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'Making trouble': a Bourdieusian analysis of the UK Government's Troubled Families Programme

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Abstract

In the wake of riots in towns and cities across England in 2011, the UK coalition government launched the Troubled Families Programme, which aimed to 'turn around' the lives of the most troublesome and anti-social families in England by the end of their term of office. In a new iteration of the 'underclass' thesis, 'troubled families' were held responsible for a wide range of societal ills, with intensive work with families identified as the solution to the problems they allegedly caused. This thesis examines the construction of 'troubled families' as an official social problem, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and scholars who have extended and developed his work. Despite being arguably the most influential sociologist of the last fifty years, and with a critical interest in issues of power and the reproduction of inequalities, Bourdieu's extensive body of work has not been well utilised by social work and social policy academics outside of France. This study, then, represents an original contribution to both the development of Bourdieu's work since his death, and to social policy and social work research in the UK.

The Troubled Families Programme is conceptualised as a policy field and a three-stage approach to operationalizing Bourdieu's theory of practice is utilised in the study. The history and emergence of the 'troubled families' label is examined, using previous academic work, government documents, speeches and media reports. Interviews with thirty-nine workers, managers and directors involved with the delivery and implementation of the Troubled Families Programme have been carried out, providing a 'street-level' perspective of the 'troubled families' field. Finally, the tools used in carrying out the research and constructing the research object are turned on the research itself, in a process of participant objectivation, highlighting the structural constraints and forces that influence the production of the study and, ultimately, the thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	Acceptable Behaviour Contract
ADCS	Association of Directors of Children's Services
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
ASBU	Anti-Social Behaviour Unit
CSM	Children's Services Manager
COS	Charity Organisation Society
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE	Department for Education
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FIP	Family Intervention Project
FW	Family Worker
HoS	Head of Service
IEA	Institute for Economic Affairs
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
NECPC	North East Child Poverty Commission
OU	Open University
PbR	Payment by Results
RTF	Respect Task Force
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
TFEA	Troubled Families Employment Advisor
TFP	Troubled Families Programme
UNCRDP	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People
WFE	Working Families Everywhere
YW	Youth Worker

Statement of Copyright

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For Harriet, Daisy and Sam

"My intention … is to subject the state to a sort of hyperbolic doubt. For when it comes to the state, one never doubts enough."

(Bourdieu et al, 1994: 1)

Chapter 1: Introduction

> By giving a name to a malaise ("the sickness of the suburbs", for example, or "teachers woes"), they tell us how we ought to think about it, imposing these interpretations not only on those who are not involved, but also on the principal interested parties who find there a legitimate discourse about a malaise that they have been sensing more or less confusedly, but that remained inexpressible because it was illegitimate (Champagne, in Bourdieu et al, 1999: 213).

> The definition of a problem usually contains, implicitly or explicitly, suggestions for how it may be solved (Becker, 1966: 10).

1.1   Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a short discussion of the events that led to the establishment of the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) in December 2011 and its progress since this date. The programme, launched in the aftermath of the 2011 riots, will have seen over half a million disadvantaged or 'troubled' families worked with (or on) by the completion of its second phase in 2020. Following this brief introduction to some of the key elements of the TFP, potential research approaches are discussed. Just as there is a long history to labels such as 'troubled families' or 'the underclass', there is a long history of researchers who have been concerned with such groups and the 'problems' they allegedly cause. A number of different entry points to a study on 'troubled families' are presented before the choice of a Bourdieusian approach to the current study is explained. The justification for this approach is explained as a desire to work against *pre-constructed* notions and concepts such as 'troubled families', avoiding what Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al, 1991: 20) called 'spontaneous sociology', and instead interrogating the conditions surrounding the emergence of such ideas and labels. Some of the key tenets of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the hugely influential French sociologist, are then sketched out, with a particular focus on the relevance and potential application of his work to a study of the *'troubled families' field*. The chapter ends with a summary of this Bourdieusian approach and the structure of the thesis, including a precis of the remaining chapters.

1.2   The Troubled Families Programme

> …today, I want to talk about troubled families. Let me be clear what I mean by this phrase. Officialdom might call them 'families with multiple disadvantages'. Some in the press might call them 'neighbours from hell'. Whatever you call them, we've known for years that a relatively small number of families are the source of a large proportion

of the problems in society. Drug addiction. Alcohol abuse. Crime. A culture of disruption and irresponsibility that cascades through generations.

David Cameron, Troubled Families speech, 15 December 2011.

In August 2011, riots broke out in towns and cities across England following the death of Mark Duggan, a black man, who was shot by police in Tottenham, London on 4 August. MPs were recalled from their summer holidays and, on 11 August, the Prime Minister David Cameron gave a statement to Parliament about the riots and their consequences. Cameron firstly set out the sequence of events that led to the riots, before he highlighted efforts to 'restore order' and support victims of the disturbances. Finally, he turned to 'the deeper problem' (Cameron, 2011a) that existed, of 'children growing up not knowing the difference between right and wrong' and a 'culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities'. Denying that the riots were about poverty, he turned the focus squarely onto poor parenting and family breakdown, saying:

> In too many cases, the parents of these children—if they are still around—do not care where their children are or who they are with, let alone what they are doing. The potential consequences of neglect and immorality on this scale have been clear for too long, without enough action being taken.

Four days later, in a speech setting out the 'fightback' following the riots, this theme continued as Cameron promised to put 'rocket boosters' under plans to 'turn around' the 'most troubled families' by the end of the coalition's term of office in May 2015. Cameron (2011b) once again stated that the riots were not about poverty and added, for clarity, that nor were they about race or government cuts. Instead, he argued that the riots were 'about behaviour: people showing indifference to right and wrong; people with a twisted moral code; people with a complete absence of self-restraint'. The focus on families and parenting remained:

> I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it's standard for children to have a mum and not a dad, where it's normal for young men to grow up without a male role model, looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger. So if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start.

Cameron also spoke at length about the need to fix a broken welfare system that apparently encouraged this bad behaviour and irresponsibility:

> For years we've had a system that encourages the worst in people - that incites laziness, that excuses bad behaviour, that erodes self-discipline, that discourages hard work, above all that drains responsibility away from people. We talk about moral hazard in our financial system - where banks think they can act recklessly because the state will always bail them out. Well this is moral hazard in our welfare system - people

thinking they can be as irresponsible as they like because the state will always bail them out.

Exactly four months later at the official launch of the TFP on 15 December 2011, Cameron (2011c) returned to this topic, arguing that 'troubled families are already pulled and prodded and poked a dozen times a week by government' and suggesting that 'one of the reasons for their dysfunction is their hatred of ''the system'' which they experience as faceless, disjointed and intrusive'. Cameron crystallised what he meant by the phrase 'troubled families', conflating impoverished families experiencing multiple disadvantages with 'neighbours from hell' in the process. 'Troubled families' were, according to Cameron a small hard-core who were 'the source of a large proportion of the problems in society' and who transmitted their depraved behaviours – their 'culture of disruption and irresponsibility' - to their children. Louise Casey, the former head of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU) and Respect Task Force (RTF) under New Labour, was appointed as the Head of a new Troubled Families Unit in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Positioning the TFP as a response not just to the problem of 'troubled families' themselves, but also to the problem of the state failing to address their problematic behaviours, Cameron advocated a 'new' approach. The TFP would be delivered using the 'family intervention' model, which sees a single 'keyworker' or 'family worker' working intensively with families in order to help them 'turn their lives around'. The intensive, persistent and assertive approach of the keyworkers would encompass work with the 'whole family', rather than 'troublesome' individuals within the family, encouraging all family members to take responsibility for their circumstances. Workers would be 'dedicated to the family' and able to 'look at the family from the inside out, to understand its dynamics as a whole, and to offer practical help and support' (DCLG, 2012a: 4). Not only would families be 'gripped' by this approach, but workers would also 'grip' partner agencies and services in an attempt to co-ordinate and improve service delivery.

The TFP then, was a central government intervention that would address the putative failings of local services and practitioners as well as 'sorting out' 'troubled families', once and for all, thereby helping to reduce the costs of such families to 'the taxpayer' at a time of austerity and public sector cuts. The programme was to be delivered in England alone, and all 152 Local authorities across England 'signed up' to deliver the programme with the then Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, stating that 'the fast and unanimous level of take-up shows that the Government has got the confidence of local councils that together we can tackle a problem that councils have long grappled with' (DCLG, 2012b).

Troubled families were officially defined as those who met three of the four following criteria:

- Are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour
- Have children who are regularly truanting or not in school
- Have an adult on out of work benefits
- Cause high costs to the taxpayer
  (DCLG, 2012a: 9)

Local authorities would receive funding on a Payment by Results (PbR) basis, with initial 'attachment' funding paid to them for each 'troubled family' they started working with and the remainder being paid once certain behavioural change thresholds had been met. The proportion of funding available as an attachment fee was 80% in the first year, reducing to 60% and 40% in the second and third years (DCLG, 2012c: 8), thereby encouraging local authorities to start working with families early in the programme. In order for a local authority to claim funding for a family that they had 'turned around': juvenile crime had to decrease by at least 33%; anti-social behaviour across the family had to decrease by at least 60%; and school attendance for each child in the household had to be above 85%; and/or an adult demonstrating 'progress to work' by 'volunteering' for the Work Programme; or, an adult in the family had to move off out-of-work benefits and into continuous employment for over 6 months (DCLG, 2012c: 9). Hence, if an adult entered 'continuous employment' for 6 months, local authorities could claim they had 'turned around' the entire family, no matter what progress, or lack of it, had been made on other issues. Other potential improvements in the family's circumstances, such as reduction of debt, increased household income and/or reduction of poverty, cessation of Domestic Violence, or improved housing conditions, were not recognised by the PbR mechanism.

A second phase of the TFP, initiated in May 2016, was announced in July 2013 when the 'discovery' of a further 400,000 'high risk families' was announced (DCLG, 2013a). In August, 2014, a full year after the initial announcement, more detail on the 'troubles' these families caused and experienced was published, along with a summary of the methodology used to calculate the number at 400,000. By this time, the families were no longer labelled as 'high risk' and were instead referred to as 'more' 'troubled families' by the government, and as a 'new underclass' by *The Sunday Times* (Hellen, 2014: 1). These new 'troubled families' were those who met any two out of six expanded criteria:

- Parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- Children who have not been attending school regularly
- Children who need help
- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness
- Families affected by domestic violence and abuse

- Parents and children with a range of health problems
  (DCLG, 2014a)

In May 2015, at the end of the first phase of the TFP the government announced that local authorities had 'turned around' 99 per cent of the original 120,000 'troubled families' (DCLG, 2015), prompting some to question the 'miraculous success' (Butler, 2015) of a near 'perfect social policy' (Crossley, 2015). David Cameron (2015a) called the programme a 'real government success' and announced that he wanted 'to extend this thinking to [other social policy] areas where state institutions have all too often failed', namechecking child protection as one such area.

This alleged success, alongside a rhetoric that has promoted the TFP as a programme which would bring 'radical reform' to public service delivery, should have seen the 'troubled families' approach gather (even more) speed in its second, expanded phase. But the second phase of the TFP has operated with much less political promotion behind it. There were no quarterly updates on local authority performance, as there had been under Phase 1. Louise Casey, in many ways the figurehead of the TFP, was appointed firstly to lead an 'independent' investigation into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham and then to head up a review into community engagement to tackle Islamic extremism, leaving her deputy in charge of the TFP. The mooted diffusion of the 'troubled families' approach to other areas did not materialise either, at least not in full. Proposed reforms to children's services and child protection systems instead revolved around the formation of independent trusts, the potential for private sector companies to take charge of 'failing' local authority children's services, and reforms to social work education including the reification of fast-track schemes such as *Frontline.* A revised parenting voucher scheme, announced by the Prime Minister in early 2016 (Cameron, 2016), was one of the few policy developments around children, young people and families that was linked to the TFP during the early stages of its second phase.

This may, in part, have been due to critical scrutiny of the claims of 'success' in the latter stages of the first phase (Bawden, 2015; Butler, 2015; Crossley, 2015; Portes, 2015) but it may also be linked to a less than enthusiastic endorsement of those claims from the official evaluation of the programme, which found 'no discernible impact' on a number of key outcomes (Bewly et al, 2016). Despite the apparent slowing down of government rhetoric and spin surrounding 'troubled families', the phrase has undoubtedly entered mainstream usage. By the end of the second phase of the TFP in 2020, over half a million families in England, approximately 6.4% of the total number (DCLG, 2014b: 15), will have been labelled as 'troubled' and worked with under the TFP.

1.3   Adopting a position on 'troubled families'…

'Troubled families' represent an *official social problem*, one that is being addressed by the Troubled Families Programme, a specific government policy. An 'underclass' has been constructed by the state, and the government response to this social problem is seeing workers, employed by or acting on behalf of the state, working with 'troubled families' in an effort to 'turn around' their lives. As such, a research study relating to 'troubled families' has a number of possible 'entry points' and various theoretical frameworks or perspectives could be employed in carrying out such research.

Concerns about troublesome or deviant, anti-social groups who threaten wider societal norms are not a new phenomenon, and nor are attempts to split people living in poverty into categories along an axis of 'deserving' to 'undeserving'. Macnicol (1987: 314) has argued that the 'underclass' thesis has 'a long and undistinguished pedigree' and this history has been documented extensively elsewhere (see, for example, Himmelfarb, 1984; Macnicol, 1987 & 1999; Morris, 1994; Stitt, 1994; Welshman, 2013). A historical analysis of 'troubled families' would enable us to retrace the continuities and breaks between concepts such as the social residuum from Victorian times, the 'problem families' of the 1940s, and more recent concepts such as the concept of a 'cycle of deprivation' advanced by Sir Keith Joseph in the 1970s and the transatlantic 'underclass' debates popularised by Charles Murray in the 1980s and 90s (Murray, 1984, 1990 and 1994).

The portrayal of 'troubled families' 'as a relatively small number of families [that] are the source of a large proportion of the problems in society' (Cameron, 2011c) represents, it could be argued, a new *moral panic* about an old group of *folk devils,* but one with a new name. Cohen's classic work on moral panics (2002: 1) suggested that 'every now and then … a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests'. Hall et al (1978) also used moral panic theory to develop their conjunctural analysis of the societal concern about *muggers* and this approach could be deployed to examine this new social construction of deviance (see Kirkwood, 2015 for an examination of troubled families using a moral panic framework). Other works on the sociology of deviance such as Becker's examination of *Outsiders* (1963) and Gusfield's work on 'public problems' (1980) could be used to support and develop such a theoretical approach and Cohen's work on social control is also potentially relevant here (Cohen, 1985).

A narrower discursive approach could see the discourse(s) surrounding 'troubled families' being analysed, using, for example, a Foucauldian approach (Garrity, 2010; MacLehose, 2014)

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or by drawing on similar work that examined the language of 'social exclusion' under the previous Labour administration (Levitas, 1998; Fairclough, 2000). Foucault's work, including the concepts of power and governmentality, has been used extensively to explore social work practices (see, for example, Chambon et al, 1999; Healy, 2000: 37-55; Duschinsky and Leon, 2012; Winter and Cree, 2015). The extensive literature that already exists in this area that draws on Foucault, and the existence of PhD thesis deploying a 'Foucauldian analysis of 'troubled families'' (MacLehose, 2014), are key reasons why Foucault does not feature more prominently in this thesis.

Fischer's work on discursive politics and public policy discourse (2003) is also potentially useful and there is a large body of work on the role of argument, narrative and discourse in the shaping and framing of public policy problems (see, for example, Stone, 1988; Fischer and Forester, 1993). However, a purely discursive or historical analysis of the TFP potentially marginalises the fact that this is a policy that is being operationalized across England. Every day, agents of the state are working with/on 'troubled families', in an effort to 'turn around', their lives and reduce the financial burden of such families on the politically constructed 'taxpayer'.

A decision to critically engage with the role of 'family' in the 'troubled families' agenda could draw on the substantial work in this area, going back many decades (Williams ,2004, Thane, 2010). Donzelot's classic work *The Policing of Families*, which argued that 'the social worker is gradually taking over from the teacher in the mission of civilizing the social body' (1997: 96) is especially relevant. Revisiting *The Anti-social Family* (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982), written in the early stages of Margaret Thatcher's first government represents another lens through which to view the emergence of the 'troubled families' concept. These, and similar, approaches would be fruitful in examining the re-emerging political salience of 'family' at a time when arguments have been advanced that sociological research has retreated from use of the term, in favour of concepts such as intimacies and kinship (Gillies 2011, Edwards et al, 2012). The work of Val Gillies (2005, 2006, 2007), Tracey Jensen (2010), Steph Lawler (1999, 2000, 2005) and Bev Skeggs (1997, 2004) are particularly insightful in understanding the portrayal of working class women and their perceived roles and responsibilities within the 'family' at a time when the Prime Minister has argued that 'whatever the social issue we want to grasp - the answer should always begin with family' (Cameron, 2014). Simultaneously, researchers have noted that 'public discourses of 'troubled families' and poor parenting are … easily and problematically collapsed into one of 'failed mothering' (Allen and Taylor, 2012:5).

In discussing the increasing political interest in 'troubled families' Gillies and Edwards (2012: 432) have argued that:

> we have seen a largely silent and unremarked upon resurrection of a cycle of deprivation theory, elision of a social justice agenda with tackling 'troubled families', an orgy of family blaming after the English riots last year and an assault on state provision for families in the name of austerity.

Governmental approaches to supporting or intervening in the lives of 'complex' or 'troubled' families have also been extensively researched. For example, in recent times researchers have examined and 'evaluated' the 'family intervention' model advocated by the TFP, beginning with the original Dundee Families Project (Dillane et al, 2001) and including the rolling out across England of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) under the New Labour *Respect Action Plan* (RTF, 2006a). As well as the official evaluations of these projects, publications arising from these studies have explored aspects of the development and implementation of FIPs such as: the policy transfer process from a single Scottish project operated by a voluntary organisation to a national government programme in England (Nixon et al, 2010); the silence of gender in the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) discourse (Nixon and Hunter, 2009); and FIPs as sites of both social work practice (Parr 2009); and of subversion and resilience (Parr and Nixon, 2009). Garrett (2007a:203) has taken issue with some of the early government funded evaluations by some of the above researchers, arguing that the reports were 'lacking in reflexive hesitancy and insufficiently critical' and that the researchers should:

> retain a certain wariness and scepticism before providing research ''products'' which seem to largely endorse the policy and practice ''solutions'' that the State, committed to the maintenance of social order, has formulated.

Lipsky's view of frontline workers, or 'street-level bureaucrats' (1980), as the ultimate policy makers is particularly pertinent to the operationalization of the 'troubled families' narrative given that there was no statutory guidance issued or legislation enacted in respect of the TFP at its outset, allowing considerable local discretion in keeping with the coalition government's localism and decentralisation agendas.[1] Lipsky's work has been well-utilised in recent years in discussing contemporary social policy and practice issues in the UK, with the street-level bureaucrats concept in recent years applied to social workers (Evans and Harris, 2004; Ellis, 2011 and 2013) jobcentre workers (Wright, 2002; Fletcher, 2011; Wright, 2012) and homelessness services (Alden, 2015), amongst others. There is also an extensive literature on social workers attempts to resist the state's desire to use them as agents of 'control' rather

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[1] There are reporting obligations relating to the TFP in the Welfare Reform and Work act 2016 but these only require the Secretary of State to report progress to central government. There are no statutory local duties in relation to the TFP, even in Phase 2.

than as caring professionals (Parry et al, 1979; London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980; Jones, 2001; Jordan, 2001) and the increasingly managerialist approach to social work under New Public Management (Harris, 1998; Harlow, 2003; Banks, 2011). Evelyn Brodkin's (2011 and 2013) extension of Lipsky's work to include a focus on other street-level organisations is also relevant here, given the role of some voluntary sector organisations in delivering the TFP in some local authorities.

All of the approaches discussed above focus on the way that the families are constructed, talked about, and/or worked on or with. An alternative or complementary approach would involve carrying out research with the families themselves in an attempt to understand their experience and whether they agree with the construction of their lives as 'troubled'. In more recent times, a number of studies including some within the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Transmitted Deprivation programme of the 1970s (see, for example, Brown and Madge, 1982; Brown, 1983), and the Teesside studies of Macdonald, Shildrick and others (Macdonald et al, 2001; Webster et al, 2004; Macdonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick et al, 2010; Shildrick et al, 2013) have sought to gain an understanding of families lives by speaking to them directly and hearing 'their side of the story' (see also Ribbens McCarthy et al 2013; Daly and Kelly, 2015; McKenzie 2015a).

Adopting such an approach in this research study would help to address Morris' (2013: 198) claim that 'remarkably little is known about family perspectives and experiences' amongst those families who have high levels of support needs, but would hopefully provide a more robust analysis of the lives of 'troubled families' than that advanced in the DCLG report *Listening to troubled families* (Casey, 2012).[2] Attempting to give voice to families through the research process could provide a strong counter narrative to the dominant political and media narratives of welfare-dependency, cultures of worklessness, and scroungers and shirkers, which circulate in mainstream newspapers and prime time television 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2014) programming,[3] without much critical interrogation or reflection.

Making 'troubled families' themselves the subject of the research, however, runs the risk of accepting and endorsing them as 'the problem' to be examined and scrutinised. Such an approach would be in keeping with the government's trope that it is necessary to 'get in

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[2] Casey discussed, in an interview, why she undertook her own 'research': 'I've looked very hard to find a similar research report that has actually spent that amount of time directly with families and written it up in the way that we did. I felt it was worth doing, otherwise I wouldn't have bothered doing it.' (Hollander 2012)

[3] See, for example, *Benefits Street* (Channel 5), *We all pay your benefit* (BBC1), *Britain on benefits* (Channel 4), and *On benefits and proud* (Channel 5).

through the front door' and 'start with the family' in order to understand the problems that 'troubled families' face – a case, potentially, of social science doing 'little more than ratify[ing]' a social problem produced by the state (Bourdieu et al, 1994:2). The approach of responding unquestioningly to pre-constructed social problems has also been likened to General Custer's approach of 'riding to the sound of the guns' (Lemert, 1951:3).

Much of the alleged success of the programme is credited to the idea that the programme requires 'a single dedicated worker to walk in the shoes of these families every day. To look at the family from the inside out' (DCLG, 2012a:4). Good family intervention workers '"grip" the family, their problems and the surrounding agencies and are seen to be standing alongside the families, their difficulties and the process being put in place' (DCLG, 2012a:18). Therefore, a narrow focus on the frontline workers involved in the delivery of the programme may appear to support the view that it is individual workers who can make the difference, ignoring the structural conditions and bureaucratic environments in which they operate, and the forces they are subject to. Garrett (2013: 182) has argued that approaches which 'under-theorise the state and its role in generating and sustaining patterns of "othering"' enable the 'resolution of issues' to be almost 'entirely displaced onto micro-encounters', such as those that take place between the family worker and members of 'troubled families'. In the TFP, it is the state itself, in the guise of Louise Casey, that under-theorises its potential role in the lives of 'troubled families':

> 'The beauty in this programme is that it starts with what's happening in the families—why they cause the problems they have and why they have the problems they have. We work back from that in how we then tackle the system' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2014: 27)

Spector and Kitsuse, in their classic work *Constructing Social Problems,* argue that '[T]he notion that social problems are a kind of condition must be abandoned in favour of a conception of them as a kind of activity' (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977:73). They go on to specify that social problems are the 'activities of those who assert the existence of conditions and define them as problems' (1977: 74). In examining the way that labelling has been used to exert the existence of an 'underclass' in poor black communities in the US, Gans argues that there is a 'label formation process' which requires certain actors to play different roles or carry out different activities, including those of 'label-makers', 'alarmists', 'counters' and 'label users' (Gans, 1995: 11-26).

Such a focus on the activities of the label-makers, alarmists, and so on, enables the study to examine the emergence and development of the 'troubled families' agenda, including the sites of competition and struggle within the *'troubled families' field*. The 'common sense' approach

to working with 'troubled families' advocated by the TFP, the cleanliness of the idea of families being 'turned around' and the near perfect success of the initial phase are all examples of the 'false clarity [that] is often part and parcel of the dominant discourse' (Bourdieu, 2004:52). The stereotyping that occurs within the 'troubled families' agenda – the 'neighbours from hell' who are 'turned around' by dedicated, heroic individual family workers should also be troubling to researchers. In discussing the role of narrative in policy-making Kaplan has argued that:

> Stock characters – such as greedy politicians with no policy interest except those that lead to their own financial benefit and hopelessly lazy bureaucrats – doubtless do exist. *But a policy narrative that rests entirely on stereotypical characters engaged in stereotypical action at least deserves extra scrutiny*' (Kaplan, 1993:178, emphasis added)

Whilst the TFP starts with the families and works backwards and looks at the families 'from inside out rather than outside in' (DCLG, 2012a: 26), this research study 'bends the stick the other way' (Bourdieu, 2014:167), and instead starts with what is happening in the state, working backwards and upwards from that, examining the state from the inside-out. This is the fundamental point of departure from the official doxa – the seemingly natural, taken-for-granted assumptions of the dominant discourse – for this thesis.

This analysis will attempt to work *against* the pre-constructed idea of 'troubled families' and instead analyse the construction, development and utility of that label. Where the focus within the TFP is on the practice of individual workers, and the potential benefits of research have been largely dismissed (Crossley, 2014), this thesis will attempt to theorise the concept of 'troubled families', locating it in its wider historical and contemporary political contexts (see Garrett, 2013: 3-6 for a discussion of 'the fallacy of theoryless practice'). The research aims to use a 'street-level lens' (Brodkin, 2011: i200), interviewing workers involved with the delivery of the TFP, to examine the day-to-day practice of the programme. The focus will be on their relations with other agents in the field and the forces and constraints they are subject to when carrying out their duties. It is therefore proposed that a Bourdieusian analysis of the *'troubled families' field* offers a framework which will enable the examination of the theory and the practice - the 'thinking' and 'doing' - of 'troubled families'.

Such an approach will draw on a wide range of Pierre Bourdieu's work, including that on: the 'bureaucratic field' (Bourdieu et al, 1994); the 'abdication of the state' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 181-254); the family (Bourdieu, 1996); neoliberal developments (Bourdieu, 1998, 1999) and the ability of the state to perform 'social magic' (Bourdieu 1991). Developments and extensions of Bourdieu's work on fields (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015) and perspectives of him as a political sociologist (Wacquant, 2005; Swartz, 2013) are also examined, including

consideration of the recrafting of the welfare state under neoliberal government (Wacquant, 2008, 2009a, 2010) and the potential to examine 'public policy fields' (DuBois, 2009, 2010, 2015). This cohesive approach – a 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977) - will align with Bourdieu's intention that his work be used as a whole, without various concepts being 'stripped out' and used in isolation.

1.4   Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu is arguably the most influential sociologist of the last fifty years. Following his death in 2002, *Le Monde*, the major French national daily newspaper, postponed publication of its editions in order to put the news of his death on the front page. It was said by his friend and collaborator, Loïc Wacquant, that it would take 30 to 50 years 'for us to draw out fully the implications of his work' (McLemee, 2002). This section provides a very brief, and inevitably incomplete, introduction to Bourdieu's expansive body of work, the intention being to provide a basic introduction to Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977). A fuller examination of the application of Bourdieu's work to the concept of 'troubled families' is reserved for Chapter 2.

Bourdieu published work spanning an extensive range of disciplines and topics including art, education, work, economics, philosophy, language, literature, sociology, politics and religion (DiMaggio, 1979: 1460-1461; Calhoun et al, 1993: 1) and Wacquant has noted that his 'near encyclopaedic *oeuvre* throws a manifold challenge at the current divisions and accepted modes of thinking of social science by virtue of its utter disregard for disciplinary boundaries' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 3). One review essay summarised his work thus:

> A wide-ranging body of work remarkable for its theoretical sophistication and for its ethnographic acuity, and constituting one of the most significant of recent attempts to adapt the theoretical legacy of classical social theory to the empirical study, from a broadly critical perspective, of contemporary society (Brubaker, 1985: 745).

Another writer, reviewing two of Bourdieu's books, considered his work to be:

> A large effort to delineate the mechanisms of symbolic domination and control by which the existing social order is maintained in both preindustrial and modern social systems. He has further aimed to construct a generally applicable sociological practice which unmasks the legitimations, misrecognitions of power, and 'symbolic violence'

inherent, so he believes, in the functioning of any social system (DiMaggio, 1979: 1460).[4]

Bourdieu's work drew on – and set itself against – a range of classical and contemporary thinkers. He began his academic career studying philosophy and, despite an early turn towards empirical research and the desire to engage with the social world in a scientific way, he continued to draw on the likes of Hegel, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Bachelard and Cassirer throughout his career. At the same time, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber were also central influences on Bourdieu's thinking. He extended, negotiated or rejected different aspects of their work in his attempts to construct a social theory 'premised on the systematic unity of practical social life' (Brubaker, 1985: 748). Di Maggio argued that Bourdieu had 'outlined an elegantly systematic, if not entirely satisfactory, revisionist approach to the Durkheimian problem of order – an effort, in some respects, brilliant, to mate Durkheim and Marx' (DiMaggio, 1979: 1460-1461) while Brubaker argued that whilst many of his ideas were derived from Durkheim and Marx, it was Weber who provided 'the substance of his theory' (Brubaker, 1985: 747).

At the time that Bourdieu was wrestling with and against the work of classical philosophers and sociologists, he also 'came of intellectual age' (Brubaker, 1985: 746) whilst the French intellectual field was dominated – and split - by the structuralism of Levi-Strauss and the voluntarism of Sartre. Bourdieu, according to Brubaker, viewed both of these theories as:

> antithetical poles of a basic opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, an opposition discernible in different guises throughout the history of social thought and constituting, in his view, the chief obstacle to the construction of an adequate theory of society (Brubkaer, 1985: 746).

In attempting to transcend these two positions, then, Bourdieu's work affirms 'the *primacy of relations'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15 original emphasis). It was argued that the choice between agency and structure, subjectivism and objectivism, individualism and structuralism was a false choice, created by and embedded in the language that we use and which favours the description and distinction of *things* over relations and processes. Bourdieu and Wacquant argued that 'Social science need not choose between these poles for the stuff of social reality – of action no less than structure, and their intersection as history – lies in relations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15).

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[4] The reviews of Bourdieu's work by DiMaggio and Brubaker, heavily drawn on throughout this section, are highlighted by both Bourdieu and Wacquant as providing excellent summaries and critiques of his writing.

Bourdieu's positioning against dominant thinking was a recurrent theme throughout his work. DiMaggio (1979: 1461) argued that 'Bourdieu takes as his subject precisely those attitudes, dispositions, and ways of perceiving reality that are taken for granted by members of a social class or a society', highlighting that:

> Since Bourdieu takes as the fundamental problem of sociology the means by which systems of domination persist and reproduce themselves without conscious recognition by a society's members, it follows that any social science based on the subjective perceptions of participants, or on commonsense classifications of social groups or social problems, can only reinforce and confirm the very domination he regards as problematic.

Bourdieu himself argued that '*[t]he presconstructed is everywhere'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 235 original emphasis) and that it was necessary for sociologists to break with common sense views and widely-used classificatory systems. Bourdieu called this widespread acceptance of common sense opinions and the closing off of discussions about alternatives a *doxa,* thus highlighting a distinction from the concepts of heterodoxy and orthodoxy where alternative opinions are available and debated, if not necessarily accepted. Doxa, Bourdieu argued, led to a view of the world as 'taken for granted' and 'self-evident' and was the outcome of attempts to make the arbitrary appear natural (Bourdieu, 1977: 164-167). Thus, Bourdieu was never likely to be satisfied in working with an existing theory or body of work and his writing is littered with references to breaks, departures, ruptures, struggles, conflicts and metaphors encouraging sociologists to instead 'twist the screw the other way' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53).

The necessity to break with dominant discourses led, in part, to Bourdieu developing his own set of tools for thinking *with and against* pre-constructed 'commonsense' notions and ideas. He suggested that, if he were forced to provide a name for his approach, he would 'talk of *constructivist structuralism* or of *structuralist constructivism*' (Bourdieu, 1989: 14, original emphasis). He went on to elaborate what he meant:

> By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes.

Bourdieu often highlighted the importance of being specific in the use of language, arguing that 'the dictionary is charged with a political mythology' (Bourdieu, 1993: 20). He proposed that 'the need to resort to an *artificial language* is perhaps more compelling for sociology than

for any other science' (1993: 21, original emphasis), suggesting that 'invented words' were 'secure against hijacking because their "linguistic nature" predisposes them to withstand hasty readings'. Whilst Bourdieu did use existing words such as *field, capital* and *class* in his writings, he also introduced, re-introduced and/or re-worked a number of lesser known words such as *habitus*, *allodoxia* and *hysteresis*.

Bourdieu's best known concepts are those of habitus, capital and field. These concepts are relational to each other. For example, a person's habitus will affect the forms of capital they possess and pursue (and vice versa) and the various forms of capital are only of value and use when they exist in relation to others – '*A capital does not exist and function except in a field*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101 original emphasis).

The habitus, according to Bourdieu, in an oft-quoted passage, consists of 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations' (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Acting as 'the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu, 1977: 72), the habitus is a way of being, a way of seeing and responding to the world. A key aspect of the concept is the embodied nature of the habitus – how people walk, the hand gestures they use, how they eat, how they greet others, the language that they use, the accent that language is spoken in. The habitus has been likened to a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1994: 9): the embodied ability to use past experience and knowledge to practically and physically adapt and respond to the present situation, in order to maximise ones' advantage or secure or strengthen ones position in the 'game'. Bourdieu argued that hysteresis occurred when an agents' habitus did not fit the field they were located in, giving them a sense of being 'out of touch', 'out of place', or not truly belonging to their surroundings (see Hardy, 2008).

Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital can be found in three fundamental guises: *economic capital, cultural capital* and *social capital*. Economic capital is at the heart of these forms of capital and Bourdieu highlights how economic capital (money & related financial resources) can be converted into the other forms of capital, and vice versa. For example, cultural capital, such as a good degree or similar educational qualification or background, can often be converted into a good, well-paid job, bringing increased economic capital. And economic capital can be used to 'purchase' cultural capital, through private schooling, extra-curricular activities and participation in the 'right' kind of leisure and cultural pursuits. Similarly,

economic capital can be converted into social capital – the resources obtained or held through membership of a social network – through membership of the 'right' clubs or bodies.[5]

In comparison to habitus and capital, the concept of field was developed later in Bourdieu's writing (Savage & Silva, 2013: 115), but came to 'assume an increasingly significant aspect of his work' (Thomson, 2008: 68). Bourdieu conceived of a field as a social space, 'a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97), and his view was that society consisted of a series of autonomous, but structurally homologous, fields. He argued that there were 'general laws of fields: fields as different as the field of politics, the field of philosophy or the field of religion have invariant laws of functioning' (Bourdieu, 1993: 72) and that 'as a space of potential and active forces, the field is also a field of struggles aimed at preserving or transforming the configuration of these forces' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101). Thus a field *is 'simultaneously a space of conflict and competition'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 17 original emphasis), one where actors with varying degrees of capital struggle and vie with one another for advantage and status, acting according to their strategic 'feel for the game'. Thus, the concepts of field and habitus both 'designate bundles of relations' for Bourdieu and Wacquant:

> A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16)

Bourdieu wrote about the bureaucratic field (Bourdieu et al, 1994) and the *field of power* (1996). Whilst the majority of Bourdieu's work was not focused explicitly on the state, his interest in issues of power and the reproduction of inequalities mean that much of his writing is applicable to examinations of the state. The linked concepts of *symbolic power, symbolic violence* and *symbolic capital* are, for example, particularly relevant to discussions of the state and Bourdieu extended Weber's definition of the state as being the site of the monopoly of legitimate violence to include the concept of symbolic, as well as physical, violence (Bourdieu, 2014: 4). Symbolic power is, in Bourdieu's words, 'a power to construct reality', (Bourdieu, 1979: 79) and 'a power of consecration or revelation, a power to conceal or reveal things which are already there' (Bourdieu, 1989: 138). It is the power to shape people's perceptions about the world, about 'the way things are'. Symbolic violence is the exercise of this power with the consent of those affected by it. It is a form of soft power which operates without being perceived as being violence – 'the gentle invisible form of violence, which is never

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[5] It should be noted that Bourdieu's concept of social capital is very different from the policy-friendly, apolitical version popularized by Robert Putnam in recent years (Putnam 2001).

recognized as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen' (Bourdieu, 1977: 192). In the struggle to impose a 'vision of divisions', agents draw on their symbolic capital, a form of 'social authority' which acts as a credit which they have acquired in previous struggles (Bourdieu 1989: 138). Whilst many people in positions of influence – politicians, media commentators, celebrities, campaigners etc. – can wield symbolic power, it is the state, in Bourdieu's eyes, that is in the strongest position in the struggle to impose a constructed reality.

Bourdieu (2014: 166) has drawn on the work of Ernst Cassirer to explore the quasi-magical powers of the state in constructing reality and maintaining order, often without recourse to explicit directives or even violence.

> The state … is this institution that has the extraordinary power of producing a socially ordered world without necessarily giving orders, without exerting a constant coercion – there isn't a policeman behind every car, as people often say. This kind of quasi-magical effect deserves explanation

He has highlighted that official discourse is powerful, possessing a particular strength, and capable of imposing an official point of view or 'a new construction of social reality' (Bourdieu, 1989: 18) by virtue of its special authority and legitimacy – what Bourdieu (1991: 223) called 'social magic'. Developing Austin's work on performative utterances and *How to do things with words* (Austin, 1962), and highlighting the symbolic power of language (Bourdieu, 1979), Bourdieu argues that 'in the social world, words make things, because they make the meaning and consensus on the existence and meaning of things, the common sense, the doxa accepted by all as self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1996a: 21). The concept of symbolic power can become, in the hands of politicians, the power to *make* groups, or classes, of people and to create what he termed a 'vision of divisions':

> the power to conserve or to transform current classifications in matters of gender, nation, region, age, and social status, and this through the words used to designate or to describe individuals, groups or institutions (Bourdieu, 1989: 23)

'Troubled families' represent one such group or (under)class. In a rare foray into discussions about 'family' Bourdieu (1996a: 24) highlights the role of the state in classifying and privileging different types of families and argues that 'one has to cease to regard the family as an immediate datum of social reality and see it rather as an instrument of construction of that reality'. Categories such as 'troubled families', 'workless families', 'lone-parent families' or 'hard-working families' are not natural. They are state classifications that have the power to shape reality. Bourdieu (1996a: 25) notes that social workers (or, indeed, family workers), as agents of the state, 'are invested with the capacity to work on reality, to make reality, [and]

help to give real existence' to the category of 'family' and its assorted offspring. Bourdieu discusses the classification of 'family' generally, but one is able to apply his analysis to a 'troubled families' lens, no more so than in his concluding sentence (1996a: 25):

> Thus the family is indeed a fiction, a social artefact, an illusion in the most ordinary sense of the word, but a "well-founded illusion", because, being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist.

Thus, the 'well-founded illusion' of 'troubled families' provides an example of a 'corporate body' (Bourdieu, 1989: 23), brought into existence and brought to life and 'guaranteed' by the state. 'Troubled families' were 'quantified and coded by the state' and given a 'state identity' (Bourdieu, 2014:10). The widespread acceptance of the existence of an identifiable and quantifiable group of 'troubled families' and the largely uncontested belief that the TFP is succeeding in 'turning around' the lives of these families is testament to the strength of the social magic exerted by the state. But the symbolic power of the state can also be used to conceal things, as we shall see. Noticeably absent from the announcements in Cameron's speech was the source of the original estimate of 120,000 families. The authorized, official account of the state's knowledge of 'troubled families' neglected to mention that the research on which the number of 'troubled families' was based was carried out for completely different purposes and reflected families struggling with multiple, primarily structural, disadvantages and not the long list of putative behavioural failings linked with 'troubled families' in the official narrative. Poverty, material deprivation, longstanding illness or disability and maternal health issues were not part of the official, state guaranteed, 'troubled families' identity (Levitas 2012; *The Guardian*, 2012). Along with any discussion of the impact of the coalition government programme of austerity and reforms to welfare services on marginalised families (see Beatty and Fothergill, 2013 and 2016), they simply vanished.

Since Bourdieu's death in 2002, his friend and long-time collaborator Loïc Wacquant has developed and extended many of his concepts and has deployed them in trenchant critiques of neoliberal policies and practice. For example, Wacquant wedded Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power with Erving Goffman's (1963) work on stigma to develop the concept of *territorial stigmatization* – the process by which places become tainted and 'publicly known and recognized as those urban hellholes in which violence, vice, and dereliction are the order of things' (Wacquant, 2007a: 67). He has also developed Bourdieu's concept of the bureaucratic field (Wacquant, 2009a & 2010) to underpin his analysis of the shift from welfare to workfare, and the project of neoliberal statecraft that he sees in the United States and other developed countries (Wacquant, 2009a). Less well-known, perhaps, is the work of Vincent

DuBois who has used Bourdieu's work on fields to inform his analysis of *public policy fields*, primarily amongst welfare recipients in France (DuBois, 2009 & 2010). To date, Bourdieu's work has not been extensively used in examining welfare or public policies in the UK (see Peillon, 1998; Hastings & Matthews, 2014; Matthews & Besemer, 2015; Crossley, 2016a & 2016b for exceptions) despite some academics highlighting the relevance of his work (Houston, 2002; Garrett, 2007b, 2007c & 2013). Wacquant's work, whilst it has been used extensively by geographers and urban sociologists, has equally been neglected by social work and social policy researchers although, again, the relevance of this work to these areas has been noted in recent times (Cummins, 2015; Garrett, 2015; Crossley, 2016a).

1.5   Structure of the thesis

This thesis attempts to provide, as far as possible, a fully Bourdieusian examination of the 'troubled families' field, thereby demonstrating the utility of such an approach to the study of public policy development and implementation. It is my contention that this approach has not been used in the study of public or social policy in the UK to date. Whilst a number of academics have highlighted the potential utility of Bourdieu and Wacquant's work to social work and social policy research (Peillon, 1998; Houston, 2002; Garrett, 2007b, 2007c, 2013, 2015; Cummins, 2015) few, if any, have used their body of work systematically in the carrying out of empirical research. The thesis represents a rigorous application of Bourdieu's approach to research, including the construction of the research object against pre-constructed notions, a three-stage approach to field analysis and a chapter on participant objectivation, examining the social conditions of the production of the thesis.

The second chapter provides a fuller introduction to Bourdieu's 'trove of conceptual tools' (Wacquant, 2005: 4) which will be used in the thesis, before the attention turns to a more detailed discussion of the use of *field theory* in an examination of the construction, emergence and maintenance of a 'troubled families' policy field. This examination also includes scrutiny of developments of Bourdieu's work on bureaucratic and political fields in the years since his death. The third chapter begins by setting out three methodological principles to a Bourdieusian research project, drawing primarily on work by Michael Grenfell. A section on the analytical process sets out how these principles were applied in this research study, before the second half of the chapter discusses the research process that was undertaken. Sections on ethical considerations and limitations of the study conclude this chapter.

Chapter 4 examines the long history of ideas similar to 'troubled families', beginning with the establishment of Poor Laws in the sixteenth century. The history of these ideas over the *longue durée* is only briefly discussed, acknowledging that there is already a substantial body of work covering this history. The second half of the chapter focuses on the more recent history of ideas about an 'underclass' in the UK, and examines the journey from concerns about 'transmitted deprivation' in the 1970s to the 'Broken Britain' discourse promulgated by Conservative politicians and their doxosophists – 'would be scholars of the obvious' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 629) – in the *Centre for Social Justice* think-tank in the early 2000s. The fifth chapter takes up the story from the point at which a coalition government was elected in the UK in May 2010 and the ways in which the 'troubled families' field was constructed. The riots in 2011 propelled the concept into the mainstream media and the chapter charts the response to the riots, including the establishment of the TFP in the months following them. The official criteria and requirements surrounding the TFP are then explicated, with a focus on the agents that are allowed entry to the 'troubled families' field*.*

Chapter 6 examines the habitus of family workers and their managers within the 'troubled families' field, and discusses their professional backgrounds and trajectory prior to their current work within the TFP. The chapter also discusses how these agents conceptualise their work in the field, and the extent to which these perspectives coalesce with or jar against the dominant doxa of 'persistent, assertive and challenging' family workers capable of 'turning around' families by 'gripping' families, their problems and the myriad services working with them. The following, seventh, chapter examines the relations between keyworkers and families, and between keyworkers and their fellow street-level bureaucrats in other teams, departments and organisations. Again, the focus is on the extent to which these relations affirm or trouble the dominant narrative that it is the trusting relationship forged between keyworker and 'troubled family' that is central to the families prospects improving and their lives being 'turned around'.

Chapter 8 examines the influence of the field of power, both within the 'troubled families' field and across other policy fields and the bureaucratic field more generally. The chapter begins by examining the importance of the involvement of key individuals such as David Cameron and Louise Casey before moving onto the forces exerted by doxic elements of the TFP such as the relentless focus on families and the Payment by Results mechanisms. Resistance from the street-level to these forces is also discussed, before the chapter turns to expound the influence of the TFP, which was never intended to be a 'boutique project', on other policy fields.

The ninth chapter sets out some concluding thoughts, which begin with a discussion of the symbolic power of the state in creating and sustaining concepts such as 'troubled families', 'family workers' and a Troubled Families Programme. Resistance to this power is then discussed, with a summary of the daily 'acts of resistance' (Bourdieu, 1998) and strategies that workers use to make sense of the programme that have been uncovered by the research. The second half of the chapter examines the symbolic work of the TFP that cannot be undone by subversive street-level agents. The focus also turns, once again, to bureaucratic and policy developments 'beyond the boundary' of the 'troubled families' field, and attempting to place the TFP in its wider context of austerity, 'welfare reform', and attempts to craft a neoliberal state in the UK.

The tenth and final chapter turns Bourdieusian tools of analysis that have been used on the research object, back onto the research project itself. This process of *participant objectivation* attempts to deconstruct the position in the field from which this particular 'point of view' has been expressed. The chapter begins with a brief explication of my personal background and trajectory as a street-level bureaucrat before the commencement of the PhD, with the attention then turning to forces that are exerted upon PhD students, and other junior or 'early career' researchers, in the academic field in the UK. The implications of carrying out 'live sociology' (Back and Puwar, 2012) and a 'scholarship with commitment' (Bourdieu, 2003) are also discussed in this chapter, along with potential future developments using Bourdieusian theory to study social policy fields.

A complete bibliography and the appendices conclude the thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

> … the stuff of social reality – of action no less than structure, and their intersection as history – lies in relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15).

2.1   Introduction

A number of possible theoretical entry points to researching the concept of 'troubled families' were discussed in the introductory chapter. It was proposed that Pierre Bourdieu's relational approach, his desire to work against pre-constructed ideas and his refusal to accept the social problems provided by the state, could provide a comprehensive framework which would enable the study of the concept of 'troubled families' as a public policy field. Using a truly Bourdieusian approach, and attempting to make full use of his 'conceptual arsenal', aligns with Bourdieu's intention that his work be used as a systematic whole without various concepts being 'stripped out' and used in isolation. Others (Garnham and Williams, 1980: 209) have argued along similar lines:

> [a] fragmentary and partial absorption of what is a rich and unified body of theory and related empirical work across a range of fields from the ethnography of Algeria to art, science, religion, language, political science and education to the epistemology and methodology of the social sciences in general can lead to a danger of seriously misreading the theory.

This chapter extends the discussion, initiated in the previous chapter, on Bourdieu's body of work and the way it has been developed in recent years by Loïc Wacquant and Vincent DuBois. The chapter begins with a summary of some recent discussions on the utility of a Bourdieusian conceptual framework to social policy and social topics. Some of Bourdieu's key concepts are examined before the focus turns to field theory. An introduction to field theory in general terms precedes a discussion of Bourdieu's work in relation to fields, in particular, his work on the field of power and the bureaucratic field, and how Wacquant and DuBois have subsequently developed and extended this work. A number of critiques and criticisms of Bourdieu's work are then examined. These critiques examine Bourdieu's work in a broad sense, but the concluding paragraphs concentrate on critiques of his approach to fields. The chapter ends with a summary of the discussion and introduces some key research questions.

2.2   Bourdieu and social policy and social work

Bourdieu's work has been extensively used in the UK and beyond by researchers examining education (e.g. Reay, 1995; Grenfell and James, 2004; Ingram, 2009; Reay et al, 2011), class (Savage, 2000; Reay, 2005; Savage, 2005; Atkinson et al, 2013), language (see, for example Myles, 2009; and a special edition of *Social Epistemology*, guest edited by Susen, 2013), gender (see Adkins and Skeggs, 2004) and culture (Fowler, 2000; Robbins, 2000; Bennett and Silva, 2006; Bennett et al, 2009). Researchers working in other fields such as housing (Robertson, 2013), organizational studies (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008), geography (Benson, 2014) and the charitable and voluntary sector (McGovern, 2014) have also drawn on Bourdieu's body of work.

Scholars in the fields of social work and social policy have, however, been slightly slower than those in other disciplines in making use of Bourdieu's writings (Garrett, 2013: 121). Hastings and Matthews (2014: 3), in examining the UK coalition government's reforms and cuts to local government, suggest that 'social policy scholarship has not tended to employ Bourdieu' in relation to public services other than education, and Garrett (2007c: 356) has noted that '[b]eyond France, and specifically in terms of social work, Bourdieu's theorizing and his critical engagement with key contemporary political issues have been neglected'. This neglect is despite Bourdieu engaging with issues relevant to social work at various stages throughout his career. This engagement is most noticeable in his more explicitly political writings in the decade or so before his death (see, for example, Bourdieu et al, 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999; Bourdieu et al, 1999; Bourdieu, 2001 and 2005).

Some authors have, however, explored the relevance of Bourdieu's for work for social policy and social work practice. Houston draws on it in an attempt to make progress towards a 'culturally sensitive social work' arguing that '[b]y focusing on the relationship between agency and structure in such a fecund and challenging way, Bourdieu's theory enables practitioners to gain an in-depth understanding of the nexus constituting the person in society' (Houston, 2002: 163). Emirbayer and Williams (2005: 715) articulate 'what a Bourdieu-inspired analysis of the field of homeless services' in the USA might look like. They suggest that this perspective provides 'an alternative understanding that captures more compellingly the objective principles of division actually operative within and effectual' across the homeless service field, recognizing the concept of field as a 'space of contestation in which heretofore little-recognized stakes all play a crucial role' (2005: 715). Peillon has deployed Bourdieu's work to theorise the practices of welfare institutions, and the forces and mechanisms they are subject

to, in what he calls 'the welfare field' (Peillon, 1998) and DuBois has used Bourdieu's work in empirical research in French welfare offices (DuBois 2009, 2010, 2014).

It is, perhaps, Garrett, however, who, in a series of publications (Garrett, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2013) has been the strongest advocate 'if not for a Bourdieusian social work, then for a social work informed by Bourdieu's theoretical insights and by his opposition to neoliberalism' (Garrett, 2007b: 238). Garrett articulates how Bourdieu's work 'contains key "messages" for the social professions in the early twenty-first century' (Garrett, 2007b: 226), demonstrating both the value to practitioners of Bourdieu's key concepts such as habitus (Garrett, 2013: 123-127) as well as highlighting some criticisms, difficulties and inconsistencies in his work. Particularly problematic, in Garrett's eyes, and in addition to some concerns expressed about Bourdieu's conceptualization of the state, are the 'unsatisfactory engagement with factors enmeshed in multiculturalism, "race" and ethnicity' (Garrett, 2007c: 363), and Bourdieu's sometime deterministic portrayal of dominated and marginalised populations, specifically the working classes (Garrett, 2007c: 366-370). These are among the critiques discussed towards the end of this chapter.

More recently, Garrett (2015) has also set out a case for social work to engage with the work of Wacquant, arguing that his form of critical sociology offered opportunities to respond to comments by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove that social workers training encouraged them to view clients as 'victims of social injustice whose fate is overwhelmingly decreed by the economic forces and inherent inequalities which scar our society' (in Paton, 2013). Garrett (2015: 5) highlights five 'preoccupations' of Wacquant which can aid social workers: critical thinking; opposition to neoliberalism; wariness about the role of the USA in promoting and exporting policy solutions to issues of disorder and deprivation; a defence of the 'welfare' state in the face of 'workfare' regimes; and the utility of his concepts of 'advanced marginality' and 'territorial stigmatisation'. Cummins (2015) has also highlighted the potential of Wacquant's research and theoretical advances for social work and namechecks the 'troubled families' agenda as a programme indicative of the neoliberal induced social policy shifts that Wacquant documents. Crossley (2016a: 274) has argued for an extension of Wacquant's analysis in examining 'the (re)emergence of 'the family' … as a site for neoliberal welfare interventions' at a time of widespread austerity measures and cuts to public services in the UK. Most of the above contributions highlight the usefulness of Bourdieu's and Wacquant's work for social work and social policy scholars. Few of them have, however, put their work to empirical use, which was always Bourdieu's intention – his theory was 'essentially a theory of research practice' (Grenfell, 2008: 219).

2.3   Bourdieu (in brief)

In the preceding chapter Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field were briefly introduced, as was some of his work on the symbolic power and social magic of the state. Even in an expanded discussion in this chapter, it is still not possible to provide a comprehensive examination of Bourdieu's concepts, how they were developed, how they have been applied and/or how they have been critiqued. Texts that elucidate Bourdieu's writings are, however, numerous (see Swartz, 1997; Lane, 2000; Jenkins, 2002; Grenfell, 2008 for accessible introductions, and Robbins, 2000 for a more comprehensive and complete examination of Bourdieu's work). This section provides a slightly fuller examination of the relations between habitus, field and capital, before Bourdieu's work on fields is expounded and placed in its wider theoretical context.

The habitus has been criticised as 'a concept made to do an extraordinary amount of theoretical work' by Bourdieu, and as possibly just 'another in the series of dialectical do-it-alls sprung on generations of unsuspecting sociology students by the ever-resourceful French' (Brubaker, 1985: 760). Joppke went further arguing that the habitus was 'a conceptual monster often applied in a blurred and metaphorical way' (Joppke, 1986: 61). Bourdieu and Wacquant deal with some of these criticisms in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992: 22-23). Separately, Bourdieu acknowledged these positions and argued that because the habitus did not follow or adhere to explicit laws or rules, it went '*hand in glove with vagueness and indeterminacy*', obeying 'a practical logic, that of vagueness, of the more-or-less, which defines one's ordinary relation to the world' (Bourdieu, 1994: 78, original emphasis).[6]

In a robust defence of the habitus that also acknowledges its limitations, Diane Reay argues that 'there is an indeterminacy about the concept that fits in well with the messiness of the real world' (Reay, 2004: 438). She proceeds to note that it is the 'conceptual gaps, the aspects of habitus that remain relatively unfilled … that simultaneously contain its utility and its pitfalls'. Highlighting that Bourdieu intended the habitus to be used in empirical research 'rather than [as] an idea to be debated in texts', she proposes that:

> Using habitus as a conceptual tool ensures that the research focus is always broader than the specific focus under study. While it is important to view individuals as actively engaged in creating their social worlds, Bourdieu's method emphasizes the way in which the 'structure of those worlds is already predefined by broader racial, gender and class relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 144). *Habitus, then, is a means of*

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[6] Bourdieu and Wacquant also quote Don Levine who wrote 'the toleration of ambiguity can be productive if it is taken not as a warrant for sloppy thinking but as an invitation to deal responsibly with issues of great complexity' (cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 23).

> *viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings* (Reay, 2004a: 439, emphasis added).

These broader societal relations (e.g. race, class, gender) that help to structure interactions between individual agents are *embodied* within the agents themselves. The embodied nature of the habitus – a way of *being* in the world - is linked with the concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986: 243) argues that:

> Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title nobility.[7]

Cultural capital, itself, could exist in three forms according to Bourdieu: in the *embodied state*, cultural capital shows itself in practices such as table manners, language and vocabulary, way of walking, leisure activities etc.; in the *objectified state*, it is perceptible through possessions and the ownership of cultural goods such as books, musical instruments, items of clothing or jewellery, cars etc.; and in its *institutionalized state, cultural capital* is demonstrated by educational qualifications, or school or university attended (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). Bourdieu highlighted the domestic transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 244) and argued that educational achievements reflected, in large part, the investment in cultural capital (often supported or provided by economic capital) by the family. Examples of this could be purchasing extra-curricular music lessons or private tuition for children, membership of certain sports clubs, attendance at certain cultural events or activities such as the theatre or music concerts, frequenting museums, and providing financial support during university studies.

The concept of political capital, in comparison to the other forms of capital, features relatively late and infrequently in Bourdieu's work (Swartz, 2013: 67). In two sections on *The Kinds of Political Capital* and *The Institutionalization of Political Capital* in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1991: 194-198), Bourdieu highlights that politicians can mobilize their power in either of two ways: personally or by delegation. Personal political capital is attached to the individual and is based on their 'good reputation'. Delegated political capital is the authority of 'the *official*, the product of a … transfer of a capital held by the institution and by it alone' (1979: 194 original emphasis). Bourdieu (1979: 195 original emphasis) goes on to note that 'the acquisition of a delegated capital obeys a very specific logic: *investiture*, the veritably

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[7] The omission of symbolic capital and political capital from this passage is noteworthy, but this absence also provides an example of the way in which Bourdieu's work constantly developed and evolved throughout his lifetime.

magical act of *institution* by which the party magically *consecrates*' the new holder of the capital.

The various forms *of capital ar*e only of value and use when they exist in relation to others – '*A capital does not exist and function except in a field*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101 original emphasis). Those agents with larger volumes of economic or cultural capital tend to occupy dominant positions in fields (often referred to as the field of power – see Figure 1).
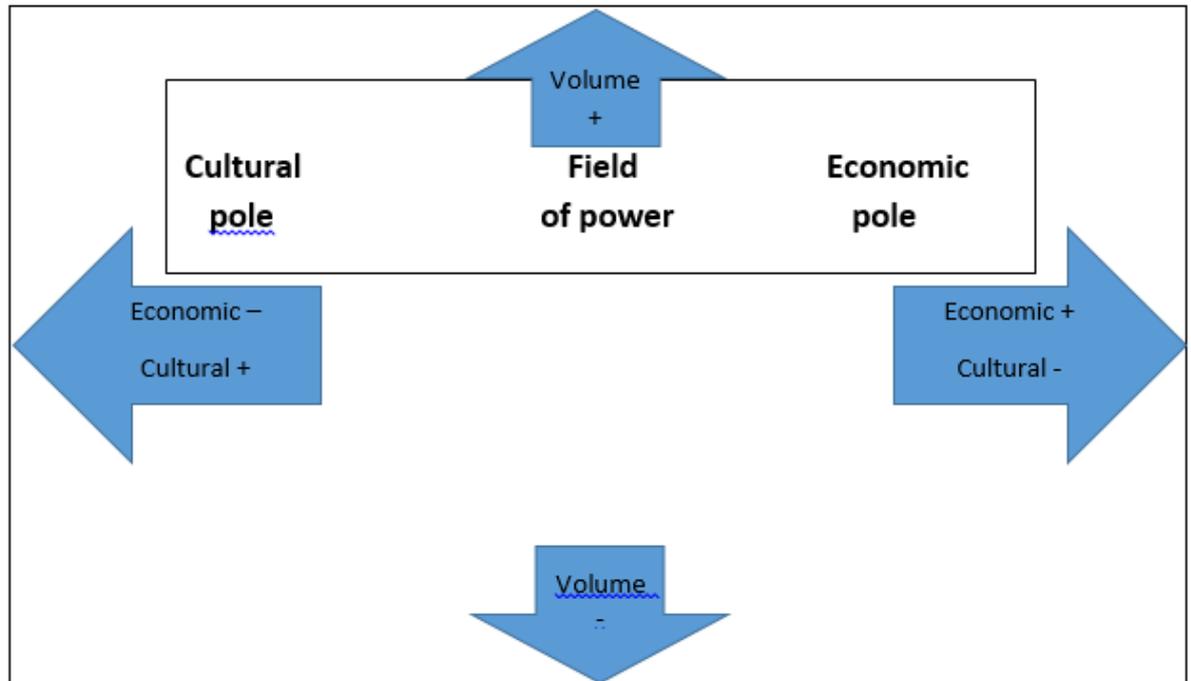
Figure 1. The distribution of capitals and the field of power
Source: Hilgers and Mangez (2015: 8)

The analogy of playing or taking part in a game has often been invoked in explaining the concept of field and it is one that Bourdieu agrees with, whilst acknowledging that the comparisons should be cautious and highlighting the obvious exceptions that fields are not created deliberately or artificially and that the rules or 'regularities' of fields are not explicit or officialised (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 98). Actors have a stake in the playing of the game and their participation in the game is interpreted as their belief in the value of the game (*illusio*), their agreement that the game is worth playing. Different agents occupying different positions within a field, based on the particular accumulation of capital that they possess, can be viewed as analogous with players in a game occupying different positions based on the skills they possess and/or the roles they are expected to fulfil, possibly on behalf of their team. Agents with a lot of experience may have a better 'feel for the game' and be more strategically

aware than new entrants into the field, or those who lack experience in a particular field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 98-100). Bourdieu argued that it was the interplay between habitus, capital and field that led to *practice*, or the actual *playing* of the game. In *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984: 101), he famously set out this interplay in the format of an equation:

$$[(habitus) (capital) + field] = practice$$

2.4   Field theory, Bourdieu, and the state

> … field theory is an excellent vehicle for making complex social phenomena intuitively accessible without relying on prejudices or "common sense" first person understandings (Martin, 2003: 36).

The development of field theory in the social sciences owes its origins to work in the physical sciences (Martin, 2003, 2011; Hilgers and Mangez, 2015; Martin and Gregg, 2015) and, in recent times, undoubtedly buoyed by its association with Bourdieu, field analysis has 'been trumpeted as a fundamental means of renewing social scientific analysis' (Savage and Silva, 2013: 111). The concept entered the social sciences through the work of the *Gestalt* theorist, Kurt Lewin (Savage and Silva, 2013: 111), and other German psychologists and philosophers (Martin and Gregg, 2015: 39). For Cassirer, for example, field theory helped to elaborate 'the shift from a substantialist mode of thought to relational thinking' (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015: 3) that characterized modern science. Wacquant, in an oft-quoted footnote in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97 *n48*) sums up how field approaches need to be understood in relation to previous realist constructions of social life:

> Just as the Newtonian theory of gravitation could only be structured against Cartesian realism which wanted to recognize no mode of action other than collision, direct contact, the notion of field presupposes a break with the realist representation which leads us to reduce the effect of the environment to the effect of direct action as actualized during an interaction.

Both Bourdieu and his collaborator Jean-Claude Passeron acknowledge the *Gestalt* heritage (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015: 3), and more than one commentator has noted that Bourdieu's field theory shares similarities with Lewin's (Swartz, 1997: 123; Martin & Gregg, 2015: 47). Martin (2003: 28) has extended this analysis, arguing that there are a number of constants across different field theorists such as: an understanding of what a field is; how field analysis should be conducted; and how relations between fields and individuals and their cognitions should be understood. He (Martin, 2003: 28) also notes the similarities in the way the word field itself is used by different theorists:

There is a tendency for field theorists to use the word 'field' in three overlapping or interrelated senses. In the first there is the purely topological sense emphasized by Lewin: the field is conceived as an analytic area of simplified dimensions in which we position persons or institutions. Second there is the sense of a field as an organization of forces. Third, there is the sense of the field as a field of contestation, a battlefield.

Thomson (2008: 68-74) highlights how each of these three senses can be found in Bourdieu's writings. Noting that, in French, there are two different words for field, she (2008: 68) highlights that Bourdieu uses *le champ* which is used to describe fields of contestation such as a battlefield and fields of knowledge, and not *le pre* which is closer to the English 'meadow', and which describes an area of relative peace and tranquillity. Thomson also uses the analogy of a football field (as did Bourdieu himself) to highlight the boundaried nature of social fields, and as a site where games are played, with players or participants in the game occupying different positions, performing different roles and implicitly agreeing to and sharing an understanding of the rules of the game. The science-fiction inspired concept of a 'force-field' is also deployed to highlight the boundary between what happens inside the field and what takes place outside, and how the activities taking place inside the force-field 'constitute little self-contained worlds' (Thomson, 2008: 70). This analogy can also be useful in highlighting the changing shapes of fields: in a sports field, the boundaries generally remain fixed, whereas in a social field, the boundaries are sites of contestation and fields can grow or shrink, becoming weaker or stronger, depending on their relations with sources of power. Finally, Thomson also employs the idea of a force field in physics to highlight the tensions and forces inherent within social fields.

Although it has been suggested that Bourdieu used 'the notion of field in a highly technical and specific sense' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 95) it is also a concept that, in some of his major works, is not always elaborated upon. Savage and Silva (2013: 115-116) note, for example, that, even in a chapter in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 2010) called *The dynamics of fields*, the concept of field is 'skated around' and 'lurks in the background as a largely invisible underpinning'. Bourdieu argues that his use of open concepts was a way of rejecting positivism and that concepts like field 'serve as a 'permanent reminder that concepts have no definition other than systemic ones, and are designed to *be put to work empirically in systematic fashion*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96 original emphasis). He rejected the comparison with a system, arguing that 'a field is a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104).

Whilst Bourdieu, then, did not ever attempt to make field a 'closed' concept, he did, at various times set out some *properties* of fields (Bourdieu, 1993: 72-77), and the *logic* of fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 94-115). From these, and other explications,[8] it is possible to identify six key properties of fields, as they were understood and used by Bourdieu:

1. There are *general laws of fields*. That is, different fields in different cultural or economic spheres share 'invariant laws of functioning' (Bourdieu, 1993: 72). It is therefore possible to apply and learn from observations in one field in an attempt to analyse and interpret the operations within a different field.
2. All fields are characterised by *struggles between agents* who possess different forms and volumes of capital. Some (usually dominant) agents will attempt to preserve the *status quo* or orthodoxy of the field whilst others (usually dominated agents or new entrants to the field) will attempt to challenge and subvert the structures of the field.
3. The functioning of any given field requires people prepared to 'play the game' and for these *players to invest stakes* in the playing of the game. To use the footballing analogy, a game of football cannot take place without the requisite number of players who understand the rules of the game and agree to abide by them, to a greater or lesser extent.
4. The structure of the field is 'a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle' (Bourdieu, 1993: 73). This structure, the *relations between agents* within the field, is one of the things that is at stake in the playing of the game.
5. All agents within a field share certain *fundamental interests*, namely, that the game itself is worth playing. Different strategies arise, struggles and individual contests occur but these antagonisms occur within the rules of the game. How best to play the game is an issue at stake, but the game itself is not.
6. A *field effect* can be said to be operating when there is an unconscious acceptance of the game, when there is tacit recognition of the value and the history of the work and when agents (mis)recognise the legitimacy of their role within the game. This is consistent with the concept of *habitus* which 'generates strategies which can be objectively consistent with the objective interests of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end' (Bourdieu, 1993: 76)

The above focus on properties and relations that can be observed *within* individual and distinct fields, however, risks undermining the relational nature of structures *between* and *across* fields. Whilst Bourdieu generally conceived of fields as being autonomous, that autonomy was relative (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015: 8). In a discussion examining the genesis of fields and the consequences 'when a domain of activity wins its (relative) autonomy from social, political and economic constraints', Hilgers and Mangez (2015: 6-8) highlight that increased autonomy from outside influences leads to changes within the field. They argue that the greater the level of autonomy, the more a field is produced and re-produced by (and produces) agents whose

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[8] Savage and Silva (2013: 113) draw on a 1976 lecture by Bourdieu to arrive at a similar list of six 'fundamentals of Bourdieu's field analysis'. Swartz (1997: 122-129) identifies four slightly different 'Structural Properties of Fields'.

habitus best fits the field, and the more a field 'produces an autonomous and specific language, representations and practices, and the more the perception of realities is subject to the logic specific to the field' (2015: 7)

No field can ever be fully autonomous from all other fields or, more specifically, from the field of power, as conceived by Bourdieu. Just as fields are characterised by internal struggles between agents, there also exists external struggles between individual fields and the field of power. Hilgers and Mangez (2015: 8) suggest that 'the "field of power" is thus a key concept for understanding the structure of specific fields'. Swartz (1997: 136, original emphasis) has called it the 'principal field' in Bourdieu's work on fields, arguing that he:

> puts this concept to two distinct but overlapping uses. On the one hand, it functions as a sort of "meta-field" that operates as an organizing principle of differentiation and struggle throughout *all* fields. This is the most important usage. On the other hand, the field of power can designate for Bourdieu the dominant social class.

Bourdieu (1996b: 264-265) clarified these two uses in *The State Nobility***:**

> The field of power is a field of forces structurally determined by the state of the relations of power among forms of power, or different forms of capital. It is also, and inseparably, a field of power struggles among the holders of different forms of power, a gaming space in which those agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital (economic or cultural capital in particular) to be able to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields confront each other using the strategies aimed at preserving or transforming these relations of power.

In discussing the shift in his thinking from a ruling or dominant class to the field of power, Bourdieu suggested it was to focus attention on structures of power rather than dominant groups or populations (Wacquant, 1993: 21) and how these structures managed to reproduce and reform themselves. Bourdieu (in Wacquant, 1993: 19) proposed that there was a *'structural homology'* between the field of power and the *'grandes ecoles'* of the French education system. He argued that the higher reaches of the education system in France did not just 'produce' individuals who would go on (or continue) to make up the dominant groups in society but that 'their main function is to reproduce a structure, that is, a system of differences and distances', which thereby legitimates individuals access to various positions of power across different fields, including the bureaucratic and political fields. The power that existed across different fields was then reproduced using symbolic violence, a soft form of power that is misrecognised and exerted over groups with their consent.

Extending Weber's famous definition of the state as the holder of 'the monopoly of legitimate violence', Bourdieu (2014: 4) argued that the state was the holder of 'the monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence'. He believed his definition supported Weber's in

that symbolic violence was a necessary precursor to the enactment of physical violence. Bourdieu suggested that official discourses often carry more weight than other discourses by nature of the legitimacy and authority that they carry with them. Representatives of the state, such as politicians and civil services possess the necessary authority to *state how things are*, and *what should be done.* Despite this power, Bourdieu (1989: 22) believed that 'in the struggle for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, the holders of bureaucratic authority never establish an absolute monopoly'. In other words, struggles and conflicts, which were often hidden, existed in every society over the classification of groups, even in the bureaucratic field and in the face of state power. Bourdieu (2014: 7) suggested that:

> the state is the name we give to the hidden, invisible principles – indicating a kind of *deus absconditus* – of the social order, and at the same time of both physical and symbolic domination, likewise of physical and symbolic violence

Bourdieu wrote about the bureaucratic field on a number of different occasions (Bourdieu et al, 1994; Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu et al, 1999; Bourdieu 2005, 2010). Throughout these writings, Bourdieu presents the struggles that take place within and across this field, between those involved with the delivery of the social functions of the state and those more concerned with the fiscal and economic matters of the state, the 'state nobility'. Bourdieu characterised this struggle as being between the *left hand* and *right hand* of the state (Bourdieu, 1998: 1-10; Bourdieu et al, 1999: 183-184). These tensions increased with the shift to neoliberalism during the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. The cuts to public spending, changes to the structures of systems of social security and the reification of the market that accompanied this shift led Bourdieu et al (1999: 183) to conclude that the right hand no longer cared what the left hand did:

> It is understandable that minor civil servants, and more specifically those charged with carrying out the so-called 'social' functions, that is, with compensating, without being given all the necessary means, for the most intolerable effects and deficiencies of the logic of the market – policemen and lower-level judges, social workers, educators and even, more and more, in recent years, primary and secondary-school teachers – should feel abandoned, if not disowned outright, in their efforts to deal with the material and moral suffering that is the only certain consequence of this economically legitimated Realpolitik. They experience the contradictions of a state whose right hand no longer knows, or worse, no longer wants what the left hand is doing, contradictions that take the form of increasingly painful 'double constraints'.

In *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al, 1999), Bourdieu and his co-authors discuss the 'abdication of the state' at length through discussions with low/mid-ranking 'street-level bureaucrats' to highlight some of the contradictions they experience in carrying out their work. Comparing two differing experiences highlighted during an interview with 'Pascale R.', a social

worker in the north of France, Bourdieu (in Bourdieu et al, 1999: 190) notes that in one project, due to lack of funding and other material resources, Pascale was left to work with 'the purely symbolic resources of conviction and persuasion' which could not address the material needs of the people she was working with. Pascale herself acknowledges the frustration her work brings when she says 'I know that what all the people in the neighbourhood are after is a job … And that's the one thing they can't be given.' Bourdieu et al (1999: 4) argued that those who worked with marginalised populations who experienced 'the "real" suffering of material poverty (*la grande misère*)' themselves experienced 'all kinds of ordinary suffering (*la petit misère*)' and a '*positional suffering*' as a result of their proximity to and dealings with marginalised groups.

Bourdieu also highlights how these tensions are embodied within social workers. They have to do battle on two fronts, according to Bourdieu; firstly with the apathy and resignation of their clients, long resigned to their 'fate' (see the following section for a critique of this view), and; secondly, with the rigidity of the bureaucratic institutions they are housed within and the need to make people fit into 'categories' whilst all the time taking orders 'from above'. He argues (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 190) that the social functions of the state in such conditions can only be pursued and fulfilled 'thanks to the initiative, the inventiveness, if not the charisma of those functionaries who are the least imprisoned in their function'.

This analysis, thus far, is not dissimilar to Lipsky's (1980) original work on 'street-level bureaucrats' which also highlighted the discretion that frontline practitioners had, and often had to use in order to make public policies meet the needs of their client groups.[9] Lipsky (1980: 19) also considers the issues of resource pressures and discusses different 'double constraints' to those that Bourdieu refers to, arguing that 'street-level bureaucrats have some claims to professional status [in their dealings with clients and service users], but they also have a bureaucratic status that requires compliance with superiors' directives'. Similarly, DuBois (2010) spoke of the two bodies of reception agents in his study of French welfare offices. He argued that workers were both 'merely the state's incarnation', in charge of applying the rules, and yet they were also 'concrete individuals' – an 'obvious fact [that] is all the more difficult to forget as the visit to reception sees a physical encounter between two persons' (2010:73).

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[9] For a Marxist, class-based analysis of such dilemmas, see *In and Against the State* (London to Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980) which highlights the way in which state categories and systems force workers to attempt to work with and support people as individual 'cases' rather than 'classes' and to use the 'proper channels' at all times.

Subsequent research on street-level bureaucrats, in the UK at least, has tended to focus on the application of discretion during encounters between workers and clients (see, for example, Wright 2002; Evans and Harris, 2004; Barnes and Prior 2009; McNeill et al 2009; Ellis 2011 and 2013; Fletcher 2011; Alden, 2015), rather than on the constraints that shape and structure their opportunities to exercise any discretion. For Bourdieu, however, a primary focus on such interactions provides an incomplete picture given his view that 'what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). Meetings involving social workers and their clients, such as office meetings or 'home visits', should never be viewed simply as an interaction or an encounter between two individuals. They are, in Bourdieu's eyes, concrete and material events that are structured by (and which themselves structure) the agents' positions in the (bureaucratic) field.

A narrow focus on 'street-level' interactions thus risks missing the 'bigger picture'; the hidden forces, structures and power imbalances that shape such interactions. Bourdieu argues that such a 'bottom-up' approach to the complexities and negotiations inherent in implementing public policy reflects a 'somewhat optimistic representation [which] has the merit of taking into account the complexity of interactions concealed beneath the apparent monotony of bureaucratic routine' before highlighting that 'we cannot forget that each of these interactions is the site of power games and important stakes, and hence a site of violence and suffering' (Bourdieu 2005: 140).

When, in a chapter in *The Social Structures of the Economy* on *The Field Of Local Powers* (Bourdieu, 2005: 126-147), Bourdieu returns to this theme, he extends his analysis and highlights some of the more hidden, structuring features of, and forces exerted upon, the discretion used by street-level bureaucrats. Bending the rules, or not following a rule 'to the letter of the law', for these dominated agents, is a way of acquiring 'bureaucratic charisma' (2005: 132), of setting themselves apart and distinct from the stereotypical rule-following bureaucrats, who are themselves symbolic of a rigid, inflexible bureaucratic apparatus. But these subversive elements, the turning of a blind eye to an indiscretion, the extra support or assistance provided, are, according to Bourdieu (2005: 132), examples of 'a legitimated transgression, an official or semi-official dispensation, in the sense of an exception to the rule made within the rules, and a legally sanctioned privilege'. As Bourdieu noted in *The Weight of the World* (and discussed above), these transgressions are necessary if bureaucratic functions are to be exercised, but they are 'partial revolutions' that 'do not call into question the very foundations of the game, its fundamental axioms, the bedrock of ultimate beliefs on which the

whole game is based' (Bourdieu, 1993: 74). Fundamental questions regarding the existing systems of support to disadvantaged and marginalised populations are thus not raised, remaining undiscussed and at the level of doxa. What is at stake, therefore, in this bureaucratic game, as it is played by low-ranking bureaucrats (and the clients they work with), is the style of the game, how it can best be played given the field conditions and the resources (or capitals) available to them. The bureaucratic games themselves, such as, one could argue, the TFP, are not generally at stake.

In charting more recent neoliberal shifts, Wacquant has both drawn on and drawn out Bourdieu's work on the bureaucratic field. Wacquant's work has, in recent years, focused on how the 'neoliberal government of social insecurity' (2009a) in the USA and beyond has stigmatised and punished poor populations. Wacquant charts a shift from the broadly welfare missions of the post-war Keynesian state in the USA to a workfare state that is required to respond to the increase in social turbulence resulting from neoliberal economic and social policies. In *Prisons of Poverty*, Wacquant (2009b: 3) sets out the USAs ability to export punitive social policies, highlighting London's role as a 'Trojan horse and acclimation chamber for neoliberal penality with a view to its propagation across the European continent', arguing that the European 'fascination with the United States stems essentially from the performance of its economy'. European governments' political and economic fascination with the USA model and its associated policies, and a desire to learn more about its potential application to domestic arrangements is, Wacquant (2009b: 55) notes,

> much less diligent when it comes to registering the devastating social consequences of the veritable *social dumping* that these policies imply: namely, mass poverty and job precariousness, the generalization of social insecurity in the midst of regained prosperity, and the dizzying increase of inequalities fostering segregation, crime, and the dereliction of public institutions.

In a more expansive examination of this 'punitive upsurge' (Wacquant 2009a), Wacquant sets out a detailed 'sketch of the neoliberal state' (2009a: 287-314), drawing heavily on Bourdieu's concept of the bureaucratic field. He (2009a: 289) suggests that in 'the contemporary period, the bureaucratic field is traversed between two internecine struggles'. These are, firstly, between the 'higher state nobility' determined to enact neoliberal reforms to public services and the 'lower state nobility' of 'executants' who are concerned with discharging the traditional functions of government. Secondly, Wacquant reiterates the tensions between the left and right hands of the state – the left that 'offers protection and succour' to disadvantaged communities and the right that 'is charged with enforcing the new economic discipline via budget cuts, fiscal incentives, and economic deregulation' (2009a: 289). Wacquant develops

the hands of the state idea further by labelling the left hand as 'the feminine side of Leviathan' and the right hand as the 'masculine' side', and by including criminal justice services such as the police, the courts and prisons alongside the economic and fiscal departments making up the right hand of the state.

Wacquant (2009a: 289) proposes that the concept of the bureaucratic field helps us 'to map the ongoing shift from the social to the penal treatment of urban marginality', what he calls the '*remasculinzation of the state*' (2009a: 290). He argues that 'the new priority given to duties over rights, sanction over support, the stern rhetoric of the "obligations of citizenship"' are 'policy planks [that] pronounce and promote the transition from the kindly "nanny state" of the Fordist-Keynesian era to the strict "daddy state" of neoliberalism' (2009a: 290). Wacquant, then argues that the *left hand* of the state under neoliberal governance is being transformed and is no longer (if it indeed it ever was) concerned primarily with the prevention or relief of social suffering. Instead, this state 'support' is increasingly being replaced by ever more robust 'interventions' in the lives of marginalised populations aimed at controlling their behaviour and ensuring they become respectable neoliberal citizens (Gillies, 2011; Hancock and Mooney, 2013; Gillies, 2014). The rolling back of 'traditional' welfare services such as, in the UK, provision of public housing, financial support, local state institutions and facilities, and services for children and young people is, Wacquant notes, occurring at the same time that workfare programmes encouraging the take-up of poor, low-paid and insecure employment *of any kind*, and welfare 'reforms' that make public funds less accessible and more cumbersome, are being rolled out. This, Wacquant (2009a: 304) argues is an exercise in state-crafting that 'partakes of the correlative revamping of the perimeter, missions, and capacities of public authority on the economic, social welfare and penal fronts'.

At the heart of Wacquant's analysis is a belief that neoliberalism needs to be understood sociologically and not just economically. Arguing that dominant representations of neoliberalism adhere to the doxic notion that it is predicated on a small state, Wacquant (2009a: 308) argues instead that 'while it embraces laissez-faire at the top … it is anything but laissez-faire at the bottom':

> Indeed, when it comes to handling the social turbulence generated by deregulation and to impressing the discipline of precarious labour, the new Leviathan reveals itself to be fiercely interventionist, bossy, and pricey. The soft touch of libertarian proclivities favouring the upper class gives way to the hard edge of authoritarian oversight, as it endeavours to direct, nay dictate, the behaviour of the lower class.

This recent interventionist approach (linked back, in part, to Wilson and Kelling's (1982) 'Broken Windows' article) represents a shift from the effects on public services resulting from

neoliberal developments as Bourdieu et al (1999) saw it. In *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu et al (1999: 184) argued that social and public services were being replaced by 'direct aid to individuals' which 'reduces solidarity to a simple financial transaction'. Wacquant's perspective highlights a neoliberal turn which has seen the left hand of the state become increasingly influenced by and under the authority of the right hand.

In a separate, but linked, development, DuBois (2015) has set out how the development and implementation of public policies can be analysed using field theory. He argues that concepts such as that of a 'policy community' – politicians, civil servants, 'experts' and relevant interest groups – tend to downplay or marginalise issues of power and unequal relations between the various factions involved in the space of production of a policy'. Similarly, in critiquing the idea of 'concrete action systems' he argues that 'the strategic and interactionist vision prevalent in the concept of the action system leads to neglect of the symbolic dimension of the exercise of power and *therefore of the conduct of policies*' (2015: 202, emphasis added).

Instead, DuBois proposes viewing a policy as 'a sociological object' (2015: 204), suggesting that such a practice

> consists in regarding public policy as the product of the practices and representations of the agents involved in it, these practices and representations being determined by the social characteristics, interests and objective positions of the agents, and therefore the structure of the relationships among them. By making it possible to objectivate the structure of the positions, of the corresponding position-takings and the relationships, analysis in terms of field enables one to bring to light the social foundations of a policy and so put forward a sociological analysis.

In setting out how such an analysis can be put to work , DuBois (2015: 206) reformulates 'five classic questions in field sociology' and applies them to the field of public policy production.

- What stakes define the field?
- How does one define and delimit the space of a field?
- What are the systems of relations within the field?
- What are the principles of opposition that structure the field?
- What are the products of these competitions?

In keeping with a Bourdieusian interest in the relations and tensions between fields, DuBois also stresses that it is necessary to understand 'bilateral relations' and the 'concordance of fields' across policy domains. He goes on to argue that, whilst his focus at that time is on the production of public policy, he does not want to imply that this is where the utility of field theory ends for the analysis of public policy. On the contrary, he argues that 'this analysis also makes it possible to account for the concrete production of policies "on the ground", involving agents at all levels' (DuBois, 2015: 210). DuBois' therefore argues for a fusion of Bourdieu's

field theory with Lipsky's (1980) concept of 'street-level bureaucracy' to provide a *thick sociological analysis* of policy development and implementation – or of *state thought* and *state acts*. DuBois has operationalized this analysis in research examining the practices of welfare officers in French employment bureaux (DuBois, 2009, 2010, 2014). Mirroring Bourdieu's belief that struggles within fields take place within the rules of the game, and implicitly highlighting the forces that dominated agents are subject to, DuBois (2014: 39) argues that

> The categories of perception and judgment defined at the top of the state apparatus and inscribed in formal rules and those that street-level bureaucrats actually use in their daily practice may differ, but that they are closely intertwined. Individual stereotypes and discretionary interpretations of norms do not necessarily contradict the rationales of official policy and may also serve its goals.

2.5   Critiques of Bourdieu

Thus far, then, some relevant sections of Bourdieu's body of work, and developments arising following his death in 2002, have been laid out, hopefully highlighting the benefits that a Bourdieusian approach can bring to a field analysis of the concept of 'troubled families' and the TFP. A number of authors have, however, also identified what they perceive as problems, inconsistencies or shortcomings with Bourdieu's work. Many of these academics have critiqued Bourdieu's work whilst simultaneously acknowledging the value of much of his output. Indeed, many of Bourdieu's strongest critics have also worked with his concepts in order to develop and extend them. Garrett (2007c: 360) identifies some 'obstacles to understanding' Bourdieu, including his writing style and the size and scale of his output. Others have argued that his work is overly deterministic and leaves little room for transformational processes to occur. His problematic engagement with issues of class and race have attracted criticism and a lack of focus on gender has also been scrutinized. These issues, along with some of Bourdieu's responses to them and defences from other researchers, are expounded, in turn, below, before some issues with regards to Bourdieu & Wacquant's work on the bureaucratic field are raised.

Bourdieu's approach to writing augments his approach to pre-constructed ideas, and he intends to make the reader work hard in order to understand or examine the subject under discussion (Bourdieu, 1990b: 52). He states that:

> In any case, what is certain is that I am not out to make my writing clear and simple and that I consider the strategy of abandoning the rigour of technical vocabulary in favour of an easy and readable style dangerous. This is first and foremost because false clarity is part and parcel of the dominant discourse, the discourse of those who

think everything goes without saying because everything is fine as it is. Conservative language always falls back on the authority of common sense'.

A second reason, given by Bourdieu for not writing in a simplified 'straightforward' way was to ensure that his writing could not be used to 'manipulate this world in dangerous ways' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 52), in the way that slogans and phrases – such as 'troubled families' – often are. Avoiding pre-constructed words and phrases in the same way that he avoided pre-constructed visions of the social world, Bourdieu instead argues that sociological writing often involves a 'struggle against words' and that '[w]hat very often happens is that in order to transmit knowledge, you have to use the very words that it was necessary to destroy in order to conquer and construct this knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 54). Bourdieu argues against sociologists who 'may be tempted to join in the game, to have the last word in those verbal disputes by saying how things are in reality' proposing instead that the task of the sociologist 'lies in describing the logic of struggles over words' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 55). The complexity of Bourdieu's writing, then, is inseparable from his wider epistemological approach and whilst it can present some difficulties, they can and have been overcome by countless researchers who have successfully engaged with his work.

The sheer volume of Bourdieu's output also makes using his work more difficult, a fact compounded by the way in which he revisited material from his earlier works in order to develop his conceptual framework. It is estimated that, by the time of his death, Bourdieu had written 37 books and over 400 articles (Wacquant, 2007: 263) and much more of his work has been published and/or translated into English in the years since his death (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005 and 2014). Much of his work, however, remains unavailable to English audiences, particularly the work published in the journal *Acts de la recherché en science sociales*, established by Bourdieu and his colleagues in 1975 in an attempt to 'establish autonomous scientific practice outside institutionalised social hierarchies' (Robbins, 2000: 16). Delays in the translation of his work and the extraction of it from the French academic field, the context in which it was written, have also led, in some instances, to what Garnham and Williams (1980: 209) would argue was 'a fragmentary and partial absorption' of Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu's work has been criticised by 'numerous commentators of various persuasions … for being overly static and "closed"' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 79), with little room provided in his theory for significant social change and transformation. These criticisms are viewed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 80 original emphasis) as being 'strikingly superficial' and he argues that:

I do not see how relations of domination, whether material or symbolic, could possibly operate without implying, activating resistance. *The dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a force*, inasmuch as belonging to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it (if only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy its dominant positions).

A lot of the criticism of determinism within Bourdieu's work is aimed at his depictions of the working classes and other marginalised groups in society. Jenkins (2002: 28) argued that his early work in Algeria 'bears more than a passing resemblance to Oscar Lewis' much-criticised notion of the 'culture of poverty', leaving his subjects 'incapable of imagining the possibility of social change', whilst Skeggs (2004b: 87) has suggested that his portrayal of the working classes in *The Weight of the World* portrayed them as 'racist, pathetic, useless and abused'. Lawler (2005: 434), meanwhile, in discussing the same work, has argued that'[i]t is clear that "misery" is what Bourdieu and his team went looking for, and misery is what they found'. The passage below (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 129 emphasis added) is an example of the representation of suffering that Skeggs and Lawler, amongst others, have raised concerns about:

'Bringing together on a single site a population homogeneous in its dispossession strengthens that dispossession, notably with respect to culture and cultural practices: *the pressures exerted at the level of class or school or in public life by the most disadvantaged or those furthest from a 'normal' existence pull everything down in a general levelling. They leave no escape other than flight toward other sites* (which lack of resources usually renders impossible)'.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 80), however, argue that such criticisms are not valid and that '[t]he rigid determinisms [Bourdieu] highlights are for him observable facts that he has to report, no matter how much he may dislike them'. His belief that 'the dominated are dominated in their brains too', an effect of doxa which means they are prepared to accept more than others (particularly researchers and 'left-wing intellectuals') expect them to, something that 'everyone who has seen it from close up knows perfectly well' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 41) suggests, however, that, at times, at least, Bourdieu is prone to lapse into pessimism, if not outright determinism.

Bourdieu's work has also attracted criticism for its perceived problematic engagement with issues of race and gender. Jenkins suggested that the issue of ethnicity was rarely of interest or concern to Bourdieu after his early fieldwork in Algeria (Jenkins, 2002: 92), although this view ignores the extensive coverage of issues relevant to immigration and race covered in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al, 1999) and several later, shorter interventions around state racism and xenophobia (see, for example, Bourdieu 1998 and Bourdieu, 2008: 284-288). Drawing on work by Werbner (2000), Garrett argues that the alleged gap that exists in Bourdieu's work around issues of race and ethnicity is 'explicable (but still unconvincing) if

located within a French milieu' (2007c: 365) where (and when) there were issues surrounding the acknowledgement of different ethnic groups, and 'race' was not viewed as a valid or useful concept or category. Garrett similarly argues that Bourdieu and Wacquant's criticism of the 'new planetary vulgate' which includes words such as '"underclass" and "exclusion", "new economy" and "zero tolerance", "communitarianism" and "multiculturalism" … and so on' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001: 2) fails to acknowledge the complexity of multiculturalism, highlighting that 'debates centred on it are *not* simply a result of US dominance of international intellectual fields' (Garrett, 2007c: 365 original emphasis). A number of scholars have, however, drawn on Bourdieu's work to examine the issue of race and ethnicity, particularly in education (see, for example, Crozier and Davies, 2008 and 2009; Crozier, 2009; Reay et al, 2011; Vincent et al, 2012; Flynn, 2013).

In a similar vein, the suggestion that 'Bourdieu's social theory had relatively little to say about women or gender' (Adkins, 2004: 3) has not prevented a number of feminist scholars engaging with, critiquing and developing his work (see, for example, Moi, 1991; Skeggs, 1997; Butler, 1999; Moi, 1999; Fowler, 2003). In the Introduction to a *Sociological Review* monograph exploring 'Feminism after Bourdieu' Adkins (2004: 3) writes that:

> while the disavowal of feminist theory on the part of Bourdieu is to be lamented … an understanding of the social which is not conceived with reference to a gender difference defined in the registers of social theorizing should not necessarily be read as limiting the possibilities of a dynamic engagement between contemporary feminist and social theory.

Drawing on the work of Moi, who argued that gender should be understood as part of every field, as opposed to a field in its own right, the writers in the monograph develop Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital and re-work them, using feminist perspectives. Reay (2004b) 'genders' the concept of capital in a discussion which introduces the idea of 'emotional capital', Lovell (2004) explores intersections between class and gender in the social field and, in a discussion of *habitus*, power and resistance, Lawler (2004) examines the ways in which class and gender are embodied.

Garrett (2015) has also highlighted the problematic nature of the way in Wacquant adds feminine and masculine credentials to the states left and right hands. At times, both Bourdieu and Wacquant offer up a somewhat rose-tinted view of welfare provision before the neoliberal turn: a view which does not, in keeping with the criticisms highlighted above, amplify longstanding and problematic issues of class, gender or race in the delivery of public services. Similarly, the prior discussion of the 'double constraints' imposed upon street-level workers and their 'two bodies', along with Bourdieu's and Balazs' own concept of the 'double-

binds' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 206-212) they face, highlights the internal struggles that occur within agents tasked with implementing state policy. Garrett (2007c: 371 original emphasis) has taken up a similar point and argues that workers situated in the supposed left hand of the state are often tasked with carrying out duties that they may not feel comfortable with:

> The left hand cannot be viewed as unambiguously benign because this would mask the regulatory intent and practice of some of these interventions … In short, the 'left hand of the state' can also be a *punishing* hand.

The idea of the different 'hands' of the state only feature fleetingly in Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu et al 1999: 183-184, Bourdieu 2001: 1-10) and Garrett argues that it is better to see the state as a totality, rather than as two opposing sites. This perspective is closer to, if not the same as, Bourdieu's wider body of work on fields and the state and is also consistent with Wacquant's (2010: 200) interpretation that Bourdieu viewed the state 'not as a monolithic and coordinated ensemble, but as a splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods'. The simplistic split between a right hand and a left hand of the state is, in fact, an example of an artificial binary or 'dualist opposition' (Bourdieu 1989; 23) that often organize perception of the world and that Bourdieu counselled against accepting unquestioningly. Wacquant's addition of genders to each hand merely helps to repeat and re-produce dominant discourses: men are 'business-minded' and rational, women are caring and emotional. The right hand – left hand metaphor thus serves as a neat folk concept, uncomfortably approximate to 'spontaneous sociology', and not as a robust analytical tool. The intention within the thesis, then, is to work with the concept of policy fields, examining internecine struggles involving different agents within and across these fields, rather than more seemingly straightforward conflicts between so-called right and left hands of the state.

There are also a number of critiques of Bourdieu's application of the concept of field more generally. Savage and Silva (2013: 116-119) highlight four sometimes contradictory and conflicting ways that Bourdieu puts fields to use. One of these points highlights Bourdieu's preoccupation with struggles rather than instances of co-operation and integration that also take place within fields, a point also made by Martin (2003: 33). Savage and Silva (2013: 118) ultimately argue that drawing out this tension offers a route forward for research drawing on field theory. Swartz (1997: 215) and Martin (2003: 25-26) note Bourdieu's lack of engagement with institutions in his work on fields, although Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992: 232) address this in arguing, not entirely convincingly, that it is not possible to know anything about an institution 'since it is nothing outside its relations to the whole'.[10] Thomson (2008: 78-81),

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[10] In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu (2000a) proposed viewing 'the firm' as a field and in *Practical Reason* (1998b), he argued that the 'family' could be seen as a field.

meanwhile, highlights some problems around the borders and boundaries of specific fields, the proliferation of fields in Bourdieu's writing and his mode of field analysis, and in the relations between the various fields. Adding to the potential for confusion, extensions of Bourdieu's work on fields have considered concepts such as sub-fields (Murdock, 2005: 18), proto-fields (Metvetz, 2015: 230) and the 'spaces between fields' (Eyal, 2013).

2.6   Conclusion

Bourdieu's 'trove of conceptual tools' (Wacquant, 2005: 4) and, more specifically, his concept of the bureaucratic field provides a robust framework for a more comprehensive sociological analysis of the day-to-day conduct of public policies, than the comparatively narrow focus on, for example, 'street-level bureaucracy' or policy implementation. This argument is augmented by DuBois' (2015: 204) suggestion of mobilizing the concept of field to 'ground a truly sociological analysis of public policy' (see also Thomson, 2005 for a discussion on 'Bringing Bourdieu to policy sociology') and Wacquant's (2010: 212) belief that accounts of neoliberal state-craft need to 'move from an economic to a fully sociological understanding of the phenomenon'.

The overarching objective of the research then, in Bourdieusian terms, is to conduct an analysis of the 'troubled families' field. In keeping with Bourdieu's argument that a field is more than a system (or, in this case, a policy programme) the study will also examine the symbolic and political work that the concept of 'troubled families' performs in and across other fields. Given the problematic engagement with the issues of gender by both Bourdieu and Wacquant, it is worth emphasising that I will attempt to maintain a focus on gender relations and the gendered construction of 'family' during the analysis here.

Objective

To conduct a Bourdieusian analysis of the 'troubled families' field, using a 'street-level lens'.

Aims

1)   Examine the symbolic power and social magic of the state in constructing and operationalizing 'troubled families' as a social problem

2)   Examine the historical and political context surrounding the emergence and construction of the 'troubled families' field

3)   Conduct a three-level analysis of the 'troubled families' field including:

   a)   The habitus of workers within the field

b) The structure of relations between workers in the field
c) The relationships between the 'troubled families' field, other policy fields and the field of power

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

Bourdieu's extensive array of theoretical concepts and tools were intended to be put to use by researchers and it has been argued that his theory of practice is 'essentially a "theory of research practice"' (Grenfell, 2008: 219). This methodology chapter draws primarily on two different sections of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology,* along with work by Grenfell (2008: 219-227) who attempts to highlight some methodological principles of Bourdieusian research. A framework for operationalizing Bourdieu is presented and summarised, demonstrating its utility in examining the 'troubled families' field. Given a focus of the study on the symbolic power of the state in constructing a group of 'troubled families' (largely through speeches and government publications, policy documents and the actions of state agents) and the ways in which official discourses exert forces within the 'troubled families' field, methodological decisions focused more on which type of qualitative approach should be used, rather than whether to use a qualitative or quantitative approach. The analytical approach that was used to operationalize a Bourdieusian field analysis is discussed and presented. The specific research process that was undertaken is then laid out, providing summaries of how the existing literature was reviewed, including the analysis of government texts and discourses. A more detailed explication of the fieldwork sites is provided, setting out how access to both local authorities and individual participants was negotiated. A discussion of ethical issues relating to the project follows this section and the chapter concludes with a summary of some of the limitations of the study.

3.2 Operationalizing Bourdieu

Bourdieu argued that researchers must 'learn how to translate highly abstract problems into thoroughly practical scientific operations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 221) and believed that the division between theory and method should be rejected (1992: 225). In *The Craft of Sociology*, Bourdieu argues that it is 'futile to hope to discover a science of the way to do science' (Bourdieu et al, 1991: 6) suggesting that 'the insistent calls for methodological perfection are likely to lead to a *displacement* of epistemological vigilance' (1991: 9). Instead he proposes that the way forward is to 'subject scientific practice to a reflection' (1991: 8) which can help to confront the errors and the false starts that occur within research practice. In this way, the craft of sociology that Bourdieu argues for is a form of research habitus - a feel

for the game, an appreciation of the rules of engagement in the field of social scientific research (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 223)

In a section in *An Invitation* called *The Logic of Fields* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 94-114), Bourdieu sets out three 'necessary and connected moments' (1992: 104) in response to a question about how one carries out a study of a field and what the necessary steps of analysis are. In the final chapter in *An Invitation*, on *The Practice of Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu highlights the importance of the *construction of the research object* and of *participant objectivation*. Grenfell (2008: 219) has drawn these elements together to set out, as he sees it, 'the principal stages (or principles) for a Bourdieusian approach to the analysis of social phenomena':

1. The construction of the research object
2. A three-level approach to studying the field of the object of the research
3. Participant *objectivation*

Each of these stages are discussed in more detail below, drawing on both Bourdieu's original work and Grenfell's interpretation of them. The ways in which they have been operationalized in studying the '*troubled families' field* are also presented.

1. *The construction of the research object*

   The ordinary objects of research are realities which are pointed out to the researcher by the fact that they "stand out", in a sense, by "creating problems" – as, for instance, in the case of "teenage welfare mothers in Chicago's black ghetto". Most of the time, researchers take as objects of research the problems of social order and domestication posed by more or less arbitrarily defined populations, produced through the successive partitioning of an initial category that is itself pre-constructed: the 'elderly', the 'young', 'immigrants', 'semi-professions', or the 'poverty population', and so on.

   The first and most pressing scientific priority, in all such cases, would be to take as one's object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object. That is where the point of genuine rupture is situated. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 229)

Bourdieu argued against what he often referred to as the practice of 'spontaneous sociology' (Bourdieu et al, 1991: 20) that saw sociologists accepting the problems presented to them by research foundations, government departments, media outlets, and private sector or philanthropic organisations. This 'half-scholarly science *borrows its problems, its concepts, and its instruments of knowledge from the social world'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 236 original emphasis) and fails to acknowledge that the object of the research is itself socially constructed. Applying this logic to 'troubled families', we are able to see that it is the families themselves, an arbitrarily defined population, who have been pointed out to the researcher, and who are allegedly creating problems.

In order to avoid falling prey to spontaneous sociology, Bourdieu believed that the 'most pressing scientific priority' was to construct the research object against common-sense notions, 'representations shared by all' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 235) and socially constructed 'problems'. This, Bourdieu believed, was not an easy task that could be carried out prior to the research commencing as 'a sort of inaugural theoretical act' (1992: 228). Instead, it was a process that had to be 'accomplished little by little, through a whole series of small rectifications and amendments' (1992: 235). He again deployed the concept of habitus by arguing that this process was 'inspired by what is called *le metier*, the "know-how", that is, by the set of practical principles that orients choices at once minute and decisive' (1992: 227-228).

The construction of the research object, in this study, has developed over the course of the PhD. The original proposal for ESRC funding (attached as Appendix 1) stated that the focus would be on the 'recontextualisation and operationalisation' of the TFP. The initial research plan was to interview workers and families, with a focus on the street-level implementation of the programme, understanding how workers and families negotiated, resisted and/or subverted the national policy rhetoric and aims. Through the gradual process described by Bourdieu, the focus has shifted somewhat from the tangible object of 'family work' – the actions and interactions between workers and families – to the wider, and better hidden, forces and pressures that are exerted on workers and local authorities responsible for delivering the programme. Early meetings with local authority staff and discussions with others interested in the 'troubled families' discourse highlighted the importance of some of the hidden practices of agents involved in different spaces, which would remain marginalised by a focus on the 'street-level'.

In order to examine and attempt to reveal these forces and hidden practices, the research object was constructed as *the troubled families' field*. Brodkin (2011: i200) has highlighted how adopting a 'street-level lens' can help to 'make visible and understandable informal organizational practices that otherwise can escape analytic scrutiny and even recognition'. This research study, then, primarily adopted a 'street-level lens' to 'study up' (Nader, 1972) the *'troubled families' field*. This approach was complemented and augmented by examining attempts from those occupying more dominant positions in this field to shape and structure the field and direct the actions and interactions of dominated (to a greater or lesser degree) agents. Both of these elements were used in order to examine the *emergence, construction* and *boundaries* of the troubled families' field, discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104-105) argues that 'analysis in terms of field involves three necessary and internally connected moments':

> First, one must analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power … Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which the field is the site. And, third, one must analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which finds in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized.

Little further detail is provided following this initial articulation but, this is in keeping with Bourdieu's desire not to be constrained by 'methodological monotheism' (1992: 226) and his belief that sociological research was a 'craft' rather than a 'method' to be followed, step-by-step. Grenfell (2008: 222-225) expands upon Bourdieu's articulation and demonstrates how 'these three levels represent the various strata of interaction between habitus and field'. In doing so, he highlights that the three stages are not sequential or linear and 'there is a question about whether the researcher begins with level one, two or level three' (2008: 223-224). Data collection can, according to Grenfell, begin at the individual level, building a picture of the field from the ground upwards, or the structure of the field can be mapped first, examining how this topography affects individual habitus later on. Grenfell argues that it is not just the three stages that are required: he also suggests that it is *the connections between the three levels* that need to be analysed to ensure that the research approach fits with Bourdieu's *modus operandi*. This inter-connected approach enables us to understand the impact that official discourses, emanating from the field of power, have on the structured practices or habitus of agents elsewhere in the field. Similarly, it allows us to begin to uncover the relations that structure the field and the different struggles (and moments of co-operation) that take place between agents within the field.

An example of the relations between the three different levels of analysis can be found in the excerpt below, taken from an interview with Maggie, a family worker in one of the study's fieldwork sites:

> *Erm, so previously, Southborough's a really brilliant place to live and work because we're really, really, as, erm, a community of practitioners, the police, housing, we all used to meet monthly as a community and have, what we called, a Community Forum. This is before Southborough Families. So we, schools used to come along, erm, youth workers. So we would all meet monthly and we had quite a good network going. So we were very, it was easy to pick up a phone and speak to someone because you'd seen them face to face at a meeting once a month.*

So when the Troubled Families Programme came along, it wasn't a step up really. It wasn't much different to the way we were already working. They turned our Community Forum into the local Troubled Families Practitioners meeting. So then it became that and another man came in, who'd been, you know, piloted it. And then he was the Southborough Families Lead Practitioner and he coordinated us.

But, so we would meet once a month. But it became much more focused on actually discussing family's names. Erm, (sigh), what I struggled with in the beginning of the Troubled Families, was that a lot of families went on the list, the list, without knowing they were on it. So they met two of the four criteria or three of the four criteria, and then they were put on the Troubled Families list. And we would meet, certain professionals would meet, and we would discuss these families without their knowledge.

So ethically, I had a bit of a struggle with that really. And when I was first taken on, I was asked, the initial part of my job, there was at least sort of forty or fifty families on the list. And I was asked to pick out certain families that hadn't had any engagement from practitioners, and go out and talk to them about it. And say, hi, you're on a list, we can support you. But these families didn't know they were on a list, so it's quite an interesting time really, when it first started.

Maggie articulates how existing *relations* between practitioners changed as a result of new 'rules' for the game and new entrants to the *field*, and how practice changed and became 'much more focused' as a result of the criteria and performance targets associated with the TFP and decided by agents in the *field of power*. Maggie's *habitus* meant that she 'struggled' with the practice of 'picking out' and discussing families without their consent and placing them on a list of 'troubled families' without their knowledge.

It is, then these three stages and the links between them (and not necessarily the specific sequence they are carried out in) that form the conceptual framework for a Bourdieusian field analysis. Grenfell operationalised this framework himself in examining the field of Initial Teacher Education (Grenfell, 1996: see also Grenfell and James, 1998; Grenfell, 2007; Grenfell and Hardy, 2007 for further applications and discussion) and inverted the sequence in his reporting of the results. Figure 2, below, provides a simplified diagram of this cyclical, rather than step-by-step, approach.

The intention below is to highlight the methods used in gathering and analysing data for each of the three stages of the field analysis outlined above. The order of the stages presented here follow Grenfell's approach, i.e. habitus as the first stage, the structure of relations between agents as the second stage, and position of the field in relation to the field of power as the third stage. The rationale for this is a desire, is to 'twist the stick in the other direction' (Bourdieu 1993:269) and shift the doxic focus within the 'troubled families' discourse from the individuals involved in the programme to the field forces and relations with other agents that

Figure 2: Three stage approach to an analysis of the 'troubled families' field
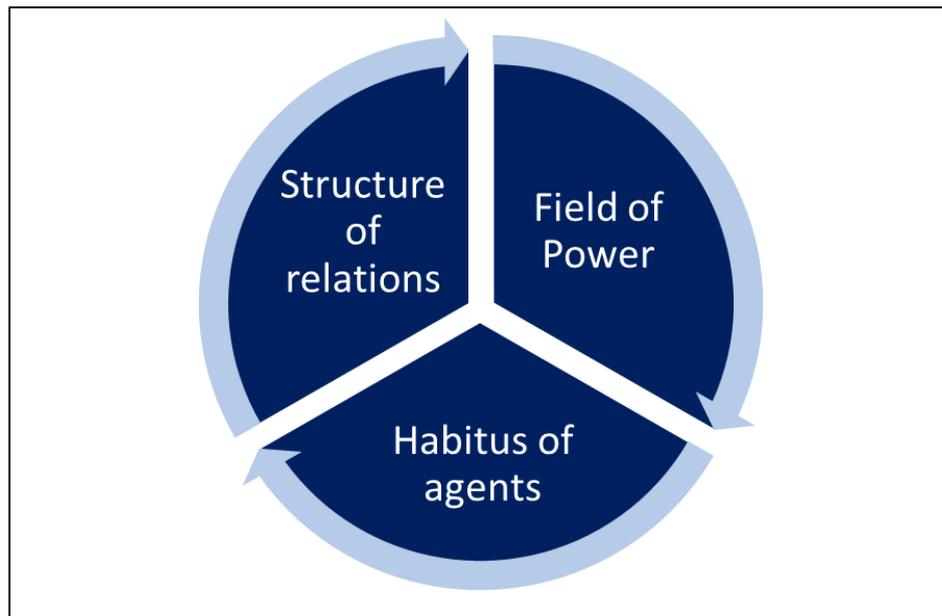
structure their participation in the TFP and to the relationship between the 'troubled families' field and other political and bureaucratic fields. This order is maintained in the reporting of these three stages in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, although I attempt to show the relations between agents and structures throughout the analysis, and the presentation of the analysis across the three distinct chapters. The intention is to 'retain the intrinsic connectivity of social reality and [Bourdieu's] sociological reasoning while disentangling both enough' (Wacquant, 2002: 182) to ensure that the reader is able to perceive and comprehend the topography of the 'troubled families' field and the agents and forces operative within it.

At the first level, Bourdieu argued that it was necessary to analyse the habitus of individual agents, their durable and transposable dispositions, and how their position within the field is embodied and internalized. This requires attention to individual's background, trajectory and positioning within the field. Grenfell (2008: 223) argues that 'Habitus then directs and positions individuals in the field in terms of the capital configuration they possess and how this resonates, or not, with the ruling principles of logic of the field'.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with thirty-nine local authority and voluntary sector employees, across three different local authority areas, involved in the day-to-day delivery of the TFP. This approach to data collection with front-line 'welfare' workers in the UK has been used extensively in recent times (see for example, Jones, 2001; Barnes and Prior, 2009; McNeill et al, 2009; Parr and Nixon, 2009; Ellis, 2011; Fletcher, 2011; Ellis, 2013) and also by Bourdieu and colleagues in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al, 1999). These interviews were designed to focus on the habitus of, and relations between, agents involved

with the programme and how they mediated and/or operationalized the dominant discourses surrounding 'troubled families'. Questions were framed to help:

1. explore the workers personal and professional background prior to being recruited to their current role
2. discuss their perception of their day-to-day role in relation to the programme
3. who they worked with (horizontally and vertically, inside and outside their organization), who they did not work with, and what those relationships were like
4. explicate the particular 'approach' of the local authority to implementing the TFP within their area
5. explore their perceptions of the families they were working with or who were involved with the programme
6. discuss how they saw their future, if they had one, within the TFP and what the future of the TFP more widely might look like.

The analysis from this first level is reported in Chapter 6.

In the second level, the focus shifts to the relations between agents operating within the field. This involves considering the levels and types of capital each agent possesses, their positions in the field and their relation to other agents with different forms and volumes of capital in other field spaces. It is at this level that struggles between agents, both dominant and dominated, competing for authority within the field will be analysed. Data collected from interviews was again used to analyse the relations between agents occupying different spaces in the 'troubled families' field. Research participants discussed who they worked with and how they worked with them. This included vertical relations with supervisors, managers and 'troubled families', as well as horizontal relations with colleagues within their team or department and with other departments or organisations. The analysis of the relations between different agents is discussed in Chapter 7.

In the third stage, then, it is necessary to analyse the relationship between the field in question and the field of power. Bourdieu notes that this means paying attention to the 'particular role of the political field and especially of the bureaucratic field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 239) highlighting how it is often governments and administrations that create, sustain and structure fields, in some way or another, through political, legal or financial instruments. This is, of course, especially true of the 'troubled families' field. There are, however, other agents and institutions in the field of power, such as media companies, and voluntary and private sector organisations that often act as 'mediating institutions and fields' (Grenfell, 2008: 222).

In analysing the relationship between the 'troubled families' field and the field of power, then, the analysis examines how the structural requirements of the TFP exerts forces upon agents within the 'troubled families' field. Wider government approaches and media discourses on

other marginalised populations and how the 'troubled families' approach could be extended to other 'at-risk' or 'risky' groups – *field effects* felt outside the 'troubled families' field - are also considered. The TFP was launched with Cameron arguing that it was necessary 'to change completely the way government interacts with them; the way the state intervenes in their lives' (Cameron, 2011c). This indicated that the role and shape of the state – from the perspectives of disadvantaged families and those who worked with them – would change as a result of the creation of the 'troubled families' field. The analysis of the relationship between the 'troubled families' field, the field of power, and other fields is presented in Chapter 8.

3. Participant Objectivation

The third and final Bourdieusian methodological principle that Grenfell calls attention to is *participant objectivation*. For Bourdieu, this mean turning the tools of analysis onto the analyst themselves, the researcher. He believed that presenting research should be the opposite of an exhibition or a show, where the primary aim was impressing others or proving oneself competent. Instead, Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 219 original emphasis) argued that the presentation of research was 'a discourse in which you *expose yourself*, you take risks'. Seeking to put distance between his concept of participant objectivation and the reflexive approach employed by anthropologists working in different culture and foreign territories, Bourdieu (2003: 282) argued that

> Science cannot be reduced to the recording and analysis of the 'pre-notions' (in Durkheim's sense) that social agents engage in the construction of social reality; it must also encompass the social conditions of the production of these pre-constructions and of the social agents who produce them.

He goes on to propose that it is not the researcher themselves that needs to be objectivised, but the social world that made them and their position in their particular academic field. In discussing how this approach relates to the anthropological field, Bourdieu (2003: 283) highlights the 'traditions and peculiarities, its habits of thought … its shared beliefs and commonplaces, its rituals, values, and consecrations' as examples of the forces operating on the field. Such issues apply to all academic fields and to all researchers located within them, even (and perhaps especially) PhD students. The final chapter of this thesis, then, consists of the *objectivation* of my own social world (and that of other PhD candidates in the UK) which has structured the positions I have taken, both before commencing the PhD and whilst I was undertaking it.

3.3   Analytic approach

The analytic approach to material also followed a three-stage approach. Although this was not a deliberate decision designed to mirror the three-stage approach to Bourdieusian research, there are, as one might hope, strong similarities between the approach outlined here and Bourdieu's desire to affirm the primacy of relations. These three stages, and the connectivity between them are set out in detail below. Firstly, analysis of existing texts such as government policy documents, and interviews, along with academic critiques of historical antecedents of the 'underclass' thesis, was undertaken to understand how the 'troubled families' field was structured and how the concept of 'troubled families' differed from previous iterations of the 'underclass'. Secondly, interviews with research participants were analysed to understand how they explained their entry into the field, the positions they adopted or were given, the struggles they were engaged in, their relations with other agents in the field etc. Thirdly, the relations between the two previous stages was analysed – the extent to which the field and the rules of the game affected the daily work of agents, or the extent to which agents' actions troubled or subverted the doxa, or if and how they 'broke the rules' of the game.

Government texts – such as policy documents, speeches, announcements, interviews – were examined and analysed to understand the structure of the 'troubled families' field and how it related to other bureaucratic fields. Policy documents such as *Listening to Troubled Families* (Casey, 2012), *Working with Troubled Families* (DCLG, 2012a) and the *Financial Framework* (DCLG, 2012c) for the first phase of the TFP were analysed to understand how the representation of 'troubled families' influenced the way that the government believed they should be worked with, and how local authorities should be resourced and rewarded for work with such families. Strong, official discourses about 'chaotic' and 'dysfunctional' families, that needed to be 'gripped' by 'persistent, assertive and challenging' family workers, in order to 'turn them around' were conceptualised as forces, emanating from the field of power, that served to structure the field and the actions of participants within it. Other examples of such forces include the official criteria of what constitutes a 'troubled family', the 'timetable' set by Cameron (2011b, 2011c), the expansion of the programme, and thus the restructuring of the field, to include 400,000 more 'troubled families', and the promotion of the 'success' of the first phase (DCLG, 2015). Policy developments in other fields were also examined to understand how, if at all, the 'troubled families' field was structurally homologous with other policy fields, and if and how the TFP contributed to wider state-crafting.

Texts, primarily historical records and academic critiques of previous constructions of 'the underclass' were also examined to understand how the concept of 'troubled families' differed

from its antecedents, and in which ways it remained similar. Dominant discourses within previous iterations were compared and contrasted with dominant themes emerging from the discourses surrounding 'troubled families'. Issues of gender, class, characteristics of families, and those involved in propagating the ideas were central here.

The interviews with research participants were analysed to understand, in Bourdieusian terms, their habitus, their position in the field, their relations with other agents in the field, and the field forces that were exerted upon them. All interviews, with the exception of the first two, were transcribed by a professional transcriber shortly after the semi-structured interview had taken place. The original intention was to transcribe all interviews myself, but this was very time-consuming and, therefore, time constraints and a pragmatic approach led to the decision to send the remainder of the interviews to a professional transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement regarding the transcriptions. This decision undoubtedly saved a lot of time, but it also introduced the potential of a 'distance' developing between myself and some of the primary research material. In order to limit this distance, steps were taken to ensure I remained as close as possible to the data. For example, the transcriptions were read upon receipt, with initial thoughts jotted down and notes made on interesting themes or observations of the participant. These notes built on contemporaneous notes taken either during interviews with participants, or immediately afterwards. Systematic coding and analysis took place after all of the transcripts had been received and after all field work was complete.

Coding activity initially focused on the three-level approach to studying the field – i.e. transcripts were examined to understand the habitus, the structure of relations, and the field of power. The codes were thus 'theory-driven', drawing on 'the language of the researcher's field, filled with the special meanings and jargon' (Boyatzis, 1998: 33), and were in keeping with Grenfell's (2008: 219) assertion that Bourdieu's theoretical work was 'essentially a "theory of research practice"'. Coding was undertaken manually, despite an initial desire to use analytical software to complete this part of the research process. In another example of 'small rectifications and amendments' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 235) to the research process, this was again a pragmatic decision, taken partly because of coding taking place at numerous locations (at home on two different computers and in two different university libraries) and inconsistent access to the same version of the appropriate software, and because manual coding intuitively felt better and more appropriate. Each of the codes within each transcript was then examined again to amplify and draw out sub-themes, again with a focus on Bourdieusian theory and concepts. Thus, and as reported in more detail in Chapter 6, when examining the habitus of agents, sub-themes of 'amor fati', 'a feel for the game', and

'troubled trajectories' emerged. In analysing the relations between participants and other agents in the field (discussed in Chapter 7), the importance of social capital, the relations between family workers and 'troubled families', other workers, and other agencies were explored, and the concept of the 'two bodies' of state agents (DuBois, 2010: 74), and the 'double constraints' (Lipsky, 1980: 19) they faced emerged from the transcripts.

The third and final stage of analysis involved linking the two previous stages – the merging of structure and agency – to examine the effects of forces from the field of power on the practice of agents in the field, and their ability to resist such forces and exercise discretion in the daily conduct of the TFP. These issues are explored in more detail throughout the 'findings' chapters of this thesis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) but, in brief, themes that emerged included: attempts to subvert the 'muscular authoritarianism' (Featherstone et al, 2014: 2) of the TFP; the partial re-insertion of poverty and structural disadvantage into 'troubled families' discussions; the rejection of the rhetoric of 'turning around' 'troubled families' lives; and resistance to the bureaucratic demands of the programme, which requires large amounts of data to be collected on 'troubled families'.

Once the analysis was largely complete, a draft structure of three 'findings' chapters was set out. The intention, as mentioned earlier, was to 'retain the intrinsic connectivity of social reality' (Wacquant, 2002: 182) whilst also highlighting the three individual levels of field analysis. Issues of connectivity and consistency between the three levels, such as the conversion of capitals, the effects of doxa, and the practice in the field (which all involve discussions of habitus, relations and the field of power) were examined to see where they might best 'fit' in the discussions, with the intention of avoiding duplication and confusion.

It should be noted here, that whilst the process above may appear relatively straightforward and pragmatic, this is an example of the presentation of the research process in its '*finished* state' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 219). It does not provide a 'complete recording of all the mishaps and misfirings' or the 'false starts, the wavering, the impasses' (1992: 220) that occurred during the study. It was, for example, at the outset intended to use a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to analysing the texts and transcripts discussed above. Although CDA approaches and methodologies (see Wodak and Meyer, 2009 for an introduction) were very useful in shaping my thinking about the approach to carrying out the research and potential analytic frameworks for the study, they did not, in the end, contribute to the 'formal' conduct of the research. In one respect then, this interest, and numerous others that aren't included here, represent 'false starts' or 'dead ends', but in another respect, and one which I feel is more robust and closer to reality, they all contributed to the

construction of the research object, the conduct of the research, and the analytical approach outlined above.

3.4   Research process

Finding and Reviewing the Literature

Just as there is a long history to ideas similar to 'troubled families', there is also a long history of social scientists and other interested parties writing about them. There is also a shorter history to the TFP which can be traced back to New Labour concerns about 'problem families' in the 2000s. A combination of methods were used to ensure a robust review of the literature supported the thesis. I was already aware, prior to the commencement of the PhD, of a number of sources relating to the long history of the 'underclass' thesis and Welshman's book *Underclass* (2013) is perhaps the definitive book on this topic. Database searches (such as Web of Science, Social Science Abstracts, and the Durham University 'Discover' database) were used to find more recent relevant journal articles (such as those on the UK 'underclass' debates of the 1990s, Family Intervention Projects in the 2000s and on 'troubled families' themselves') and government websites were searched to find copies of policy documents, speeches, and evaluations of projects. Social media also helped with many people identifying and sharing relevant articles on Twitter. 'Snowballing' from all of these sources, drawing on the bibliographies of relevant and useful articles, also produced important literature.

As well as reviewing the literature on 'troubled families', their antecedents and state responses (both policy and practice) to such concepts, the voluminous work of Pierre Bourdieu was also reviewed. Some challenges in using Bourdieu's work were discussed in the previous chapter. A new challenge occurs due to Bourdieu's position as one of the most influential sociologists of recent times (Thatcher et al, 2016). This means that there are vast numbers of publications that draw on his work, not all of which engage fully with his theory of practice. Reay (2004a: 432) has argued against the use of Bourdieu as 'intellectual hairspray' and another researcher has spoken of the 'bullshit ways' that Bourdieu is used, asking if he has become 'too fashionable' and arguing that 'we are seeing a commodification of Bourdieu perhaps due to the marketisation of academia' (McKenzie, 2015b).

Hoping to avoid these charges, and after attempting to (re)familiarise myself with Bourdieu's major works, I partially followed the *How to Read Bourdieu* Appendix in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 261-264) which offers a strategy for readers wanting to familiarise themselves with his work. In an attempt to focus the reading

more, I concentrated on Bourdieu's work on the state (for example, Bourdieu, 1996, 2005, 2014; Bourdieu et al, 1994; Bourdieu et al, 1999), on language (Bourdieu 1991), symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991) and some of his more political interventions (Bourdieu, 1998, 2001, 2008). Wacquant's work on the management of marginalised populations (Wacquant 2008, 2009a, 2009b) was also reviewed, as were commentaries on Bourdieu's: use of field (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015); his relevance to democratic politics (Wacquant, 2005); and the potential to view him as a political sociologist (Swartz, 2013). Although there is no 'traditional' literature review chapter in this thesis, the *Theoretical Framework* chapter (Chapter 2) and the *Troubled Families: the 'long and undistinguished pedigree'* chapter (Chapter 4) summarise and critique much of the literature discussed above.

Analysis of government texts and discourses

Government documents and texts relating to the Troubled Families Programme were important sources of doxa that were analysed using the approach articulated above. These texts were usually official DCLG publications, speeches by government ministers (primarily David Cameron and Eric Pickles) that covered 'troubled families' or related topics, and 'interventions' by Louise Casey, the senior civil servant leading the Troubled Families Unit in DCLG: Casey gave numerous interviews with national newspapers and spoke frequently at conferences.

Freedom of Information requests

A small number of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests were made to DCLG, asking for information that wasn't currently in the public domain. In most cases, this was to validate or expand upon information I had been given by practitioners during the course of the PhD, sometimes from fieldwork interviews and sometimes from discussions with people not directly involved in my research.

Fieldwork

  a) *Fieldwork Sites*

Fieldwork was carried out in three local authorities in England. In preserving the anonymity of the local authorities involved, it is not possible or desirable to provide detailed information about them here. Highlighting the numbers of 'troubled families' identified by central government for each area, their 'performance' on the TFP, or the specific region (e.g. London, North West, Yorkshire and Humber etc.) the authorities were located in could potentially be used to identify them. It is, however, both necessary and desirable to highlight some of the similarities and differences between the authorities. The differences between the research

sites help to strengthen the argument that the approaches to local implementation of the TFP cannot be dismissed as being part of a small sub-group of 'similar' local authorities.

Two of the authorities studied were in the North of England, and one was in the South. One authority was predominantly urban, one was a mixture of urban and semi-rural and one was primarily rural. One authority was Conservative controlled, whilst two were Labour controlled authorities. All three authorities were re-structuring their children's services to greater or lesser extents during the period of time the research was carried out. The population in all three sites was predominantly white, although, in each area there were neighbourhoods that were ethnically diverse. Two of the authorities were in the 50% most deprived local authority areas and the third was in the 50% least deprived, as calculated by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2015. In summary, then the three sites provided a diversity of geography (both within and between the sites), demography, and political control.

For the remainder of the thesis, pseudonyms are used for the local authority areas participating in the research. These are:

- Northton
- Westingham
- Southborough

As discussed in the Ethics section later in this chapter, all three local authorities re-named their local TFP work and used a more neutral, less stigmatizing term. This was in keeping with almost all other local authorities and names such as, for example, *Thriving Families, Families First* and *Stronger Families* were used across the country. For ease, and to preserve the anonymity of the three participating authorities, their local 'troubled families' work is referred to by simply adding the suffix 'Families' to the pseudonym – e.g. *Northton Families*.

Three research sites were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, there was a desire to examine, in the absence of any statutory guidance, a diversity of approaches to the implementation of the TFP and to understand if and how local political, geographic and demographic contexts influenced local delivery. An ethnographic approach to the study was rejected as it was felt that findings from an ethnographic study, focusing on one local authority area in depth, could, if they were critical, be dismissed as 'weak' or 'limited' given the diversity of approaches operating across the country. In field terms, then, I was keen to understand how forces and the structure of the field operated across the field, as much as possible, rather than in one particular location.

Secondly, given the pressures on local authority staff (both generally at a time of widespread job losses across local government and specifically in relation to the high-profile nature of the TFP) when the research was taking place, it was felt that institutional and individual practitioner support for the project may be stronger if the commitment required to participate in the research was less substantial. The forces operating within the 'troubled families' field and other bureaucratic fields therefore had an effect on the type of research that was carried out.

Ethical considerations influenced the third and fourth reasons for choosing multiple research sites. Staying too long in one area and becoming more closely 'associated' with it increased the risk of identifying the authority, both during the data collection stage and in the reporting of the research.[11] Fourthly, and finally, given that a critical approach to the political construction of 'troubled families' was adopted from the outset, spending a long time in one area and potentially developing bonds with research participants might have influenced the analysis, interpretation and reporting of the research. There are, of course, benefits to strong bonds developing between researcher and research participant, but in this instance, given the critical approach of the research, and the other reasons highlighted, the decision was taken to carry out research in three different sites, rather than one.

The research does not however, claim to be comparative in any formal or systematic sense. Similarities, differences and connections are highlighted, where appropriate both across and within different sites but the intention with the fieldwork was to examine the daily life and conduct of the programme rather than to systematically compare approaches across different local authority areas.

b) Access to research sites

Access to the research sites was negotiated in a number of different ways. As part of the development of a PhD proposal seeking funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), two authorities in the North of England were approached to ascertain if they would be willing to participate in and support the research project. I had contacts with certain key figures in these local authorities as a result of existing personal and professional connections. A third local authority was secured during the course of the research project and following a written approach from the Lead Supervisor, Professor Roger Smith, which outlined the research, its objectives and what was required from participating local authorities. A

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[11] Officials within DCLG are aware of my research and I have been given the impression by more than one individual involved with the programme that they are not entirely supportive of my work.

briefing note for local authorities was developed to provide a summary of the research project. A version of this is attached as Appendix 2

Following agreement from local authorities, a lead person or persons in each authority was identified who I would liaise with in order to carry out the research. In two of the local authorities, the identified point of contact at the start of the research project was no longer in place when the fieldwork started as a result of re-structuring and organisational change within local authorities. This, again, highlights how forces operating in and on the 'troubled families' field affected, to varying degrees, the research project that was being conducted within the field.

Once institutional consent was confirmed following the commencement of the research project in October 2013, a number of meetings took place with key contacts in Northton and Westingham. In Southborough, the third local authority, preparatory meetings were not possible due to the long distance between my location and the fieldwork site and also due to the later date at which the authority became involved in the research (May 2015). Instead, e-mail and telephone conversations took place between myself and the lead person to identify appropriate research participants and arrange suitable weeks to carry out interviews.

Fieldwork was originally planned to commence in September/October 2014, following a 9 month PhD progress review process and following institutional ethical approval, which could not be granted before the 9-month review. Following discussions with Northton, however, it was agreed that it would be more suitable for them if the research took place in the early months of 2015. This was partly because there was pressure on them in late 2014 relating to the end of the first phase of the TFP and preparation for the second phase, a further example of field forces at work. The timescale for carrying out research in Westingham was also slightly delayed due to similar pressures. The interviews in Southborough took place over two weeks, with a third week (the first week that was planned) cancelled due to its proximity to the outcome of restructuring and job losses being announced. A brief summary of the research timetable for the fieldwork is below:

- **Northton** – interviews primarily carried out from January – March 2015 (with one interview taking place in July 2015
- **Westingham** – interviews carried out from May – September 2015 (with one interview carried out in October 2015)
- **Southborough** – interviews carried out during October 2015

c) Access to research participants

Participating authorities were asked to support access to between ten and fifteen people involved in the local response to the TFP. It was envisaged that between eight and twelve of these participants would be 'frontline' workers involved with direct work with families, with between two and five participants involved in different ways in the delivery of the TFP such as, managers, data analysts, and elected members. The exact make up was not more prescriptive owing to the different local approaches to implementation and because participation was voluntary.

The original intention was to recruit participants using a variety of methods, primarily through email contact, presenting at team meetings and through snowballing techniques. It was hoped that a large number of workers involved with local 'troubled families' work would be informed about the research, made aware of the institutional support for the research and the opportunity to participate, and that volunteers would then come forward. If more volunteers came forward than it was possible to interview, given time and resource constraints, a purposive sampling procedure would be employed. In practice, all of these strategies were used, to greater or lesser extents, to identify potential research participants.

In Northton, a special meeting was convened for me to meet with five workers and I also attended a team meeting in another department to again explain to potential participants what the research involved. Whilst it could be argued that the managers had, in these instances, acted as gateways to their team members, there is also reason to believe that they also acted as gatekeepers. The identification of the initial five workers and the arranging of a special meeting with them was helpful, but it also potentially excluded other workers who weren't invited, or who might have been interested in participating or finding out more about the research. With regards to the team meeting, I was reassured by the manager that he would speak to some people beforehand to ask them to volunteer and would also make sure that I did not 'get' one particular worker who, in his view, would be very critical of the programme. This was framed as being for my benefit. E-mails, personal contacts and snowballing techniques were also used in this authority to identify and recruit potential participants.

In Westingham, emails were sent to team leaders and managers from the main contact for the research, asking for volunteers for the research from their teams to be identified. Follow up e-mails were often required and, in one instance, I was invited to join a team meeting to again present their research and ask for participants. This resulted in four people volunteering to take part in the research, although only two of these interviews came to fruition.

In Southborough, the lead contact for the research put together a programme of interviews in consultation with me. This was, as had been noted, due to the distance between the research site and my location, which meant that attendance at team meetings or ad-hoc 'introductory' meetings was not a viable option for recruiting research participants.

In total, 39 research participants were interviewed face-to-face. The majority of these were one-to-one interviews with only two participants in each authority being interviewed together (at their requests, and ostensibly due to the overlap in their roles), making 36 interviews in the fieldwork sites in total. In all three sites, the majority of interviewees were female. In both Northton and Westingham, both men and women who fulfilled the family worker role were interviewed whereas in Southborough, all of the frontline workers were women. In all three authorities, more female managers were interviewed than male managers. A break-down of the research participants, by employment category and gender can be found below in Table 1

Participant observation took place on a small number of occasions in Northton and Westingham, including: accompanying one family worker to two meetings with 'troubled families'; observing another family worker working with a young person during an after-school session; and attending a local 'troubled families' board meeting. The opportunity to undertake such work was not pursued in Southborough due to time constraints and, for a number of reasons, further opportunities for observation of daily practice were not requested in Northton or Westingham.

The formal ethical requirements of research carried out in academic institutions do not always sit easily with the day-to-day complexities of local service delivery with disadvantaged families. It was not, for example, possible to gain written consent from families or family members during the limited number of shadowing or observation occasions. In fact, on each occasion, the information and consent forms for family members provided to workers in advance of the scheduled observations were not completed and verbal consent was established at the time of observation. On one occasion my shadowing of a worker meant that I attended a child protection meeting that I was unaware would be taking place. It should be stressed that this is not to blame workers for not getting the required consent, but the ethical complexities of obtaining consent from families played a part in the decision not to undertake further participant observation or direct work with families.

Table 1: Research participants in the three field work sites

Northton	
Troubled Families Co-ordinator	1
Performance / data team members	2
Managers / Supervisors	3
Family Workers	5
Other frontline workers	3
Total	**14**
Gender	**10 female / 4 male**

Westingham	
Troubled Families Co-ordinator	1
Troubled Families Employment Advisor	1
Managers / Supervisors	3
Family Workers	5
Other frontline workers	1
Elected Member	1
Total	**12**
Gender	**9 female / 3 male**

Southborough	
Troubled Families Co-ordinator	1
Chief Executive	1
Troubled Families Employment Advisor	1
Performance / data team members	2
Managers / Supervisors	4
Family Workers	4
Total	**13**
Gender	**9 female / 4 male**

I also became concerned about the representativeness of any families that workers identified for me. I was asked, during initial discussions if I wanted to see 'some juicy families', and warned that I would meet some 'proper characters'. Whilst attempting to arrange one shadowing session, I was repeatedly told by the worker to 'wear your running trainers', in case we needed to get away quickly. There is a dearth of research that has been carried out relating to the practice of social work, broadly understood, in clients' houses (Ferguson, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016a, 2016b) and pursuing the opportunity to observe first-hand the TFP being implemented was given serious consideration. Given the ethical, resource and methodological concerns outlined above, it was, however, decided at an early stage in the second fieldwork site that future observation opportunities would be limited to those that did not involve families, such as internal or multi-agency 'business' meetings involving local authority staff and/or their partners.

d) Interview procedures

Acknowledging that there are rules to the game of research, Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 608-609) has written of the importance of 'non-violent communication' and 'active and methodical listening' during research interviews. He (1999: 609, original emphasis) argues that it is necessary to '*reduce as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted through that* [researcher-participant] *relationship*'. This included using a researcher who was socially proximal with the people they were interviewing and/or familiar with the conditions of their existence (1999: 610). In this study, the choice of researcher was limited, but my background as a relatively junior 'street-level bureaucrat' who had previously worked with disadvantaged populations in a local authority context hopefully helped to limit the *symbolic violence* of the researcher-participant relationship.

Potential participants were provided with an information sheet and a copy of the Informed consent form (attached as Appendices 3 and 4). Where interviews were arranged via e-mail, which happened in the majority of cases, these were sent in advance of the meeting and hard copies were also taken to the interview. I stated that I was happy to answer any queries or concerns in advance of the meeting, although this rarely happened. Participants were told that the interviews would generally take no longer than an hour and would be recorded, if possible.

All interviews took place on work premises, often in meeting rooms or offices which the workers identified or booked for the duration of the interview. Participants were offered the opportunity to meet elsewhere, off the premises of their employer but no-one accepted this offer. Two interviews were conducted in public spaces within local authority buildings, which may have resulted in participants being overheard by other people, but this did not appear to

influence their responses or their approach to the interview. On three occasions (one in each fieldwork site) joint interviews were carried out with two participants at the same time, at the participants' request. On two of these occasions the interviews were with participants involved with local data collection and analysis and on the third, two consecutive interviews that had been arranged with members of the same team were merged into a single joint interview.

Informed consent forms were signed and collected before recording began for all of the interviews. Participants were verbally reminded that the interviews were completely voluntary and could be stopped at any time and without penalty. They were also reminded that discussions were confidential and their comments would not be reported back to colleagues or other people working on the programme. Participants were informed that they would be anonymised during the transcription process and that their names, along with the names of the participating authorities, would not appear in any published writing or documentation relating to the research project. No participants refused to be recorded and only a small number asked further questions about the research prior to the interviews commencing.

3.5   Ethical issues

Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Applied Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Durham University. The main ethical issues covered in the application process related to ensuring the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their responses. Ethical issues relating to families' involvement in the research were also addressed, although it was stressed that the intention was not to interview family members directly and the focus of the research was on the workers. Letters or emails of support from the three participating local authorities confirmed that they were willing to support the research and that they were satisfied with the ethical approval provided by Durham University. The Chair of the ethics committee was informed as and when the three local authorities agreed to participate in the research and the appropriate sections of the ethics application were updated to take account of the new fieldwork sites. The accepted and approved ethical application forms were shared with the participating local authorities.

The ethical considerations relating to the research extended beyond the administrative process that was observed to gain institutional approval for the research to be carried out. Ethical considerations were also taken into account when deciding how many research sites to include, and whether or not an ethnographic study was appropriate, as discussed above. The epistemological and theoretical implications of constructing 'troubled families' themselves as

the research object have also been discussed previously, but there are also ethical concerns which should influence where researchers focus their gaze. Researching the families' risks merely accepting the problematic government construct of them as deviant, troublesome and 'the source of a large proportion of the problems in society' (Cameron, 2011c). The DCLG report *Listening to Troubled Families* (Casey, 2012) provides ample evidence of the need for sensitivity when researching and reporting the lives of disadvantaged families. However, given that many of these families were receiving additional intervention, support or resources from the state, some of them may not have felt empowered enough to refuse a request to take part in this research if it was made via their family worker. Concerns about the extent to which 'informed consent' was present when observing workers in family homes are noted above.

Most of the local authorities involved in the delivery of the TFP chose to call their local programmes by a different name and many chose not to inform the families they were working with that they had been identified as 'troubled families'. This was generally for fear that it was a stigmatising label that lacked a grasp of the problems the term created in practice and would not encourage families' involvement in the programme, as one manager in Northton noted:

> *I think what a practitioner can't do is go out to [name of neighbourhood] on a Tuesday morning and say "you've been identified as part of the troubled families' agenda" on the doorstep, I think that's a different thing altogether, and I think it would hinder engagement.*

Instead, many authorities told families that they were simply 'eligible for extra help', an early example of negotiation within the 'troubled families' field, subverting the official narrative that it is necessary to 'tell it like it is' to families:

> *I basically was thinking, right if I was on the other side of that ['troubled families' front] door, what would I want to hear? And why would I let this person in? So, erm, I was very careful about how I phrased it, you know, and I'm here for the family. So, you know, generally, I was kind of saying, oh you're eligible for extra support, you know, you meet the criteria to say that you can get extra support.* (Claire, Family Worker, Northton)

Making families a focus of the research would have meant negotiating this issue in some way, either through complicity with the local authority by not mentioning the phrase 'troubled families', or revealing to the families their official classification and risk leaving them feeling stigmatising and deceived. Given this ethical quandary, and the other issues raised, making families themselves the focus of this particular research project was not justifiable.

Another ethical consideration arose when one of the local authorities raised the issue of an online blog which I had established in connection with the research.[12] The blog was established for a variety of reasons and was used to provide short, responsive critiques and commentaries on 'troubled families' related announcements, publications and news stories. Many of the posts on the blog were critical of government policy in relation to 'troubled families' and the authority that raised it as an issue wanted reassurance that they would not feature in any posts on the blog. An email confirming this was the case, and highlighting that the ethical approval covering the research also applied to the blog, was accepted and, on this basis, and following a discussion at a senior management meeting, the authority declared that they were happy to proceed and participate in the research. Several individual research participants had read the blog or were aware of it before being interviewed and practitioners from two of the participating authorities 'followed' the blog, receiving electronic updates when new posts were published.[13]

3.6   Limitations of the research

There are, of course, numerous limitations with this study. The point of view expressed here is, as Bourdieu points out, merely a view from a point and it is important that the point from which that view is expressed is examined. This is the purpose of *participant objectivation,* which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. The focus in this section is on some of the limitations of the study *as it was carried out,* and the research methodology used, as opposed to the limitations of the interpretation of the data collected.

Although more is not always better, the research could have been strengthened by a larger number of local authorities and/or by more participants being interviewed. Whilst carrying out interviews with the small number of participants who were working on the margins of the TFP (e.g. Youth Offending Team Workers who 'carried' some 'troubled families' in their case load, and senior managers who had broader remits than just 'troubled families'), I came to realise that the point of view expressed from these agents was often different, in some respects, from those whose work meant that they were more heavily involved in the programme. In other words, the points of view expressed by agents who were on, or close to, the boundaries of the 'troubled families' field were different from those expressed by agents closer to the centre of the field, who arguably had a greater investment in the playing of the game. This shouldn't be

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[12] www.akindoftrouble.wordpress.com, see Chapter 10 for a further discussion of issues presented by the blog.
[13] Two individuals with DCLG e-mail addresses also followed the blog.

a surprise but it acts as another reminder, at a different level, of Bourdieu's observation that the truth of any situation is not always to be found in the most obvious place. Just as the truth of the TFP cannot be grasped by observing interactions between workers and 'troubled families', the full truth cannot be obtained from within the 'troubled families' field, that is, without greater recognition of its relation with other fields.

Another group of participants who would have strengthened the research had it been possible to interview them are civil servants working in the Troubled Families Unit in DCLG. Two e-mails were sent to this team (one in December 2015 and one in February 2016), inviting them to participate. A response was received from Joe Tuke, a Director in the Troubled Families Unit in March 2016 stating that 'owing to the significant demands on time and resources [students interested in studying the TFP] place on a small and very busy team', they were unable to help with the request to participate. Interestingly, Louise Casey (in Aston, 2015) suggested that her research team in the investigation into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham 'could infer something negative' from people not wanting to talk to her. No such inferences are made here.

There are also a number of potential issues posed by the participants that did take part in the research that require consideration. Although the process was voluntary, some of the participants were identified or 'selected' for interview by managers or supervisors, as noted above. This potentially means that I was encouraged to speak to some of the more supportive workers involved in the TFP, although I heard a great diversity of views, some of them very critical, expressed by participants. Self-selecting participants can, of course, also bias or skew the sample in different ways, but again, the range of views expressed during interviews towards the TFP suggests that it was not workers with a particular viewpoint that volunteered or agreed to take part in the study.

The fact that there was corporate consent for the study from the three local authorities involved may have influenced those participants that came forward and, indeed, those who chose not to participate. Some participants may have also been aware of my contacts with people in two of the authorities, leading to some ambivalence regarding insider/outsider issues in research practice (Bridges, 2001; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).[14]

Further, and despite reassurances regarding confidentiality and anonymity, these issues may have influenced participants' responses during interviews. Having stated this as a possibility,

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[14] See also Chapter 10 for a brief discussion on the potential to revise concerns about 'insider/outsider researchers.

during only one interview did I receive the impression that I was only being given the 'corporate line'. During some interviews there was a feeling that participants were negotiating or feeling their way through some answers, learning the rules of the game as they went. The majority experience, however, was that participants demonstrated an understanding of what I was interested in discussing with them and responded honestly and openly during interviews.

There is also the possibility that research participants 'talked up' some aspects of their work in the belief that I was interested in the more extreme or salacious aspects of their work. Extreme case studies of 'troubled families' are used in the national portrayal of such families (see Casey, 2012; DCLG, 2014c). When, at a national 'troubled families' conference, I queried the representativeness of some of the case studies used in a workshop, a member of the Troubled Families Unit from DCLG responded that stories of more mundane 'troubled families' who needed some support with, for example, cooking skills 'were not sexy enough'.[15] I have highlighted above how workers thought I would be most interested in 'juicy' families. This may have been the case for some participants in some of their responses but, as Chapters 6 and 7 hopefully demonstrate, most research participants gave nuanced answers to questions about the families they worked with and the kinds of work that they believed was required. Many of these answers conflicted with dominant narratives about 'troubled families' and the 'best' way of working with them.

Finally, if one acknowledges the possibility that participants may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear, there is also the possibility that I, as a critical researcher, have simply prioritised what I wanted to hear, or merely found what I went looking for. The potential to revisit and discuss the theoretical framework and my critical approach to the 'troubled families' field with participants and other frontline workers is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

3.7   Conclusion

This chapter has set out the research methods adopted during the study. In doing so, it has attempted to articulate the rationale for these methods, as well as demonstrating their applicability to a Bourdieusian analysis of the 'troubled families' field. A three-stage operationalization of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, originally articulated by Bourdieu and developed and clarified by Grenfell, has been presented which provides the foundations for

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[15] When I responded to this comment by stating that the case studies were not meant to be sexy, the civil servant concerned retracted their comment and requested that I did not put it on Twitter.

the research study. Whilst Bourdieu's concepts and writings have been used extensively across many different disciplines, comprehensive Bourdieusian research projects are much rarer. The approach taken here is not presented as the *only* way that a Bourdieusian research study or field analysis can be carried out, but it is certainly one way, which has its roots in the writing and approach of Bourdieu himself. It is also an approach which, given the research object, *feels* appropriate and appears to offer a robust framework to examine the concept of 'troubled families', to 'help reveal what is hidden' (Bourdieu, 2011: 17) and 'to tell about the things of the social world and, as far as possible, to tell them the way they are' (Bourdieu, 2000b: 5).

The process for constructing the research object has been explicated and the approach for a three-level study of the 'troubled families' field, examining the habitus of agents, the structured relations between agents, and the relationship with the Field of Power, has also been laid out. Finally, the intention to turn the tools of analysis upon the research project and myself, as the researcher, has been established.

The second half of the chapter has provided detail on the process of carrying out this research study. The analytical approach, the process of finding and reviewing relevant and securing access to fieldwork sites and, subsequently to research participants are all explained and brief descriptions of fieldwork sites and research participants have also been provided. Some ethical considerations have been discussed and some limitations to the study are acknowledged.

Chapter 4: Troubled Families: the 'long and undistinguished pedigree'

… the separation of sociology and history is a disastrous division, and one totally devoid of epistemological justification: all sociology should be historical and all history sociological (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 90, original emphasis).

4.1   Introduction

Concepts such as 'troubled families' are, of course, not new. The idea of a group of families, or a class of people, cut adrift at the bottom, exhibiting different cultural values and representing a threat to 'mainstream' society, has 'a long and undistinguished pedigree' (Macnicol, 1987: 315) and represents something of a doxa, an idea that is taken for granted and rarely questioned. It has been claimed that ever since 'the happy sixteenth-century custom of chopping off the ears of vagabonds, rogues and sturdy beggars, the British have had some difficulty in distinguishing poverty from crime' (Golding and Middleton, 1982: 186). When David Cameron (2011c) announced at the launch of the Troubled Families Programme that 'troubled families' were also 'families with multiple disadvantages' and 'neighbours from hell', he revealed the lack of progress that has been made in both analysing the 'problem' and identifying a solution to it. However, whilst, throughout history, the 'ragged classes' have often been conflated with 'dangerous classes' (Himmelfarb, 1984: 381; Morris, 1994) there also exists an extensive history of attempts to delineate different groups of poor people.

Early Poor Laws in England included attempts to distinguish between 'vagrants' and the 'impotent poor'. The Poor Law of 1834 included an official distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and, in 1852, Mary Carpenter argued that there existed 'a very strong line of demarcation which exists between the labouring and the "ragged" class, a line of demarcation not drawn by actual poverty' (in Himmelfarb, 1984: 378). Fast forward over one hundred years and Charles Murray, who did so much to advance the concept of an 'underclass' on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1980s and 90s, provided a contemporary perspective, making it clear that the 'underclass' 'does not refer to degree of poverty, but to a type of poverty' (Murray, 1996: 24):

> It is not a new concept. I grew up knowing what the underclass was; we just didn't call it that in those days. In the small Iowa town where I lived, I was taught by my middle-class parents that there were two kinds of poor people. One class of poor people was never even called 'poor'. I came to understand that they simply lived with low incomes, as my own parents had done when they were young. Then there was another

> set of poor people, just a handful of them. These poor people didn't lack just money. They were defined by their behaviour. Their homes were littered and unkempt. The men in the family were unable to hold a job for more than a few weeks at a time. Drunkenness was common. The children grew up ill-schooled and ill-behaved and contributed a disproportionate share of the local juvenile delinquents.

The long history of the 'underclass' thesis has been extensively documented elsewhere, primarily by social policy and social history researchers (Jordan, 1974: Macnicol, 1987; Morris, 1994; Macnicol, 1999; Welshman, 2013), and it is not the intention, nor is it possible, to cover similar ground in similar detail here. Instead, this chapter presents a brief history of the genesis of ideas about the differences between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor from fourteenth century England to the modern day, with a particular focus on these constructs over the last twenty years. The chapter also highlights: the gendered nature of these debates with a frequent focus on the role of mothers; the continuing salience of 'family' in different iterations of the 'underclass'; and the tensions between the 'care' and 'control' functions of the state in providing for poor people. It also considers the role of social science in these debates, and examines the political utility of them, particularly in recent times. Bourdieu's concepts of the bureaucratic field (Bourdieu et al, 1994) and the symbolic power of the state (Bourdieu 2014), are useful in discussing the varied and changing roles of the state in creating, sustaining and responding to these ideas. The focus here is primarily on UK constructions, although international examples are also referred to, where appropriate.

The next section provides a necessarily brief and incomplete summary of the longue durée, from the introduction of the Statute of Labourers in the fourteenth century, through the Poor Laws and Victorian concerns about a social residuum, to concerns about a 'cycle of deprivation' in the UK in the 1970s (see Welshman, 2013 for the most comprehensive historical account of the 'underclass' over this period). The focus then moves to a more detailed explication of recent constructions: the 'underclass' and the 'dependency culture' debates in the UK in the 1980s and 90s; New Labour's programme to address social exclusion and anti-social behaviour in the early 2000s; and the 'Broken Britain' discourse most closely associated with the Conservative party under the leadership of David Cameron. This takes the 'troubled families' back-story up to the formation of a coalition government in the UK, in May 2010, where the next chapter starts. A concluding section analyses some of the continuities and discontinuities through different constructions of the 'underclass' thesis over time, again with the focus remaining primarily on recent developments.

4.2   The long history

The emergence of government initiatives to address problems of poverty and disorder can be traced back to the fourteenth century at least, and to the decline of feudalism in the UK (de Schweinitz, 1961). Prior to this date, the feudal system meant that most people should have been protected by their masters from destitution, distress and suffering. The demise of feudalism led to workers enjoying greater freedom from their masters, but this also meant greater insecurity, and the lack of a patron when misfortune or ill-health occurred. Given their predicament, many people turned to 'mendicancy and theft' (de Schweinitz, 1961: 3). In 1349, amid the collapse of feudalism and the increased freedom of poor people, the *Statute of Labourers* was enacted which compelled unemployed people to work for a maximum wage, prevented them from travelling and forbade others to give alms or charitable donations to them. It was this Act of Parliament which arguably paved the way for the systems of social security and the 'welfare states' that now exist in most countries with capitalist economies. Hill (1962) subsequently suggested that it was then that 'Leviathan … replaced the Good Samaritan' (in Golding and Middleton, 1982: 9).

Prior to these interventions poor relief was seen as the preserve of the church and private, locally organised philanthropic endeavours (Piven and Cloward, 1971: 12). The development of government initiatives towards the poor continued to be heavily influenced by public order issues and 'remained primarily a direct result of the government's concern with public security' (Waxman, 1983: 76). Piven and Cloward (1971: 11) argue that it was 'food riots' and 'mobs of starving peasants' overrunning the town that, in the 1530s 'led the rulers of Lyon to conclude that the giving of charity should no longer be governed by private whim'. They go on to note that:

> Most of the features of modern welfare – from criteria to discriminate the worthy poor from the unworthy to strict procedures for surveillance of recipients and measures for their rehabilitation – were present in Lyons' new relief administration.

Similar arrangements, also with continuing relevance, were put in place in England at around the same time and, in 1531:

> the government, under Henry VIII, for the first time recognized governmental responsibility for the care of the poor, established what may be the first "means test" for determining eligibility for the right to beg and provided areas within which begging was permitted (Waxman, 1983: 78).

This act 'represented the beginning of definite assumption by government of responsibility for the care of persons in economic distress' (de Schweinitz, 1961: 21), but the provisions for the

'impotent poor' also meant that the 'able-bodied unemployed', the 'vagabonds', were dealt with more severely. The punishment for illegal begging was a whipping until the blood ran. In the 1570s, during Elizabethan times, a distinction between 'vagrants' or 'professional beggars' and the 'impotent poor' was established (Waxman, 1983: 78) and in 1601, following riots, food shortages, and economic depression, the Poor Relief Act, popularly known as the Elizabethan Poor Law, came into being. A series of amendments and additions were made to this 'Old Poor Law' before the 'New Poor Law' was introduced in 1834, via the Poor Law Amendment Act. A Poor Law Commission was established to oversee and implement a new national system of poor relief, which represented a shift from localised, parish-based arrangements under the Old Poor Law. The distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor was also officially recognised and made explicit in this Act, achieving a 'vision of divisions' (Bourdieu 1989: 138) between those lacking economic capital but possessing some form of cultural capital (the right dispositions, some trade or craft, or some of the right possessions or clothing), and those lacking both economic and cultural capital.

The 1800s saw an increasing distinction between the 'ragged' classes and the 'perishing' and 'dangerous' classes. Himmelfarb (1984: 371) notes that the term 'ragged' had been used to describe the poor for centuries but that '[b]y the early nineteenth century that label was being applied more selectively' to the very poor or to those who were 'conspicuously ragged'. Special 'Ragged schools' were set up to educate the '"substrata", "residuum", "outcasts", the lowest of the poor' (Himmelfarb, 1984: 375). Mary Carpenter (in Himmelfarb, 1984: 378), a founder of a ragged school believed that not only was it easy to distinguish between the working classes and the 'ragged' classes, but that this clear distinction meant that different ways of 'dealing with them' were required:

> There is, and long will be, a very strongly defined line of separation between them, which must and ought to separate them, and which requires perfectly distinct machinery and modes of operation in dealing with them.

The 'perfectly commendable wish to go see things in person' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 181) led to a number of social investigations into the plight of the poor in Victorian England (Welshman, 2013: 15). Researchers and journalists such as Henry Mayhew took it upon themselves to document the conditions of the lower-classes and 'slumming', the practice of visiting the East End of London to observe first-hand these conditions, became a popular past-time for affluent Londoners (Koven, 2004). Welshman (2013: 15) has argued that the tendency of historians to focus on the empirical investigations of the time, from well-known figures such as Charles Booth and Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, has neglected the 'wider ideological context' and the

'moral assumptions that often lay behind policy' in Victorian England. Drawing on the work of Stedman Jones (1971), Welshman (2013: 26) argues that Booth was central in 'amplifying' the 'new distinction between the residuum and the respectable working class'. Booth's namesake, General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, drew on his work to propose the idea of a 'submerged tenth', those who were destitute in England (Booth, 1890).

The flurry of media attention and research led to an increase in philanthropic activity in Victorian England and this, in turn, led to the establishment of the Society for Repressing Mendicity and Organizing Charity (better known as the Charity Organisation Society, or COS) in 1869. The COS believed that the plethora of local philanthropic initiatives only served to encourage pauperism, rather than prevent it (Koven, 2004: 92) and could easily be manipulated by wily paupers with a knowledge of 'the system'. The COS instead saw their task as being 'to exclude as many people as possible from all forms of costly outdoor relief, which included cash, goods, and services' (Koven, 2004: 98). This was to be achieved through an increased focus on case records of clients and the central co-ordination of poor relief. Here then, was an early example of a 'new', more efficient approach that could 'grip' both troublemaking families *and* local services, being touted as the answer to an overly generous system of poor relief.[16]

No legislation or reforms were enacted specifically to counter the alleged threat of the residuum, and the popularity of the concept largely subsided following the gentlemanly behaviour of dock strikers in 1889 and the advent of World War I, which led to full employment in England.[17] Such developments led Stedman-Jones to conclude that the residuum 'had never existed, except as a phantom army called up by late Victorian and Edwardian social science to legitimise its practice' (in Welshman, 2013: 17).

The concept of a residuum, however, proved influential in the subsequent constructions of the 'unemployables' in the 1900s and the 'social problem group' in the 1920s. Welshman (2013: 35) notes the concept of 'unemployables' was often used interchangeably with residuum and was thus a 'Trojan Horse concept' which helped to keep the idea of the residuum alive, providing 'fertile soil for the concept of the social problem group in the 1920s'. The idea of a social problem group, enthusiastically supported by the Eugenics Education Society, gained ground during the economic depression and time of high unemployment of the 1920s.

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[16] Family Action, the voluntary organisation that developed out of the COS, is supportive of and involved with the delivery of the Troubled Families Programme (see Holmes, 2015).

[17] Concerns about a 'residuum' were, however, also raised by the ill health of many recruits for the Boer War between 1899 and 1903 who came from poor, large families, (see Morris, 1994: 25)

Macnicol (1987: 300) notes that the arrival of mass democracy in 1918, an increasing concern about 'mental defectives' (sic) and the rise of both the Labour Party and the medical, health and social work professions also played a role in the development of the concept. A 'Mental Deficiency Committee' (also known as the Wood Committee) report of 1929 contained, 'a famous passage which was to be quoted frequently by future supporters of the underclass concept' (Macnicol 1987: 302). The passage related to a 'group of families' that:

> would include, as anyone who has extensive practical experience of social service would readily admit, a much larger proportion of insane persons, epileptics, paupers, criminals (especially recidivists), unemployables, habitual slum dwellers, prostitutes, inebriates and other social inefficients than would a group of families not containing mental defectives. The overwhelming majority of the families thus collected will belong to that section of the community, which we propose to term the 'social problem' or 'subnormal' group. (in Macnicol, 1987: 302)

Macnicol (1987) and Welshman (2013: 65-77) both highlight the lack of robust research produced by the Eugenics Society who went in search of the social problem group, following the Wood report. Their inability to provide any real evidence in support of the existence of the social problem group led them to 'fall back on the argument that, while the existence of the group was self-evident, more research was necessary' (Welshman, 2013: 76). This undoubtedly contributed to the gradual demise of the concept. Other factors which played a part included the National Socialists interest in eugenics in Germany, the outbreak of the Second World War, and the publication of the Beveridge Report of 1942. The evacuations of slum children during the war, however, provided the impetus for the concept of 'problem families' to emerge.

The Women's Group on Public Welfare *Our Towns* report (1943) is credited with being the first place where the phrase 'problem families' was first consciously used (Philp and Timms, 1957: vii). The report was written following concerns among members of the Women's Group about the condition of slum children who were evacuated from urban to rural areas from 1939. The introduction argued that the state of children arriving from slum areas proved that the 'submerged tenth' 'discovered' by General William Booth in the nineteenth century still existed in parts of England. This 'finding' led to discussion about, and criticism of, the effectiveness of state provision – mainly health and welfare services - for members of 'problem families'. This debate, in turn, led to the proposal of a new form of casework with families, which paved the way for new forms of social work to develop. This style of casework, delivered by voluntary organisations such as the Family Service Units and Family Welfare Units, came to be known as 'friendship with a purpose' (Starkey 2000: 539) and Welshman (2013: 88) has noted how workers in Liverpool, for example, 'rejected a more professional approach,

arguing that they were successful only with a ''warm sympathetic relationship of friendship and involvement''.

There are similarities between these debates and those surrounding the 'troubled families' of the modern era and Macnicol (2017) and Welshman (2017) have both argued that, out of all of the previous constructions of the 'undeserving' poor, it is the idea of 'problem families' that bears the greatest resemblance to todays 'troubled families'. Welshman has, for example, examined continuities and changes across three key areas: the ways in which families are described and defined; the nature of the intervention to address family 'problems' or 'troubles'; and how success in working with families was defined. It has also been observed that 'problem families' in reality meant 'problem' or 'feckless' mothers (Starkey, 2000) and there are strong similarities between this focus in the 1940s and 1950s, and the 'hyper-visibility of women' (Allen and Taylor, 2012) in the political discourse following the 2011 riots and the 'mother-blaming' rhetoric of the TFP. The practical hands-on help offered by practitioners in both eras manages to locate the source of the family's 'problems' firmly within the domestic sphere that was, and still is, very much associated with 'mother's work'.

Whilst academics and members of the developing social work profession became increasingly sceptical and critical of the idea of 'problem families', the concept was more warmly received by health practitioners and policy-makers, including Medical Officers of Health (Welshman, 2013: 92). The publication of *The Problem with the Problem Family* (Philp and Timms, 1957), written by two social workers, crystallised a number of the profession's concerns and Richard Titmuss, writing in the foreword to the book, gave a damning indictment of the 'evidence' and 'false clarity' (Bourdieu, 2004: 52) supporting the concept:

> … the debate about the 'problem family' has been conducted in a singularly uncritical manner. Precision has been lacking in the use of words and in the observation of phenomena has been generally lacking; heterogeneity has been mistaken for homogeneity; biological theories have obscured the study of psychological and sociological factors; the classification and counting of 'abnormals' has proceeded regardless of the of the need to set them in the context of contemporary social norms; in short, what knowledge has been gained from all these inquiries has not accumulated on any theoretical foundations.

In contrast, local and central government health services who started using the term 'problem families' in the early 1950s, continued to use it until the 1960s and, in one area at least, the 1970s (Welshman, 2013: 91-92). By this time, the culture of poverty theory (Lewis, 1959, 1961; Harrington, 1962; Lewis, 1965) was gaining traction in America and it would not be long before Sir Keith Joseph, the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Services in the UK advanced his theory of a 'cycle of deprivation'.

4.3 From 'transmitted deprivation' to 'Broken Britain'

During a speech in 1972, Sir Keith Joseph, asked why, despite years of full employment and long periods of economic stability since the Second World War, 'deprivation and problems of maladjustment so conspicuously persist' (in Welshman, 2012: 1). Joseph believed that there was a phenomenon he referred to as a 'cycle of deprivation', whereby parents 'transmitted' their behaviours and lifestyle - and by extension their deprivation – onto their children, who then grew up to be the 'deprived' of the following generation. Joseph argued that the process by which this transmission - or cycle – occurred, required further investigation and he established a Working Party which led to a large-scale research programme, delivered by the Department of Health and Social Security and the Social Science Research Council.

The research programme came to span eight years and produced a number of publications examining different aspects of deprivation. One of the first publications to arise from the programme was *Cycles of Disadvantage*, a review of existing literature (Rutter and Madge, 1976). The Introduction begins in a forthright fashion, with a famous quote from *Through the Looking Glass*, in which Humpty Dumpty declares 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less' (1976: 1). The first sentence from the authors states 'The term "deprivation" must be one of the most overworked words in the English language' and they go on to note that:

> The literature is full of countless articles and books on the nature, causes and consequences of deprivation and the research reports are outnumbered only by the emotional and polemical monologues and interchanges on a variety of theoretical, practical and political aspects of the topic. Much of the controversy is a consequence of the very diffuseness of the concept which is used by different writers (usually with force and conviction) to cover quite different issues and problems.

Highlighting previous work by one of the authors which proposed the term '"deprivation" had served its purpose and should now be abandoned', they argue, on the second page, that '[o]ur review of the writings on the topic of deprivation has strongly reinforced that view' (1976: 2). Resistance to the concept of 'transmitted deprivation' continued throughout the research programme and many of the individual projects and the related publications either avoided the concept altogether or were dismissive of it. One writer (Berthoud, 1983: 151) noted, at the end of the programme, that the 'hypothesis [of 'transmitted deprivation'] itself was a sort of burp from a debate about poverty and pathology that had been rumbling on for decades, if not centuries', but was equally critical of the research programme generally, in that it failed to keep the issue of 'deprivation' centre stage, and of the final report more specifically. The final report itself stated that 'All the evidence suggests that cultural values are not important for

the development and transmission of deprivation' but did suggest that deprivation sometimes 'seems to lead to particular behaviours which may affect the chances of second generation members' (Brown and Madge, 1982: 226).

Whilst Joseph's idea of a cycle of deprivation was subject to critical examination by academics, another theory of poverty was being advanced which received similar scrutiny. Poor economic performance during the 1970s and a number of high-profile newspaper articles on 'scroungers' from 1976 onwards (Golding and Middleton, 1982) led many politicians and media commentators to conclude that an expansive welfare state led to a 'dependency culture' amongst recipients. Following a Conservative election victory in 1979 and influenced by a desire to cut state spending and assert the primacy of the market, the government 'nourished and sustained the idea of a dependency culture and, given the 'social, economic and political context [it] …. was an idea whose time had come' (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992: 25). McGlone (1990: 160) argued that the 'Thatcher government lacked any clear and well formulated policies for reforming the social security system', but was ideologically driven and 'committed to cutting public expenditure as part of its monetarist economic strategy'. Researchers examining the dependency culture found no evidence of separate cultures or values amongst people in receipt of state support, arguing that 'any social security policy based on the notion of 'dependency culture' is likely to be counterproductive' and that 'the notion obscures rather than assists our understanding of dependency' (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992: 122-123).

At the same time that UK politicians and national media were discussing how to get to grips with the dependency culture, their counterparts in America were discussing the associated concept of an 'underclass'. Whilst the term 'underclass' was first used in this context by Ken Auletta (1981), a writer for the *New Yorker* magazine, and the term was used by many scholars in different ways and for different purposes, it became most closely associated with Charles Murray, an 'unemployed political scientist of mediocre repute' (Wacquant, 2009b: 12), associated with the right-wing think-tank the *Manhattan Foundation*. Murrays' book *Losing Ground* (1984) argued that generous welfare systems had created an underclass who simply responded to the 'new rules' of the game: 'we tried to remove the barriers to escape from poverty, and inadvertently built a trap' (1994: 9). Just as scholars took issue with the idea of 'dependency culture' in the UK, a number of researchers who investigated evidence of an 'underclass', in Murray's terms found little evidence to support his thesis (see Gans, 1995; Katz, 1989; Sherraden, 1984;) This did not, however, prevent the *Institute for Economic Affairs* (IEA) and *The Sunday Times* inviting Murray to the UK in 1989 to discuss the issue of an

'emerging British underclass' (Murray, 1990). Murray announced himself as 'a visitor from a plague area come to see whether the disease is spreading', writing (1990: 42):

> With all the reservations that a stranger must feel in passing judgement on an unfamiliar country, I will jump directly to the conclusion: Britain does have an underclass, still largely out of sight and still smaller than the one in the United States. But it is growing rapidly. Within the next decade, it will probably become as large (proportionately) as the United States' underclass. It could easily become larger.

Murray's intervention, aided by the support of a national newspaper, prompted a strong and sustained response from British academics (see, for example, Dean, 1991; Bagguley and Mann, 1992; Robinson and Gregson, 1992; Mann, 1994; Mann and Roseneil, 1994; Macnicol, 1999). A second contribution from Murray in 1994, *Underclass: The crisis deepens*, focused on recent changes that he perceived 'in the English family' (1996: 102). Murray's consideration of these changes led him to the conclusion that '[a] top to bottom overhaul of the benefit system is necessary' which must start with the question 'What is it worth to restore the two-parent family as the norm throughout British society?' (1996: 103).

The crisis deepens also provoked responses from British academics, and, in 1996, Murray's two essays along with commentaries from academics were reprinted as *Underclass: The developing Debate* by the IEA. In the foreword to this publication, Ruth Lister provided a comprehensive summary of some of the main weaknesses of the 'underclass' thesis and warned that 'the use of stigmatising labels is likely to lead to stigmatising policies' (1996: 10). She concluded that:

> It is partly because the notion of an 'underclass' now carries such strong connotations of blame that I do not believe that it offers the means of reconciling structure and agency in helping us to understand poverty and thereby do something about it (1996: 12).

The debate summarised above, appeared to have little direct or immediate influence or bearing on government policy in the UK, which was still occupied with tackling the broader idea of a dependency culture. The term, however, entered mainstream usage and became contemporary shorthand for the historical feckless, undeserving poor.

When New Labour entered office in 1997, they came armed with the new language of social exclusion (Fairclough, 2000), although links with the idea of an underclass remained. In Tony Blair's first speech as Prime Minister, he argued that there was a need to tackle 'what we all know exists – an underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose' (in Welshman, 2012: 234). Whilst Blair continued to use the term 'underclass' relatively frequently, certainly in his early days of office (Levitas, 1998: 155-156), it was the concept of social exclusion that was formalised via the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit

(SEU) in Whitehall. Levitas (1998) argued that within the social exclusion agenda, there were competing, often contradictory discourses at work. She argued that a Redistributive Discourse (RED) quickly gave way to both a Social Integrationist Discourse (SID) which valorised paid work as the solution to social exclusion, and to a Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD) which was:

> a gendered discourse with many forerunners, whose demons are criminally inclined, unemployable young men and sexually and socially irresponsible single mothers, for whom paid work is necessary as a means of social discipline, but whose (self) exclusion, and thus potential inclusion, is moral and cultural (1998: 7-8).

Veit-Wilson highlighted similar inconsistencies and argued that within wider social exclusion discourses there were strong versions, which emphasised structural issues and the role of society in doing the excluding, and weak versions which focused primarily on the behaviours of the excluded themselves as the cause for their exclusion (in Byrne, 1999: 4-5).[18] Nonetheless, in keeping with their desire to see 'evidence-based policy' and implement 'what works', the Labour government established strong relationships with the London School of Economics and Political Science which saw the establishment of a Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE). The SEU itself was also prolific in producing research and policy reports, across a number of different policy areas such as 'young runaways', 'neighbourhood renewal', 'teenage pregnancy', 'truancy and school exclusion' and 'anti-social behaviour'. In 2002, a separate Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU) was established in the Home Office to address increasing popular concern about a small minority of troublesome young people and families. Louise Casey, the government's 'Homelessness Czar' (Burney, 2009: 31) was appointed to lead the ASBU.

Labour's approach to tackling anti-social behaviour owed a lot to the American 'broken windows' thesis, highlighting Wacquant's (2009b: 3) argument that London was an important staging post for American social policies on their journey to mainland Europe. The 'broken windows' thesis argued that low-level nuisances, often environmental issues, left unchecked, would escalate and lead to more serious criminal behaviour (Kelling and Wilson 1982). Responses from academics were swift and largely negative (Millie et al, 2005; Squires and Stephen, 2005; Hughes, 2007; Squires, 2008). Burney called it an 'elastic concept' (2005: 7), and described anti-social behaviour as the 'hydra-headed monster that represented a spectrum of bad behaviour, from serious to merely irritating' (2005: 16). Ashworth (2004: 263) suggested it was 'a vague term with a broad definition, which in the last few years has become

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[18] Improving the amount of social capital in disadvantaged neighbourhoods was proposed as a remedy for the problem of social exclusion, but it was Putnam's apolitical concept that was unsurprisingly favoured by New Labour politicians.

a rallying call for some onerous and intrusive measures against individuals'. Burney (2005: 17) also highlighted that 'concerns about crime became focused on the fear and disruption attributed to a small number of families and individuals in hard-to-manage neighbourhoods of social housing'. Squires (2008) argued that the ASB agenda simply amounted to the 'criminalisation of nuisance', primarily amongst young people.

Examining a claim by Tony Blair that he first used the phrase 'anti-social behaviour' in 1988, Squires and Stephen (2005: 20) argue that 'anti-social behaviour did not arise, perfectly formed, in the mind of this politician'. They suggest that it 're-emerged as a result of a complex combination of influences' including a focus on social exclusion and victimisation, and the residualisation of social housing. The 're-discovery' of the term 'anti-social behaviour' also fitted with the wider focus on 'social exclusion', which, as discussed, was similarly critiqued as a vague concept which housed competing discourses (Levitas, 1998).

In his third term of office as Prime Minister, Tony Blair stated that he wanted to create a society of 'respect' (Millie, 2009: 1). A new Respect Task Force (RTF) was established in 2006, replacing the ASBU, but still headed by Louise Casey. A Respect Action Plan (RTF, 2006a) accompanied the launch of the Task Force, Hazel Blears was appointed as the Minister for Respect, and 'Respect became a banner attached to anything related to the menu of policies passing through the hands of the Task Force' (Burney, 2009: 33). Burney argues that the discursive shift from 'anti-social behaviour' to 'Respect' helped to highlight the increasing political concern with parenting practices and, more specifically, parental responsibility for children's behaviour and attitudes. The environmental and neighbourhood-based enforcement tools remained, but they were now accompanied by funding for local youth provision and parenting classes and support, as well as an expansion of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) for the 'most challenging families' (Burney, 2009: 34).

FIPs began life as a single 'Families Project' in Dundee, run by the children's charity NCH Action for Children Scotland (Dillane et al, 2001). Following a positive evaluation, six Intensive Family Support Projects (IFSPs), using a similar model, were established in England in 2004, as part of the work of the ASBU. In 2006, and following mildly promising evaluations of the initial six projects (Nixon et al, 2006), the establishment of a 'national network' of Intensive Family Support Schemes was announced in the Respect Action Plan. The plan called for a 'new approach' in working with the 'small number of households [who] are often responsible for a high proportion of antisocial behaviour'. This approach, mirroring that of the COS over 100

years previously, was designed as a response not just to the family's problems but also to the perceived inability of local services to address their problems:

> What makes the projects distinctive and different is that a lead person 'grips' the household and the range of services and professionals that are involved. This provides co-ordination and consistency for the household and a consistent message on the consequences of disengagement (RTF, 2006a: 22).

The family intervention approach is based on a single keyworker who can 'get to grips' with the whole family and look at the family, working with them persistently and assertively, as well as helping with practical tasks and domestic chores. An RTF document (2006b: 2) setting out what FIPs were claimed that evidence supported a view that 'this small number of families need an intensive, persistent and, if necessary, coercive approach'. A 'twin-track' approach was thus advocated, one that combined help and support for families with the threat of sanctions and 'supervision and enforcement tools to provide them with the incentives to change' (RTF, 2006b: 2). FIPs would, the government claimed, 'ensure that the destructive behaviour which is so often passed from generation to generation, blighting not only these families but entire communities, is effectively tackled for the first time' (RTF, 2006b: 2). They were rolled out as a 'national network' to 53 local areas under the Respect agenda and were also positioned as a solution to the putative problem of traditional family services failing to 'get to grips' with 'troubled or 'problem' families (Parr & Nixon, 2008: 165). The often punitive, sanctions-based 'last chance' approach of FIPs which largely ignores structural issues, has also attracted a large amount of criticism (see, for example, Garrett, 2007a; Gregg, 2010).

The Respect Action Plan claimed that there was robust evidence supporting the family intervention approach, although the evaluation reports are littered with warnings about the strength of the evidence, most of which was based on practitioners' views. In a comprehensive and scathing analysis of the evidence, Gregg (2010) highlights numerous weaknesses in the data as well as misrepresentations of it in government documents and notes that three teams of researchers calls for better models of data collection and longer-term evaluations fell on deaf ears (2010; 14). Gregg also noted that the family's rarely lived up to their 'neighbours from hell' image, instead arguing that criminality rates were 'sexed up' (2010: 11) and that 'what distinguishes [families involved in FIPs] across all the evaluations is a high level of mental and physical disorders and extreme poverty' (2010: 12). Whilst the evaluation reports did contain caveats regarding the quality of the data and the ability to draw conclusions from them, Garrett (2007a: 203) argued that they were 'lacking in reflexive hesitancy and insufficiently critical', failing to acknowledge the problematic history of similar concepts and proposed 'solutions'.

At the same time that the anti-social behaviour agenda was focussing on a small minority of troublemaking families, the social exclusion agenda was also shifting its focus. A report published in 2007 (SETF 2007) identified 140,000 families in Britain that were deemed to be 'at risk'.[19] 'At risk' effectively meant families experiencing five out of seven disadvantages (SETF, 2007: 4) and were therefore, perhaps the most disadvantaged families in the UK. The seven disadvantages were:

- no parent in the family is in work;
- family lives in poor-quality or overcrowded housing;
- no parent has any qualifications;
- mother has mental health problems;
- at least one parent has a long-standing limiting illness, disability or infirmity;
- family has low income (below 60% of the median); and
- family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items.

Shortly after becoming Prime Minister in 2007, Gordon Brown closed the RTF and Louise Casey moved to a new job in the Cabinet Office, looking at community policing. Many of the RTF policies, including FIPs, remained, with some simply moved over to a new Youth Task Force. Brown remained supportive of FIPs and promised to further extend them to 'the 50,000 most chaotic families' (Brown, 2009) if Labour won the 2010 general election. The Conservative opposition, aided by the *Centre for Social Justice* (CSJ) think-tank and the national tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, were, in 2007, simultaneously pressing ahead with their own 'Broken Britain' narrative.

Following his unsuccessful stint as party leader, the Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith reinvented himself as a social justice champion and established an 'independent' think-tank – the CSJ – to explore the root causes of 'social breakdown' in the UK. When David Cameron became leader of the Conservatives, he established a number of policy groups to look at specific areas, including social justice. The CSJ provided the secretariat for this group, which was headed by Duncan Smith. In 2006, the CSJ published *Breakdown Britain*, an 'interim report on the state of the nation (CSJ, 2006) and, a year later, followed it up with *Breakthrough Britain* (CSJ, 2007) which contained policy recommendations to the Conservative party.

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[19] This report, published in 2007, that examined families experiencing multiple disadvantages, and using data from the 2004-05 Families and Children Survey, was to become a key document in the identification of 120,000 'troubled families' in England in 2011.

In the foreword to the *Breakthrough* report, Duncan Smith argues that 'social breakdown is the greatest challenge we face' (2007: 4) and highlights what he has learnt from 'visiting many of Britain's most difficult and fractured communities' over the past six years:

> I have seen levels of social breakdown which have appalled and angered me. In the fourth largest economy in the world, too many people live in dysfunctional homes, trapped on benefits. Too many children leave school with no qualifications or skills to enable them to work and prosper. Too many communities are blighted by alcohol and drug addiction, debt and criminality and have low levels of life expectancy.

Cameron picked up on the 'broken society' theme, using it frequently in speeches and interviews (e.g. Watt and Wintour, 2008), and even referring to a by-election in Glasgow East as 'the broken society by-election' (Hencke et al, 2008). *The Sun* newspaper ran a Broken Britain campaign in 2008 and, in an interview with the newspaper, Cameron said 'I applaud *The Sun's* Broken Britain campaign. You are absolutely on to the right thing' (in Pascoe-Watson, 2008). The 'Broken Britain' narrative, focused on behavioural 'pathways to poverty', the putative negative 'effects' of living in social housing or 'welfare ghettos', and eliding 'family breakdown' with 'social breakdown' (see Pickles, 2010 for an example) has been subjected to extensive critique (Mooney, 2009; Lister and Bennett, 2010; Hancock and Mooney, 2013; Slater, 2014). Although Cameron used his last Conservative party conference speech before the 2010 general election to argue that our society was 'broken' because 'government got too big' (Cameron, 2009), Hancock and Mooney (2012: 59) argue, in contrast, that the broken society narrative legitimates increasing state intervention in the lives of poor people:

> Far from withdrawing from intervention in working-class lives, the state, in the guise of welfare 'reform' to combat the broken society, is involved in earlier and deeper penetration of those lives and in particular in the lives of the most disadvantaged sections of society.

By the time that the Conservatives arrived in government, as lead partners in a coalition government in May 2010, the political focus was on responding to the economic crisis and implementing a series of austerity measures. The coalition's programme for government stated that the government would 'investigate a new approach to helping families with multiple problems' (HM Government, 2010: 19). Whilst Cameron remained committed to promoting the importance of family in society (Cameron 2010), it wasn't until riots erupted across England in the summer of 2011 that he promised that 'the broken society is back at the top of my agenda' (Cameron, 2011b). The next chapter highlights the way in which the concept of 'troubled families' emerged during the early days of the coalition and how it has developed, following the riots and the establishment of the TFP.

4.4   Differences and continuities: a 'direct line of descent' or 'sequential bureaucratic adjustment'?

The issues of poverty and, perhaps more specifically, poor people themselves, have been a concern of government for at least 650 years. Throughout this history, as we have seen, the concern has often been as much about relief *from* the poor as it has been about relief *to* the poor (Wacquant, 2009a: 295). Similarly, officials have often attempted to make a distinction between the various categories of the deserving and undeserving poor. In tracing the doxic backstory to 'troubled families' we can see many continuities between different concepts of the underclass and/or the undeserving poor, but there are also a number of shifts which have taken place in the way that these concepts are constructed and developed. Many of these will be returned to in later chapters, so the intention here is merely to foreground some of these issues and emphasize, as Welshman (2013: 231) has done, how the development of such ideas says as much about the wider social and political context as it does about the 'underclass' itself.

There has, in recent years, been a (re)intensifying of the gaze on the 'family' in underclass discussions (Gillies, 2014). The family, 'plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the social order' (Bourdieu 1996: 23) and, as such, this gaze inevitably leads to a focus on parenting and child rearing practices, which, in turn, leads to policies scrutinizing the capabilities of working class women. It should be noted here that efforts to make working-class women 'more respectable' have their own long history, going back over 200 years (Skeggs, 1997: 41-55). More recently, Keith Joseph was concerned about deprivation that was 'transmitted' through the generations and Charles Murray's second intervention in the UK in 1994 focused on changes to the British family. Labour shifted a broad policy brief around social exclusion and antisocial behaviour to a more focused gaze on the 'most challenging families' (RTF, 2006a) and 120,000 families 'at risk' (SETF, 2007) in their later years in office. Cameron's strong belief in the importance of family (see, for example, Cameron, 2010, 2011a, 2011b & 2014) fits with traditional Conservative interests, which manifest themselves in the contemporary fixation with 'hard-working families', and a parallel concern about, the social consequences of 'family breakdown' and 'troubled families'. Contemporary social policy attempts to encompass the 'whole family' thus view the family as a 'reality transcending its members, a transpersonal person endowed with a common life and spirit and a particular vision of the world' and 'an active agent' capable of acting on the world (Bourdieu, 1996: 20). Gillies (2011) has highlighted how families are often viewed by contemporary politicians in terms of their *practices* such as child-rearing, education and, especially in the case of 'troubled families', the all-round

domestic competence of the household. Although the focus on mothers often remains implicit in debates around 'the family', we can see that gender doesn't so much *flow* through the 'troubled families' field, as *saturates* it.

Welshman (2013: 230-231) notes how, in recent years, government agencies have become more central to the construction of underclass concepts, taking over from voluntary organisations, pressure groups and individual social reformers and researchers of earlier times. We can see this increase in state involvement develop from: the use of 'problem families' in official reports in the 1950s; through the large transmitted deprivation research programme initiated by the then government minister Sir Keith Joseph in 1972; the cultivating of the idea of a dependency culture by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s; and the establishment of a Social Exclusion Unit by New Labour in the 1990s and 2000s. 'Troubled families', a genuinely *official* social problem, one that has been created, named and given legitimacy by the state appears as the culmination of this process. Riding shotgun with this expanding role of state sponsorship is an increasing role for the state in resolving the myriad problems associated with members of the underclass. This development can again be traced back to interest from the state in theories about 'problem families' and 'transmitted deprivation'. In the 1980s, it was thought that general reform to the welfare system would be sufficient to tackle 'welfare dependency' and New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit in the 1990s included Action Teams across 18 different policy areas and a raft of initiatives and funding streams aimed at the multiple dimensions of social exclusion. Multiple problems, in New Labour's eyes, required multiple solutions. The development of a single programme to tackle 'troubled families' represents a contemporary realisation of Mary Carpenters belief, in the 1800s, that a 'perfectly distinct machinery' was required for dealing with the 'dangerous classes'.

Just as government have become more central to debates about the putative existence of an underclass, so, arguably, have the media. Whilst the slumming adventures of journalists in Victorian times (Koven, 2004) helped to raise awareness of the conditions in which the poor lived, there is little evidence to suggest that they were heavily involved in disseminating more specific ideas about the 'residuum' or the 'submerged tenth' of that time. Similarly, Welshman (2013: 97) notes that the problem family debate of the 1940s was confined largely to academic and practitioner discussions. More recently, however, we have seen *The Sunday Times* inviting Charles Murray to the UK to discuss his underclass theory, *The Sun* running a 'Broken Britain' campaign, and a post-riots 'underclass consensus' (Tyler, 2013: 7) developing amongst politicians and the media in 2011. The 'Broken Britain' narrative has also been associated with

a number of UK films in recent years, such as *Ill Manors, Harry Brown* and *Eden Lake*. More recently, there has been the explosion of 'poverty porn' programming, such as *Shameless, Benefits Street, We all pay your benefits,* and *On Benefits and Proud,* that has offered television viewers glimpses of the 'underclass' from the safety of their own front rooms (see Allen et al, 2014; Crossley & Slater, 2014; Jensen, 2014).

Researchers have played a prominent part in the history of these debates and discussions and Macnicol has noted that a 'recurring feature' of underclass debates is the need for more research to be carried out (Macnicol, 1987: 316). Some of the early social researchers such as Seebohm Rowntree and Charles Booth were involved in the 'discovery' of the residuum' in Victorian times. It was American academics whose work was influential in propagating the concepts of a 'culture of poverty' and an 'underclass'. More regularly, however, and certainly in more recent times, it is academics who have been the strongest opponents of the underclass thesis. This trend has continued, with some academics providing critiques of the TFP and the concept of 'troubled families' more generally (Bond-Taylor, 2015; Butler, 2014; Gillies, 2014; Hayden and Jenkins, 2014; Crossley, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Lambert, 2016; Bond-Taylor, 2017; Lambert and Crossley, 2017; Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage, 2017; Sayer, 2017; Wenham, 2017) despite the government's insistence that no more research is necessary (Crossley, 2014).

One relative constant in these debates, both historically and contemporarily, has been struggles between different arms – or aims - of the state. The history of poor relief, as we have noted, has been riven with tensions about how best to care for members of the 'deserving poor' and how best to control their wayward cousins, the 'undeserving poor'. Dominant narratives about how expansive state provision and a generous welfare system can create a 'dependency culture', which first surfaced in Victorian times, have returned under the spectre of austerity to highlight tensions between 'hard-working families' and 'troubled families'. There are also, however, tensions and struggles within the caring functions of the state, what Bourdieu (1998: 1-10) referred to, as the left hand. For example, at the same time that Medical Officers of Health were finding the 'problem family' a useful label, social workers were attempting to distance themselves from it (Welshman, 2013: 92). Social workers published *In and Against the State* in 1980 to articulate how they often had to work against the policies of the Conservative government in order to support their clients. Workers in children service's challenged the issuing of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) by their local authority through a legal process as they viewed the Orders as being counter to the welfare of the children involved, which was their statutory concern (Edwards and Hughes, 2008: p. 67). FIPs were

positioned as a response to this 'disjointed' approach, and the failure of traditional ways of organising and delivering public services to 'challenging' or 'complex' families (Parr & Nixon, 2008: 165). The TFP has been justified in a similar way. The recent trend towards more coercive and conditional forms of state intervention, often accompanied by the threat of sanctions or the withdrawal of support, serves to support Wacquant's thesis (2009a: 290) that the right hand of the state is orchestrating a shift from 'the kindly "nanny state" of the Fordist-Keynesian era to the strict "daddy state" of neoliberalism', with social policies increasingly being used to discipline marginalised populations.

4.5   Conclusion

These struggles and the shifts in emphasis that have occurred over the years highlight that the concept of 'troubled families' has not materialized fully-formed and without contention. Instead, a number of issues have occurred which have contributed to the creation of an official classification of 'troubled families'. The roles of Cameron and Casey should not be underestimated and will be examined more closely in Chapter 5 which traces the development of the 'troubled families' field. The respective interests of these two influential individuals, aligned with New Labours latter focus on 'the most disadvantaged', the 'need' for austerity following the economic crisis of 2007-08, and coupled with traditional Conservative interests in the role of the family have, following the 2011 riots, coalesced with an electorally successful 'broken society' narrative to produce a symbolically powerful discourse about 'troubled families', complete with accompanying policy programme.

These observations highlight that arguments which suggest that 'a direct line of descent' (Butler, 2014: 422) runs from New Labour to the coalition government in this strand of family policy only tell, at best, half the story. Wacquant's (2009: 312) alternative argument that such government initiatives do not proceed 'according to some master-scheme concocted by omniscient rulers' is more convincing. Even the best laid policy plans are prone to 'wobbles'.[20] Drawing on Bourdieu's work on struggles within the bureaucratic field he goes on to say that contemporary efforts to punish the poor are a 'rough *post-hoc functionality* born of a mix of initial policy intent, sequential bureaucratic adjustment, and political trial-and-error and electoral profit-seeking' (2009: 312).

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[20] My thanks to Roger Smith for this observation

Viewing the state as a field and a site of struggles allows us to move beyond a broadly linear or 'chain of sequences' (DuBois, 2015: 199) model of policy development and implementation. It allows us to examine the ways in which the state, via policy programmes such as the TFP, is being re-drawn, rather than 'rolled back' when considering the effect of welfare 'reforms' and other forms of state re-structuring under austerity. It enables us to examine the (re)emergence of 'family' amidst this restructuring, as a central feature in debates about the causes of and solutions to the problems posed by today's 'underclass'. Finally, it also encourages us to examine the ways in which, beneath the dominant doxic narratives, different agents and institutions of the state are engaged in ongoing struggles for position, and to 'fully attend to the internal complexity and dynamic recomposition of the bureaucratic field' (Bourdieu, 2009: 311).

Chapter 5: Constructing the 'troubled families' field

To avoid becoming the object of the problems that you take as your object, you must retrace the history of the *emergence* of these problems, of their progressive constitution, i.e., of the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle that proved necessary to make such and such issues to be known and recognized as *legitimate problems*, problems that are avowable, publishable, public, official (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:238 original emphasis).

5.1   Introduction

This chapter traces the emergence and development of the concept of 'troubled families', from a speech by David Cameron during the early days of the coalition government (2010-2015) through to the establishment of a central government policy with official criteria for what constitutes a 'troubled family' and indicative numbers of 'troubled families' allocated to individual local authorities. The strength and specific symbolic power of official discourse is central to understanding the emergence of 'troubled families' as a group that exists in the minds of politicians, civil servants, local authority practitioners, journalists and the wider public. The government have been able to bring 'troubled families' to life, by publishing criteria setting out how they can be identified and stating that there are 120,000 of them in England (although they subsequently found 400,000 more around 18 months later). Bourdieu (1989: 22) argued, drawing on work by Aaron Cicourel, that official discourse 'accomplishes three functions':

1. it provides a diagnosis of a condition or a person, and says what they are;
2. it states what is needed to be done, what people have to do, in the form of orders, directives and prescriptions;
3. it provides 'authorized accounts', via documents such as police records or case files, stating what people 'have actually done'

Each of these functions can be seen when examining not only the putative social problem of 'troubled families', but also when thinking about the state response to 'troubled families': its framing of the central role of family workers working on the TFP; the model of intensive family intervention as being the *only* approach that 'works'; its Payment by Results model which requires local authorities to collect and submit evidence that families have met certain behavioural 'standards'; and its reporting of families being officially 'turned around'.

The chapter begins by examining the early coalition attempts to work with 'families that need extra help' via the volunteer-led *Working Families Everywhere* project. The government

response to the 2011 riots, and its focus on parenting failures, is then considered. In the months following the riots, the TFP was established and launched and 'troubled families' became an official title for families displaying or causing certain 'problems'. This development, the emergence and construction of a 'troubled families' public policy field, is analysed, before attention turns to the agents involved in the 'troubled families' game and the boundaries of the field. A concluding summary of the chapter draws heavily on Bourdieu's work on the way that state constructs and sustains the 'illusion' of different types of families.

5.2   The emergence of 'troubled families'

In December 2010, just over six months after becoming Prime Minister, Cameron spoke at an event organised by *Relate*, a relationship advice charity. In his speech (Cameron 2010), he set out his government's 'family-friendly reform agenda' which would be about 'thoughtful, sensible, practical and modern support to help families with the issues they face'. Cameron stated that he was 'as aware as anyone about the limits of what government can do in this area' and was not going to introduce 'some bureaucratic system telling parents what to do', but nor was he advocating 'leaving families to get on with it in a hostile world'. Making it clear that 'I loathe nanny-statism' and that he was 'not proposing heavy-handed state intervention', Cameron instead set out why he believed government, and policy-makers, should be cognisant of the importance of 'family':

> The seeds of so many social problems - as well as success stories - are sown in the early years. Family is where people learn to be good citizens, to take responsibility, to live in harmony with others. Families are the building blocks of a strong, cohesive society. This isn't a hunch. A whole body of evidence backs it up. When parents have bad relationships, their child is more likely to live in poverty, fail at school, end up in prison, be unemployed later in life. It would be wrong for public policy to ignore all this. No one who wants to tackle some of our deepest social problems - and the massive economic costs they bring - has a hope unless they understand the importance of family.

It was in this speech that Cameron first used the phrase 'troubled families', and he spoke at length about the problems they faced and how the coalition government would work with these families:

> But we also need to recognise some families need extra help. For years we've known that a relatively small number of troubled families are responsible for a large proportion of the problems in our society. Maybe the parents have an addiction or have never worked in their life. Maybe there's domestic violence. Often the children are completely out of control.

If we're honest, people's first instinct with these troubled families is to turn their backs on them. But that's self-defeating. The problems get worse. The misery increases - for them, their neighbours and society as a whole. Let's not forget that children are being brought up in these homes - children who through no fault of their own have inherited a life of despair. And let's not forget these families cost us a fortune - in benefits, social workers, police time and places in young offenders' institutes and prisons. Indeed, some estimates suggest that just 46,000 families cost the taxpayer over £4 billion a year - that's nearly £100,000 each.

Take action now and we could cut these costs, turn lives round and sort out our neighbourhoods' worst problems. The previous Government, for all their interventions and initiatives, never got to grips with troubled families. I am determined that we will. That's why we are not only protecting funding for Sure Start children's centres, but increasing their focus on the neediest families. And today, I can announce a further step we are taking to turn troubled families around.

All the evidence suggests that it's no use offering a range of different services to these families - the help they're offered just falls through the cracks of their chaotic lifestyles. What works is focussed, personalised support - someone the family trusts coming into their home to help them improve their lives step-by-step, month-by-month.

Cameron went on to set the ambition that by the end of the Parliament, he wanted to 'try and turn around every troubled family in the country'. This ambition was to be realised through a *Big Society* venture, relying on private and voluntary sector input and based on volunteers supporting 'troubled families'. Emma Harrison, the Chief Executive of the welfare-to-work company *Action 4 Employment* (A4E), was announced as the person who would lead the work to 'turn around' the lives of 'troubled families', with Cameron arguing that '[h]er approach is the complete opposite of the impersonal, one-size-fits-all approach that has failed so many families'.

Cameron promised to help Harrison 'pioneer a new way of doing things' that would be less bureaucratic, less impersonal, more human, more effective'. This would include working with the family as a whole and not just as individuals, although given Garrett's (2007) critique of the 'pioneering' claims attached to FIPs and the 'think family' approach of the previous government, it is unclear in what respects this approach was 'pioneering'. The approach would be piloted with 500 'troubled families' in different local authorities. Cameron further marginalised the role of government in this endeavour by stating:

Our side of the bargain of this: we will strip away the bureaucracy and give her, and the many others who we hope will follow her lead, the freedom she needs to make a difference. Her side of the bargain: to get these families back into work and on their feet.

Although 'troubled families' were never clearly defined by Cameron at this stage, Harrison's work, which came to be known as *Working Families Everywhere* (WFE), was focused on 100,000 families that had 'never worked'. The scheme would see a number of volunteer 'family champions' supporting families with multiple disadvantages into work, with Harrison (2010) saying that 'every family will have their own "Emma", able to use every existing resource to help them get going, face up to and sort out their problems, whether they be parenting challenges, poor health, debt, addiction, dependency or lack of motivation'. The scheme operated outside of the media glare for much of its initial period. Following the riots that took place across England in August 2011, it, along with the concept of 'troubled families', was thrown back into the media spotlight.

On 4 August 2011, Mark Duggan was shot dead by police in Tottenham. Peaceful demonstrations involving members of Duggan's family and his friends took place two days later outside Tottenham police station, following what they perceived as misinformation and a lack of direct communication from the police. When senior police officers refused to meet with or speak to protesters, the situation escalated with police officers coming under attack from bottles and fireworks. The BBC reported that '[u]nconfirmed reports say the incident was sparked by a confrontation between a teenage protester and a police officer' (BBC News, 2015) although alternative explanations have been given (see, for example, Cadwalladr, 2016).

The rioting spread to other parts of London in the following days, as well as other cities and towns across England, including Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, Luton and Nottingham. MPs were recalled from their summer holidays as a result of the unrest and, on 11 August 2015, the Prime Minister delivered a statement to Parliament (Cameron, 2011a). Dealing initially and primarily with the incidents that led to the riots, the police response to it and the damage caused by those involved in the riots, Cameron eventually turned to what he called 'the deeper problem':

> I have said before that there is a major problem in our society with children growing up not knowing the difference between right and wrong. This is not about poverty; it is about culture—a culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities.
>
> In too many cases, the parents of these children—if they are still around—do not care where their children are or who they are with, let alone what they are doing. The potential consequences of neglect and immorality on this scale have been clear for too long, without enough action being taken. As I said yesterday, there is no one step that can be taken, but we need a benefit system that rewards work and is on the side of families. We need more discipline in our schools; we need action to deal with the most disruptive families; and we need a criminal justice system that scores a clear, heavy

line between right and wrong—in short, all the action that is necessary to help mend our broken society.

Cameron's focus on the 'cultural' causes of the riots, one that glorifies violence, one where lone parent families and lack of parental care are inextricably linked, formed part of what Tyler (2013: 7) called the 'underclass consensus', a doxa surrounding the riots and their causes. She notes that this emerged in and from the responses of politicians and journalists (see also Jensen, 2013), even whilst the riots were ongoing. Champagne, in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 47), highlights how, during such 'events':

> The media act on the spur of the moment and collectively fabricate a social representation that, even when it is rather distant from reality, persists despite subsequent denials or later corrections because, quite often, it merely reinforces spontaneous interpretations and hence mobilizes prejudices and thereby magnifies them.

In a similar vein, DeBenedictis (2012) traced the 'feral parents' narrative that played out in some sections of the media, echoing Cameron's concerns about absent parents and disruptive families, and giving the 'social malaise … a visible existence' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 46). Allen and Taylor (2012: 5) also argued that popular debates surrounding the riots 'were suffused with a long-standing narrative of troubled mothers which refuelled debates around welfare dependency and the (un)deserving poor in an age of austerity' (see also Bristow, 2013 for an analysis of the topic of 'parenting culture' in media reporting of the riots). Alternative explanations were effectively crowded out.

Four days after his address to parliament, Cameron (2011b) gave a 'fightback' speech in his Oxfordshire constituency of Witney. He again eschewed structural or political issues as catalysts for the riots, stating that they were not about poverty, race or government cuts.[21] Instead they were, in Cameron's eyes, about behaviour: 'people showing indifference to right and wrong, people with a twisted moral code, people with a complete absence of self-restraint'. Stating that the broken society was 'back at the top' of his agenda, Cameron promised that 'today and over the next few weeks, I and ministers from across the coalition government will review every aspect of our work to mend our broken society'. The speech contained numerous proposals across disparate policy areas, including: a promise to reform the police service and education provision; an echoing of New Labour in calling for 'respect for community'; arguing for a welfare system that promotes responsibility; namechecking a National Citizen service for young people – a 'non-military programme … that captures the

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[21] See Lightowlers (2014) for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between deprivation and the disturbances which offers an alternative view to that of the Prime Minister.

spirit of national service'; and even promising a 'no holds barred' approach to 'the human rights and health and safety culture'. Setting out such extensive government intervention, has been called an exemplar of neoliberal 'state-crafting' (Crossley, 2016a: 269) whereby the state re-draws 'the perimeter missions, and capacities of public authority on the economic, social welfare and penal fronts' (Wacquant, 2010: 210).

Cameron also focused on the issue of families and parenting and argued that it was only necessary to 'join the dots' to get a 'clear idea' of why so many young people were involved in the rioting:

> I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it's standard for children to have a mum and not a dad, where it's normal for young men to grow up without a male role model, looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger. So if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start.

He stated that a 'family test' would be applied to all domestic policy and also mentioned speeding up work to improve parenting, but he also paid particular attention to 'troubled families':

> And we need more urgent action, too, on the families that some people call 'problem', others call 'troubled'. The ones that everyone in their neighbourhood knows and often avoids. Last December I asked Emma Harrison to develop a plan to help get these families on track. It became clear to me earlier this year that - as can so often happen - those plans were being held back by bureaucracy.

> So even before the riots happened, I asked for an explanation. Now that the riots have happened I will make sure that we clear away the red tape and the bureaucratic wrangling, and put rocket boosters under this programme, with a clear ambition that within the lifetime of this Parliament we will turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country.

The mention of Harrison's work prompted a renewal of media interest in the WFE scheme. *The Times* reported that the scheme would work to 'uncover a background of welfare dependency' (Sherman et al, 2011). In an interview with *The Sunday Times* (Driscoll, 2011), Harrison also claimed credit for the term 'troubled families':

> In the beginning he [Cameron] used the term 'problem families' - in that they're a problem to society - now he says 'troubled families'. Do you notice that? That's my word. These are not bad people, they are families who haven't got a clue.

Although she claimed that '[p]art of her deal with Cameron was that this vilification should stop', she still managed to pathologise and infantilise the families she was working with, giving one example of the 'transformative' power of her approach:

> I sat with them for two hours. There were cigarette ends and dirt everywhere, mattresses on the floor… We had a real good chat. I said to them, "There's a chap who runs a charity shop in your local precinct, and he's asked if you'll come and help out tomorrow." They said, "Us? But people think we're scum."
>
> This family lived on crisps, chips - and cigarettes - but at the end of the day the manager told them they'd done a good job, and they had that good feeling you get from a job well done, and the mother went into a shop and bought some fresh food and cooked a meal. Her daughter nearly fell over. Now I might never get Mum back to work, but she can help her children, she can support the working family.

Other commentators were less effusive about the approach with one calling the approach a 'small state fantasy' and a 'new government initiative dedicated to summoning paradise out of chaos' that 'conjures the image of workshy beasts lying in piles of Pringles and crack, waiting to be shouted at by Hyacinth Bucket, on top of the rest of their woes' (Gold, 2011). Cameron's 'rocket boosters' quickly fizzled out, however, and the 'small state fantasy' never materialised. In October 2011, Louise Casey was announced as the head of a new cross-departmental Troubled Families Unit, located in the DCLG, a central government department. In December 2011, a new government programme, the TFP, was launched by Cameron, which would fundamentally contradict the small government, *Big Society* rhetoric espoused twelve months earlier. Leviathan once again replaced the Good Samaritan.

5.3 Official boundaries: the launch of the Troubled Families Programme

'Troubled families' became an official social problem on 15 December 2011, when David Cameron launched the TFP with a speech at Sandwell Christian Centre in Oldbury in the West Midlands (Cameron, 2011c). Individual families were, in Althusserian terms, *interpellated* (Althusser, 1971) or *hailed* into becoming 'troubled families'. Cameron, the Prime Minister, standing behind a lectern sporting the government coat of arms, was endowed with sufficient authority and symbolic power to bring the concept of 'troubled families' to life in the imagination of the wider public.

In contrast to his previous commitment (Cameron 2010) to 'strip away the bureaucracy' to help Emma Harrison develop her volunteer-led approach to supporting 'troubled families', Cameron now claimed that 'only government has the power … to sort them out' and argued that it would 'take a concerted effort from all corners of Government' (Cameron, 2011c).[22] The shift from *Big Society* venture to a state-led intervention at a time of austerity, welfare

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[22] See Crossley, 2016b for a fuller discussion of the contradictions between Cameron's speech in 2010 and the speech given at the launch of the TFP

retrenchment, and decentralisation provides another example of a 'policy wobble' and the 'mix of initial policy intent, sequential bureaucratic adjustment, and political trial-and-error and electoral profit-seeking' referred to by Wacquant (2009: 312). The social turbulence caused by the riots and the government's need to be seen to be doing something, required a stronger, more robust response than the 'Hyacinth Bucket' image of the WFE programme.

Although the launch of the TFP occurred in December 2011, plans for the programme had been put in place in the months leading up to the announcement. In October 2011, Louise Casey was unveiled as the head of a new Troubled Families Team in DCLG. Following an interview with Casey for *The Guardian*, Ramesh (2012a) suggested that the TFP was her idea, writing that:

> she had been drafted in to Downing Street months earlier by now cabinet secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood and Cameron's then policy guru Steve Hilton. Her job was to find out whether the hotchpotch of schemes the government had set up on problem families – including troubled families champion and A4e boss Emma Harrison looking at getting more people into work, community budgets under Eric Pickles and a plethora of education initiatives – were working. They were not, Casey told Cameron's team bluntly. Her prescription was a Blairite one: a delivery team with a cross-departmental remit and a bazooka of a budget.

Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities was the Minister responsible for delivering the programme. In the week following the announcement on Casey's appointment, Pickles (2011), echoing the Prime Minister's robust rhetoric, set the tone – and the pace - for the TFP during a speech to council leaders:

> Last week the Prime Minister announced a Troubled Families Unit in my Department led by Louise Casey. She will be working on an action plan for what needs to be done nationally and locally to deliver this ambition. That will include cutting the bureaucracy that gets in your way. And she'll be supporting and talking to you. To ensure that all across the country, councils and their partners are prioritising the activities and interventions which work. If you're wondering is this a threat to your independence - the answer is yes, it is a threat. It is a threat if you don't get on with things. Think of this as a race to deliver by 2015. If you motor along then we'll play catch up. But if we get there first - you'll find yourselves behind the agenda. And I'm sorry about people who tell me they've already got a programme that deals with this. Well, if it was all dealt with we wouldn't be here. One or two projects along the right lines isn't nearly enough to solve this problem. So be in no doubt - we are in a hurry, we mean to deliver. You don't need to talk about it or show empathy. I want you to get on with it. And I know local government can get results. But understand - this isn't either or. We are going to deliver on this. So get moving.

Throughout these early stages of the construction of a 'troubled families' field, the discourse surrounding and permeating the field was reminiscent of Wacquant's argument that neoliberalism involved a *remasculinization* of the state and supports Featherstone et als (2014:

2) claim that there exists an approach of 'muscular authoritarianism towards multiply deprived families'. Cameron wanted to 'sort out' these families, Pickles was 'threatening' local authority leaders and Casey is, and was, well-known for blunt talking and getting things done (Ramesh, 2012a). This rhetoric continued with the promotion of an intensive 'family intervention' approach that would 'grip' not just families, but the allegedly un-coordinated mass of services that was failing to turn them around. Casey (2013a, emphasis added), in an interview with the *BBC*, explained the 'family intervention' approach thus:

> What we know works is this thing called family intervention and what it does is basically get into the actual family, in their front room and if actually the kids aren't in school it gets in there and says to the parents I'm gonna show you and explain to you exactly how to get your kids up and out every single day and then *I'm gonna make you do it. And if you don't do it, there are gonna be consequences*.

'Troubled families' were not just brought into existence (Bourdieu 1991:223) and given a 'state identity' by the government, they were also 'quantified and coded by the state' (Bourdieu 2014:10). There were, according to the government, 117,015 'troubled families' (rounded up to 120,000), and each local authority was provided with an indicative number of 'troubled families' in their area. This estimate was arrived at using data from the Families and Children Survey in 2005, and population estimates and indices of deprivation and child well-being (DCLG, 2011). Levitas (2012) highlighted that the FACS data, which led to the aforementioned (Chapter 4) SETF (2007) publication on 'families at risk', revolved around disadvantages such as material deprivation, low-income, maternal mental health and poor-quality or over-crowded housing. She went on to argue that the figure of 120,000 'troubled families', characterised by crime, anti-social behaviour, educational truancy and worklessness in England, on closer inspection 'turns out to be a factoid – something that takes the form of a fact' (Levitas, 2012: 4). Noting that the term 'troubled families' 'discursively collapses 'families with troubles' and 'troublesome families', while simultaneously implying that they are dysfunctional as families' (Levitas, 2012: 8), she also argued that the language was part of a wider discursive strategy that was 'successful in feeding vindictive attitudes to the poor'. The misrepresentation of the research base was brushed aside by the government, with Casey suggesting that 'a lot is made of this, in retrospect, which needn't be' (in Gentleman, 2013) and that the most important thing was that she was 'getting on with the job', working with local authorities - giving them the criteria for 'troubled families' and working to help them populate their local database 'with real names, real addresses, real people'.

The linking – through government commissioned research - of poverty with troublesome behaviour highlights that the 'troubled families' concept represents an official extension of the

'underclass' thesis. The lack of scrutiny of the concept of 'troubled families' demonstrates the doxic success of the government in persuading others that these families exist, as a 'corporate body' (Bourdieu 1989: 23). This is demonstrated, for example, by two mildly critical pieces in *The Guardian* newspaper (Butler, 2012; Williams, 2012) which were published shortly after the DCLG published *Listening to Troubled Families* (Casey, 2012). These two pieces, by well-known commentators Patrick Butler and Zoe Williams, both highlighted the misuse of data by the government but both also suggested the 'real problem' with 'these families' was poverty. In doing so, both appeared to accept or (mis)recognise the *existence* of 'troubled families', and were therefore focused on proposing a more appropriate 'treatment' for them. In a similar vein, all 152 local authorities 'signed up' to deliver the TFP in what Eric Pickles called a 'fast and unanimous level of take-up [that] shows that the Government has got the confidence of local councils' (DCLG, 2012b). The financial pressures that local authorities faced, and the fact that councils were already working with, and delivering services to, many families who would 'qualify' for the TFP were not discussed as possible reasons for their participation in the programme. The widespread acceptance of a 'family intervention' model as the best way to work with 'troubled families' once again highlights the doxa that surrounds and permeates the 'troubled families' field and the misrecognition that flows from it. The impact of welfare reforms, precarious and poor quality labour market opportunities and predicted increases in child poverty all remained 'beyond question' (Bourdieu, 1977: 169), in the 'universe of the undiscussed' (1977: 168) that girdles the concept of 'troubled families'. This investment in the concept of 'troubled families' meant that many agents entered the field when it emerged. It is to these individuals that we now turn.

5.4 Agents and entry requirements

Within the 'troubled families' field, there are a number of different agents occupying different positions and involved with different relations and struggles. This section begins with a brief examination of the families who gain entry to the field by virtue of them meeting the qualifying criteria, before moving on to a fuller discussion of agents of the state involved in the 'troubled families' field, at a local level and also at a national level, with some agents operating within the field of power.

'Troubled families', as we have seen, were, in the first phase, those who met three of the four following criteria:

- Are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour

- Have children who are regularly truanting or not in school
- Have an adult on out of work benefits
- Cause high costs to the taxpayer
  (DCLG, 2012a: 9)

Despite the official number of 'troubled families' in England originating from data which included disadvantages such as poverty, poor housing, low skills and maternal mental health, none of these issues were explicitly reflected in the criteria used by local authorities to identify 'troubled families'. Poor families who might be experiencing some of these issues but who did not, for whatever reason, meet three of the criteria, would not be eligible for the TFP. Thus, entrance to the 'troubled families' field was reserved for the 'troublemaking' or 'undeserving' poor, reinforcing the rhetoric that this was a programme targeting a small hard-core of 'neighbours from hell' at the 'bottom' of society, who lack any social, cultural or economic capital that could be used to improve their situations.

As well as the official criteria for being a 'troubled family', speeches by Casey and Pickles and DCLG publications offered an insight into the 'types' of families that would qualify as 'troubled' and what their shortcomings were. These were families that could not keep their houses clean, that could not properly care for their young children and/or could not control their teenage children:

> The help provided is often very practical and involves workers and families 'rolling up their sleeves' and 'donning the marigolds' – working alongside families, showing them how to clear up and make their homes fit to live in. (DCLG, 2012a: 21)

> Work with individual family members and group work with the family as a whole often looked at family relationships and communication as well as supporting parents with parenting positively, setting boundaries and routines and learning how to praise and motivate their children. (DCLG, 2012a: 12)

> This is all about making sure the mum is in control of her household and even with a 14 or 15 year old teenager, quite often when they're looking at, you know, being sent down, right, who do they call for? Their mum. (Casey, 2013a)

The focus on improving parenting practices and providing domestic support is suffused with gendered assumptions about the (in)competence of mothers within 'troubled families' and, in some cases, the links have been made more explicit, as can be seen in the final quote above. Casey has also suggested that mothers in 'troubled families' have too many children (Winnett and Kirkup, 2012) and should be given contraception advice by family intervention workers (Swinford, 2013). An accompanying rhetorical preoccupation with domestic violence almost slips into mother-blaming in Casey's suggestion that 'while those [women] who suffered

domestic violence did not *actively* choose violent partners, they may be used to, vulnerable to, or not surprised by violence in partners' (2012: 50, emphasis added). The implicit and sometime explicit focus on maternal (in)competence and (lack of) control in 'troubled families' is entirely consistent with Starkey's (2006: 544) observation about the 'problem families' discourse in the 1950s:

> In spite of the use of the term 'problem family', what was really meant was 'problem mother'. The description which appeared to embrace all members of the family was used to mask a profoundly critical attitude towards poor, working class women'

The construction of 'troubled families' and the putative source(s) of their problems has implications for the type of work that is required to 'turn them around' and also for the workers tasked with carrying out that work. Family workers, as shown in the quotes above, are expected to be able to 'roll up their sleeves' and 'don the marigolds'. They are also expected to be willing to get down on their knees and scrub floors and cook pizza, if necessary and demonstrate how to get children ready for school and 'out the door' (in Bennett, 2012). As well as this maternal, 'caring' side to family workers, they are also required to demonstrate a 'tougher' side as well. They have to be prepared to be 'persistent, assertive and challenging', able to 'tell it like it is' to the families they are working with and threaten them with sanctions where non-compliance might be an issue. They have, in Casey's words, 'been around the block themselves, they won't take no for an answer' and often 'don't look and feel like officials' (in Hellen, 2014).

Just as the TFP is positioned as a policy response to past 'failures of the state (see Crossley, 2016b), the qualities of family workers are juxtapositioned against other street-level bureaucrats in general, and social workers in particular. Social workers, in Casey's eyes 'circle' families, armed with clipboards, 'assessing the hell out of them', 'writing reports about them' (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2014: 21) but never able to effect any lasting, sustainable change within the families. Social workers 'collude with [families] to find excuses for failure' (Casey, 2013b), and Casey has been clear that she is 'not running some cuddly social workers' programme to wrap everybody in cotton wool' (in Winnett and Kirkup, 2012). The TFP then, attempts to claim distinction for family workers, attempting to forge a new social identity for them – and 'difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the closest threat' (Bourdieu, 2010: 481). Casey (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2013: 5, emphasis added) herself highlighted this when she gave evidence to a select committee and told them:

we have staff and workers *who are extraordinary*. They walk into these families' lives; *they do not invite them to an office for an appointment with a letter*. They walk through the front door and into the front room past two extraordinarily difficult and dangerous-looking dogs that they hope are locked in the kitchen. They have to sit on a settee, often in a pretty rough environment with some very aggressive people, and, with kids not in school and people all over the criminal justice system and so on, they have to get them from there to there. I think that is extraordinary.

Thus, the new, dynamic, persistent, 'hands-on', 'get-up-and-go' family worker who can achieve tangible, quantifiable 'results' is contrasted with the traditional stereotype of a grey, stuffy bureaucrat who sits at a desk in an office and arranges meetings with service users via letters. DuBois (2010: 183) has argued that 'no figure is more prone to prejudice than the "civil servant" behind his desk … the rigidity of their world of administrative forms seems to call for mockery or revolt' and that the desk, or counter, serves as both a material and symbolic barrier between the bureaucrat and the citizen (2010: 5). By contrast, the symbolic bureaucratic encounters that define the TFP take place not at a desk or counter in the public space of an office, but in the more intimate spaces of the front room, or the kitchen, thus 'separated from the external world by the symbolic barrier of the threshold' (Bourdieu, 1996: 20). The TFP, then, is reputedly predicated on a qualitatively different bureaucratic encounter. This symbolic violence castigates traditional forms of service delivery to disadvantaged families and individuals. It also requires family workers to acknowledge their 'failings' and 'inadequacies' in their former identities as youth workers, educational welfare officers, play workers, or social workers, and for services involved in the delivery of the TFP to acknowledge similar 'shortcomings'.

The potential economic and political capital associated with the TFP, at a time when both were in short supply in local authorities, led to services competing for position in at least two of the fieldwork sites involved in this study. In Northton, for example, one manager stated that, when the financial detail of the programme was announced:

> there was a bit of a queue at the door – "I've heard there's troubled families' money coming in … you know, my housing team does work with, on ASB, troublesome tenants, whatever, we'll have a bit of that".

Another manager highlighted how they had effectively managed to gain symbolic capital by implementing *Northton Families,* presenting on the programme to elected members, and highlighting the finances coming into the council through the PbR process, all whilst not taking any of the funding:

This is for the local authority, it's not for me. It's got nothing to do with me, it's not, you know, I protected people's jobs because I've made them work differently, but I haven't taken any of the funding.

Family workers, in 'donning the marigolds' and 'walking through the front door' are able to acquire distinction from other bureaucrats (and their former selves) who carry clipboards and spend too much time 'assessing'. They are expected to exude a 'particular form of bureaucratic charisma that is acquired by distancing oneself from the bureaucratic definition of the civil service role' (Bourdieu, 2005: 132). In performing these acts, however, the concomitant expectation is that they are able to symbolically deny the social distance that exists between themselves and the families they are working with, proving themselves to be, 'down to earth', and able to 'walk in the shoes' (DCLG, 2012a: 4) of the families. Such acts, according to Bourdieu (1989: 16), are 'strategies of condescension' where:

> agents who occupy a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space symbolically deny the social distance between themselves and others, a distance which does not thereby cease to exist, thus reaping the profits of the recognition granted to a purely symbolic denegation of distance … In short, one can use objective distances in such a way as to cumulate the advantages of propinquity and the advantages of distance, that is, distance and the recognition of distance warranted by its symbolic denegation.

The ability to 'get stuck in' and get things done whilst being 'persistent, assertive and challenging' are all characteristics and dispositions that have been associated with Casey, who is known for having a 'tough streak' (Chambers, 2012) and for her 'plain speaking and habitual trashing of PC niceties' (Williams, 2012). Just as Emma Harrison suggested that each family would have its very own 'Emma' helping them in the WFE scheme, it appears that Casey believes that it is workers who share her dispositions and attitude that are best placed to help 'troubled families' under the TFP.

Casey also makes regular visits to local authorities to speak directly to workers and asks to meet families who have been 'turned around' and talk with them about the effect that 'family intervention' has had on their lives. Casey expects the same habitus from members of her team in DCLG, many of whom have worked for her previously:

> There's a group inside Whitehall that have worked with me on and off for a number of years. I've tried to create a culture of getting on with the job: we're able to start up immediately and we don't have to wait six months to recruit people. Therefore we can move really, really quickly … The people in my team need to believe in the cause. Don't come and work in a team like mine if you don't believe in the cause, because I just can't be doing with it. (in Chambers, 2012)

The TFP, it should be noted, also carries the hallmarks of two other influential figures – Cameron and Pickles. Pickles blunt talking reinforces Casey's rhetoric and Cameron's traditional Conservative belief in the centrality of the family in social life surround the programme. Cameron himself was perhaps more closely associated with the TFP than he is with other social policies and programmes. It was him who first spoke about 'troubled families', he announced the programme in December 2011 and, a few months later, held an official launch at 10 Downing Street, and a speech on families in August 2014 immediately preceded the publication of details of the expanded programme. Casey has acknowledged that 'the fact that her appointment as head of the Troubled Families Unit was announced by David Cameron as "an important signal" and made a "big difference" to her authority to act' (Rutter and Harris, 2014: 8).

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how the concept of 'troubled families' has emerged as an official social problem, extending and strengthening the long history of the 'underclass' thesis discussed in Chapter 4. The state, through the concepts of 'troubled families' and their more respectable relations the nation's 'hardworking families' (Runswick-Cole et al, 2016) have achieved a 'vision of divisions' that is widely accepted and taken for granted. A vague and confused concern about 'family breakdown', 'families with multiple problems' and 'never-worked families' crystallized, following the 2011 riots, into a single government policy to 'turn around' the lives of 'troubled families'.

The development of this new public policy field, involving local authorities, has come at precisely the same time as other, similar fields have been contracting and/or disappearing as a result of austerity measures. For example, the expansion of the TFP, accompanied by £200 million of central government funding, was announced as part of a Comprehensive Spending Review which saw local authorities lose approximately £2.1 billion (Butler, 2013). Youth provision (including Youth Offending Teams), education welfare and early years and children's centres have all seen reductions in their budgets in many local authority areas at the same time that the advent of the TFP has seen cash injected into local authority areas – the 'correlative revamping of the perimeter, missions, and capacities of public authority on the economic, social welfare, and penal fronts' that Wacquant (2010: 304) speaks of. The most deprived local authorities, where the government believes most 'troubled families' live, have seen, and will continue to see, the largest cuts in funding since the coalition came into power

in 2010 (Beatty & Fothergill, 2013 & 2016). The relations between the 'troubled families' field and other policy fields are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

We have seen how the influence of powerful individuals Cameron, Pickles, and Casey can be found in the development of and discourses surrounding and permeating the 'troubled families' field. Casey, a senior civil servant who is trusted by both Cameron and Pickles,[23] acts as a fulcrum in this field, delivering policy messages to frontline members of staff and meeting with families on a regular basis. These messages invariably include an exhortation to 'roll your sleeves up', 'get stuck in' and show 'tough love' when working with 'troubled families'. This, in the government's eyes, is how the 'troubled families' game should be played.

The rhetoric, the counting of families, the establishment of a policy programme, the face-to-face work with families, and the publishing of results are all part of the government's attempts to construct a particular social reality. Bourdieu (1996: 24), in a rare foray into discussion of 'the family' specifically, argues that one:

> has to cease to regard the family as an immediate datum of social reality and see it rather as an instrument of construction of that reality; but one also has to … ask who constructed the instruments of construction that are thereby brought to light.

He notes that government officials, such as statisticians and social workers (as well, it should be said, as sociologists) help to produce and reproduce this social reality by *acting on* this reality (Bourdieu, 1996: 25). Every visit to a 'troubled families' house by a family worker, every PbR claim submitted for a 'turned around' family, every press release highlighting 'progress' in working with 'troubled families' helps to sustain and nourish the concept of 'troubled families', despite the shaky foundations on which the concept is built. The state, Bourdieu argues, is almost uniquely placed to create this doxa in modern societies. Whilst his focus in this piece of writing was on the way in which the state privileges certain types or forms of family, expecting others to adhere or conform to these 'normal' and 'natural' dominant arrangements, his work can also be used to understand how deviant families are also constructed by the state. The insertion of the word 'troubled' in the following quote demonstrates this:

> Thus the [troubled] family is indeed a fiction, a social artefact, an illusion in the ordinary sense of the word, but a "well-founded illusion", because, being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist (1996: 25)

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[23] See her appointment, by Pickles, to lead an 'independent' inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council following widespread Child Sexual Exploitation in the area and her subsequent appointment by Cameron to lead a review of integration on communities, linked to the tackling extremism agenda.

Chapter 6: Habitus

6.1   Introduction

This chapter draws on interviews with workers and managers tasked with delivering the TFP in the three fieldwork locations of Northton, Westingham and Southborough. The chapter explores the habitus of these agents, and how their backgrounds and prior experiences are embodied and internalised in their habitus within the 'troubled families' field, and how their position within the field is experienced.

The chapter begins with a brief examination of a 'preferred' family worker habitus that can be traced through pronouncements from politicians and civil servants, and which is central to the operationalization of the TFP and the creation of a more efficient, less bureaucratic way of delivering state support or intervention to 'troubled families'. The focus then moves onto the backgrounds, prior experience and trajectories of workers engaged with the local iterations of the TFP: how participants constructed their work histories, personal stories and reasons for entry into the 'troubled families' field. Of particular interest are the ways in which workers argued that their habitus 'fitted' the field. Examples of participants displaying a 'feel for the game', reconciling their aspirations with their position in the field (what Bourdieu called *amor fati*), and highlighting their own 'troubled' pasts, are all examined.   Following this, the diverse practices of family workers, as articulated by them and their managers, are examined, with differences between their views and the sometimes simplistic portrayal of family work advanced by national actors also explicated. A concluding discussion section highlights both the disjuncture between the narratives presented by street-level bureaucrats involved in the daily life of the TFP and the national portrayal of that life by senior actors occupying positions in the field of power, and the strength of the 'troubled families' doxa that permeates the field.

6.2   A family worker habitus?

> These workers have a distinct working style seen as the key to success consisting of dogged persistence, the ability to challenge values and behaviour, clear, honest, authoritative and assertive working styles and a real understanding of the family (DCLG, 2012a: 19)

The 'family intervention' approach relies, in the main, on the family workers' 'distinct working style' and their persistence, assertiveness and challenging approach which apparently distinguishes them from their colleagues in social work-related roles. Family workers are, we

are told, prepared to roll their sleeves up, get their hands dirty and engage with families whilst carrying out domestic chores such as getting children ready for school and cleaning or tidying the house. The embodied nature of the work is extended to include muscular, masculinized elements, with workers encouraged to 'grip' 'troubled families' (as well as other services) and use the threat of sanctions where they deem it appropriate. Despite this muscular rhetoric, Louise Casey has also argued that 'what's missing [from social work practice] is love' and has suggested that 'we need to bring back, actually, some emotional exposure, the ability to be human, the ability to empathise, not to be fearful of empathy' (in Aitkenhead, 2013). In summary, the approach, the dispositions, or the habitus, of individual family workers, is central to the putative success of the TFP and it is their embodied cultural capital that is valued and privileged over any institutionalised cultural capital they may hold.

Family workers, then, are positioned against other public sector workers who are characterised as being bound by bureaucracy, unable to care properly for (or about) families, or affect positive change in their lives. Family workers are thus able to 'turn around' the lives of 'troubled families' where all other state agencies have previously failed. To date, the creation of the *profession* of family worker or family intervention practitioner has received little critical attention. And yet, in the same way that a group of 'troubled families' have been created by the state, the profession of family worker has also been created and sustained by the state. The simplistic success story of the TFP as a social policy is, in fact, embodied in the simplistic success story of determined and dedicated practitioners who are able to overcome bureaucratic barriers to help 'turn around' the lives of disadvantaged families. Where family workers came from, or what they did, before they were interpellated by the state is unclear in this narrative. Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 242-243) notes that the idea of a 'profession':

> is a folk concept which has been uncritically smuggled into scientific language and which imports into it a whole social unconscious. It is the social product of a historical work of construction of a group and of representation of groups that has surreptitiously slipped into the science of this very group.

He goes on to argue that the concept works 'too well in a way' (1992: 243) as it manages to convey a neutral image that belies the 'work of aggregation and symbolic imposition that was necessary to produce it'. The symbolic privileging of 'family work' over 'social work' - and the clear distinction between the two - helps to concentrate the policy gaze on 'the family' in the same way that the focus on workers who can 'get through the front door' helps to close off discussions about social determinants and structural disadvantage. The oft-repeated belief that the family work approach is akin to 'old fashioned social work' (Gentleman, 2013;

Cameron, 2015) helps to portray not just a rose-tinted view of the history of social work interventions, but also locates *today's* social workers and contemporary social work practice as part of the problem, and thus ripe for 'reform'. The symbolic and political capital delegated to and invested in family workers should, like the idea of Emma Harrison's 'family champions' before them, be understood, in terms of social work practice, as one of number of 'developments on the margins of mainstream practice … likely to be significant' (Garrett, 2013: 14). The privileging of 'attitude' over 'knowledge' or 'experience' should also be of concern to social workers who have often struggled to create or maintain their professional status.

The idea of a single, distinctive family worker habitus*,* as articulated by Louise Casey and David Cameron, and repeated by other intermediaries such as media organisations and voluntary sector agencies, begins to look problematic when a 'street-level lens' is applied to this idea. Many of the frontline participants in the research study had been employed in similar roles prior to becoming family workers or family intervention practitioners. Their backgrounds included play work, youth work (often with young offenders or young people at risk of offending), education welfare, teaching, social work, early years and family work, and many practitioners had experience across a number of these roles.

The family workers involved in this study did not make any special claims to distinction or superiority over any of their colleagues in other bureaucratic fields. They did not suggest that their approach or their skills or backgrounds were somehow different to colleagues working in other fields or with similar families on more specific issues. One manager believed that the skill set of her (family intervention) team was no different to that of other children's and family teams within Westingham. Some of the workers who took on the role of 'lead' or 'keyworker' with 'troubled families' remained in their substantive posts and also worked with families or individuals who did not meet the 'troubled families' criteria, with their work effectively spanning more than one policy field.

In Westingham, workers from different service areas, such as *Connexions*, were nominated as the 'keyworker' when a family required a single-service intervention, which undermines the rhetoric of workers working holistically with all family members. In Northton, where a family intervention style team had been expanded using funding related to the TFP, lead workers were still spread across twelve different service areas. Youth Offending Team (YOT) workers involved with the programme in Northton suggested that they saw little difference to what they were doing with cases identified as 'troubled families', and those that weren't. For example, 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) meetings operated for both, and one worker stated

that she tended not to make a distinction in how she worked between the two. Where differences between current and previous practice was expressed, it was often couched in terms of changes to bureaucratic or statutory constraints and expectations. Workers talked about enjoying greater freedom or flexibility in how they worked with families than they might have enjoyed previously, or in other areas of work.

In addition to many of the practitioners who displayed long standing public or voluntary sector service in social work or welfare related roles, there were also a number who had come to the local iteration of the TFP from different backgrounds, including private sector employment, self-employment, work in manual or semi-skilled professions, as well as some periods of unemployment, travelling and/or studying. Many workers had spent some time working across the private, voluntary and public sectors. Family workers professional backgrounds included: work in printing firms; petrol stations; travel agents; insurance companies; accountancy; bar work; and as a life coach:

> *Erm, my first job was, erm, as a printer on a YTS, so completely different. Erm, then I moved on to graphic design. That place shut down and I moved in and did a play work qualification. I got bored with that and then went on to do a youth work qualification.* (Alison, Family Worker (FW), Northton)

> *So I was a parenting worker, erm, we had parent workers and we had individual workers, but we still worked holistically, if you know what I mean, you know, the post was a parenting worker. Prior to that, I was actually here for the opening of this building, in a post with Sure Start. Erm, and that was sort of, it's similar again, family support, play work. Before that I used to teach gymnastics, before that, erm, I worked at* [name of company] *in the accounts, in charge of the bought ledger department, and before that I was at* [name of department store] *bought ledger department.* (Becky, FW, Westingham)

> *Erm, done, in amongst that I've been a Youth Worker for ten years until that got annulled. Erm, then before that I was working at a tool bank company, selling tools. Erm, been a, err, travel agent, a florist, waitressing, bar work. Erm, I'm originally from Australia, so I kind of…* (Kayleigh, FW, Southborough)

Whilst this variety of backgrounds, qualifications, training and experience could add credence to the doxa that dispositions and a 'can do' attitude are more important than previous experience or qualifications in *doing* family work, one family worker in Southborough explicitly rejected this idea:

> *When I went to see her* [Louise Casey] *talk, she was saying, anyone can do this work, it could be a truck driver, it could be a lolly pop lady. It could be, erm, a baker, anyone. And I'm sitting there thinking, I've done this job and I've had a lot of training, anyone can't do this work. If you go into a house where there's a couple of heroin addicts and they're not in the best of moods and you're a truck driver, you might be able to get a bit, you know, but not anyone can do this work … It was all, you can go and do it and*

> *you'll be great, get your hands dirty, do the dishes and that's going to make a difference. What a load of rubbish.* (Maggie, Family Worker, Southborough)

One manager in Westingham offered a slightly more nuanced view. When discussing the redeployment process in Westingham, as the authority was trying to avoid compulsory redundancies, she argued that not everyone could do the job of a family worker:

> *some of the people who come along are just completely unsuitable. It's not fair to them, they haven't got the, you know, you don't mind somebody not having the experience, but you could just see, they were going to really struggle with challenging families, it wasn't fair to the family either.* (Sarah, Children's Services Manager (CSM), Westingham)

Given that 'troubled families' are supposed to represent the 'worst families' in the country, with intergenerational cycles of problems that they allegedly bring upon themselves, it is unsurprising that working with them is not for everyone. And yet, again, as many of the workers themselves suggested, there was nothing tangible about them that distinguished them from colleagues in other services, other than the political and institutional support that their work obviously enjoyed. They did not construct themselves as different from former or current colleagues. Nor did they did look or dress differently from colleagues in other teams, as far as I could tell from my visits to town halls, civic centres and neighbourhood centres. This was also the case with their supervisors or managers, many of whom had extensive experience across a range of social welfare services including youth work, youth offending, social work and educational welfare. Some managers believed that their previous work had 'led' them to the 'troubled families' agenda or that their interests had coalesced in their new role:

> *I've managed teams which have almost worked the full 0-19 spectrum, or, in children's centres cases minus 9 months to 19 … in terms of working with the unborn child if you like. And up to age 25 where there's evidence of additional needs or learning difficulties, so a full spectrum of children and, and youth work really I think.* (Ben, CSM, Northton)

> *So I do all the housing support, I work in the hostels, I work, you know, in terms of some of the real sort of, erm, complex side of things. I quite like that, to be honest, you know, I deal with travellers, I deal with, erm, all the things that probably other people would probably keep their head down on, you know. And what tends to happen here is, if it is a bit iffy, it comes my way. So Troubled Families, in the first instance, I was asked to get involved in Troubled Families and start to set up the approach. You probably understand why now.* (Bill, Head of Service (HoS), Westingham)

> *Because, erm, I think, well because I think I've got a track record of managing change. Erm, because I was, erm, parenting lead before, in terms of family support, you know, in the old … So, erm, I, erm, I did that. Actually, what I'd forgotten was I, I managed the Family Intervention Team as well. So, erm, that's sort of come back round full circle. So I've got experience in family work, erm, but also, because of the extended schools work, erm, I had to work with partners.* (Kim, CSM, Southborough)

As well as many of the managers and supervisors highlighting how their previous experience had *prepared* them for their 'troubled families' roles, frontline workers expressed similar sentiments, even when their movement into their current post was for reasons somewhat outside of their control. In short, many frontline workers expressed satisfaction with and/or gratitude for their role. Bourdieu (1977: 72) argued that the habitus comprised the integration of past experiences and acted as a 'strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever changing situations'. He used the phrase *amor fati* to highlight how agents often make a virtue out of a necessity, or attempt to exercise choice where that choice either doesn't exist or is severely constrained. Lane (2012: 130) has suggested that:

> the working-class habitus is what allows objective necessity to be experienced as a subjective choice undertaken in accordance with a communally maintained sense of what might constitute an appropriate or proper course of action.

There were numerous examples of *amor fati* in the accounts participants gave of their entry into the 'troubled families' field, not least when the reason for entry into the 'troubled families' field could have been viewed negatively (e.g. the loss of a previous job or an inability to secure a preferred job), or where their positions were precarious. One worker, in describing their move from working in a play service that was shedding staff to the TFP stated that 'it was definitely something I was looking for anyway'.

This feeling was widespread, despite the different reasons for entry into the field from different participants. For example, some participants in Northton and Westingham were family workers as a result of redeployment processes within the local authorities and Sam, a CSM in Westingham, noted that the programme had helped to sustain jobs for some employees whose services were affected by cuts and job losses. Employees who faced possible redundancy as a result of cuts to their services were thus able to secure, to a greater or lesser extent, employment within new 'troubled families' teams or positions. Many of these new positions were precarious, dependent as they were on continued government funding for the TFP. Some participants also saw family work as a stepping stone to other positions and careers, often social work and there was no sign of *hysteresis*, or the 'disjuncture' between workers' values and their practice that Smith et al (2016: 6) observed in discussions with social workers involved with child protection cases. Others, who had perhaps been involved in family work of some description prior to the TFP more or less offered support for the aims of the new programme:

> *And rather than wait for neighbourhood working to be completely dismantled, you know, I was, I was, I was almost forced if you like to take a position within, within the*

Northton Families Team, but that was a decision which I welcomed because I think it was consistent with a lot of my background anyway (Ben, CSM, Northton)

Err, we were getting cut out of working from secondary schools. And, err, and not long after then I got a phone call saying, "We're not sure you're going to have a job in September but there's a job going in the Council, which I think you'd be ideal for, we advise you to apply." So got into it that way and I've been here nearly two years now. And it's been really useful, I've really enjoyed it. (Steve, FW, Northton)

I suppose I was always looking to take up a post with young people but I ended up in a post working with families. Erm, and then that's led me on to developing some of my skills and experience and then that's where I felt that I wanted to pursue my interests. (Kirsty, FW, Northton)

So, and then, it wasn't my cup of tea answering phone calls (laugh), with a headset on and oh (laugh). So I kept applying and applying for these jobs I was getting matched to and then this one came along. (Ann, FW, Westingham)

Well when I saw the, erm, job description, it basically ticked all my boxes, err, which was basically that, erm, I could be very creative in the role. I could use all my skills and training and life experiences in the role. And I think it helps people, which I love to do. So it just seemed to fit me perfectly. (Vicky, FW, Southborough)

Just as their professional backgrounds fitted the work they were doing in the TFP, so some of the workers believed that their personal backgrounds had helped prepare them for work with 'troubled families'. Some of them had, to use Casey's phrase, 'been around the block' themselves and, where this was the case, workers undoubtedly felt that it enabled them to empathise with the situations faced by members of the families they worked with. They had, they believed, 'a feel for the game' that was being played:

I've worked in factories, been unemployed, been a mature student, went to University as a mature student. And I think very much that kind of helped me because I've done the low paid crap jobs, I've done those things. Erm, I've been on the dole and I feel that I'm, you know, I recognise what it's like being a young person without any kind of routes or without any, err, aspiration, err, I've been there. But I also now, I'm a family man, so I've kind of got those experiences to chuck in with that. (Steve, FW, Northton)

My mum had us out of wedlock in 1968, biggest taboo, biggest shock … So my mum was sent off to have me somewhere else and, you know, my granddad at the time didn't want her in the house because she'd brought shame on the family. So I've always had a chip on my shoulder, so I think that's why I empathise with the kids that I work with. Because I'm thinking, yes I know what it's like to have people go, oh that's that person over there. But, err, quite a complex family, as most families are. Lived with my granddad and my mum, my aunt and my uncle. And, err, never knew who my dad was, never had any inclination of who he was, he never made any contact with me. (Alison, FW, Northton)

Erm, my background, personally, is that I left home at fifteen. I didn't get any qualifications. I worked locally, seasonally. I was an unemployed single parent. I've had domestic abuse in my life, drugs, alcohol. So the, you know, all the things that, you

know, we support families to do, I've kind of had experience of quite extensively in my young life. (Maggie, FW, Southborough)

These types of backgrounds were by no means the only histories articulated by workers and/or managers however. One worker admitted that they were a bit 'wet behind the ears' when they started the job and 'didn't know poverty existed the way that it does until I walked into this job' whilst another, who despite considering herself more 'worldly-wise than most' admitted that 'I thought I'd seen everything and I haven't, until I started this job.' Some participants discussed mixed life histories which included, on occasion, periods of unemployment, time spent travelling, time spent studying (often as a mature student), raising of families etc., whilst others relayed relatively smooth transitions into adulthood: going to university, getting a job in the local authority and then moving jobs within the authority into, eventually, their current post.

6.3   *'Hold their hand but don't make them dependent':* practice in the field

Unsurprisingly, given the varied backgrounds of participants in the study, but in contrast to the national portrayal of the TFP as a new way of working with troublesome families, many of the participants stated that there was little in the family intervention model that could be considered innovative. Many participants in Northton and Westingham highlighted that the exhortation to 'think family' (Cornford et al, 2013) and 'whole family' models predated the TFP by a number of years. In Westingham, one manager spoke of feeling 'a bit like a fraud' when discussing the way that the government presented the TFP as something novel. Workers and local authorities were afforded some discretion around how to implement and operationalize the TFP locally, as long as they met the targets set by government: how the 'troubled families' game was played was therefore of secondary importance to ensuring the aims of the game were achieved. Where distinctive practices associated with the TFP were discussed by participants, they tended to be presented in terms of a much more focused approach, but complemented by greater flexibility in terms of specific practices:

> *Erm, it's definitely shifted and I think probably Troubled Families has got a little bit to do with that or, you know, got some part to play in that. Because it's definitely, you know, as a workforce and the services, we've gone from kind of that visit and a cup of tea and a bit of a chat, you know, it's got to be really focused.* (Audrey, CSM, Southborough)

> *Previously, mainstream advisor, you would get, erm, you would have a day full of interviews, pre-determined interviews, and you would spend that day doing those interviews every twenty minutes/half an hour, so possibly fourteen/fifteen interviews a*

day … I mean this role now, working with, erm, working with social workers and the police and antisocial behaviour, gives a whole picture about a family. (Tina, TFEA, Westingham)

Unsurprisingly, given the government focus on outcomes rather than process in the first phase of the TFP, practitioners articulated a number of ways in which their approach differed from the dominant doxa of a muscular, assertive form of intervention that 'grips' families. Workers who were supposed to 'not take no for an answer' spoke of small numbers of families that refused to engage for a variety of reasons and where they could not 'get a foot in the door'. These families were, however, often already involved with other agencies such as children's social care services and where their engagement with that service was not voluntary. It was widely accepted that very troublesome and/or criminal families were not being worked with under the TFP because it was viewed as inappropriate to do so. Sarah, in Westingham, said 'we identified that some of our families were actually too dangerous to work with' and Claire, a worker in Northton spoke of these 'notorious families' being 'parked with the idea of going back to them and having another look'. Whilst these families represented a small minority of the families that could potentially be worked with, workers also spoke of a far higher number of families where positive outcomes weren't achieved despite their best efforts and where cases were closed for negative reasons. In some families, despite the involvement and support of a family worker, family life did not improve or the situation worsened, with referrals to child protection teams a common reason given for family workers stepping back from working with families:

> *I would say, well speaking of my caseload, I would say probably a third end successfully, that's being optimistic … because, erm, more often than not they step up or, erm, or they disengage or, you know, I've got a couple that I'm still working with that I started working with when, when I started the job, the one that I've been with for eighteen months, for example.* (Daisy, FW, Southborough)

> *Well I've just finished working with a family who I've worked with for a year. And the mum has developed a dependency on myself as a support worker … In this particular case, I think this mum will come round again to us, I do, erm. So, err, but she's with social care at the moment. I referred her to social care. I've always kept her up to speed. She knows the reasons why she's there. She knows the level of support they're going to give her.* (Lisa, FW, Westingham)

The finding that many families proved resistant to the efforts of their family worker instantly troubles the doxa of an almost perfect social policy (Crossley, 2015) which allegedly saw 99 per cent of 'troubled families' 'turned around' within the government's own timescale. Workers and managers also disagreed with the idea that families lives had been 'turned around' by the support they had received from their workers. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

A more respectful approach towards families could also be found in workers practices. Just as workers were prepared to accept 'no' for an answer from families, workers spoke of gentler ways of working which, implicitly at least, achieved a form of distinction from the muscular interventions craved by Cameron and Casey. Workers also discussed how they would send out letters to families before attempting to make an appointment or before calling at the family home. Where contact with the family hadn't been made prior to an initial home visit, workers described tentative approaches which included checking that it was an appropriate time to call and, if not, offering alternative dates and times for return visits.

> *Erm, and you can't, you know, you can't impose it on people. So all you can do is try and say, well there's other, what about, I could help you with work, have you got issues about housing, you know, and try to explore stuff. Better in person than over the phone, erm, and I'll always, even if they still say no, because it is voluntary and you're not about kind of trying to harass people, erm, I'll still always send them a letter saying, you know, thank you for talking to me, here's a little bit more about what we do.* (Jacqui, Youth Worker, Northton)

Initial visits were also often made with other professionals who were better known to, and in some cases, trusted by, the families. Workers or managers from all three locations often presented their approaches more akin to 'hand-holding' or 'walking with families', rather than 'gripping' them, suggesting a subversion of the 'muscular authoritarianism' (Featherstone et al, 2014: 2) preferred by the government:

> *But the difference we make is, we can come in and support them through it and show, teach them how to do it, show them how to do it. Hold their hand while they do it and then they learn how to do it and they reduce that, erm, anxiety and they gain in confidence to be able to do it.* (Jess, CSM, Southborough)

> *Like yes, walk beside them. Yes, hold their hand but don't make them dependent.* (Emma, CSM, Westingham)

Whilst a narrative of support, which can also be found in some government publications and commentary on the TFP, is preferable to one of 'muscular authoritarianism' (Featherstone et al, 2014: 2), the rhetoric of 'hand-holding' still risks patronising and infantilising family members generally, and mothers specifically (Garrett, 2013: 15). Parents who need their hands holding are positioned as being incompetent or inadequate and 'lacking' the necessary maturity to parent and provide for their children without support from another adult. It also mimics Casey's (2012: 19) view in *Listening to Troubled Families* that 'Many of the parents [in 'troubled families] were little more than children themselves when they started having children', and it misrecognises the resourcefulness required by parents raising children in difficult circumstances or the stresses placed upon them in doing this. As Eleanor Rathbone

(1913, in Pedersen, 2004: 113-114) noted when presenting on the condition of widows under the poor laws in Liverpool at the turn of the twentieth century:

> It is hard for a woman to be an efficient housewife and parent while she is living under conditions of extreme penury – obliged to live in an insanitary house because it is cheap; waging a continual war with the vermin which infests such houses; unable to spend anything on repairs and replacements of household gear unless she takes it off the weekly food money; limited in the use of soap, soda and even hot water, because of the cost of coal; with no pennies to spare for the postage or tram rides that would keep up her own or her children's intercourse with relatives at a distance, or give them a day's holiday in the parks or on the sands, or enable her to frequent the Labour Exchange to seek better work for herself and the elder boys and girls; and trying through it all to earn part of the family income as well as to administer it. The astonishing thing to us is not that so many women fail to grapple with the problem successfully, but that any succeed.

Despite the emphasis on embodied hands-on domestic work undertaken by family workers within the national discourses, this did not appear to be central to the everyday practice of workers although, in fairness, their practice did appear to be extremely diverse. Again, given the diversity of family 'problems' that are covered by the 'troubled families' umbrella, it should not be surprising that the simplistic narrative of workers who need do little more than 'roll up their sleeves' and 'model' good parenting to effect dramatic change does not fare well under empirical examination. Whilst managers in Northton highlighted how they had needed to draw up new guidelines to assist workers who were willing to carry out small repairs and home improvements with the families they worked with, there were different approaches from workers within the authority to helping out with domestic work:

> *Generally the ones that will go in and start cleaning the floors are the older members of the team, who are family support workers originally. I mean they're now family intervention workers but they've come from a family support background. So they're, they used to be based in children's centres and then they've moved into, they're the ones that you tend to find will go and clean the house. Whereas, obviously, I'm from a social work background, I'm not about creating a dependency. I'm about empowering people to change their own lives and improve things for themselves.* (Pam, FW, Northton)

Across the different locations, there was also a mixed reception to the issue of domestic work. The need to observe or help with breakfast or bedtime routines was not a priority issue for many of the families that workers were working with, although some did state that it was required in some of the families they had worked with. Most workers believed that although the ability to work 'intensively' with families was an important aspect of their work, this did not necessarily translate into intrusive practices at intimate times in daily routines. Instead, workers focused more on the extensive and time-consuming support that families often

needed when navigating other services and agencies who were involved in their family life in different ways.

In a majority of interviews, workers highlighted the advocacy work and negotiations they undertook on behalf of families, often with colleagues in their local authority or with housing providers, health professionals and/or private sector companies such as utility companies and debt agencies. The importance of other individuals and services to the 'troubled families' agenda is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it is important here to highlight the administrative and stereotypically bureaucratic nature of much of the work of frontline family workers. Cameron (2011a), in his speech at the launch of the TFP argued that 'troubled families are already pulled and prodded and poked a dozen times a week by government' and the TFP was needed to establish 'a single point of focus on the family: a single port of call and a single face to know.' In reality, families remained engaged with numerous other agencies and the family workers spent a large amount of time drawing on existing social capital and developing new social capital, discussing issues with other service providers. This inevitably meant that the focus of their work was less on 'the family' and more on 'services to families'. Family workers, in effect, became a source of capital to the families – possessing the requisite volumes of cultural and social capital to engage with the state more effectively than families often could.

In some cases, workers highlighted how other state agencies often increased the pressure on families whilst others also expressed frustration that they were able to advocate successfully with partner agencies when families' attempts to negotiate or discuss issues had been unsuccessful:

> *So they'll do, you know, they'll, and I will fight their corner, particularly, you know, it is difficult for parents, with regards to, some head teachers are very challenging. Erm, some housing officers are really, their mind is already made up before they've even walked in that door, erm, you know. A lot, the, the families themselves have a lot of prejudice to overcome in some of the services. And sometimes just having me next to them, asking those questions that they were probably thinking about asking but wouldn't dare because the head teacher would shoot them down or, you know. I'll kind of be their voice in some ways.* (Claire, FW, Northton)

The doxa around the family intervention approach, focussing as it does on practical hands-on work that takes place inside the family home, leaves little scope for discussion of the mundane, everyday bureaucratic negotiations that family workers are compelled to carry out in order to support the families they are working with. In addition to the desk-based work with colleagues in other departments and services, workers also highlighted the amount of recording and paperwork that was required for the TFP.

The family intervention approach has been portrayed as an antidote to modern social work practice which Casey has characterised as involving workers holding clipboards, 'circling families' and 'assessing the hell out of them'. The testimonies of the participants involved with this research study indicated that, in many cases, family workers felt that the recording and monitoring requirements of the TFP often undermined their ability to work constructively with families. When asked about frustrations with their job, numerous workers highlighted the amount of paperwork and recording that was required. Workers spoke of keeping a 'chronology' of every contact with the family and every action carried out on their behalf or related to their case. Summaries of events at home visits and discussions during telephone calls with both family members and other services were recorded on computer databases so that the states involvement with 'troubled families' could be tracked. These practices provided 'authorized accounts', of what people 'have actually done' or agreed to do (Bourdieu, 1989: 22) and helped to record what workers had or hadn't done. The 'really focused' approach that Audrey spoke about when discussing work with families also applied to the work of family workers:

> *Right, well since it went over to Westingam Families, our paperwork, erm, has increased, in respect of the fact that new paperwork has come in. I mean we had agreement plans and things that were already formulated for our service. Erm, since it's gone over to Westingham Families, we have used paperwork that has been created in other local authorities. But, to be honest, it is quite lengthy and it constantly needs reviewing. And when your caseload's as high, it's very difficult to keep going back and reviewing it and reviewing it. And it doesn't take much to kind of fall behind. And it's something that I hate the thought of doing but sometimes it, it's unavoidable, you know. And, erm, I would say that, if anything could change, it would be the paperwork.* (Lisa, FW, Westingham)

> *You know, I do question myself sometimes, why do we need to print all of these emails off? Why do we need to keep trails of emails because it's not, that's not relevant to the progress that's been made? But, erm, it's to show that we've been working in a multi-agency way, it's to show, it's to keep a trail of what we've been doing with the families really.* (Daisy, FW, Southborough)

As well as this local administrative burden, workers, managers and analysts also highlighted the amount of information they were required to extract from the family to meet the needs of the national programme. Family Monitoring Data, required for the national evaluation of the TFP, amounted to 55 different pieces of information (where applicable) on each family member and this information was typically recorded at three stages of work with a family: on entry to the TFP, when a PbR claim was made, and when the family case was closed by the local authority. In addition to this information (which was changed to Family Progress Data under the second phase of the TFP) local authorities also collected data for their own local

evaluations and for other purposes. Northton, at the start of Phase 2 of the TFP, collected 95 different pieces of information on families, for 6 different monitoring or reporting purposes. This intrusive form of surveillance, often carried out without the families' explicit consent, suggests that 'assessing the hell' out of families had been eschewed in favour of recording or 'surveilling the hell' out of them. Whilst the former implies the considered exercise of discretion, perhaps based on professional knowledge and past experience, the latter could be understood as a lesser task of collecting and recording what has been seen, said or done. And whilst Casey believed that it was social workers with clipboards who were carrying out seemingly endless assessments in front of the families, the gathering and assessing of data under the TFP often takes place *between services*, and away from the front rooms of 'troubled families'.

The issue of informed consent and the sharing of data concerned a number of workers and managers, and confutes the notion that a key factor in the TFP is the shared 'trust' that exists between families and workers. In the early stages of the programme data was 'trawled' or 'washed' to produce a list of allegedly 'troubled families' who were often then discussed at multi-agency meetings. Participants highlighted how this process often led to families with very minor or historical 'troubles' being discussed as possible 'beneficiaries' of the TFP without their knowledge, including one family in Westingham where a child had once stolen a *Mars* bar. Similarly, under Phase 2 of the programme, participants expressed unease at the amount of data that was required by central government and family's knowledge of and consent to that data being sent:

> *And I really struggled with that initially, the families that were being discussed at the meetings, were being discussed by via a data trawl of the Government's criteria.* (Emma, CSM, Westingham)

> *So I went back to legal and said that this question was on and we do not have explicit consent from these families, to share this information with National Troubled Families Team. What we do have is consent from the families to share information in relation to putting in place a package of support.* (Janet, CSM, Northton)

A sample data sharing consent form for families provided to me by officers in Southborough included the caveat that, if families consent to the sharing of their personal data was withdrawn, support from the Southborough Families programme could also be withdrawn. In effect, and in a localised example of increased conditionality within the welfare system, if families wanted support from, or access to resources associated with, the programme, it was dependent on them agreeing to share personal information about themselves with different state agencies. The issue of 'consent' and whether it was explicit, informed or merely implied,

was raised by a number of participants in the study, but no participants couched their discussions in terms of the rights of the families they were working with. This may be a coincidence, but it may also reflect the doxic influence of a discourse which currently prioritizes responsibilities over rights in discussions about state support for disadvantaged families and individuals.

Despite this duplicity towards families in order to meet the monitoring and reporting aspects of the TFP, participants also noted that working against aspects of the national programme was also often required in order to support families effectively. Ben, a manager in Northton, observed that '[a PbR] claim and closure [of a family case] are two different things' and that 'practitioner integrity' meant that the workers he managed were often reluctant to close cases where the family's needs were identified as being unmet, even when a successful PbR claim had been submitted for the family. This was a theme that was repeated throughout interviews and across all three fieldwork sites and exemplifies the freedom and flexibility that workers appreciated. Across all three locations, the PbR claiming process was either distanced from the day-to-day practice of family workers or was moving in that direction. Some workers highlighted that they sometimes discussed progress in relation to claims during supervision meetings whilst others stated that they were completely uninvolved and therefore the PbR aspect of the work did not impact on their practice at all. This topic is returned to in the following chapters.

6.4   *'Partial revolutions'* and *'legitimated transgressions'*: a discussion

The interviews with workers and managers in local authorities involved in the delivery of the TFP highlighted 'the complexity of interactions concealed beneath the apparent monotony of bureaucratic routine' (Bourdieu 2005: 140). The simplistic, but symbolically potent, rhetoric of heroic family workers challenging 'troubled families' to change their behaviour and turn their lives around did not match the realities experienced and expressed by those workers. Whilst it would be unhelpful and similarly simplistic to talk of a divide between national policy rhetoric and local practice, there were substantial differences – a 'governmentality gap' (McNeill et al, 2009) - between the approach promoted by dominant and powerful actors in the field and that which was carried out by less dominant workers employed by local authorities and their partners.

Where government rhetoric promoted the idea of an ahistorical, highly individualised family worker, participants involved in the programme locally highlighted long backgrounds in either similar work or in similar institutions. This experience, along with the training and qualifications picked up along the way, was often drawn on to provide legitimacy for their current role, even when workers previous positions were deemed surplus to requirements as a result of austerity measures and cuts to local services. Workers valued their institutionalised cultural capital more than they did any embodied cultural capital. Their reliance on colleagues in other local teams, departments or organisations – their social capital - is discussed in more detail in the next chapter but all workers also articulated the importance of these partners in helping families. In place of the 'can do' attitude and 'hands-on' work carried out in family homes afforded primacy by the likes of Cameron and Casey, a more stereotypical bureaucratic approach was articulated by workers, which involved navigating rules and procedures and negotiating with fellow street-level bureaucrats. Workers and managers recognised that 'family work' wasn't necessarily suited to everyone, but there was no appetite amongst participants to portray themselves as distinguished individuals, different from their peers. Where differences were articulated, they were framed in terms of greater freedom and flexibility offered by the programme, rather than any distinctive or new habitus possessed by workers, or acquired by them upon entry to the field.

The muscular robust approach to 'intervening' in families that is advocated in policy documents was replaced with a softer, more feminised approach that owed more to a desire to support families through their troubles – a case, perhaps, of a velvet fist in an iron glove. Calls to 'grip' families' were ignored with workers preferring to see themselves in a 'hand-holding' role, and workers often stayed involved with families even after a PbR claim for 'success' had been achieved. The misrecognised value of a certain embodied cultural capital in the dominant doxa did not always translate into local practice, where greater value was attached to different forms of institutionalised cultural capital such as training, qualifications and professional status.

However, these subversions were all relatively minor alterations to policy which did little to trouble the national portrayal of the TFP (Crossley, 2016b). They did not, as DuBois (2014: 39) has pointed out, 'contradict the rationales of official policy' and ended up serving it goals. They were thus all examples of 'safe oppositions',[24] occurring within the 'black box' of policy implementation, which enabled workers, many of whom were precariously employed on

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[24] Thanks to Roger Smith for this observation

short-term contracts, to exhibit autonomy and discretion within the boundaries allowed by the TFP. In Bourdieusian terms, these practices can be viewed as 'legitimated transgressions' (Bourdieu, 2005: 132) or:

> *partial revolutions* which constantly occur in fields [and] do not call into question the very foundations of the game, its fundamental axioms, the bedrock of ultimate beliefs on which the whole game is based' (Bourdieu, 1993: 74 original emphasis)

Participants in the research then did not trouble the idea that family work of some description was necessary for the families that they were working with. They attempted to play the 'troubled families' game in the best way they could, given the surrounding field conditions. What was at stake, for them, then, was not the idea of family intervention or family work with marginalised or 'troubled families' *per se*, but the form that that work took. Whilst they engaged in different, more sympathetic approaches towards families, no workers, for example, refused to comply with the recording and monitoring requirements of the TFP. All participants had therefore entered the field and were prepared to play the 'troubled families' game, displaying 'an objective complicity which underlies all the antagonisms' (Bourdieu, 1993: 73). In this way, participants in the TFP help to generate and reproduce the doxa that the lives of 'troubled families' can be 'turned around' by some form of 'family intervention' which prioritises familial behaviour change over structural or systemic adjustments, inadvertently helping to produce and reproduce this particular social reality by acting on it (Bourdieu, 1996: 25).

This observation is not to suggest that the state does not have a right, and in some cases, a duty to intervene in the lives of families at certain points and when certain situations arise. But the state already does this, through existing practices and services addressing issues such as child protection, domestic violence and mental health, for example. Many families, no matter what their resources or class background, at various stages of their lives, rely on the state for extra support or advice. Nor is it in doubt that some families' lives can be improved through the timely provision of extra support with a range of tasks and challenges, some of them unintentionally created by the state. But a practice which focuses on, in Bourdieu et als' words (1999: 190) the 'symbolic resources of conviction and persuasion' – be it hand-holding or gripping families – is unlikely to 'turn around' the lives of families experiencing multiple (often structural) disadvantages, or 'grande misere' (Bourdieu et al, 199: 4) whilst other services and material resources are being systematically withdrawn from those families (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016). At the same time, and in this context, the generative practice of 'family work' helps to (re)produce belief in the concept of 'troubled families'. This is not intended to be read

as a criticism of the research participants. Instead, the aim is to highlight the strength of the doxa and how social magic permeates the field, creating a 'belief effect' even amongst some of those agents close enough to see the sleights of hand being used.

The concept of habitus then, has, in this chapter, enabled the history and dispositions of workers to be examined and discussed in terms of their everyday practice within the 'troubled families' field. The research has shown that the idea of a family worker, endowed with a specific habitus is, like its delinquent relations, the 'troubled family', a fiction that receives the support and guarantee of the state. Just as the problems faced by 'troubled families' have been individualised, so the solution has, in national rhetoric, been similarly individualised with a narrow focus on solitary workers. The state has effectively absented itself and has encouraged a focus on micro-encounters between individuals which then 'become conceptually overburdened with expectation' (Garrett, 2013: 182). This focus marginalises the continuing importance on family's lives of existing bureaucratic structures, relations and apparatus. The relations that exist within the 'troubled families' field, between different agents of the state and between those agents and 'troubled families', is the subject to which we now turn.

Chapter 7: Relations

Interactions, which bring immediate gratification to those with empiricist dispositions - they can be observed, recorded, filmed, in sum, they are tangible, one can "reach out and touch them' - mask the structures that are realized in them. This is one of those cases where the visible, that which is immediately given, hides the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself for observation (Bourdieu, 1989: 16).

7.1   Introduction

This chapter examines some of the relations that exist within the 'troubled families' field. An analysis of all of the relations between agents and institutions is beyond the scope of the chapter and so the focus here is primarily on the relations between family workers and other agents in the field. The focus is not, however, on the individual interpersonal relationships that workers cultivated or the daily interactions that they had with other agents in order to carry out their work. Instead, the focus here is primarily on the *structured relations* in the 'troubled families' field that are masked by the discussion or observation of symbolically potent individual 'micro-encounters'. As DuBois (2010: 73) noted, workers are not just individuals, but they represent the embodiment of the state. The structures of the TFP itself structure relations within the field. Hidden elements such as strategies of distinction and condescension, conversions and exchanges of different forms of capital, and *misrecognised relations* will be brought to the fore. This approach aligns with Bourdieu's (2005: 140) belief that 'each of these [street-level] interactions is the site of power games and important stakes, and hence a site of violence and suffering' (Bourdieu 2005: 140).

The chapter is split into four main sections. Firstly, the symbolic and doxic importance of the relationship between 'troubled families' and the workers tasked with 'turning around' their lives is examined, drawing, again, on official government publications and interventions by Louise Casey. Secondly, the ways in which workers understand the position occupied by 'troubled families' in the field is examined, alongside the ways that the doxic absence of structural issues is negotiated and how family workers draw on their symbolic, cultural and economic capital to build social capital with the families they are working with. Thirdly, the value of social capital held with other street-level bureaucrats and the symbolic and political capital associated with being a family worker is considered. A fourth and final discussion section summarises the duplicity, in both senses of the word, involved in daily 'troubled families' work and the 'two games' that workers are often forced to play.

Examining the relations between workers and families risks accepting the dominant view that it is this relation that is the most important in the 'troubled families' narrative. However, as will be seen, exploration of these relations, as articulated by workers involved with implementation of the programme, helps to illuminate the triteness of the 'trusting relationship' trope. Discussion of important relations with street-level workers also serves to highlight the continued significance of banal bureaucratic processes in state sponsored work with marginalised families.

7.2   *'Building an honest and productive relationship'*: the national perspective

> All of what we do turns on something very simple: the relationship between the worker and the family. (Louise Casey, in Aitkenhead, 2013)

As we saw in the previous chapter, family workers are central to the task of 'turning around' the lives of 'troubled families'. More important than their training and their experience is, according to government rhetoric, their ability to form strong and lasting relationship with families who they are working with. Linked to this is an ability to also work with other agencies to support the family:

> The evidence suggests that much of the success of family intervention work is due to the skills of individual workers, both in building an honest and productive relationship with a family and influencing the actions of other agencies around that family (DCLG, 2012a: 17).

A section in the report *Working with Troubled Families* entitled *Dedicated workers, dedicated to families* suggests that 'evidence shows the relationship [troubled families] build with this individual [key-worker] is central to progress being made' and that 'many families acknowledge that it is the key worker that helped them change their lives' (DCLG, 2012a: 17). The report (DCLG, 2012a: 18), highlighting the distinction and 'bureaucratic charisma' (Bourdieu, 2005: 132) associated with family workers, goes on to state that:

> Families can feel that the relationship with a case worker is very different to other agencies. They are clear that they want to feel that they are treated as a human being, that they are listened to, and that their individual circumstances are being taken into account. They often feel their worker really knows and understands them and their family. Families believe the workers are dedicated to helping them and 'going the extra mile'.

It is undoubtedly this relationship that is the portrayed as being the most important aspect of the work that is undertaken with 'troubled families'. The emphasis on the workers' relationship with the family once again helps to locate the family as the focus for the changes that are required to improve their lives. There is however, also an expectation that family

workers will work with other agencies and sustain working relationships with them in order to better co-ordinate services to 'troubled families', and to help the state become more 'efficient' in its dealings with citizens. At times, the same muscular language that is deployed in encouraging workers to 'grip' families is employed to describe the ways in which workers should 'ensure the efforts of different agencies and professionals are pulled together and aligned', and be able to 'cut through overlapping plans, assessments and activity', thus preventing 'resources being wasted as different agencies pull in conflicting directions' (DCLG, 2012: 27). Social capital is expected to save economic capital.

There are also times, however, when workers are expected to bypass the 'honest' aspect of relationships they have with families. Workers are encouraged, for example, to ask partner agencies to 'ramp up' enforcement proceedings or possible sanctions against families where they feel this is appropriate, in a belief that it helps to 'concentrate the mind' of families (DCLG, 2012a: 28 emphasis added):

> The family intervention worker acts as an intermediary in the use of sanctions by other agencies – *which may mean asking other agencies to accelerate threat of a sanction to exert maximum pressure on families to change*, or to slow down their use of sanctions in situations where enforcement action might undermine the progress a family are making.

At other times, the type of 'relationship' that is required between the worker and the family has been cast in different terms by Louise Casey. In evidence given to the Communities and Local Government Committee, Casey discussed the importance of the PbR aspect of the programme and argued that the TFP helped to 'clarify' the relation between the state and 'troubled families' and provided a 'different discussion between the state and the individual':

> The liberating thing about payment by results is that it makes absolutely clear that you are looking for definite change in the family … it makes the transaction between ourselves and what we are trying to do with the family clear. Instead of paying for lots of people to go and chat with families about how things are and whether things will change, there is a real simplicity, which is, "Are your kids in school all day, every day at normal attendance rates?" For me, there are two reasons why this works. One is that it does incentivise people. The other is that it gives real clarity. (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 668, 2014: 9-10)

The family worker, then, is portrayed as the fulcrum of the various relations that exist within the daily life of the TFP. Whether they are 'standing alongside' (DCLG, 2012a: 18), 'gripping' families and their problems, 'lining up the right services at the right time' (Cameron, 2011a) or encouraging those services to 'exert maximum pressure' on families, individual workers and their ability to work across divides and negotiate micro-struggles on a daily basis, are once again pivotal to the 'success' of the TFP. Within the national narrative, then, the embodied

cultural capital required of family workers that was discussed in the previous chapter needs to be augmented by their ability to draw on and develop social capital with other participants in the 'troubled families' game. This includes 'troubled families' themselves, whose primary social contacts were allegedly with an 'anti-social family and friends network', and who 'tended to stick within a network of other dysfunctional peers' (Casey, 2012: 50).

7.3   *'It's poverty underlying everything, it really is'*: the *grande misère* of 'troubled families'

Family workers were expected to build strong relationships with families who were depicted as 'neighbours from hell' by the Prime Minister and as the 'worst families' who people wouldn't want to live next door to by Louise Casey, the most senior civil servant in charge of the TFP. Eric Pickles claimed that 'These families are ruining their lives, they are ruining their children's lives and they are ruining their neighbours' lives' (in Siddique, 2012).

Participants tended to distance themselves from this stigmatising rhetoric and instead suggested that very few, if any, of the families they worked with fitted the national stereotype of anti-social and troublesome families. Workers instead provided much more complex accounts of families' lives than are told through the sensationalist vignettes often used in government speeches and interviews. Whilst many families did, according to some workers, experience multiple issues such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health issues and unemployment, many families were also portrayed as merely requiring a little bit of extra support at a particularly challenging point in their lives. This was certainly the case when discussing families entering the programme under the new expanded criteria for the second phase of the TFP. In many cases, workers highlighted that it was the behaviour of an individual within the family that was perceived as being *the* issue that needed to be dealt with, rather than entire families who required 'turning around'. Socially isolated and vulnerable families were also involved with the TFP although one would never be aware of this from the depiction of these families in political speeches and much of the mainstream media.

Many participants, whilst reluctant to explicitly blame families for their circumstances, did echo the 'inter-generational' rhetoric associated with 'troubled families' at a national level, almost suggesting a 'troubled families' habitus.[25] Even when prompted during interviews for

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[25] See Atkinson (2011: 338) for a refutation of the concept of 'family habitus' which, he believes, 'completely steamrolls any internal heterogeneity or dissension' and negates analysis of 'differences, contradictions, rifts, struggles and alliances within the family on account of the gender, position in social space and trajectory of each individual'.

their views on what lay behind individual issues such as truanting, unemployment, substance misuse or mental health problems, parental or generational influence was almost always offered as an explanation, rather than any societal or structural factors:

> *Well everything and anything. Non-school attendance, domestic violence, horrendous domestic violence, err, that's massive. Mental health, huge. Erm, unemployment, erm, housing issues, err, drug and alcohol. I mean drug and alcohol are in here, it's a huge, huge issue. Erm, social isolated, learning difficulties, learning disabilities, erm, bullying, absolutely everything. The whole thing's linked, the whole thing. The toxic triangle thing, you know, everything's linked, everything's, yes, generations.* (Becky, FW, Westingham)

> *What I'm trying to say is, erm, there's a culture where some families, grandparents have never had employment.* (Lisa, FW, Westingham)

> *But now I'm getting cases where there might have just been a little blip, you know. There might have been a bereavement or there might have been, erm, a separation in the family and the child's maybe gone off the rails. And it's about just, you know, getting them back on track.* (John, FW, Northton)

A small minority of workers did, however, break through the doxic focus on families and acknowledge the *grande misère* (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 4) experienced by many 'troubled families' and sought to re-insert structural issues such as poverty, deprivation and poor quality housing into discussions about the troubles experienced or caused by families. At the same time, they recognised that the TFP left little room to discuss such issues (see also Hayden & Jenkins, 2014: 642; Crossley, 2016b: 138-139):

> *A lot of them are trapped in a cycle of poverty. And I know politically, we're not supposed to discuss things like that. But it's poverty underlying everything, it really is.* (Susan, Youth Worker, Northton)

> *Housing, there isn't housing, Southborough is very, very poor, in terms of what there is available locally. There aren't council houses and the ones that there are have all been sold off. And flats and bedsits, they're horrendous, landlords are awful, rents are high.* (Maggie, FW, Southborough)

Unsurprisingly then, given that workers largely ignored Eric Pickles exhortation to be 'a little less understanding' (in Chorley, 2012),[26] they articulated far more sympathetic views towards the families they worked with. Many workers talked about 'my families' or feeling like 'part of the family' when describing their caseload and, as detailed in the previous chapter, preferred a narrative of holding families hands over one which emphasised the need to 'grip' families. Local authorities themselves also took corporate decisions not to employ the label 'troubled

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[26] This was, in effect, a rehash of John Major's 1993 plea for society to 'to condemn a little more and understand a little less' (in Macintyre, 1993).

families' in naming their local programmes and some were explicit about the reasons for doing this:

> *Like Nana who was seeing us as like her grandson, didn't she? And she tried to buy us stuff, like a bottle of something for Christmas. And I was, we were like the only people who believed in her and were there, even at the end of the phone.* (Jim, FW, Westingham)

> *So it's about doing it together. And again, when you review it, it's about, you know, I sit down with my mum, my family, and I say, OK, this is where we were last time, you know, what have we done since then?* (Jess, CSM, Southborough)

> *I never liked the word, Troubled Families. You know, if you were going into a household and saying to them, do you want to be part of Troubled Families? Well it's a negative straightaway, isn't it?* (Liz, Councillor, Westingham)

> *I can imagine that people thought there was a negative connotation to calling it troubled families work. I look around the country and I can't think of a single local authority that has included the word 'troubled' in their agenda. I genuinely can't.* (Ben, CSM, Northton)

Managers and senior officers or councillors interviewed in the research also attempted to distance themselves from the rhetoric of sanctions that could be found at a national level. Again, this was portrayed as a considered and explicit choice that had been made, with the argument advanced that families lives were hard enough already without the local authority making it harder for them. Instead, workers sometimes talked about explaining the potential *consequences* of certain forms of (in)action or non-engagement to families. These consequences included potential referrals to statutory social care services where there were concerns about children's welfare in families who weren't engaging with the TFP. Whilst this could also be understood as a form of coercion, it was understandably also portrayed as being a more sympathetic and honest approach than, for example, encouraging other services to escalate enforcement proceedings in order to facilitate engagement:

> *I remember one of the councillors being quite vociferous and saying, you know, we don't, err, put sanctions in place, you know, we're here to help our families.* (Sarah, CSM, Westingham)

Workers were also keen to highlight that they attempted to work with families in an empowering way, encouraging family members to take small steps with initial support from the worker, in order that they would be able to make similar or greater steps on their own at a later date. This work often included help with domestic arrangements, such as setting up rotas for household tasks, support to attend meetings with other professionals and providing support to address housing or repair issues. At the same time, workers, such as Kim who was discussed in the previous chapter, also stressed that they were careful not to create a 'dependency' on themselves. Some felt that this was a flaw with the national rhetoric around

workers who should be prepared to scrub floors and get children ready for school. At times, however, the version of empowerment that was practised by workers appeared to be perilously close to the 'responsiblization' agenda that national government rhetoric advocates (see also Bond-Taylor, 2015). Empowering work often coalesced with suggestions on how family members could address or resolve their own problems and therefore reduce future demand on state services:

> *And I think that if we continue to work the way that we are at the moment … we will empower those families to make those changes, so that they don't keep coming back to us, which will then allow us to work with the new families.* (Sally, CSM, Southborough)

> *But it's quite obvious in what, in the way we support families, that we're looking to empower and motivate and, erm, like I use a lot of motivational interviewing strengths based approaches* (Pam, FW, Northton)

Some workers also highlighted how the initial assessment phases of the family's needs were empowering as they encouraged families to prioritise the issues that were important to them. Attempts to reconcile this with the focused, top-down approach and the clarity of the PbR 'transaction' led to a form of dissonance experienced by workers involved with the programme. An exemplar of this can be found in Vicky's articulation of how she develops plans with families she works with in Southborough, where inconsistencies and tensions can be found at almost every stage:

> *What we try and do, hopefully, everybody, but what I try and do is empower people … We discuss it and I use my, erm, techniques to really get them to see what the benefits are of change. And we're looking for what they feel is a problem, rather than what we feel is a problem. Every family is different and just because you think that should be done that way, it doesn't necessarily mean it's so. However, you know, child protection is always paramount, so we would always look at that.*

> *So it's about looking at needs, looking at healthy behaviours and attitudes. And also, what we're mainly looking at, we've got criteria, obviously, that we have to cover, which is, you're probably aware of it, the worklessness, mental health, erm, you know, domestic violence, those type of things we're looking at. Erm, attendance for children at school, which is a biggy. Erm, you know, so we bring all of that in. And what we would then do, once we've built the rapport, is we'd look to, erm, develop, erm, a plan of action. And that would be very much owned by the family. So, and we set it up together, we discuss it, we make sure it covers our remit, anything else that the family needs on there, we're quite versatile with that. Erm, and they would take ownership of the action plan but we would support them through that.*

> *Erm, yes and that's the main thing. So we'd be looking at when we can do it, how we can do it, that type of thing. With regards to the children, we would be setting up meetings, to make sure everybody's involved. So it would be pulling in all of the professionals that we feel could be a benefit to that family. And I do think that's one of our main roles. We're not an expert in everything, you know, but it's about sitting down with a family. They trust you, and then you say, OK, we're going to pull in these*

different professionals, from DWP, from, erm, debt charities, from housing, we pull them all in and we say, come on, we've got to look for a solution here. And that's what's really good about the job as well, that we are seen to do that role.

Similar inconsistencies arose when workers discussed the ways in which families were supported and how they were allocated workers. Families were allocated to workers in different ways within and across the three fieldwork sites. Sometimes the process was geographically based or dependent on which workers had capacity to take on new cases, but in some cases, families were allocated workers depending on 'known problems' within the family, such as youth offending, school exclusion etc. Workers with appropriate backgrounds would then be allocated to families which often led to families being 'worked with' either according to workers previous experience and skills, or according to the availability of existing services. Differing familial priorities, concerns about service-related or systemic issues, or even 'hidden problems', such as physical or mental health issues, substance misuse or domestic violence, that might only be unearthed during initial work, appeared to exert little influence over how families were involved in the execution of any family plan or agreement. Bond-Taylor (2015: 378) argues that family workers should 'reflect upon the extent to which family participation in the process merely legitimates existing power relations under a veneer of empowerment discourses'. Vicky's penultimate statement above, again, provides a good example of this.

Bond-Taylors concept of a 'veneer' of empowerment discourses is helpful in highlighting the absence of thicker, more critical constructions of empowerment in discussions with family workers. There was no mention of empowering families to challenge structural or systemic issues in the interviews with participants. No workers advocated collective or class-based action to challenge the barriers and hurdles that families faced in overcoming disadvantage and marginalisation. The absence of 'the social' in the wider 'troubled families' rhetoric and the primacy afforded to 'the family', is once again significant here.[27] The 'troubled families' doxa encourages narrow procedures, focused on individual families, and workers ability to smooth the passage through 'established channels' of service delivery (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979: 23-25). The gaze of the worker (and by extension the state), in terms of problems and solutions, remains firmly fixed on the family. Critical, reflexive practice is all but impossible in such situations. As Skeggs (2004: 123) has noted, it is a form of symbolic violence when possibilities of action are effectively erased: 'How can you be radical if your self is named and organized for you?'

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[27] It should also be acknowledged that this absence could be explained by the primary focus, during the interviews, on the practice of the research participants, as opposed to their ideal forms of practice.

When workers did attempt to address issues which originated or lay outside of 'the family', they often advocated on behalf of family members, using the social and symbolic capital available to them. This included discussions with housing providers, schools, and debt collection companies, as discussed previously. Again, however, the focus remained on the quick resolution of individual or family issues rather than longer-term changes in the relations between families and different organisations. Correspondingly, all three local authorities also provided small budgets for workers to draw on in their work with families. Some workers valued this facility and used it to purchase household equipment and goods such as beds, duvets and washing machines for families, whilst others rejected it as a form of 'cheating' or as an illegitimate short-cut to achieving family change. There was, in some cases, resentment that money was available to 'throw at families' simply because they met the 'troubled' criteria, whilst there were also suggestions that it merely presented another way for families to 'play the system'. As well as addressing some of the material deprivation found within families, workers also used the funding to improve access to some services, either through commissioning packages of support for family members or supporting them with travel costs to access existing services that were otherwise out of their reach. At times support and advocacy was also inflected with coercion and conditionality:

> *it's not about having a magic wand and throwing money at people. But, erm, money does help and it helps if, you know, they're in dire financial need and can't put food on the table and, you know, don't have something to sit on, don't have a mattress. You know, to be able to go, do you know what, I can probably help you with that, erm, it's a good engagement tool, erm, bribe, if you want to.* (Susan, YW, Northton)

> *So I saw the money as a bit of a barrier. Some agencies saw it as a bit of an open door for families. So they'd go in and they'd say, oh yes, we'll spend thousands on you. And I'd be like, no we're not because we've got to do this first. Sometimes it's a bit of a bargaining tool.* (Daisy, FW, Southborough)

> *Yet there's others who, they're, they're on the estate, they're talking to all the other families who are working with my colleagues, who, you know, "oh, so-and-so's managed to get this for my family, you should ask them if they can get that for you." And that's the frustration that, you know, they're talking at the school gates about what they're getting from one service or the next service.* (John, FW, Northton)

This support, advocacy and negotiation with other service providers may well have helped to set family workers apart from other professionals in the eyes of some families, and support the idea that they have a 'distinct working style'. However, whilst workers saw little difference between themselves and colleagues in similar roles when discussing their backgrounds and dispositions in the research interviews, they often strategically suggested to families that they *were* different from other professionals that might be involved with the family. Many workers explained how, in the initial relationship building stages with families, they would state that

they were not social workers, with one worker highlighting that this approach was part of a 'pitch' to the family to ensure their engagement

> *So I try and sell it that, you know, you want to work with us (laugh), we're the good guys, like work with us now. I sometimes say like, it's like a revolving door, once you get into that social care system, so we're like putting our foot here to stop that revolving door. So that you're not going to go in, come back to us, go in, come back to us. We're here now to stop you ever going into that system, you know.* (Pam, FW, Northton)

Another difference that workers highlighted and valued was the fact that the TFP was run on voluntary lines. Although there are undoubtedly coercive elements in both the national guidance and local practice, workers often claimed to be upfront with families about it being a voluntary programme, with workers almost making a play of their impotence in terms of statutory powers. Workers were able to portray themselves, in their interactions with families, as both distinct from social workers and also 'on the level' with families, thus acquiring the 'bureaucratic charisma' that Bourdieu (2005: 132) highlights and that family workers are supposed to possess.

All of these examples of distinctive practices – support with domestic activities, apparent immersion in family life, advocacy against other services and the rhetoric of 'doing things together' - can also be understood as elements of strategies of condescension (Bourdieu, 1989: 16) whereby workers attempted to symbolically deny the difference between them and the families they were working with. Such strategies undoubtedly aided the building of relationships between workers and families but they are also widely used by other professionals working with families in order to gain credibility and legitimacy. Going 'above and beyond the call of duty' (or 'ABCD' in new managerialist parlance) or the bending or non-application of a rule are part and parcel of the discretions afforded to low-level workers tasked with making policy work. However, even when workers highlighted the similarities between their backgrounds and those of some of the 'troubled families' they were working with, their current situation, their jobs, their dispensation of advice and their better access to professionals and resources, highlighted the different – and higher - social space that they now occupied. It is to the relations between family workers and other street-level bureaucrats that we now turn.

7.4   *'We'll just drop everything to get that sorted'*: the value of social capital.

Family workers are often portrayed as lone wolves, most happy when operating at the margins of bureaucratic territory, and indicative of what a new, more efficient, business-like and

confident state might look like. However, workers themselves did not necessarily share this view, as discussed in the previous chapter, and participants in the research also highlighted a myriad of supportive relations with colleagues, managers and partners. Family workers were immersed in, and totally dependent upon, numerous different bureaucratic networks and communities. This included colleagues sitting within the same office doing the same job, as well as other front-line workers based in different departments or organisations.

The national focus on a single 'do-it-all' keyworker who is capable of seamlessly inserting themselves into the daily lives of 'troubled families' leaves little room for discussion about the support that such workers may need in order to carry out their work. And yet, in discussions about their roles and who they worked with, family workers who participated in the research drew attention, time and time again, to the importance of the variety of support they received from colleagues. Workers spoke of the value of being able to discuss specific issues with colleagues with differing skills and experience. For example, family workers with experience of working with pre-school children spoke of the advice and support they were able to ask for from colleagues with a background in youth work when they were working with families with teenage children. Workers with experience of drug and alcohol issues or with backgrounds in domestic violence were also mentioned for the advice and resources they were able to offer. Family workers also highlighted how having colleagues with backgrounds in housing and education was particularly invaluable in navigating legislation and processes within those policy areas. In some cases, family workers would ask colleagues to co-work a family with them in order to do a specific piece of work with an individual within the family, or they might make a referral to a piece of group work (usually around parenting) facilitated by a colleague. These examples highlight how family workers used their social capital to access other forms of institutionalised cultural capital which they themselves did not possess.

As well as this *professional* or *technical* support on specific issues taking place within families, family workers also spoke about the *emotional* support they received from colleagues. Family workers often carried out initial home visits to families in pairs for safety and support reasons, and workers often spoke about the need to 'unload' to colleagues about families they were working with:

> *So you do, you do go and talk to your team because I ran out of ideas, I'm not, so with their help and support, you know, you kind of, and sometimes, you know, things get a bit aggressive in the family household. So they're phoning you and you kind of think, so I'll go, Daisy, I need you to come with me to do this. I want to make sure that the house hasn't totally been trashed but I don't want to go in by myself.* (Kayleigh, FW, Southborough)

> *Where here you've got maybe, like three of four people in one area, then we come together as a team. And I love that because it's great, you can come back to the office and you can offload, you need to do that … And sometimes you just need, you need that for your own sanity to, you know, you just need to offload before you go home (laugh), else you'd be sitting rocking in the corner (laugh).* (Beth, FW, Westingham)

Two family workers in Westingham (interviewed together) also spoke of the way in which they and other colleagues would 'drop everything' and help if one of the families a colleague was working with suffered some form of emergency or crisis situation:

> Jim: *And I work with, there's three of us in an office and* [if] *something happens, three of us*
>
> Ann: *We tend to help each other out, don't we?*
>
> Jim: *We'll sort it out. So one might be looking on the internet for something, somebody's ringing*
>
> Ann: *Yes.*
>
> Jim: *But if a phone call comes in like that, well then it just, letting somebody sit there and going, "Oh, I've got loads of paperwork to do"?*
>
> Ann: *No.*
>
> Jim: *We'll just drop everything to get that sorted. And likewise, if somebody's on holiday or on another call and somebody comes in, we tend to know quite a lot about each other's families, so we pick it up.*

Within the teams that were predominantly focused on work with 'troubled families', there was little evidence of *struggles* taking place between agents within the teams. Instances of collaboration and co-operation appeared to be the norm, although that is not to say that tensions did not exist. The different professional backgrounds of workers, as we have seen, led to different interpretations of the role of 'family worker', but there were also other sources of tension or disagreement. Different entry routes into the 'troubled families' field and the precarity of some of the work that was on offer resulted in workers carrying out the same job, working to the same job description, sitting in the same office, but sometimes being paid very differently, due to terms and conditions from previous positions being protected for a specified period. In other words, the relatively substantial symbolic and political capital attached to family workers did not always translate into greater amounts of economic capital for them. Workers were sometimes seconded into existing (and expanding) teams for limited periods as a result of funding attached to the TFP. Such inequality was generally seen as unfair by most workers, including those who had greater job security and/or higher or protected pay:

> *I'll tell you what I am frustrated at is, I mean I've, I've explained to you that I'm on a better level than some of my colleagues, OK. Like my pay scale is pretty good and, you know, I don't mind sharing with you that, you know, I'm currently on £29,000. But what I do know is that there's people on £19,000. So that is a big difference, you know, and I*

can understand people's frustrations if they're doing a similar role and things like that. (John, FW, Northton)

Ann was on a lower scale, so she actually gets less money than me but the fact is she's, they put sliding scales in to save money … which I've always said is wrong, because if you're doing the same job, you should be getting the same money. I have always said that. (Jim, FW, Westingham)

Family workers also tended to exhibit positive views of their managers, often highlighting how they were supportive in what was a relatively high-pressure and challenging job within the local authority. One-to-one supervision meetings appeared to be particularly important to workers who would use these meetings to discuss difficulties and/or progress with individual families as well as other work-related issues. Managers, for the most part, were viewed as being supportive during these meetings although some workers did feel that the supervision meetings also presented an opportunity for managers to enquire about progress in relation to PbR claims with families. Where this did happen, workers also acknowledged that managers were in a difficult position in having to demonstrate to their managers that their teams were performing in terms of providing the government with 'good' progress figures on 'turned around' families and in 'bringing money in' to the authority. Again, whilst the majority of relations between workers and managers were portrayed positively, there was evidence of some resistance between some frontline members of staff to the implementation of the local iterations of the TFP and managers had to negotiate these. These tensions tended to be between members of teams on the periphery of 'troubled families' work, such as statutory children's services and Youth Offending Teams. Some managers articulated a robust approach to navigating these concerns:

I have to say, I had a lot of resistance from them. And I was like, well you know what, you might not have a job in two years, so if I was you I would quickly rethink and reflect on your role. (Janet, CSM, Northton)

Some people almost actively were against, because I think they saw it as a threat and saw it as, you know, who are they to tell us what to do, type thing. Erm, and I had some very, very, erm, interesting conversations with people at that time, erm, because I just felt they were being out of order really. (Bill, HoS, Westingham)

Relations between family workers and other services or organisations were mixed as well, as might be expected. Some workers believed that colleagues in other services saw them as a threat, as a cheap generalist service that was replacing more expensive specialist services at a time of austerity. Others acknowledged that some workers – especially in statutory services - saw value in having a service that could support them and ease their own caseload at a time of diminishing resources. The political capital invested in the 'troubled families' agenda was often converted into symbolic capital for family workers who were sometimes seen as people who

could sometimes 'get things done' for other services, although some managers doubted that colleagues were aware of any changes in working practices brought about by national 'troubled families' funding. Numerous workers highlighted struggles with social workers where concerns were raised about a family, leading to a referral of some sort to social care teams, only for the case to be handed back to a family worker because it 'didn't meet social care thresholds' or because the level of support and family contact offered by the family worker was greater than what could be offered by a social worker. Almost all workers, however, were aware that other services were under threat and facing their own issues and were slow to point the finger of blame at them when support wasn't forthcoming, recognising that these teams or departments did not always enjoy the political support that the TFP did. Similarly, almost all workers were able to describe very positive relations with a number of individuals in key services who 'bought into' the values of the programme and had been helpful, either with individual cases or on an ongoing basis:

> *I don't think they pick up on it. I think they kind of, because our team has been here, so they've just pre-Northton Families, I mean they love us because we take over as lead practitioner. So I think they just see it as an extension.* (Catherine, CSM, Northton)

> *And the social worker basically said to us, "We're not picking up, there's nothing for social care to do. And anyway, if we picked it up, they wouldn't get half the service they're getting from you, because they're getting all sorts from you what they wouldn't get from us." So just basically, crack on and good luck (laugh).* (Beth, FW, Westingham)

Reductions in the capacity of other services to attend meetings or to meet the demands of the TFP were also sources of tension. Managers spoke of the struggle to get partner organisations to engage with multi-agency, outward facing 'troubled families' meetings when they were experiencing internal issues such restructures, staff turnover and cuts to their own services. The funding arrangements, with all central government funding going directly to local authorities, also appeared to prevent resource strapped agencies from engaging with the programme as much as local authority managers would have liked them to. Data sharing practices were also sources of tension, with health agencies and the police name-checked as organisations that were viewed as unhelpful in sharing data that they held on potential 'troubled families':

> *And the other thing is really just, I think when I first started, there was this whole, it was kind of like flogging a dead horse. So we were trying to get partners, trying and trying and trying to get partners to work, to think in a whole family way, to attend*

panels and things like that … And people are just, backs against the wall trying to do their own job. It's very, very difficult for people. (Suzanne, CSM, Westingham)

Whilst the extent to which other services engaged with the local 'troubled families' work varied both within and between the different fieldwork sites, there was strong consistency in the amount of new, local multi-agency working arrangements and bureaucratic processes that had been established to support the implementation of the TFP. Northton established two new multi-agency groups to oversee their local work: a steering group that originally met fortnightly and then moved to monthly meetings oversaw the day-to-day work of the programme; and a business group, comprising of more senior individuals from the same agencies represented on the steering group, which took a more strategic, long-term view of the programme. Westingham and Southborough both developed neighbourhood or area-based models for their local 'troubled families' work, which again involved multi-agency meetings to discuss different aspects of the work.

In Westingham this involved a variety of different services agencies making referrals of families who potentially met 'troubled families' criteria to a central point, with this referral then being checked and passed to the relevant neighbourhood co-ordinator who disseminated the family details and referral notes to different services and organisations, who were tasked with collating any information they held on the family. Five different multi-agency neighbourhood forum meetings took place each week to discuss up to around twenty referrals in each area. One such meeting that I attended saw thirteen attendees from different services and organisations discuss eighteen different families, with the person chairing the meeting reading the notes on the referral form out to the meeting for every family being discussed. Other services then gave their views on what should happen, which agency should take the lead, and which intervention should be 'offered'. In one case, the forum simply referred a family back to the agency that had referred them. When discussing another family, a social worker asked 'Anyone got any ideas?' after relating her previous contacts with the family. The meeting lasted two and a half hours and did not feel entirely symbolic of a new, pared-back, almost perfect system for 'turning around' the lives of the most disadvantaged families in the country.

Relations between local authority managers and representatives from DCLG also appeared to be largely positive, although, underscored by the localism and decentralisation agendas, not particularly intensive, or hands-on. One chief exec highlighted the symbolic capital of the Prime Minister officially launching the programme at an event at 10 Downing Street and also argued that it was one of the few coalition government social policies that had been 'well handled', with much of the credit for this going to Casey. Casey had visited all of the fieldwork

sites or spoken at conferences that workers had attended and some workers had 'provided' families for her to talk to during her visits. One of these workers expressed surprise at, in discussions with a family, how Casey 'pried quite a lot into their kind of background and mum's background as a young person, and her experiences of her parents' rather than asking about the families' experience of the TFP. Evidence of the success of Casey's own strategy of condescension could be found in the ways workers valued things such as her experience and her desire to 'keep in touch with the troops' and 'sing the praises of staff':

> *And I do think Louise Casey was a really good pick, you know, if they're going to pick, you know, she's, she's got sort of a no nonsense, say it as it is style. She's worked on the ground, she wasn't a civil servant, you know, the typical.* (Alan, CE, Southborough)

> *But it was like real life, you know, so she came to meet somebody whose life was chaotic.* (Kirsty, FW, Northton)

Aside from generally positive views about Casey, there was also some bemusement from managers about the naivety of some of the work of the Troubled Families Unit in DCLG. One manager in Northton suggested that, in developing the second phase of the TFP, officials were attempting to put wings on the plane whilst it was flying, whilst another manager suggested that they had little cognisance of how some of their proposals might impact on local authorities.

> *It kind of, erm, right, I don't know how to say this. They invent things in their kind of offices at DCLG and then get really upset when we say, well we can't do that because, or these are the ramifications of doing that.* (Suzanne, CSM, Westingham)

7.5 *'Playing two games'*: a discussion

Relations within the 'troubled families' field are cast as encounters between individuals, seemingly freed from structural determinants of any kind. 'Troubled families' - architects of their own circumstance whose condition has nothing to do with poverty and inequality – can be 'turned around' by heroic family workers, released from their bureaucratic constraints and free to do 'anything and everything' and be 'all things to all people', as two research participants put it. And yet, the structures and framework of the TFP can be seen everywhere in these micro-encounters.

This rhetorical focus on *thin*, individualized co-operative interactions deflects attention away from the *thick* structured relational positions of the agents involved. It is a misrecognized relationship on both sides. The rhetoric of empowerment, families' participation in the

programme highlighted as voluntary, and small pots of discretionary budgets seduce families into thinking that this programme – and the workers aligned with it – represent some kind of 'new deal' from the state. Workers themselves state that the work they do is empowering, and they undoubtedly become more involved in families' lives than many other state services can or do.

And yet this seemingly inclusive, caring 'relationship' between representatives of the state and families it defines as 'troubled', manages to marginalise or gloss over some anomalies in the relationship. Strong relationships based on trust do not normally need to be augmented by plans or agreements leading to 'shared goals'. Workers, no matter how much they try to pretend otherwise, are not 'on the level' with, or occupying the same social space as, many of the 'troubled families' they work with. Even when workers had previously 'been around the block' themselves, they were now sat in families' front rooms not as friends, but as agents of the state, with targets and timescales to meet, and expected to be persistent, assertive and challenging in their dealings with families. The deceit encouraged by suggesting family workers ask for sanctions to be increased, the conditionality attached to small offers of financial assistance, the conflation of empowering families with responsibilizing them, and the doxic focus on familial behaviour change and movement towards paid employment, all point to a less than salubrious relationship between the state and its most marginalised families.

The 'honest and productive relationship' that is, according to TFP policy documents, fundamental, appears, on closer inspection, to be a one-sided arrangement. Families participating in the programme are expected to be completely up-front with workers, disclosing all of their problems and agreeing for this information to be shared widely across the state, but a duplicitous approach is encouraged amongst, if not required of, family workers. Even when workers can break the spell of 'troubled families' and see the structural disadvantages that many families face, they are required to deny those issues or, at best, use them as leverage to induce certain types of behaviour change. Just as symbolic violence is enacted on a daily basis against 'troubled families', the state subjects its own workers to it. Workers were tasked with 'turning around' ' troubled families' 'without being given the necessary means' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 184) to fulfil this aim, armed only with 'the purely symbolic resources of conviction and persuasion' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 190).

Relations between family workers and other workers appeared to be similarly complex. Family workers who, in the national narrative, are portrayed as the solution to the complexity and bureaucracy of other state services, relied on those same services, drawing on their networks, to support and facilitate large parts of their work. Workers who sought to distinguish

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themselves from their colleagues in their dealings with families sought to align themselves more closely with those colleagues when asking for support and advice. Forms of co-operation and collaboration, issues which are often absent from Bourdieusian field analyses, appeared, at times, to be integral to the operationalization of the TFP. At the same time, struggles, even minor ones, between agents and institutions, also appeared inevitable when discussing the imposition of a high-profile new social policy at a time of wide ranging cuts to public services.

Workers were often adept at converting different forms of capital in order to access resources they required to carry out their work, often strengthening relations in the process. The use of social capital to access knowledge and experience – the institutionalised cultural capital - of colleagues has already been discussed. Perhaps the best example of the complexity of some of these capital conversions can be found in the ways in which workers and families interacted and struggled for position in relation to the small amounts of funding available to them. Workers would attempt to use the economic capital they had access to, to improve families' cultural capital, through improving their aptitude and motivation through various courses, their qualifications through support with transport costs, for example, or their possessions through purchase of clothes for interviews or household goods. Families, according to workers, used their social capital, as well as their feel for the game, to find out from their neighbours and peers what this source of economic capital had been used for by their workers.

In discussing some of the tensions faced by such workers, Lipsky highlighted the double constraints that street-level bureaucrats often faced in their work – their professional identity in helping clients and their administrative identity in working with colleagues and meeting bureaucratic objectives. DuBois (2010: 74), in his discussion of the 'two bodies' of state agents, highlights how an agent's habitus cannot help but influence and impose itself on encounters with clients and how sometimes this personal background and history can set the agent in conflict with the bureaucratic duties or processes they are expected to observe:

> The … agents' duplicity (his double body) and the tensions that come with it have consequences on professional practices and relationship … This duplicity also constantly has to be managed: the … agent must know how far he can go in any direction, if only to 'not let himself be eaten up' in the event of overly strong personal pressure and match the minimum conditions of administrative livability by avoiding an overly strict bureaucratic attitude.

The participants in this study demonstrated duality and duplicity in their dealings with families and with colleagues – they were 'shot through with the contradictions of the state' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 184). Indeed, one worker at a seminar I attended, spoke of 'playing two games': - a local game of practice and a national game of meeting performance measures. When this was

relayed to a manager taking part in the study, she countered with a proposal that there were, in fact, two local games being played, along similar lines, with one focusing on practice with families and the other relating to the maintenance of local partnerships. In the complexity of the games that workers were expected to play and the different starting positions they occupied in relation to other agents in the field, we can begin to see the state 'not as a monolithic and coordinated ensemble, but as a splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods' (Wacquant, 2010: 200). The next chapter, focusing on the field of power and its influence on the 'troubled families' field and other, connected bureaucratic fields, examines some of these forces in more detail.

Chapter 8: The Field of Power

8.1   Introduction

This chapter examines the relations between the 'troubled families' field and the field of power. The primary focus of the chapter is on forces that emanate from the field of power and the effects they create, both within the 'troubled families' field, and in other policy fields and the bureaucratic field more widely. The chapter is thus split into two main parts. Firstly, forces exerted *downwards*, onto agents within the 'troubled families' field are examined and discussed. These forces include the changing criteria for what constitutes a 'troubled family' and how this changes entry requirements to the field and changes the shape of it, with 400,000 newly identified 'troubled families' announced shortly after the first phase of the TFP began. The doxic focus on families and family workers is then discussed, followed by the extent to which the political capital invested in the TFP meant that it was 'doomed to succeed' from the outset. Practitioners and managers efforts to resist these forces are also presented.

The second half of the chapter focuses on forces exerted *outwards* from the 'troubled families' field, onto agents operating in other policy fields, and the extent to which the TFP is, or is not, changing the way the state intervenes in the lives of marginalised families. This was, of course, a key reason for the establishment of a new programme – to address the previous failings of the state and provide a new way of working that would bring about systemic change on a grand scale. The bold early rhetoric of Cameron and Casey is revisited before the attention turns to more recent, and largely unsuccessful, attempts to roll-out the 'troubled families'/'family intervention' approach to other policy fields. A concluding discussion brings in Wacquant's work on *neoliberal statecraft* to highlight the symbolic and material role of the TFP in forging a new 'daddy state' in the UK.

8.2   Under Pressure: forces within the 'troubled families' field

Many public or social policies are designed, developed and implemented with little direct influence from the Prime Minister. The TFP, however, undoubtedly benefitted from the political capital that David Cameron invested in its development and the 'labour of representation' that he 'continually perform[ed] in order to impose [his] own vision of the world' (Bourdieu, 1991: 234). Cameron was the person who brought the phrase 'troubled families' into the public conscience, articulated the 'ambition' to 'turn around' the lives of

'troubled families' via the TFP, established a cross-departmental team to oversee the programme, and then formally launched it with an event in Downing Street where he expressed his 'passion' for the programme to guests:

> *It was very clear from the start of the programme that it was kind of prime ministerial expectation that local authorities would give it the highest profile. And as you know, David Cameron invited local authority Chief Executives down to London, err, at the start of the programme, to say that this had his full support, erm, with various Ministers and Secretaries of State standing around looking very enthusiastic about it.* (Alan, CE, Southborough)

Cameron's involvement in the TFP was sustained up until his resignation in July 2016 following the decision, via referendum, that the UK would leave the EU. He continued to namecheck the programme in speeches about a new 'smart state' and family support as well as planning to put the programme at the heart of the symbolically violent 'life chances' agenda that replaced talk of tackling child poverty (Cameron, 2015b and 2016). The appointment of Casey to head up the TFP was also an act that helped to keep the programme in the national spotlight and uppermost in the minds of local authorities. Casey's frequent media interviews, speeches at conferences, and visits to local authorities ensured that the TFP successfully sustained the profile it started with and emphasizes the importance of media narratives in constructing social problems (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 46). Her high public profile stands in stark contrast - or *distinction* - to other senior civil servants who often remain anonymous in terms of public discussions of the policies they are tasked with delivering. In effect, Casey was asked to reprise her role as the head of the Respect Task Force, under New Labour and many local authority staff were familiar with her from her time in that role, often referring to her as 'Louise'.

The 'chain of legitimation' (Bourdieu, 1987: 824) for the TFP also includes, not just the personal patronage of the Prime Minister and the oversight of a high-profile and distinctive civil servant, but also a number of symbolic awards and official acts of state. In 2014 and in another demonstration of the political capital and symbolic importance of the TFP, six Troubled Families Co-ordinators received MBEs via the New Year Honours list (Valios, 2014). The TFP was mentioned in the 2015 Queens Speech and, in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2016, Casey herself was made a Dame.

Policy documents operate as both boundary drawers of a policy field, and as forces operating within the field itself. The policy framework of the TFP, whilst not including any statutory changes or new legislation, does provide guidance as to who can enter the field of play, how the game should be played and what constitutes success in the playing of the game. These forces that emerge from the field of power do not just land directly onto the shoulders of

street-level bureaucrats and other agents of the state. They are mediated and recontextualised, both through media discourses and through other organisations in the 'troubled families' field such as children's charities anxious to demonstrate their 'track records' of working with disadvantaged families that fall through the cracks of the state's systems of support, and software companies keen to provide 'solutions' for the data requirements associated with the TFP. There is not space here to examine some of the interventions by such organisations but they are discussed in the following chapter.[28]

As has been noted before, only certain families meet the criteria for being 'troubled' in the eyes of the state. The official criteria for phase 1 covered family involvement in crime or ASB, poor school attendance or exclusion and/or an adult in the household receiving out-of-work benefits, more commonly referred to as 'worklessness'. Local authorities were also provided with an indicative number of 'troubled families' they were to work with and 'turn around' in the timescale provided by the Prime Minister. The inclusion of a fourth local criteria was intended to help local authorities 'make up the numbers' with a financial framework document published by the government stating that where there were insufficient numbers of families meeting all three of the government's central criteria, 'the balance should be identified using your local discretion' (DCLG, 2012c: 5).[29]

These local criteria were essential in helping local authorities work with the families that they had identified as requiring support, as was a relaxation of the official central government criteria during the first phase of the TFP:

> *So bringing the local criteria meant that we could actually work with the families who made an offer, rather than saying, well I'm sorry, you don't meet our criteria, you're just going to have to make the best of it.* (Sarah, CSM, Westingham)

> *Erm, we've got very, very low levels of youth crime and antisocial behaviour. I mean DCLG wouldn't … and also, erm, unauthorised absence. We really, really struggled. As the criteria for the first phase relaxed and there was more local discretion, so there's more local discretion, in terms of the education ones.* (Kim, CSM, Southborough)

It should, however, be emphasised again that local authorities did not begin working with these families from 'a standing point' (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2013: 10) as has been claimed by Casey. Most local authorities had already adopted a 'whole family' approach in some of their work with families similar to 'troubled

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[28] See also earlier discussions about 'poverty porn' programming and, more specifically, the press coverage of 'feral families' following the riots and the identification of 400,000 more 'troubled families being presented as evidence of a 'new underclass' by *The Sunday Times*

[29] In the early stages of the programme, there was concern that local authorities were unable to find the number of 'troubled families' that had been allocated to them by central government (Wiggins, 2012).

families' and one manager spoke of the TFP being set up 'in parallel' to similar work that was already taking place. Another stated that there was no need to 'reinvent the wheel' when the TFP came along:

> *So we just thought, it's madness, don't reinvent the wheel. It's taken us six years to get where we are [in 2012], if you put another layer of something different, we'll lose everything we've done, and they're the same families.* (Janet, CSM, Northton)

These negotiations or struggles can be understood as an example of the boundary of the field itself, as well as the agents allowed entry to the field, being at stake in the playing of the game. They also raise the question of the intentions behind the establishment of a new policy field. Why was such a field required when work was already taking place with similar families?

The expansion of the TFP into its second phase has also changed the playing field completely, in the eyes of those involved in delivering the programme and playing the game. The criteria for being identified as a 'troubled family' has shifted from the 'fixed and rigid', in the words of one CSM, criteria in the early stages of the TFP, via a relaxation of that criteria during phase 1, to a more expansive, flexible set of criteria for the second phase of the programme. In contrast to a concern about finding sufficient numbers of 'troubled families' in phase 1 (see Wiggins, 2012), participants began to express concern about meeting the 'demand' created by the new 'catch-all' criteria in phase 2. Participants across all three fieldwork sites argued that there was 'no difference' now between 'troubled families' and other families receiving some form of extra, non-universal support from the state:

> *Every case that comes through is checked against Northton Families criteria and now, practically everyone that comes into social care, because of the expanded criteria in phase two, will hit it.* (Gill, CSM, Northton)
>
> *Every family is a Westingham Families and there is no distinction made now* (Emma, CSM, Westingham)
>
> *I challenge you to identify a child or a family who are in need who wouldn't meet one of these [new TFP criteria].* (Kim, CSM, Southborough)

The label attached to a 'relatively small number of families' who were 'the source of a large proportion of the problems in society' that David Cameron referred to at the start of the TFP in 2011 had expanded to include more than half a million families who were experiencing, for example, financial worries, poor health and children who 'need help' in some way. The implications of this 'widening of the net' (Cohen, 2002: 64) - or expansion of the playing field - on other policy fields is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The policy documents for the TFP hardly ever mention structural causes of family or societal problems. Casey's report *Listening to Troubled Families* – contrary to its title, an officialised

exercise in *prescribing* what a 'troubled family' is - does not include the words 'poverty' or 'unemployment' once. Casey, in giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee in 2014 stated that '[t]he beauty in this programme is that it starts with what's happening in the families' and that 'we work back from that' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2014: 46), but it is unclear how much further back the programme goes. In short, the focus of the programme appears to start *and* finish with what's happening in families.

And yet, as we have seen, family workers sometimes sought to include wider issues in descriptions of the troubles that families faced. It has also been noted that even when workers offered more sympathetic descriptions of the families they were working with, there was still a belief in the value of the 'troubled families' game being played. The impact of government decisions in other areas of these families' lives, outside of the introduction of the TFP, rarely featured in the research interviews. Issues of austerity, welfare reform, poor housing and relatively weak local labour markets were largely undiscussed by most participants. When new criteria were introduced, and the number of 'troubled families' expanded massively, there was similarly little critical questioning about whether family intervention or a different 'whole family' method was still the most appropriate approach to support 'new 'troubled families', many of whom will have very different 'problems' from the original 'neighbours from hell' who the TFP originally targeted.

Throughout the study, research participants suggested that the TFP focus on 'the family', rather than on 'the individual', was a beneficial one which helped to explain the 'success' of their approach. This *first* step in attempting to gain a better understanding of environmental influences on an individual's behaviour was, however, rarely followed by a *second* step which sought to understand any environmental influences on families' behaviour. While workers were very clear that individual behaviour did not occur in a vacuum, they were often unable or unwilling to extend this approach to the putative behaviour of the family. The 'whole family' approach, therefore, was usually not augmented by a 'whole society' perspective. Many workers exhibited a 'belief' in the value of the work they were doing that led them to an almost unquestioning view of its suitability for addressing almost any 'problem'. An exemplar of this 'doxic adhesion' (Bourdieu, 2014: 184), a self-evident, taken-for-granted view of the origins of 'troubled families' problems, and the solution to these problems, can be found in the quote below from a CSM in Westingham:

> *But we look at the whole family. And it's almost like, isn't it, the, what is the total? The total is a sum of parts, is a saying, isn't it? Is about another service might look at that bit or that bit or that bit, or that person or that person, but we can look at the whole. So in the office, talking with one of my workers yesterday, we've got, erm, a*

> *referral, the presenting issue was an eight-year-old boy whose behaviour is awful. But actually, it's not about, it's not about him. Actually, when you hear about the layers, it's about, these parents aren't giving that little boy what he needs. And she gave me an example of what happened at the weekend. I said, you need to challenge those parents because actually that's about them. His behaviour, he was crying out for their attention. You know, it's about, and it's about engaging with parents but not being afraid to challenge them when you need to. Erm, but for me, yes, going back to the difference, it's about working with the whole family.* (Jess, CSM, Southborough)

The relentless *family* focus within policy documents and the wider narrative surrounding 'troubled families', and their antecedents, meant that statutory guidance was not necessary at the outset of the TFP. As Bourdieu (2014: 166) noted, the state is capable of creating a 'belief effect' or a 'generalized submission' without recourse to formal orders or 'constant coercion'.

The PbR element of the programme, according to Casey 'adds a sharpness to this programme that nothing I have ever done or been involved with before does' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2014: 31). This sharpness was felt most keenly by managers, with efforts made within the three local authorities to 'protect' frontline workers from the impact, although discussions with workers suggested that even where the PbR outcomes were not explicitly prioritised in their work, the very fact that they existed exerted an influence on their practice and the types of 'problems' that were addressed (see Vicky's description of the 'family plan' process in Chapter 7). Whilst individual workers argued that PbR concerns did not directly affect their practice, at a managerial, or institutional level, the opposite was often true. Managers and supervisors described the 'bloody hard work' that was involved in negotiating the double-bind in which they were caught and the pressure to 'demonstrate progress':

> *And that's another form of tension, because I have, I honestly think, you know, are we, are we supporting in order to make the claim or to what's in the best interests of the family. The tension for me as a manager is that I know that if I don't pick up new work and get the £1000 attachment fee and I don't make a claim and that goes back in, we lose the workers. Erm, you know and recently, you know, we're going through this claim window where, you know, I think, I think, for 89% almost nine out of ten, we've made a claim, you know and commissioning always come back to us and say, "You know, you not claimed yet for the Smiths or for the Joneses yet?" And there is things as a manager I have to say "Do you know what it is? This is bloody hard work".* (Ben, CSM, Northton)

The political capital invested in the TFP meant that the programme was never going to be allowed to 'fail'. One senior police officer remarked, at the first national 'troubled families' conference for police officers, in Durham in 2015, that the programme was 'doomed to succeed' from the moment Cameron launched it and declared it was his ambition to 'turn around' the lives of all 120,000 'troubled families' before the next general election. One senior

officer also noted that there was a sense of inevitability about the 'success' of the programme and staff in all three fieldwork sites spoke of DCLG officials ringing up senior officers in local authorities, 'demanding' to know why progress hadn't been as swift as it could have been:

> *It's not always been administered in the best way, you know, it's got under a number of peoples skins. You know, [DCLG] ringing Chief Executives and stuff like that, kind of demanding where the people are at, in terms of results and stuff like that, in some Local Authorities.* (Sam, CSM, Southborough)

> *David Cameron needed to be able to say, he turned round a hundred and odd thousand troubled families because that's what he said he was going to do* (Alan, CE, Southborough).

In August 2014, nearly three years after the launch of the programme and just 9 months before the end of Phase 1, local authorities were informed that, in order to be eligible for the national roll out of the second phase of the TFP, DCLG 'will need sufficient assurance that areas are likely to hit their existing commitments to turn around **all** of their current allocation of troubled families by May 2015' (DCLG, 2014d, original emphasis). This 100% target had never been mentioned in previous 'troubled families' communications or publications, including the TFP 'financial framework' document (DCLG, 2012c). This situation, of effectively being named and shamed and excluded from the second phase of the programme, led some local authorities to identify and claim for previously 'troubled families' who had 'turned themselves around' without any formal intervention from the TFP (see Bawden, 2015 for a discussion of the national scale of this phenomenon):

> *So we had to have a think about which of the families had been worked with recently that might have been eligible, although we wouldn't have originally identified them as Troubled Families. So we found a cohort of families that had some intervention of some sorts, not specifically within this programme, where we could see their attendance had changed, or whatever it was had changed. So they had never been specifically worked with as Troubled Families. They did fulfil the criteria, things had improved for them, a hundred percent claim.* (Janet, CSM, Northton)

It should be noted that the terms of the financial framework for the first phase of the TFP mean that these data-matching exercises were effectively sanctioned by DCLG. In the first phase, there was nothing within the PbR mechanism that stated, for example, that families had to be worked with under a 'family intervention' model, or something similar. The data matching was, in Bourdieu's terms a legitimated, *if not encouraged*, transgression, ignored because it helped to prove the value of playing the game in a certain way. Many of the agents involved in the game, however, saw little value in such proclamations of success.

8.3 *'I think that's a load of bloody rubbish':* resistance of doxa

Bourdieu (1989: 22) notes that 'in the struggle for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, the holders of bureaucratic authority never establish an absolute monopoly'. In this study, there was resistance to forces emanating from agents possessing 'bureaucratic authority' in the field of power. As well as the 'legitimated transgressions' and the daily authorised 'bending of the rules' that have already been discussed, there was, at times, more explicit rejection of some aspects of the 'troubled families' doxa, especially in relation to the alleged success of the first phase of the programme. Participants largely rejected the idea that families' lives had been 'turned around' as a result of the local interventions, although some participants did believe that it was possible to work 'a little bit of magic' with families when they were given the resources and support to work with them unconditionally:

> *I think that's a load of bloody rubbish and I think it's political rhetoric. I think there are some families who we can make a difference to, usually at lower level, usually if we get in early enough. But by the time you come to the families that were initially targeted by the Government, erm, it's chronic, it's entrenched, it's multi-generational. I think if we can get them to a point where they're functioning good enough, for the next six months, and the kids get to school for the next six months and the house is clean for the next six months, erm…* (Emma, CSM, Westingham)

Two participants in Northton, interviewed together at their request, argued that parts of the TFP were 'immoral' and 'flawed' and that the PbR design, which rewarded adults finding work of any quality, had the potential to 'hurt' families where other issues remained unresolved:

> Janet: *I think it's a well sold programme. But anything where you are trying to prove something before it's happened, is a little bit dangerous, from a data or statistical perspective, you know. I think there's some really good work being done in Northton. I think it's of some use to collect data that helps us show progression. You [troubled family] were here, look how brilliant you are now. Fantastic, I like that, that's a good tool, that's helpful. Erm, but I think that if you start from the standpoint where you say, this programme is going to turn around families and you are going to get a hundred percent payment by results, then you're, I just think it's flawed. I just think it's flawed and I think it's, part of it, is, erm, (laugh), you know, just bits of it are immoral, they're immoral, you know. It's almost like you're chastising people for being poor. You're troubled because you're poor.* (Janet, CSM, Northton)
>
> Steph: *And I think there's a lot that's immoral about the payment by results process, absolutely.*
>
> Janet: *Yes. How is it that work is top trumps? You can still be beating nine bells out of your wife and children, and your children may not be achieving anything at school because they don't attend because they're busy mopping the blood up off the floor. But actually, you went out and you got a job in a betting office or whatever you got. And that's top trumps and that hurts.*

Steph: *We've turned that family around … It stills leaves a lot to be desired, doesn't it?*

One participant suggested, after their interview had finished that I should question why there was not more audible resistance to the programme from local authority personnel. The participant suggested that the effects of cuts to other services had left people too afraid to speak out, for fear of them and/or colleagues losing their jobs. This perspective was also articulated by a 'below the line' respondent to a *Guardian* online article about the TFP which queried whether the claims of success were 'too good to be true' (Bawden, 2015). The response was posted under a pseudonym and so one cannot be sure who posted it, but the author claimed to be working in a local authority and the full comment suggested good knowledge of the funding matrix for the programme. They argued that the unquestioned 'success' of the TFP needed to be understood in the wider context of what was happening more generally to local services, and specifically those that supported children and families:

> Troubled Families is the only new money we have available in drastically sinking services. It deserves criticism but we have massive anxiety that it will just get pulled and we'll be completely screwed. All central funds go to support top end social work and increasing costs of care, troubled families is the only fund that offers opportunity for earlier and different kind of working …

> … while we all roll our eyes at the funding matrix between ourselves we daren't project this criticism to the national stage because we'll be starved of any funding at all if the Government pull it. We are a bit like abused children made to eat gruel, complaint won't lead to better food, it'll lead to less gruel.

In Bourdieusian terms, the effects of the pressure exerted within the 'troubled families' field from the field of power can only be understood when considered in relation to the pressures or forces exerted in other bureaucratic fields. The TFP arguably generated very little negative feedback from local authorities, because it offers 'good news' - in the forms of economic, political and symbolic capital - to them, at a time when they are otherwise largely starved of positive feedback from central government. Potentially dissonant voices have had their mouths stuffed with cash. Because of its location as a subfield of the bureaucratic field, its proximity to other policy fields and its reliance on resources from these fields, the 'troubled families' field is not a particularly autonomous field. The wider context of public policy fields similar to the 'troubled families' field is examined in the next section.

8.4   *'No scope for boutique projects'*: the TFP and other policy fields

A defining feature of the coalition government's political programme was the insistence on the need to reduce public spending. Both parties were agreed on the need for austerity measures to help the UK economy to recover following the banking crises of 2007-08. The result was, as

one respected social policy academic noted, a plan which would see the UK 'have the lowest share of public spending among major capitalist economies, including the USA' with 'the welfare state … under the most severe and sustained attack it has faced' (Taylor-Gooby, 2012). Welfare reforms have disproportionately impacted on poor families with children, and analysis suggests that reforms yet to be implemented will continue this trend (Beatty & Fothergill, 2013 & 2016; De Agostini et al, 2015). The withdrawal of local government funding linked to deprivation has resulted in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK being most affected by cuts to local government services (Innes and Tetlow, 2015). Participants in a study examining the effects of government cuts on local services noticed reductions in local environmental services which maintained streets, parks and playgrounds, with some residents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods suggesting that their areas had 'been "forgotten" or "abandoned"' (Hastings et al, 2015: 50). One participant in this research study noted how these cuts had also affected previous family intervention services in their local authority and in neighbouring authorities:

> *Erm, and the irony was not lost on us, that in 2010, one of the first things the coalition government did, was to cut the early intervention grant in a year to local authorities. So (laugh), so family intervention was an early casualty of that.* (Alan, CE, Southborough)

Clarke and Newman (2012: 300) have argued that the concept of austerity was 'ideologically reworked', from being an economic response required by the financial crisis of 2007-8, to a political response that 'focused on the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector … as the root cause of the crisis'. Politicians of different stripes competed to end the 'something for nothing' culture associated with people claiming social security payments. 'Hard-working families', 'workers' and 'strivers' were pitted against 'troubled families', 'shirkers' and 'skivers', in new iterations of the age old cleavage between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor'. The use of research on multiple disadvantages to bring 'troubled families' to life was, as Levitas (2012: 8) noted, part of a 'discursive strategy … successful in feeding vindictive attitudes to the poor'. Increasing conditionality within the welfare system, the publication of a government child poverty strategy which focused primarily on addressing behavioural changes amongst poor people, and an increasing policy focus on 'early intervention' can all be seen as part of this strategy.

It was amidst these developments that the new expansive, interventionist TFP was announced and launched. At the same time that government was cutting funding to local authorities and attempting to implement austerity measures, it announced a new, high-profile social policy that ostensibly targeted a small hard-core of troublemaking families. It was, however, couched

in terms of saving public funding, an official 'fiscal case' for working with 'troubled families' was published by DCLG (2013b) and, according to no less an authority than the Prime Minister, the programme would 'change completely the way government interacts with them; the way the state intervenes in their lives' (Cameron, 2011b). The TFP was going to turn around expensive, inefficient public services that had failed 'troubled families' for generation after generation. In a 2012 interview with the trade magazine *Civil Service World* (Chambers, 2012), Casey was unequivocal about the difference between a network of FIPs and the TFP:

> This time around, there's no scope for boutique projects; the scope is to do full system change around how we work with those families, so [we] can learn the lessons of the family intervention projects …

> I don't just want a big boutique project. What I want is all of those other services, from policing to housing to health, to change. You have to change the system.

The wider agenda of the TFP and its potential to impact on other policy fields was acknowledged in the three fieldwork sites. Many participants thought that the family intervention model would become a key way of working for different services within local authorities in the future and that it would become 'mainstreamed' in different ways. This is unsurprising given that, as the last section highlighted, almost every family that receives some form of referral to specialist services could potentially meet the criteria for being a 'troubled family' under the expanded second phase of the programme:

> *This whole, even from phase one, this programme, if you want to call it, because it's not a project, is about improving outcomes for families, reducing the burden on the public purse and transformation … It's not going to go away, erm, this is meant to be how you transform your services, so that you will work differently.* (Gill, CSM, Northton)

> *I think it will just be embedded in services. And, you know, as contracts are recommissioned and stuff, actually, it's just part and parcel of what everybody does. So I think it's here to stay. I think it's got to be that.* (Audrey, CSM, Southborough)

Other participants suggested that the government's austerity measures and cuts to local services played more of a role in changing services than the TFP had. Participants highlighted that the TFP, and the local iterations of it, were just one of the many changes happening to local authorities' structures and services. One participant discussed work they were involved in around housing support which involved new commissioning arrangements and working closely with health services and local police officers, but this work was taking place in parallel to changes within the TFP. Ofsted inspections, and the fear of them, appeared to carry far more weight in terms of re-designing services than any need to 'integrate' 'troubled families' approaches in all three authorities. Other participants noted that the continuing re-structures

and redundancies within local authorities were bigger drivers of change and that the TFP simply provided them with a useful and politically expedient framework for 'restructuring':

> *Obviously, the council has had to make efficiencies and that is going to continue. So clearly, they would have had to do something. But I think Troubled Families, as I say, has just given us the framework to say, right, this is what the Government are suggesting we do, let's put this in place and this is how we're going to do it.* (Sarah, CSM, Westingham)

> *[The Local Strategic Partnership] themselves recognised, and this is way before Troubled Families, that, erm, they need to work differently and in a more joined up way. Then when the, erm, oh what's it called, the pre-cursor of Troubled Families? The community budget stuff came up. Erm, so we started thinking about how we could do something different before the Troubled Families Programme came.* (Kim, CSM, Southborough)

The 'success' of the first phase of the TFP has led to the government and other influential agents proposing an expansion of the 'troubled families' approach to more than just an extra 400,000 'troubled families'. The desire to 'transform' public services that was articulated by Cameron and Casey at the start of the TFP has continued, using the 'success' of the first phase as justification for this 'new' approach to be expanded into other social policy fields. As well as addressing the 'problems' covered by the new TFP criteria, numerous MPs and members of the House of Lords have highlighted the benefits of the TFP in speeches and responses to questions about a variety of different policy areas such as: youth unemployment; government funding based on indices of deprivation; gangs and youth violence; rough sleeping; violent extremism; dog fighting; and funding for children's nurseries and day care.[30] In essence, as well as the concept of 'troubled families' acting as a symbolic dumping ground for a wide range of 'social problems', the TFP also acts as the 'go-to' policy for solution-seeking politicians at a time of wider retrenchment of public sector services.

Before he resigned, Cameron namechecked the TFP in a number of speeches about different policy objectives and areas of government work. In a speech on 'Opportunity' (Cameron, 2015a) Cameron announced that the TFP had 'changed lives' and claimed that he wanted 'to extend this thinking to areas where state institutions have all too often failed'. His next sentence began 'One area is child protection...' before going on to talk about the role of *Frontline*, a fast-track graduate social work programme based on *Teach First* principles. When talking about the need to create a 'smarter state' (Cameron, 2015b) that was 'not unlike business', he stated that:

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[30] A simple search on the *They Work For You* website (https://www.theyworkforyou.com/), which collates speeches made by politicians in the Houses of Parliament shows the full extent of the view amongst politicians that the TFP is a panacea to a wide range of social ills.

> Our Troubled Families programme has shown just what we can achieve when we get
> different bodies channeling their resources into a single, locally-led determined
> intervention. The results are inspiring. More children going to school, fewer crimes,
> less anti-social behavior - and across the country thousands of troubled families turned
> around.

In a speech setting out the concept of 'life chances' (Cameron, 2016) in which he argued that 'mums and dads literally build babies' brains', Cameron highlighted how he wanted 'parenting skills and child development become central to how [the TFP] is both targeted and how it is delivered. He went on to argue that:

> It's tragic that some children turn up to school unable to feed themselves or use the
> toilet. Of course this is a clear failure of parenting, but by allowing poor parenting to
> do such damage for so long, it is also state failure of social services, of the health
> service, of childcare – of the lot.

The rhetoric of the 'troubled families' approach spreading to other bureaucratic or policy fields has not, to date, been matched by the reality on the ground. Whilst 'troubled families' are expected to be central to the government's forthcoming *Life Chances Strategy* and new reporting requirements on TFP progress to Parliament were included in the Work and Welfare Reform Act 2016, a 'troubled families' miasma has not yet completely enveloped other areas of local authorities' work. A call from the 'would-be scholars of the obvious' (Bourdieu, 1999: 629) at the think-tank *Institute for Public Policy Research* (IPPR) to develop a 'troubled lives' programme for adults experiencing homelessness, substance misuse and/or mental health problems has not yet come to fruition despite its authors stating that 'The new Conservative government is now actively considering the case for extending the Troubled Families programme to these individuals' (McNeil and Hunter, 2015: 3).[31] Recent publications exploring options and opportunities for the future of children's services by the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Department for Education mention the TFP only in passing (Selwyn, 2016), or not at all (DfE, 2016).

Participants in the research study, whilst understanding that the TFP was supposed to be about 'systems change' and acknowledging that it, along with other structural drivers had changed the way services were delivered to some extent, were often quite sceptical about the long-term future of the programme. Some workers stated that they had been around long enough to know that services and priorities changed quite often and that the TFP, despite its popularity, would be little different. The Chief Executive of Southborough noted that the

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[31] At the time that the report was published, McNeil, one of the authors, was seconded from IPPR to the Cabinet Office.

council had already begun trying to apply learning from their 'troubled families' work to other service areas, but there was still scepticism from elsewhere within the authority. In a similar vein, despite widespread support for the programme from participants from Northton, there was also doubt as to how the work was viewed and valued from elsewhere within the authority:

> *Erm, so I think (sigh), I think it's a good thing but I don't think it's a long term thing because I've seen things change so much in the services I've worked for over the years. Over the twelve/thirteen years that I've been, erm, working in these roles, I've seen so many changes. I don't think it can be a long term thing.* (Daisy, FW, Southborough)

> *I keep saying the right things and hoping people will take it on board. And why isn't it linked in to the transformational work that's currently going on? Because of the, the funding gap, there's a multi-million funding gap we've got, you know. Why aren't people looking at Northton Families and actually using those models?* (Gill, CSM, Northton)

Continued job insecurity was also highlighted as a reason why the expansion of the TFP may not be sustainable. As well as key workers often being employed on temporary contracts linked specifically to TFP funding allocations, other workers whose primary role was in other policy fields were also concerned about their futures, as a result of relentless re-organising in the local authorities. The workers who spanned the boundaries of different policy fields were also concerned about possible de-professionalization of public sector careers:

> *Erm, so you're sort of thinking, will I still be here next year? So you've got through another year, it's like, oh great, got another year. Will I still be here next year? Erm, we've had a few restructurings, where we've had to go for our jobs again. Erm, I mean we don't know whether our role radically, will completely change. Erm, whether we'll become more like, for example, the role of more to do with like the Child and Family Support, having that more direct role.* (Rob, YW, Westingham)

> *I think we'll end up, erm, being more just Northton Families Case Managers. So, you know, erm, triage ... So I think, I think we'll end up holding, because of widening the kind of criteria as well with phase two, basically, any child who stubs their toe, no that's a bit ridiculous. But, you know, any child in need, you know, there's so many criteria, I think you can make a lot of families, I say make a lot of families fit, a lot of families do fit the model, erm, and would benefit from the support.* (Jacqui, YW, Northton)

Therefore, despite the symbolic capital associated with the TFP and its 'miraculous success' (Butler, 2015), there appears to be some doubt surrounding the future direction and significance of the programme. The evaluation of the first phase of the TFP, including an impact assessment that found no evidence to support the claims of success made by the government, will not have helped (Bewley et al, 2016), although it has recently been claimed that the programme will be 'rebooted' (Savage, 2017). The three main protagonists in the first phase of the TFP have all moved on from their posts: Cameron has resigned as Prime Minister and left parliamentary politics altogether; Casey was seconded firstly to an independent

investigation into Child Sexual Exploitation and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) and then into a role examining community cohesion and extremism;[32] and Pickles was replaced as Secretary of State for Communities by Greg Clark, who himself was replaced by Sajid Javid during a cabinet re-shuffle following Theresa May's appointment. May's (2016) comment that 'If you're from an ordinary working class family, life is much harder than many people in Westminster realise' in her first speech as Prime Minister highlight the fact, however, that the significance of 'the family' in current policy discussions transcends individual politicians.[33]

The mooted expansion into other service areas has not materialised and the public profile of the second phase of the programme has dipped markedly in contrast to the regular press releases and progress reports that were a key component of the first phase. No regular progress reports have been published relating to the second phase of the TFP and the evaluation of the first phase has yet to be published, with the first report to parliament due at the end of March 2017. It could, of course, be argued, that the hard symbolic work has already been done. 'Troubled families' have already been brought to life by the government, policy-makers, practitioners and members of the general public are already sensitized to the concept and it is therefore no longer necessary to keep bringing attention to them, especially in light of some of the criticisms surrounding the first phase of the programme (Levitas, 2012; Crossley, 2015; Portes, 2015).

8.5 'Troubled families' and neoliberal statecraft: a discussion

It is possible to view the TFP as a distinct policy programme or, in the words of Casey, as a 'boutique' project, but it would probably be unwise and unhelpful to do so. Clearly, this was not the aim of the programme when it was conceived by the government and it does not appear to have been operationalized entirely as a distinct programme in the fieldwork sites researched here. The 'troubled families' field is thus producing *effects* that can be felt beyond its boundaries. An alternative perspective, and one which the government would have people believe, is that the TFP is revolutionising the way that the state interacts with disadvantaged or

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[32] There is emerging evidence that Casey's *habitus* is durable and transposable enough to withstand her entry into other policy fields. She recommended robust, short-term, intensive government intervention to sort out RMBC and was linked with a proposal that suggested more Muslim women learning English would help to tackle radical extremism.

[33] See also the furore surrounding erstwhile Conservative Leadership contender Andrea Leadsom's comments that she had a greater stake in the future of the country because she had a family of her own, in contrast to May, who does not.

'troubled' families, as Cameron claimed it would when he launched the programme in 2011. And yet, the empirical research carried out in this study, and a cursory examination of changes in other policy fields, suggests that the state is changing, but the TFP, which itself has undergone changes in its relatively short history, is only one, admittedly important, element of a much broader reconfiguration of state duties and responsibilities.

A number of commentators have noted that recent UK governments have become increasingly interested in 'the family' (see, for example, Morris & Featherstone, 2010; Gillies & Edwards, 2012; Butler, 2014) as a site for state intervention and regulation. This intensifying gaze on families, especially after the 2007-08 economic crisis, has occurred at precisely the same moment that public services have retreated from many of their traditional sites and roles (Hastings et al, 2015; Crossley, 2016c) and wider structural changes have been taking place under Conservative-led governments (see Bochel and Powell, 2016 for a discussion of the coalition government's social policy record). Similarly, recent policy developments circulating 'the family' have favoured the concept of *intervention* over *support* (Featherstone et al, 2014). Wacquant (2009: 288) has argued that it is necessary to examine both symbolic and material changes in order to 'heed and hold together the instrumental and expressive function' of neoliberal social policies. Whilst the focus of Wacquant's analysis in the USA was on the expansion of the penal apparatus of the state and the concomitant expansion of workfare regimes, his theory, with some modifications, can be deployed to understand the centrality of 'the family' in the process of neoliberal statecraft that is being undertaken in the UK at the current time (Crossley, 2016a).

Fusing symbolic and materialist approaches, as Bourdieu did, encourages us, in examining policy shifts, to see how 'the management of dispossessed categories and the affirmation of salient social boundaries … has reshaped the sociosymbolic landscape and remade the state itself' (Wacquant, 2009: 288). In elucidating historical parallels between the origins of the Poor Laws and the neoliberal turn at the dawn of the twenty-first century, Wacquant (2009: 294) argues that elements of 'punitive containment' can be found in both. Just as the fear of unrest and disorder amongst the lower classes forced the state to act in the sixteenth century, Wacquant argues that is a desire to quell the social disturbances (such as the 2011 riots) that arise from contemporary neoliberal policies that has spawned new forms of interventions, rather than support, for marginalised and disenfranchised groups. Whilst the neoliberal state adopts a laissez-faire attitude towards dominant agents in the social space, it prefers and adopts a more authoritarian and interventionist approach to dominated or potentially 'troublesome' groups. Punitive containment, for Wacquant (2009: 294), then:

taps the diffuse social anxiety coursing through the middle and lower regions of social space in reaction to the splintering of wage work and the resurgence of inequality, and converts it into popular antimus toward welfare recipients and street criminals cast as the twin detached and defamed categories which sap the social order by their dissolute morality and dissipated behaviour, and must therefore be placed under severe tutelage.

He argues that neoliberalism needs to be understood sociologically rather than economically and that this 'thicker notion' can help to identify 'the institutional machinery and symbolic frames through which neoliberal tenets are being actualized' (Wacquant, 2009: 306). Viewed through this theoretical lens, the TFP and the associated concepts of 'troubled families', 'family workers' 'turned around families' etc. can be understood as exemplars of the institutional machinery and the symbolic frames that Wacquant identifies. Concepts such as 'early intervention' adoption decisions 'within the child's timeframe' and 'life chances' can be viewed as similarly symbolic frames. The conflation, at the outset of the TFP, of families experiencing multiple disadvantages with 'neighbours from hell', augmented by the official criteria including 'worklessness' and crime/ASB manages to perfectly crystallize the concern about 'welfare recipients' and 'street criminals', as do the five 'pathways to poverty' including debt, worklessness and addiction, constructed by Iain Duncan Smith's 'lackey intellectuals' (Stabile and Morooka, 2010: 329) at the CSJ.

The aspects of the 'troubled families' doxa discussed above, emanating from the field of power, and the uses to which they have been put, similarly suggest that the TFP is a key part of a wider project. The high-prolife support of the Prime Minister and the choice of a high-profile civil servant highlighted the symbolic importance of the TFP to the government from the outset. The subsequent 'success' and 'massive expansion' of the programme to work with 400,000 more 'troubled families' with, in many cases, different 'troubles' again demonstrates that the government had bigger plans for the TFP than simply 'turning around' 120,000 'troubled families'. Although the proposed expansion into other policy fields has yet to materialise, the symbolic and political groundwork for such incursions has been laid.

The relentless focus on families, and family intervention that must be carried out by workers who can 'get in through the front door' and the need to get family members into jobs (of any kind), into school (regardless of their behaviour or attainment once there) and off the streets highlights the punitive containment elements of the TFP, both spatially and symbolically. Family workers are tasked with helping, if not making, families – and more specifically, mothers - cope with their existing poverty better, rather than addressing the poverty itself. The supposedly intensive nature of family intervention work, its coetaneous focus on demonstrating domestic competence, and a rhetorical preoccupation with 'gripping' putative

problems illustrates the severe tutelage that is required to 'turn around' 'troubled families'. Casey's (2016: 45) suggestion that children's services should act like 'a rapid and decisive SWAT team for when all else fails' lends credence to Wacquant's (2009: 290) argument that this is a 'daddy state', one that is being *remasculinized* under neoliberalism.

The PbR process, the explicit fiscal case for working with 'troubled families' and the publication of a report demonstrating the 'benefits to the taxpayer' (DCLG, 2015b) is merely the vanguard for Cameron's (2015b) vision of a 'smarter state', run along private sector principles and increasingly by private sector companies highlights another way in which the state is being remade under neoliberalism. Social Impact Bonds, the privatisation, or continued symbolic threat of privatisation, of public services such as probation, children's social services and health services are also central to this agenda, which is increasingly viewing multiple disadvantage as a commodity to be exploited by investors with an eye for a 'growth area'.

These attempts to remake the state, both materially and symbolically, have, as we have noted, not always gone entirely smoothly. Once the doxic surface of the purported near-perfect social policy is scratched, one can see that conflict, contestation and correctives occur at a number of different points. To paraphrase Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) in their classic discussion of the implementation of public policies in the USA, the great expectations of Westminster can easily be dashed in places like Dorset, Dagenham and Darlington. Local authorities and their employees have, as we have seen throughout the previous chapters, attempted to challenge or subvert some of the less edifying aspects of the TFP. They have called their local programmes by different names, workers have attempted to work in ways that they believe 'empower' the families they are working with, and the PbR/'turning families around' elements of the programme have come in for particular criticism. And yet, given the numerous concerns that one can articulate about the TFP, it could be argued that it is surprising that resistance has not been stronger. Considering the restructuring and, in many cases, shrinkage that is taking place in other policy fields at the current time allows us to better understand the way that agents and institutions in the field of power exert their influence both within and across different policy fields.

Chapter 9: 'Fixing the responsibility deficit': some concluding thoughts

> … my mission in politics - the thing I am really passionate about - is fixing the responsibility deficit. That means building a stronger society, in which more people understand their obligations, and more take control over their own lives and actions. For a long time, I was criticised for talking about the broken society. But I believe that it's only by recognising the problem that we can fix what's gone wrong. And this summer we saw, beyond doubt, that something has gone profoundly wrong. The riots were a wake-up call - not a freak incident but a boiling over of problems that had been simmering for years (Cameron, 2011c).

9.1   Introduction

When David Cameron (2011c) launched the TFP in December 2011, he remarked that the thing he was 'really passionate about' was 'fixing the responsibility deficit'. If we, as a country, were to address the 'broken society', Cameron believed that it was 'only by recognising the problem that we can fix what's gone wrong'. Cameron's focus was firmly on those families he labelled 'troubled' and the gaze of the TFP has remained firmly on those families and the activities of the workers tasked with 'turning them around'. Workers have been expected to 'look at the family from the inside out' (DCLG, 2012a: 4) in attempting to make 'troubled families' take responsibility for the circumstances in which they find themselves. This research study has, in heeding Bourdieu's advice to be wary of 'pre-constructed' problems, attempted to look in the opposite direction. The study hopefully serves as a corrective to the dominant doxic notion that the TFP can turn around both 'troubled families' and 'troubled services'. The 'responsibility deficit' that should be most troubling to us, as a society, can be found not amongst the dominated agents in the 'troubled families' field, but in those occupying positions of power within that field, and others.

This penultimate chapter brings together some of the key findings of the study. The power of the official concept of 'troubled families' is firstly examined in a section examining the ability of the state, and other dominant interests, to wield symbolic power and to work a form of social magic in creating 'a new construction of social reality' (Bourdieu 1989: 18), and a belief effect around 'troubled families' and the TFP.[34] The simplicity of the national narrative is then challenged with a summary of findings from research with street-level bureaucrats operating in the 'troubled families' field, many of whom highlighted tensions and contradictions between

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[34] The focus in this chapter is, in keeping with the approach of the thesis overall, on the role of the state but the role of media organisations, think-tanks, voluntary sector organisations and campaigning groups in creating the 'belief' effect around 'troubled families' should not be underestimated.

their daily work and the portrayal of the TFP at a national level. A third section highlights that the relations between agents and institutions in different areas of the field are often based on deceit and duplicity, with street-level workers engaged in deception with both the 'troubled families' they work with, and with more powerful agents demanding results from them.

The second half of the chapter highlights that research carried out in the 'troubled families' field has its limitations and that, in order to fully understand the role of the TFP in wider government reforms and social policies, it is necessary to moved 'beyond the boundary', and examine the restructuring that is taking place in other, bureaucratic or welfare fields. This section sets out the extent to which the TFP represents a key element of recent attempts to restructure and recraft the state in the UK. We return to Wacquant's work on the need to view neoliberalism sociologically rather than economically to understand and explain these changes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the 'responsibility deficit' within the UK government and the distorted reality of the 'ambition' to turn around the lives of the country's most 'troubled families'.

9.2   Symbolic power and social magic

This Bourdieusian study of the 'troubled families' field has demonstrated the symbolic power and social magic of the state in bringing things to life and creating a belief effect around them. Bourdieu argued that individuals and institutions invested with the authority to think, speak and act on the world were able to create groups of people and impose a 'vision of divisions' on the world. The state and its representatives are best placed to exert this symbolic power.

This symbolic power can be seen in at least three concepts or constructions relating to 'troubled families'. The political construction of 'troubled families' themselves has been closely examined in this thesis. Welshman (2013: 231) noted that the various constructions of the 'underclass' that emerged at different times often revealed as much about the wider social and political context as it did about the specific 'underclass' group itself. The former Prime Minister, David Cameron, built upon historical concerns about an 'underclass', contemporary fears about the 'broken society' and the re-emergence of policy and political concerns with 'the family', to draw attention to a group of families that he alleged 'were the source of a large proportion of problems in society' (Cameron, 2011a). He gave these families a state identity, bringing 'troubled families' to life, hailing them into being, through a series of speeches before, during and after the riots in 2011. This official identity was augmented by the launch of the TFP and the corollary publication of: numbers of 'troubled families' in each local authority

area; research 'proving' the existence of 120,000 'troubled families'; official criteria for what constitutes 'troubled family'; the daily work of family workers involved with the programme; and details of how 'troubled families' could be officially 'turned around'.

A largely compliant media, aroused by the announcement of a high profile social policy, at a time when austerity was the watchword, swallowed the story whole, and repeated it *ad nauseum*. Many well-known children's charities, conscious that most of their popular support, not to mention grant funding and contracts, depended to a large extent on similar, if not quite so stigmatizing, stories of parental failure and vulnerable children, adopted the role of cheerleaders for the new programme. The story of 'troubled families' was maintained by the high media profile of Louise Casey, and regular publications by DCLG which, amongst other things, set out: good practice in working with 'troubled families'; the 'fiscal case' for working with 'troubled families'; the 'cost' of 'troubled families'; and the extent of their 'problems'. Official press releases received extensive coverage in the media, and helped to keep them interested in the progress that was being achieved by local authorities in 'turning around' 'troubled families'. When 400,000 more 'troubled families' were identified, this announcement was touted as proof of a 'new underclass' (Hellen, 2014) rather than being interrogated in any detail. In short, and drawing on Bourdieu's work once again, we can see how 'troubled families' represent an example *par excellence* of the state's capacity for symbolic power and of the continuing salience of 'the family' in maintaining social order. It is a concept that is 'produced and re-produced with the guarantee of the state' (Bourdieu, 1996: 25).

The interpellation of family workers is a second example of the ability of the state to make groups of people and to carve up social reality. Just as 'troubled families' could be identified by their 'problems' and the high burden they placed on the 'public purse', the family workers who would grip them and help them turn their lives around could be pinpointed by their 'persistent, assertive and challenging' approach, and, more routinely, their ability to walk through front doors. Although Casey (2014) stated, 'It is not that family intervention workers are 'jacks of all trades', they are masters of one – the relationship', they were also supposed to be able to perform the myriad tasks that mothers are often expected to carry out, including scrubbing floors, getting children ready for school and establishing some form of routine within the household. In some cases, their work includes working with members of the family to resolve issues as diverse as Domestic Violence, 'poor parenting', mental and physical health issues, and unemployment. They are also expected to grip other unnamed but multiple 'services' as well, resolving issues such as housing complaints, benefit queries and debt advice.

And they are required to do all of this whilst keeping extensive records of their activities and whilst never telling the families that the state had labelled them as being 'troubled'.

All other attempts to deal with 'troubled families' had allegedly failed. Social workers who used clipboards and other stereotypical bureaucrats – those who sat at desks and arranged to meet service users in offices – were marginalised in the 'troubled families' narrative and cast as part of the problem to be solved. A new programme was thus required, along with a new approach, based on 'dedicated workers' who were prepared to 'walk in the shoes of families'. Yet no clue was given as to where these workers had been during previous government interventions or support work with 'troubled families', or what they had been doing prior to the launch of the TFP. There was no indication that the new cadre of family workers would be recruited from similar services such as education welfare, youth offending teams, and children's centres. There was no explanation as to how the simple adoption of a 'family intervention' approach would see such a radical change in the alleged 'performance' of street-level bureaucrats. Details and contradictions such as these were largely absent from the governments pronouncements about the success of family workers, remaining undiscussed. Whilst the details of some 'troubled families' backgrounds have been probed and laid bare by Casey and others during the life of the programme, similar exercises have not been undertaken with family workers.

A third example of the symbolic power of the state can be found in the development of the TFP itself. The programme was, according to Cameron, going to change the way that government intervened in the lives of 'troubled families'. The launch of a single official government programme would help to address the disparate approaches to resolving families' troubles that had reputedly undermined similar work in the past. The programme relies on local authorities implementing and delivering the programme, without any statutory guidance, in keeping with wider political shifts towards localism and decentralisation. Local councils had to identify a named Troubled Families Co-ordinator to liaise with DCLG and lead the local implementation work. The official criteria set out which families were eligible for the TFP and the 'financial framework' decreed exactly what improvements needed to be made in order for a 'troubled family' to be declared 'turned around' and how much local authorities would be paid for turning them around. Local authorities are required to gather and maintain lots of information on participating families and, in the second phase of the programme, they are required to keep even more detailed records to track families progress against the 'problems' that they face. All of this activity helps to give the TFP a 'much more focused' feel, as Audrey, a CSM in Southborough noted, one where the transaction between the state and 'troubled

families' is, in Casey's words (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 668, 2014: 9), 'absolutely clear', and local authorities are supposedly no longer supporting families endlessly without seeing 'real' progress.

And yet, the lack of any formal or statutory guidance about how the programme should be implemented locally means that it may be more instructive to think of the TFP as an empty shell of a programme, a triumph of style over substance. Very few, if any, local authorities include the label 'troubled' in their local programmes and some have been explicit in rejecting this label. The 'family intervention' approach has been applied and interpreted differently in different authorities with authorities developing local approaches which fit somewhere along the continuum of creating entirely new teams to deliver the work and spreading the workload amongst existing teams and structures (see also White and Day, 2016). Some authorities have even claimed for 'turned around' families that no worker connected with the TFP has been near, via data-matching exercises which were allowed under the PbR framework in the first phase of the programme (Bawden, 2015).

Upon consideration of these local variations and some of the resistance and subversion of the TFP that has been discussed, it becomes increasingly difficult to see the TFP as a single policy programme, especially one that has changed completely the way the state intervenes in 'troubled families' lives. The structure of the programme, however, does have the potential to revolutionise how central government interacts with local government or, indeed, other organisations involved in the street-level delivery of public services. The imposition of (admittedly lax) criteria about who can and cannot be worked with, the spreading of funding for local authorities over various stages of 'success' in working with citizens, the need for detailed submissions documenting 'progress' to be made in order to receive funding, and the monitoring of families' 'progress' against certain criteria without their knowledge or consent are all relatively new developments within the bureaucratic field in the UK.

The fact that some of the troubles or concerns expressed above, and indeed, throughout the previous chapters, have barely made it into small sections of the mainstream media is testament to the social magic of the state. Most media organisations, including local newspapers and regional television stations, accepted the 'false clarity' provided by politicians and civil servants. They largely did not stop to question how a social policy working with some of the most 'troubled families' in England achieved a 99% success rate at the same time that the welfare state and local services are facing almost unprecedented cutbacks. The fairy-tale presented to readers of most newspapers and viewers of local news was one where heroic workers had worked unstintingly to get 'troubled families' 'off the sofa of despair' and helped

them 'turn around' their lives by getting them back into work and their children back into school. This changed slightly following the publication of the official evaluation of the first phase of the TFP, and, whilst interest in this particular aspect of the 'story' was short-lived, it does suggest that social magic has its limits and spells can be broken. A more subdued second phase of the programme, a recent suggestion that the programme may be in line for a 'reboot' (Savage, 2017) and the recent policy interest in 'just about managing' (or JAM) families similarly suggest that interest in 'troubled families' may recede, highlighting further continuities with previous constructions of the 'underclass'.

9.3   Entering a public policy field at the street-level

As we have seen, Bourdieu warned against social researchers too readily accepting and thus ratifying the social problems identified by the state. He argued instead for sociological research that 'bends the stick the other way' (Bourdieu 2014:167) and rejected easily observable, tangible encounters and interactions. Such research, Bourdieu argued, would 'help reveal what is hidden' (Bourdieu, 2011: 17) and DuBois has proposed that the development and implementation of public policies should be viewed as fields. This research study entered the 'troubled families' field at the street-level, using Bourdieu's field approach to construct a thick account of the states' work, at different levels, in creating and sustaining the 'well-founded illusion' (Bourdieu, 1996: 25) of 'troubled families'. In contrast to a large amount of street-level research, which has often focused attention on the interactions between public sector workers and service users, this research has attempted to use a 'street-level lens' (Brodkin, 2011: i200) to study backwards and away from these interactions, examining the hidden forces and structures that shape and constrain the everyday practice of the TFP. This approach enabled the study to trouble the doxic simplicity and linearity of the programme, and has helped to uncover the 'complexity of interactions concealed beneath the apparent monotony of bureaucratic routine' (Bourdieu, 2005: 140).

Interviews with workers revealed numerous gaps between the political discourses surrounding the approach of family workers and the reality of daily life within the programme. Despite the praise heaped on them by Casey, workers largely rejected the idea that they were different or distinctive from their colleagues, whilst also acknowledging that they sometimes, and in some respects, enjoyed greater latitude in their work, due to the political and financial profile of the programme. There was, however, no distinctive family worker habitus, or a particularly 'persistent, assertive and challenging' disposition towards their work which made workers

stand out from their colleagues. Instead, workers came from a variety of professional backgrounds and many of them drew on, and continued to value, knowledge and experience that they had gained from previous roles, as well as skills learnt during training and education opportunities. The robust, muscular and authoritarian approach advocated by the government was usually replaced with a more tentative, sympathetic and understanding approach to working with families which recognised that they were not the sole architects of their circumstances. The 'sleeves rolled up' narrative which afforded primacy to support with domestic chores was similarly largely eschewed by workers who instead discussed the traditional, and sometimes excessive, bureaucratic demands that were placed on them. Some workers highlighted how they were required to keep chronological accounts of their contacts with families whilst others spoke of the need to print off and keep hard copies of e-mails relating to their work with families. The process of identifying, allocating workers to, monitoring the progress of, and claiming PbR funding for, 'troubled families' often required new or amended bureaucratic arrangements and referral processes to be established by local authorities and their partners. Workers and managers displayed a 'feel for the game' they were being asked to play, despite the fact that the TFP has been portrayed as a new and transformational way of working with 'troubled families'. Many workers had worked with marginalised individuals and families in previous roles and most rejected the idea that the rhetoric surrounding the TFP represented anything truly revolutionary or distinct from previous exhortations to adopt a 'whole family' approach.

Despite the prominence given to the relationship between family worker and the 'troubled families' themselves, other relationships and interactions were revealed to be equally as important to the day-to-day operation of the TFP. Whilst Cameron and Casey attempted to portray the TFP as a necessary policy response to the failings of previous approaches and existing service arrangements, workers tasked with implementing the programme relied heavily on the expertise and resources of colleagues in these allegedly 'failing' services. Officers and workers in social work, housing, education and welfare rights were all identified as being important in supporting family workers in improving different aspects of 'troubled families' lives. Family workers within the same team or department were also identified as being sources of support and advice for workers who did not possess specialist knowledge or who lacked experience in working with or around specific issues. The research, then, highlights that there was little support for, or reality to, the 'one family, one plan, one worker' (DCLG, 2012a: 27) image portrayed by the government, with research participants variously espousing the virtues of working as part of a team, valuing the support of colleagues with specialist or professional knowledge of different policy or welfare areas, and bemoaning the bureaucratic

demands placed on them. Thus, the atypical 'bureaucratic charisma' and distinctive cultural capital that workers are portrayed as possessing in various DCLG documents and 'troubled families' speeches and interviews *failed to materialise* during the study, with the workers themselves strongly rejecting the idea that they were somehow different. In their place more mundane forms of cultural and social capital associated with public sector and partnership working were found: the ability to develop and sustain working relationships with people; knowing who to speak to; understanding how 'the system' worked, etc.

Although many of the substantive daily bureaucratic routines and practices of family workers remained largely unchanged from their previous roles, the TFP had made an impact in certain key areas. Workers and managers acknowledged that the design of the PbR framework, the political expectation of 'success', and the timescale associated with 'turning around' all 120,000 'troubled families' had influenced local practice, often in ways which were not always viewed as positive developments. Workers often argued that the outcomes required from the programme did not impact on their frontline practice, which was more likely to be portrayed as an empowering approach, but also discussed how they managed to insert the PbR topics into family action plans to ensure that they were addressed. Progress against these issues was sometimes discussed by workers and managers during supervision meetings whilst in other areas a conscious decision was taken to keep the PbR claiming process distinct from, and separate to, family workers practice, in an effort to avoid the 'sharpness' that Casey (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2014: 31) believed it bought to service delivery. The example that Maggie, a family worker from Southborough, gave about the changes to local multi-agency meetings and the partnership arrangements between different organisations highlighted how the new 'rules of the game' and the arrival of new entrants to the field affected local relations and practices.

As mentioned previously, the left and right hands of the state argument advanced by Bourdieu and Wacquant appears incompatible with much of their other writing on the state, as well as the findings of this research. Such a simplistic binary cannot do justice to the complexity of relations between those agents primarily concerned with fiscal constraints and those whose main concern was with social and welfare issues, or between powerful agents (often operating at a national level) and those subordinate workers (often to be found in local areas). Central government's development of a centrally driven policy invested with so much political capital, and its subsequent reliance on local authorities and their employees to deliver the programme, highlight how tensions and inconsistencies of the programme needed to be managed effectively. The introduction of a PbR framework and the localisation of the auditing

process for PbR claims means that the already cloudy waters of national-local relations under the coalition government were muddied further. Ben, a CSM from Northton provided an illuminating account of the tensions associated with working to the PbR framework: supporting the 'practitioner integrity' that ensured a family would be worked with if they needed support, even when a claim had already been made or there was no realistic chance of making one, whilst demonstrating to his colleagues in a Commissioning Team that they were making progress, picking up new work and claiming the associated 'attachment fees'. Here then, and as was discussed briefly in Chapter 7, Wacquant's (2010: 200) argument that the state represents a 'splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods' is more appropriate than a more straightforward arm-wrestling context between two opposing 'hands'.

9.4 Playing the 'troubled families' game

> … political discourses have a sort of structural duplicity (Bourdieu, 1985: 738)

These tensions can be seen in the attempts by the local authorities and the research participants to negotiate some aspects of the programme that they found less palatable, and their attempts to play the 'troubled families' game in ways that they felt more comfortable with. Unfortunately, the rules of the game were structured in such a way that their efforts did little to challenge the efficacy or suitability of the rules. The contention here is that the 'troubled families' game is founded on a form of doxic duplicity and deceit. Participants in the game are expected, if not required, to comply with the rules, and not discuss breaches of them, when they enter the field.

The duplicity displayed from within the 'troubled families' field of power is well documented (Bawden, 2015; Crossley, 2015; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2016), but it is worth summarising here. There was little evidence that 'poor parenting' was a primary cause of the riots in 2011, which sparked the development of the TFP, despite Cameron's (2011b) assertion that it was only necessary to 'join the dots to have a clear idea' as to why so many young people were involved in the riots. When the figure of 120,000 'troubled families' was announced at the launch of the programme, research highlighting the number of families experiencing multiple disadvantages was misrepresented to suggest there was a credible evidence base for the number of troublesome and anti-social families (Levitas, 2012). The portrayal of 'troubled families' as being afflicted by drug and alcohol abuse (Cameron 2011c), and by Casey as being 'the worst' families and 'off the barometer in terms of the problems

they face' (in Hellen, 2014) does not sit well with the views of practitioners involved with this study, or with official figures from the independent evaluation (see Whitley, 2016), which suggest the majority of families involved with the TFP did not adhere to this stereotype (see also Crossley, 2015). The argument that a family has been 'turned around' if someone enters work of any kind or if some arbitrary behavioural thresholds are met was subjected to challenge by participants in this research and others who have noted that other, sometimes more serious, problems may still be affecting families deemed by the state to have had their lives 'turned around'. The announcement of there being 400,000 more 'troubled families', identified using new and extended criteria, and a different methodology (published 18 months after the expansion of the programme was announced), but retaining the same official, stigmatising label is also questionable. The government argument that 99% of 'troubled families' had their lives 'turned around' by the TFP, during the first phase of the programme does not stand up to any form of scrutiny. Finally, the government response to the national evaluation of the first phase of the TFP, which suggested that there was no consistent evidence that the 'programme had any significant or systematic impact' (Bewley et al, 2016: 20) on many of the key outcomes, was to question the competence of the researchers involved,[35] and produce an 'overview' document of the first phase which largely ignored criticisms of it (DCLG, 2016).

This level of duplicity has effects, which can be felt (and resisted to greater or lesser degrees) in other parts of the 'troubled families' field. The stigmatising rhetoric surrounding 'troubled families' was softened, to a degree, by the local authorities involved in this study. Institutionally and individually, there was little appetite for being closely connected to the official programme or the discourses that engulfed it. Practitioners involved in this research discussed how families were rarely, if ever, informed that they had been identified as a 'troubled family' and were instead given more ambiguous information about the programme, such as being told that they had been identified as being eligible for 'extra support'. Families were not always informed how they had been identified and few will have been explicitly aware that their personal circumstances might have been discussed at multi-agency professional's meetings. A number of practitioners expressed their discomfort at these arrangements, and the wider aspects of data sharing that the programme requires, which they saw as being unethical. There was little suggestion that families were aware that the local authority was working with them on a PbR process or that the family meeting certain criteria

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[35] See the oral evidence given at the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into the TFP by Dame Louise Casey, Joe Tuke, and Melanie Laws on 19 October 2016.

would result in payments to the local authority. All of these issues, relating to frontline practice, cast doubt on the alleged relationship based on trust between the worker and the family.

Local authorities accepted that the programme was 'doomed to succeed' and that the idea of 'turning around' families lives, along with the overall 'success' of the programme was political rhetoric which bore little resemblance to the reality experienced on the ground. And yet, the pressure that was applied to local authorities to comply with the intended outcomes of the programme led to them participating in the deceit, albeit often unwittingly. This echoed DuBois' (2014: 39) argument that although judgements and rules 'defined at the top of the state' often differed from 'those that street-level bureaucrats actually use in their daily practice may differ …they are closely intertwined'. Numerous local authorities claimed for success with families that they hadn't worked with (Bawden, 2015) and participants involved with this study articulated their unease at the portrayal of this success. Even where family workers believed that they were subverting or resisting the muscular approach to family intervention advocated by Casey, the constraints and demands of the programme – and the PbR aspect of it in particular – meant that their room for manoeuvre was limited. Whilst some workers welcomed the perceived autonomy they had in their work on the programme, few recognised or acknowledged the effects of the constraints of the programme. The attempts by Vicky, a family worker in Southborough, discussed in Chapter 7, to reconcile the tensions inherent within the programme, highlights the demands placed on practitioners and the 'double-binds' they were subjected to. These attempts at subversion have not, however, as I have argued elsewhere, made much impact on the dominant narrative of a programme and an approach that has been a spectacular success (see Crossley, 2016b). They were, according to Bourdieu (2005: 132), 'legitimated transgression[s]' or 'legally sanctioned privileges', which acted as 'partial revolutions' that, ultimately, did 'not call into question the very foundations of the game, its fundamental axioms, the bedrock of ultimate beliefs on which the whole game is based' (Bourdieu, 1993: 74). Local practice and implementation has therefore been unable to undermine the symbolic and political work that the TFP does more widely, and the effects of that work that are felt beyond the 'troubled families' field. As DuBois (2014:39) noted, 'discretionary interpretations of norms do not necessarily contradict the rationales of official policy and may also serve its goals.'

9.5   Beyond the boundary

In *Beyond a Boundary*, the seminal book locating the game of cricket in its wider social, political and cultural context, C.L.R. James (1963) drew on a quote from Rudyard Kipling's poem 'English Flag' to rhetorically ask 'What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know'. James argued that the game of cricket affected, and was in turn affected by, life 'beyond the boundary' of the field. In attempting to understand the 'troubled families' field, and the game played within its boundary, it must similarly be located in its wider social, political and cultural context, and the links with other fields must be made. This is in keeping with Bourdieu's argument that there are general laws of fields (Bourdieu, 1993: 72), and that positions and principles identified in one field can be mapped onto positions and principles in another (Martin & Gregg, 2015: 49). DuBois (2015: 212) has also noted how the various '"reforms" that are now proliferating to the point of becoming synonymous with "government policies"' are 'interrelated'.

It is, or perhaps was, possible to view the TFP as an 'outlier' or an anomaly of a social policy, and not part of a series of interconnected, structurally homologous bureaucratic fields. The expansive and interventionist, centrally driven programme was launched at a time of supposed austerity when the 'big state' was decried and support from the state to disadvantaged groups was being scaled back. Localism and decentralisation were being promoted and the government was still attempting to get the idea of the *Big Society* off the ground. The programme was sold as being one that would transform the way the state engaged with 'troubled families', and was presented as being an opportunity to not repeat the failed attempts of the past, as Casey (2012: 3) put it. At a time when welfare reforms and cuts to local government and voluntary sector organisations were making disadvantaged families lives more difficult and precarious, the TFP was intent on turning their lives around, whilst simultaneously saving 'the taxpayer' vital funds.

This is certainly one perspective. If, however, we break free from the *symbolic violence* of the TFP and attempt to examine developments in other bureaucratic and political fields, a counter argument can be made that the TFP should not be viewed as a distinctive approach, but instead as one that is entirely in keeping with wider developments in social policy and social work in the UK and other countries. Heeding Wacquant's call to think about neoliberalism *sociologically* rather than *economically* provides us with a framework through which to view developments across the bureaucratic field. Wacquant (2009a: 306) argues powerfully that:

> Whether singular or polymorphous, evolutionary or revolutionary, the prevalent conception of neoliberalism is essentially economic: it stresses an array of market-

friendly policies such as labour deregulation, capital mobility, privatisation, a monetarist agenda of deflation and financial autonomy, trade liberalisation, interplace competition, and the reduction of taxation and public expenditures. But this conception is thin and incomplete, as well as too closely bound up with the sermonizing discourse of the advocates of neoliberalism. We need to reach beyond this economic nucleus and elaborate a thicker notion that identifies the institutional machinery and symbolic frames through which neoliberal tenets are being actualised.

Such a perspective, aligned with a historical perspective on the dual roles of the 'deserving and undeserving poor' enables us to examine the TFP and the UK government's programme of austerity and decentralisation through a different prism. Viewed in this way, the approach and development of the TFP comes to be seen as an integral part of recent efforts to recraft the state in the UK.

As noted in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7, Wacquant (2009: 304-308) argued that, under neoliberalism, traditional welfare services and support from the state were being rolled back at precisely the same time that more interventionist strategies aimed at controlling disruptive or unruly elements were rolled out. In his analysis, he highlights the 'shared historical origins of poor relief and penal confinement in the chaotic passage from feudalism to capitalism' (2009a: 291) and argues that the remaking of the state in the latter stages of the twentieth century had seen two distinct spheres of the state – welfare and criminal justice – recoupled. Wacquant's focus was on the development of workfare programmes and the expansion of the prison population in the USA, although he also noted that there were other countries where similar developments could be found. Tyler (2013) has drawn on Wacquant's work in examining the 'underclass consensus' that emerged following the 2011 riots and Hancock and Mooney (2012: 59), as we saw in Chapter 4, have previously argued that the rhetoric surrounding the 'broken society' encouraged earlier and deeper penetration … in the lives of the most disadvantaged sections of society'. The next two sections sketch out some of the restructuring that has taken place in other bureaucratic fields and attempt to highlight the confluence between the aims of the TFP and those of other contemporary UK social policies.[36] First, the attention turns to the withdrawal of the state from some its traditional welfare policy areas.

Recent years have seen numerous attempts to subject the welfare state to 'radical reform'. Upon entry to office in 1997, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair reportedly asked Frank Field to 'think the unthinkable' about welfare reform and, in 2008, the Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell faced severe criticism for increasing conditionality within the welfare system,

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[36] This is an issue that I have touched on elsewhere (see Crossley, 2016b & Crossley, 2017, forthcoming) but the focus here is slightly different and examines specific social policy shifts in more detail.

being accused of introducing 'workfare' (Kirkup, 2008; Sparrow, 2008). In 2010, the coalition government published a white paper, *Universal Credit: welfare that works* (DWP, 2010)*, that, in the words of Iain Duncan Smith, marked 'the beginning of a new contract between people who have and people who have not' (DWP, 2010: 1). Whilst this document focused on Universal Credit, introduced in an attempt to make the benefits system more straightforward and transparent, the coalition also introduced other significant changes to existing benefits, conditions attached to them, and how they were paid. A number of benefits, such as Child Benefit and some elements of tax credits, were frozen for three years while others were limited to increases of just 1 per cent for certain periods of time (see De Agostini et al, 2014: 10- 13 or Beatty and Fothergill, 2016: 6-8 for lists of the main benefit and tax changes since 2010). The rate at which benefits were uprated was changed from the Retail Prices Index to the Consumer Prices Index which one commentator noted was a move that would make 'the system significantly less generous to all claimants' (Hirsch, 2010: 6) and appeared to be a choice made 'principally to limit the cost of benefits to the exchequer' (2010: 9). A 'benefit cap' was introduced in 2013, and then reduced in 2016, limiting the total amount of benefits that any single household could claim. A spare room subsidy, popularly known as the 'bedroom tax' was also introduced for social housing tenants who were deemed to be 'under-occupying' their property. The eligibility criteria for disability and incapacity benefits have been made more restrictive and some elements made time-limited and means tested (De Agostini et al, 2014: 11). In October 2016, an inquiry conducted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP) into the impact of welfare reforms on disabled people concluded that there was reliable evidence that 'the threshold of grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities' had been met (UNCRDP,2016: 20). Some benefits, such as the Employment Maintenance Allowance and the Health in Pregnancy Grant, were cut completely. The campaigning charity Child Poverty Action Group estimated that a baby born in April 2011 would have been around £1500 worse off than one born in April 2010 as a result of the early coalition government welfare reforms (CPAG, 2011).

In addition to these 'reforms' which have seen some benefits withdrawn entirely, the levels of others reduced, and new assessment procedures and changes to eligibility criteria, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of people penalised and sanctioned for not meeting certain conditions attached to unemployment and 'job-seeking' related benefits. Potential sanctions have traditionally played a limited role in the administration of social security benefits but, in the last 25 years or so, the rate and severity of sanctions has increased substantially. Dr David Webster, an honorary research fellow at Glasgow University has, in a series of publications and briefings drawing on historical documents and DWP statistics,

highlighted these changes.[37] In August 2014, Webster highlighted that around 7.25% of people receiving Job-Seekers Allowance (JSA) had been sanctioned during the previous year. Figures for people claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA) were proportionately much lower but were also increasing. Combined, Webster (2014a 1): argued, in the year leading up to March 2014:

> an estimated total of 1,104,000 JSA and ESA sanctions were imposed, of which an estimated 149,000 were overturned on reconsideration/appeal, with claimants nevertheless having had payment stopped for weeks or months. The annual number of JSA/ESA sanctions has almost doubled under the coalition, while the annual number of cases of people losing benefits only to have them reinstated has quadrupled.

Webster (2015), in a comparison of which Wacquant would approve, has referred to the sanctions as 'an amateurish, secret penal system which is more severe than the mainstream judicial system, but lacks its safeguards'. He documented that, in 2013, more people were sanctioned through the benefits system than received fines through the criminal justice & court system. He also highlights how 'sanctioned benefit claimants are treated much worse than those fined in the courts' (Webster, 2015) and points out that sanctions are generally applied to poor people and they tend to result in almost total loss of benefit income for a period of at least two weeks, despite a system of 'hardship payments'. Webster suggests that sanctions push people off benefits, but not necessarily into employment of any kind, least of all good quality, secure work. He goes on to expound some of the other consequences of sanctions:

> Sanctions undermine physical and mental health, cause hardship for family and friends, damage relationships, create homelessness and drive people to Food Banks and payday lenders, and to crime. They also often make it harder to look for work. Taking these negatives into account, they cannot be justified.

At the same time, funding to and support for other elements of the welfare state have also seen fundamental changes and restructuring. Numerous structural changes have taken place, for example, in both the health and education fields, with more private sector providers involved in the delivery of public services in these areas.[38] These shifts highlight how the public policy fields of many of the traditional functions of the state – welfare support, health, social care, education and housing – are experiencing significant restructuring, with new rules being applied, greater restrictions on entry, and the boundaries of those fields being redrawn. This restructuring does not end here, however, and at the same time that the state is stepping back

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[37] See http://www.cpag.org.uk/david-webster for a full list
[38] For fuller examinations of the re-structuring that took place under the coalition, see Bochel & Powell (2016) and Birrell & Gray (2017).

from certain functions, it is also 'stepping up' in other areas, most specifically in its numerous 'early interventions' in family life.

The state has a longstanding interest in family life (Thane, 2010) and, as we have seen, this has increased in recent years. New Labour's initial policy focus on tackling child poverty and implementing large scale programmes gradually came to focus on efforts to 'responsibilize' small groups of 'problem' or 'at risk' families. When Cameron was Prime Minister he made several speeches about the importance of families, claiming that they are 'the building blocks of a strong, cohesive society' (Cameron, 2010) and that 'whatever the social issue we want to grasp - the answer should always begin with family' (Cameron 2014). In a speech on improving children's life chances in 2016, Cameron (2016) claimed that 'Families are the best anti-poverty measure ever invented … [t]hey are a welfare, education and counselling system all wrapped up into one.'[39] The proposal to withdraw Housing Benefit entitlement from some 18-21 year olds from April 2017 (see Wilson, 2015) and the suggestion by a government minister, when answering questions about a crisis in social care provision, that people have as much of a responsibility to look after their parents as they do their children (Asthana, 2017), highlights the potential centrality of 'the family' in future housing and social care policy fields as well.

Cameron's speech on life chances included numerous mentions of the importance of getting things right in 'the early years'. This policy focus on the 'early years' and its derivatives such as 'the foundation years', legitimises state 'early intervention' in the lives of disadvantaged families with small children (see, for example, Allen and Smith, 2008; Field 2010; Allen, 2011a & 2011b). The focus, grounded in questionable neuroscience 'evidence' (Wastell and White, 2012) has been critiqued as being 'a future oriented project building on elements of social investment and moral underclass discourses' (Featherstone et al, 2014: 1739).

In the coalition government's first child poverty strategy (HM Government, 2011), Sure Start centres were re-positioned as being services that 'targeted' the 'most disadvantaged families'. The same document linked the recruitment of an extra 4,200 health visitors to other work focusing on the 'most disadvantaged families', or those with 'multiple problems' (2011: 4). It has also been argued that as well as being 'mother's friend', health visitors are also now expected to be involved in 'identification, surveillance and early intervention of a wider set of vulnerabilities facing children and young people that expand the scope of their gaze beyond more traditional health and developmental concerns' (Peckover, 2013: 120). The introduction

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[39] These comments echo those of Margaret Thatcher who, in 1988, told the Conservative Women's Conference 'the family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure place, a place of refuge and a place of rest.' (Thatcher, 1988)

of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) in 2007, designed to support young mothers and pregnant women in their parenting through a programme of intensive home visits, 'a psycho-educational approach and a focus on positive behaviour change' (FNP, no date), provides another example of the state's increased reach into family life. The FNP website alludes to the 'moral underclass discourse' basis that Featherstone et al highlighted, stating that it is a 'preventive programme [that] has the potential to transform the life chances of the most disadvantaged children and families in our society, helping to improve social mobility and break the *cycle of intergenerational disadvantage*' (FNP, no date, emphasis added).

This intense gaze on, and increased state intervention in, the 'most disadvantaged' families can also be found in other policy fields. The government have attempted to speed up and increase adoptions for children who are taken in to care and, when he was Prime Minister, Cameron (2014) stated that he was 'determined to do everything we can to unleash this adoption revolution in our country'. Academics have pointed out that although non-consensual adoption practices can be found in other countries, 'no other EU state exercises this power to the extent that England does' (Gupta et al, 2015). Researchers examining the link between deprivation and child welfare interventions have noted 'substantial inequalities in rates of state intervention in family life between areas and population groups linked to relative deprivation' and that 'gross inequalities in children's life chances are being acted out through child welfare services' (Bywaters et al, 2014: 9-10). There is, they argue a 'systematic link between levels of deprivation and a family's chances of being the object of powerful state interventions' (2014: 10). Put simply, children living in neighbourhoods identified as 'deprived' in the UK have a far greater chance of being the subject of a Child Protection Plan or being looked after in out-of-home public care than children in more affluent neighbourhoods (Bywaters et al, 2014 & 2015). At a fringe event at the Conservative party conference in October 2015, the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, suggested that a 'draconian' approach was required to tackle childhood obesity. He reportedly told the audience that the 'huge success' of the TFP meant that government had a 'direct line to 300,000 of the most under-privileged families in the country', and that there would be a higher proportion of obese children in those families (in Demianyk, 2015).

In addition to these developments, the reach of the 'troubled families' approach has also been extended, highlighting efforts to integrate principles in one bureaucratic field into other, similar fields. The expansion of the TFP into its second phase brought an extra 400,000 families into the programme and it also sanctioned the inclusion of families who weren't 'troublesome' to others. The new criteria mean that families with disabled or sick children, or those facing

financial hardship can easily be officially labelled as 'troubled families', in the process becoming recipients of 'the most intensive form of state intervention there is' (Cameron, 2016). There have also, as noted in the previous chapter, been suggestions that the approach should be extended to working-age individuals without children, with the think-tank IPPR advocating a 'troubled lives' programme in a document appropriately called *Breaking Boundaries* (McNeil and Hunter, 2015). The report proposes a new programme 'targeted at approximately a quarter of a million individuals who experience two or more of the following problems: homelessness, substance misuse and reoffending' (2015: 3). The expansion of the 'troubled families' or 'family intervention' approach into other policy fields has not happened in any high-profile way at the time of writing, although there is evidence that local authorities are using some of the principles involved in 're-designing' of their services due to financial pressures (White and Day, 2016).

9.6   'Learning to be poor': a conclusion

Cameron's statement, at the launch of the TFP, that the thing he was 'really passionate about' was 'fixing the 'responsibility deficit' needs to be examined in the wider context of state activity whilst he was Prime Minister. The coalition government undertook a programme of neoliberal statecraft in the UK, across different bureaucratic fields, and with the TFP at the vanguard of that project. Wacquant (2009: 304) has argued that this state crafting includes 'the punitive containment of urban marginality through the simultaneous rolling back of the social safety net and the rolling out of the police-and-prison dragnet and their knitting together into a carceral-assistantial lattice'. In the UK, welfare reforms, curbs on public spending and cuts in the levels of income and corporation tax have been implemented hand-in-hand with more interventionist policies, usually aimed at disadvantaged populations, such as the TFP. These 'early intervention' approaches, according to Edwards et al (2016: 1-2), form

> part of a modernising new managerialist approach to governance in which social values and moral issues are reduced to technical rationality, cut adrift from political debate involving interests and power, while social justice, material conditions and social inequalities are obscured from view'.

Sanctions and conditionality in the welfare system have increased dramatically in a worrying meeting of 'welfare' and 'justice' policies, no doubt aimed at responsibilising marginalised groups. Poor families with children have been subjected to numerous forms of powerful state interventions which have attempted to change the way they behave without taking the

resources they possess, or the effects of structural inequalities into account. If previous iterations of 'the underclass' were often parts of attempts to 'constrain the redistributive potential of state welfare' (Macnicol, 1987: 316), the official label of 'troubled families' can perhaps best be understood as part of an attempt to craft a new, neoliberal state. It is in this context that the TFP has emerged, 'pioneering' a new set of relations between the state and some of its most vulnerable citizens. It acts, along with the other high-profile reforms or policies mentioned, as 'fleet vehicles for broadcasting the newfound resolve of state elites to tackle offensive conditions and assuage popular resentment toward derelict or deviant categories' (Wacquant, 2009: 312).

Perhaps one example, above others, highlights this resolve. In April 2016, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 saw substantial elements of the Child Poverty Act 2010 repealed, including the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and the requirement to report child poverty statistics to Parliament on an annual basis.[40] In their place, new reporting obligations were introduced, including an obligation to report on progress made by 'troubled families' that have been 'supported' by local authorities. Bourdieu noted the *symbolic power* of the law and argued that '[l]aw does no more than symbolically consecrate … the structure of power relations among the groups and classes' (Bourdieu, 2004: 188). The publication of the Act and the introduction of the reporting obligations around 'troubled families' progress, at the expense of child poverty reporting commitments cements the new approach to addressing disadvantage, rendering it 'eternal and universal' (Bourdieu, 2004: 188). In discussing the concept of the 'culture of poverty' that emerged in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s, William Ryan wrote about the impact of the concept on policy responses to poverty. His words still have relevance today:

> If poverty is to be understood more clearly in terms of the "way of life" of the poor, in terms of a "lower class culture" as a product of a deviant value system, then money is clearly not the answer. We can stop right now worrying about ways of redistributing resources more equitably, and begin focusing our concern where it belongs – on the poor themselves. We can start trying to figure out how to change that troublesome culture of theirs, how to apply some tautening astringent to their flabby consciences, how to deal with their poor manners and make them more socially acceptable (Ryan, 1971: 118)

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[40] This was ten years after Cameron gave a speech in which he stated that he wanted a 'message to go out loud and clear: the Conservative Party recognises, will measure and will act on relative poverty' (Cameron, 2006).

The TFP, then, should be viewed as an integral part of an irresponsible programme of neoliberal statecraft across numerous policy fields that has seen different marginalised groups – such as disabled people, lone mothers, and unemployed individuals – targeted by a raft of welfare reforms that have served to stigmatize poor and vulnerable communities and vitiated their material circumstances. The ambition of the government, far from being to 'turn around' the lives of the most 'troubled families' amounts to little more than encouraging them to learn to be poor (Ryan, 1971: 112-135), and responsiblising them to be well-behaved, quiet, and inexpensive, whilst doing so.

Chapter 10: From street-level bureaucrat to street-level (postgraduate) researcher: Participant Objectivation

> One too often forgets or ignores that a point of view is, strictly, nothing other than a view taken from a point which cannot reveal itself as such, cannot disclose its truth as point of view, a particular and ultimately unique point of view, irreducible to others, unless one is capable, paradoxically, of reconstructing the space, understood as the set of coexisting points … in which it is inserted (Bourdieu, 2003: 284).

10.1   Introduction

This final chapter addresses and attempts to tie-up some traditional 'loose ends' of the PhD, such as some limitations of the research and some avenues that future 'troubled families' or social policy research might explore. After all, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 219) noted, 'Homo academicus relishes the finished'. This is not, however, its primary purpose, which instead is the undertaking of what Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 253-260; Bourdieu 2003) called 'participant objectivation'. This chapter turns the same research tools used in studying the 'troubled families' field and the participants within it, onto the research study itself. My own biography, trajectory and habitus are examined, along with the fields that I have passed through on my journey to the 'troubled families' field. The 'choice' of the object of the research project is also discussed, building on earlier sections of the thesis (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3). My positions in the fields where the research process was conducted are also explored, in an effort to reconstruct the point from which previous views in this thesis have been expressed. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 219 original emphasis) suggested that discussing one's own research was 'a discourse in which you *expose yourself*, you take risks' and that 'the more you expose yourself, the greater the chances of benefitting from the discussion and the more constructive and good-willed, I am sure, the criticisms and advice you will receive'. The hope here, is that in 'exposing' myself and turning Bourdieusian tools upon the research project presented here, it is not a case of 'borrowing the Emperor's new clothes and leaving oneself looking naked' (Nash, 1999: 179).

Grenfell (2008: 219-227) presented three guiding principles of Bourdieusian research. The third and final stage requires the researcher to undertake participant objectivation. Bourdieu argued that it was necessary for researchers to turn the research tools upon themselves and, more specifically, their positions in fields because 'objectivist or scholastic knowledge was

formed in field contexts which shaped and influenced the means of expression' (Grenfell, 2008: 226). Grenfell goes on to argue that:

> In short, there was a necessity to employ the same epistemological approach to the objectifying subject that was used to produce knowledge about the object of research in the first place; in other words, to direct his or her own epistemological "thinking tools" to those who produced the research knowledge.

Bourdieu (2003: 282) stated that he had 'little sympathy with what Clifford Geertz calls, after Roland Barthes, 'the diary disease', an explosion of narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism' and that the process of participant objectivation did not consist of 'observing oneself observing, observing the observer in his work of observing or of transcribing his observations'. Nor was it 'mere narcissistic entertainment' or 'some kind of wholly gratuitous epistemological point of honour' (2003: 286). Instead, participant objectivation amounts to the use of such terms as habitus and field, not only in analysing a particular context, but in analysing the construction of the analysis, as it occurs' (Grenfell, 2008: 227).

Grenfell (2008: 226, drawing on a paragraph in Bourdieu, 2000a: 10) suggested that Bourdieu had identified three principal forms of bias in field knowledge:

1. The position of researchers in the social space
2. The orthodoxies of the field itself
3. The simple fact of having "free time" or *skholè*

The approach here attempts to address these three forms of bias, but the focus is primarily on expounding 'the historical unconscious that [I] inevitably engage in [my] work' (Bourdieu, 2003: 284-285) and examining the 'social conditions of the production of [my] pre-constructions' (2003: 285). The following section examines my own biography and trajectory through bureaucratic fields before arriving in the academic field and the 'troubled families' field. Tracing this journey helps to objectivate the object of the study – the 'troubled families' field – and why it was chosen. Grenfell (2008: 226) argues that this is particularly important when state funding of research is involved, as is the case with this study. I then examine some of the rules of the game for, and the forces exerted upon, postgraduate researchers in the UK academic field at the current time, which undoubtedly influenced my research 'strategies'. The attention then turns briefly to more specific disciplinary issues and sociological attempts to 'twist the stick the other way' in the face of an increasingly instrumentalist approach to social policy and social work scholarship.[41] The effects of my approach to research on the 'troubled

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[41] See, for example, the involvement of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the national 'What Works Network' and the proposal to make Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding dependent on the *Big Society* being a key research theme (Boffey, 2011).

families' field are then discussed, drawing on Bourdieu's (2000b) call for 'a scholarship with commitment and acknowledging the implications of what some have called 'live 'or 'public' sociology (Burawoy, 2004; Back and Puwar, 2012). A concluding section notes the ongoing restructuring of the 'troubled families' field at the time of writing and discusses opportunities for future action.

10.2   From street-level bureaucrat to street-level researcher

> Each of us, and this is no secret for anyone, is encumbered by a past, his or her own past, and this social past, whatever it is – 'working class' or 'bourgeois', masculine or feminine, and always closely enmeshed with the past that psychoanalysis explores – is particularly burdensome and obtrusive when one is engaged in social science. I have said … that I believe that the researcher can and must mobilize his experience, that is, this past, in all his acts of research. But he is entitled to do so only on condition that he submits all these returns of the past to rigorous scientific examination (Bourdieu, 2003: 291).

In this section, I attempt to set out the 'historical unconscious' (Bourdieu, 2003: 285) that has travelled with me through the various fields I entered prior to entering the 'troubled families' field as a researcher. My own personal biography and trajectory is sketched out, with a primary focus on work experience and education, adhering closely to the discussions I had with research participants at the start of my interviews with them.

I left school at the age of sixteen, at the suggestion of one of my teachers, and attended a local college to study 'A' levels. None of my family had attended university and I did not either, leaving college with one 'A' level and having decided against applying to go to university. I worked in a local supermarket for a couple of years before moving to London where I had a series of part-time jobs in bars and restaurants, alongside coaching football to children and young people in both central London and more affluent rural areas in Surrey. I returned to the North East aged 23 and worked in a local authority housing department as a Housing Assistant. In doing so, I followed in the footsteps of my father and his father, both of whom were employed in local authorities for long periods of their working lives. From there, and because of my football coaching qualifications and voluntary work with young people, I moved to a housing association as a Community Development Officer, and worked on family housing estates in the North East in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was the time of New Labour and their focus on neighbourhood renewal, social exclusion and, increasingly anti-social behaviour. In 2002, when the ASBU was formed, I was working on a Neighbourhood Support Project that included housing officers, community development staff, a welfare rights advisor, a financial inclusion officer, tenancy enforcement officers and a team of Neighbourhood

Wardens.[42] As time passed, the support element reduced, leaving a project that was primarily concerned with enforcement. My role was to work with young people on the estate and develop 'diversionary activities' for them to 'keep them out of trouble'. Many of the young people I worked with received Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (ABCs) and a small number received Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). It was often colleagues of mine who pursued these measures, and there was often disagreement and conflict (albeit usually well-managed) about appropriate courses of action when incidents involving young people were reported. During this time, I was studying for an Open University (OU) degree in Childhood and Youth Studies, which I had originally commenced whilst working at the supermarket shortly after leaving college.

After four years working with the housing association, I moved to work for a tenant-led organisation working on housing issues in Newcastle upon Tyne. Whilst I was there, I finished my OU studies and decided to study for a Masters. I wanted to experience seminars and lectures for the first time and so opted against another distance learning course and enrolled for an MA Sociology and Social Research course at Newcastle University. I left the tenants organisation after two years and joined a local authority in the North East, working on the Labour government's community cohesion agenda.

Having access to the university library, I was able to read academic critiques of the community cohesion agenda at the same time that I was working on developing a community cohesion strategy and implementing the agenda within a local authority. In a parallel of the 2011 riots sparking the TFP, 'disturbances' in a small number of towns in Yorkshire and the North West in 2001 led to the emergence of the community cohesion agenda, aimed at improving relations between migrant communities and longer-term residents. There was a disconnect between the critiques I was reading and the rhetoric of politicians and the aims of the policies they were pursuing (see, for example, Burnett, 2004 and Phillips, 2006). Here was an example of my own efforts at street-level bureaucracy, attempting to soften the sharp edges of a national policy agenda that risked blaming migrant communities for failing to 'integrate', and for leading 'parallel lives', whilst trying to make it work for all residents in a local authority in the North East.

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[42] Louise Casey, in her role as Head of the ASBU, visited the estate on at least two occasions, although I never met her.

I completed my MA dissertation on the role of local authorities in promoting 'social capital', arguing that Bourdieu's concept of social capital and the way it is deployed was more convincing and offered better explanatory potential than Robert Putnam's apolitical version of the concept. I became increasingly interested in Bourdieu's writing on the reproduction of inequalities (primarily through the education system but also through the conversion of different forms of capital) and continued to read his work even when I wasn't studying formally. I wanted to study for a PhD – my partner described it as an itch that required scratching - but did not have a clear idea of which topic or issue I could commit to at that time.

After two years working on community cohesion, I moved, on secondment, within the authority and within the same team and worked as an Area Co-ordinator in a Neighbourhood Management Team. My remit was to help co-ordinate public services (including those sometimes delivered by voluntary sector organisations) within a geographical area of the authority. The issues covered were diverse and included community safety, services for young people, public health initiatives, transport and environmental protection. The idea that public services required better co-ordination and could be delivered more effectively through more multi-agency working, as we have seen, is a longstanding one and efforts to address this putative problem did not begin with the TFP. When the two-year secondment was coming to an end, and as the coalition government's austerity measures began to impact on local authorities, I looked for a new post and applied for a position working at Durham University on a knowledge exchange project, aiming to address the issue of child poverty in the North East of England.

In February 2011, I started work at the Institute for Local Governance at Durham University, as the co-ordinator of the North East Child Poverty Commission (NECPC). My role was to support local authorities in fulfilling their local duties under Child Poverty Act 2010, providing them with access to academic research and evidence that would help to inform their local child poverty strategies (NECPC, 2012). This 'foot in both camps' experience, straddling two different fields, provided me with another experience of the 'knowledge exchange' 'problem', whereby academic research and evidence does not neatly translate into policy development processes. Some of the strategies developed by local authorities highlighted the need to 'raise aspirations' amongst poor families and the need for the state to intervene to stop 'cultures of worklessness' that were being passed down through the generations. These strategies were developed at the same time that accessible research reports were (again) challenging many of these doxic ideas (see, for example Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012; Shildrick et al, 2012). Thus, my experience of tensions between the different fields of academic research and public

policies, the forces exerted within these fields by politicians and policy programmes, and attempts by some street-level bureaucrats to negotiate these 'double constraints' (Lipsky, 1980: 19), that I became interested in during my MA, continued into this role.

The TFP was launched in December 2011 and my interest in the concept of the 'underclass' developed. I wrote three short articles on the NECPC blog site shortly after the launch of the programme and remained interested in it during its first year of development, which included the publication of *Listening to Troubled Families* (Casey, 2012) and *Working with Troubled Families* (DCLG, 2012a). In late 2012, I began discussions with colleagues at Durham regarding pursuing a PhD on the 'troubled families' agenda and developed my ideas with the support of Roger Smith and Lena Dominelli. I applied for Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding in early 2013 and was awarded funding in April 2013. I commenced my PhD studies, and took a further step into the academic field on 1 October 2013. [43]

10.3 Playing the academic game, from the position of a postgraduate researcher…

There is pressure on Research Council UK-funded PhD students to think about the potential impact of their research at the earliest possible opportunity and to demonstrate the impact of their work. The original PhD proposal to the ESRC (attached as Appendix 1) included a section on 'Collaborative approach & Impact', which set out the attempts that would be made to 'influence policy and practice at a time when practitioners are being urged to "think family"'. The intention was to work closely with non-academic partners to encourage 'knowledge exchange' and 'policy impact' for my work. The ESRC website (no date) defines impact as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy'. It goes on to say this 'can involve academic impact, economic and societal impact or both'. Students, and other ESRC-funded researchers are encouraged to think about their 'pathways to impact', are offered 'tools and tips' for 'developing a communications and impact strategy' and developing 'a consistent brand for your research project.' The ESRC Research Performance and Economic Impact Report 2014-15 proudly includes an 'Impact case study' of how ESRC-funded research was used to verify the numbers of 'troubled families' affected by domestic violence, as part of the expanded phase 2 of the TFP (ESRC, 2015: 10). Impact understood and communicated in this way - the marketing and promotion of research findings to policy-makers or corporate bodies - has received intense criticism from some senior academics in the UK in recent years (see, for example, Holmwood, 2011; Martin, 2011; Back, 2015; Holmwood

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[43] This is, I realise, my own sense of *amor fati.*

and McKay, 2015). One scholar (Wolff, 2016) has argued that such a perspective leads to 'academic bragging contests',[44] and premature promises about the likely impact of research studies:

> Nowadays, it is all about show. If you are applying for a research grant, for instance, you need an imaginative "public engagement" plan. You will swear to saturate social media with updates and novelties. At the same time you won't forget the more old-fashioned folk, with colourful exhibitions at the local library, and maybe something on the radio.

> Could this be a little worrying? After all, at the time when you are applying for the grant, you haven't yet done the work. Maybe your research will be a disappointment and you can't show what you hoped. What do you do? An exhibition in the style of Magritte: "This is not a research result"? A Beckett-inspired radio play "Waiting for thermonuclear fusion?" Of course not. If you can't promise a positive result, you don't even get the grant.

Postgraduate researchers are time-limited entrants to the academic field. Once their studies are complete, if they wish to remain in the field, they must find a new position, offered to them by already established players in the field. They are effectively 'on-trial' or 'in the shop window' for, in the case of PhD student, three to four years and must use this time to both carry out their research and sell themselves to prospective future employers. Faced with playing a game which I did not much believe in, I attempted to at least play it in a way that I felt comfortable with, although, ultimately my efforts were 'legitimated transgressions' that did not call into question the impact game itself. In attempting to subvert the game, to play it differently and twist the 'impact stick' the other way, one could argue that it was an attempt to demonstrate 'academic charisma' and to create distinction between myself and other postgraduate students, because 'difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the closest threat' (Bourdieu, 2010: 481).

Although I highlight above that this strategy could be viewed as an attempt to create distinction, an alternative but complementary reading is that this strategy, along with my 'choice' of Bourdieu as theorist,[45] merely aligned me with other players in the game, who shared similar perspectives and thoughts on how the game should be played. Academic disciplines that my work touches upon such as sociology, social policy, and social work, have a long history of promoting critical thought that doesn't always align with or support the ideologies of the powerful (see Becker, 1967, Nicolaus, 1968, and Marx, 1972 for some examples). More recently, sociologists have argued for new, more dynamic forms of

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[44] At an ESRC PhD conference that I attended in November 2013, students were informed that ESRC students were 'the best' and should consider collaborations with other ESRC students because the ESRC wanted 'the best working with the best'.
[45] See Thatcher et al, 2016 for examples of other postgraduate and early career researchers who have used Bourdieu

sociological enquiry to address contemporary issues. Burawoy famously called for a 'public sociology (2005) Beer (2014) has called for a new 'punk sociology', there have been separate calls for 'DIY sociology' (Carrigan, 2014 and Paton, 2015), Carrigan has written extensively about 'digital sociology', and Lury (2012) has called for a move towards what she calls 'amphibious sociology'. Jones (2015), in calling for amphibious sociology in the UK has written:

> Amphibious sociologists – like frogs crossing between water and land – adapt to more than one environment: both analysing their data and forming part of that data; critiquing structures of power whilst also recognising how their work might benefit from and even reinforce some of those structures. We want to 'publish the shit out of' structures of power which are having immediate effects in our lives and society – but we recognise that this is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Not only is a peer-reviewed journal article likely to come too slowly and too quietly to publish the shit out of anyone; but we also have to recognise that the type of responsive, mobile, opportunistic and yes, if you like, entrepreneurial sociology I am advocating is also worryingly resonant in some of those characteristics with ideal neoliberal behaviours. (Jones, 2015)

Bourdieu (2000b) himself called for 'a scholarship with commitment' and argued that 'intellectuals … are indispensable to social struggles', believing that they should 'submit dominant discourse to a merciless logical critique' (2000b: 41-42). He went on to say:

> Researchers must transcend the sacred boundary inscribed in their mind, more or less deeply depending on their national tradition, between scholarship and commitment, in order to break out of the academic microcosm, to enter into sustained and vigorous exchange with the outside world … instead of being content with waging the "political" battles, at once intimate and ultimate, and always a bit unreal, of the scholastic universe (2000b: 44).

All of these approaches share the theme of 'going live' and working with present struggles in common (see also Back and Puwar's, 2012 call for 'live sociology'). Whilst I do not consider myself a 'digital sociologist' or an 'amphibious sociologist', there are similarities between the approaches argued for above and my own efforts to play the postgraduate game differently. I set up a blog site and a Twitter handle (@akindoftrouble) and began writing short posts or providing links to 'troubled families' related stories. [46] I received support from other academics and researchers interested in similar topics and, on the back of some of my blog posts, I was invited to speak at seminars and conferences, contributed to other blog sites and online publications (Crossley, 2014) and responded to requests from some media organisations for support with their 'troubled families' stories. The constraints that I was subject to as a street-level bureaucrat in terms of public utterances no longer existed and, as a postgraduate

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[46] The blog can be found at www.akindoftrouble.wordpress.com but I deleted the Twitter account in June 2016.

researcher, and with the freedom afforded by *skholè,* I was able to make myself available for comment and to speak publicly, although this was, again, something I resisted at times.[47]

The research approach in this study of 'studying up' in the *'troubled families' field* was thus accompanied by attempts to *report across the field whilst I was still in it,* and not necessarily 'up' to policy-makers and politicians, after I had collected everything I needed to collect and left the field. I have attempted to sustain this approach after leaving the field, and have produced a summary of the study, aimed primarily at practitioners who participated in the research, but also at others who may be interested in the research I have undertaken. A version of this is attached as Appendix 5. But the responsive, mobile, opportunistic and entrepreneurial sociology that Jones calls for, and that I have, on reflection, attempted to produce, has implications, both for the researchers themselves, their research participants, and the fields they enter.

10.4   Entering the 'troubled families' field

> Nothing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself into his research (Bourdieu, 2003: 287).

Bourdieu argued that researchers needed to intervene in political struggles 'without forsaking their duties and competencies as researchers' (2000b: 40). This call follows in the footsteps of many others who have argued for more engaged forms of critical scholarship that do not fall into the trap of ratifying social problems identified and produced by the state (Bourdieu et al, 1994: 2). Howard Becker (1967), in his 1966 address to the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, famously asked of fellow sociologists, 'Whose side are we on?' He argued that the question of whether or not a researcher should 'have values' or 'take sides' when studying 'problems that have relevance to the world we live in' was a false one:

> This dilemma, which seems so painful to so many, actually does not exist, for one of its horns is imaginary. For it to exist, one would have to assume, as some apparently do, that it is indeed possible to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies. I propose to argue that it is not possible and, therefore, that the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on (Becker, 1967: 239).

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[47] A number of reports in the national media either drew on my research or consulted with me about it, (Bawden, 2015; Butler, 2015; Cook, 2016; Gifford, 2016) and I appeared on a *Channel 4 Dispatches* programme on 'troubled families', screened on 17 October 2016. I drew the line at helping *The Daily Mail* or speaking to Julia Hartley-Brewer on *Talk Radio*.

Two years later, in August 1968 at the Convention of the American Sociological Association in Boston, Martin Nicolaus gave a speech which became known as an attack on 'fat-cat sociology' (Nicolaus, 1968). Protesting the invitation to Wilbur Cohen, the US Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to speak at the conference, Nicolaus argued that Cohen's department could be:

> more accurately described as the agency which watches over the inequitable distribution of preventable disease, over the funding of domestic propaganda and indoctrination, and over the preservation of a cheap and docile reserve labour force to keep everybody else's wages down.

He then suggested that Cohen was the 'Secretary of disease, propaganda, and scabbing.' Arguing that one's perspective 'depends on where you look from, where you stand' he suggested that 'the eyes of sociologists, with few but honourable (or honourable but few) exceptions, have been turned downward, and their palms upward':

> Eyes down, to study the activities of the lower classes, of the subject population - those activities which created problems for the smooth exercise of governmental power … The things that are sociologically "interesting," are the things that are interesting to those who stand at the top of the mountain and feel the tremors of an earthquake. Sociologists stand guard in the garrison and report to their masters on the movements of the occupied populace. The more adventurous sociologists don the disguise of the people and go out to mix with the peasants in the "field", returning with books and articles that break the protective secrecy in which a subjugated population wraps itself, and make it more accessible to manipulation and control.

Bourdieu, as we have seen, shared similar sentiments and, whilst Nicolaus argued for 'the machinery to be reversed', Bourdieu (1993: 269) advocated for research that could 'twist the stick in the other direction'. Committed, engaged scholarship was essential, Bourdieu believed, to critique and offer alternatives to dominant discourses, and to 'counter the pseudoscientific authority of authorized experts … with a genuinely scientific critique of the hidden assumptions and often faulty reasoning that underpin their pronouncements' (2000b: 42).

Entering the 'troubled families' field as an engaged critical researcher, determined to 'study up' and not accept the pre-constructed 'problem' of 'troubled families' as the research object, brings with it some tensions. The desire to engage in 'live sociology' responding to announcements and critiquing them as they happen can, at first glance, appear similar to the 'spontaneous sociology' (Bourdieu et al, 1991: 20) performed by 'knee-jerk critics' (Stabile & Morooka 2010: 330) who 'never stop talking, often "too soon"' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 627). This 'live' engagement, however, has relied on, rather than displaced my critical stance and I do not believe that I have 'forsaken' my duties as a researcher in responding to issues rapidly, and outside of traditional academic publishing methods. Such engagement could also, one

might argue, partially address some of the potential researcher bias from having *skholè,* or academic freedom from not having to 'act in the world' (Grenfell, 2008: 226).

Researchers in general, and academics in particular, have not been made to feel welcome in the 'troubled families' field and the potential benefits of research into the programme have been derided (Crossley, 2014). There are a long list of misuses and abuses of research within the TFP, beginning with the decision to use research on families with multiple disadvantages to prove the existence of an anti-social and criminal group of families (Levitas, 2012). When asked about this, Casey responded that too much was made of the issue, and that new research was unnecessary because she already knew what it would find:

> I could have said, let's get a university to spend the next three years studying, who is criminal, not in work, with kids not in school. I tell you what they will show – probably that a lot come from disadvantaged backgrounds (in Gentleman, 2013).[48]

Casey's (2012) *Listening to Troubled Families* was criticised for not having any ethical approval, with the government responding by stating that the report did not constitute 'formal research' and 'falls more properly within the description 'dipstick/informal information gathering' (Ramesh, 2012b). A 'survey', used by Casey in high-profile speeches to demonstrate the need for 'radical reform' of the way the state engages with 'troubled families' did not actually exist (Crossley, 2013). The survey, which turned out to be an anecdote, allegedly showed that out of 3,000 children on a single estate in the North East of England, not one had been for a routine dental appointment but that 300 had been to A & E for emergency dental treatment.

The government response to critical or non-supportive reports has tended to be to criticise the approach of the researchers rather than to reflect on the criticism. In response to a report questioning the claims of 99% success in the first phase of the TFP (Crossley, 2015) it was reported that a 'spokesman for the Department for Communities and Local Government said the report fundamentally misunderstands how the Troubled Families programme works' (Puffett, 2015). When the independent researchers commissioned to undertake the evaluation of the first phase of the TFP could find 'no discernible impact' (Bewley et al, 2016) their analysis was attacked both in print (see DCLG, 2016: 13) and in person. Casey, in giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, accused individuals involved in the research of seeking to 'undermine the programme', of 'misrepresenting their own research', and of

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[48] A DCLG 'Overview' document published on the same day that the national evaluation was published continued this dismissal of such criticisms by stating 'Those who have sustained a critical focus on the derivation of the 120,000 figure, however, risk missing the wider and more important point' (DCLG, 2016: 12).

engaging in 'unedifying' debates in the media (see NIESR, 2016 and Portes, 2016 for rebuttals to these accusations).[49]

The absence of any robust engagement with research on the part of the government, coupled with the strength of its doxic discourse of success, however, has provided fertile ground for critical research to interrogate the programme. This research study has explored the 'troubled families' field using a street-level lens, but seeing public policies as fields – sites of social struggles with multiple agents – offers up opportunities for different perspectives and for developing this research approach further. If the strength of the discourse about 'troubled families' can itself be 'troubled' by researchers, then this may help to prepare the ground for a sympathetic hearing from the families themselves. Whilst this project has, for various reasons, chosen to focus on other, more or less powerful, agents in the field, the voices of the families affected by this social policy (and, by extension, the absence of other alternatives) themselves need to be heard. An alternative argument, and a convincing one, is that discussions about policy development and delivery must start with the people on the receiving end, and they should not be 'added on' to discussions at a later date (see Beresford, 2016 for a comprehensive explication of this approach). Such an approach, and positioning of the researcher, could help to address and undermine Bourdieu's (1990b: 41) deterministic argument that 'the dominated are dominated in their brains too'. Participatory research can begin to address, to some extent at least, potentially problematic relations between researcher and participants, and help to make the voices 'speaking truth to power' a little bit louder and more coherent.

A critical point here is 'where you look from, where you stand', as Nicolaus noted, and avoiding looking 'down' on families as the 'problem' that a research study can help to solve. Using a field approach to public or social policies can help researchers to remain aware of the relations between different agents in the field and the way forces are exerted across different areas of the field. It can help to remind them that 'the stuff of social reality … lies in relations' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 15). An awareness of these relations and the forces that are exerted on the most dominated participants in a field should help to encourage instances of 'non-violent communication' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 608-612) in both research activities and the outputs arising from those activities. Bourdieu et al (1999: 609) argued that it was necessary to 'reduce as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted' through the researcher-participant relationship and to establish a relationship based on 'active and

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[49] It should also be remembered that the publication of the evaluation was severely delayed and there were reports that it had been 'suppressed' because of the critical findings (Cook, 2016).

methodical listening'. Conceiving of policies as fields, with entry requirements, and the potential for field effects and so on, can also serve to remind researchers to be aware of their position in the field, in relation to both their research participants and other agents in the field who may be out of sight, but should not remain out of mind. Acknowledging the complexities of these relations could also help develop and revise the traditional concern about 'insider/outsider' research. As my position as a researcher in this study has shown, the binary opposition between being insider or outsider, one thing or the other, is insufficient to describe some of the complexities faced by researchers involved in researching issues that they have a commitment to.

Collecting and reporting the views and experiences of dominated agents, such as family members and family workers in this field, can help to challenge dominant and doxic discourses, but another way of reducing the symbolic violence of the relationship between researcher and research participant could be to take the *theory* of research studies such as this back to the participants themselves, and attempt to theorise their actions with them. It is now not unusual to report findings from research back to participants (who, increasingly, may also have been commissioners of the research), and participatory methods now allow participants to be involved in different parts of the research process. New forms of research practice emphasise the potential for 'co-production', 'knowledge exchange' and other forms of 'research collaboration', but it is rare for these practices to include much discussion of theory. Bourdieu (2003: 288) wrote that people he wanted 'to understand' in his research:

> do not stand before their action … in the posture of an observer: and that one can say that, strictly speaking, they do not know what they are doing (at least in the sense in which I, as observer and analyst, am trying to know it).

> They do not have in their heads the scientific truth of their practice which I am trying to extract from observation of their practice. What is more, they normally never ask themselves the questions that I would ask myself if I acted towards them as an anthropologist: Why such a ceremony? Why the candles? Why the cake? Why the presents? Why these invitations and these guests, and not others? And so on.

In conversation with Terry Eagleton (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1991: 118), he also suggested that 'workers know a lot: more than any intellectual, more than any sociologist. But in a sense they don't know it, they lack the instrument to grasp it, to speak about it'. Although there is no record of Bourdieu taking his work back to workers and other dominated groups, it would certainly be in keeping with his wider work, and his involvement in political struggles, particularly with trade unions, and his efforts as 'public intellectual' in France and beyond.[50] In

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[50] See Charlesworth (2000) for an example of theory-based discussions between a Bourdieusian researcher and his participants.

The Weight of the World, in referring to efforts to lay bare the social determinants of many causes of suffering, he argued that 'producing awareness of these mechanisms that make life painful, even unlivable, does not neutralize them; bringing contradiction to light does not resolve them' (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 629). Notwithstanding these limits, taking theoretically informed research back to participants offers another 'possibility for action' (1999: 629) that, as a critical researcher, should be fully and methodically explored. It would also help to explicate what Thompson (2010: 6) has called 'the fallacy of theoryless practice' amongst some social work practitioners, policy-makers and politicians. Similarly, and in a good example of continuing to twist the 'troubled families' stick the other way, it could help to examine the statement made by one of Garrett's social work students who argued that 'theory won't get you through the door' (2013: 1).

Such approaches for future research into the 'troubled families' field and other structurally similar policy fields may help to open up discussion of alternative courses of action, breaking the doxic focus on the relationship between families and workers. This study has identified different relations that are also important to street-level bureaucrats in carrying out their daily work within the 'troubled families' field and the discussions with research participants involved here differ markedly from the official success story of a 'lean and mean' approach to 'family intervention'. These discussions highlight how low-level workers are often sent 'into the frontline to perform so-called "social" work to compensate for the most flagrant inadequacies of the logic of the market, without being given the means to really do their job' (Bourdieu, 1998: 2-3).

Research with families, in this context, could complement and augment these arguments and, at a time of welfare retrenchment in many areas, serve to highlight the symbolic and material support that structurally disadvantaged populations still require from the state. In summary, such research could maintain the focus on other forms of relations that continue to exist between the state and families and workers, and remind the state of its own responsibilities, to families and workers, before it starts publicly discussing the 'responsibility deficit' it apparently sees in others.

10.5   Conclusion

This study has sought to subject the official doxa of 'troubled families' and the associated Troubled Families Programme to a sustained critique. It has done so by studying the programme as a policy field – the 'troubled families' field', drawing on the work of Bourdieu

and other critical scholars concerned about the damaging effects of punitive policies on marginalised populations. It has attempted to shift the focus upwards, from the putative behaviours of the families themselves to the activities and assumptions of the state, by interviewing street-level workers and asking them about their horizontal and vertical relations with other agents in the field. Studying up, at a time of wide-scale restructuring of welfare fields, is a strategy that should be vigorously pursued by critically minded researchers, ensuring that we do not 'under-theorise the state and its role in generating and sustaining patterns of "othering" and (mis)recognition' (Garrett, 2013: 182). If the welfare field is being comprehensively re-structured and the relations between agents in those fields are being re-shaped, academics need to consider what such structural changes mean for their entry into and engagement within such fields. In *For a Scholarship with Commitment*, Bourdieu argued that social critique could no longer withdraw into academic debates and 'internecine campus wars that threaten no one on any front' and that, as a result of previous withdrawals, '[t]he whole edifice of critical though is thus in need of reconstruction (2000b: 42). At the same time, researchers need to, as Garrett (2007a: 2003) noted in relation to FIPs, 'retain a certain wariness and scepticism' of policy solutions proposed by the state. Bourdieu et als' (1994: 1) insistence that we 'subject the state and the thought of the state to a form of hyperbolic doubt … for with the state, one never doubts enough' should be at the forefront of critical researchers' minds.

At the time of writing, there are reports that the TFP is to be 'rebooted' (Savage, 2017). A story in *The Times* on 17 February 2017 suggested that Damian Green, the Work and Pensions Secretary, has 'advised the prime minister that the criticisms of the programme were unfair and that it was carrying out worthwhile work' (Savage, 2017). A government source was quoted as saying:

> We are going to reboot the troubled families programme. We think it did a lot of good work and some of the criticism it got was unfair. Lots of people presumed it was going away but it will be improved. There is a delivery infrastructure there, so what do you do? Do you get rid of it or do you make it better? The troubled families programme is alive and kicking.

If the government intends to persist with the TFP, then academics perhaps need to borrow from the 'troubled families' playbook and demonstrate their own 'persistent, assertive and challenging' dispositions. We should be prepared to roll our sleeves up, 'not take "no" for an answer' and knock on doors until we are allowed in, for, in spaces of struggle such as the 'troubled families' field, as Bourdieu et al (1999: 629) noted, 'what is certain is that nothing is less innocent than non-interference'.

Appendix 1: Proposal for ESRC funding

"A kind of trouble that is even more troublesome…"[51]

Recontextualising and operationalising the Troubled Families Programme

Introduction

The Troubled Families Project (TFP) is a 'flagship' project of the coalition government (Little 2012) that 'every upper-tier authority has agreed to run', with a 'fast and unanimous level of take-up' (DCLG 2012a). The government aims to support these 'troubled families' 'by decentralising power to the lowest appropriate level' and 'allowing for greater innovation in commissioning and delivery so that it suits local needs' (DCLG 2012b p62), thus highlighting the role of practitioners as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980). They also state that

> *Locally-designed and delivered solutions are critical here. This Government is clear that individuals and organisations working at the grassroots, from local charity and community leaders to local authorities and agencies, are best placed to make decisions about how improvements can be made to the way services are delivered in their area.*

> (DCLG 2012, p11)

This research project will critically examine how the TFP is being negotiated and implemented/resisted by practitioners and received/rejected by families at a local level, exploring what Lipsky calls 'the struggles between individual workers and citizens who challenge or submit to client-processing' (pxii). It will seek to influence the design of services and future policy and practice at a time when practitioners are being urged to 'think family' (SETF 2007).

Research Question

How is the Troubled Families Programme being *recontextualised* and *operationalised* by practitioners and members of the families themselves?

Aims

1) To explore how local practitioners are *enacting* the Troubled Families Programme and how the families themselves (and individuals within them) are *inculcating* their involvement.

2) To explore the *intertextuality* between the concept of 'troubled families', the recent concept of 'families with multiple disadvantages' and previous (historical) concepts such as 'transmitted deprivation' & 'problem families'.

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[51] The title is taken from a line in the Ogden Nash poem *The Terrible People*

Background

In October 2011 David Cameron made a commitment to 'the 120,000 families that are most troubled - and causing the most trouble' to 'turn their lives around by the end of this Parliament' (Cameron 2011a). In December 2011, Cameron gave another speech about 'troubled families' and claimed his 'mission in politics' – the thing he was 'really passionate about' – was 'fixing the responsibility deficit'. He also wanted to 'be clear what I mean by' 'troubled families':

> *Officialdom might call them 'families with multiple disadvantages'. Some in the press might call them 'neighbours from hell'. Whatever you call them, we've known for years that a relatively small number of families are the source of a large proportion of the problems in society. Drug addiction. Alcohol abuse. Crime. A culture of disruption and irresponsibility that cascades through generations.*

> (Cameron 2011b)

Concepts similar to 'troubled families' have been around for decades and a number of authors have explored these (Macnicol 1987 identified six 'reconstructions', see also Welshman 2006, Jordan 1974). Welshman explored 'the idea that an "underclass" has been successively re-invented over the past 120 years' (pxi) and acknowledges there have been 'continuities in these debates' but also 'differences … reflecting the distinctive economic, political and social contexts of particular periods.' (pxiv). New Labour's language of Social Exclusion has also been interrogated (Levitas 1998) and it is now possible to add a further 'reconstruction' with the 'Troubled Families' agenda.

This political reinvention has occurred despite a large volume of academic research which has found little evidence of a distinct group of poor people with a different culture, separated from the rest of society. Rutter and Madge (1976) concluded that 'Problem families do not constitute a group which is qualitatively different from families in the general population' (p255) and that 'stereotypes of '*the* problem family' are to be distrusted' (p256). Gordon has suggested that 'any policy based on the idea that there are a group of 'Problem Families' who 'transmit their Poverty/Deprivation' to their children will inevitably fail, as this idea is a prejudice, unsupported by scientific evidence.' (2011, p3)

The 'troubled families' agenda, as well as creating a new 'moral panic' (Cohen 1972, Goode & Ben Yehuda 1994), has experienced its own discursive shifts and Levitas has argued that 'troubled families discursively collapses 'families with troubles' and 'troublesome families', while simultaneously implying that they are dysfunctional as families. This discursive strategy is successful in feeding vindictive attitudes to the poor' (2012, p8 - see also Smith 2007 for a discussion of 'stigma communication'). The TFP is taking place when 'family values' are back on the political agenda (Wilkinson & Bell 2012, p427) and when 'recent policy directives of the coalition government appear

to draw on strands of the neoliberal and moralising discourses of the 1980s and early 1990s' (Klett-Davies 2012, p128), when cultural underclass theory held sway (Murray, 1990).

Methodology & methods

The research will use Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (2003) and his 'conceptual arsenal' (Wacquant 1998, p220) to analyse and understand the operationalization of the TFP, using a local authority as a case study. Garrett has suggested that social work practice has neglected Bourdieu (2007, 2013) and he argues for a 'social work *informed* by Bourdieu's theoretical insights' (2013, p146). He highlights how the concept of habitus is 'the space in which social work functions' and which 'becomes particularly relevant at the point of contact between practitioners and those using (or being denied) services' (ibid). Bourdieu suggested that social workers were 'agents of the state … shot through with the contradictions of the state' (Bourdieu et al 1999, p184), but that these contradictions open up 'a margin of manoeuvre, initiative and freedom' (p191).

Bourdieu argued that 'in the social world, words make things, because they make the consensus on the existence and the meaning of things,' (1996, p21) and Thompson suggests that he portrayed 'everyday linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between agents endowed with socially constructed resources and competencies' (1991, p3).

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, consistent with Bourdieu's attempts to 'transcend the opposition between the individual and society' (Garrett 2013, p124), will also be employed. Fairclough & Wodak suggest that CDA 'sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice'. They go on to argue:

> *discourse is socially constitutive and as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power.*

(1997, p258)

CDA is appropriate as it considers the *intertextual* linkages between texts and the *interdiscursive* relationships between discourses. Drawing on the concept of *recontextualisation*, (Bernstein, 1981) CDA explores the process by which given elements are taken out of one context (*decontextualisation*) and inserted into a new context (*recontextualisation*) (Reisigl & Wodak 2009, p90). Fairclough has also highlighted how discourses 'may under certain conditions be *operationalised* or 'put into practice'… they may be *enacted* as new ways of (inter)acting (and) they may be

inculcated as new ways of being (identities) (2010, p233). In summary, 'a discourse is not a closed unit, but a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation' (Reisigl & Wodak p89).

Wodak & Meyer state that 'there is no consistent CDA methodology' (2009, p31) and 'no CDA way of gathering data, either' (p27) whilst acknowledging that commonalities include a hermeneutic rather than analytical-deductive approach (p28). The interdisciplinary methodology of CDA suits the research methods which will involve ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and analysis of written data (see, for example, Wodak 1996, Muntigl et al 2000, Fairclough 2009). Eckert (1997) argues that because 'meaning is made in day-to-day practice, much of it tacitly, the study of social meaning requires access to this practice' and that, along with other methods, ethnography 'will bring the researcher close to day-to-day practice'. These methods will therefore support the study of the *operationalization* of the TFP - how the TFP is being *enacted* by practitioners and *inculcated* by families.

The research will be carried out in collaboration with a local authority partner in the North East. This will provide access to practitioners and families (who might otherwise be 'hard to reach'), to documentary material and a case study approach provides the opportunity to explore diversity and complexity around the implementation and negotiation of the TFP in great detail. An estimated 595 'troubled families' live in the locality. Ethnographic fieldwork will take place within the partner organisation, during meetings between 'key workers' and families and during interactions arising as a result of a family's participation in the TFP. The practitioners assigned to between 10 - 15 families will be interviewed, as will the families themselves, potentially more than once during the project (between 40 – 60 interviews in total). Documentary data (strategies, policies, council papers etc.) will be examined and access to confidential information will be discussed with families and the collaborative partner. Families will be identified with, but not by, the collaborative partner.

Data analysis will be carried out using the Discourse-Historical Approach within CDA which aims to decipher 'the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance' (Reisigl & Wodak 2009, p88) and which follows eight stages (ibid, p96). Other approaches such as Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss) and Adaptive Theory (Layder) will also be of interest and utility.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues will be very important and the project will operate within ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics, the BSA's Statement of Ethical Practice and in accordance with Durham University's ethical requirements. This will mean, for example, that informed consent will be sought from all participants, verbally and in writing, making it clear that participation is voluntary and can be ended by interviewees at any point (or that they can choose not to answer particular questions).

Safe storage of the data will be carefully considered. Ethical questions, covering risk, confidentiality, stigma and reporting protocols, will be discussed with the collaborative partner prior to research commencing. Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure: anonymity of participants and organisations; confidentiality of interviews and; elimination of potential harm to participants.

Collaborative Approach & Impact

A collaborative project will ensure there is strong potential for the findings to be adopted by non-academic partners and full consideration of how best to ensure 'knowledge adoption' will be given from the outset. The project aims to influence policy and practice at a time when practitioners are being urged to 'think family'. The ESRC *Pathways to Impact Toolkit* will be reviewed and utilised, along with lessons from other collaborative research or knowledge exchange projects, (for example, Macdonald et al 2012) to improve the potential of 'knowledge adoption'.

The *social activity method* of knowledge adoption (Dowling 1993) proposes that knowledge adoption will be most successful if it occurs over a long period of time and if the 'story tellers' and 'audiences' have distinctive roles but also have the opportunity to 'interact' at least once. Brown (2012) has suggested a *policy preferences model*, with two extra factors: whether the research relates to a currently favoured idea; and the strength and nature of the relationship between policy makers and researcher(s). A number of dissemination and engagement techniques will be used including social media and seminars to ensure that research 'stories' are tailored to specific target audiences.

The non-academic partner has supplied a letter of support and the collaborative approach will help to bridge the divide between academic criticisms of the TFP and widespread adoption and support amongst politicians and policy makers. At a time when researchers are encouraged to 'challenge the narrow scope of government policy' (Wilkinson & Bell 2012, p427) the research will contribute to 'a more sophisticated, empirically informed conversation' that Cornford et al have called for and which 'can take in voices and concerns from frontline professionals, public service managers … and, most importantly, families themselves' (2013, p13). It will also help social work practitioners develop a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990, p66) and help them progress towards a more culturally sensitive social work (Houston 2002, pp149–167).

Word count: 1998

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Appendix 2: Local authority briefing note

ESRC PhD Research **on the Troubled Families Programme**

Stephen Crossley, School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University

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Purpose: This briefing note provides a brief introduction into the ESRC funded PHD research that is being carried out by Stephen Crossley, relating to the implementation of the Troubled Families Programme.

Aims and objectives: The research sets out to understand how the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) is being implemented at a local level and what implications for local policy and practice flow from the national 'troubled families' programme.

The methodological approach focuses on the how the local practitioners and policy-makers make the 'troubled families' agenda 'fit' at a local level the research is to examine how the national programme plays out in different local authorities on a day-to-day basis. The fieldwork focus on frontline family workers and other local authority employees will enable the research to examine how the state ultimately engages with – and intervenes in the lives of - the 'troubled families' it has identified.

Objective: Explore how the construction and representation of 'troubled families' at a national level influences policy and practice at a local level

Aims

1) To examine the construction of 'troubled families' at a national level, with reference to political, policy and media representations of 'troubled families', and potential solutions.

2) To examine how local authorities and other organisations involved in the delivery of the TFP are adapting and/or negotiating the 'troubled families' discourse.

3) To examine how local practitioners are operationalising the Troubled Families Programme and putting the Troubled Families Programme into practice.

4) To examine the links between the concept of 'troubled families' and recent concepts of 'families with multiple disadvantages' and 'social exclusion'.

Fieldwork: The fieldwork will involve comparing and contrasting the implementation of the TFP in three different local authorities in England. Local authority documents will

be examined and interviews with senior managers and elected members will help to explore the role of local authorities and their partner organisations in adapting and negotiating the national discourse - making it 'fit' with their existing approaches and preparing it for operationalization. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and/or observations will be carried out with frontline 'family workers' to understand how the Troubled Families Programme 'plays out' at a family level. It is hoped that observations will take place in workplaces and the homes of 'troubled families, but it is acknowledged that the latter may not always be possible.

It is anticipated that around 10 and 12 frontline 'family workers' and between 3 and 5 strategic officers/elected councillors will be interviewed, per authority, with fieldwork taking place on agreed days within approximately a 2 month period for each participating authority. Access and logistical arrangements will be discussed and agreed with authorities.

Ethical arrangements: The research has received ethical approval from Durham University and a copy of the approved form and risk assessments will be made available to participating authorities. The research will also be carried out in accordance with participating organisations ethical requirements, if appropriate. No organisations or individuals will be identifiable as a result of participating in the research. Participation in the research, for both organisations and individuals is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Potential benefits for participants: It is anticipated that participation in the research project would allow organisations to understand more about the ways in which frontline workers adapt policies and exercise discretion in their practice in order to accomplish policy goals, and to understand the ways in which policies and procedures sometimes constrain or encourage this negotiation. Understanding this may help organisations to support workers in these areas or design policies which require or permit less negotiation and improve service delivery. Participating authorities may also learn of other issues of interest from comparison with other participating authorities. Feedback on the fieldwork element for local authorities will be available if required and a short summary of the work carried out in each local authority area will be prepared and presented to the authority, if appropriate.

Contact details

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Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Research on the Troubled Families Programme – also known as (Insert Local Authority local Troubled Families Programme name here).

Participant Information Sheet - Officers

What is this sheet about?

This sheet provides you with some information about a research project that is being carried out, looking at how officers are delivering the (Insert Local Authority local Troubled Families Programme name here).

The research has 3 main aims

1) How is the Troubled Families Programme being organised by local authorities?

2) How is the Troubled Families Programme being implemented by practitioners?

3) What are the similarities and differences between the Troubled Families Programme) and similar recent and historical work with families.

This research is being carried out by Stephen Crossley, a PhD student at Durham University as part of his studies. More than one local authority is involved with the research. The research project should be completed by October 2016. The project has been given ethical approval by the School of Applied Social Sciences in Durham University.

Why have I been given this sheet?

I would like to talk to and observe people involved with the Troubled Families Programme. I would like to do this by having some informal, semi -structured interviews or discussions with workers and officers involved with the programme. I would also like to have group discussions with more than one person. I would like to record the conversations if possible, but this is entirely up to the people being interviewed. I expect that these interviews will not take any longer than 1 hour. I would also like to 'shadow' some family workers and observe some interactions between workers and families during home visits and other meetings between them. If I want to do all of these things, I need to get consent from potential participants.

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. Everyone that is asked has the right to say no, at any point during the research. This means that, even if you agree to taking part, you are still free to change your mind at any point during the research and you can do this without any penalty. It is absolutely fine if you choose not to take part in the research.

If I do take part, what will happen to the information I provide?

The information collected and the notes that are made will be used for the PhD and associated work. This means that it might be used in academic writing such as for book chapters and articles in journals. All writing will be written in such a way that it will not be possible to identify any participants. No names will be mentioned and the names of the different local authorities will not be mentioned either.

The information that is collected during interviews and the notes that are made following observations will be stored safely and in a way that means no-one will be able to identify which families or workers were observed. Electronic copies of the information will be password protected. I would like to keep the information that is collected for three years after the PhD is finished. This would potentially allow me to use the information in the future for more research. If I do this, the same safeguards will apply to future use.

The only time I might not be able to keep something confidential is if I see something which might make me think that your wellbeing or the wellbeing of someone else is at risk. If this happens, I will have to seek advice and speak to another employee of (insert local authority here)

What is in it for me?

I hope that the research will help to improve the services that local authorities deliver to families, workers interact with family members, although there is no guarantee that any findings from the research will be taken up by any of the local authorities involved in the research. I do not expect there to be any risks to people who take part in the research.

What should I do next?

Please have a think about what you have read and whether or not you would like to take part in the research. I will ask you for an answer around a week after you have received this sheet so that you hopefully don't feel rushed into giving an answer.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research, please contact either Stephen Crossley on 07957 758 560 or at s.j.crossley@durham.ac.uk or Professor Roger Smith at Durham University on (0191) 334 1503 or at roger.smith@durham.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone at (insert local authority here) about the research please contact (insert local authority contact here)

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form
<u>INFORMED CONSENT FORM - OFFICERS</u>

The recontextualisation and operationalization of the Troubled Families Programme

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

Please cross out
as necessary

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?   YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to
discuss the study?   YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?   YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the research   YES / NO
and what it will be used for?

Have you been told about how the information you   YES/NO
provide will be stored, and who will have access to it, and for
how long?

Were you given enough time to consider whether you
want to participate?   YES/NO

Who have you spoken to?   Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Prof..

Do you consent to participate in the study?   YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw or take a break from the study:

     * at any time and
     * without having to give a reason for withdrawing and
     * without penalty of any kind?   YES / NO

Signed ....……................   **Date** ....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) ....……........................

Durham
University

Appendix 5: Thesis Summary

'Making trouble': a Bourdieusian analysis of the UK Government's Troubled Families Programme

Stephen Crossley, School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University

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Introduction

The aim of this summary is to provide an accessible introduction to the PhD research carried out by Stephen Crossley, and the thesis that was produced following the research. It has been produced primarily for participants who took part in the research, but it is hoped that it may be of interest and use to other people, especially practitioners and policy-makers involved with the delivery and implementation of the Troubled Families Programme, and/or other similar programmes.

The full thesis can be accessed at: url to be inserted here

Background & research approach

Following riots that took place in towns and cities across England in 2011, the UK government launched the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) in England, with the aim of 'turning around' 120,000 'troubled families' by May 2015. These families were characterised as being anti-social, criminal, 'workless', with children not attending school on a regular basis, and were linked with a wide range of other social ills. The programme was launched during a time of austerity, wide-ranging welfare reforms and cuts to public services. It was subsequently expanded to include 400,000 more 'troubled families in a second phase which ran from May 2015, whilst austerity measures and welfare reforms were still being implemented.

The government argued that 'troubled families' required 'family intervention', which would see a keyworker working with all family members to address their problems. Such keyworkers or 'family workers' were allegedly characterised by their 'persistent, assertive and challenging' approach and their ability to challenge families when necessary. The workers would act as a single point of contact for the families and would help to co-ordinate - or 'grip', in the government's language - the activities of other services involved with the families as well.

There is a lost history to the 'underclass' thesis – the idea that there is a group of individuals or families that are somehow cut-of from the mainstream population and

that have a different 'culture' to the majority - that stretches back to Victorian times, at least. Social historians have traced various constructions, from concerns about a 'social residuum' in the late 1800s, through, for example, a belief in 'problem families' during and following the Second World War, to concerns about a 'cycle of deprivation' in the 1970s and a belief in an 'underclass' in the 1980s and 1990s. There is, however, little or no evidence that such distinct and discrete groups exist.

Social research has often focused on marginalised groups or disadvantaged populations such as 'troubled families'. It has also been argued that research that focuses on such groups risks ratifying the 'social problems' or 'problem groups' identified by powerful individuals and institutions. Sociologists such as Howard Becker have urged researchers to clarify whose side they are on and to think carefully about who they study and, just as importantly, who they write for. This research project was not focused on any families, and instead focused on the state's construction of 'troubled families' as a social problem. In doing so, it adopted a 'street-level lens' to examine the daily conduct of the TFP, interviewing local authority practitioners and managers involved in the delivery of the programme, in an attempt to understand the 'reality' of the programme on the ground.

Theoretical perspective

The research drew on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, arguably the most influential sociologist of the last fifty years. Bourdieu's work has been extensively used by researchers studying disciplines and areas such as education, race, class, language, and culture, to name but a few, but, to date, his work has not been used widely by social work or social policy researchers outside of France. Bourdieu argued that social spaces (not physical spaces) were made up of *fields*. He often used the analogy of a sports field to highlight how within social spaces, people occupied different positions, which carried different expectations for how they played 'the game', and had different backgrounds and experiences which also influenced their playing of the game. Individuals, as well as taking part in the wider game were also involved in micro-struggles where they sought advantage over other 'players' they were directly competing against. This research study viewed the TFP as a policy *field*, with different people occupying different positions in the field, and attempting to play the game, or direct the game itself, in different ways.

The research also draws on work by Michael Lipsky, an American public policy scholar who coined the phrase 'street-level bureaucrats' to describe frontline workers, such as youth workers, social workers, police officers, teachers etc. These workers are able to exercise discretion in their work, to the extent that they become policy-makers in their own right, deciding how members of the public receive and experience public and social policies.

Methodology and method

The research used a three-stage approach to study the 'troubled families' field. This included examining the habitus (a Bourdieusian term roughly meaning a way of being and acting in the world) of research participants, examining their relations with other agents in the field, and examining the 'forces' that were applied in the field from powerful individuals and institutions.

The research included analysis of central government texts, including policy documents, press releases, speeches and interviews given by politicians and civil servants involved with the TFP. This analysis was undertaken to examine and understand the 'official' line about – or the *political construction* of - 'troubled families' and the TFP, and the forces that were exerted on people tasked with implementing the programme. Research was then carried out in three local authority areas, with 39 people involved in the delivery of the TFP interviewed across the three sites. There were a number of differences (political control, location, geography, demography, size etc.) between the three sites, although the intention was not to carry out a comparative study between the three areas. The majority of the interviews were with workers working directly with families on a daily basis but some managers and Heads of Service were also interviewed, along with the chief executive of one authority and an elected member of another. Participants were asked about their background and work history prior to becoming involved with the TFP, what they did in their day-to-day work, who they worked with regularly (horizontally and vertically), and their opinions and experiences of the families on the programme.

Findings

The national rhetoric surrounding the TFP suggests that the failures of other services to help 'troubled families' has led to the need for family workers and a robust family intervention approach. Just as the idea of 'troubled families' has been constructed by the government, so has the profession of 'family workers', who can 'turn around' these families. Many of the family workers that participated in the research had previously worked in services that the government accused of letting 'troubled families' down and many had worked with similar families before. In some cases, workers suggested that there was little difference between what they were doing under the TFP and much of their work in previous roles, or with other families or services users who did not fall under the TFP. There was little sign of a 'distinctive' family worker approach, with many participants continuing to use skills and knowledge and draw on experience that they had accrued from previous roles. For example, some workers stated that support with domestic work formed only a small part of their work, whereas others eschewed it altogether, despite this area being central to the government narrative of the types of support families require and receive. Family workers were often critical of the bureaucratic demands of their jobs. Monitoring and reporting requirements, often linked to the TFP evaluation or the Payment by Results mechanism, meant that large amounts of data on families was being recorded, which many workers thought interfered with their ability to support families more effectively.

Family workers were often involved in large amounts of stereotypically administrative work, such as liaising with other agencies, and many participants highlighted the support they received from colleagues in the same team and from other professionals in other departments and organisations. The idealist image of a single family worker working intensively with a family – articulated by the government as 'one family, one plan, one worker' – rarely materialised. Workers sometimes co-worked cases, where they lacked the experience, knowledge or confidence to address issues on their own, and they continued to rely on support from colleagues in services that had allegedly failed members of 'troubled families' for many years. In many cases, workers advocated on behalf of families and, in some cases, tensions existed between workers on the TFP and other services, due to the political support and funding for the TFP at a time of widespread austerity and cuts to local services. However, services that were struggling to support family members and keep on top of caseloads were also grateful for the extra resources that family workers brought with them and the political capital they could draw on to 'get things done'.

In all three fieldwork sites, the TFP was delivered by workers working in departments across the local authority, and sometimes by external voluntary sector organisations. Many of these workers also held caseloads with 'non-troubled-families' and had not changed job roles or job descriptions. Some of the families or individuals that they had previously been working with had been 'identified' as 'troubled families' but little else appeared to have changed. Some participants suggested that other departments and agencies might not necessarily be aware that it was 'troubled families' work that was taking place due to this continuity and the local authorities decision not to explicitly use the term 'troubled families'. These findings cast doubt on the 'service transformation' that the government allege is taking place under the TFP, and participants suggested that other factors, such as cuts to local government and Ofsted inspections were potentially bigger drivers of change and restructuring in their authorities than the TFP.

Participants spoke of the pressure they were under to meet the targets set out by the government and to demonstrate they were making progress with the programme. They often rejected the national rhetoric surrounding 'troubled families' and the types of issues they were facing, with some keen to highlight structural issues such as poverty. Most participants acknowledged that the majority of families they were working with did not fit the 'neighbours from hell' stereotype of 'troubled families' and that, under the expanded second phase of the programme, almost any family could be made to fit the 'troubled families' criteria. Participants also rejected the idea that they were 'turning around' the lives of the families they were working with, with some suggesting that keeping them out of statutory services for 6 months represented a success. In all three areas, the process for submitting a PbR claim for 'turning around' families was separate from decisions about when and how to withdraw support from families. In one area, a manager argued that the programme relied on 'practitioner integrity' to ensure that families received support after a PbR claim had been made,

whilst in another area a manager suggested that the idea that families had been 'turned around' was 'a load of bloody rubbish'.

Conclusions

Despite the TFP being a standalone programme and it being launched and expanded whilst other services and support for disadvantaged families were being withdrawn or scaled back, it should not be viewed in isolation. The thesis argues that the TFP, which is based and relies on duplicity from design to implementation, is a central plank in attempts to re-shape and restructure the welfare state. Support – both symbolic and financial - for universal services, such as libraries, children's centres and youth projects, is reducing whilst direct financial support to marginalised groups is also being cut, with welfare reforms hitting many of the most disadvantaged groups hardest. These forms of support, and many other more specialist services, are being replaced, rhetorically at least, by an intensive form of generalist family intervention which allegedly sees a single key worker capable of working with all members of the family, able to 'turn around' their lives no matter what problems they may be facing or causing.

The simplistic central government narrative of the almost perfect implementation of the TFP was not to be found 'on the ground', where there were multiple frustrations and concerns about the depiction of the families and the programme, and numerous departures from the official version of events. Despite the rhetoric of 'turning around' the lives of 'troubled families', in the face of cuts in support and benefits to families, the thesis concludes that the TFP does little more than intervene to help struggling families to cope with their poverty better, despite the efforts of local practitioners. Put simply, the TFP does not attempt to address the structural issues that cause many of the problems faced by 'troubled families'.

About me

I am an ex-local authority employee, who has previously worked in a number of different roles with families who would now be called 'troubled' and who would be eligible for the TFP. I have also worked for voluntary sector housing organisations and, immediately prior to starting work on the PhD, which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), I worked on a regional child poverty project at Durham University. It was during this time that I became particularly interested in the 'underclass' thesis and the gap between the academic research and the politics and policies in this area. That gap appears larger than ever now.

I now work as a Senior Lecturer at Northumbria University. I have written a number of other articles, reports and book chapters on 'troubled families', some of which can be found overleaf. If you would like copies of any of these, or would like to discuss my research further, please feel free to contact me.

Acknowledgements

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to acknowledge and thank the individuals who agreed to participate in this research, and those who agreed to provide institutional support for the study. At a time when local authorities and their employees were under lots of pressure, people made themselves available to talk to me about a politically sensitive topic. I am extremely grateful to them for doing this, and for the insights into the day-to-day life of the programme that they provided me with. Quite simply, the research could not have taken place, or developed in the way it did, without the goodwill and support of these people. I do not doubt that some of the research participants may disagree with my interpretation and theorising of the discussions we had, and with my wider critical perspective on the implementation of the TFP. Where this is the case, I hope that I have not misrepresented their views, and that they can at least appreciate the positions I have taken.

In addition to those who participated formally, I was contacted by many people working on the TFP who shared information and interesting leads with me because of their concerns about the programme. I would also like to acknowledge their help and support in providing information that I was previously unaware of.

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