

*‘Rolling up their sleeves’ and
‘donning the marigolds’: class,
condescension and
cleanliness in the ‘troubled
families narrative’*

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Following the 2011 riots...



*“ ... That’s why 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’**.”*

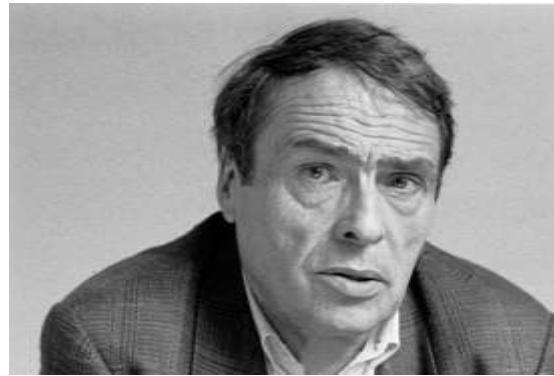
... the 'fightback'



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 (2011)

Distinction



‘Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat’

Bourdieu (1986:479)

*‘When the front door opens and
the worker goes in...’*



this happens.....

*“... **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.**”*

Casey (2013a)

... and this...

*“They walk into these families’ lives ... 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.**”*

Casey (2013b)

It's 'official'...

*'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 (2012)

... and there's (no) 'evidence'.

'One survey looked at 3,000 children in one area of the north east – an area that has been through every deprivation programme going

*A survey showed that **not one of those 3,000 children had been for a routine dental check-up – for free – but 300 of them had been to A & E for emergency dental treatment.***

The long history....

- **1880s** **Victorian residuum**
- **1910s** **The unemployables**
- **1930s** **Social Problem Group**
- **1940s** **The 'problem family'**
- **1960s** **Culture of poverty**
- **1970s** **Cycle of deprivation**
- **1980s** **Underclass**
- **1990s** **Socially excluded**

Welshman (2013)



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‘Problem families’ ...

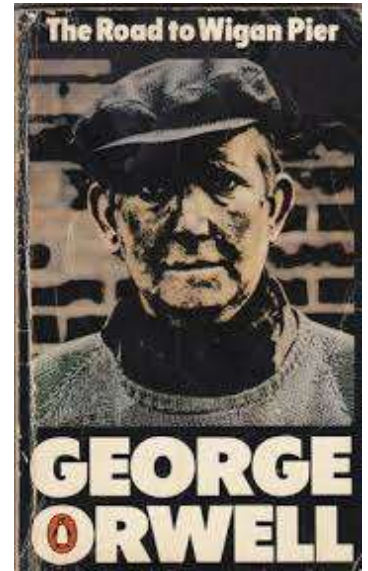
‘highly charged class-prejudicial accounts of the children’s behaviour that gave the impression that a large section of the British working class were the ‘great unwashed’ living lives of dirt, disorder and incorrigible irresponsibility, their bodies riddled by headlice and impetigo, lacking elementary domestic manners and culturally alienated – in short, urban savages of the worst kind’

‘Problem families’ ...

‘The children in such a family are always ragged and dirty, have verminous heads and sometimes verminous bodies; the following up at home reveals dirt and neglect; if there is any decent bedding it is usually on the parents bed, the children’s accommodation being a filthy, holey flock bed or palliasse, flock or straw protruding onto the floor and soaked with urine’

In Starkey (2006:542)

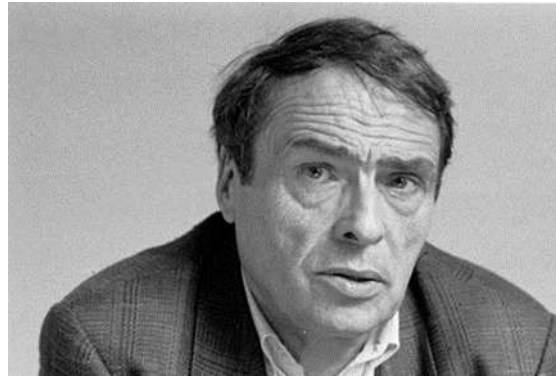
‘the lower classes smell’ ...



*‘It may not greatly matter if the average middle-class person is brought up to believe that the working classes are ignorant, lazy, drunken, boorish and dishonest; **it is when he is brought up to believe that they are dirty that the harm is done**’*

Orwell (1989:119)

Dirt and ‘troubled families’



‘the field of doxa (of) that which is beyond question and which each agent tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention.’

Dirt is in the eye of the beholder



***‘There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists
in the eye of the beholder.’***

Douglas (1994:2)

‘Something very simple

*‘All of what we do turns on something very simple: the relationship between the worker and the family. None of us changes because we are given a report or an analysis. The difference with family intervention is that they make people believe in themselves. **Remember the humanity in it.** Forget which agency you are from, and **remember the human being.**’*

(In Aitkenhead 2013)

Strategies of condescension



*‘those strategies by which 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’***

Bourdieu (1989:16)

Strategies of condescension



‘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’

Strategies of condescension



‘Creating things with words...’



‘Symbolic power is a power of creating things with words’

Bourdieu (1989:24)

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