

## Reviewing Intimacy Dr Jacqui gabb

### CCIG Working Paper

'[I]ntimacy is at the centre of meaningful personal life in contemporary societies' (Jamieson 1998: 1)

This paper aims to map conceptualisations of intimacy and how the 'interiority of family life' (Smart 2004: 1048) has been evinced in sociological research. As Lynn Jamieson says, intimacy is at the centre – or may be more pertinently stated – the literal and metaphorical *heart* of contemporary family inter-personal relationships. In this paper I map out the emergence of intimacy as an area of academic interest, and in particular, how this work has shaped the field of family studies. I have not traced the historical emergence of patterns of intimacy, firstly because Lynn Jamieson has already completed this endeavour and I could add nothing to this (Jamieson 1998), but secondly because I wanted to focus on the ways that intimacy has been conceptualised in and through academic literature. I do not claim this to be an exhaustive review of all literature, the enormity of such a task makes it impossible, especially given the significant increase in studies of intimacy in the past decade and the multidisciplinary interest in the topic, most notably in the area of self-help books on intimacy and sexuality in couple relationships. It is also important to acknowledge other limitations of scope. I have only included sociologically-informed work that is focused around Western culture, and especially UK and US societies. Furthermore, I engage with debates grounded in the British sociological tradition more than those of the US. That is to say I conceptualize families as 'spheres of intimacy and interaction... where the meanings attributed to and generated by relationships are constructed by family members (in a cultural and historical context) rather than in relation to naturalistic reproductive and/or socialization functions' (Smart 2004: 1046). I refer to both the meta-theorization of intimacy and to (predominantly small-scale) qualitative research of interpersonal relationships. In doing so I aim to map debate in the field rather than test out meta-theory, although I do concur with researchers who point to the incompleteness of theorizing that does not account for the messiness and everyday (gendered and generational) materialities of family life. What I have endeavoured to achieve is to characterize key interventions and themes within sociological debate.

In the following paper, I have engaged with debate around four critical junctures:

- Intimacy is bound up with sexuality and (hetero)sexual relationships and shapes the affective functioning of families (pp.2-5)
- The democratisation of interpersonal relationships has led to transformations of intimacy (pp.5-15)
- Intimacy and family relationships are embodied practices which are experienced in particular spaces, largely in the home (pp.15-22)
- Private intimate relationships and family practices are shaped by, and in turn shape, public institutions (pp.22-28)

By drawing attention to these particular themes, I do not suggest that after each 'debate' consensus was achieved and critical interventions started anew; remnants of earlier discussions typically rumble on and resurface in subsequent arguments at later times. Moreover, while the ordering of the four themes is generally-speaking chronological, this does not mean that each debate is contained; the themes inform each other in a dialogue, albeit a fractious one in some instances.

### **Intimacy and Affective Function**

From the outset, a main aim of the *Researching Families* project was to problematize the concept of 'intimacy'. Notwithstanding the importance of this aim, a review of the literature on intimacy shows that the concept of intimacy has been the source of some considerable debate in the social sciences, if not outright controversy, for some time. The 'problem' of defining and studying intimacy as a discrete category of human experience in its own right emerged as a major issue in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At this time, intimacy was variously defined as comprising elements of affection (Berger and Calabrese 1975), altruism and solidarity (Levinger and Snoek 1972), a heightened sense of the importance of the relationship (Huston and Burgess 1979), interpersonal openness (Altmann and Taylor 1973) and commitment (Huston and Burgess 1979); an important dimension of relationships between adults (Walker and Thompson 1983). Writing at this time on the topic of intimacy was often situated in the context of sex research (Kinsey, Pomeroy et al. 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy et al. 1953; Masters and Johnson 1966; Masters and Johnson 1970). The coupling of intimacy with sexuality and sexual/sensual relationships was not unpicked, with authors such as Ronald Mazur talking about 'creative intimacy as a means to celebrate polymorphous sensuality' – an ethic of 'sex for enjoyment and interpersonal enrichment' (Mazur 1973). Analysis of intimacy and family lifestyles examined emergent 'alternative moralities' and 'family pluralism' through the lens of changing patterns of sex, sex roles and family life: 'The need for intimacy and enduring commitment has outlasted the social institutions that provided for them in the past, and their replacements have not yet been invented' (Skolnick and Skolnick 1974: 18). Debate between Mary Jo Deegan and Joseph Kotarba (Deegan and Kotarba 1980) focused critical attention on the (theoretical and relational) interdependency of intimacy and sexuality, likewise the ethics and wherewithal of researching such a sensitive topic. Kotarba (1979) studied intimacy among visitors and prisoners during prison visits. Deegan criticized Kotarba for his apparent assumption that intimacy is something which can be observed and determined by the researcher as either present or absent in episodes of interaction; that it is primarily associated with relations between a heterosexual couple; and that it is distinct from familial (presumably non-sexual) relationships.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that these comments were made against the historical background of attitudes toward same-sex intimacy wherein attention was primarily focused on the causal factors which shape female sexual socialization (Estep, Burt et al. 1977) and the pathologizing of

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, a recent study of inmates and their partners adopted a similar focus conjoining sexuality and intimacy (Comfort, M., O. Grinstead, et al. (2005). "'You Can't Do Nothing in This Damn Place": Sex and Intimacy Among Couples With an Incarcerated Male Partner." *Journal of Sex Research* 42(1): 3-12.)

homosexuality, especially in psychoanalytically-informed literature, as troubled if not abnormal forms of self and identity (see Weeks 1986).

This type of sex/uality approach to the study of intimacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s laid the foundation for the sustained focus on the emotional functioning of heterosexual relationships in general and marriage in particular. In this historical context, the study of intimacy concentrated on a variety of internal and external factors affecting the marital relationship, for instance, the influence of perceived competition between heterosexual partners (Sanders and Suls 1982), the intensification of intimacy levels afforded by the progression of courtship rituals (King and Christensen 1983), the connections between marital conflict, decreased sexual desire and female dominance/male passivity (Knupp and Georgiopoulos 1982), and social attitudes toward extramarital sexual permissiveness (Saunders and Edwards 1984). Though special attention at this time was starting to be devoted to the importance of sharing (hurt) feelings between marital partners in the context of clinical therapy as a primary dimension of intimacy (L'Abate and Sloan 1984), this thread concerning the importance of mutual disclosure as a fundamental site for constructing intimacy would not be picked up again as a foundational principle in contemporary sociology until the early 1990s, most notably in the work of Lynn Jamieson (1998) and Anthony Giddens (1992), work which I return to in more detail later on. Throughout much of the 1980s the emphasis in studies of intimacy typically remained on the construction of sexual identities, proclivities and personal transmission of intimate behaviours through individual familial contact investigated using predominantly qualitative methods. At the same time, contributions of psychologists and sex therapists in the scholarly literature on intimacy did not preclude references to the critical structural frameworks of the Marxian social models, specifically the commodification and fetishisation of human sexuality in modern consumer culture (Baker 1983), and the ideological conformity of the family to a capitalist mode of production (Zaretsky 1976). These themes have been extended to include contemporary forms of mediated intimacy in recent studies that examine the influence of internet technology on intimate family relationships (for example Gonyea 2004). In the more recognisably sociological theoretical framework, the growing diffuseness of the individual's conceptualization of intimacy was more overtly read back into socio-cultural discourses of unequal power dichotomies operative between men and women within a patriarchal and capitalist social order, for example Saunders (1984) and Zaretsky (1976); analysis which has been added to in more recent studies of heterosexual love and sexual relationships (Larson and Allgood 1987; Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Jackson 1993; Duncombe and Marsden 1996; Heller and Wood 1998; Langford 1999; McCabe 1999). In this general context, external social factors such as crime, violence, warfare, nationalism, inequalities and child abuse have continued to be identified as major issues in the study of pathological intimacy and (lack of) interpersonal affectivity (Hudson and Ward 1997; Riggs, Byrne et al. 1998; Whiffen and Judd 1999).

Among the early literature there were a couple of notable exceptions to the focus on (hetero)sexual relationships as central to the study of intimacy, namely Susan Shaul and Jane Bogle's *Toward Intimacy: Family Planning and*

*Sexuality Concerns of Physically Disabled Women* (Shaul and Bogle 1978) and Stevi Jackson's *Childhood and Sexuality* (1982). Because of the scope and importance of Jackson's study, even though it did not address the concept of intimacy per se, it does warrant further attention. Apprehension over the utterance of childhood and sexuality in the same breath, as something other than an occasion of abuse, crisis and/or risk, remains undiminished. Jackson was fully aware of the 'seismic sensitivity' (Weeks 1986) of her research: To write about children and sex is to bring together two sets of issues that are highly emotive, that readily provoke moral outrage and righteous indignation' (Jackson 1982: 1). Few subjects are as universal to shared and ordinary life experience as the intimate, erotic interpersonal experiences which occur in childhood, albeit that consensus quickly dissipates over their formative influence on later adult sexuality (Estep, Burt et al. 1977). Paradoxically, to this day, there is little sociologically-informed research which tackles this area. *Childhood and Sexuality* (1982) thus represents a quite remarkable engagement in the study of children's ordinary and non-abusive experiences and understandings of sex/uality in the context of their everyday family lives. Jackson focuses on how both childhood and sexuality are socially constituted, and by extension the socio-cultural constructedness of what might be generically termed 'childhood sexuality', however construed. The crux of her thesis lies in its challenge to the widespread cultural understanding of childhood as a stage in the physiological life course and sexuality as a facet of human reproduction. According to this way of thinking, children are children because of their chronological age or stage of physical development; similarly, individuals are sexual or gendered in conformity with their physiological (normally genital) presentation. In other words, the nexus for understanding childhood and sexuality is via their functional link to the human reproductive system, a scientific narrative which is quantified by the rather elegant economy of two mutually exclusive genders and/or sexes, no more and no less. Thus Jackson explodes the myth linking childhood and sexuality with biology or the biological discourses of 'nature'. In its place, Jackson (1982) and later Jeffrey Weeks (1986) and Lynn Jamieson (1998) develop the theme of the constructedness of childhood, sexuality and intimacy by showing how the patterning and understanding of these experiences vary between cultural groups as well as being historically changeable within the same group over time.

By the mid-1980s, the conception scope on the subject of intimacy began to broaden, increasingly taking in to account the chronological transmission of intimate practices within intergenerational family relationships (Thompson, Clark et al. 1985). This (re)conceptualization of intimacy was founded on the work on intergenerational phenomena of child socialization and psychological development carried out during the 1970s, notably in the work of Bengtson and Kuypers (see Thompson, Clark et al. 1985) and continued throughout the 1990s and beyond (for example Scheffler and Naus 1999; Terrell, Terrell et al. 2000; Dorr 2001). This life course approach to the study of intimacy places the emphasis on continuity within the extended family as opposed to the functioning of individual, normally marital, relationships within the 'nuclear' family. The disciplinary perspective afforded by psychology quickly opened the way for the interrogation of adult intimate/sexual identities and behaviours

linked to parental/intergenerational influences, for instance, on phenomena like same-sex intimacy. For example Alfred Heilbrun's (1984) study of how girls' strong identification with a father figure results in diminished heterosexual orientation among adult females. Such psychological inquiries into lesbian and gay sexuality extended to cover issues such as same-sex parenting (Kirkpatrick, Smith et al. 1981; Golombok, Spencer et al. 1983; Harris and Turner 1985) and indeed the primacy of homosexual adult relationships themselves as the anchor to family life (Schreurs and Buunk 1996). Early sociologically-informed accounts of same-sex parenting (Hanscombe and Forster 1981) explored how lesbian parents balanced their sexual and maternal lives, but subsequent additions to the field tended to shift the focus away from intimacy and affective relationships and onto gender and sexual identity (Lewin 1993; Dunne 1999). Only recently has attention been drawn back to love, sex and intimacy in same-sex family analysis (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001; Gabb 2004a). This decentring of the study of intimacy, away from heterosexual partnerships, adds another dimension to the study of intimacy and families and is an area that I return to later on in the next section 'transformations of intimacy' and through analysis of 'families of choice'.

It is arguable that the shift of attention away from the myopic focus on adult intimacy and heterosexuality within marriage accomplished by the study of gay and lesbian intimacy in intergenerational family research has led to a greater critical awareness of the influence of factors such as equity, autonomy and emotional inter-dependence—what has come to be known as the 'democratization thesis' (see Skolnick 1992; Giddens 1999; Plummer 2003). This perspective challenges the previous concentration on the impact of the successful functioning of macro-phenomena like socialization patterns and structural gender roles frameworks as central themes affecting levels of satisfaction within intimate relationships (Schreurs and Buunk 1996). The democratization of intimacy thesis builds on the idea that a genuinely reflexive attitude toward the study of family is needed. This situates families as ongoing series of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996); family members are not the passive recipients of social structures or functional patterns in 'doing' family but rather actively contribute to how these macro-conceptualizations of the family are inherited and shaped for future generations (Silva and Smart 1999; McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2003; Williams 2004). Thus what has been emphasized is the interpretive and *discursive* nature of family life (for example Gubrium and Holstein 1990) whereby family is construed as an ongoing and interactive process which is contingent upon the mutual understandings of family members and is moreover contingent and negotiable rather than normatively defined (Finch and Mason 1993). These ideas are central to the 'detraditionalization' and 'transformations of intimacy' theses.

### **The Detraditionalization of Intimacy**

Whether it is as a conceptual framework or a theoretical model to argue against, detraditionalization and democratization theses provide the backdrop to much contemporary debate on intimacy and affective relationships. Discussion in this area is so central to contemporary analyses of intimacy and family relationships that rather than simply scope the relevant literature in this field I will unpack key debates and areas of contestation in some detail. While

opinions diverge on the extent and contemporaneousness of transformations of intimacy, there is general consensus that since the 1960s there have been changes in patterns of intimate relationships – notably romantic-sexual partnerships – across much of the Western world (Jamieson 1998; Budgeon and Roseneil 2004; Williams 2004; Gross 2005). Lone parent families (Silva 1996), step-parent families (McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2003), friends as family (Nardi 1992), families of choice (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001), blended families (Portrie and Hill 2005), brave new families (Stacey 1996) all testify to the reconfiguration of traditional forms of intimacy and interpersonal relationships, while paradoxically reinforcing the underlying status of families as a social unit (Morgan 1996; Weston 1997) in which affect and emotions reside. The professed changes in patterns of intimacy have been understood by social theorists in a variety of ways: through the role of social movements notably second wave feminism (Castells 1997), globalization and the liberalization of attitudes (Giddens 1992), individualization (Beck and Beck-Gersheim 1995), structured through late capitalism (Illouz 1997; Hochschild 2003), a consequence and constituent of postmodernity (Bauman 2000). In this section of the paper I want to focus attention onto Giddens' ideas of 'transformations of intimacy', not because I give greater credence to this conceptual framework above and beyond others cited, but because his ideas stirred up an intensity of debate that teases out many interesting points that cut across wider discussions on the detraditionalization of intimacy.

Anthony Giddens suggests that transformations of intimacy have occurred across contemporary Western society and that these transformations reflect a 'wholesale democratisation of the interpersonal domain' (Giddens 1992: 3). He bases his argument around contemporary therapeutic ideologies which he claims have fostered a culture of self fulfilment by which individuals judge the merits of intimate relationships. Giddens' argument is that the separation of sex from reproduction has brought about the possibility of the 'pure relationship' – a relationship wherein men and women are equals. Giddens sees the 'pure relationship' as part of a generic restructuring of intimacy' (Giddens 1991: 58). It has replaced familial ties of obligation: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver' (1991: 6). As such, when relationships cease to 'deliver', couples separate, by mutual consent. For Giddens, the 'liberation' of sex from the affective and caring stranglehold of reproduction represents 'a revolution in female sexual autonomy' (Giddens 1992: 28). Freed from the needs of reproduction, sexuality is decentred, an idea which leads to flexibility and choice, or in Giddens' terms 'plastic sexuality' (1992: 2). Advancing his argument one step further, he points to the prevalence of 'episodic sexuality' among gay men suggesting that their polyamorous practices and/or intimate encounters sever 'the connections which link sexuality, self-identity and intimacy' (1992: 146). The individual is a 'reflexive subject'; someone who is able to move within and create a 'narrative of self' (1992: 75). In the wake of Giddens' notions of the 'pure relationship' and 'transformations of intimacy', much has been made in the theoretical literature of the sociological triad of breakdown, democratisation and continuity as foundational to the study of family intimacy (Gillies 2003). Additionally, Zygmunt Bauman's (2003) extension of his archetypal postmodern metaphor of *liquidity* to the realm of intimacy and

interpersonal relationships has emphasised the underlying insecurity, frailty and impermanence of the bonds of love in modern societies, and the subsequent need for people to take a more active role in managing these uncertainties. As in the case of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gersheim (1995), the stress in the theoretical literature is now put on risk, anxiety and uncertainty as at the heart of contemporary experiences of intimate relationships, primarily as a consequence of the fragmentation of traditional family structures issuing from the escalation of individualism in modern culture. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gersheim suggest that in the cultural context of serial adult-sexual relationships it is children who have become the reliable source of love (Beck and Beck-Gersheim 1995), something which can adversely affect the adult-adult relationship (Beck-Gersheim 1999). Research has highlighted the increasingly 'democratic' and participative nature of family intimacy (Passmore 1998) and the ethos of negotiation and disclosure between parents and children (for example Laurenceau, Barrett et al. 1998). This 'democratisation' is typically seen as an outcome of greater parental anxiety over child welfare, new patterns of family communication, changes to the constitution of the modern extended family network, and for William Cosaro (2005) changes to standards of medical care and fluctuations in the birth rate.

Critics of the detraditionalization thesis do not reject the idea of changes in the affective patterning of relationships per se, instead they tend to claim that proponents have overstated their case (Jamieson 1999; Smart and Shipman 2004; Gross 2005). For example Neil Gross contests whether individuals and groups who live outside the (heteronormative) centre do in fact become 'arch inventors' of contemporary patterns of intimacy (Weeks, Donovan et al. 1999), pointing to the proliferation of wedding-like ceremonies and the wedding industry (Lewin 2002), which in the UK in particular is targeting the 'pink pound' on the back of recent civil partnership legislation, as evidence that the ideal romantic-sexual couple remains powerful in the cultural imaginary. Gross cites examples across a breadth of research projects and survey data to demonstrate how the tradition of marriage persists as a 'guiding cultural ideal' for much of the U.S. population, and the ways that patriarchal beliefs and practices remain commonplace as do traditional understandings and practices of sexuality and romantic love (Gross 2005: 297-301). He says that while there is some evidence that 'regulative traditions' such as 'lifelong, internally stratified marriage' is in decline, this 'does not mean that reflexivity, understood as unbounded agency and creativity, has rushed in to fill the void.' He claims that this lack of momentum in radical social change is due to the prevalence and embeddedness of 'meaning-constitutive traditions'. 'Meaning-constitutive traditions establish limits on what may be expressed to oneself and others in a situation, influencing the thinkability of particular acts and projects' (Gross 2005: 295-296). Gross argues that the detraditionalization of intimacy is 'underspecified and empirically problematic', points which are echoed and extended by others, many of which come from a feminist standpoint. In a critical engagement with Giddens' ideas of the 'pure relationship' and 'plastic sexuality', Lynn Jamieson argues that he marginalises childhood and parental relationships and effaces the classed, gendered and ethnic dimensions of parenting and socialisation in the material

and embodied context of everyday family life (Jamieson 1998). The reflexive process (self as project) advanced by Giddens is said to lead towards self-obsessed individualism – a 'luxury' from which many are debarred. Jamieson has been extremely critical of arguments around 'transformations of intimacy', arguing that Giddens' patterning of (s)elective love in contemporary relationships remains an ostensibly theoretical account of interpersonal-democratisation. It obscures the relational basis which underlies most people's affective lives. Jamieson suggests that there may be public stories of intimacy in circulation which emphasize disclosing intimacy and reciprocity as structural principles of affective relationships, but she reminds us that 'there is no clear evidence that disclosing intimacy is increasingly the key organizing principle of people's lives' (Jamieson 1998: 2). There is a complex relationship between stories and lived experience. People incorporate and recycle public stories into their own narratives of self but the authentic self and the story of self are often separable (1998: 12).

Jamieson maps the historical emergence of contemporary family relationships, highlighting the shift in emphasis on the study of personal or primary relationships from the structural analysis of relational bonds to the more qualitative perspective of personal intimacy based on affective and communicative disclosure. In the early twentieth century parent-child relationships were not typically experienced as emotionally intense (Jamieson and Tonybee 1990). 'Good mothering' was characterized in functionalist terms; a job which needed to be done and for which women were 'naturally' suited. Proponents of functionalism, such as Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), believed that women's move from the workplace into the home was part of an evolutionary outcome, which was necessitated by the increasingly complex basis of society. In the 1940s-1960s Talcott Parsons extended such thinking arguing that effective childrearing depended on specialized skills, skills which only women had (Parsons 1959). In order for children to 'fit' within society and the rapid social change of this time period, the mother was charged with the task of using her innate emotional maternal bond with 'her' children to socialize them into good citizens. Thus it was only in the 1950s that motherhood and the mother-child relationship became characterised as such an emotionally-charged relational experience, with the focus being on caring for the physical and psychological well-being of the child. In today's society, the parent-child relationship is one of constant negotiation: intimacy now encompasses constantly working with the child, to know and understand him or her' (Jamieson 1998: 47). Jamieson suggests that this relationship-as-process relies on 'disclosing intimacy' as a means for parents (as a couple) and parents and children (as a family) to develop mutual understanding through 'talking and listening, sharing thoughts, showing feelings' (1998: 158). This process is not dependent on verbal communication – the articulation of intimacy – a couple who are close but who do not regularly disclose intimacy can have an equally rewarding relationship as those who discuss their feelings everyday: 'it is deep knowing and understanding which particularly characterise disclosing intimacy' (1998: 9). Patterns of disclosing intimacy are part of an emerging future' (1998: 159).

On the surface, Jamieson's argument on disclosing intimacy in parent-child relationships actually does have some parallels to the one advanced by Giddens. Taking a heavy steer from child development literature (Gadlin 1978), Giddens suggests that it is the quality of the parent-child relationship which is paramount 'with a stress upon intimacy replacing that of parental authoritativeness. Sensitivity and understanding are asked on both sides' (Giddens 1992: 98). The parent-child relationship is structured around dialogue. He advocates that the parent-child relationship should approximate the pure relationship and draw on free and open communication. This does not dissolve parental power but shifts it from authoritarianism to authority, which, he says, can be 'defended in a principled fashion' (1992: 109). He asserts that the relationship between parent and child should be democratic, irrespective of the child's age: 'It is a right of the child, in other words, to be treated as a putative adult'. When the child is too young to enter into negotiations, 'counterfactual justification should be evident' (1992: 191-192). Where Jamieson and Giddens substantively diverge is in the area of gendered and generational power relations within family relationships. As Jamieson points out 'Parenting is rarely a gender-neutral activity and often exacerbates inequalities'. On a day-to-day basis 'mothers typically remain much more emotionally and practically involved with their children than fathers' (Jamieson 1999: 488) and parents (both mothers and fathers) wield significant power over their children (Delphi 1992). There is some evidence that mothers do enter into complex negotiations with older children, trying to practice empathy, understanding and communication (Brannen, Dodd et al. 1994). Some mothers may even aim towards a goal of pseudo-democracy with younger children through careful reasoning of argument (Walkerline and Lucey 1989). But Jamieson asserts that 'Mutually intimate mother-child relationships are not necessarily the consequence' (Jamieson 1999: 488). There is little to suggest that such strategies are universal in fact the opposite.

Jamieson (1998) notes that the new and much-heralded ethos of mutuality among partners and families, has been observed in practice to be a smoke screen to cover the traditional implementation of parental control through socially sanctioned authority. For example, white middle class mothers may claim to have open communication with their teenage children but these same children can perceive such strategies quite differently. *Knowing* children easily slips into wanting *knowledge* about their activities, as a means to protect and/or control them. The 'twin ideals of democracy and intimacy necessarily clash in parent-teenager relationships... because both parties have opposing goals in the trading of information' (Solomon, Warin et al. 2002: 965). While both parents and their teenage children may subscribe to the discourse of openness and honesty as the route to intimacy and democracy, there are tensions within the concept of openness, around the areas of communication, disclosures, secrecy and surveillance (Gillies, McCarthy et al. 2001). For parents, information gain means the retention of power and control, while for teenagers, the withholding of information from their parents ensures their privacy, power and identity. What may feel like 'confiding' to parents may be construed by children as parental pressure to disclose – to divulge information which they may otherwise want to keep to themselves. 'Studies suggest that a good relationship between some parents and their growing up children

requires increasing silence on the part of the parents rather than intense dialogue of mutual disclosure' (Jamieson 1999: 489). Problems of communication between parents and children are further exacerbated when the topic of conversation is 'sensitive'. Fathers often find it particularly inhibiting to discuss issues of sexuality with their children (Kirkman, Rosenthal et al. 2001).

There is substantial evidence which shows that the axial cultural constructions of intimacy and gender socialization in the context of 'family sexuality' (Gabb 2001b) is still a potent mix, especially when it comes to families' understandings and/or communication. Findings indicate that there is significant variation about what it means to be a good mother and what constitutes a good relationship across class and ethnicity. Barry Fallon and Terry Bowles (1997) demonstrate that family functioning (that is to say, parenting style, for example 'democratic' decision making) was significantly affected by family structures. Their study is rare in that it utilizes the phrase 'family intimacy', defined as the sharing of meaningful or 'quality time' within families (including parents, children, siblings and their friends). This quality time is not simply being together in the sense of being physically present in the same space it is characterized by intimacy and trust – the type of time during which issues of importance can be discussed (Fallon and Bowles 1997: 30). This taxonomy of family functioning-form is reminiscent of Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic analysis of patterns of family communication, wherein he distinguishes two types of family – positional and personalizing (person-oriented). In a positional family decision-making depends on a member's formal status and family roles are clearly separated, and in a person-orientated family there tends to be arbitration and discussion among family members. He suggests that working class families are traditionally positional, and that middle class families are typically personalizing in type (Bernstein 1974). Subsequent research has problematized the mapping of parenting-styles onto socioeconomic and/or class status, demonstrating that in many instances it is practical circumstances which determine how families function (Phoenix and Woollett 1991). Certain families may be more predisposed to practicing particular kinds of interpersonal relationships but we should be wary of generalizing tendencies into definable patterns of intimacy.

The ostensibly theoretical account of democratisation and mutuality conceals the material conditions and affective messiness of everyday lives and nowhere is this more evident than around the issue of parents' 'divorce'. Giddens may treat children as 'the putative equal of the adult' (Giddens 1992: 191), but these ideas unravel once parents' separate. While couples in a 'pure relationship' may part with impunity, children cannot be so easily cast aside; childcare responsibilities, financial obligations, and parent-child emotional attachments live on. Research has demonstrated that in many families, men are content to retain traditionally-defined masculine roles such as breadwinner and hands-off parent (for example Brannen and O'Brien 1995). There is some evidence to suggest that non-resident parent-child relationships can be sustained across households and that children are able to readily accommodate ideas of two-homes (Smart, Neale et al. 2001), but others highlight how many non-custodial fathers lose touch with their children,

especially over the course of time (Cherlin 1992). The reasons for losing touch may be due to waning interest or because contact is either too hard to negotiate and/or too painful to continue, but the result is the same – the mother remains the constant source of emotional attachment. Lynn Jamieson (1998) suggests that in an era when marriage, divorce and remarriage are commonplace it is not surprising that the research agenda has shifted away from a structural analysis of relational bonds to more qualitative perspectives of personal intimacy based on affective and communicative disclosure. This shift from structuralism and/or functionalism to interpersonal interactions has increasingly manifested itself in the study of the family and kinship as evidenced by the disinterment of family studies from community studies during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Young and Wilmott 1957; Morgan 1996), affording a greater concentration on the experiences of closeness and intimacy in everyday family interactions. This new concentration on interpersonal experiences of intimacy has resulted in a heightened awareness of the significance of *everyday family practices* as the main constituent of 'doing family' in contrast to earlier foci on fixed institutional structures such as heterosexual marriage and the ethnically and class-neutral conceptualisation of the conventional nuclear family headed by a male breadwinner (Morgan 1996; Mackey and O'Brien 1999; Chou 2000; Rothbaum, Morelli et al. 2000; Williams 2004). This has led some to argue that it is no longer viable to understand practices of intimacy through the lens of family and kin (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Contemporary relational patterns of care and intimacy undermine this heteronormative framework and require a queering of sociological thought (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004).

It is claimed that transformations of intimacy and care are eroding the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy (Roseneil 2000), out of which comes 'a certain logic of congruence' (Weeks, Donovan et al. 1999: 85) in which the relationship – the desire for intimacy – is important in its own right, structuring everyday lives and lifestyles. 'Families of choice' (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001) and 'families we chose' (Weston 1997) demonstrate the voluntary basis of affective attachments and suggest that friendship networks can become 'de facto families' (Altman 1982). These elective families are 'something new sociologically', an 'index of changing social possibilities and demands' (Weeks, Donovan et al. 1999: 90). Friends are the source of consistency and support, something which was previously taken-for-granted as a function of families or kin-networks. Supplementary, and in some instances substitute, affective-structures, such as 'friend-like relationships' (Pahl and Spencer 1997), networks of friends and non-resident partnerships, have been cited as increasingly commonplace – the contemporary source and repository of care and intimacy (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Same-sex friendships have been shown to be equally important for both men and women, although differences between genders have been identified. For example, women's friendships are said to be more intimate (Roy and Benenson 2000; Fehr 2004), men can experience alienation rather than connection with friends (Tognoli 1980), complementarity of interpersonal styles are typical of female friendships but not evident in similar relationships between men (Yaughn and Nowicki Jr. 1999), and platonic male-female friendships can provide some men with greater fulfilment than same-sex friendships (Wagner-Raphael and Seal

2001). The universalism of the 'friends as family' model among lesbian and gay communities (Bozett 1987; Nardi 1992) has been queried (Lewin 1993; Gabb 2004b) however there is general consensus that a functional framework, wherein one-model-fits-all, no longer reflects the pluralism of interpersonal networks and relationships – if indeed it ever did.

Shelley Budgeon and Sasha Roseneil (2004) pull together many of the ideas around the detraditionalization of family and intimate relationships in an edited collection of articles in *Current Sociology*. They acknowledge that the category of family still has salience, but contend that even in its changed and diversified form, it is 'increasingly failing to contain the multiplicity of practices of intimacy and care which have traditionally been its prerogative and its *raison d'être*' (Budgeon and Roseneil 2004: 127). They suggest that 'there are fundamental shifts underway in the social organization of intimacy and sociability... which are both constitutive and productive of these conditions of social change' (2004: 128) but rather than position these within the largely pessimistic framework of individualization and breakdown (Bauman 2001; Bauman 2003) they propose a range of personal relationships are now being shaped which provide intimacy, care and companionship across life course. Focusing attention on 'non-standard intimacies' (Berlant and Warner 2000) highlights the blurring of boundaries and the fluidity between different categories of relationship, and, in doing so, decentres the conjugal relationships as the nexus for research on intimacy. 'This queering of the social calls into question the normativity and naturalness of both heterosexuality and heterorelationality' (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004: 138-141). The articles in their collection examine different aspects of contemporary intimacies, for example Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon (2004) explore how sexual partnerships are deprioritized as friends provide care, support and intimacy in times of emotional, physical and practical need. Similarly, couples who retain separate households, 'living apart together' (LATs), are shown to destabilize the dyadic relationship model and traditional ideas of family as defined through household (Levin 2004) as do those who create 'personal communities' of friends and families structured through the concepts of choice and commitment (Pahl and Spencer 2004). Sue Heath suggests that young people are looking to the communality of shared housing for intimacy and support in ways which challenge the conventional heterosexual couple and in the process create 'neo-tribes' (Heath 2004). While Judith Stacey (2004) proposes that gay men's recreational sex creates 'families of choice' which provide the possibility of greater reciprocity of care over the course of the life-cycle, and Barry Adam (2004) that same-sex relationships challenge traditional (legally institutionalized and culturally reified) forms of citizenship and thus require new language beyond family-values orthodoxy. In a debate around the historical configuration (Evans 2004) and durability of sexual/love bonds, contributors highlight how processes of individualization produce contradictions that rise to the surface in intimate ties particularly around socioeconomic factors which underpin ideas of 'choice' (Bawin-Legros 2004), this suggests that it is compromise that as the overriding characteristic of affective relationships (Holmes 2004).

The shift in focus away from families and/or couples as the loci of intimate relationships and the idea that intimacy is linked with reciprocity, expressed through affection, feelings, care, compassion, or any other relational transaction, is interesting because it implies a mutuality of purpose and a levelling of difference among those who reciprocate. This mutuality does not account for intimate relationships that may be imbalanced such as many relationships between men and women, parent and child, younger and elder siblings, rich and poor, sick and healthy. As previously discussed, generation and gender remain defining factors in many family relationships, as Lynn Jamieson has shown (Jamieson 1999). But to displace the centrality of reciprocity within intimate relationships because of difference between intimates may be unduly hasty instead it may be useful to examine the ideas of Iris Marion Young and her discussion of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' as a means to illustrate the usefulness of the term to understandings of intimacy. Young contests the need to affect symmetry between self and other in order to understand their standpoint. She argues that respect for others is not dependent on a desire for and/or achievement of symmetry in positions of self and other, rather it relies on the acknowledgement of differences between self and other. 'Moral respect between people entails reciprocity between them, in the sense that each acknowledges and takes account of the other. But their relation is asymmetrical in terms of the history each has and the social position they occupy' (Young 1997: 343). Social positions cannot be liberated from their structural relation with one another: 'Persons may flow and shift among structured social positions, and the positions themselves may flow and shift, but the positions cannot be plucked from their contextualized relations and substituted for one another' (Young 1997: 353). Young suggests that symmetry and sameness obscures difference and advocates that rather than describing multivalent relations with one another as similarities and reversibility, differences should be acknowledged, as differences can open up 'creative exchange' (Young 1997: 347).

Young aims to 'develop an account of moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity' that precisely express the specificity of differences. She proposes to 'understand communicative action as involving an *asymmetrical reciprocity* among subjects' through a 'mutual acknowledgement' of others' interests as 'each position and perspective transcends the others, goes beyond the possibility to share or imagine' (Young 1997: 351). Young derives her model of asymmetrical reciprocity from Emmanuel Levinas (1981) and Luce Irigaray (1974). Levinas suggests that people construct relationships which acknowledge and/or foster solidarity and similarities between them but their positions are not interchangeable. The ethical relation remains asymmetrical because disclosure is always a gift – it may anticipate or desire reciprocity but it can neither predict nor presuppose it, for to do so undermines the gift. The gift (of disclosure, of communication) requires that someone speak first, effectively taking a risk, because if someone doesn't start the exchange then it will never occur. Young draws in Irigaray's ideas of sexual difference and subject differentiation, in that the separation of self and other establishes respectful distance (both spatial and temporal) of self from other: 'Speakers cannot communicate unless there is a space differentiating them and across which they communicate' (Young 1997: 352). She draws attention to

communication as 'a creative process' – a dynamic exchange in which 'I am open and suspend my assumptions in order to listen'. This process of listening and being open to others' standpoints achieves 'moral humility' it acknowledges that there is a great deal that we do not know or understand about others' perspectives – it is a 'humble recognition' of our own situated position (Young 1997: 354-355). This moral respect and openness to the other requires 'some sense of mutual identification and sharing' but more importantly it also requires 'a moment of *wonder*, of an openness to the newness and mystery of the other person' (Young 1997: 357). Wonder 'does not try and seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free' (Irigaray 1974: 13). Respectful wonder represents openness not only to others it also 'means being able to see one's own position, assumptions, perspectives as strange' (Young 1997: 358) and as such it decentres take-for-granted social positions as the focus for knowledge and interpretation. Young does not directly address asymmetrical reciprocity in the context of intimate relationships but by opening out ideas of reciprocity beyond mutuality does mean that structural differences in subject positions can be taken into account. A model of asymmetrical reciprocity, as the cornerstone of all intimate relationships, not only acknowledges difference between intimates, it makes such differences a creative and dynamic factor within these relationships.

The emphasis on the notion of intimacy, as a diverse composite of various social/personal practices taking place in a variety of social contexts, among different categories of people, as part of everyday interaction, has led researchers to study different styles of attachment as themselves indicative of wider social competency (Hudson and Ward 1997). What might be classified as an 'intimate turn' in the study of families and interpersonal relationships has witnessed an exacerbated concentration on '...adult, often sexual, relations, theorising them in terms of individualised, negotiated interactions, in contrast to previous models that emphasised gendered roles, responsibilities and obligations' (Gillies 2003: 2) noted previously in childhood studies. This concentration on real life interaction and everyday practices represents a paradigm shift not only in the study of families and kinship but in the very qualitative meaning of family life and the cultural construction of intimacy as a discrete subject for analysis, evaluation and judgement:

The study of intimate partnerships has provided a new lens to help us understand how there are greater expectations in the *quality* of personal relationships and that this quality has to be achieved; it cannot be assumed just because a couple have agreed to be together... There is thus an uncertainty about intimate relationships; they are contingent upon their capacity to meet mutual expectations. These new notions of intimacy have made possible a greater inclusiveness in the study of family practices, for example, in giving recognition to gay and lesbian relationships, step-families, and close friendships (Williams 2004: 17 [original emphasis]).

The over-riding point being made here is that 'family' loses its ontological status as a permanent and fixed feature of social reality, becoming instead regarded as a changing phenomenon with localized epistemological

underpinnings, that is something you do as opposed to something you are (Gillies 2003). This new emphasis on the discursive and participative nature of intimacy has turned the tables on previous historical understandings of intimacy and sexuality in respect of the social institution of the family. This has highlighted how the articulation of hitherto private and personal narratives of intimacy and sexuality can be extremely powerful when publicly circulated. The potential impact of this externalizing of intimacy on public and political conceptualizations of what constitutes 'normal' intimacy cannot be understated (Plummer 2003). Among other things, the 'democratization' of intimacy approach has helped generate a greater diversity in the taxonomies of emotional intimacy. While some work still tries to quantify and measure distinctive types of intimacy (see Hook, Gerstein et al. 2003) suggesting that intimacy is one part of individual's wider affective register alongside other interrelated feelings such as passion and love (Baumeister and Bratslavsky 1999), there is other literature and research which endeavours to de-emphasize the distinctions between different kinds of feeling and relationships, for example erotic and non-erotic relations. This allows for friends, lovers and children to be brought together under a single concept (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001: 107) and queries how mothers understand and articulate love and desire (Gabb 2004a). Subsequently, similar conceptual moves have been made in various related areas of intimacy research, among disabled people (Walker-Hirsch and Champagne 1991; Tidmarsh, Carpenter et al. 2003), children in the early and pre-adolescent years (Sroufe 1997; Brillleslijper-Kater and Baartman 2000) and during adolescence (Gale and Minowa 1997; Feldman, Gowen et al. 1998; Giordano, Cernkovich et al. 1998; Seiffge-Krenke 2000; Terrell, Terrell et al. 2000), older people (Walker and Ephross 1999), siblings (Updegraff and Obeidallah 1999; Mauthner, Edwards et al. 2005), grandparents and grandchildren (Mueller, Wilhelm et al. 2002), and members of religious faith communities (Blass and Fagan 2001; Bellous 2002; MacKnee 2002). Lately the field has been further extended to include topics as diverse as the management of emotion and intimacy by 'victims' and their families during trauma and crisis situations (Lois 2001; Mills and Turnbull 2004), self-disclosure as a protective strategy in violent intimate relationships (Marcus and Swett 2002), and the relational-effectiveness of self-help 'advice' manuals on intimacy and mutuality (Zimmerman, Holm et al. 2002). Although the character of underlying theoretical frameworks in the study of intimacy and interpersonal relationships has changed significantly over the last generation, issues such as social inequality (particularly on the issue of gender) and its inverse relationship to effective levels of interpersonal intimacy in real everyday life, remain key factors in the research literature (for example Larson, Hammond et al. 1998; Moret, Glaser et al. 1998).

### **Embodied Intimacy**

Notwithstanding the diversity of forms, practices and conceptual understandings of intimacy, what is common to all is the embodiment of such experience – ranging from the sensation of touch to our physical reaction to others' articulation of feelings. Words alone may be spoken but they elicit a physical sensation in the recipient. Jamieson suggests that while mutual disclosure is an intimacy of the self rather than an intimacy of the body, 'the completeness of intimacy of the self may be enhanced by bodily intimacy'

(Jamieson 1998: 1). Parent-child relationships may draw on means other than 'knowing' and 'talking' to establish intimacy: 'A sense of unconditional love, trust and acceptance may be sustained with caring actions and relatively few words' (Jamieson 1999: 489). This begs the question, how do families *do* non-verbal 'bodily intimacy'? The answers from research, although in no way conclusive and quite limited in number and scope, add a crucial dimension to the study of intimacy. What constitutes 'the body' remains contested (Turner 1984) with the differences and particularities of the prediscursive, the phenomenological and the lived body being unpicked. It is argued that 'the body is a masculinist illusion' that does not exist in any single or simple form, and, as such, there are 'only bodies in the plural' (Longhurst 1995: 98). I leave to one side this complex area and take-for-granted (for the purposes of this paper) that material bodies do exist through social experiences and understandings of self and other. As such I am talking about the embodiment of intimacy and bodily intimate practices rather than the body as something in and of itself.<sup>2</sup> There is a wealth of interest in studies of embodiment, body practices and bodily boundaries, exploring the body and society (Turner 1984; Scott and Morgan 1993), diet and body shape (Bordo 1993), consumption and eating (Bell and Valentine 1997; Valentine 1999), pregnant bodies (Young 1990; Longhurst 2000), bodies and sickness (Brown 1995; Moss and Dyck 1996), and embodiments of gender and sexualities (Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Ingram, Bouthillette et al. 1997), class (Cresswell 1999; Dowling 1999) and race (Craddock 1999), and change across life course (Teather 1999) – to name but a few. Studies of the body and emotions have also come to the fore as pertinent to the study of intimacy, as seen for instance in the importance of body image on hetero-sexual interpersonal functioning (Wiederman 2000; Cash, Thériault et al. 2004), correlations between adolescent girls' friendship intimacy and body image concern (Gerner, Wilson et al. 2005) and pre-adolescent children's experience of same-sex bodily intimacy in close platonic friendships and sports (Zarbatany, McDougall et al. 2000). Much of this work is situated in the (inter)disciplinary context of geographical studies, which has encouraged explorations of the complex interrelationship between 'embodiment and spatiality' (Rose 1995: 546). Feminist theorizing has been hugely influential in this field (Simonsen 2000), drawing attention to the 'sexed body' as a 'critical component in the matrix of subjectivity' which foregrounds and evinces the 'understandings of power, knowledge and social relationships between people and environments' (Longhurst 1997: 495). Notwithstanding the importance of this canon of literature, David Morgan suggests that 'the systematic linking of family sociology and the sociology of the body remains to be achieved' (Morgan 1996: 113) – an observation that is some ten years' old, but which still rings true in many ways.

In childhood studies and in child welfare literature significant attention is paid to policing the (affective and physical) boundaries of the child. In one of the very few studies of 'normal family sexuality', Marjorie Smith and Margaret Grocke (1995) examined children's sexual knowledge in 'ordinary families',

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<sup>2</sup> See Robyn Longhurst for a good overview of geographical studies and theorizing of bodies, embodiment and bodily boundaries (Longhurst, R. (1997). "(Dis)embodied Geographies." *Progress in Human Geography* 21(4): 486-501.)

illustrating how boundaries between abusive and non-abusive parenting were hard to define. Behaviours thought to be indicators of abuse, such as 'excessive masturbation, over-sexualised behaviour, an extensive sexual curiosity or sexual knowledge and genital touching', were common within their sample and as such they question whether these signs alone are sufficient to suggest abuse (Smith and Grocke 1995: 83). Research in the area of child welfare has explored the range of parental behaviours towards children across the general population, paying particular attention to practices of physical punishment. This research has demonstrated that, in the UK, the use of corporal punishment is largely universal (Smith, Bee et al. 1995; Nobes and Smith 1997). Sociological research has pointed out that the amount and nature of physical contact between adults and children signifies children's social position (Jackson 1982: 26) and denies them any concept of 'bodily autonomy' (Kitzinger 1988: 85). In families, the body is socialised with reference to broader structures of power and control. Bodies deal out or receive punishment, signify the gendered hierarchies that exist between 'husband' and 'wife', and represent the generational hierarchy of adult-child relations (Morgan 1996). Particular body parts take on particular roles, many of which are dual purpose. 'Eyes can speak volumes'; they can say 'I love you' or they can show annoyance, distress and hatred. Hands may caress, express love and tenderness, they can care for and connect with others. Paradoxically they may be clenched in a fist and inflict pain or be withheld to separate self from other (Morgan 1996). Teenagers' assertion of 'talk to the hand' is a potent symbol of how demonstrative hands may be and is an example of how (powerless) children may use their bodies to distance self from other. Genital and certain erotic areas of the body, such as women's breasts, are accorded a particular status in families. Social norms of modesty dictate that these sexual areas must be concealed from children's eyes, especially once they reach puberty and become aware of their own sexuality and sexual identity. Children likewise learn to manage the sexual potentialities of their bodies. From an early age they are 'taught' that their 'privates' must be kept hidden, or that some areas like 'down there' are too secret to even mention by name (Gabb 2004a). To know these codes and perform the necessary shifts in public and private personas marks the acceptable social citizen from anti-social 'others' (Goffman 1969). Physical expressions of intimacy may be encouraged as part of families' 'healthy' interpersonal communication but where such affective exchanges occur and what form these expressions may take is socially prescribed. The 'civilising process' is done at home (Morgan 1996).

It is claimed that the parent-child embodied relationship is like no other: 'family members have bodily licence' (Morgan 1996: 134). Research has shown how women's embodied experience of menstruation, childbirth and lactation challenge bodily boundaries of self and other (McDowell 1993). Studies of motherhood have demonstrated that moral anxieties about body space and the proximity of others' bodies are assuaged during maternity (Young 1990) as sensuality and physical contact reinforce the mother-child bond (Gabb 2004a). Research on fatherhood has shown how some fathers compensate for their lack of physical connectedness with the child by engaging in embodied activities such as cuddling, sleeping with their child or bathing

together (Lupton and Barclay 1997). However David Morgan argues that the 'pleasures and erotics of family living cannot... be detached from issues of risk and danger' (Morgan 1996: 124). These sentiments are typical of sociologically-informed work. Psychological literature has looked at parent-child sexuality and intimacy in the context of children's sexuality development – focusing on the mother-child bond (Bowlby 1969), the differences among mother/father-child relationships (Fox, Kimmerly et al. 1991) and children's sexual behaviour and psychological development (Sandfort and Rademakers 2000). In wider social sciences debate, studies on children, intimacy and sexuality tend to be framed around ideas on 'risk' (Ennew 1986; Scott, Jackson et al. 1998), sexual abuse (Kelly, Burton et al. 1996) and paedophilia (Wyre and Tate 1995). Such research typically situates child sexual abuse as 'a man thing' (Itzen 2000) and comparative research has claimed that even non-abusing fathers experience sexual arousal or interest in their daughters (Williams and Finkelhor 1995). It is primarily in the area of children and sexuality research – set aside from intergenerational relationships – where the sexuality=risk equation appears to be challenged. Studies which focus on sex education (Thomson 1994; Measor 2004), and how young people experience and understand sexual relationships (Thomson and Scott 1991; Wallis and VanEvery 2000; Allen 2004; Sharpe and Thomson 2005) in the context of heterosexuality (Holland, Ramazanoglu et al. 1998) and emergent lesbian and gay sexualities (Epstein 1994; Saffron 1996; Epstein 2000; Thorogood 2000; Wallis and VanEvery 2000) shift the agenda away from risk and danger. These analyses are extremely important in developing sexual health and sex education policy and are building a picture of intra-generational intimacy and sex/uality learning; but the jigsaw remains incomplete (Jackson 1982) because these studies typically focus on adolescents apart from their families, in youth centres and schools, and as such negotiations around *intergenerational* sexuality and intimacy remains uncharted.

There is the controversial literature on 'man-boy love' (Sandfort 1987) and intergenerational intimacy (Jones 1990) which argues that relationships between adult men and children can be consensual and fulfilling: an integral part of non-western culture (Herdt 1981). Attempting to bridge the void between literature on 'child abuse' and 'child love', Ken Plummer (1990) suggests that, if we adopt a social constructionist approach to understandings and analyses of these practices, then we can gain greater insight into the 'historical diversity and situational ambiguity of "sex"' and make inroads into the divisive debate on children and sexuality (Plummer 1990: 232). Some research has attempted to tread this path, looking at how and why children and sex/uality have become culturally synonymous in the Western world (Kinkaid 1998) and how the media construct (innocence-sexual) dualisms which are especially unhelpful to debates on children and sexuality (Walkerdine 2001; Jackson and Scott 2004). This research tends to reinforce the idea that families are hegemonic institutions designed to manage sexuality in ways that protect the (socially constructed) innocence of children (Foucault 1979; Jackson 1982). Other research (discussed earlier) attempts to challenge distinctions between erotic and non-erotic relations by bringing together friends, lovers and children under a single concept, 'families of choice', a term which tries to flatten affective hierarchies such as

intergenerational power relations and cultural imperatives that set up family versus friends, sexual versus platonic relationships (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001: 107). By drawing attention to how mothers understand and articulate love and desire (Gabb 2004a) this work aims to call into question the socio-cultural demarcation and understandings of feelings and desire. Ideas on 'sexual citizenship' (discussed in more detail in the next section) add another dimension to understandings on sexuality and children as it aims to denaturalize the sexual (Weeks 1998) and thus accord children equal (autonomous) citizenship rights (Evans 1993).

Research on how bodily boundaries (of self and other) are managed (Longhurst 2000) and how parents' and children negotiate their sexual-familial identities in their everyday lives (Robinson, Hockey et al. 2004; Gabb 2005a) highlights the cultural specificity of codes of conduct and decency and brings to the fore the constructedness of affective boundaries within families. This work suggests that most families are not directly scrutinized – although those in receipt of benefit and/or in regular contact with the health service due to children's ill-health/disability are open to routine inspection and interrogation. Similarly those who live outside normative conventions of how families should be and/or those who express 'inappropriate' forms of affection are subject to social sanction in many forms (Gabb 2005b). Sanctions may be as austere as criminal prosecution and punishment or they may be more 'passive' such as the simple act of staring. Erving Goffman analyzed 'the stare', showing how powerful and censorial this gesture can be. He showed that while it is an apparently 'harmless' act it works to stigmatize the (illegitimate) other, separating them from normal society while legitimating citizens who embody the right to stare (Goffman 1963). Michel Foucault (1977) returned to this notion of stigma, suggesting that in order to avoid being stigmatized, individuals regulate their lives and lifestyles. As such they create an introspective gaze, '[an inspecting] gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising his surveillance over, and against himself' (Foucault 1980: 155). This self-inspecting gaze requires that individuals (and families) measure themselves against 'the norm', a standard template and way of 'doing family' which is largely taught through 'advice' on how to manage the trials and tribulations of parenthood, and be 'good enough' parents (Winnicott 1965).

Parenting advice is mediated knowledge – firsthand experience passed down from mother to daughter, professional 'knowledge' written in handbooks and magazines, 'expert' advice delivered in the form of reality television (such as *Super Nanny* (Channel 4); *Little Angels* (BBC3); *Who Rules the Roost?* (BBC3); *Driving Mum and Dad Mad* (ITV1)) and websites aimed to provide instant access to (frequently sponsored) advice, ideas and guidance (for example <http://www.thinkbaby.co.uk>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting>). These 'simulations of intimacy' (Plummer 2003: 21) are supported and given credence by official documentation in the area of social policy (for example Bramwell 1998). Such 'advice' and guidance is clear about embodied boundaries and typically advocates the need to protect children from 'risk', especially sexual predation. Parenting guidelines recommend respect for

(legislatively enforced) children's rights, but they seldom address the tricky terrain of 'normal family sexuality' and intimate familial relationships instead they tend to focus on healthy living and unruly behaviour. Parents have to rely on 'instinct' while all the time taking on board media hyperbole around instances of child abuse and adult-child predation which inform social policy and the cultural climate around what is appropriate behaviour. In contrast, sex education literature aimed at teenagers describes intimacy and intimate relationships as part of everyday relational life, being linked with but not dependent on sexuality and sexual relationships (Farrington 2000).

David Morgan argues that in this uncertain climate all physical contact between adults and children, including comforting, rough-and-tumble, routine caresses and embraces, even when they are mutually consensual and enjoyable to all parties are risky practices, as they are at risk of being misunderstood. 'Parents especially fathers, may express confusion as to what is now expected of them in the context of widespread concerns about the sexual abuse of children' (Morgan 1996: 124). In the areas of child welfare and non-familial (institutional) care there are clear-cut guidelines available on adult-child, carer-client bodily boundaries. For example in a guidance booklet on 'safer caring' (Bray 2003), written for the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), it is recommended that foster carers should not touch the foster child in ways that could be misconstrued, such as cuddles and kissing goodnight. Carers should only enter the child's bedroom when asked, and fathers should always be accompanied by another (female) adult in such 'private spaces'. These guidelines are aimed at short term carers of children who (may) have been previously abused. The strategies mentioned are intended to protect people (carers and the local authority) rather than provide therapeutic responses. It is acknowledged that in long term care 'normal' behaviour should be encouraged so that children can learn and enjoy being free about their own bodies (O'Grady 2004).

In non-familial, institutional care, the boundaries of body work are similarly brought to the fore in order to evacuate intimacy and sensuality from formal acts of intimacy. In a study of the experiences of older and disabled people who are reliant on professionals and service providers for their care, Julia Twigg explored 'the intimacy of body work' that is involved (Twigg 2000). Ordinarily 'bodily closeness contains the capacity to create intimacy', in the carer-client relationship it can signify unequal power relations. Twigg argues that 'the power dynamics of bathing' demonstrate this inequality as the powerful carer stands, fully clothed, above the powerless, naked, client, occupying the formerly private space of the bathroom (2000: 180). Such work suggests that the hierarchy embedded in activities of institutional care and intimacy necessitates the enforcement of bodily boundaries of both parties, so that both the care-provider and the client may feel separate from one another. In contrast research on sexuality and families demonstrates how bodily boundaries between self and other are typically blurred (Gabb 2004a; Gabb 2005b). Family bodies are familiar to one another; they grow up together, shifting the boundaries as children mature but sharing the same physical and affective space. Research has demonstrated how the blurring of boundaries is also prevalent in the spaces which families inhabit, especially those which

accommodate sexuality (Gabb 2005b). It is claimed that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between people and the places they inhabit: 'bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their sociocultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interest of the body' (Gross 1992). This suggests that embodied family intimacy should not be removed from the sites in which it is primarily situated as these are consequential.

Domestic space is structured along a public-private axis (Allan and Crow 1989). There are degrees of public access to private space within the home, 'a privacy gradient' in which halls are more public than sitting rooms, which are in turn more public than bedrooms' (Twigg 2000: 86). Homes are not neatly carved up into front public and private spaces but represent 'a series of overlapping front and back stages' with areas such as doorways, windows and gardens bridge between the spatial (public-private) divide. Front and back stages are further sub-divided into zones which require 'special rituals' (for example knocking) to permit entry (Morgan 1996). These private zones are often to do with the concealment of bodies and sexuality, demarcating the boundaries of shared intimacy. Such spaces are semi-private, for example the bathroom is private for the occupant when the door is locked, but a place of intimacy when activities such as bathing are shared (Gabb 2005b). Bathrooms are also not exclusively private as people outside the family visit this area, for example when they need to use the toilet (Morgan 1996; Twigg 2000). To explain the messiness of everyday living, Gillian Rose has developed the idea of paradoxical spaces: 'spaces that would mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – center and margin, inside and outside' – but which are, on a routine basis, 'occupied simultaneously'. These paradoxical spaces are 'an imagined order', a means to 'articulate a troubled relationship to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism' (Rose 1993: 140-159). Like bathrooms, the parents' bedroom also functions at this level with the conjugal bed doubling up as an intimate space for adult sex/uality and also 'family hugs' (Gabb 2005b). Studies in this area focus on the dynamic interplay between the public and the private in family homes. Home functions as a sign and is loaded with connotation. It alludes to privacy, 'a place where inhabitants can escape the disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life' (Johnston and Valentine 1995: 99), but home is not without surveillance: 'the public world does not begin and end at the front door' (Allan and Crow 1989: 5). Expanding this notion of surveillance, Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine highlight how the home functions to censure inhabitants' sexuality: 'home may be more or less a private place for 'the family' [but] it doesn't necessarily guarantee freedom for individuals from the watchful gaze of other household members' (Johnston and Valentine 1995: 100). Intimate relationships that are sanctioned by the family may be readily accommodated within the home, but transgressions outside these parameters are disavowed and policed in ways that reinforce what constitutes acceptable bodily forms of family intimacy and sexuality.

There is a significant body of work on sexuality and space albeit predominantly focused on lesbian and gay men. This work demonstrates how public/private boundaries shape sexual identities (Valentine 1993; Valentine

1995), how 'deviant' bodies are constituted through and (mis)read in different locales (Bell and Valentine 1995), and how places inform what is deemed appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Valentine 1996). Studies of 'family intimacy' do not fit comfortably within this sexuality/sexual identities framework, indeed it has been argued that such analyses typically occlude the experiences and identities of lesbian mothers (Gabb 2005a), and accord an excess of significance to public sexuality-space. Families' affective interactions primarily occur in the home. Many families see their homes as *their* space, a canvas upon which they could create and express their own identity (Duncan 1981: 2-4); 'a site of identity and self expression, an opportunity to extend the self in material surroundings' (Twigg 2000: 78) in the 'privacy' of the family home. But the home is not a blank canvas. Spatial analyses of family homes, places that were predominantly constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, point out that these sites were 'designed, built, financed and intended for nuclear families – reinforcing a cultural norm of family life with heterosexuality and patriarchy high on the agenda' (Bell 1991: 325). The layout and descriptors of rooms 'physically represent and reinforce the cultural norm of the reproductive monogamous family unit', with 'master' bedrooms and smaller spaces for the children. The walls of a house contain and structure affective life that may otherwise find other forms. Social movements, particularly in the 1970s, which called for 'alternative lifestyles' looked beyond compartmentalised housing towards communal living (Mazur 1973). Home ownership and shared mortgages curtail the freedoms evoked by such alternatives and subsequently (re)offered by the 'pure relationship'. As such the physical space of home lies at odds with contemporary discourses on the fluidity of families and non-traditional networks of support. There is some research which suggests that home as a heteronormative space may be disrupted through friends living together (Heath 2004) while others who refuse to organize their everyday lives along the friends/family dichotomy blur the boundaries of affective space (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). However research on affective bodies and the geography of homes tends to highlight how interpersonal relationships and family intimacy are typically structured through hegemonic (public) standards of in/appropriate behaviour and the normative design of familial living space.

### **Intimate Citizenship**

An embodied approach to the study of family relationships is advocated because this brings to the fore the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions evident in our everyday experiences of family, factors which arise out of the contested barriers between what constitutes the public and the private. As David Morgan says, 'Family bodily practices operate at the interface between the public and the private' (Morgan 1996: 124-135). In this final section of this paper I now focus on how ideas of the public and the private feed into conceptualisations of intimacy and intimate relationships. In a recent paper in *Sociology* by Joe Bailey (2000) and subsequent repost by Jane Ribbens McCarthy and Rosalind Edwards (2001) the concepts of 'public' and 'private' are interrogated in part around ideas of families and intimate (parent-child) relationships. This debate underpins subsequent formulations of intimate citizenship (Plummer 2003) and thus warrants further note above and beyond general sociological interest. Bailey suggests that we are seeing 'an advocacy

for the private' in sociological studies and that fascination with the private is a sociological response to an 'exhausted or evacuated public realm' (Bailey 2000: 382-383). He situates the public and the private in a dichotomous relationship with one another; an analytical distinction which is 'multi-dimensional and extensive' (Bailey 2000: 384) wherein the private is associated with the interiority of self, human nature. He asserts that feminist scholars and the sociology of the family have colonised conceptualisations and studies of the private, focusing attention on 'the emotional valency of one-to-one relationships in a sociological understanding of the institutions and society which contain them' (Bailey 2000: 392). In their response, McCarthy and Edwards outline how they, and other feminist scholars, have used the concepts pointing out that the public and the private are not mutually distinct. They evince the way they have addressed these concerns by referring to 'social practices and orientations' which social actors 'do'; 'practices that create, invoke and depend upon certain values and expectations' (McCarthy and Edwards 2001: 770). As such they demonstrate the interrelationship of the public and the private and advocate using the term 'the personal' as opposed to the private to get away from ideas of interiority, a move which rescues the private from 'a total identification with intimacy and the self... The concept of "the personal" is instead intended to draw attention to the *experiences* that are constituted around a sense of self or identity, to do with emotions, intimacy or the body... "The personal" is also social ' (McCarthy and Edwards 2001: 773 [my emphasis]).

Many studies of intimacy and intimate relationships undo the dichotomy (falsely reasserted by Bailey) of the public and the private. Research on intimacy, intimate relationships and affective communication in the workplace often tackle head-on the boundaries between public-private, self-other (for example Hochschild 1983; Marks 1994; Kakabadase and Kakabadse 2004). Another area where intersections between the public and the private have been brought to the fore is in analysis of economies of care and affect. Viviana Zelizer (2005), a cultural analyst of economic processes, dismantles the doctrine of 'hostile worlds' which positions relational intimacy as distinct from economic transaction and suggests that, as world markets expand, monetized social relations are invading all spheres of intimate life (for example Rifkin 2000). She argues that 'In a normative version, the hostile worlds view place rigid moral boundaries between market and intimate domains. It condemns any intersection of money and intimacy as dangerously corrupting'. Such separation is based in the 'dichotomous theories of sentimentality and rationality' that can be traced back to early nineteenth century industrial capitalism; theories which run aground when confronted with contemporary debates on such topics as payments for egg donation, the sale of blood and human organs, the purchase of care (for dependent children, the elderly, disabled and/or sick friends and relatives) (Zelizer 2005: 22-26). What Zelizer finds surprising about such debates is their failure 'to recognize how regularly intimate social transactions coexist with monetary transactions'. She suggests that intimacy and intimate relationships are not fragile flowers but are robust and thrive among a material culture where economic self-interest and money structure so many aspects of our lives. 'Money cohabits regularly with intimacy, and even sustains it' (Zelizer 2005: 28). In contrast to the 'hostile

worlds' thesis, Zelizer argues that 'across a wide range of intimate relations, people manage to integrate monetary transfers into larger webs of mutual obligations without destroying the social ties involved' (Zelizer 2005: 28). It is through 'connected lives' that 'people manage the mingling of economic activity and intimacy by creating, enforcing, and renegotiating extensive differentiation among social ties, their boundaries, and their appropriate matching with commercial media and transactions of production, consumption, and distribution' (Zelizer 2005: 40-41). Zelizer illustrates her argument by tracing how economic transactions are routinely evident across the spectrum of intimate life, from courtship through to marriage, in caring relationships between friends, relatives, the cared-for and the carer. She suggests that it is not that monetary exchange is absent so much that in order for the affective exchange to be acceptable, it is necessary to 'match the right sort of monetary payment with the social transaction at hand' – for example payment as gift, fee, allowance, charity – to 'adopt symbols, rituals, practices, and physically distinguishable forms of money to mark distinct social relations' (Zelizer 2005: 27-28).

Zelizer argues that intimacy and economy are interwoven at many levels and advocates a 'connected lives approach, showing the continuous crossing of our intimate relations and economic transactions... We should stop agonizing over whether or not money corrupts, but instead analyze what combinations of economic activity and intimate relations produce happier, more just, and more productive lives' (Zelizer 2005: 298). She suggests that we need a 'feminist rethinking of care concerns' which focuses attention on actual caring relationships in order to break down 'the traditional hostile worlds dichotomies that erroneously split economic transaction and intimate personal relations into separate spheres... Only after we recognize that caring labor has always involved economic transactions, can we construct democratic, compassionate caring economies, supplying care workers with greater resources, legal standing, and respect than they have previously enjoyed' (Zelizer 2005: 303). Payment for care does not make caring 'relationally second rate' it simply enables carers to 'do work they love, among people they love, and get paid at the same time' (Nelson 1998: 1470). This emphasis on care, as central to intimate lives, echoes ideas previously discussed around reciprocity (Stacey 2004) and the reframing intimacy beyond family (Budgeon and Roseneil 2004). Where Zelizer adds another dimension to this debate is in her interrogation of the nature and *valuation* of relational work, which builds on earlier ideas developed by Arlie Hochschild on women's emotion work (1989) and the 'care deficit' (1995: 342). Hochschild pulls together these ideas in her book *The Commercialisation of Intimate Life* (2003) when she discusses 'the economy of gratitude' and how the gendering of emotion-exchanges structure family relationships. Researchers have clearly illustrated how women sustain families and households through their domestic labour (Delphy and Leonard 1992), doing the majority of emotion work (Putnam 2000), shoring up relationships between fathers and children (Seery and Crowley 2000: 102) and sustaining wider kin-relations through 'keeping in touch' (di Leonardo 1987). The activities that women routinely do, such as 'feeding the family', do not only serve a pragmatic purpose but also perform a symbolic function, with mothers literally constructing a sense of family through the meals which they

produce (Devault 1991). Their emotion work and the maintenance of affective ties among family members illustrate the intersections between public/private worlds.

Hochschild explores how individuals 'gift' emotion-work to others, in an affective-exchange which goes beyond what is normally expected – gifts being supplementary to necessity. She suggests that gifts are shaped by their social milieu and are understood by men and women 'through different cultural prisms' (Hochschild 2003: 105). How social meanings are negotiated by individuals in this gift-exchange represents the 'economy of gratitude'. Unlike Zelizer, Hochschild does not situate the economic in terms of financial value instead she focuses on its purpose in sustaining interpersonal (family) relationships and the distinctive roles of men and women in these relationships – the affective economy of families (Hochschild 1989). 'An economy of gratitude is a vital, nearly sacred, nearly bottom-most, largely implicit layer of an intimate bond. It is the summary of all *felt gifts*... Crucial to a healthy economy of gratitude is a common interpretation of reality, such that what feels like a gift to one person feels like a gift to another' (Hochschild 2003: 105). For example a woman may feel grateful for the gift of additional child care contributions from her husband but if switched around such activities would not be seen as a gift, as they might constitute part of the woman's routine role in the family. While Hochschild accounts for the (gendered) ways that care is provided in families, what concerns Zelizer is how society is moving towards recognition of the financial cost of such intimate care. Moving between different forms of intimacy and interpersonal relationships, she demonstrates how society puts a value on care and defines what constitutes intimate relationships and who these may be between, for example a daughter caring for her mother, a mother caring for her child, a housekeeper caring for a family that is not her own. She suggests that who gets paid for transactions of intimacy and the emotional-value of relationships is repeatedly decided through social policy and the courts. Zelizer demonstrates that it is through contested cases in law that the boundaries between intimacy and economy get drawn, placing people and relationships on one side or the other. She examines compensation payments to the families of victims of 9/11, suggesting that victims' families 'were seeking not only financial advantage but also public recognition of their loss and of their special relationship to the victim'. As such, what makes these payments interesting is that, in some instances, some of these payments included recompense for victims' *unpaid* contributions to the making of their households: 'the medium and modality of compensation represents not simply quid pro quo cash value but the meaning of the relationship is involved' with significant value being assigned to relational work (Zelizer 2005: 305). Thus she talks about the 'purchase of intimacy' not simply the financial value of intimate care but also the conceptual understandings and valuations of this care. This framework evinces how the public and the private coexist at many levels, and that, in an era where compensation-culture is prevalent, how we sustain intimate relationships has a financial cost attached. This does not devalue the feelings or quality of care that is given (typically, between family members, as a gift) as suggested by proponents of the hostile worlds thesis

so much as acknowledge, financially, the emotion-work of women that has traditionally be provided free of charge.

While Zelizer does confront the ways that compensation payments from 9/11 typically reinforced heteronormative family structures, which debarred the rightful acknowledgment of lesbian and gay couples and recompensed victims' families of origin, sexuality and sexual identities are not the primary foci of her ideas. It is in the field of sexuality studies that the public/private interplay of intimacy and sexuality gets addressed. This field has a longstanding history of highlighting the intersections between the public and the private, particularly in analyses of 'families' and interpersonal relationships. This work generally aims to decentre heteronormative models of family – as a site for private (hetero/homo)sexual relationships – and evince the ideological purpose in maintaining the status quo. Alongside this argument, some scholars have advanced the idea of 'intimate citizenship'. Debate in this area is wrapped around gay activism and equal rights. It is claimed that sexual or intimate citizenship is 'an attempt to give meaning to the recognition of diversity... It is a useful metaphor for new claims of rights, and for rethinking the balance of entitlement, recognition, acceptance and responsibilities' (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001: 196). Weeks et al unpack the term, saying that the sexual has been situated as at the heart of intimate personal life, while citizenship resides in the public sphere within broader social communities. The 'sexual citizen' is a hybrid being which usefully breaches the public-private divide (Weeks 1998). Analysis of sexuality and citizenship focuses attention on the heterosexual and gendered underpinnings of citizenship status (Richardson 1998). Research on 'families of choice' suggests that possibilities of parenthood and family constellation are being innovatively explored, inventing 'new ways of living that can influence the available possibilities for thinking and doing citizenship' (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001: 199). Treading cautiously into the terrain of sexuality and children, some have used the idea of sexual citizenship as a means to extend citizenship status to all, including children. Jeffrey Weeks has suggested that ideas of the 'new sexual citizen' help advance debates around relationships, between adults and children and in families by highlighting the denaturalization of the sexual (Weeks 1998). This is extended, in a more contentious form, by David Evans, who invokes children's rights as a means to include children as sexual citizens in their own right (Evans 1993).

There are merits in using the term 'sexual citizenship', as a means to foreground the interrelationship of public-private discourses around the affective register of families, but there are also limitations. This has led other scholars to prefer the term 'intimate citizenship', suggesting that it is better suited to the breadth of intimate experience. Plummer argues that 'intimate citizenship' is preferable to 'sexual citizenship' because it is more inclusive and embraces a wider spectrum of issues which include, but are not structured through, sexuality (Plummer 2003: 65). Intimate citizenship is grounded in contemporary understandings of citizenship (for example Janoski 1998) which incorporate the United Nation's Charter of Human Rights in which 'a plurality of rights and obligations are shaped through participatory, differentiated social worlds (& communities), each with contested status and

continuing tensions that need resolving' (Plummer 1999: 1). It draws on ideas of democratisation and individualisation but does not see this as without responsibility and commitment, instead 'it requires the reflexive working out of those chosen ties in everybody's "do-it-yourself biography"' (Weeks, Heaphy et al. 2001: 197). It is in the work of Ken Plummer that ideas of 'intimate citizenship get thoroughly unpacked. He argues that citizenship carries legal weight while identity carries social and cultural weight; the term intimate citizenship reveals the legal referents that structure private lives and are constituted through private practices. For Plummer it is this interrelationship between private actions and public debate which is of central concern: 'how our most intimate decisions are shaped by (and in turn shape) our most public institutions' (2003: x). He uses the term intimate citizenship as a 'sensitizing concept' (Van den Hoonaard 1997), to draw attention to the linkage between the personal and the private. He suggests that it represents 'a potential bridge' (Plummer 2003: 15) between the public and the private which means that these areas can no longer be conceptualised and understood as 'separate autonomous spheres' – if indeed they ever were (2003: 68). Plummer then moves to advance earlier ideas of sexual citizenship by using the term 'intimates' to describe anyone who is engaged in practices of intimacy. He acknowledges that the term 'intimate' has no unitary meaning but it does enable intimacy to be seen as something which is embodied by people – intimates. This references back to Lynn Jamieson's ideas of the 'intimate mother' and the 'intimate mother' (Jamieson 1998), differentially gendered parenting roles through which men and women *do* intimacy. But what Plummer aims to achieve is to materialise the doing of intimacy at a deeper level than simple practice; in the understanding and doing of self. He argues that intimacies are not only about 'our closest relationships with friends, family, children, and lovers', they are also about 'the deep and important experiences we have with the self... with our feelings, our bodies, our emotion, our identities' (Plummer 2003: 13). His conceptualisation of intimates and intimate citizenship pulls together the public and the private, and illustrates intimacy as embodied practice.

While Plummer's ideas connect with the democratisation thesis with its (theoretical-informed) equality of rights agenda, his conceptualisation of intimate citizenship simultaneously draws on Jamieson's relational matrix which is embedded in social structures. He acknowledges that families are the nexus for the reproduction of gender relations and patterning of power relations between adults and children. 'The intimate zone is, through and through, socially produced, maintained and transformed'. Even the most private aspects of family lives are 'ultimately engulfed in legislation regarding marriage, divorce, child care, and pensions, not to mention wider social ideologies of familism' (Plummer 2003: 70). Plummer does not see this gendered and generational framework as something which reduces the transformative potentialities of families, instead he argues the reverse. He suggests that nowhere is it more evident, that practices of intimate citizenship are forging new ways of being intimate and doing intimacy, than in the moral decision-making of families (Smart and Neale 1999; McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2003). Intimate citizenship acknowledges the material conditions of intimates – that gender and generation structure parent-child relationships – and

recognizes public-private tensions, but rather than this being disempowering for parents and children, this is recast as a dynamic process. As such Plummer brings as full circle, he demonstrates how intimacy is bound up with ideas of sexuality and sexual relationships but whereas theorizing in the 1970s and early 1980s struggled to move beyond seeing intimacy as the emotional functioning of heterosexual and family relationships, Plummer situates intimacy and interpersonal relationships as reflexive sites of agency. He argues that private intimate relationships and family practices are shaped by, and in turn shape, public institutions. In doing so he separates intimacy from the sexual by showing how families' acts of intimate citizenship – their *doing* of intimacy – feed back into ways of *being* family in contemporary society. How intimacy is no longer a functional determinant in families but is a means of expression and affective fulfilment. Intimate citizenship draws attention to the critical tensions between the public and the private and recasts ideas of 'creative intimacy' (Mazur 1973) within contemporary forms and experiences of family.

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