



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

Tracing an Ethic of Care in the Policy and Practice of the Troubled Families Programme

Sue Bond-Taylor, University of Lincoln

‘Getting with the Programme’

Workshop 1: 11th February 2015

Introduction

- Growing recognition of the utility of an ethic of care approach in researching family policy and practice (See Barnes, 2012; Morris and Featherstone, 2010; Williams, 2004a, 2004b).
 - Doing family involves caring practices
 - Through 'care' individuals are constructed as moral beings (eg good parent or troubled family)
 - Supporting families in crisis should also be conceptualised as 'care'
 - Care ethics provide a framework for analysis of practice in family support services
 - Challenges stigmatising 'othering' discourses

What is an Ethic of Care?

Carol Gilligan (1982) *In a Different Voice* - challenged Kohlberg's theory of the stages of moral development as a *gendered* morality, based in an ethic of ***justice*** rather than the alternative ethic of ***care***.

Justice (Kohlberg)

Individualism

Concern for rights

Generalisable rules

Rational/autonomous

Reciprocity



Care (Gilligan)

Relationality

Concern for responsibility

Contextualised decisions

(Inter)dependent

Compassion

 ***Feminine*** ethic of care v ***feminist*** ethic of care

Key Principles of Care Ethics

1. Attentiveness
 2. Responsibility
 3. Competence
 4. Responsiveness
- (Tronto, 1993)
5. Trust (Sevenhuijsen, cited in Barnes, 2012)
 6. Respect (Enger, cited in Barnes, 2012)
 7. Actuality
 8. Recognition of selfhood
 9. Recognition of loss
- (Smart and Neale, 1999)

Family Experiences

(Bond-Taylor & Somerville, 2013)

“She kind of gets us as a family”

“She takes the interest, not as a social worker but as a friend of the family.”

“She’s not acting as a case worker or whatever it is you like to call her, she’s acting as a friend. She cared.”

“She puts her heart and her mind into it, and that is the thing that I’ve never had.”

“We were a case and not a family”

“But I find with my key worker I don’t have to worry about that because she’s there to support me and I know that my children are not going to get taken off me and she’s there to support me, and that I’m not there on my own, I don’t have to battle everything on my own.”

“Being able to hold my head up and not down. I can look at people now and not like look away... now I can actually look up and smile.”

“I was happy every day because I loved helping myself. I found it really good that I was doing it, because it’s something that I never done before.”

***Trace*: Care Ethics in Policy Analysis**

- Selma Sevenhuijsen, developed *Trace* as a strategy for policy analysis which “takes the feminist ethic of care as its main point of reference” and aims to “evaluate the normative frameworks of policy documents that deal in one way or another with care” (2004:13).
- Policy documents act as “vehicles of normative paradigms” (2004:14-15) which configure ‘knowledge’ and construct social problems as particular kinds of concerns. They thus act as ‘modes of governance’.
- *Trace* provides a means to challenge the power which such policy documents confer.

Tracing an Ethic of Care in TF Policy

'Care' within *Working with Troubled Families* (Dec 2012)

- “This work requires a single dedicated worker to walk in the shoes of these families every day. To look at the family from the inside out, to understand its dynamics as a whole, and to offer practical help and support” (DCLG, 2012: 4)
- “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.” (DCLG, 2012:20)
 - **Empathy, compassion, attentiveness**
 - **Situated, contextualised support**
 - **Responsibility and competence**
 - **Trust and honesty**

Challenges to an Ethic of Care in TF Policy

‘Justice’ ethics within Working with Troubled Families:

- **Inauthentic contractual governance** (Crawford, 2003)

“families signing up to a contract that offered a mix of support and challenge to them with a new threat of sanction if families refused help” (DCLG, 2012:11)

- **Sanctions, rationality and responsibility**

“the threat of sanctions such as loss of tenancy ‘concentrates the mind’ of families and is a key mechanism for bringing about change” (DCLG, 2012:28)

“Families and their problems are gripped”(DCLG, 2012b:27)

PLUS - Family Intervention ‘Light’ and ‘Superlight’

Challenges to an Ethic of Care in TF Policy

Contradicted by 'Listening to Troubled Families' (July 2012)

- **Casey is NOT listening to families**

“No judgements are made on individual families” (Casey, 2012:2)

- **Undermining family's claims about state failure**

“Many of the families complained about professionals or agencies involved with them, and in particular, social services. However it would not be fair to always lay blame there when looked at dispassionately.” (Casey, 2012:51)

- **Deflecting attention from structural issues – eg no discussion of poverty or gender**

“it was clear that the reasons for that behaviour had come from the household itself – the poor parenting skills, the constant changes in the home, family and partners, and the ongoing verbal and physical violence” (Casey, 2012:59)

Conclusions (1)

- Families describe the support they have received in terms of care ethics and judge its value in terms of the quality of the relationships built between their family members and between the family and their key worker.
- There is considerable evidence of the value of care ethics within the delivery of services supporting families in crisis.
- Sevenhuijsen's (2004) Trace method provides a useful framework to trace the 'normative paradigms' within TF policy documents and to evaluate the role of care ethics.
- *Working with Troubled Families* offers a model for family intervention which clearly draws on care ethics principles (trust, empathy, actuality, situated decision making, collaboration, relationality)

Conclusions (2)

- By contrast, Listening To Troubled Families tends to undermine the families' accounts, presents 'troubled families' as having a homogenous set of problems, as evasive and/or passive in the face of engagement with services, and blames families (mothers).
- The focus on sanctions within the TF programme reflects an ethic of justice which attributes considerable autonomy/rationality to family members.
- The financial framework of the TF programme (ie payment by results process and light/superlight models) poses a threat to the inclusion an ethic of care within support for disadvantaged families.

References

- Barnes, M. (2012) *Care in Everyday Life: An ethic of care in practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Bond-Taylor, S. and Somerville, P. (2013) *Evaluation of Families Working Together: Final Report*, Lincoln: University of Lincoln
- Casey (2012) *Listening to Troubled Families: A report by Louise Casey CB.*, London: DCLG.
- Crawford, A. (2003) 'Contractual Governance' of Deviant Behaviour' *Journal of Law and Society*, 30(4): 479-505.
- DCLG (2012) *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*, December 2012, London: DCLG
- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological theory and women's development*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Morris, K. and Featherstone, M. (2010) 'Investigating Children, Regulating Parents, Thinking Family: A Decade of Tensions and Contradictions' *Social Policy and Society*, 9(4), 557-566.
- Sevenhuijsen, S. (2004) 'Trace: A method for normative policy analysis from the ethic of care' in Sevenhuijsen, S. and Svab, A. (Eds) *The Heart of the Matter: The contribution of the ethic of care to social policy in some new EU member states*, Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies.
- Smart, C. and Neale, B. (1999) *Family Fragments?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tronto, J. (1993) *Moral Boundaries*, London: Routledge.
- Williams, F. (2004a) *Rethinking Families*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Williams, F. (2004b) 'What Matters is Who Works: Why every child matters to New Labour. Commentary on the DfES Green Paper Every Child Matters' *Critical Social Policy*, 24(3): 406-427.