Workshop 8 - Housing and Social Theory

The Gendered Nature of Policy Discourse: Patriarchy, Pathology or is there a Third Way?

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The Gendered Nature of Policy Discourse: Patriarchy, Pathology or is there a Third Way?

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Revised Abstract
The paper provides a critical analysis of the gendered nature of policy discourses. Drawing on documentary analysis and empirical work we explore the development and influences informing the changing UK discourses around domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. While these two issues have emerged as fields of social policy concern separately and over different time-frames they share a number of defining features and examination of these distinct discourses raises a number of key questions:

- Whose behaviour is problematised?
- How is responsibility and culpability apportioned for particular types of behaviour?
- How does the construction of the problem inform the choice of interventions?

A comparison of the different responses to anti-social behaviour and domestic violence illustrates the various ways in which social problems are gendered and highlights the way in which concepts of culpability and responsibility are variously employed in relation to women.

Introduction

“Men and women are, by and large, positioned differently within the family-state-labour-market triad, reflecting the interaction of private and public spheres. They thus represent gendered welfare subjects. As parents, children, workers, migrants, public, private and informal service users or benefit recipients, our relationship to welfare is gendered.” Lister 2000:29.

Social policy is necessarily contradictory and complex and as the above quotation points out is a site where gender plays a pivotal role. The development of a gendered analysis of social policy provides both a lens through which to describe and analyse institutions, relations and discourses and illuminates the way in which women are problematised in their relations to welfare provision (Lister 2000). In this paper we draw on discourses in relation to two clearly gendered policy fields, domestic violence and anti-social behaviour, the first of which has been clearly gendered from the outset. The second we would argue has a more hidden but no less gendered construction. While these two issues have emerged as fields of social policy concern separately and over different time-frames they share a number of defining features. Firstly, they are both sites which reveal the complex interdependency between public and private spheres. Secondly, they illustrate the wide-ranging ways in which the family home is often a site of conflict and discord rather than security and safety. Thirdly, an examination of the processes by which the two issues emerged as legitimate areas of policy concern highlights the different ways in which concepts of culpability and responsibility are employed in relation to women. Finally analysis of the gendered dimensions of social policy is informed by empirical evidence which indicates that in practice the two issues are inextricably linked with many of those constructed as the object of technologies to control behaviour also constituting the subjects of family violence1. This conjuncture of the two issues raises interesting questions about the way in which women’s behaviour is problematised.

1 The term ‘family violence’ refers to a spectrum of interpersonal violence including intimate partner violence and/or intergenerational violence involving physical, mental or sexual abuse.
The paper starts by briefly outlining the framework for analysis focusing on the locales of conflict in which the public and private spheres are clearly interconnected. Within this context we reflect on the ways in which domestic violence emerged in the early 1970’s as a site for government intervention. At this time the problematisation of male violence was explicitly informed by feminist analysis of patriarchy and resulted in a highly gendered construction of the problem. Such analysis is not apparent in more recent ‘anti-social behaviour’ discourses which are for the most part silent on the gendered nature of the problem\(^2\) (Hunter and Nixon 2001). In the third section of the paper we turn to the lived material realities of anti-social behaviour and the failure of state agencies to acknowledge the gendered construction of the anti-social subject. The paper concludes with a number of observations on the construction of women as gendered welfare subjects.

**Data sources:**
For more than thirty years second wave feminists have highlighted the need for welfare agencies to recognise the endemic nature of violence within women’s lives. Drawing on documentary analysis of reports, policy papers and media accounts published in the 1970s, when the issue of domestic violence was successfully established as a site for state intervention, discursive practices in relation to the construction of domestic violence are highlighted. This analysis focuses on how the problem of homelessness arising as a result of domestic violence became a policy issue in England.

By way of contrast an exploration of the gendering of anti-social behaviour is based on empirical data collected by the authors over the period 2004-6. The paper draws on findings from our recent evaluation of six Intensive Family Support Projects (IFSPs) which were established in 2003 specifically to work with families who were under threat of homelessness as a result of complaints of anti-social behaviour (Nixon et al 2006). The IFSPs included in the study were pioneering a ‘new’ form of ASB intervention which involved providing families at risk of eviction with intensive support to help them address behavioural and other problems. In addition to the provision of outreach support in order to help families maintain their existing tenancy, a small number of families were moved into core residential accommodation where they were required to adhere to strict rules and regulations and were subject to daily supervision and observation. Over the course of the evaluation quantitative and qualitative data was collected in relation to 256 families living in disparate geographical locations in the north of England. The study represents the first significant empirical report of the lived realities of anti-social behaviour from the perspective of alleged ‘perpetrators’ (see also Jones et al 2006; Stephen and Squires 2004; 2005).

An examination of the multi-layered reality of ASB exposes the way in which ASB is gendered as a site where women are simultaneously characterised as victims and villains, responsible adults and dysfunctional parents, active citizens and outsiders; subjects and objects of abuse. The study findings illustrate how disciplining technologies such as IFSPs disproportionately impact on women-headed households, for example:-

- A clear gender bias was apparent in the population of families referred to IFSPs with 68% of families, most of which contained three or more children, headed by lone parent women;
- Family violence was found to be very prevalent with 47% of women suffering from either a history of, or currently subject to, intimate partner violence and/or intergenerational violence involving physical, mental or sexual abuse;

\(^2\) One notable exception to this silence is a paper we wrote in the early 2000s in which we explored social landlords use of disciplinary mechanisms illustrating the disproportional impact technologies to control behaviour have on women headed households (Hunter and Nixon, 2001).
• Evidence of the complex multi-layered reality of ASB was reflected in the finding that in addition to being ‘perpetrators of ASB, in 60% of families one of more member of the household was also a victim of ASB.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with lone parent women who were working with Intensive Family Support projects over the period 2004-2005 we explore the ways in women resisted being constructed as the ‘fearsome’, ‘anti-social’, ‘other’ and offered alternative constructions of the problem.

The gendering of social policy – private and public locales

Since the early 1980s feminists have been highly critical of the constructed dichotomy between the public and private spheres pointing to the complex interdependency between them. A gendered analysis of social policy and welfare provision provides a way of connecting the public, the sphere of citizenship, with the private spheres of family and personal relations. The feminist project of re-gendering issues deemed to be private into legitimate concerns of public policy is well illustrated by reference to domestic violence which has been transformed from a hidden private matter to one that is seen as a legitimate area of concern by a wide range of welfare and control agencies. Turning to the more recent discourses on anti-social behaviour there is evidence of communitarian influences in which anti social behaviour has also been constructed as a problem which bridges the public private divide (Walklate 2002). In political and media representation the ‘neighbours from hell’ are constructed as the scourge of the wide community and therefore legitimate subjects of punitive public controls and sanctions over the conduct of their private lives (Nixon and Parr 2006). As a way of beginning to explore how the very different constructions of these two issues can be understood we make reference to a combination of feminist theory, concepts of governmentality and critical discourse analysis.

Feminist writers have identified the twin concepts of ‘parental responsibility' and the move from ‘private to public patriarchy’ as central themes underpinning legislation to control behaviour in the private and public spheres. Across a range of policy fields the active promotion of parental responsibility by successive neo-liberal governments has been highlighted as a pre-requisite for the creation of a suitable moral climate in which the introduction of disciplining technologies can be justified (Fox-Harding 1996; Gillies 2005). Eekelarr (1991) points out how the principles of ‘responsiblealisation noted by Garland (2001) and others in relation to responses to the ‘crime control complex’ of late modernity are equally evident in moves to promote parental responsibility as being pre-eminently an individual responsibility thus absolving the state from a wider duty of care. At the same time Walby (1990) notes a movement away from private patriarchy in which the individual man controls women and excludes them from public spheres to public patriarchy in which the state assumes the mantle of protecting the public interest by enforcing sexual controls in the public sphere. Thus she argues as women have struggled to escape from private patriarchy and became more active in the labour force their exclusion from the state has been replaced by their subordination to the state which is of itself essentially patriarchal. This process is particularly evident in relation to lone mothers:

“While they lose their own individual patriarch, they do not lose their subordination to other patriarchal structures and practices. Indeed they become even more exposed to certain of the more diffused public sets of patriarchal practices.” (Walby 1990:197).

The shift from private to public patriarchy is critical to understanding state responses to both domestic violence and anti-social behaviour where [parental] responsibility and culpability are implicitly or explicitly gendered.
At a more general level policy decisions can be seen to be embedded within a wider context shaped by power relations, institutional arrangements and values with particular polices developing momentum for a number of reasons (Burney 2005:16; Hawarth and Manzi 1999; Flint 2006). Jacobs et al (2003) set out three conditions that must be met for social problems to emerge and be acted upon; firstly, a convincing narrative identifying the nature and extent of the problem; secondly, a coalition of support generated by a process of bargaining between interest groups with varying degrees of power; and finally the implementation of institutional arrangements focusing on particular sites and target populations. Employing this analytical framework the following sections of the paper explores the various and different ways in which domestic violence and anti-social behaviour have been constructed as social policy problems.

The construction of domestic violence as a policy problem

In this section of the paper we focus on the emergence in the early 1970’s of domestic violence as a policy problem, when feminists established a clear gendered narrative to explain the “story” and extent of domestic violence. A coalition of support was constructed by means of the media and targeted awareness raising campaigns focussing on sympathetic policy makers and politicians. This was done in order to instigate institutional measures which culminated in the passing of the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act, 1976. As with other contested policy issues the effective implementation of the Act involved protracted post legislative battles through the Courts to ensure that the measures were implemented in the way that was originally intended. Case law was created to ensure not only that the problem was acted upon, but also done so by means of technologies and solutions that the discourse created.

Feminist constructions of the problem

Throughout much of the early and mid twentieth century violence against women was an unacknowledged and hidden site of private patriarchal control. From Victorian times the ubiquitous belief in the sanctity of the family, serving as a social institution to protect family members from the evils of the outside world led to a societal rejection of outside intervention in family affairs. Furthermore as Carr (2006) points out such values serve to reinforce the dichotomy between public and private spheres:

“Victorian constructions of gender meant that the father functioned in the public sphere and was a conduit between the public realm and the private life of the family whilst the mother took prime responsibility for the home. Failure to appropriately socialise children and run a good home made her a ‘bad mother’.”

A similar process of the construction of ‘bad mothering’ and the assignment of culpability to women is noted by Watson (1983) in relation to the post war period where after 1945 the expanding welfare state and full employment made poverty seem avoidable. Poor families were therefore constructed as inadequate “problem families”. Wife beating was portrayed as just one part of their general slovenly behaviour, which was associated with drunkenness and squalor of the wife’s own making. The dominant narrative was one in which family life was seen as the one great source of happiness and fulfilment and social workers were instructed at all costs to prevent family breakdown (Watson, 1983). Thus as Radford and Stanko point out for most of the twentieth century the ‘most frequent and routinized forms of male sexual violence were shielded from public view, lost in the discourse of dysfunctional families and female inadequacies” (Radford and Stanko 1996).

It was not until the emergence of the second wave feminist movement during the 1960’s and 1970’s that a critique of such constructions of gender was voiced in the public realm (references) The world’s first refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence was established in Chiswick, a suburban neighbourhood in London in 1971. This signified the
start of a wider political movement focussing on the re-gendering of male violence and posed a direct challenge to the normative construction of the public private divide. From the start of the feminist project to address violence against women the problem was constructed as a normalised issue potentially affecting all women. Violence in the home was identified and labelled by feminists as being frequent, normally against women, and represented an extension of domination and control of husbands over their wives. (Dobash and Dobash, 1979).

Scott-Jones and Nelson Le Gall’s (1986) work on the social construction of lone parenthood informs the explanation of how within a remarkably short time a powerful coalition of support had been formed resulting in legislative change and policy interventions to protect women from male violence. They describe how social issues which are attributed to a discredited minority – in this case the feckless wife and bad mother- are generally treated as peripheral issues. It is only once a narrative is constructed which reflects the experiences of the law abiding majority that a powerful normalising discourse results in the issue being taken more seriously (Scott-Jones and Nelson Le Gall, 1986). Thus as long as domestic violence was seen as an aberration it was censured in an essentialist manner with constructions focussing on individual pathologies informed by notions of women’s blameworthyness and fecklessness. Once however, male violence in the home was problematised by reference to normative values reflected in a convincing narrative that all women, regardless of class or position, were vulnerable the case for change became compelling.

As feminists strove to identify domestic violence as a gendered normative issue the provision of refuges, such as the one at Chiswick, were framed as the solution. Pamphlets with titles such as “Women’s Aid and the problem of battered women”, (Women’s Aid, 1974) and “Battered Women need Refuges” (National Women’s Aid Federation, 1975), were published by the emerging network of Women’s Aid Refuges to reinforce this message.

“We have discovered the tip of an iceberg”, (Pizzey, quoted in Women’s Aid and the problem of battered women, 1974).

These pamphlets employ an eloquent discourse to reveal the acute financial and isolation difficulties encountered by women who had separated from abusive partners. Refuges were portrayed as a solution to these difficulties because they replaced private patriarchy with a structure of communal self-help that addressed women’s social and psychological needs whilst also enabling women the freedom to go out to work whilst others looked after their children.

Mainstreaming feminist constructions of domestic violence

The process of building a convincing narrative focussed on mainstreaming feminist domestic violence constructions. Building on early successes Women’s Aid Groups sprung up across the county, employing sophisticated media campaigns speaking out about the extent and wrongs of domestic violence with the deliberate intention of putting domestic violence on the policy agenda. The rapid development of a coalition of support to achieve change is evidenced by the speed with which the issue was taken up by politicians with Jack Ashley the first MP to raise the issue in the House of Commons in 1971. Over the next few years continuing political agitation put the government under increasing pressure to address the impact of male violence within the home. In an article entitled “Home Secretary in talks on police action in battered wife cases”,(The Times 17/7/73), it was reported that the then Home Secretary insert name had come under sufficient pressure from pressure groups and individual MPs to investigate social welfare agencies failure to provide women with protection from domestic violence. This had been preceded two weeks earlier by the Prime Minister, Ted Heath, agreeing to investigate a dossier compiled by Jack Ashley MP on “domestic cruelty on battered wives” (The Times, 4.07.73). Here the use of language to describe the problem is significant. Although at this time feminist discourses on the construction of the
problem were clearly very influential the choice of the term ‘battered wives’ rather than the more neutral term ‘women’ illustrates the powerful appeal of patriarchal discourse in which women are defined primarily in terms of their relationship to men.

Notwithstanding these signs of resistance to the feminist narrative further evidence of the success with which feminist constructions of domestic violence were mainstreamed was apparent. In an article in the Times newspaper in July 1974 entitled “Police should prosecute wife-beaters, report says” reference was made to a memorandum from the National Association of Probation Officers to the Home Office which called for the police to treat allegations of domestic violence in the same way as any other allegations of criminal assault (The Times, 19/07/04). The memorandum was collated at the request of the Home Office as “Government Departments want more information to help them decide how to advise those to whom such wives may turn”. What is instructive about these public discourses is the extent to which they reflect an acceptance that domestic violence is essentially a gendered problem. The language employed implicitly acknowledges that there is a social problem of domestic violence, that the victims are women, and that they should receive advice and help on how to cope with their situation. The Probation Officers memorandum here problematises the previously normalised police discourse in which violence against women was dismissed as simply being “just a domestic”, and their reluctance to interfere in a marital relationship or to take domestic violence seriously (Charles and Jones, 1993; Hooper, 1996; ODPM, 2002).

By 1974 the issue had achieved such political prominence a Home Affairs Select Committee in Violence in Marriage was established to take evidence on the scale and nature of the problem. Thirteen MP’s sat on the Select Committee, and their interim report, which was published in September 1975 concluded:

“Immediate action can be taken, including instructions to the police to be more ready to help in cases of domestic violence and greater willingness of Local Authorities to provide housing for battered wives and their children”…

“Refuges should be available very readily and rapidly”. (The Times, 19.9.1975)

The extraordinary success of the early feminist project of constructing domestic violence as a problem which was inextricably linked to the workings of private patriarchy is reflected in the speed with which this became a normalised discourse (Watson, 1983). The Select Committee Report was unequivocal in accepting that domestic violence was a gendered crime, with mostly male perpetrators and mostly female victims. The Report went on to recommend that there should be 24 hour family crisis centres in every large town and many more refuges for “battered wives”. Indeed the Select Committee identified the need for one family refuge place for every 10,000 of the population. The enduring strength of this discourse is reflected in the fact that 30 years later this target figure has recently been resurrected in the Supporting People Guidance document 2005/6 (ODPM, 2005).

The coalition of support continued to grow and culminated in the late 1970’s with the introduction of a private members bill to Parliament. The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act finally came into force on the 1st June 1977, having previously twice failed to get a second reading because of objections by some Conservative members of Parliament. Thus by the late 1970s as a direct result of feminist agitation new legislation had been introduced which brought about four major changes in law (procedure for obtaining a non-molestation injunction without the need to start other proceedings; powers of arrest to the police if the perpetrator broke the terms of the injunction; an exclusion or ouster injunction which could exclude (for a specified period) a violent partner from the family home if he was still living there, and which allowed the victim to return to the home if she had left following the perpetrators violence). Analysis of the political discourses of the time reveals the extent to which feminist constructions of the problematisation of male violence had become part of a
normalising discourse as the following quotation from Jo Richardson, the MP who introduced the Bill illustrates:

“Some men thought it was their right to beat their women and that any interference from outside was an unwarranted intrusion. The problem had now become one of general public concern. Centres for battered women began springing up three or four years ago and there were now more than 40 women’s aid centres. They were a godsend to women forced to leave their homes because of their husbands’ brutality” (The Times, 13.2.76)

This statement makes explicit the powerlessness of women by using phrases such as “forced to leave” and “husbands’ brutality”. The way in which the problem had been constructed as one of powerlessness is also reflected in the choice of technologies to address the problem. Informed directly by the feminist domestic violence narrative the solution was seen as the provision of initially at least, refuge to women within a “refuge”. While it was also acknowledged that such a solution may not be universally appropriate with Jo Richardson MP reported as commenting: “If women in this position had a stronger law to protect them they could remain in their own homes”, (The Times, 13.2.76), no evidence came to light that women resisted this labelling of themselves as powerless until at least a decade later.

A further striking feature of the domestic violence discourses in the 1970s is how its gendered nature enabled a binary divide to be constructed where women were presented as the ‘victims’ and men as ‘perpetrators’. Inevitably there was resistance to this label from men, which focussed on challenges to the law to protect women. Within a few months of the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act being implemented its provisions were challenged by those outraged that the Act could impinge on the property rights of the property owning (normally male) spouse, particularly in cases where the couple were not married. Brentford County Court suspended an injunction ordering a male domestic violence perpetrator to vacate the premises and not return, on the grounds that if “battered wives” were enabled to turn out the man it would be “a very drastic inroad into the common law rights of the property owning spouse” (The Times, 28.11.1977).

Perhaps surprisingly this view of the law was not sustained in the highest court. After two earlier contrary decisions by the Court of Appeal, and a sustained campaign by supporters of the legislation, including a demonstration by women outside the House of Lords in support of the plaintiff and thousands of other women in similar situations, the Law Lords found that the two recent decisions of other divisions of the Court of Appeal had been wrong in their construction of the Act. They upheld the “right of unmarried woman to evict her partner” (The Times, 29.11.1977). The article went on to quote Jo Richardson MP stating: "the courts no longer see women as the chattels of their men”, an overt statement of feminist views and their success here in competing with more reactionary discourses.

As the above summary account of the emergence of domestic violence as a public policy issue illustrates, feminist constructions were fundamental in transforming the issue from one hidden as a private matter in which notions of culpability and blame were linked to individual pathologies to an issue which was a legitimate concern for public intervention. While over the last 30 years a more nuanced domestic violence discourse has emerged current narratives remain firmly rooted in an understanding that it is essentially women who are victims of a patriarchal exercise of power as this contemporary definition of domestic violence by the Greater London Authority demonstrates;

“Domestic violence is essentially about the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one adult person, usually a man, over another adult, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship” (Greater London Authority, 2001).
Constructions of Anti-social Behaviour as a site for policy interventions

A number of researchers have sought to understand and articulate the social and political consequences of discursive practices in relation to the control of conduct (Hastings 1999; 2000; Jacobs et al 2003; Papps 1998; Steven and Squires 2005; Flint 2006). Within the UK over the last 10 years a convincing ASB narrative has clearly been constructed although as a concept it remains devoid of a clear definition and lacks specificity incorporating a multiplicity of diverse, low and high-level deviant behaviours. It is a subjective term underpinned by an amalgamation of unconnected ideologies, practices and concepts, such as actuarialism, managerialism, responsibilisation and ‘just deserts’ (Muncie, 2005). Indeed Carr and Cowan (2006) suggest that it is precisely due to the lack of clear parameters that the term is invested with power. As a 'vehicular concept' its potency lies in the fact that it can be employed and manipulated by different types of intellectual or expert.

In common with the construction of other social problems ASB policy discourses incorporate sharp distinctions between different groups of people and their behaviour focussing on target populations who are presented as dangerous, threatening individuals and agents of moral decline (Jacobs et al 2003; Flint 2006). As with early twentieth century discourses around domestic violence, drawing on underclass theorists political rationalities characterise perpetrators and the communities in which they live not simply in terms of material poverty but by reference to moral deficiency and cultural ‘otherness’. Employing binary oppositions the anti-social minority are differentiated from the ‘law abiding decent majority’ as feckless, undisciplined individuals unconnected for others and willfully irresponsible (Nixon and Parr 2006; Stevens and Squires 2005). Analysis of ASB discourses clearly illustrate the way in which neighbour disputes often become a site where identities are established through a binary classification of 'them' and 'us', where ‘other’ are the ‘dysfunctional’, ‘irresponsible’ and 'selfish' and “we” are the ‘normal’, ‘decent’ and ‘hardworking.’ (Nixon and Parr 2006). At no point is there an acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of the problem (Hunter et al 2003; Brown, 2004) or the fact that people can simultaneously be both “victims” and “perpetrators” of anti-social acts (Jones et al 2006; Stephen and Squires 2004). This is of course very different from the binary divide in domestic violence cases; between male and female. Indeed it is a divide in which gender is hidden, in that it returns to the Victorian notions that a “violent” husband or ‘anti-social’ child is the result of poor mothering (Carr, 2006). Moreover as Flint (2006) points out such discourses reflect the way in which government rationalities both individualises the causes of problematic behaviour and simultaneously problematises the responses of deprived communities to social problems.

The lived material realities of ASB - stories of resistance

It is incisive that a majority of families defined as anti-social are headed by single mothers (Hunter and Nixon 2001; Jones et al 2006). Feminist analysis has long established the pivotal role of the family as both a site of welfare consumption and also of production (Barrett and McIntosh 1982). As an institutional basis of welfare the family has been a site where the ideal form, namely that of two married parents with children has been privileged to the detriment of alternative forms of living arrangements. In particular families headed by lone parent women have been the focus of a demonising discourse with the lone parent woman constructed as being ‘feckless and wilfully responsible for the poverty in which she is confined to live and thus undeserving of either public sympathy or economic support’ (Phoenix 1996:175.) Phoenix argues that such pervasive discourses serve as justification for punitive policies which are rationalised as necessary for the deterrence of others. Thus negative discourses of lone mothers can be seen to constitute a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1972) in which lone parent motherhood is defined as a deviant form of the family.
Although within the official ASB discourse there is a clear emphasis on dysfunctional families and bad parenting the discourse is silent on the gendered nature of the construction of the problem and little account is taken of the stark lived material realities of ASB. The problem is never put in a social context or conceptualised as a manifestation of outcomes generated by wider economic, social and political forces (Gillies, 2005). As women told us their stories it was clear that they resisted and contested the dominant demonising analysis apparent within official discourses, where morally deficient families are attributed causal primacy in explaining the behaviour of young people. In the remaining sections of the paper we draw on women’s stories to explore the contradictory multi-layered reality of ASB focussing on three themes that emerged from women’s accounts of why they had been referred to Intensive Family Support Projects:

- Powerlessness and resistance
- Violence in the home
- Women as victims of anti-social behaviour

**Powerlessness and Resistance**

In listening to women we were struck by the complexity and contradictions inherent in their accounts. While families were reported as being the subject of numerous and sometimes very serious complaints of ASB they also reported that they had been exposed to very high levels of victimisation and retaliation. In this context being labelled ‘anti-social' with its host of negative connotations including bad parenting and disregard for neighbours denied the profound sense of powerlessness many women felt in controlling and containing the behaviour of their partners and teenage children. Sarah’s story is illustrative of the complex multi-layered reality of ASB.

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<th>Sarah's Story</th>
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<td>Sarah, a single mother with four children aged from 18 to 12 suffers from severe depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Two of her children had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; one had been excluded from school, while the other, who also suffered from a bone tumour, was very withdrawn and had suicidal tendencies. Her eldest son was violent and abusive towards Sarah and at the point that the family were referred to the ISP had left home. The trouble started when the eldest children became closely involved with a criminal gang and the family were the subject of numerous complaints about gang fights, noisy threatening and abusive behaviour, and criminal damage. Gang warfare resulted in the family becoming the target of retaliatory action involving criminal damage, intimidation, and burglaries, culminating in Sarah being raped by a gang member. Sarah had no choice but to leave her home and take her children to an emergency Refuge accommodation in a nearby town. This move however, resulted in her getting into arrears with rent payments as a result of which her landlord took eviction proceedings. Sarah was then referred to an IFSP who provided her with accommodation and support.</td>
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Issues of powerlessness and lack of control featured strongly in women’s accounts of why they had been referred to IFSPs and it is within this context that we question the rationalities in which culpability and responsibility are apportioned within official discourses. In this sense the women were as powerless to control the behaviour for which they were being accused as are victims of domestic violence.

Nonetheless despite this powerlessness women were also resistant to the label being put upon them. Without exception, women we interviewed were resistant to being labelled ‘anti-social which they found to be ‘humiliating’, ‘upsetting’ and ‘embarrassing’. Stephen and
Squires’ work on contemporary constructs of marginalised youth illustrates the way in which judgements about appropriate behaviour are commonly made by reference to perceived norms of behaviour in a neighbourhood (Stephen and Squires 2004). We also found that people assessed the severity of behaviour by reference to relative norms. Women were aware of the binary oppositions that are employed to distinguish the ‘anti-social’ from the ‘responsible’ neighbour and were anxious to affirm that they and their children conformed to norms of conduct making clear distinctions between their own behaviour and their constructions of behaviour which could legitimately be described as anti-social:

“what I say’s anti-social is like, say if like, a neighbour, neighbours have got disputes, so that your going onto their property shouting, screaming, banging doors, causing trouble and things like that...if you are playing music really loud and things like that, fair enough, that is anti-social behaviour. But I know for a fact I don’t do that. I won’t expect someone to do it to me, so I don’t do it to them. I expect to be treated the way I treat people. I always have, I were brought up like that.”

“I know they are no angels, I know that for a fact but like there’s kids round here, really really, naughty kids that have got ASBOS against them. I know they have and then when, we went to that meeting and they threatened them with an ASBO, I though God you’re putting my kids in the same category as that they are nowhere near as bad as that, no where near.”

Further evidence of resistance was apparent in discussions about the extent to which women felt that the complaints that had been made against them were justified. Many disputed the legitimacy of either all or at least some of the claims being made. Typically, it was held that the behaviour being complained about either did not happen, was exaggerated or was simply behaviour that is common to many families. Particularly where the alleged behaviour involved children, mothers felt that the complaints were largely a result of personal vendettas or a lack of tolerance of the natural tendency for young people to challenge boundaries. These perceptions engendered a strong sense of unfairness and it was common for women to describe feelings of being victimised and confused as to why they had been singled out as the target of complaints as Teresa, a mother of three teenage children explained:

“They’re good kids. They’ve never been in trouble with the Police ever. They do know right from wrong but I think when they are out with their friends they try and show off a bit, but they are just normal kids and they’re not, they’re not really bad. I know they are not angels, no kids are but they’re not as bad as half of them round here and I can’t understand why it’s us. I really can’t.”

Interestingly it was not just mothers who resisted the anti-social label, officials working for the projects were also hesitant in using such language reporting that it was a stigmatising and damaging term. This reluctance to label families as ‘anti-social was closely linked to the use of pathologising discourses in which alternative labels such as ‘problem’ or ‘vulnerable’ families were employed:

“I would say they were more of a problem, problematic family”

Issues raised by families were however, never placed in a wider structural context of change and decline in local communities and interventions tended to be framed in terms of pathology or personal inadequacy focusing on facilitating access to treatment and/or education rather than attempts to address wider structural issues of social exclusion, poverty and deprivation. There was no normalising discourse which suggested that the problems encountered by these women could, as with domestic violence ‘happen to anyone’.
Women as victims of violence

Interviews with women also revealed that as well as being the subject of complaints they were just as likely to be ‘victims’ of the behaviour of others as evidenced by the high incidence of family violence and it is to that issue that we now turn.

In just under a half of families working with IFSP at least one member of the family either had a history of, or were currently being subjected to, family violence, including physical, mental and sexual abuse. Women most commonly reported suffering intimate partner violence and violence from male teenage sons. In some instances there had been a long history of violence within the family involving children as well:

Q: Were the kids causing any trouble or…?
A: It’s not the kids that are causing trouble, it’s their dad that causes trouble because he loses it. And he’s had tendency to sock ‘em. And hit ‘em… Now I’m one that’s always said, if anything happens, then tell the Social Services. Tell your teachers at school and they’ll get in contact with Social Services… I was sexually abused when I were little, I was raped when I was seventeen.”

As well as the direct impacts on health and well being, domestic violence is closely associated with alcohol misuse and can impact on neighbour relations in a number of ways resulting in complaints of noise nuisance and disorderly behaviour as one woman explained:

“Yeah he was coming a lot of time, I mean, it wasn’t fair on the neighbours. It really wasn’t. If he wasn’t drunk, he wouldn’t come anywhere near and as soon as he’s drunk he was putting me windows through, me front door, banging the door, shouting, screaming. It wasn’t fair, it was anti-social behaviour, it wasn’t fair on but I wasn’t causing it, he was actually coming and I was asking him to go away. I must have called the Police from last Christmas to New Year seventeen times.”

The issue of inter-generational violence between mothers and their teenage sons was also raised by a number of lone mothers. The language used to describe this type of violent conflict tended to be hesitant with the issue raised in an ‘off hand’ way as if it was of no real importance:

"I was having a lot of trouble with my children and like my son was hitting me and mental abuse."

Lone parent women in particular reported finding it hard to access help to deal with the violence, as one mother explained:

“It was like when I first phoned up Social Services, I said to them ‘it’s going to be him [her son] or me’ because he had a knife up at me at one point, just it’s going to be a case of him or me, that’s how it was going next with things getting that bad and he was that violent towards me…but even then …they [Social Services] didn’t want to know.”

Such reports are reminiscent of response to domestic violence at the turn of the century and caused us to reflect on why women continued to experience such difficulty in accessing support to deal with violence in the home. An examination of the empirical evidence suggests that once families are labelled as being ‘anti-social’ the disciplinary gaze effectively prevents the development of a more subtle and nuanced understanding. For example, scrutiny of individual families’ project case records revealed that references to family violence were normally presented as secondary peripheral issues with little causal primacy attributed to the impact of violence within the family on behaviour outside of the family home.
Women as victims of ASB

Within policy discourses binary oppositions are employed to symbolically differentiate the law abiding from the irresponsible. Examination of the lived experiences of ASB reflects a much more complex reality in which the distinction between ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ can not always be clearly made. Many women reported that as well as being the alleged ‘perpetrators’ they had also been ‘victims’ of anti-social behaviour and had made complaints to either the police, housing and/or local councillors about the behaviour of their neighbours.

“Well I’d say that were antisocial what they all used to do, chucking mud at the windows and everything like that, do you know, I thought that were antisocial behaviour. Kicking all the door in, setting on fire the front door, do you know what I mean? I said ‘Listen I, I, we are the victims, not them.’ They could say they are the victims because I told them to ‘fff’ down the path, do you know what I mean? And cos I’d done that and told them to stay away they didn’t like it, so they were retaliated that way so then that meant we ended up being the victims.”

Lone parents, who felt particularly powerless to prevent the anti-social behaviour, often took avoidance action rather than confront the ‘perpetrators’ about their behaviour:

“I have been a victim, yeah. At the beginning, when I first moved in there I had, because I were having a lot of trouble about the balls banging against this garage and I kept going out. And they were like 16, 17 year old lads these, there were about 18, 19 of these hanging around on the street, just where I lived. … I had spray paint on me door, things being put through me letterbox, all me washing pulled off me line, all ripped… Yeah. I were on antidepressants and everything from doctor. Put everything in [to the landlord] and said ‘Look I need a move’ and that. [The landlord] weren't interested. Never, so I just kept me gob shut, let them carry on doing what they're doing, just kept the kids in.”

For a small number of interviewees, the alleged anti-social behaviour they had endured was serious in nature and included racial harassment and threats of violence, and had resulted in families being rehoused. The severity of the behaviour had contributed to health problems among family members. One woman, a single mother with three sons, all subject to ASBOs and all of whom had been the subject of local publicity campaigns, described how the local community had undertaken a course of harassment against her family in order to force them from their home. The police believed that the family were indeed at considerable risk of harm and recommended that the family be rehoused, which they subsequently were:

"We had the curtains closed 24 hours a day. We didn't go outside. If we had to go shopping, doctor’s surgery, it was always in a taxi, cos we always got, you know, people calling us, racial harassment names and stuff. So, so I ended up seeing a counsellor, cos I can't sleep you know, at nights, and stuff.”

The issue of victimisation was closely linked to the concerns identified above and some interviewees considered complaints of anti-social behaviour to be a product of personal vendettas or intolerant neighbours. This resulted in people feeling that they were they were the ones who were being harassed not the complainants but their views were not taken seriously. The experience of not being heard was directly related to being labelled ‘anti-social’ and it was strongly felt by many families that once labelled no one would be prepared to hear their side of the story. These experiences left many women feeling further marginalised and powerless to defend themselves against the damaging consequences of the demonisation process.

Conclusions
The examination of the emergence of domestic violence as a policy issue illustrates the powerful influence of feminist discourse which focussed attention on the contradictions inherent in private patriarchy. This construction can be seen to have facilitated the development of a simply binary divide which portrays men as villains and women as victims. Indeed with in political and policy discourses the emphasis has largely been on the victim side of this equation. The enduring appeal of this simple construction is reflected in the fact that the ‘solution’ to domestic violence is still framed in terms of the provision of refuge accommodation for women and children rather than for instance, the criminalisation of perpetrators. The simplicity of the binary divide has also has meant that it has taken a long time for other forms of family violence to be recognised as legitimate areas of public concern and as our empirical data illustrates the issue of inter-generational violence is one which is still largely unacknowledged and invisible.

While there is now a growing body of work examining the introduction of technologies to control behaviour in both the private and public spheres to date little attention has been paid to the way in which such interventions have had a disproportional impact on women headed households. In contrast to the highly politicised constructions of domestic violence, anti-social behaviour discourses remain largely un-gendered which facilitates a return to Victorian notions of womanhood, where the failure of women to control the behaviour of members of their families is presented as a failure of parenting and citizenship. When framed in these ways women become the villains and are thus the legitimate targets of disciplining forms of intervention. As with domestic violence the use of binary divides reinforces a construction of the problem which denies complexity. That lone parent women can be both simultaneously ‘victims’ and ‘villains’ has not been recognised by New Labour politicians or the media who predominantly portray perpetrators of ASB in negative and demonising ways.

These two policy discourses which run on very separate tracks, in real life overlap. There seems a cruel irony in the fact that whether the woman herself complains about the violent behaviour of her partner or children, or whether the neighbours complain about it, should determine whether the woman is dealt with as a victim or a villain. The findings presented in this paper highlight some of the enduring contradictions inherent in the formation of women as gendered welfare subjects and indicate the importance of developing more finely nuanced gendered analysis in this under theorised field as evidenced in Helen Carr’s paper to this conference which provides a fascinating account of the contemporary role of the social construction of gender as a disciplinary mechanism (Carr 2006).

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