



TAVISTOCK

RELATIONSHIPS

Her Majesty's department of love? The state and support for couple and family relationships – Honor Rhodes, OBE

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Miniluv was one of the four most powerful and the most secretive super ministries governing the state of Oceania. It was housed in a building with no windows, heavy steel doors, barbed wire fences and strategically positioned snipers. Its bright lights were never turned off; it was a place “where there is no darkness”. Its function was not to support its citizens in loving one another better but to instill in them an abiding love for Big Brother. It achieved this end through fear, the antithesis of love, through the work of the Thought Police and the known existence of Room 101, “the worst thing in the world”, where each unfortunate occupant would face their worst fear and be broken by it. (George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949)

Introduction

Is the idea that the government could create a Department of Love, to implement its policy for the improvement of human relationships, entirely fanciful? Or is the very idea of this an Orwellian step too far? In this chapter I will examine some of the social policies of recent decades that have sought to promote, either directly or indirectly, improved family and couple relationships. Inevitably the state's intervention in family life raises important legal and ethical questions about the respective rights and responsibilities of the citizen to live life as a free person and of the state to intervene when the exercise of this freedom adversely affects the lives of others.

Orwell's Miniluv captures an image of an extreme totalitarian system, the purpose of which was to control thinking and to subvert individual autonomy in the service of asserting state control. Perhaps this nightmare image of what a state's involvement in the intimate lives of its citizens might become connects to deep anxieties about the intrusion of government into the realm of family life. Given such a pedigree, albeit a fictitious one, is it sensible to entertain, even for a moment, the idea of a Department whose existence would be hugely costly and whose outcomes would, inevitably, be mixed? What would it do? Who would work in it? Would it be a major Department with a Secretary of State of Love (the SoSoL) or, would it be better called the Department for Love with the change of title implying the higher purpose of striving to encourage ideal human relations. However far-fetched it may seem, this picture may be a useful *reductio ad absurdum* to prompt our thinking about the different and, sometimes, conflicting arguments used to justify the involvement of statutory and non-statutory organisations in family life, what has been done, and what could be done in future.

To ask such questions is also timely as there is popular debate about how to maximise well-being and happiness on the one hand (Layard et al., 2006) and, on the other hand, how to minimise family breakdown and social disorder. It is important that we ask such questions now, after the announcement of grant funding from the Department for Education (DfE, 2011) for the children, families, and couple

relationships charity sector. Of this sum £7.5m is specifically designated for couple relationship work with a four year commitment of £30m in total. At a time of extreme financial retrenchment such an investment in an area as complex as couple relationship support looks generous and, perhaps, evidence of making good the promise within the Conservative Party manifesto to support marriage. For recipient organisations such as the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, Relate, and others it is neither more nor less than they have received in the recent past and a reduction compared to earlier marriage support funding (Boucher, 2008).

We need also to retain a sense of proportion. While £7.5m to support couple relationships is undoubtedly welcome, when set against the annual cost of relationship breakdown, conservatively estimated at £20bn (Callan, 2007), it looks and feels like a small sum. It is equivalent to the £7.5m spent by Stockport Council in one year providing a range of recycling bins for its residents (*Manchester Evening News*, 22 June 2011) or the amount Devon County Council paid for gritting and salting roads during the snows of 2009 (*BBC News* online, 9 September 2010).

In reviewing recent policy initiatives the suggestion is made that specific aspects of family functioning have been targeted which, with few exceptions, have excluded help to parenting couples. The aspects of family functioning that have commanded priority have been those promoting children's early health and well-being or those combating antisocial behaviour. These imperatives will be outlined briefly and the chapter will conclude with an account of new policy developments which are now beginning to focus directly on parenting skills and the couple relationship, given the increasing salience of evidence for their strategic relevance in supporting and maintaining family well-being.

“Every Child Matters”

Plainly the creation of a Department for Love will never happen. As soon as we begin to play with the idea and its possibilities we realise that the proposal subverts and corrupts the meaning of love. We find it hard when a government, of whatever colour and stripe, colonises the words we use and redefines them to suit political ends. A phrase such as “Every Child Matters” has made a short and hectic journey from a commonplace truism to the title of a huge raft of policies. These affected the lives of a whole generation of children's workers who strove to measure everything they did against its desired outcomes (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/about/aims/aims/>). There were five: “Be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being”, but these should be written in the past tense as the website can now only be found in the Archived Web pages section of the website for the renamed Department for Education.

Every Child Matters, or ECM for short, is a good worked example of the state's articulation of government policy and the fact that it is a policy of the previous government is neither here nor there (James, 2009). How is it that the government's intention to provide every child with the necessary environment at home and at places of learning turns into an enormous policy apparatus of national scope? In all children's centres workers must enquire of themselves, and of parents, how work done in a Monday “Messy Play” session helped a child “enjoy and achieve”; a judgement that necessarily involved measuring just how much that child was enjoying and achieving. This complex outcome, however worthy, was not the intention of the policy but the inevitable concomitant of a state intervention that must have within it a data collection regime to evaluate its effectiveness. Measures of outcome are now a necessary policy adjunct, enabling the responsible government department to report success to “stakeholders”. This is another colonised word meaning you and me as taxpayers, government and Parliament as policy “owners”, interested professional groupings, and other communities of interest, including the private sector for whom the work might represent an opportunity to be tendered for and delivered under contract in the future.

Local authority policy making and service delivery

National imperatives to make every child matter were tailored to local circumstances. For example, in local authorities with high levels of deprivation, the planning and execution of policy was shaped to bring targeted benefit to children from minority ethnic communities or to children with disabilities. With the sole exception of one London borough, Islington, which had received assistance from a consultancy interested and active in the field, no local children and young people's plan included support and guidance on parental couple relationships. Even the much vaunted parenting strategies, created with great labour and excellent intentions, failed to recognise the strategic importance of couple relationships in shaping effective parenting. This was despite the relationships sector's briefings and papers to senior DCSF policy makers pleading that such guidance and research be included within the government circular that set the work in motion and despite some civil servants' best efforts to promote such ideas. It is this "couple blindness" that must interest us and inform how we help policy makers put couple relationship spectacles on and view the world differently.

As this chapter is written (summer 2011) the coalition government is making a huge reduction in public funds for local government, a blow sweetened by an equally large swathe of freedoms to spend monies as is seen fit at local government level. This policy shift, which represents a departure from the Labour government's "top-down" approach, will have important consequences for the types of family programmes given central and local government backing and the ways in which they are reported and evaluated. How this shift in policy and emphasis affects the children's centre worker following a Monday Messy Play session remains to be seen. It may be unlikely that such locally led initiatives will be any more successful in bringing a greater emphasis on the couple relationship to family policy and practice given no central government specific ring-fencing or requirement. Although research has shown the importance of the couple relationship in the mental health of the child and the family (Hanington, Heron, Stein, & Ramchandani, 2011; Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002), a recognition of which has, at times, been evident in government policy aspirations, it has struggled to keep this in its sights, as the recent history of the fate of strategic endeavour in this area testifies.

Supporting families: the adoption of a programme approach

Children need stability and security. Many lone parents and unmarried couples raise their children every bit as successfully as married parents. But marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children and remains the choice of the majority of people in Britain. We want to strengthen the institution of marriage to help more marriages to succeed. (Home Office, 1998)

This quotation is taken from an ambitious, and contentious, Home Office green paper, *Supporting Families* (1998). Amongst its recommendations was one which identified married couple relationships as an area worthy of investment. Putting to one side important differences of view about the respective merits of married and unmarried partnerships and the steady reduction in the popularity of marriage as measured by the marriage rate, this Home Office document sought to focus attention on the value of couple relationships, a focus which seems to have become fainter and more diffuse over the last thirteen years. There has instead been a steady advance in the connections between parenting and antisocial behaviour. Perhaps the generalist support to couples and families in the early green paper had to give way to a harder edged policy project that focused resource and attention on those families who did not appear to subscribe to a prevailing view of what family life ought to be.

These families, the new "troubled" families, were perceived in the media as under-regulated, over-spilling their lives into streets and communities. In the tabloid press these families were dubbed "nuisance families" or the "neighbours from hell" and were seen to threaten the quality of life of those citizens who wanted to lead lives unmolested by shouting youths. The Labour government made a

decision to require local action and enable “good” families to have secure homes, to be able to park their cars safely outside their front doors, and not have their children’s school experiences and life chances diminished by the need to attend to children from families where education comes a poor second to other interests.

These troubled or problem families became the central focus of the Respect and antisocial behaviour agendas promoted by Tony Blair as prime minister and influenced by the work of Richard Sennett (2002) and others. Their analysis was that deficient parenting lay at the heart of dysfunctional family behaviour and the remedy for this shortfall was to first identify and then enroll target families into highly specialised, manualised programmes designed to reduce children’s antisocial behaviours. Parents were to be supported, cajoled, and finally, if all else failed, required to create an environment within the family home where children “mattered” and where they could safely and healthily develop - with an eye to economic productivity in their later working years. These loud, provocative and often frightening families were the ones that the Respect policy was to target. In a symmetry that is hard to ignore, as poor parenting was increasingly identified as the “deficit” needing to be addressed, so programme after programme was imported from the USA and Australia (see Turner, Markie-Dadds, & Sanders, 2010; Webster-Stratton, 2006). It was as if the state, as parent, lacked parenting knowledge and had to find it elsewhere. This meant that local initiatives from organisations like Family Action and Barnardo’s were overlooked, their learning and thinking unvalued.

If these families lacked skills the state would teach them. Activity cranked up a gear and local family intervention projects (FIPs) were created, taking an idea formulated in Dundee by the charity Action for Children, previously NCH (Pawson et al., 2009), where families were brought into residential accommodation, signed a contract of work to achieve “better behaviour” targets, and submitted, sometimes very gratefully, to the intensive help offered. They returned to “civilian” life when sufficient change was made and sustained and, for those who could not improve sufficiently, the option of care proceedings was considered for the children at most risk. This is a development of the earlier pioneering method used by the NSPCC in Rochdale for “dangerous” families, where work would only be undertaken once the local authority had instituted interim supervision or care proceedings to allow the agency a clear mandate for its muscular family change work (Dale, Davies, Manson, & Waters, 1986).

Very few local FIPs adopted the residential model as very few local authorities had spare blocks of flats at some distance from local communities. So, unlike Dundee, a “dispersed” scheme was most often used, working with families in their own homes and communities where the problems were manifest. The model of change could, and did in some cases, include engaging with neighbours and community groups, intended in part to act as a source of reassurance that “something” was finally being done. It was rather like making the change process visible through the windows and doors of the family’s world, and was consciously or unconsciously mimicked in the highly visible Respect campaign of the time that included large posters on hoardings and on the sides of buses showing the faces of individuals successfully prosecuted under the new raft of legislation.

An analysis of these policies in action illustrates the gap between policy intention and policy achievement. Some family policy levers were shown to be unsuccessful. Moreover, good work was thwarted by both the fearful law of unintended consequences and people’s capacity for industrial scale unconscious sabotage. For example, much effort was made by housing associations and local authority housing officers, carrying out their new antisocial behaviour responsibilities, to involve social workers from the newly formed Children’s Services departments. Housing officers became frustrated and despairing as social workers, delighted at this new resource, drew their own thresholds for intervention tighter and higher.

How did we get here?

If policy work is the machinery that delivers a government's prospectus, we now need to contemplate how we have arrived at this particular point, and to consider whether the nation state's family policy is a story of neglect followed by endeavour, a smooth glide from Poor Law to Every Child Matters, or perhaps, a game of continuous catch-up between policy makers, the public, researchers, and the government of the day. If we are clever and thoughtful we might also divine what particular place marriage and couple relationships occupy in any of the policy development thinking observable in the past and present.

A question we need to ask is why the state decided, with a moral majority, to identify and target problematic families in such a way. Carl Whitaker's perturbing family therapy questions, "Why now? What for? Why worry?" might help us also to consider how relationship policy became increasingly coercive, and involve a complicated dance with the preoccupation of the "red top" national newspapers with hellish neighbours and strident demands for government action (Nichols, & Schwartz, 1998).

In 2008 we had arrived at a point where families identified as antisocial were to be better regulated by the use of interventions related to housing tenure. This bricks and mortar approach, used to modulate human behaviour, is a morally complex area and marks a change of scope and scale from the original Dundee project to a new programme implemented in every English local authority. Action for Children had worked with Dundee Council to create a place where families came, having agreed to relinquish any tenancy rights they might have had, and on the further understanding that future occupation of local authority or any social housing stock was, by agreement, a tenancy with conditions. This approach accepts as its basic premise the human need and the human right to shelter; but it adds the often poorly articulated concomitant, that such rights entail responsibilities which in these cases require tenants to act reasonably and in ways that do not cause undue nuisance to others. This reasonable condition of tenure addresses the social "rules" by which people engage with their neighbours but does not, of itself, address the underlying causes of undesirable behaviours. Tenants imperilled their security of tenure through antisocial behaviour that could include making loud and annoying noise, having uncontrolled pets, and being careless with rubbish, and by aggressive or threatening behaviour of family members and their guests in the neighbourhood and beyond.

The original model used highly committed unqualified staff as the family key workers; they were well supervised by qualified social workers and other professionals. The small evidence base they generated for the project was, nonetheless, impressive and, at the time, one of the few places where change for deeply troubled families, on the scale required by the government response to the Respect agenda, could be found. It is little wonder that the model was seized upon as an example of "what works" and gathered considerable support from the Home Office and later the Department for Children, Schools and Families which took the work on.

At this time the Home Office undertook a review of work up and down the country with recalcitrant families. One of the consistent characteristics of much successful practice was the presence of imaginative and innovative schemes staffed by practitioners who had in common a capacity to tolerate the hostility they encountered in the family members with whom they worked. These schemes were often based in voluntary sector organisations or at the very edges of local authority work where practitioners felt free to innovate and to develop their work unfettered by bureaucracy, including systems and measures for thorough evaluation. These small scale projects, often depending for their success on the presence of charismatic and determined leadership, fitted uncomfortably into programmes of intervention that demand a manualised and, therefore, standardised approach. One unresolved question appears to remain - whether it is possible to create policy initiatives that allow a creative tension between the need for systematic rigour on the one hand, and the need to allow personal creativity among front line practitioners on the other. It will be interesting to see whether the recent "contracting out" of project work with families beset by unemployment to a private sector company will achieve this creative balance, and if so how a "family champion", with no therapeutic training will fare (Prime Minister's Office, 2010).

Family change machinery

The presence of staff unqualified and untrained in the skills necessary to help clients change their behaviour meant that family intervention projects required evidence based tools that could be lifted and applied in situ. This resulted in the huge financial investment in the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, launched in 2007 and the purchase of licences and training for the parenting programmes imported from abroad.

What is interesting about these programmes, nearly all developed by clinical psychologists, is their theoretical base: a blend of adult learning theory, skills acquisition, and rehearsal together with a very clear focus on the parent-child relationship. They have all been rigorously road-tested and have a weight of evidence in their ability to enable parents to make positive changes, measured by clinical tools. They appear to be an ideal “off the shelf” solution, provided that the practitioners are trained in the use of the programme manual, select an appropriate cohort of parents, apply the manual’s instructions faithfully, and are well supervised themselves. If these requirements are in place then “purchasers” can be confident they get the results advertised.

In terms of family policy and its development, it is worth pausing to consider how it came about that family policy, at this point, became a conversation about very deeply troubled families whom it was thought would benefit from behavioural interventions instead of more psychodynamic approaches. What is it about an understanding of human relationships that generates a profound mistrust or even ridicule on the part of policy makers, acting on the wishes of government? It is worth remembering that politicians and therefore policy makers are working to very short timetables for delivery on election promises; subtlety, nuance, ambiguity, and downright uncertainty are not qualities that can be considered positive. Change if promised must be seen to be delivered whilst interventions that work slowly, undoing years of hurt and harm, that can tolerate worsening before improvement, and need skilful, highly trained practitioners are not likely to be central to the answer, whatever the question.

In the long historical sweep of what could be called loosely “family” policy making, developments accelerated in the last century and have become breathlessly fast in our current one. In this trajectory there have been periods when the state has actively concerned itself with questions about the quality and nature of couple relationships. Concern has often been expressed in the form of enquiry about the durability of the very institution of marriage and sometimes about the “curability” of those couples whose relationships are troubled.

The years of family policy making have been well rehearsed elsewhere and less idiosyncratically than here (Kamerman & Kahn, 1998), and show the slow emergence of state sanctioned “romantic” love, based on degrees of partner choice as opposed to medieval and early modern requirements for dynastic settlements. Family policy concerned itself in the past with dowries, child brides, and wardships, designed far less to protect vulnerable wives and children than to protect vested financial and property interests of husbands and fathers (Waller, 2009). Marriage, and its legal form, was the critical and overarching preoccupation in these earlier centuries, offering assurances as to the purity of the bloodline, the rights of inheritance, and the settlement of political alliances.

It is only much more recently, by and large during and after the two world wars, that the state both created for itself, and accepted responsibility for, the moral and other improvement of the monarch’s subjects. It is the post Second World War settlement that brings family policy to the foreground and its interpretation by successive Labour and Conservative governments.

The state at work, the “contested ground”, and moral panics

Social policy generally and family policy in particular can be understood to reflect, in part, prevailing political values of parties in power concerning the responsibilities of the state and the individual. The political philosopher, George Lakoff (2002) has identified the contested ground most clearly. He argues that the Conservatives on the political right hold a “strict father” in mind, one who instils in his children firm discipline and a capacity for independence which allows them to prosper in adulthood without recourse to the services of the state. While this fits neatly with the Neo-Con and Tea Party libertarian right in American politics it has a less good fit with English “high church” Tory and Whig historical traditions of laissez-faire paternalism, but the resemblance is clear.

By contrast he argues that the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties on the political left give greater prominence to the importance of a “nurturing mother” figure in domestic life who protects her children from harm and by doing so provides greater legitimacy to continuing aspects of dependency than those on the right of the political divide would support. When these “family values” are tested in the political arena it becomes clear that those on the right wing of the political spectrum are always going to argue for a less prominent role for the state in family life than those in the centre and on the left.

The contest is familiar as politicians, the media, and the public generally adopt these metaphors from parenting and construct arguments using them. For a right wing politician the “nanny state” which tells us all to eat five pieces of fruit a day is just that, a fussy over-particular mother or mother substitute. For the politician from the left to know that fruit improves human health and happiness and not tell people would be remiss and represent neglectful mothering. The fracture is painful as Lakoff observes, with both sides finding each other’s views incomprehensible and, to a great extent, immoral so that any political exchange is experienced as an attack on deeply held beliefs about personal morality and one’s lived experience of family life.

While we do engage in contest it is reasonable to say that, unlike our European neighbours, Britain has a fairly pragmatic view of policy making. It accompanies our empiricist-rational scientific tradition which is unlike that of the more philosophically driven science of France and Germany, where politics itself remains as a pure science, critiqued and considered within a grand tradition of political thinkers such as Hegel and Adorno (Buckle, 1999).

Adopting a practical approach to policy has advantages. It means that the machinery of government must be light on its feet to welcome any new political administration and able to articulate the manifesto commitments that it brings; this has required the state to fund a large and complex civil service, impartial and expert. The disadvantages are plain also, in that investment in previous policy programmes is lost as they are swept away. It is rare to find a policy area that remains unchanged after a general election which brings a new party to power.

Equally, in the life of a government the policies which Lakoff would identify as most closely aligned with his strict or nurturing parent positions are those that generate the most heat, if not the most light. One striking example of policy formation that disobeyed this rule was the cross-party support for the Children Act 1989, the fundamental reshaping of decades of increasingly creaking child care law. Its passing was a triumph and indeed the statute was immeasurably improved by its committee stages where critical issues were discussed and resolved in a remarkably non-party political fashion.

Child care law, whilst a key part of family policy, is by no means the whole, and it is the other areas - marriage and relationships, family taxation, housing, immigration, and welfare benefits to name but a few - where such a consensus is scarcely ever reached. These areas are highly charged and are the battlegrounds on which politics, as we know it, is fought, with policy following in the battle’s wake.

Another issue in pragmatic policy making is the regular perturbation caused by “moral panics”. The idea takes hold that “the government should do something”, whether that is the public discourse driven by

the eugenics debates of the Boer War and First World War on finding that a high percentage of British men were unfit for military service, or the modern anxieties about the drunken rampaging of “feral youth” in city centres on Friday and Saturday nights, and the failure of British parents to raise their children properly leading to such antisocial behaviour. For all political parties, to differing degrees and articulated differently, much of the problem at the heart of society’s ills is the breakdown and break-up of family life, with its consequences for the welfare of children in particular.

It is here, in the heart of the panic about family life that the idea of couple relationships has secured a small foothold. One visible manifestation was the commitment made by Gordon Brown, early in his office as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the UK treasury secretary, to the creation of a fund that would support parents in particular difficulties. The Parenting Fund started its work in 2004, funding voluntary sector organisations in areas of acute deprivation, and was offered as three different grant programmes of eighteen months to two years, concluding in March 2010. While family relationships were always at the heart of the fund the last round, Parenting Fund Three, starting in April 2009, has as its first criterion: “Strengthen existing parental couple relationships, whether parents live together or apart, and assist separated/divorced parents who are in conflict to better work together in order to minimize the impact of the poor parental relationship on their child or children, and so improve outcomes for those children” (Parenting Fund Guidance).

This prominence was largely to do with the determination of the couple relationship sector, matched by a commitment from civil servants, to ensure that the opportunity for new projects in communities of high need could take shape and be tested as prospective solutions to family breakdown.

Many of the couple relationship organisations were successful in Round Two and Three: Relate and One plus One together with the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships (TCCR) all ran projects. TCCR used the funds granted to it to develop parental couple relationship counselling in children’s centres, together with some group work activity for parents living with postnatal depression. It became abundantly clear that the offer was viewed as helpful and accessible by communities who had not previously been seen as a “market” for counselling approaches. Whether the communities were Turkish, black African, or Vietnamese, outcome measures indicating improvement for both the parents’ couple relationship and the children’s well-being were positive (Clulow & Donaghy, 2010). What was equally interesting was the cultural shift made by the workers in the centres. Reluctant to refer at the beginning of the project’s life, they became increasingly clear that this focus was the missing link in the range of services on offer to parents. Politicians and policy advisers made visits and heard first-hand how sensitive, evidence based approaches can and do tackle the “wicked” problems that lead to family breakdown, child poverty, and poor physical and mental health.

Changing families and fragile families

Governments must have answers, or something that looks like the beginning of part of the answer, to these public outcries of concern, wherever they come from. Most governments find themselves spending valuable time and public resources on issues that relate to family life without having an overarching and fully worked ideological position from which to start. That is not to say the successive Conservative and Labour governments have no position on the centrality of family life and how it might be sustained and supported, and indeed both have concerned themselves with it. It is just that we, as a nation, are deeply sceptical and, indeed, resistant to the idea that the state has much of a part to play in the ordering of our domestic relationships. It is not an issue that we go out to vote on or one that is easy to campaign on. Indeed, many politicians prefer to keep their own personal lives out of public view, concerned for the welfare of children or because they are fearful what judgement the public would make of their living arrangements, and this makes talking about the family lives of others a good deal harder. It is misconduct in the areas of money and sex that brings most politicians down. We only need to see the

faux horror that attended Jacqui Smith's expenses claim (revealed in the *Daily Mail*) that appeared to include the cost of renting pornography to see how potent the two can be when combined.

Sceptical or not, some people accept the state's sanctioning of our couple relationships but increasing numbers do not. In 2006 one in six couples in the UK were cohabiting (2.3 million couples) and more than a third (36%) of the public in England and Wales had been in a cohabiting relationship at some time (Office for National Statistics, 2008).

By opting out of state recognised unions, cohabiting couples place themselves, by and large, outside the provisions of the law to end marriages and civil partnerships, with the consequence that the care of children and the division of property and financial assets may be less equitably distributed than for divorcing peers. For many new Conservatives the nature of the family in Britain is fragile, an argument set out in detail in the 2007 *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown* report (Callan, 2007). This contains a list of endeavours that any Conservative government would be urged to deliver, the answers ranging far and wide, from preferable taxation status in marriage to something called "Building relationship competence". The welcome emphasis on preventing breakdown is amplified by the analysis of the consequences for children, communities, and the state of families that are not able to sustain themselves, intact and employed.

The consequences are indeed grave for children raised in families living in poverty, and the ideological battle lines are drawn on whether poverty is a contingent ill of single parenthood and family breakdown or vice versa. However, in fact, neither party adopts such a purist approach in their policy making, and both in times of power and opposition have offered thoughtful policy outlines. One of the clearest of these was the development, in Labour's years of opposition and policy renewal, of the Sure Start programme, however imperfectly implemented whilst in government. The imperfection is critical. How can it be that a government holding all the policy levers and able to direct huge resources can find its best ideas – and ones for which there is, by and large, general if grudging support - distorted and occasionally perverted as they land on the ground? It seems that as a populace we continue to resist being told what to do and call such attempts the "nanny state", whilst increasingly and ceaselessly searching for help in being better parents. The evidence is plain to see: a plethora of television programmes urging us to tackle our tiny tearaways with "naughty steps" and time-out sessions, and "infotainment" in the form of badly parented adolescents being required to camp out in inhospitable terrains so that they can be returned to their despairing, and usually culpable, parents as reformed characters.

Public aversion to state interference, private distress, and remedies

We remain fast in our belief that the state has only very little to do with how and whom we love, for how long we love them, and what provision we might turn to when things go wrong. We look to lawyers to extricate us from failed relationships as a matter of course; as a nation we rarely seek counselling or therapeutic help to save a relationship or help one end well. Of all the therapies, couple counselling and therapy is the one that is, largely, only available as a private purchase, and few can bear the financial cost. The price we pay for keeping our private lives private is high indeed and yet, while lamenting family breakdown, the state has done very little to make the idea of seeking early help acceptable and accessible, even though the evidence is there that it works.

Something hidden is at work in this lack of capacity in the state and its citizens to hold in mind the nature of love and to build the emotional support "architecture" in which it can flourish. We are unable, as we know, to bear much reality, as T. S. Eliot (2001) suggested, while carrying a longing for deep and abiding intimacy. The push and pull of public policy exemplifies this ambivalence and our human frailty.

It is no wonder that a Department for Love is a long way off. Even if we wished to see some of its positive features introduced, we would need a secretary of state who was not so in thrall to performance

measures as to overlook the important and the immeasurable. The deeply complex nature of the human heart would be accepted without a five point programme to deal with it; as if by magic the Department's work would be to sweep away the small and large cruelties and indignities that afflict and diminish our capacity to love, from hospitals, schools, and prisons as well as our family lives. We would be better educated in the hard graft of loving one another and know that there were places to go with people to see when we found ourselves in emotional distress. Couple counsellors and therapists would be found in accessible locations on the high street.

As a result our children reared with "good enough" (Winnicott, 1973) love would have an enhanced capacity to attend to others, including the old and the vulnerable. It is maybe that we can achieve some of this without the help of an Orwellian government. Children's and adults' services, some statutory and some voluntary, operating within the welfare state as we know it, can help us to live together and love better but to do this more effectively requires that they communicate better about what they do and, by so doing, challenge the idea of the exclusively private family and privatised couple relationship.

Bravery is required to argue for expert help when a "Big Society volunteer helper" is offered as an answer to the need for a massive reduction in public spending. By choosing to work as couple therapists and counsellors though, in preference to other areas, the resources we have to hand in the people who work in the arena of love – and hate - are already the bravest of the brave. So, to Emily Dickenson (1973) the last word on the matter,

That love is all there is, is all we know of love.

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