative style of these adverts is quite explicitly marked from the outset: the first words of the first advert begin 'Once upon a time'; a 'framing key' (Goffmann 1974) that marks what follows quite explicitly as a child-oriented narrative. The language is also simple and colloquial, particularly where the item triggers a discourse-level evaluation (Lemke 1998) for instance: '*that's loads o calories; yuk!, nasty; I'm knackered; turns out the stuff I like is bad fer mi; loads o fun; we're right little monkeys'*. The interactional moves in these adverts intersect with their interdiscursivity. Thus the opening sequence typically involves a lifeworld discourse (Habermas 1984) representing some aspect of the family's everyday lifestyle in relation to diet or exercise. This is then evaluated as a disease risk through a biomedical scientific discourse, which is followed by a nudge-type solution like 'smart swaps', offering 'benchmarks' with which to calibrate and self-regulate behaviours. Finally a closing editorial comment either extols this as a means of achieving a better, healthier life or exhorts the viewer directly to engage with the C4L campaign by signing up to the companion website. Secondly, style: there are different acoustic voices present in these ads, falling into two main categories: that of the (child/adult) nudgee and a

government ‘spokesperson’ who, in the style of a typical commercial voice-over, directly addresses the viewer. Their voices are distinctive in terms of regional accent and dialect features, and play an important rhetorical (and potentially ideological) role in targeting a particular demographic. Shifts in participant role and narrative point of view are signalled through this change in speaking voice, as well as through the use of personal pronouns and evaluative lexis. As I argue below, these semiotic transitions are also vehicles through which the government either ‘intrudes’ into the narrative or instead takes a step back and invites (especially) children into a semi-fictional fantasy world in which they are encouraged to identify with the problem behaviours.

**Ventriloquizing the policy message: narrative voice and point of view**

Close examination of narrative organisation and voice in these adverts offers particular insights into the way they target (and pathologise) specific sections of society (Q2), as well as how expert obesity knowledge is enacted as pedagogic discourse (Q1). The concept of ‘voice’ is closely related to the linguistic construction of style and identity. It is also relevant to the question of hegemonic closure; to what degree does a text accentuate difference by allowing in multiple (potentially competing) voices? Does one voice dominate? A text may contain the voice of just one person or those of several people, for example the sentence ‘*Trump, in his wisdom, ordered me to step down as communications director*’ contains the (reported) voice of Trump and that of speaker (Scaramucci). Their voices are linguistically realised through first person narrative point of view (‘me’) and through intertextuality (the reported speech). Through the two voices we are thus given two *perspectives* on this event. We can distinguish between monologic (one voice) and heteroglossic (many voices) texts (Bakhtin 1981).

The C4L adverts are apparently heteroglossic, containing several different voices. These are quite explicitly marked by being acoustically distinctive (in terms of gender, age, regional accent). However, I will argue that this plurality of voice is simulated, masking a monologic discourse in which one voice and one discourse (that of the government) dominates. This is a hegemonic strategy: by blurring authorial voice claims can be presented as if they are shared. Moreover the picture is further complicated by the use of first person narrative in these adverts which, aside from creating an intimate, confessional tone, also adds to the blurring of authorial voice. Based on the distribution of voice throughout the corpus there are two major and eight minor types of advert. In Type A the addresser and omniscient narrator is a disembodied voiceover, while in Type B one or more depicted characters is the first person narrator, with a closing editorial comment and direct address by the disembodied voiceover. Table 1 below provides a more detailed picture. The distributional patterns underlying these categories are elaborated in the sections that follow.

Insert Table 1 here

Table 1: Heteroglossia in the C4L corpus

**The Social Semiotics of Regional Accent:** The use of regional accents is systematically patterned across the ads. In contemporary Britain each connotes particular social identities and value systems, and I would argue has been deliberately selected for rhetorical effect. As Cook (2001) observes, in advertising the voice-over is an important vehicle for bestowing upon the product the values signified by the voice, its accent, or the individual it belongs to. The voice of the nudgee is, with just one exception, always realised using a northern English accent and involving certain Yorkshire dialect features (e.g. 'right' as emphatic premodifier, as in '*we're right little monkeys*'). In the UK this accent is traditionally associated with 'ordinary, working class' people and with personal traits like 'straight-forwardness,

frankness’. The adverts were often broadcast during the commercial breaks of Coronation Street, a popular soap opera depicting the lives of working class families in Lancashire. It is conceivable that the (regionally adjacent) Yorkshire accent was selected as one that is both trustworthy and likely to invite identification among the target audience which, by extension, is presumably northern, working class.

**Voice Role:** How are the different voices used? The corpus was further coded for narrative point of view and narrative mode ($1^{st}$, $2^{nd}$ or $3^{rd}$ person). Type A and Type B adverts display different patterns with respect to the degree of explicit government ‘presence’ in the quasi-fictional world represented. Type A ads contain only the ‘voice’ of the government, while Type B adverts use first person narrative by a cartoon character to construct a much more personalised, intimate appeal, inviting the viewer into the fictional world ‘unescorted’ by government direct address. This textual strategy is routinely adopted where children are the targets. In this way the corpus displays a distributional correlation between intended policy target, message content, and message mode.

***Type A: Targeting parents’ ignorance:*** In half of the Type A adverts there is explicit penetration of the government’s voice through $2^{nd}$ person direct address: ‘*wanna unstick the kids from the sofa?; kids getting under your feet this summer? YOU lot! What ARE you putting in your bodies? Let me show you*; *fill in our games for life questionnaire; pick your favourite Disney team and help them win’.* In the remaining examples there is a more complex merging of narrative points of view, whereby the government is able to represent its policy message as one which is shared by the viewers. This is done through considerable slippage between ‘*we/our’* (which variously and somewhat ambiguously includes or excludes the viewer from its reference) and ‘*you’.* This creates a highly personalised tone alongside a degree of referential ambiguity that merges points of view, drawing viewers into authorial responsibility for the claims made. For example, the following excerpt contains complex

slippage from third to first (inclusive) then (^elliptical) second person reference in order to move from a biomedical discourse of risk, through a modelling of unhealthy lifestyles (mirrored in cartoon images of the family eating junk food while watching TV), to a behaviour change policy exhortation.

*'Nine out of ten kids growing up with dangerous levels of fat in <u>their</u> bodies? That's not <u>us</u>! <u>We</u> don't stuff ourselves with snacks and things and veg on the sofa. Or do <u>we</u>? Maybe <u>we</u> should do the 'how are the kids' questionnaire from Change4life. Just ^<u>fill</u> it in, send it off, and they'll send <u>us</u> back our own personalised action plan'* ('How are the kids?' 2009)

This excerpt illustrates one means of achieving a prominent rhetorical strategy found throughout the C4L corpus, wherein the depicted cartoon characters ventriloquize the government's lifestyle policy message. Further interesting patterns emerge where the government voiceover is female. In these adverts mothers are the intended addressees and are (visually) depicted as the primary domestic caregivers. For example in adverts delivering nutritional advice, the images indicate a cartoon mother shopping in a supermarket. The opening sequence represents and identifies with the thoughts of the mother: '*Eating healthy can be confusing* [puzzles over two similar-looking ready-meals] *It's hard to know what to buy, especially when we all need a different daily amount of calories…*'. The advert then moves to second person address to deliver its core message. Alluding to the 'traffic light' nutritional labels on food packaging, it advises '*Just remember, choose less red, go more green instead. And by checking the labels you'll also find it easier to stay inside your calorie limit for the day. And it needn't cost you more. Nice! So be a smart shopper, go for more green!*' ('Green is Good' 2014). Like the adverts 'Food Figures' (2014), 'Smart Restart' (2013), and 'Be Food Smart' (2013), this advert uses direct address to impart advice on shopping for, and preparing, healthy meals. Each assumes that the core policy problem to be addressed is ignorance about healthy living and thus offers a pedagogical solution. There is

some acknowledgement of the material obstacles families may face '*it needn't cost you more'; 'here's our free meal mixer, packed with cheap and tasty meal ideas'*, but the true socioeconomic complexities underlying 'obesogenic environments' are dismissed as being merely a matter of having more consumer 'smartness' - as the C4L website argues, eating healthily and cheaply is easy, 'you just need to be clever about it' (NHS 2017). Indeed, the theme of 'smartness' recurs throughout the C4L campaign and is the 7th most prominent Keyword. The following concordance lines illustrate its use (in eight different adverts) and reveal two main structural patterns in which the adjective occurs, yielding subtly different meanings:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| cancer. Come on, let's get food | smart | .Here's our free meal mixer. It's pa |
| to school soon . So it's time for a | smart | restart. Cos if we can get our kids |
| we're making one of change for life's | smart | swaps. Sugary to sugar free drinks |
| to get FREE money-off vouchers and a | smart | swapper packed with easy meal ideas |
| er. Come ON, it's easy to get food | smart | .Let me show you some healthier alt |
| everyday ideas. Hmm, nice! Be food | smart | .Join change for life for your free f |
| needn't cost you more. Nice! So be a | smart | shopper, go for more green! |
| remember, 400, 600, 600. Be food | smart | .Look for calories on the label and |
| Download the change for life sugar | smart | app so you can make the changes you |
| We're taking you down Let's get sugar | smart | .Download the free app NOW |

Firstly 'smart' appears in the following structural frame: *let's get/be* + *N* + __. The attributive nouns 'food' and 'sugar' turn 'smart' into a specific domain of nutritional knowledge (which the viewer is presumed to lack), while the change of state verbs 'be' and 'get' add a dynamic, behaviour change imperative. In each case, becoming 'smart' is the solution to the depicted problem. In the second pattern 'smart' pre-modifies a noun: *VP* + __ + *[restart/swaps/swapper/shopper/app]*. Here smart becomes a quality attached to a range of

dynamic (the first three nouns include the meaning 'change') and consumer-based actions. The term 'smart' is also used in the title of three of the adverts and in wider C4L campaign marketing materials ('Be Food Smart App', 'Sugar Smart'). Thus textual innovations with the concept of 'smartness' are linked to a consumerist pedagogic discourse, which is primarily targeted at (working class) mothers, who are thereby implicitly pathologised as lacking in nutritional 'rationality'. ***Type B: Targeting children's bad habits:*** Type B ads are textured as a short first person narrative delivered by one of the characters. The success of any advert depends on the viewer projecting herself onto the characters depicted and the fictional world they occupy. The character-narrator in these ads is the (grammatical) subject of the unhealthy lifestyles *and* of the behaviour change solutions, thus acts as both nudger (conveying the policy message) and nudgee (modelling for the viewer the desired behaviour change). This is a textual strategy entirely compatible with biopedagogy, enlisting the active engagement of at-risk subjects in strategies of self-surveillance (identifying, problematizing, and transforming their own lifestyle behaviours). Children are most frequently the target of these ads, with the narrative voice (a girl or boy) and point of view 'contained' within the depicted cartoon world. This preserves the integrity of the fictional world, with no intrusion from an authoritative adult voice until the closing exhortation to 'change for life'. These adverts use Yorkshire accents and a simple, colloquial register. They also have a simpler and more consistent move structure than Type A adverts, and take the form of a confessional narrative. The character begins by recounting their unhealthy lifestyle habits (eating too much junk food, not exercising), evaluates this as a health risk through a simplified scientific discourse, then describes how they have changed their behaviour. Interdiscursively and multi-modally these ads thus weave together at least three different types of discourse:

1. everyday 'lifeworld' discourse '*after school we're right little monkeys; we love pop; we're always hunting down the sweet stuff; mum's ace…but I know how to get around*

*her, get the snacks I want; if they gave out gold medals for sitting around doing nothing then I would win one*'

2. fragments of biomedical and scientific discourses, often framed as the reported speech of a parent or teacher '*we could grow up to have heart disease, cancer or type 2 diabetes; eating too much causes fat to build up in mi body; too much sugar means extra calories; just one can o cola contains nine whole sugar cubes; this can lead to the build-up of harmful fat on the inside… [which] can cause serious diseases*'
3. the branded marketing discourse devised for this campaign: 'Me sized meals', 'Change4Life', '60 active minutes', 'Snack swapper', 'Smart swaps', 'Sugar swaps'.

These form the basis of the move structure, in a simple, memorable pattern for a young viewer. Colloquial exclamations (*ugh!, nasty, nice!)* form evaluative transitions between these interdiscursive fragments, embedding them in the child's (northern English) voice and point of view, while the highly quotable marketing slogans and brand-endorsed merchandise (e.g. Disney) add to the rhetorical force of these adverts. Two remaining adverts target adults and contain messages about alcohol consumption and general unhealthy lifestyles. Thus when the core message of the adverts is about ingrained, unhealthy lifestyle habits, the government intrudes less into the narrative. Instead the viewer – most frequently a child - is invited to identify with the fictional world through an age-appropriate narrative voice, regional accent, colloquial language, and intimate, confessional style. In this pedagogic tool of pre-emptive health policy, it is thus children who are primarily enlisted as active, self-disciplinary subjects.

If truth discourses are communicated in a biopedagogical relation, their analysis requires us to ask 'who are the pedagogues?', while identifying successful strategies for intervention requires us to examine 'the relations of power which make the pedagogue' (Harwood, 2009: 25-26). By disguising its biopedagogic discourse with the narrative voices of children, the

government masks its authority and imparts expert knowledge in a way that is meaningful for 'ordinary' viewers. By making cartoon children act as the pedagogue, communicating truths in everyday language, C4L creates the appearance of a 'horizontal' power relation, inviting greater identification from its target audience. This hegemonic strategy seeks to create meaning by attaching to 'the shaping of their identities and desires of life' (Harwood, 2009: 22).

**C4L as pedagogic discourse: generic structure and addressership**

Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that recontextualising discourses not only represent social practices but also provide a more or less explicit evaluative stance towards them, creating a (morally) regulative framework for social action, particularly when they are made to serve a pedagogic purpose. Moreover, reframing knowledge as legitimate, pedagogic discourse involves control over the selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of information (Bernstein 2000). Thus the organisational features of instructional discourse reflect its underlying regulative power. The C4L adverts represent ordinary family life. They also explicitly problematize it by drawing on a discourse of biomedical risk, and construe a future possible transformation of that practice; a 'change for life'. In this sense they recontextualise knowledge about the target families' lifestyle habits and biomedical obesity science, and reframe these in a pre-emptive, corrective pedagogy. These processes were empirically examined in the corpus by coding it according to its structural and propositional features, exploring the interdiscursive processes through which the ad series is organised as a distinctive (pedagogic) genre. The table below contains the descriptive codes used. Designed to capture the propositional content and communicative function of each section, the coding procedure drew inspiration from both content analysis and (move structure) genre analysis (Lombard et al. 2002; Swales 1990).

Insert Table 2 here

Table 2: Codes used to identify moves in the corpus

The preceding sections have argued that a key feature of these adverts is their hegemonic appropriation of viewers' points of view in order to ventriloquize the government's policy message. Therefore correlation between communicative function and narrative mode (1st, 2nd, 3rd person) was also examined. The referential meaning of the pronoun 'we' can variously include (I) or exclude (E) the addressee, or this may remain ambiguous (?) and this polyvalence may be of ideological significance in political discourse (author citation, 2012). The corpus was also coded for these rather more subtle distinctions in narrative voice (see Table 3 for distributional patterns).

All the adverts have a basic problem-solution pattern reflecting their policy function. The (lifestyle) problem (LP) takes the form of poor dietary or exercise habits, while the solution is the behaviour change recommendation (BC). The latter typically includes a memorable slogan '*smart swaps, me-sized meals, sugar swaps, shake-up*'. There are two obligatory moves: the behaviour change suggestion (BC) and the policy exhortation (PE). The latter comprises an (optional) elliptical slogan '*Just one of the ways to change for life*' and an unmodified imperative '*sign up now; search change for life; download the app*', which invites the viewer to join the C4L strategy by signing up to the companion website. Enlisting 'active, participant citizenship' is a key mechanism of biopower (Rabinow & Rose 2006 p197), though of course successfully inculcating individuals in these 'practices of the self' is a highly contingent matter. By exhorting viewers to sign up to the website the government is able to secure metrics-based evidence of (apparent) policy compliance. Therefore this important terminal element, the PE, not only closes off space for alternative interpretations of the preceding cartoon narrative, but also functions as a 'portal', linking the fictional world of

the advert with the real world of the governed and monitored citizen. The remaining moves identified in the corpus and the use of first person character-narration, together provide some context and a rationale (albeit truncated) for the advocated behaviour change, as well as a more personalised, non-authoritative tone. The lifestyle problem (LP) occurs in 74% of the adverts and in all but one case is the opening move. All narrative modes are used to deliver this element of the message. In some adverts the government explicitly addresses the cartoon family '*And THEN came the FRIED stuff, and the pizza, and the sugary stuff you kids like to pig out on.*'; '*Honestly, YOU lot! What ARE you putting in your bodies?'* Pragmatically, this use of 'you' is a high-involvement strategy in which the addresser 'steps uninvited into our world, expressing interest in our most intimate concerns' (Cook, 2001: 160-161). Of course lifestyle government nudges are by their nature a direct intervention into the lifeworld and in C4L this is symbolically mirrored by a real, life-sized hand reaching in to 'nudge' the cartoon family in their home.

Insert Image 1 here

Image 1: Still from 'Be Food Smart' (2013)

Where children are targeted the LP element involves one or more of the characters confessing their unhealthy proclivities, e.g.: ' *[mum] gives me enough to feed a horse; if they gave out gold medals for sitting around doing nothing then I'd win one; we love pop; I like my snacks; we're always hunting down the sweet stuff'*. Thus adverts involving a child narrator represent the lifestyle problem as being a matter of bad habits, but where parents are more explicitly targeted there is a presumption of ignorance. Biopower involves defining the 'normal' and then intervening to fix abnormalities. In C4L the 'abnormal' is thus modelled in the LP

element by the 'less sophisticated' behaviours of the cartoon family (dietary excess and ignorance), with which a working class audience is subtly invited to identify.

A lack of knowledge about obesity and nutrition is presupposed in two other key moves in these adverts: the scientific warning about health risks (HR) and the provision of scientific food facts (SF). It is in these moves that the adverts display the clearest and most stable intertextuality, with a marked shift to a scientific discourse of biomedical lexis, hedged claims, and the use of analogy to explain statistics, e.g.: ' *9 out of 10 kids growing up with dangerous levels of fat in their bodies; food gets stored as fat in our bodies, which means we could grow up to have heart disease, cancer, or type 2 diabetes; too many hidden nasties can create dangerous levels of fat in your body; can lead to nasty things like a stroke, mouth cancer, liver and heart disease; we get painful toothache and need fillings; [harmful fat] can cause serious diseases as we grow older including type 2 diabetes, some cancers and even heart disease; we kids eat a whopping 5543 sugar cubes, that's 22 bags of sugar, that's more than a kid like me weighs!; there's 17 cubes of sugar in that fizzy drink; [there's] up to ten cubes in one can an' up to 52 in a bottle!...*'.

Insert image 2 here (2 JPG images)

Image 2: Stills from '60 Active Minutes' (2009) and 'Sneaky Drinks' (2013)

Such moves occur in just over half of the adverts and their affective and propositional meaning is visually reinforced through cartoon images of internal fat storage and disease[4]. The primary source for the biomedical claims is the government-commissioned Foresight report (Butland et al. 2007) and they have subsequently passed through a series of (policy) genre chains, with a concomitant distortion of statistical evidence and simplification of

biomedical knowledge. Thus stripped of their original discourse context, in which the complex environmental, cultural, political economic, biophysical causes of obesity were examined, the resulting and somewhat misleading discourse fragments are mobilised as the 'hard science' behind this policy nudge and its individual-responsibility framing of obesity (see further, author citation, 2016). Harwood observes that the disciplinary pole of biopedagogies places individuals under constant surveillance, 'whilst its regularizing techniques instruct the population on the risks its children pose to the health of the nation' (2009: 26). The most obvious disciplinary aspect of C4L is a national school weighing programme, with parents of overweight children receive a letter advising them on 'how to address their child's weight'. The regularizing function of C4L is realised through its preemptive discourse of risk in which the future potential disease of children is used to mobilise anxieties and encourage self-discipline. This discourse is disseminated not only through the TV adverts, but also in communities (C4L sponsored events), in homes (via the website and pedagogic tools like free recipes, activity ideas, quizzes, phone apps), in supermarkets (C4L sponsored promotions), in primary schools through 'Be Food Smart' teaching toolkits, and in hospitals (leaflets, posters). In this way, the regularizing and disciplinary poles of C4L coalesce across institutional sites, public spaces, and the lifeworld.

However, in the operation of biopower 'the subject is active in its own constitution; it is not merely acted upon' (Harwood, 2009: 28). Vital to the success of these adverts is their ability to operate as 'modes of subjectification', attracting and engaging children especially, as active, responsible agents of behaviour change. Evaluative lexis plays an important role in this regard, helping a child viewer digest rather esoteric biomedical knowledge and organise the message into 'good things' and 'bad things'. The adverts in fact draw extensively on semantic resources that trigger both positive and (more frequently) negative discourse-level evaluation. These are primarily realised as adjectives (*horrid, dangerous, harmful, serious,*

*painful*), nouns (*nasties, disease, cancer*), and verbs (*lurking*). Additionally, a discrete evaluation move (E) contributes to the ads' coherence and logical organisation into 'bad' vs 'good' by interspersing the problematized lifestyles and behaviour change solutions with negative (*yuk! ugh! nasty!*) or positive (*Nice!*) evaluative reactions.

In summary**,** the ads display a textual structure that reflects its core policy function and helps realise a corrective biopedagogic discourse. Confessional narratives about unhealthy habits are negatively evaluated by drawing intertextually from epidemiological research on biomedical risk and obesity prevalence. While the policy claims to be aimed at parents with young children (Department of Health 2009), it is clear that (northern English) children themselves play a central role in targeting specific individuals (or sections of the population) and identifying 'ordinary' lifestyles as risky. Behaviour change solutions are 'sold' to us through a range of sub-brand '4life' slogans developed by commercial partners M&C Saatchi. The closing move in all adverts exhorts the viewer to active participation through the C4L web portal.

## Conclusions

This paper examines the UK government's 'Change4Life' anti-obesity social marketing campaign, its flagship application of 'nudge' tactics to public policy. The centrepiece of the campaign, and focus of the analysis, is a series of cartoon adverts designed to steer individuals towards healthier lifestyles. Viewed as a technique of biopedagogy, I investigated the textual strategies used to realise this policy intervention and to target and enlist particular subjects.

*Who is targeted and how?* Proponents of nudge argue that it offers a way to 'help the least sophisticated people in society' (Thaler & Sunstein 2009, p.252). In C4L systematic patterns in regional accent suggest the less sophisticated are northern, working class. This stylistic

choice aligns with audience segmentation research carried out prior to the campaign which found 'at risk' families were mainly from less affluent, urban regions. The behaviours of the target group are pathologised through narratives of dietary excess and ignorance. These narratives clearly presuppose a target audience which is governed by its 'inner lizard' (Thaler & Sunstein 2009), making decisions based on habit *'after a long day we like to unwind…with a glass or two'*, short-term gratification '*we love pop';* inertia '*if they gave out gold medals for sitting around doing nothing then I would win one'*, and imperfect knowledge '*calories…it's hard to know how many'; 'it's hard to know what to buy'*. Thus biopolitical surveillance techniques used to segregate 'at risk' sub-populations combine with patterns of style and representation to stigmatise the 'less sophisticated' as irrational. In this way nudge supplies a legitimatory discourse and policy apparatus with which to reproduce 'relations of domination and effects of hegemony' (Foucault, 1978: 141)

*How is expert knowledge recontextualised as biopedagogic discourse?* This is achieved multi-modally: colourful cartoon images and animated plasticine figures provide the visual accompaniment to a quasi-fairytale genre realised through 1st person narratives, and a simplified and emotive conceptual organisation of the message into 'bad' vs 'good'. The biopedagogic function of these adverts is most evident in their generic organisation, following a problem-solution pattern: characters 'confess' their abnormal, unhealthy lifestyles and a consumerist behaviour-change solution is offered. This follows the core principles of nudge: provide incentives (branded merchandise) and structure complex choices (behavioural benchmark slogans like '*smart swaps', 'choose less red, go green instead'*).

Expert biomedical discourse is recontextualised from the work of epidemiological scientists and rendered easy for a child to digest through simplified and emotive claims about the health

risks posed by these lifestyles. In effect, biopedagogic discourse constructs children (and the health consequences of their deviant lifestyles) as a risk to the population. C4L's core message is disseminated not only through the campaign ads and website, but also on social media, in schools, hospitals, supermarkets, and local communities. As a form of biopower, the regularizing and disciplinary modes of C4L thus coalesce across multiple institutional sites, public spaces and the lifeworld.

*How is individual agency activated?* C4L uses a highly personalised style to enlist active participation and identification, either through a confessional first person narrative or, where the government is narrator, through slippage in narrative point of view. Children in particular are construed as active agents in C4L: activated in modelling unhealthy lifestyles, invoking expert knowledge in problematizing them, and delivering marketised behaviour change solutions. The core biopedagogic discourse of disease risk is conveyed from their point of view '*[harmful fat] can cause serious diseases as <u>we</u> grow older, <u>NASTY!</u>'*. These adverts thus invite greater audience identification by having children speak to children, ventriloquizing the government's policy message. This is a hegemonic strategy which allows the government to hide its power behind a 'dialogue between equals'.

To summarise, in the C4L adverts expert truth discourses about life are disseminated through the mouths of 'the least sophisticated', whose Homer-like dietary ignorance and excess is pathologised as a risk to individuals and society. In effect, the campaign segregates and stigmatises while at the same time hegemonically appropriates the voice and perspective of its policy targets in order to coopt individuals into processes of policy through 'enhanced social responsibility'. Health policy has traditionally viewed obesity as a matter of individual (ir)responsibility, feeding into the liberal assumption that our greatest responsibility is to

ourselves and those with whom we have the closest (kinship) ties. Change4Life fits with this view, making a very direct and personalised appeal to parents and their children. In reality, however, personal and societal well-being are more intertwined and complex than this, intersecting with a huge diversity of public and private practices (e.g. charitable giving to food banks, corporate social responsibility, ethical consumption, free school meals, community 'green space' initiatives, urban planning etc.), as well as the largely unregulated over-production and marketing of profit-rich, nutrition-poor foods. Moreover, as the chair of the college of GPs, Dr Helen Stokes-Lampard observed (BBC, Dec 2016), health policy often overlooks the realities of people's lives in which many cannot afford (and may not even have the facilities to cook) the fresh, healthy foods recommended in health campaigns of this kind. C4L in effect dismisses these obstacles to healthy eating as a matter than can be simply resolved with a little more consumer 'smartness'.

With its suggestion of unevenly distributed cognitive pathologies, nudge offers governments a licence to reject fiscally expensive policy solutions to this systemic social problem in favour of individualised interventions to correct the behaviours of 'the less sophisticated', while further entrenching social inequalities through punitive austerity policies. Rather than imposing meaningful regulatory measures, business is invited as a partner in governance to nudge us towards health. Meanwhile the health, diet and therapy industries make billions from our malaise, anxiety, low self-esteem and 'unhealthy' behaviours. Nudge is partly an expression of the increased relevance of 'soft power' in advanced liberal governance (Nye, 1998; author), which places increasing emphasis on relations, shared values, and communication. Nudge in particular emphasises the importance of strategically crafted language. However, the critical scholarship on nudge has not yet examined the linguistic strategies it uses; this paper addresses that omission. The proliferation of such 'softer' forms of governance requires an analytical framework capable of linking the 'micro' level of their

realisation with ‘macro’ level political theories so as to explain the historical and ideological significance of these emergent discourse practices within the wider political formation. I argue that the approach used in this paper, bringing critical discourse analysis into transdisciplinary dialogue with Foucault’s analytics of power, offers just such a flexible, yet powerful means of critically engaging with the ‘softer’ strategies of modern political power.

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**Appendix**

Insert Table 3 here

Table 3: Overview of corpus and coding analysis

[1] Modelled respectively on Kahneman's 'System 2' and 'System 1' (Kahnmenan & Tversky 1984)
[2] For more details on the use of this approach in critical policy analysis see (author citation)
[3] Participant roles differentiate 'forms of involvement' in the communication. Of particular relevance here is the distinction between 'addressee' (an immediate intended recipient of the utterance) and the 'audience' (who may be the intended target of the message but is not directly addressed).
[4] For a detailed analysis of the role of visual images see (author)