

story of disclosing intimacy suggests then, according to theorists from a number of different theoretical traditions, this would necessarily be connected with significant changes in both social divisions and social cohesion, particularly in inequalities and differences between men and women.

## CHAPTER 2

# From 'The Family' to Sex and Intimacy

This chapter maps public stories about the history and the future of personal life which some academics have produced and other academics have deconstructed. Until very recently the orthodox historical story was one of the long-term emergence of companionate marriage and a particular type of child-centred, emotionally intense, privacy seeking, nuclear family household with an acute division of labour between a husband/father and a mother/wife. This is the type of family household, for example, in which mothers 'stayed at home' and devoted their lives to the happiness of their children and husband. The orthodox story was that marriage and the gendered family household centred on children emerged as *the* main sites of intimacy within capitalist industrial societies. It is now recognized that some features of this type of family household have a long history (like gender divisions and inequalities between husband and wife) but others (like child-centredness) do not. The deconstruction of the story has demonstrated that this idealized happy nuclear family now seen as more common in the 1950s–1970s, had a relatively short history. The trends which are denounced by some moral commentators as evidence of the impending collapse of the family – married women increasingly entering the labour force and rising divorce – had already begun at this time. Even in the 1950s, there were, of course, many other types of family household. Not everybody followed the conventional life course of moving from a family-household where they were a son or daughter to a household formed by marriage in which they brought up children. Moreover,

in all historical periods deeply unhappy and abusive relationships have been documented within the idealized nuclear family household structure and in the 1970s the Women's Movement subjected this idealized family to considerable critique.

The story of the emergence of companionate marriage and the gendered, emotionally intense, private, child-centred family (the conventional family, for short) often draws a contrast between pre-industrial, 'pre-modern' family households and the 'modern'. It has become standard to describe the societies which were first to become capitalist industrialized nation states in terms of a 'modern' or industrial period and a 'pre-modern' or pre-industrial period. If used loosely and interchangeably with pre-industrial then the pre-modern era extends right up to the 18th century, despite the fact that for many historians the pre-modern period ends and 'modern' history begins in the mid fifteenth century. In sociological accounts the disjuncture between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' typically involves much more than the presence or absence of capitalist industrial forms of organizing economic life. Those who have been regarded as 'the founding fathers' (Emile Durkheim, 1858–1917; Karl Marx, 1818–83; Max Weber 1864–1920) of sociology grappled to theorize this disjuncture and variously discussed new forms of social cohesion, new social divisions, a new ethic of individualism and loss of tradition. Contemporary retelling of such accounts often stress that the faith in tradition and 'knowing your place' of the 'pre-modern' era is replaced by faith in scientific rationality, 'progress', respect for individual achievement and recognition that each individual is equal under the law.

Recently this story has been superseded by that of a new form of society that has emerged towards the century's end. Anthony Giddens has recently argued that tradition managed to persist into the early 'modern' period and that until recently people rebuilt traditions as modernity dissolved them. He now speaks of a 'post-traditional society' (Giddens, 1994). His is one of many efforts to label Euro-North American societies at the century's end as distinctive from 'modern' societies. 'Postmodern' is the most popular term but other labels include 'reflexive modernity' (Beck, 1994), 'high modernity' (Giddens, 1990, 1992) and now 'post-traditional society' (Giddens, 1994). Other academics argue that the period of modernity is not over but is simply in a particular and distinctive phase (Bauman, 1987, 1990). This distinctive recent period, contentiously named as 'postmodern', is part three to the previously two-part story. A story

of transformations in personal life is contained within tales of 'pre-modern', to 'modern' to 'postmodern' society. These presentations of the past are a part of how 'intimacy' is constructed in the present. Some commentators suggest that the 'old days' were the bad days because personal life lacked intimacy in contrast to the present. Others argue that the late twentieth century is as lacking in intimacy as the pre-industrial period and lament the passing of the 'good old days' in the more recent past of 'modern' society. These accounts of each period are briefly summarized below and the remainder of the chapter subjects these stories to further scrutiny.

### Pre-modern/pre-industrial period

In the story of the pre-modern period, by modern standards, intimacy was attenuated. People maintained relationships with kin, family, neighbours and friends because they were bound together by necessities and tradition. Privacy was in short supply and little valued. While members of a household were in close association and had privileged knowledge of each other, household composition and lack of privacy meant that this was not restricted to members of the nuclear family. Moreover, the intimacy of close association did not necessarily result in empathy, because this was a highly stratified social world in which each knew his or her place in the social order. While most people lived in family households, many never married or had children, but all had some part in the round of traditional festivals of community life. Love and care between parents and children, and between spouses was tempered by the social distance between generations and genders. Children were treated as little adults at an early age and were often sent off to live as apprentices or servants in the households of others. Marrying and having children were economic arrangements and the relationships which resulted were ones in which men were assumed to rule and own women and children. This was sanctioned by religion, law and community norms. The church preached the restriction of sex to the marriage bed (for procreation not as an expression of love). Intimacy between friends was also tempered by the struggle for survival. Death constantly stalked life.

### Modern/industrial period

When the term is used interchangeably with 'industrial', the 'modern' period had its roots in the eighteenth century but was not

established until the nineteenth century. In the story of the emergence of this modern period, intimacy in personal life was heightened greatly, with the family-household at its core. The family household became a private domain in which intimacy – close association and privileged knowledge, empathy and understanding, love and care – blossomed. Fear of loss through death no longer overshadowed relationships between the living to the same degree (although even by the late twentieth century the rich still live longer than the poor) and individuals were not tightly bound by religion, necessity and a common community life. Relationships of marriage and parenthood became more emotionally intense. The rule of men over women in marriage no longer had the unequivocal support of religion, law and community norms. However, love and care between spouses was a more important dimension of intimacy than knowing and understanding an inner self. Divisions of labour between men and women became more extreme with the separation of private homes (the site of women's unpaid domestic work) from public places of employment (the modern means of ensuring survival through waged labour) and continued men's objective advantages over women, who were their financial dependants. As the twentieth century proceeded, marriage became highly romanticized and by the mid-twentieth century the emphasis placed by experts on love, sex and the relationship implied equality, mutuality and deep understanding between spouses. In the same period, children were increasingly protected from the adult world and remained dependent on their parents for much longer. By the second half of the twentieth century, devoting a great deal of time, attention and affection to children was a taken for granted aspect of being a parent, and particularly of being a mother. At the beginning of the century the 'good mother' loved and cared for her children but by the second half of the century she also empathized with and understood them. Youth as a stage of semi-independence between childhood and adulthood, between being a dependant in a parental household and forming a new household on marriage, grew in significance. Young men and women increasingly chose to marry for love and to protect their relationship with privacy and distance from others. Home became a private sanctuary; an appropriate setting for intense intimacy between its inhabitants. For the majority, home meant a family-household of a couple of parents and their children. A common community life had all but disappeared and only a very small minority did not form their own family households.

### 'Postmodern' period

There is not yet one story of the so-called postmodern period. Stories can be summarized as one of two versions, optimistic or pessimistic.

In the optimistic story, intimacy is intense and intimate relationships remain the crux of private life but 'the family' based on marriage is losing or has lost its centrality as the norm and ideal. One or more good relationships (ideally encompassing a good sex life) are at the centre of personal life, not 'the family'. The good relationship is a relationship of disclosing intimacy, a mutual relationship of close association between equals in which really knowing and understanding each other are the crux of the relationship rather than more practical forms of 'love and care'. Conventional gendered divisions of labour are breaking down. The late twentieth century growth in the labour market in the number of married women with children was the beginning of the end of the division between male 'breadwinner' and female 'housewife'. Sex is no longer harnessed to marriage-like arrangements and couples negotiate their own rules of sexual conduct on a we-will-do-what-we-enjoy basis. Relationships are more fragile but they are also potentially more mutually satisfactory. Although people continue to choose long-term intimate relationships, including marriage-like relationships and parenting relationships, a diversity in styles of personal life inevitably blossoms.

The proponents of the pessimistic version of postmodernity lament the loss of the vestiges of the economic, religious and normative underpinnings of marriage which survived in the modern period. Their fears regarding the collapse of family life echo those of commentators on the emergence of the 'modern' family who have spoken of its collapse for over a century. The pessimistic story of 'postmodernism' deplores the further flourishing of individualism which in the modern period encouraged a free choice of partner in love and is now thought to undermine commitment to a partner. In this vision of postmodernity, intimacy is again becoming attenuated not because people are re-absorbed into a pre-modern type of communal life but because mass consumer culture promotes a self-obsessive, self-isolating individualism which is incapable of sustaining anything other than kaleidoscopic relationships. Love, care, empathy and understanding are not sustained when long-term projects of marriage-like relationships and parenting are in constant jeopardy. A particular variant common among moral commentators

on the political Right blames the welfare state for encouraging these trends.

Whether contemporary societies are postmodern or not, an image of a conventional family arrangement as the happiest way of life is still produced by popular culture in Australia and New Zealand, Europe, and North America. In 1982 British sociologists Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh talked of the persistence of familial ideology, the pervasive focus on 'the family' as the emotional centre of life, and of familism, the organization of society on the assumption that the once 'modern' and now traditional type of family household – a husband earner/provider and a housekeeping, child-caring wife – is the basic unit of society. Barrett and McIntosh noted that familism and familial ideology persisted despite the reality of a whole array of family types, rising divorce, rising cohabitation, the marked increase in the labour force of married women with children, and the onslaught of feminist and radical critiques of the family. In the 1990s, nostalgia for a mythical past in which people lived in conventional stable happy families is acute, particularly in the United States (Coontz, 1992; Skolnick, 1991). One explanation for the rise of nostalgia is that personal life in general, and intimate relationships in particular, are in crisis or at least unsettled. This makes the gender-stereotyped, mother, father and happy family images of a past in which everybody knew the rules highly attractive (Skolnick, 1991).

### **The Making of the Conventional Modern Family**

In this section the story of 'the modern family' is scrutinized. Under the heading 'Victorian sexual morality and the Victorian family', the appropriateness of contrasting the moral uprightness of the Victorians and the allegedly degenerate permissiveness of the present is questioned. This is followed by examining strands of a more complex academic story of change in the relationship between sex, marriage and the family.

#### **Victorian sexual morality and the Victorian family**

In the late twentieth century a number of political figures, including the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, have called for a return to Victorian values. The assumption that Victorian val-

ues add up to a greater good involves a reckless disregard for the detailed histories of the period which have documented wide gaps between public values and private practice. For example, historians have long exposed the fact that many respected Victorian men made extensive use of prostitution and pornography while exhorting total sexual abstinence outside of monogamous marriage (Pearsall, 1969). A theoretical reworking of the notion of the Victorian era as a time of sexual repression comes from the intellectual traditions of symbolic interactionism (Gagnon and Simon, 1973) and the philosophy of Michel Foucault (1978). This was the period in which new sex experts, new forms of sexual perversion and a new sense of sexuality as the essence of identity emerged. While for Victorian moral entrepreneurs only the 'Malthusian couple' (the married couple controlling their family size by abstinence) were conducting their sexual lives properly, the same 'experts' were obsessed with sex in a way which was historically unprecedented. The normality of heterosexual genital sex within marriage was affirmed by the naming, describing, denouncing, warning against and attempting to reform so-called perverse sexualities. Foucault argued that rather than clamping down on existing sexual categories, the new concerns with sex were creating new sexualities for the first time. A similar argument was made by Gagnon and Simon concerning the Freudian notion of childhood sexuality. They argue that children were newly sexualized and pathologized by the 'discovery' of childhood sexuality. The middle-class Victorian fear of masturbation is often taken as an example of these consequential effects of so-called sexual repression. As efforts at combating the dangers of childhood masturbation intensified, a new, albeit fearful and guilt-ridden, sense of its forbidden pleasures was created. Hence it is argued that the so called sexual perversions of this era were an inextricable complement of the 'normal' Victorian family (Walkowitz, 1980; Weeks, 1981).

In Victorian society the possibilities for sexual expression and intimacy were structured by the harsh inequalities of class, gender, and race. The apogee of the double standard in sexual conduct, the middle-class white Victorian Englishmen's view of the world, has been deconstructed by the historian Leonore Davidoff (Davidoff, 1983; 1986; Davidoff and Hall, 1987). These were men who consolidated and justified their position in the world through powerful stories about themselves and others. As Davidoff puts it they 'had the resources as well as the need to propagate their central position'. Getting others to do their dirty work for them was normalized by seeing

these others as intrinsically dirty and polluting. In their sexist and racist world view, domestic servants, working-class people in general, foreigners, non-whites, 'natives' of the colonies were suited to their place by being closer to dirt and nature, that is less civilized, less pure, more sexual and potentially polluting. While a good middle-class man struggled manfully against his sexual instincts, he viewed good middle-class women as aiding his moral salvation. The asexuality and purity of a 'good woman' could help his reason triumph over his baser nature. On the other hand there were fallen, sexualized 'bad women' who were potentially corrupting and with whom men succumbed to their baser instincts. The good woman was pure in thoughts and deed, virginal, sexually innocent on marriage, accepting sex as a conjugal duty thereafter. Her mental purity was accompanied by physical weakness: she needed protection from too much physical or mental exertion in order to preserve her energies for reproduction. This idealized femininity justified women's dependence and subordination. It offered little possibility of women exploring the potentials for pleasure of their own bodies or of negotiating sexual pleasure with their partner. These idealized versions of masculinity and femininity severely constrained the possibilities of intimacy between men and women. Clearly, intimacy between husband and wife was not precluded. Indeed, devotion, consideration and shared understandings were expected. They were regulated, however, by particular patterns of mastery and dependence. Shared understanding was based on each 'knowing their place' rather than through mutually negotiated knowledge of each other.

Similar ideologies justified class, race and gender privilege in all Euro-North American societies in the nineteenth century. Such views made it possible for the less circumspect middle-class man to romanticize or dehumanize working-class and non-white sexuality precisely because it was seen as closer to nature – as rich, racy and exotically lacking in inhibitions – or as animal rather than human. Indeed middle-class men could readily create opportunities to observe voyeuristically and to use the victims of their fantasies sexually. This sexual voyeurism is often betrayed in nineteenth-century philanthropic perceptions of the moral dangers lurking in the mines (Humphries, 1981) and factories in which working-class women laboured (Gilding, 1991, 100). The term 'scrubber', still used in Britain and one of many insults to describe women of alleged promiscuity, carries the classist assumptions which rendered previous generations of resident domestic servants a close-to-home target for

attempts at sexual adventure. The racist assumptions of white society in the south of the incipient United States, legally and socially sanctioned white men's sexual use of black slaves, and versions of their white racist fears and fantasies about black sexuality live on into the present (Collins, 1991; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Staples, 1982).

### Marriage, love and sex

The public story that marriage is the natural outcome of a loving and sexually charged relationship between a man and a woman has a relatively short history in comparison to religious and legal injunctions restricting sexual behaviour, particularly that of women, to the conjugal duties of marriage. While love and sex may have been regarded as a legitimate part of marriage for the past two centuries, the public story for much of the period has been that marriage comes first and then love and sex follow. Historians who have documented the dominant Christian religious ideas which significantly influenced the lives of Europeans in previous centuries, suggest a series of logical shifts from marriage as an economic arrangement in which sex was a marital duty, to an emphasis on companionship and compassion in marriage which paved the way for marriage based on love, and then for the view of sex as an expression of love.<sup>1</sup> For the middle-class Victorians, marriage was both a taken for granted vocation and a privileged calling, which men of sufficient means and women virtuous and fortunate enough to be asked entered into naturally. Happiness was assumed to follow from a good marriage. While marriage for love surfaced increasingly in novels, 'suitability' was the guiding principle in the choice of a partner. Those intending to marry spent limited and chaperoned time together prior to marriage. If they did feel themselves to be 'in love', then love was often necessarily based more on an imagined than a known other. Courtship was a formal and public statement about intention to marry, not a process of testing out a relationship by getting to know each other's inner self.

The history of the shift from marriage as a patriarchal institution to marriage which is a relationship – between equals, resulting from a freely made choice, based on love, and not love-at-a-distance but love developed in a relationship – is one that floats uneasily in time. While some historians speak of these shifts as having roots in the eighteenth century, the notion of marriage as a partnership of equals

was not a dominant public story until after the Second World War. (Finch and Summerfield, 1991; Morgan, 1991). Speaking of Britain, Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield (1991) note that the term 'companionate marriage' could be found in the 1920s but was not widely used until after 1945. However, despite the currency of the concept in the post-war decade, public discussions of birth, motherhood, sexuality, women's employment and girls' education all stressed gender-segregated traditional roles. Moreover, their review of studies of family life of the 1950s led these authors to suggest a profound dissonance between the post-war ideology of companionate marriage and the lived experience (Finch and Summerfield, 1991, p. 31).

Sociologists of the 1950s, such as Talcott Parsons (Parsons and Bales, 1956, 1959), talked optimistically about complementarity between men and women while acknowledging that men and women did not fall in love on equal terms. In keeping with their different positions of power, men chose marriage partners, women worked at being chosen by the man of their choice. The language of equality rather than complementarity is not part of the academic account until the 1960s. After this the expectation that men and women will come together as equal partners in intimacy is more commonly expressed. It was in the 1960s that sociological accounts of ideal-typical marriage began to describe something like 'disclosing intimacy' between men and women (Berger and Kellner, 1964): the ideal marriage partner was then seen as a best friend, and confidante, as well as a responsive sexual partner. Intimacy now meant working at empathy and understanding and mutually working out how to please each other rather than following traditional patterns of delivering love and care.

Academic accounts describe how the pervasive public story of love as the basis of marriage gave birth to a new popular story in which love is a basis for sex. This is presented as a series of logical shifts which were embraced and acted out by populations of Euro-North American youth this century. As love became the basis for marriage, and marriage was the context in which pleasurable sex was anticipated by both men and women, then increasingly a degree of sexual contact before marriage was tolerated for both men and women. Hence, some sexual behaviour, at least kissing and often a great deal more, became a normal part of 'dating'. The late 1960s and early 1970s are often seen as the key 'permissive moment' but social historians argue that a trend of sexually charged behaviour prior to marriage was already well established (Weeks, 1981). The 1920s can be

characterized as a decade of sexual revolution in the US (D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988). Recreational dating, involving kissing and 'petting', developed around such sites as dance halls and cinemas for working-class youth, and through college entertainment for middle-class youth. So love and sex within marriage became love and sex before marriage, but, for women at least, only with the partner you planned to marry. Academic accounts agree that women's behaviour changed more in the course of the twentieth century than men's. A double standard in sexual conduct had always allowed men 'rules for breaking the rules' and even when religious and moral commentators declared sex outside of marriage as morally inappropriate for men as well as women, a strand of popular culture celebrated sexual adventures for men. The causes of the growing gap between age of first heterosexual 'experience' and age of first marriage in the twentieth century are still debated (D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Lewis, 1994; Weeks, 1981) but the permissible order of events certainly shifted in the portrayals of popular culture, much expert advice and in practice. The summing up by the historians J. D'Emilio and E. Freedman of the state of play in the USA, spelled out what would have been seen as a chaos of fornication and adultery by conservative moralists of the time: 'By the late 1960s the belief in sex as the source of personal meaning had permeated American society. The expectation that marriage would fulfil the quest could no longer be sustained' (D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988).

The 1960s have often been described as the decade when sexual behaviour definitely ceased to be harnessed to marriage. However, broad sweep accounts tend to exaggerate the pace and pervasiveness of change. Studies of married couples in the 1960s still found men and women who married believing that sex was a duty suffered by women and enjoyed by men. For example, for some of the British coal-miners' wives, interviewed by Norman Dennis and his colleagues, a good husband 'Didn't bother me much' (Dennis et al., 1969). Their testimony suggested neither 'disclosing intimacy' nor sexual pleasure featured greatly in their relationship either before or after marriage. Medical texts and advice books for the newly marrieds of the time continued to suggest that men had a stronger sexual drive than women and these texts had not yet wholly embraced the notion that a good relationship involves mutual sexual pleasure. Moreover, the physiological facts were still being misrepresented to portray women as if they could only gain sexual pleasure in penetrative genital heterosexual intercourse (Koedt, 1991; Scully 1973/4;

Jackson, 1994). In fact, changes in young people's sexual behaviour in the 1960s were arguably less dramatic than the sexualization of commodities and proliferation of sexual imagery generally. The sexualized aspects of youth culture made highly visible through television were suggestive of more dramatic change than the picture revealed by research into young people's behaviour. Youth culture as a highly visible mass media phenomenon which transcended national boundaries was in itself new and, for conservative moralists, disturbing. Post-war baby booms, relative affluence, the extension of the availability of secondary and tertiary education to larger proportions of young people, near full employment among school leavers, mass production of consumer products, and the increased availability of television, all set the scene for the massive expansion of spontaneous and commercialized youth and student culture in the 1960s (Brake, 1985; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; May, 1992)

The moral panic of the 1960s and 1970s largely focused on the higher levels of sexual activity among young people. But, gradually a new public story was circulated by many medical and therapeutic experts and by popular culture. Sex in the context of loving relationships was natural and healthy. It was casual and careless sex which was a problem because it risked psychological harm, pregnancy and disease. As before, the underlying rules were more rigorously applied to women than men and the old story of men needing sex more than women also continued to be told. Less radical religious figures and the moral Right continued to voice grave doubts about the separation of sex and marriage.

#### Child-centred family households?

By the 1970s, there was considerable consensus among North American and European social scientists writing about the development of the 'modern family', now thought of as the 'traditional' or 'conventional' family. A number of high profile, respected authors shared the view that the nuclear family household of a heterosexual married couple and their children had inexorably come to monopolize and reshape intimacy and emotional life by the twentieth century (Jamieson, 1987). Authors of the 1970s often saw the causal factors as located in the nineteenth or the eighteenth centuries but a number of subsequent critics argue that the key changes were much more recent (Gittins, 1982; Harris, 1983; Jamieson, 1987), and now the 1950s

is treated as an exceptional period rather than as a culmination of a long slow change.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, depictions of personal life at the beginning of the twentieth century often overstated the extent of child-centredness (Jamieson, 1987). Oral history in a number of industrialized countries has since indicated considerable variation in the extent to which adults had child-centred, home-based, privatized family lives at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Britain, Australia and New Zealand until the mid-century, parent-child relationships were not as a rule highly emotionally intense with family life orienting around children's needs (Jamieson and Toynbee, 1990; Reiger, 1985; Toynbee, 1995). Here, and arguably also in North America, it was only in the 1950s that motherhood was generally perceived in terms of an emotionally intense relationship, with mothers carrying responsibility for the psychological well-being of their children rather than simply caring through good housewifery. It could be argued that the material circumstances of family life limited the possibilities of intimacy between many parents and children until the relative affluence experienced by industrial societies after the Second World War. At the beginning of the century, larger family sizes, poorer health, the more common loss of family members through death, the more labour-intensive nature of housework and longer hours in paid employment were significant constraints on family time, particularly in poorer households where the daily efforts to make ends meet consumed all energies. However, middle-class households were not necessarily characterized by more intimate parent-child relationships until after the demise of the employment of domestic servants. In the early decades of this century upper middle-class children were often brought up by nannies and governesses and hence spent very little time with their parents. While there was considerable variation, many parents and adults were unashamedly superior to children who were required to be obedient and subservient. Only the exceptional few talked to children as if they were potential equals. In the USA the ethos of parents and children being pals may have been established somewhat earlier (Mintz and Kellog, 1988, p. 113). Certainly in Britain in the first decades of the twentieth century most parents did not yet want to be a friend to their children; nor did they consider family life to consist of doing things with the children (Jamieson and Toynbee, 1990; Thompson, 1977; Vigne, 1975). By contemporary standards parents from a range of social backgrounds remained distant from their children.

My mother, you know, never had charge of us. She liked to see us but then when we got rather obstreperous we were banished again. . . . Then at the age of eleven I went to boarding school. We all went to boarding school. My mother said it was the happiest day of her life when we went to boarding school. (Caroline, born 1910, mill owner/manager's daughter)

I don't know if you know the golden rule 'Children should be seen and not heard'. You were not to talk back to elders. You never joined in the conversation at the tea-table. You were never allowed at the tea-table if there were visitors in. Children were kept apart. (Angus, born 1902, tailor's son)

Contrast these statements of elderly people remembering their childhood in the first decades of the twentieth century (Jamieson, 1983) with what British mothers say about the relationship between themselves and their seven-year-old children in the 1970s.

Well, it's a strange sort of rudeness disrespectful rudeness. . . . I would never dreamt of talking to my mother like that; not even thinking that way! I've just come to the conclusion that children today are like this, you know - all the children down the street are like this. (Quoted in Newson and Newson, 1976, p. 364)

If I felt she was treating me really disrespectfully, I wouldn't tolerate it. But I like her to think of me as another human being. (Quoted in Newson and Newson, 1976, p. 364)

The British mothers quoted by John and Elizabeth Newson are reflecting on the loss of traditional authority and the reduction in social distance between parents and children. The first mother notes that since her own childhood, the hierarchy between parents and children has contracted, if not collapsed where once a mother could expect deference she must now accept rudeness. The second mother is expressing a tension between her desire for respect from her child and the desire to be 'like another human being'. In so far as respect means deference then it requires hierarchy and social distance whereas the desire to be human implies a closer relationship. Many studies find post-war parents wanting to be closer to their children than their parents were to them. The quoted men and women born 80 to 100 years ago can claim a happy childhood without needing to present themselves as having been 'pals' with their parents. They

generally took their parents' love for granted unless exceptional brutality had proved otherwise. People of this generation remember automatic deference to the traditional authority of parents. Hence, they use 'obedience' and 'respect' as key terms for making sense of their childhood. For parents in the second half of the century, 'obedience' and 'respect' are not typically taken for granted as automatic entitlements in this way and parents have to work at being loved and loving.

### Gendered divisions of labour

Non-feminist authors of the 1970s typically assumed a natural division of labour between men and women, underpinning any particular gendered division of labour. For example it was assumed that women 'staying at home' was a logical corollary of the separation of home and paid employment since women are child bearers and the natural carers. Talcott Parsons, for example, needed no elaborate explanation for the following: 'The isolation of the nuclear family . . . focuses the responsibility of the mother role more sharply on the one adult woman' (Parsons and Bales, 1956, p. 23). Many authors never make their underlying assumptions of a natural division of labour explicit because these were so taken for granted. Feminist authors argued that men collectively engaged in a patriarchal project of subordinating women; gendered divisions of labour reflected this project; and the history of the 'modern' family cannot be understood without recognizing this process. So, for example, Roberta Hamilton (1978) explained why the historical separation of home and work, production and consumption resulted in women at home and men at work by reference to patriarchal religious ideas about women's place which predated these separations. Feminist historians have documented the active exclusion of women from many industries and the development of bars against the employment of married women (Tilly and Scott, 1978). Marriage bars allowed men to protect their positions at the expense of women both directly, by excluding women, and indirectly by upholding a particular model of the family-household in which women were the dependants of men who earned a 'family wage'.

The story of the fight for a 'family wage', allowing a male worker to support a full-time housewife and children, has been told in terms of men consolidating their power as workers and as husbands over women (Barrett and McIntosh, 1980). However, there are also



feminist dissenters from this view who suggest the historical picture can be read as working-class men and women struggling together to protect their class from the super-exploitation of capitalism. Jane Humphries (1977, 1981; Mark-Lawson and Witz, 1990) argued that working-class men and women both fought for a family wage, sometimes drawing on sexist assumptions about natural divisions of labour, in order to preserve a family life beyond the reach of the exploitative capitalist labour relations. The specific conditions which made the division of labour between a husband/earner and a full-time housewife a strategy for working-class survival have now changed. These conditions involved much toil for both husband and wife. Long hours in paid work did not earn a comfortable living without the full-time efforts of a wife who mobilized all her domestic skills to decently feed and clothe her large family in a clean home, in spite of the low level of amenities and the labour-intensive nature of all domestic work.

Rising standards of living including better wages, better housing and domestic utilities, shorter working hours in employment, greater acceptance of 'family planning' and improved accessibility to contraception transformed these material conditions by the 1950s. But the 1950s are remembered as the heyday of conventional families. In this post-war period gendered divisions of labour were reasserted and given a new dimension with respect to intimacy. Home took on a new emotional resonance after the displacements and disruptions of war. In Australia, Britain, New Zealand and North America, the state propaganda machinery which had enlisted the services of women war workers now incited them to return to the home. Industries that had been diverted to war work switched to mass producing for a civilian market. The good housewife was recast from the person who 'makes down' and mends old things on behalf of her family to the purchaser of new things to make her family happier (Gittins, 1982). Domestic technology was bought and used without reducing the burden of housework to a minimum. Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1989) has documented how products such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines meant higher standards rather than radically less work: floors were cleaned and clothes were washed more often. If standards of housework were changing, then the task of mothering changed more radically still to the intensive mothering of the late twentieth century.

In the public story of the 1950s, happy families were created by a devoted, home-based wife and mother. The academic version of this

view was provided by Talcott Parsons. In the Parsonian ideal-typical family, married women stayed out of the labour force in order to take the lead in the expressive work of child rearing and stabilization of adult personalities. This meant more than delivering cuddles, cooking and clean clothes; it also encompassed subtle techniques of emotional manipulation, psychological management directed towards ensuring a harmonious household. Family intimacy, Parsons theorized, involved at least the mother in empathy and understanding as well as love and care. In contrast, Parsons depicted husbands as taking the lead in the instrumental work of bread winning. He argued that this division of labour avoided contaminating the intimacy of the family home by over-exposure to the competitive rational world of work. Several decades later, sociologists (Morgan, 1991) noted that post-war governments drew on the notion of the happy conventional family as a unifying placatory ideology which papered over differences of gender, class and race. Elaine Tyler May suggests that emphasis on the family and domestic harmony fitted with the political aims of the post-war US state. 'With security as the common thread, the cold war ideology and the domestic revival reinforced each other. The powerful political consensus that supported cold war policies abroad and anti-communism at home fuelled conformity to the suburban family ideal. In turn, the domestic ideology encouraged private solutions to social problems and further weakened the potential for challenges to the cold war consensus' (1988, 208).

However, divisions of labour between men and women were not frozen in time. Contemporary married women are often earners as well as mothers, a trend which has accelerated sharply in recent decades. Although the 1950s were the crescendo of the public story of happy families based on a complete division of labour between men and women, the trends that make this story seem dated and less plausible as a summary of most adult lives had already begun: married women's entry into the labour force and the increase in divorce. There is no dominant romanticized image of a dual-earner household to replace the once dominant image of the happy family with the full-time mother at home. There are regular public debates about who has gained and who has lost in the process of change. In 1993 Naomi Wolf claimed that men and women were on the verge of a new and ultimately mutually beneficial equality in Britain and the US: the ground had been prepared by unrecognized gender quakes in divisions of labour and distributions of power; all that was still holding women back was the patterning of their emotional attachments

(which she blamed on early childhood socialization). Perceptions of the shift in the gender order are generally more modest. The 'stalled revolution' is the phrase that Arlie Hochschild (1990) has used to describe the fact that married women and women with children have entered the labour force without men's sharing the physical and emotional responsibilities of housework and child care. Hochschild argues that men's failure to share emotional and domestic labour is key cause of much of women's anger and frustration with their marriage; men's refusal to share the double burden militates against the 'sharing' and 'mutuality' of intimacy. Her work can be read as suggesting that men's lack of participation becomes a failure of intimacy for women, who sense a neglect of love and care and a blindness to or disregard for empathy and understanding.

Some authors depict men as enduring their own particular suffering, a crisis of masculinity precipitated for some men by married women's entry into the labour force. It has long been argued that employment is at the core of many men's sense of themselves as men. 'A man disciplined himself to earn money for himself or his family, and the extent of hardship suffered to this end was an expression of his manhood' (Wight, 1993b, p. 106). A sense of being a man through the sacrifice of work is potentially disrupted by the equal participation of women in this sacrifice. The conventional male ways of expressing intimacy, caring by being the provider, expressing love by giving gifts, for example, fit with the position of greater earning power. A number of authors of varying political persuasions cite the undercutting of men's earner/provider role as incompatible with stable marriage and two-parent families (Staples, 1982; Murray, 1984, 1990, 1994). In the more right-wing variants, welfare provisions to single parents are blamed for further undermining the role of father/provider, and social disorder ranging from crime to riots is blamed on fatherless families. Some illustrations of these arguments are presented in the next section.

### Visions of the Future

In the 1980s and 1990s rates of marriage have fallen and age of first marriage has increased in the majority of 'Euro-North American' societies. While most people continue to plan to marry at some point, a common pattern is to live with a partner prior to marriage (for Britain see Haskey, 1995). Cohabitation is the norm before first mar-

riage and is even more common prior to a second marriage. One interpretation of the increase in cohabitation is that as marriage has moved from an institution to a relationship then the formal legal arrangement ceases to be important to people. Cohabitation then does not mark an increased casualness in relationships and cohabiting partners look pretty much like married partners (Burgoyne, 1991; McRae, 1993). A similar 'there-is-no-big-change' interpretation of divorce has been routinely offered by sociologists: high incidence of divorce is a reflection of the heightened importance of having a good marriage. In other words people are not giving up on the search for life-partners with whom they will live happily-ever-after, but they are not prepared to put up with relationships that do not work out. Expectations of marriage are high and the quality of the relationship is the key test of the marriage. Giddens takes this a step further in suggesting that the type of intimacy increasingly sought in relationships is inherently fragile. In practice women sue for divorce more often than men and this would fit with a view of women as seeking and valuing intimacy to a greater degree than men. This conclusion is often reached too glibly, however. For financial and practical reasons, women often need legal recognition of marital breakdown to a greater extent than men. Hence the figures concerning who initiates divorce proceedings contain an unknown number of cases in which women initiate the legal tidying up, after their partner has initiated the breakdown of their marriage.

However, there are also authors who emphasize the more profoundly disintegrative effects of high divorce rates. This is precisely because a marriage or a marriage-type arrangement is not just a relationship but a key node in a web of financial and domestic arrangements and social networks. The dissolution of a particular couple disrupts each member's social networks and that of any children. Some research suggests that in about half of cases involving children, children lose not only a parent but a set of grandparents, aunts and uncles and other friends they were connected with through the lost parent (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1988; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). Women and children left together after divorce are typically significantly poorer financially than they were before. Besides these serious disruptions to the social fabric there is also evidence that a high incidence of divorce is transforming attitudes to marriage. People marrying today do not necessarily expect to be together for ever, and from the start they have the possibility of divorce in mind (Wallerstein et al., 1989).

A number of authors, particularly in the US suggest that the high rate of divorce and separation is evidence of degenerating moral fibres – weakening commitment to marriage and children, the devaluation of love and the sapping of morality. To take two contrasting examples, Robert Bellah et al. speak with regret about the loss of the nineteenth-century conventional modern family (Bellah et al., 1985, pp. 88–89) and Arlie Hochschild talks of the subversion of the feminist goal of women's independence into magazine images of women on their own using their purchasing power to please themselves as they need nobody else (1994).

The European sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, drawing on an early version of this type of analysis (that of the US social scientist Richard Sennett), contrasts the social cohesion of an earlier period, provided by tradition and enforced through the scrutiny of public life, with the disintegration of the present. He describes how social skills become undermined by excessive concern with individuality and the compulsive consumption incited by the market forces of late capitalism:

Unable to cope with the challenges and problems arising from their mutual relations, men and women turn to marketable goods, services and expert counsel; they need the factory produced tools to imbue their bodies with socially meaningful 'personalities', medical or psychiatric advice to heal the wounds left by previous – and future – defeats, travel services to escape into unfamiliar settings which it is hoped will provide better surroundings for solution of familiar problems, or simply factory-produced noise (literal and metaphorical) to 'suspend' social time and eliminate the need to negotiate social relations. (Bauman, 1987, p. 164)

The scientific rationalizing faith in 'progress' that accompanies the development of market capitalism has also been blamed for stripping people of their social skills. Christopher Lasch (1977) has written of the proletarianization of parenthood; a process by which parents are deskilled by child care 'experts' in much the same way as management imposition of the assembly line deskills workers. Rationality did not stay outside the door of the modern family household. Some historians have attempted to provide documentation of the effects of the ideas and practices of scientific rationality on domestic and sexual life. One of the most comprehensive accounts is Kereen Reiger's history of the impact of the medical, welfare, educational and architectural professions on Australian family households and the resulting 'disenchantment of the home'. The claimed com-

bined negative effects of individualism and State intervention have become part of a questioning of welfare policies in the writings of a number of authors much cited by right-wing political opponents of welfare provisions (see chapter 3).

Andrew Cherlin, a US commentator on the family and social change, emphasizes individualism more than market forces without the same negative emphasis on welfare provision or state intervention:

The family values of the 1950s contained elements of a more individualistic ethos that would help transform family life again a generation later. Under that ethos, which has gained force throughout the West since the emergence of commercial capitalism, individuals increasingly have sought meaning in life through self-fulfilment and intimacy. The family form celebrated in the 1950s was the isolated nuclear family consisting of only parents and children. It fits the ethos by providing a more private setting for personal life. . . . But there is no reason why individualism should stop with the nuclear family – after all, obligations to spouses and children can conflict with personal desires as well. Since the mid-1960s, the quest for self-fulfilment and intimacy has taken an even more individualistic tone; increasingly what counts is one's own emotional satisfaction, even if it clashes with the needs of spouses and children and even if it leads to the break-up of a marriage. (Cherlin, 1992, p. 38)

While there is a sense of possible dangers in Cherlin's account, he stops short of a depiction of rampant individualism in which people have degenerated into self-obsessed incompetents. A similar balance of danger and optimism is found in Swidler's analysis of love in American culture. Drawing on contemporary films and novels as well as historical material, she argues that changes in the meaning of love reflect shifts in how the life course is structured and how the self is understood. The 'true self' is now defined in impulsive behaviour performed outwith institutions rather than through membership of institutions. The institutional affiliations of contemporary adulthood, to a particular employer, to a marriage partner, to children are no longer assumed to be ideally 'for life'. While stability in adult life has not necessarily been a feature of the past, the expectation that marriage lasted a lifetime meant that a sense of 'being settled' once accompanied marriage. Now a marriage is not taken for granted as the threshold of a settled adulthood; rather adulthood is seen as a phase of life which requires constant struggle.

Identity, commitment, self-realisation, and intimacy, once achieved, were simply supposed to last a life-time. Moral meaning lay in being able to stick to what one had chosen, to be animated by the commitments one had made. But in the contemporary period, the valence of the love myth is shifting – in ways which often seem regressive. . . . our culture now seeks moral significance in acts of choice, in attempts to discover, clarify, or deepen the self, whether or not these choices lead to or remain within a commitment. (Swidler, 1980, p. 143)

Accounts such as those of Cherlin and Swidler suggest the possibility of either moral degeneracy or a benign evolutionary increase in the degrees of individualism tolerated and encouraged in Euro-North American societies. Benign because greater individualism means more opportunities to value people for themselves, for the unique qualities that they possess, and more opportunities for self-expression, including expression of emotion. Each of these aspects of individualism opens up possibilities for greater intimacy and particularly 'disclosing intimacy'.

The British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern takes issue with this view of a progressive increase in individualism, suggesting rather that what is meant by individualism has changed. For Strathern, the modern period has been characterized by a middle-class English tendency, if not a general Euro-North American tendency, to see each generation as if it were more individual than the previous generation, to conceive of children as more individual than their parents, to equate parents with natural ties and convention and to equate children with choice (1992a, pp. 15–19). In Strathern's view, however, this English mind set has spiralled into a hyper-individualism which loses all sense of the individual's relationship to and responsibility for others.

We have lost the relational facility for making a partial analogy between nature and society work as the context for the way we think about individuals. . . . The individual vanishes not just from a surfeit of individuality. It vanishes when it no longer seems relevant to talk about its environment and thus – as Mrs Thatcher discovered – about 'its relationship' to society. (1992a, p. 150)

In the previous mind set of the modern era, the world was rich in cultural and natural diversity which allowed degrees of freedom without fragmenting the world into pieces. This is captured in the

modernist English view of kinship: 'Kinship delineated a developmental process that guaranteed diversity, the individuality of persons and generations of future possibilities' (1992a, p. 39). Kinship also expressed the subtleties of thinking about relationships between individual and society, nature and culture: 'In the modern epoch, kinship and family could play either nature to the individual's cultural creativity, or society to the individual's natural spirit of enterprise' (1992a, p. 43). Much of the comfort of this world view is now lost to the post-pluralist. New reproductive technologies render kinship more problematic as a way of thinking about, representing and constructing relationships between individual and society, nature and culture.

'More choice seems less choice': with the engineering of genetic stock, the potential for long-term future variation may be reduced rather than enhanced. When diversity seems to depend literally on the vagaries of human individuals, it suddenly seems at risk. . . . Procreation was a natural fact of life. But the 'natural' image has lost its obviousness in a world where couples can seek assistance to beget offspring without intercourse. So too have the 'cultural' conventions of the union. The otherwise lawful connection of husband and wife may conceivably subsume a contract with a birthing mother or an agreement to obtain gametes by donation. (1992a, p. 43)

A quite opposite interpretation of the consequences of the possibility of sex without reproduction and reproduction without sexual intercourse is made by Anthony Giddens. Giddens suggests this disengagement of sex and reproduction has helped pave the way to 'the pure relationship' and 'plastic sexuality', in his relatively optimistic account of gender, intimacy and social change (1992).

Giddens suggests that rapid social change is forcing a shift towards a particular type of more intensely intimate relationship in personal life in ways which undermine inequality between men and women. The speed and nature of change forces people to become self-reflexive, consciously working on sustaining a sense of who they are and self-consciously considering what kind of personal relationships they want (Giddens, 1991, 1992). Men as well as women are forced to self-reflexively confront their emotional needs. Greater self-awareness heightens the need for self-affirming connections with others and makes possible new depths of knowing and understanding. This is deeper than empathy based on pre-given shared understandings of

a common culture. It is a knowing which is 'discovered' or created through intense interaction. Giddens predicts that a growing number of individuals will seek a type of love relationship characterized by 'disclosing intimacy' which he calls 'the pure relationship'. The 'pure relationship' is 'pure' in the sense of having no *raison d'être* over and above an appreciation of the relationship itself. For Giddens, a pure relationship is by definition a relationship between equals. In so far as people pursue heterosexual relationships, the ascendancy of the 'pure relationship' will necessarily involve greater equality between men and women. The dimension of intimacy emphasized above all is knowing and understanding, rather than more practical forms of caring:

A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver. In the context of the pure relationship, trust can be mobilised only by a process of mutual disclosure. (1991, p. 6)

It [a pure relationship] refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it. (1992, p. 58)

These same characteristics of the relationship also make it inherently fragile. It cannot hold without mutual satisfaction.

Giddens claims that the trend towards 'the pure relationship' is paralleled by the emergence of a more responsive and creative form of sexuality which he calls 'plastic sexuality'. The term 'plastic'<sup>3</sup> is a shorthand for the late twentieth-century heightened awareness of the plasticity of sexuality – that is, of the fact that there is no essential pre-given way of being sexual. 'Plastic sexuality is decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction' (1992, p. 2). 'Plastic sexuality' involves freedom from preconceived notions about what is typical or appropriate: 'a revolution in female sexual autonomy', that is in women finding sexual pleasure in ways which are not dictated by men, and 'the flourishing of homosexuality' (1992, p. 28) are manifestations of this shift.

An important causal factor underlying the ascendancy of the pure relationship and plastic sexuality concerns the heightened sense that individuals have of their own creativity and their own limitations in the business of producing their social world. The deep-rooted changes

which underlie the transformation of intimacy are those detailed in Giddens's earlier work on the development of 'high modernity' (1990, 1991): globalization, disembeddedness, risk, dominance of experts and abstract systems, reflexivity. The pace of social change is such that traditions are more profoundly swept away than ever before (1994). The revolutions in communication technology and transport penetrate every part of the globe, promoting both the homogenization of culture and a sense of choice, reducing cultures to alternative lifestyles disembedded from their time and place. More and more aspects of life are visibly dependent on complex expert systems beyond our comprehension. Pre-modern faith in tradition was only briefly replaced by faith in the scientific fact. Facts are now known to be socially constructed such that today's right answer is tomorrow's mistake. The processes of change have sensitized people to the fragile and arbitrary nature of the social world, heightening a sense of risk and lack of control on the one hand, and a creative ability to construct ourselves on the other.

Where large areas of a person's life are no longer set by pre-existing patterns and habits, the individual is continually obliged to negotiate life-style options. Moreover – and this is crucial – such choices are not just 'external' or marginal aspects of the individual's attitudes, but define who the individual 'is'. In other words, life-style choices are constitutive of the reflexive narrative of self. (Giddens, 1992, p. 75)

The phrase 'narrative of the self' emphasizes the ongoing process of self-construction. It is as if in the Euro-North American world of the late twentieth century people cannot avoid being consciously self-reflexive, frequently considering if they are doing things in the right way as they struggle to maintain an identity.

The 'pure relationship' and plastic sexuality are forums in which the individual can intensively and co-operatively explore and construct a narrative of themselves. Men and women need to find 'forms of self exploration and moral construction' (Giddens, 1992, p. 144). The implication is that keeping oneself to oneself and denying emotions is increasingly impossible in what some authors refer to as a 'post modern' world. A successful pure relationship recreates psychological stability by resonating with the ontological security and basic trust developed in childhood (originally derived from the trust placed by children in their 'caretakers') (Giddens, 1991, p. 186).

Side-stepping Strathern's fears about the unsettling psychological consequences of new reproductive technologies, Giddens sees the freedom of the separation of sex and reproduction as part of the room for manoeuvre in which people make their own psychological stability. Exploring and discovering sexual pleasure can be part of both the 'narrative of the self' and 'the pure relationship'.

Giddens's vision of a possible future draws selectively from the range of available evidence and only briefly discusses aspects of the wider context which perpetuate inequalities between men and women. Indeed, Giddens seems to underplay the very widespread roots of inequality by suggesting that a transformation of intimacy could undermine the ways in which the wider social context produces gender and power. Moreover, the self-reflexivity which Giddens discusses with optimism is interpreted with pessimism by some authors (Bauman, 1987; Bellah et al., 1985; Hochschild, 1994; Strathern, 1992a,b). For these authors the constant monitoring of the self by the self is part and parcel of a rampant self-obsessive individualism or consumerism which may threaten to destroy all intimate relationships. They fear a future in which concern with self-satisfaction or self-protection renders impossible the necessary compromise involved in commitment to another. Women and men are envisaged as becoming equal in selfishness. Hence all intimate relationships are potentially casualties. The hypothesized diminishing of intimacy in the parent-child relationship is heralded as particularly catastrophic in its consequences. Giddens's use of psychoanalytic work is also selective, ignoring the more pessimistic offerings within the psychoanalytic tradition (see the discussion of Craib, in chapter one).

Like some other British and American commentators, Giddens constructs a positive account of a qualitative rather than simply quantitative shift in individualism. Sociologists have long argued that, in order to be able to get on with their lives, people in every society take what are arbitrary person-made rules for granted, as if they were natural or God-given. Giddens's account of high modernity suggests that less is taken for granted than ever before. And in particular people are more self-reflexively aware that they construct themselves. The American sociologist Arlene Skolnick talks of a similar process using somewhat different language. She refers to people's heightened awareness of 'individuated ways of responding in the world' (Skolnick, 1992, p. 146). The evidence for this type of reflexive individualism is reviewed by Skolnick who notes that as well as a

complex set of demographic, structural, and cultural changes that have created a more individualised life course and a heightened sense of self, there is a political dimension, variously described as 'rights revolutions' or the 'democratization of personhood'. At the centre of this shift is the claiming of political and cultural rights for disadvantaged groups – from blacks and other minorities, to women, to children, to gay people, to the handicapped, to the elderly. The democratization of personhood goes beyond the rights of citizenship, extending to all forms of authority and hierarchy. (1992, p. 169)

A number of theorists have observed that the 'democratization of personhood' and the associated reflexive search for identity is only possible at historical moments when sheer toil and the struggle for survival are not the main preoccupations of the majority (Giddens, 1990; Gellner, 1985; Skolnick, 1992). The post-war years of the twentieth century were years of relative affluence for the majority in all industrialized societies, although poverty was never wholly eradicated. Recent decades have seen reversals in fortune for significant minorities in many industrialized countries resulting from high unemployment and cuts in welfare provisions. The psychological revolution may not have stalled but for growing numbers the self-reflexive 'who am I?' questioning must compete with more pressing considerations such as where the next bed and meal is going to come from.

While stories of the past have been deconstructed and subjected to critique, this is also an ongoing if more openly speculative process for stories of the future. The competing nature of these stories, the pessimistic and the optimistic, already indicate mutual criticism. The same present-day events are often cited as evidence in opposing stories of radical change in personal life. For example, trends in cohabitation, divorce and remarriage can be interpreted as either a continuance of a profound commitment to family-type arrangements but with some modification of what counts as 'family', or as leading to the end of 'the family' as a pervasive ideal. Versions of the past are inevitably implicated in visions of the future. Those who speak pejoratively of a phenomenon described as 'rampant individualism' fear the end not just of particular forms of family life, but of all responsibility to others, with children as the main victims. In their version of the past there were limits, constraints, obligations and sanctions which worked for the benefit of all. The same phenomenon is also interpreted as an extension of the 'democratization of personhood' advanced by feminism, civil rights movements and others struggling

for more equal societies. Their vision of the past is one of pernicious inequality and unfair impositions. The issue of visions of the future, optimism and pessimism is a theme to which I will return in the final chapter of this book in the context of the interim reviews of empirical research in each intervening chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

# Parenting and Intimacy

Theoretical and historical stories of intimacy suggest two sets of questions to be asked concerning the parent-child relationship. First, is the balance of parenting between mothers and fathers changing, with profound consequences? From a variety of perspectives, more emotionally involved fathering will create a realignment of gender and intimacy. For example, psychoanalytic accounts link differences in intimacy between adult men and women back to the balance of parenting between mothers and fathers. The balance of parenting is the issue dealt with in the first section of this chapter. Secondly, are parent-child relationships moving towards equality and 'disclosing intimacy' and how should such a shift be evaluated? This issue is dealt with in the second section of the chapter. On both these issues, there are already opposing camps, those for whom more shared caring between mothers and fathers is good and those for whom it is bad, and those for whom greater equality between parents and children is good and those for whom it is bad. Much is written and spoken with limited or no evidence and, of course, all existing evidence involves a process of interpretation.

### **Mothers and Fathers as Intimates**

By the late nineteenth century, motherhood had become a matter of public policy and debate in all industrializing nation states. A