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Domestic abuse prevention after Raoul Moat

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Abstract

This article charts the development of domestic abuse policy between May 2010 and June 2011, a period in which: the UK witnessed a high profile domestic abuse case - that of Raoul Moat - pass almost without recognition as such; whilst the dismantling of much of the infrastructure used to prevent domestic abuse outside the criminal justice system commenced, in anticipation of cost-cutting reform designated necessary to the advent of the 'Big Society'. The article uses both the research literature on domestic abuse and the case of Raoul Moat to argue that preventative work in this field needs to keep issues of gender - especially masculinity - in the political frame. This focus on masculinity should not, however, be reduced merely to attitudes accepting of violence or macho values, but should, the article argues, also keep the relationships between violence, emotional dependency, heterosexual propriety, and life crises in view. The article queries whether the Coalition government's focus on 'payback', 'discipline' in schools and the 'sexualization of children' is likely to help more than hinder in this regard, and points to the real risks entailed in economic restructuring that increases the proportion of women and children vulnerable to repeat victimization.

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Key words

Big Society, domestic abuse, masculinity, Raoul Moat, violence against women and girls

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s Beatrix Campbell (1993) challenged criminologists, feminists and policymakers to address more overtly the relationships between masculinity, heterosexuality, politics and violence. Campbell's point was that the behaviour of the men living on the English inner city estates where riots had taken place could not be understood outwith the human crises – humiliation, loss, low self-esteem, hopelessness – that were exacerbated by poverty, unemployment, and recession – and the political context of getting 'back to basics', 'understanding a little less and condemning a little more', Conservative politicians used to blame the very women who rebuilt communities damaged by violence. Campbell called her book *Goliath*, not only to capture the scale of the problem of *men's responses to crisis*, but also to capture the power differentials between the embattled groups of men involved. Their destructiveness related to perceptions of unfair disadvantage and entitlement, but their 'masculinity', Campbell argued, 'established its identity by enforcing difference, by the exclusion of women' (1993: 202).

This article argues that we need to take care not to repeat this history in relation to domestic abuse policy. In particular, it suggests that the aftermath of the Raoul Moat case was a missed opportunity for reflecting on the relationship between masculinity, violence and personal crisis, raising, as it did, the spectre of a dangerous man consumed by loss, whose violence could not be contained by a police service that knew him only too well. Too soon after the case, public spending was reduced across the board, but most vastly in areas that affect children's services and a range of voluntary sector organizations that undertake domestic abuse prevention work. Within this context, the sector now confronts a new wave of domestic abuse policy that is ostensibly committed to protecting 'the most vulnerable women and girls in our society' (Home Office, 2011: 6) but silent on the men and boys, invulnerable or otherwise, who present the greatest danger to them.

Raoul Moat: Perpetrator, paranoid, legend, lost boy?

During July 2010 the story of Raoul Moat dominated news coverage in the UK, temporarily dislodging the new politics of the Coalition government from the headlines. Moat was a 37 year old man from Northumbria who, upon release from prison, shot and injured his former girlfriend,

Samantha Stobbart, shot and killed her new partner Chris Brown, before shooting and blinding a police officer, PC David Rathband. The extremity of the violence, the potential for further bloodshed, and the scale of the police operation – estimated to have cost in excess of £3.2 million (Taylor, 2010) – undoubtedly added to the newsworthiness of a story that became cast as an unfolding drama in which the public too could play a part. Sky Television provided live ‘round-the-clock’ coverage of the ‘manhunt’ and possible sightings. The otherwise dull and repetitive screening of police officers manning barricades was enlivened by the arrival in Rothbury of the footballer Paul Gascoigne – a man with a history of mental health problems and domestic abuse perpetration of his own – equipped with a fishing rod, beer and a mobile phone in the expectation he could persuade ‘Moaty’ to ‘give in’. Thereafter, the headlines focussed on the public’s own reactions, as a fanbase commending Moat for evading capture and, in some instances, endorsing his sense of betrayal by Stobbart, celebrated his heroic ‘Legend’ on Facebook. For some at least, this was an opportunity to revisit the story of David and Goliath, the fable of an aggrieved common man heroically outwitting a gigantic system of injustice against the odds.

Moat, however, was not a hero. He was well known to police and social services. He had been questioned over a conspiracy to murder in 2000, charged with possession of offensive weapons in 2005, and convicted of a common assault on his daughter, culminating in the prison sentence he had just served, in 2010. In 2003 Moat also featured in the media when his then two year old daughter survived a 35 foot fall from her bedroom window while her mother, Marissa Reid, was asleep and Moat was apparently at the gym (Fresco, 2003). While Moat was not someone who openly condoned violence against women, his friends described him as someone who was exceptionally controlling. He preferred his girlfriends to stay at home. He advised them on what they should eat, what dress size they should maintain, and against having male friends (Channel 4, 2010). Reid has argued that Moat repeatedly abused her: ‘he throttled her until she fainted, hit her in the spine with a baseball bat and flogged her with a belt before raping her while she was tied to a bed’ (Collins, 2010). While Moat perceived Sam Stobbart to be her ‘own woman’, she also lived in fear of his violence, he having split her head open and jumped on her stomach while pregnant (Channel 4, 2010; Gladdis and Thurlbeck, 2010).

So while the July 2010 shootings were exceptional, Moat’s violence was part of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours feminist research has long shown to be both definitive of domestic abuse and the real Goliath, i.e. the more pervasive problem and greater injustice (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Mullender, 1996; Stark, 2009). Since the 1990s arguments about domestic abuse among same sex couples and violence perpetrated by women have diminished the persuasiveness of ‘patriarchy’ as an all-encompassing

explanation for men's abusive behaviours (Featherstone and Trinder, 1997). The sociological exposition of a range of competing and differentially empowered masculinities has helped redress this theoretical lacuna (Connell, 1995), but the need to understand the similarities and differences between the sizeable minority of heterosexual men who perpetrate violence against women and the majority who do not remains (Hood-Williams, 2001). We know that most lethal violence against ex-partners is perpetrated by aggrieved men in the context of 'quarrels, revenge or a loss of temper' (Smith et al., 2011: 34); that men involved in other forms of crime are more likely to be violent to their partners (Walby and Allen, 2004); that women who date men involved in organized or gang-related forms of illegal violence are especially vulnerable (Firmin, 2011; Miller, 2008); and that abusers – like Moat – are often at their most abusive when their partners are pregnant and/or when their partners try to separate from them (Smith et al., 2011). Placed in these contexts, Moat's reaction to the news that Stobbart had a new partner – she had told him, misleadingly, that she was dating a police officer in the hope of deterring reprisals – was alarming but not all that unpredictable.

Bigger questions left unanswered

Given the multi-dimensional nature of the case, what it revealed about the limitations of the criminal justice system to contain the violence of men known to be dangerous, and the Coalition government's interest in the possibilities of a more actively responsible 'Big Society', one might reasonably have expected the media coverage after Moat's death to yield a more wide-ranging public debate than it did. How had Moat gotten away with such serious violence for so long? What can we learn from the sheer number of men and women who felt able to identify with Moat in spite – or perhaps in some cases also because – of his violence? Why does this country keep producing violent men who clearly need families much more than their families need them as fathers?

Alas, none of these questions were asked. Under pressure from groups representing women living with violence, the prime minister and champion of the Big Society David Cameron merely condemned Moat as a 'callous murderer', undeserving of public sympathy. He did not ask how a close knit Northumbrian community had produced a man like Raoul Moat, nor why some of its members stood by him – not just in the aftermath of the shootings – but over the many years during which he was abusing his partners. Six days after Moat's death the Home Secretary, Theresa May, did not even mention the case when she addressed the Women's Aid Federation on the subject of ending violence against women and girls. Instead, May accused the previous

Labour government of merely 'throw[ing] money' at the problem of violence against women, 'regardless of whether this was the best way to fix things' (May, 2010). From now on, May argued, success in this field would be judged in terms of whether 'more women have been helped, more abusers have been brought to justice and more attitudes have been changed' (May, 2010).

In purporting to rebalance the system in favour of victims, New Labour in government had scapegoated anti-social young people no less than the Conservatives before them had demonized 'yob culture'. But they also provided opportunities for campaigning groups to marshal public opinion in favour of criminal justice intervention and criminal law reform against particular kinds of crime. 'Hate crime' was a case in point, but violence against women is an exemplar *par excellence* of how Labour succeeded in appealing to many competing interest groups. As Toynbee and Walker note:

Labour moved against 'honour' killings. A new forced marriages unit was soon dealing with 5000 inquiries and 300 cases of forced marriage a year ... The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 made breaching a non-molestation order a criminal offence. The government planned 120 new specialist courts with staff trained to support victims; successful prosecutions increased, and cases collapsing when the victim withdrew through fear fell in number. (Toynbee and Walker, 2010: 174)

In the meantime – and potentially more to do with the declining proportion of younger adults in the general population than anything the government has done – crime rates fell, rates of domestic abuse following suit. Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, the overall prevalence of domestic abuse victims reported experiencing in the last year declined from 6% to 4% for men and from 8% to 7% for women (Smith et al., 2011: 73), continuing a trend that dates back to the mid-1990s (Dodd et al., 2004: 33), evident also in other Anglophone countries with ageing populations (Catalano, 2007; Phillips and Park, 2006). In the UK changes in homicide rates are numerically too small to reach reliable levels of statistical significance, but the general trend is in a similar direction. Since 2004 the number of women killed by partners, ex-partners or lovers, has begun to dip more often than not a little below the – nonetheless disconcerting – figure of two women a week (Table 1).

Within this context of a diminishing problem and multiple initiatives, the Coalition's policymakers in government undoubtedly felt under pressure to choose their points of distinction from Labour carefully. Attacking Labour for failing in areas where recent public reviews suggested shortcomings was the easy bit. Hence, the Coalition government – following the findings of the Stern review (2010) – reintroduced central funding for *pre-existing* Rape Crisis centres – as a means of supporting victims and reducing attrition in the prosecution process; an issue on which Theresa May campaigned while in

Table 1. Number of women killed per year by partners, ex-partners or lovers in the UK by year

<i>Year</i>	<i>2000/ 01</i>	<i>2001/ 02</i>	<i>2002/ 03</i>	<i>2003/ 04</i>	<i>2004/ 05</i>	<i>2005/ 06</i>	<i>2006/ 07</i>	<i>2007/ 08</i>	<i>2008/ 09</i>	<i>2009/ 10</i>
<i>Number of partner/ ex-partner homicides</i>	101	118	106	96	105	90	91	79	101	95

Source: Smith et al. (2011: 32).

opposition. The Coalition government also signalled its intention to act on the recommendations of Eileen Munro’s (2011a, b) review of child protection and the reduction in managerial targets and regulations it would propose.

Big cuts and their implications for victims

But it was not just bureaucracy that the Coalition government sought to cut. Munro’s (2011b) final report insists on the need for ‘sufficient provision of local early help services for children, young people and families’ (p. 10), the importance of joined up provision with services for adults (p. 138), and the importance of ‘engaging fathers’ in cases where domestic abuse is suspected (p. 178). Whether what remains of the statutory and third sectors will be big enough to deliver on these recommendations is open to question. In her speech to Women’s Aid, Theresa May (2010) assured her audience that the government was in no sense ‘withdrawing, leaving the voluntary sector to pick up the pieces’. Rather, for her the ‘women’s sector’ was to become ‘a model of the Big Society’ the Conservatives wished to build:

a society in which we all work together to address problems, conscious that government has a role to play but that it does not have all the answers, and recognising the role played by charities, voluntary groups and others alongside central and local government.

The devil, however, was in the detail of public financing, a subject on which neither May nor the Fawcett Society were able to secure significant concessions, despite open letters to the Chancellor, George Osborne (Dodd, 2010). While the Big Society philosophy of ‘localism’ shifted ‘power and decision making away from central government towards voluntary organisations, communities and individuals’ (Home Office, 2011: 14), local authority budgets were reduced so severely that councils had to decide between reducing basic

utility provision or terminating contracts for social and welfare oriented projects. As a consequence, an estimated £819 million was taken out of budgets for children's services, the cuts concentrated on youth services, early years and children's centres (Higgs, 2011).

Of course, it is the professionals in children's services that often make referrals to other frontline organizations that provide support to abused women. Some of these – like the Poppy Project and North Devonshire Women's Aid – are at imminent risk of closure. The government has promised more stable funding for Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors, but it is questionable how much this will compensate for capacity lost as third sector organizations fold and non-frontline posts go in social services, nursing and midwifery and the police. National charities can no longer fill the gaps, the NSPCC disbanding many of its local intervention projects. Those QUANGOs that once subsidized local initiatives have been either scrapped (i.e. the Women's National Commission) or rapidly downsized (i.e. the Equalities and Human Rights Commission).

Against this backcloth of contracting service provision, what needs to be kept in mind, however, is that the vast majority of women who experience physical or sexual violence from men still choose to cope with it largely alone. A disproportionate number of these are also coping on low incomes. Sam Stobbart and Marissa Reid were not alone in these respects. A third of women never report any of the domestic violence they experience; only 21% of victims say they have reported the worst assault they have experienced to the police. Telling friends, relatives and other women is much more common (Walby and Allen, 2004). We know that women who live in poverty are at much greater risk of domestic violence. In 2004, women whose household incomes were below £10,000 were three times more likely than women with household incomes above this threshold to live with domestic abuse (Walby and Allen, 2004). The highest risk of domestic violence is found among those living in the social rented sector (Walby and Allen, 2004: 79).

As the consequences of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review come into effect many more women are likely to fall into these categories. Women's mean incomes are on average 20% less than men's in almost every category of employment, except secretarial work and administration (Rogers, 2011). Currently, 22% of women have a persistent low income, compared to 14% of men (Fawcett Society, 2010). More women than men are on means-tested benefits; fewer women have savings they can draw upon in times of crisis; and many more women have to grapple with caring responsibilities and dependants through such crises. These inequalities can only deepen as: rates of unemployment among women escalate as a consequence of public sector job losses; the provision of social housing is drastically reduced; and the government introduces charges that separated parents will have to pay in order to be eligible to apply for child maintenance. Some commentators

Table 2. Revised estimates of the costs of domestic violence

Services	Costs in £ million for the year 2008
Criminal justice system	1261
Health care	1730
Social services	283
Housing and refugees	196
Civil legal services	387
Total	3856

Source: Adapted from Walby (2009: 8).

suggest that as much as seventy per cent of the revenue from increased taxation and benefit reductions proposed by the exchequer will come from women (Stratton, 2010). And as the poverty of women and children grows, so will the proportion of the population that are 'very vulnerable' to repeated experiences of domestic abuse (EHRC, 2010; Henry et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2009). Many abused women with children will face stark choices: staying with abusive partners or facing poverty as benefits, subsidized child-care, alternative housing, and secure employment opportunities diminish. In opposition, Theresa May and David Cameron pointed to the 'central role that gender inequality plays – both as a cause and a consequence of violence against women' (May, 2010, referring to Conservative Party, 2008). In the Coalition government the Conservative's commitment to gender equality appears to have become more muddled.

Staying tough: Will women's safety be improved by attempting to bring more abusers to justice?

None of this, however, is to deny that there is a case for redirecting spending on tackling domestic abuse away from the criminal justice system and into alternative strategies. In research which is usually used to justify expenditure on domestic abuse intervention, Sylvia Walby (2009) estimated the cost of domestic abuse to the criminal justice system as in excess of £1.2 billion in 2008, second only to the costs of health care for those injured by domestic violence, and seven times what is spent on refuge and housing provision for victims (Table 2). Rebalancing this spend could make a difference, but this is not exactly what is being proposed in the government's strategy to end violence against women and girls.

At present too much hope rests on the prospect of ensuring more 'abusers have been brought to justice' (May, 2010). The government's confidence

in its capacity to 'increase the number of offenders breaking out of a cycle of offending by ensuring the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes' is not explained in its *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls* (Home Office, 2011: 29); the rationale provided instead in the Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle* (Ministry of Justice, 2011). There, the presumption is that market competition will make criminal justice services work more effectively while offender payback schemes secure greater compliance. Victims, we are told, will 'benefit from services which are paid for directly out of the pockets of criminals' (Ministry of Justice, 2011: 9). Paradoxically, the same document reveals that 12% of prisoners have never had a job, 47% have no qualifications, 24% were in care as children, and at least 20% acknowledge the need for professional help with 'mental and emotional problems' (Ministry of Justice, 2011: 8).

In this context, one has to ask how likely it is that 'payback' will prove possible or effective with the general population of offenders. And this is not only because offenders are often highly disadvantaged, but also because it is doubtful as to whether the criminal justice system can become a joined up provider of justice, deterrence, rehabilitation and security, in the same way that supermarkets sit at the end of the supply chain of groceries. The issues are more complex still in relation to domestic abusers. Two decades ago Carol Smart (1989: 160) cautioned against the presumption, today shared by many policymakers and campaigning groups alike, that 'new law or more law will work better than the old law' when it comes to alleviating the violence experienced by women. Twenty years later, 'the law and the criminal justice system' are still widely considered to be the primary solutions to domestic abuse 'to the exclusion of exploring other options' (Walklate, 2008: 44).

In relation to domestic abuse, the predominant response to empowering victims has been a paradoxical one. Through information sharing processes, pro-arrest policing policies, and pro-prosecution decision-making, the system has generated a process whereby offenders can be brought to justice even if victims are too afraid or too reticent to press charges. While the deterrent value of presumptive approaches remains unproven (Sherman et al., 1991), both adult and child victims have complained that taking control of risky situations out of their hands – through information sharing that culminates in arrest with no guarantee of successful prosecution or intervention – ultimately exposes them to greater danger (Firmin, 2011; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000). As Walklate and Mythen (2011) have recently argued, proceeding in criminal justice without taking full account of women's perceptions of the risks they face and how these can best be managed makes life much more dangerous for the very people the system is supposed to protect.

This is not to deny that remarkable improvements in prosecution rates and conviction rates have been achieved (Cook et al., 2004; CPS, 2009). Rather it is only to note a) that successful prosecution is still not the predominant outcome for most victims and b) that conviction and effective intervention are not

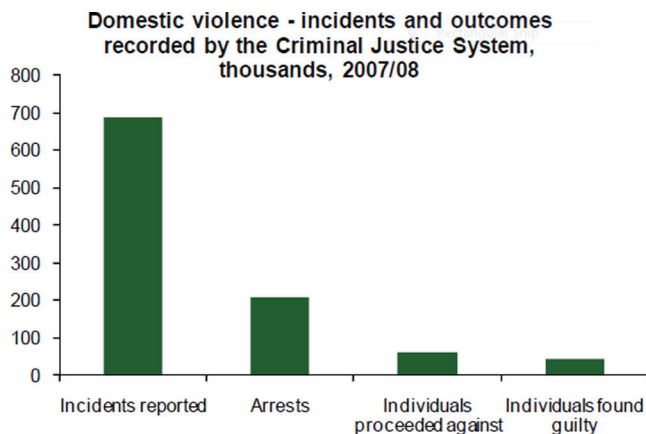


Figure 1. From Thompson (2010).

necessarily the same thing. In relation to prosecution, the picture painted by the audits of particular criminal justice agencies is one of piecemeal improvement. The Crown Prosecution Service's analysis of its own statistical returns suggests that of those cases passed to it by the police in 2008/9, 65% were proceeded with (CPS, 2009; EHRC, 2010). Seventy-two per cent of those charges proceeded against resulted in a conviction. These prosecution and conviction rates are higher than for many other crimes, but the fact remains that less than half ($.65 \times .72 = 46.8\%$) of those cases referred by the police to the CPS culminate in a conviction. Attrition in the system starts a stage back, however; many incidents are never referred by the police to prosecutors. Between 38% and 75% of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police are not recorded as crimes (HMIC and HMCPSI, 2004; Scottish Government, 2011), conversion rates seemingly higher in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. A recent study in Northumbria – the home of Raoul Moat – for example, found rapid attrition post-reporting; only 5% of incidents reported to the Northumbrian police culminating in an arrest, charge and conviction (Hester and Westmarland, 2006). Half of those offenders known to the police were also known to have abused their partners again within a three year follow up, one in five against a different partner. A parliamentary review conducted in 2010 suggested that other English and Welsh regions fare little better: 'In 2007/08, for instance, there were 686,000 reports of domestic violence to police, and 43,963 individuals were found guilty of domestic violence related offences' (Thompson, 2010: 1), i.e. there was one conviction for every 15–16 incidents reported to the police (Figure 1).

The trauma, inconvenience and potential expense of going through the process might, of course, be more palatable if those who are convicted generally see the error of their ways. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of this being the case. Firstly, not all of those who are convicted will be asked

to reflect upon what they have done. Most will receive fines or conditional discharges (Cook et al., 2004). A small minority go to prison where, if the sentence being served is long enough, opportunities to attend Healthy Relationship Programmes are sometimes available. A bigger minority receive community sentences that compel attendance on the domestic abuse perpetrator programmes accredited by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel. Research conducted in Scotland at the end of the 1990s (Dobash et al., 2000) and in the US over many years, shows that, at least in the short term, these kinds of community based programmes *have the potential* to reduce – not necessarily eradicate – re-offending, among certain groups of offenders (Gondolf and White, 2001). Such outcomes, however, are highly contingent on the availability of partner support services that are able to support women at risk of victimization by men on the programmes. They are also contingent upon ongoing development and improvement through thorough research evaluations and the responsiveness and skill of the practitioners undertaking the work with men. In Britain's probation services, few of these conditions were being widely met even before the cuts announced in May 2010. As Bullock et al. (2010: i–ii) surmise:

The study has shown that the women's safety worker can be somewhat marginalised, and information not routinely shared ... Delivering the group work elements of the programmes is challenging though and the manuals cannot guide the tutors in all the scenarios they may face ... [E]valuation measures were often not completed and those that were completed may not have been given due attention.

Hence, whether many or any of the IDAP (Integrated Domestic Abuse Programmes) that are now the standard probation response to perpetrators reduce re-offending against women in the longer term is still unproven. This is a major shortcoming given that research with social workers has revealed that such interventions are often regarded as the only viable disposal for perpetrators known to be living with adult victims and their children (Stanley et al., 2011). When this option is not viable, typically because no conviction has been sought or secured, 'violent men, who are fathers, slip through the legislative framework, particularly in relation to residence and contact issues, and post-separation violence' (Featherstone and Peckover, 2007: 184).

Raoul Moat was a case in point, but it seems highly unlikely that encouraging him to make financial recompense would have made much difference. Like many domestic abusers (Morran, 1999), Moat feared he had 'underlying problems' of his own. Three years before the shootings, Moat had asked social services to provide him with psychiatric support (Stanley et al., 2011). A documentary that interrogated the many tapes Moat had made about his battles with the police and social services, revealed that he

aspired to be a good father and a loving partner, but was unable to be so (Channel 4, 2010). Intense paranoia made it difficult for Moat to perceive the world from other people's perspectives. He was so convinced that people were out to get him that he surrounded his house in surveillance cameras. He regarded the social workers who tried to help him as critical and undermining; believed the foster carers looking after his daughter were coaching her not to talk to him; and accused the police officers that were trying to protect him from reprisals of stoking a feud with one of his enemies. When he left prison Moat posted the following messages on Facebook:

Just got out of the slammer to a totally fucked life...

Lost my business. Kids to s[ocial] services. Gonna lose my home and lost my mrs of nearly 6 years to a copper ... I'm not 21 and I can't rebuild my life, watch and see what happens. (Weaver and Carter, 2010)

As we now know, Moat had sought his own kind of payback for these losses: as he had long done. By trade, he was a professional bouncer, with a reputation as a 'straightener' who 'always' finished the fights he perceived others to have started (Channel 4, 2010).

Changing which attitudes?

How else might domestic abuse intervention be reoriented to the issues of power, gender and subjectivity that make some heterosexual men's relationships with women so dangerously crisis prone? The short-lived policy – *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls* (HM Government, 2009: 4) – launched towards the end of Gordon Brown's period in office to little acclaim – provided one opportunity for such a reorientation. The centrepiece of this policy was a schools-based agenda to 'support the promotion of healthy relationships, gender equality and non-violence' among children (HM Government, 2009: 20). Gender equality and violence against women 'were to be included in the school curriculum'; and schools were to be required to demonstrate to Ofsted that they understood violence against women and girls to be 'a safeguarding issue' that 'all staff know how to deal with' (p. 21). A multiply tiered system of intervention – involving schools, children's centres, youth offending teams, and child and adolescent mental health – was to focus on helping children and young people 'to develop healthy relationships, deal with their emotions and challenge the way in which some men and boys behave towards women and girls' (p. 6). Labour's 'prevention strategy' was to 'emphasise the part *all men* can and should play in taking a stand against violence' (p. 6, emphasis added).

The Coalition government's *Action Plan* also signals the importance of prevention, but is less ambitious with respect to what should happen to, or be done by and with, men (Home Office, 2011). It promises many inexpensive initiatives – a re-launched advertising and awareness campaign, a helpline, meetings with journalists and business – but little in terms of substantive preventative provision. The 'sexualization and commercialization of childhood' are to be independently reviewed, but unlike in the *Together* document, little is said about how sexuality, relationships and emotions are connected. Schools are to be given 'encouragement' to teach children about sexual consent and healthy relationships. But, perhaps because of the Free Schools agenda, the Coalition government is more reticent than its predecessor to proscribe curriculum content for schools. While the 'call to action' document promises to tackle the 'underlying causes of women's offending' (Home Office, 2011: 32), it seems that boys who are aggressive will be met less often with understanding and more often with confrontation and discipline.

Head teachers will be expected to take a strong stand against bullying – particularly prejudice-based bullying such as racism, sexism and homophobia. We will increase their authority to discipline pupils and maintain this discipline beyond the school gates. (Home Office, 2011: 9)

But discipline is not always lacking in the lives of violent men (Gadd, 2002). When Raoul Moat was a teenager, his stepfather attempted to discipline him physically. In response, Moat found a discipline of his own. He worked out incessantly, practised martial arts, and used steroids to enhance his physique. He transformed himself from a physically 'whispy' boy who suffered from asthma into an invulnerable looking hard man. This invulnerable appearance made him attractive to some of the women who dated him, even while it only barely concealed acute emotional insecurities (Channel 4, 2010).

Research shows that young men's attitudes about violence towards women are typically quite contradictory (McCarry, 2009). There is little reason to think older groups of men – including some domestic abuse perpetrators – are much different (Gadd, 2002; Hilton, 2000). Take, for example, Burton and Kitzinger's (1998) landmark study for the Zero Tolerance Trust. This survey of over 2,000 young people found that one in two young men and one in three young women thought it was okay to use some form of violence in at least one of 16 sets of circumstances. Over a third of boys conceded that they might personally hit a woman or force her to have sex. But fourth fifths of boys also answered 'no' when asked specifically whether it was okay to hit a woman and a third of young men answered that violence was unacceptable in all 16 of the circumstances specified in the questionnaire. When Burton and Kitzinger explored these findings further they found what study after study has reported since: most boys think that violence is wrong at least until sexual

infidelity is entered into the equation. Thereafter, violence towards women becomes comprehensible to many, and more justifiable to some especially if placed with the context of a 'fight' (Burman and Cartmel, 2005; Lombard, 2011). Raoul Moat certainly thought this way, as did some of the men who wrote notes of support to him on Facebook. But many of these men would probably also agree with what Burton and Kitzinger's participants reported in focus groups: most boys and girls have little doubt that violence against women is 'cowardly' and 'unmanly', while some young men also conceive of themselves as both 'under pressure to have sex' and 'victims of their own sexuality' (Burton and Kitzinger, 1998: 42).

Unravelling the relationship between attitudes – which are invariably contradictory – and questions of vulnerability and sexuality is therefore crucial to both intervention work and challenging heterosexual masculinity more generally. Given this, the Conservatives are right to assume that effective sex education and domestic abuse prevention are one in the same thing. But it may be less that the premature sexualization of girls needs more attention, and more that boys' expectations about sex and dependency need greater scrutiny. Research evaluations of preventative education programmes in the UK and US suggest that schools can do much to change the way most young people think about their own intimate relationships (Henderson and Reid-Howie Associates, 2002; Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Jaycox et al., 2006). In the US some studies also show that educational interventions can reduce the prevalence of dating violence (Foshee et al., 1998). In the UK, however, there is still a need to develop programmes that are responsive to boys' understandings of violence, relationships and sexuality. This is particularly so with respect to the minority of boys evaluation research reveals to be unreceptive to this kind of curriculum based learning. We currently know too little about these young men, but it would not be unreasonable to presume that their number disproportionately includes many of those who perpetrate the dating violence around a fifth of teenage girls in the UK experience from boyfriends and partners (Barter et al., 2009). Nor is it improbable that they include those exposed to the catalogue of risk factors longitudinal studies have shown correlate with becoming a violent offender in later life: anti-social behaviour problems, parental violence, conduct disorders, mental health, and drink and drug problems (Moffitt et al., 2001).

What needs to be better grasped in relation to the attitudes of these young men, however, is that the prejudices they sometimes articulate – whether sexist, racist or homophobic – can also be at least superficially protective, self-affirming, or defensive reactions to insecurities and home truths that are too painful to confront (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). Children with difficult home lives may have particular reasons for feeling more insecure than others. Some boys who have lived with violence, for example, find it easier to blame victims for their victimization, and/or women for provoking men's violence than face up to their own powerlessness to

intervene. Often children living with domestic abuse feel anxious, culpable and confused (Gorin, 2004; Hyden, 2009; Morley and Mullender, 1994; Mullender et al., 2002). Sometimes they are encouraged by abusive adults to partake in it. Often children are overcome with feelings of loss with respect to relationships, property and pets that either have been destroyed by violence, or have to be abandoned when refuge is sought (Stalford et al., 2003). Boys in particular are likely to be more reluctant than girls to speak to professionals about domestic abuse, and some feel marginalized by the support that is offered to their mothers (Gorin, 2004; Mullender et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2009) – justifiably so given that few refuges for women allow mothers to bring adolescent boys into safe accommodation with them (Worrall et al., 2008). Ultimately, some boys who have lived with abuse find it easier to identify with the apparent invulnerability of an abusive father or father figure than to empathize with a mother who appears depressed and unable to cope, however understandable such reactions are (Gadd, 2003; Featherstone and Peckover, 2007).

Of course, it is also because we – as a society – tend to expect women to take primary responsibility for the care of children that many young men direct their anger at women when such care is not forthcoming. This was very much the case for Raoul Moat. As a child Raoul and his brother Angus – otherwise known as ‘Angry’ and ‘Anguish’ to his friends – did not benefit from loving, stable and secure parenting (Channel 4, 2010; Edemariam, 2010). The boys were ‘passed from pillar to post’ as their mother – who was hospitalized for mental health problems – repeatedly lost interest in them (Channel 4, 2010). Raoul, who never knew who his father was, invented a fantasy which compensated for both this troubling omission and his tacit awareness of the difficulty he had in getting along amicably with other people. He told his peers his infant years had been spent with his father in an idyllic part of rural France and that French was his first language (Channel 4, 2010). Before he shot himself dead, Raoul Moat confronted this fantasy, telling the police: ‘I’ve no dad and no one cares about me’ (Brown, 2010). His mother had told the media that he would be ‘better off dead’, justifying her comments by saying that several years prior Raoul had pointed his fingers at her as if they were a gun.

Rethinking men’s violence; engaging with vulnerability and dependency

No-one knows for sure how best to undo the damage done to children with such emotionally deprived backgrounds. But several things would seem critical in relation to adolescent men. First and foremost, there is no escaping the need to interrogate the meanings sex holds for younger groups of men, and why sexual propriety over particular women becomes perceived by a sizeable

minority, if not always fully consciously, as something that when compromised represents a devastating loss of self worth, justification enough to excuse violence ordinarily deemed unmanly. If domestic abuse education is to become part of sex education, then the curriculum must transcend issues of consent, safe sex and/or sexual orientation, to also address questions of emotional development, vulnerability and dependency: the need for care and the capacity to give it; the substance of intimate relating that makes it alluring as well as unsettling (Albanesi, 2010).

Second, there is no escaping the need to work much more closely with those young men whose dependency needs are acute – whether because of loss, neglect, or maltreatment in their home lives, or because of direct experiences of violence. This work needs to take place before these dependency needs are buried along the developmental pathways taken to adulthood. Unfortunately, many of those young men who behave aggressively – the ‘yobs’, ‘hoodies’ and ‘ASBO kids’ politicians routinely condemn – are also more often than not children in need of protection. And, as Munro (2011a: 43) points out, children in need of protection are, however threatening they may seem in certain contexts, likely also to be:

very distressed and frightened, needing very sensitive skills in creating a level of trust where the child is willing to speak. The emotional impact of this work can also be very painful, making workers aware of how terrible some children’s lives are.

The delivery of this painful yet critical work cannot simply be left to market providers in criminal justice. There is a real need to make space for children who have lived with violence to talk openly about conflicts their parents have deemed ‘private’ without risk of reprisals or unforeseen consequences (Firmin, 2011). A recent study of men referred to treatment interventions by child protection services revealed that, having witnessed an apology from fathers who had been violent, some young people began to feel ‘more secure and less torn’ and less alone in the knowledge that whatever their behaviour ‘their parents loved and were interested in them’ (Westmarland et al., 2010: 14). It made them feel less prone to being caught up in a similar cycle; confident in the knowledge that ‘violence is wrong’. For the ‘teenage boys’ whose fathers were involved in this project, more ‘positive interactions with girlfriends’ followed, while for ‘teenage girls’, ‘seeking more equal relationships’ became a priority (Westmarland et al., 2010: 14).

Conclusion

In this paper I have charted the development of domestic abuse policy between May 2010 and June 2011, a period in which the UK witnessed one of the

most high profile domestic abuse cases pass almost without recognition as such. During this same period much of the infrastructure designed to tackle and prevent domestic abuse outside the criminal justice system began to be dismantled in anticipation of cost-cutting reform designated necessary to the advent of the 'Big Society'. I have argued that while there is good reason to be sceptical about the extent to which the criminal justice system can deliver an end to violence against women and children, this is unlikely to be rectified significantly by the new emphasis on payback in criminal justice or discipline in schools, the symbolism of which resonates rather too comfortably with the reasons some men – like Raoul Moat – give for exacting violence on women whose behaviour presents an affront to them. Current responses to the financial deficit risk increasing the proportion of women and children in the general population who are very vulnerable to violence.

In the longer term preventative intervention has a greater chance of reducing violence against women and girls, but the question remains as to how to reorient investment in this direction when the need to undertake crisis intervention work is unrelenting. However this reorientation is achieved it remains crucial that prevention is conceived, not merely as a response to a lawless minority or the correction of the prejudiced, but as an engagement with expressions of masculinity that are inextricably bound to young men's expectations of relationships, sexual propriety, and the mesh of insecurities and doubts that underlie these. Such preventative engagements need to transcend the temptations of political elites to distance themselves from potential perpetrators, as if they share none of their attitudes or values. They need also to recognize that some men have more reasons than others to perceive violence as an acceptable response to crisis, whether financial or personal. Learning how to see the connections between everyday violence and the exceptional behaviour of men like Raoul Moat is part of this challenge and one which needs to be embraced in policy and practice as much as academic research. In this context, helping young people to appreciate the perspectives of others when their own dependency needs are clouded by sexual – and sexualized – desires and anxieties is much more likely to be effective than getting tough. Such an approach takes more political nerve and greater practitioner skill, but is crucial for young people whose home lives are lacking in love and care, violent, or marred by experiences of loss, insecurity, and humiliating deprivations. As the case of Raoul Moat illustrated powerfully, this kind of learning needs to filter into work with young men who are already engaging in violence and believe they are not cared for. Such an approach is nothing short of critical with those young men who learn – often in the harshest of circumstances – to 'look after themselves' by keeping others in their place; young men who are typically nowhere near 'big enough' in psychological terms to come to terms with their own vulnerabilities, and who find it less threatening to project them out as blame and violence on to the women and children upon whom they are most emotionally dependent.

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