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'Soft' Policing

The Collaborative Control of Anti-Social Behaviour

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Series Editor's Preface

In this book you will learn a lot about the multitude of powers used in response to anti-social behaviour, not only about the Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) and the Acceptable Behaviour Contract, but also about the political and social context in which decisions about responses to crime are made. ASBOs were favoured because they provided an opportunity to intervene early and in theory provided a support-oriented philosophy, helping young people to adopt better behavioural traits. At the same time they represented a less severe response than had been in evidence under New Labour. You will read about some of the real problems in making ASBOs work. These include offenders who saw them as a badge of honour, resentment against agencies (especially the police) for the role played in their management, the families of those subject to ASBOs who suffered eviction from their homes, and mothers who suffered intimidation at the hands of their offspring. ASBOs had their appeal, but they were not an unqualified good.

The author spent two years attending case conference panels and has produced an ethnographic study, looking at referrals of those up to 18 years of age who might have multiple needs requiring the involvement of a variety of experts, albeit with the limited engagement of mental health services. Ethnography provides the methodological framework; the work of Goffman guides the theoretical interpretation of what was evaluated and found, while case studies provide a means of reporting the findings.

As the author notes, just as welfare agents have increasingly become agents of control, so the police have become engaged in welfare issues and this makes for some interesting partnership working. Initially, the police saw this as a challenge to their authority, but a variety of influences eased a transition to a less inherently conflictual way of making decisions, including the generation of trust between individuals, the use of humour, and group work. From Goffman we learn about 'offensive face work' techniques and 'dramaturgical discipline'. There have been problems and contradictions. For example, some of the ways girls were treated were problematic in terms of castigation based on class and gender. Also, the police role involved actively chaperoning young people around to various appointments; while supportive, it prevented these

young people from making their own decisions and held back their opportunity to learn and progress.

This book also provides important insights to the subject of police culture, and Daniel McCarthy has much to say about the impact of culture on behaviour. Critiquing the somewhat rigid interpretations of some previous research, he highlights instead a variety of different influences, including the fluid nature of police work, as well as the rather varied roles that exist in policing. Policing is characterised by a variety of very different cultures, some of which are conducive to, and indeed justify support for, 'soft' policing. So while the macho image associated with much police work clearly exists, it tells only a part of the story. This is a significant point; indeed, policing has always placed an emphasis on human engagement as well as crime-fighting and all that this implies. In this book we are reminded of the very real skill-sets needed to make the softer approach work, not just in delivering action for those with ASBOs but in managing the contexts in which decisions are made.

Daniel McCarthy's book is timely. As he notes, we are entering a new era in which there are challenges to establishing trust relations between agencies. His work invites consideration of a range of issues that are likely to be important if what emerges is to be effective and if we are to make proper use of the lessons from the past.

Martin Gill

Acknowledgements

This book started to take shape in 2004 following a short period spent working for a local authority during the early implementation of the anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood policing agendas. My role, amongst other things, was to conduct small-scale research projects to help identify local crime and disorder issues. During this time, I became closely acquainted with the rather messy and complex terrain of local politics and practices of multi-agency working, especially the individual professionals and their various beliefs and values. Although this book has taken almost a decade to come to fruition, these early experiences provided the basis for many of the ideas found in it.

I would like to thank my supervisors at the University of Surrey, Martin Innes, who supervised my MSc work, Nigel Fielding and Paul Johnson, who supervised my PhD. My PhD cohort made life a very collegial and enjoyable affair. In making the step into the big wide world of academia, colleagues in the Department of Sociology have been great at helping me make the transition as a member of the faculty; many of the ideas explored in this book have been developed or revised as a result of conversations with them. Beyond Surrey, my thanks also go to Megan O'Neill and Carlie Goldsmith, who provided some insightful guidance on particular chapters of the book. The series editor, Martin Gill, and the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript also deserve my thanks for their useful comments.

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Some of the ideas contained in this book were explored in articles published in peer-reviewed journals including *The British Journal of Criminology*, *Critical Social Policy*, *Policing and Society* and *Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

Finally, my parents deserve some recognition for supporting my unconventional career choice of an academic, including its anti-social tendencies and bouts of excessive narcissism. As a sociologist I would blame the institutional environment, but in these neo-liberal times I have to concede some degree of individual responsibility.