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Intimate encounters: the negotiation of difference within the family and its implications for social relations in public space

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This paper focuses on the neglected issue of encounters with difference within the context of family life at a moment in time when families are increasingly characterised by dissimilarity as a product of mobility and individualisation. The study upon which this paper is based involved both a survey of social attitudes (survey n = 3021) and qualitative multi-stage research (n = 60). The evidence of the findings is that intra-familial diversity does produce more positive attitudes in public life towards the specific social group that an individual family member is perceived to represent. However, such positive attitudes are not translated beyond this specific ‘difference’ to challenge wider prejudices towards other groups. As such, this research contributes to literatures on geographies of encounter and the geographies of family life by exposing the limits of intimate contact with difference in changing the way social relationships are lived in the wider world.

KEY WORDS: family, encounter, difference, intimacy, prejudice, contact

We are witnessing unprecedented population change within the European Union: it is an era of super mobility and super diversity. Both the globalisation of the economy and global conflicts have accelerated patterns of migration both into, and within, the EU. Other forms of rapid population change are evident too. The historical shift from industrial society to new modernity, in which individuals are assumed to be released from traditional constraints and to have more freedom to choose between a range of lifestyles and social ties, has resulted in the more open public expression of a diverse range of identities. In this context, there has been increased attention in geography and related social sciences to how ways of living together with difference are being forged.

To date this research has taken public space as the starting point of such encounters with a range of work paying attention to different types of contact sites from cafes (Laurier and Philo 2006) and markets (Watson 2009) to neighbourhoods and various micro-publics (e.g. Wise and Velayutham 2009), and even the school gate (Wilson 2013a). Most work to promote equality and diversity is also primarily concentrated in the public domain or through quasi-public institutional spaces such as the school (Hemming 2011a 2011b) or the workplace (Wilson 2013b). Yet, encounters with difference do not just arise as a result of proximity in public or institutional spaces but also increasingly begin at home in the wider collective context of family life.

Inter-ethnic and inter-racial relationships and marriages are on the rise, not only as a product of globalisation and accelerated patterns of migration, but also in part due to the ending of historical miscegenation laws. As a consequence, ethnicity is increasingly becoming a culturally less significant obstacle to love and marriage (Waters 2000). For example, European research suggests that between 2008 and 2010, on average 1 in 12 married people were in a mixed relationship (Lanzieri 2012). A recent UK study, which used Labour Force Survey household datasets (n = 60 000) to analyse patterns of household change (2004–8), found evidence of an increase in the diversity of the population. It suggested that 4% of white British people were in a relationship with a partner from a different ethnic group and around 9% of children were living in families that contained

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mixed or multiple heritages (Platt 2009, 34, 40). It also identified that younger generational cohorts are more likely to marry someone from a different religious tradition than older cohorts.

The contemporary European family has also been transformed by processes of de-traditionalisation and individualisation. From an institution with fixed roles and hierarchical relations where the emphasis was on discipline, conformity and duty, the family has become a more fluid entity where greater emphasis is placed on individual members' agency and expressivity, with the consequence that roles and relations have become more negotiable (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). For example, demographic research in Poland, a society characterised by a study of European Values as holding more traditional values than most affluent Western European nations, nonetheless identified an increase in the divorce rate, a rise in co-habitation and children born out of wedlock, more people delaying marriage, as well as an increase in the instability and fluidity of relationships (Jasińska-Kania 2012).

Indeed, Williams (2004) suggests that although family relationships have always been subject to change, the volatility of contemporary relationships means that for many people, family relationships will need to be redefined and positively established on a more regular basis as new sexual partnerships are formed, as children leave (or do not leave) their parents' home in different ways and at different stages leading to a much greater diversity of family relationships. The associated democratisation of emotions which now characterises contemporary families has also facilitated greater openness about sexuality and other forms of intimacy (Giddens 1992). As a result, it is perhaps easier now than ever before for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to come out to their families of origin, or to create their own families of choice[1] (Gorman-Murray 2008). As such, although the bonds of genes and blood evoke powerful ideas about the perceived similarity and fixity of those who are related (Nash 2005), in practice families have become characterised by increasing dissimilarity over time as a product of individual members' lifestyle choices, occupations, relationships and so on.

Yet, the home and associated spaces of family life have received little attention as sites of encounter where difference is lived and experienced. This is despite the fact that psychology researchers have long recognised the importance of family in explaining attitudes towards difference and the transmission of prejudice (e.g. Allport 1954). Indeed, geographers have paid relatively little attention to the nature of family life. In the late 1980s and 1990s an important body of work emerged on the geographies of parenting (e.g. England 1996). This literature, although initially dominated by debates about social reproduction from the perspective of working mothers and fathers, evolved to embrace the voices of children as recipients of care and as carers themselves, and to explore children's experiences of family life and adult–child power relations *within* the home (for a summary, see Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). As this body of work developed into what is now the sub-disciplinary area of children and youth geographies, its focus on the spatiality of childhood, children's agency, and the diversity of children's lives meant that relationships between adult family members (within, and between, generations) which are no longer necessarily rooted in the shared space of 'home' have been largely neglected (though for an exception, see Valentine and Hughes 2012). This paper addresses this absence by examining narrative accounts of intimate encounters with difference within intra-familial relationships, and their consequences for members' social relationships *beyond* the porous boundaries of the home.

Socialisation theory has emphasised the importance of the direct transmission of social attitudes within families. It is well established that parents intentionally inform and teach children about their attitudes and values (Allport 1954), but they also unintentionally model these through the ways in which they establish domestic rules which embody values and meanings (e.g. Wood and Beck 1994), and relate to others as part of the mundane practices of everyday life (e.g. Valentine *et al*. 2014). This can include, for example, the development of familial social capital through which parents can either reproduce, what Putnam (1995) terms *bonding capital* by exposing their children to social networks of people like themselves; or facilitate their children to develop *bridging capital* by providing them with opportunities to mix with 'others' and to make friends with people different from themselves.

However, the term socialisation can often slip into being used in implicitly ageist ways in which it is the older generation who are presumed to shape the 'norms' and practices of their offspring, whereas the evidence of intergenerational studies is that young people can and do contest, and sometimes change, the attitudes and practices of other generations. Rather, we adopt a life-course perspective. This approach sees lives as dynamic, recognising that relationships are regularly renegotiated in response to changing social circumstances and opportunities, in which family members exercise agency and try to negotiate or work out the contradictions and paradoxes of their ties to one another over time (Finch 1989; Valentine and Hughes 2012). In doing so, this paper contributes to both geographies of encounter and to wider geographies of intimacy and family life.

Research design

The study upon which this paper is based involved quantitative and qualitative research which was conducted in two national contexts. While the

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question of how to develop the capacity to live with difference is one confronting all countries of the EU, the extent to which national communities are currently characterised by supermobility and super-diversity varies. Most notably, there is a distinction between those countries which were former colonial powers (e.g. the UK) and post-communist states in Eastern Europe (e.g. Poland).

The historical legacy of colonialism (which led to the arrival of black Caribbean, Asian and in particular Muslim communities) in the UK has been the internal globalisation of society and a consequent need to address the challenges of multi-culturalism since the post-war period. The UK is also one of the societies that has been at the vanguard of processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation, and consequently is characterised by high levels of mobility and the public expression of diverse identities and lifestyles. In contrast, Poland, which historically was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, became almost ethnically and religiously homogenous during the socialist period as a result of territorial changes and resettlement of minority populations after the Second World War and communist restrictions on population mobility (Jasińska-Kania and Łodziński, 2009). Following the end of socialism, present-day Poland is slowly becoming a poliethnic society as a result of the arrival of migrants from elsewhere; transnational relationships established through its own citizens' new-found mobility; and increased engagement with global media and cultures (Sadowski 2007). The term ethnic and national minority has a specific definition in Polish law. The groups regarded as national minorities are Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Jewish. There are four groups recognised as ethnic minorities: Roma, Karaim (an ethnic/religious group stemming from Judaism), Lemkos (a Ruthenian ethnic group, usually Orthodox or Greek Catholic) and Tatar (a Muslim ethnic group). Although other groups (e.g. Vietnamese) are also established in Poland, these are not legally recognised as national or ethnic minorities by the State. Polish scholars have also started to acknowledge many other 'lines of difference' not only based on ethnicity, nationality or race, but also in terms of social and cultural differences (e.g. sexuality, disabilities, religion and belief) resulting from the post-1989 democratisation and individualisation of social life (e.g. Krzemiński 2007; Jasińska-Kania and Łodziński 2009), notwithstanding the powerful influence of the Catholic Church.

The specific cities of Leeds and Warsaw were chosen as research sites because the proportion of minority ethnic residents in Leeds is close to the UK national average (approximately 15%, 2011 Census); Warsaw was selected because it is the most socially diverse and multicultural city in Poland. Both cities have also witnessed a recent influx of migrants from other European countries. A survey of social attitudes was conducted between February and April 2012 in both cities. This asked about the respondents' encounters with people who are different from themselves in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability in many kinds of sites. Just over 1500 people took part in a computer-assisted person interview (CAPI) in each city (n = 3021). We applied a random location quota sampling design. This approach mixes a random selection of respondents with more purposeful sampling across different demographic profiles (see Piekut *et al*. 2012). A number of sampling points based on lower level geographies, output areas (OAs) in Leeds and statistical regions (SRs) in Warsaw were randomly selected (168 and 136 sampling points, respectively). Quotas for gender, age (18–34, 35–54, 55 years old or more) and work status[2] were set. Quotas were applied at the level of OAs/SRs, representative of the population of that unit to ensure that the respondents selected for the interview reflected the profile of the area. The questionnaire was cognitively tested before the fieldwork. In the post-fieldwork phase the data were proportionally weighted.

On the basis of the survey, 60 participants (30 in each city) were recruited for the qualitative research. This involved individual case studies. Here, each case comprised (1) a timeline, (2) life-story interview, (3) audio diary of everyday encounters (4) semi-structured interview about attitudes towards difference, and (5) an interview reflecting on the emerging findings (the source of interview material quoted is identified by this number system). The advantage of using this biographical approach (Valentine and Sadgrove 2014) was that it enabled a focus on both the personal and public way lives develop and an opportunity to explore both continuities and changes in participants' attitudes and values.

The participants selected included those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds whose personal circumstances and lifestyles afforded them a range of opportunities to encounter 'difference', and who demonstrated a range of social attitudes (from openness to prejudice) in the survey. All the quotations included in this paper are verbatim.

The domestication of difference: mapping diversity in the family

Just under half (46.5%) of those who responded to the *Living with difference* survey in Leeds have immediate (parents, spouse/partner, children, sibling) and/or extended (e.g. grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins) family members who they define as 'different' from themselves in relation to their ethnic background, sexual orientation or (dis)ability. The comparable figure for Warsaw was just under a quarter (23.1%).

Focusing specifically on ethnicity, in Leeds among (adult) people of white British ethnicity more than 6%

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Table 1 The social attitudes of people with and without a family member from a different ethnic background in Leeds, UK

Attitudes towards	Ethnic family diversity	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1182	0.638	0.215	NS
	Yes	289	0.648	0.230	
People aged 65+	No	898	0.800	0.190	NS
	Yes	248	0.779	0.202	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1176	0.650	0.243	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	286	0.689	0.234	
Muslim people	No	1124	0.613	0.246	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	274	0.661	0.228	
Disabled people	No	956	0.793	0.192	NS
	Yes	223	0.783	0.203	
Black people	No	1162	0.699	0.217	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	290	0.739	0.208	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	976	0.517	0.247	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	252	0.574	0.259	
Jewish people	No	1176	0.694	0.209	NS
	Yes	284	0.708	0.215	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	1084	0.496	0.239	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	290	0.547	0.249	
Transsexuals	No	1127	0.574	0.239	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	283	0.609	0.248	
White people (in-group)	No	1105	0.766	0.201	NS
	Yes	251	0.762	0.206	
Average attitudes	No	1217	0.641	0.169	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	299	0.670	0.177	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

have a family member from a different ethnic background in the immediate family (spouse/partner, parent, child, sibling) and 13% in the extended family (2% of respondents in both immediate and extended families). The percentages remain lower in Warsaw where just less than 5% of people have an immediate or extended family member of non-Polish nationality.

Our analysis[3] of the survey questions about attitudes to difference shows that respondents who stated that they had family member(s) from a different ethnic background have significantly more positive attitudes towards black people, Muslims, refugees and asylum seekers, and travellers/gypsies/Roma people (level of significance of the difference is $p < 0.01$; see Table 1)[4]. They also expressed more positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men and transsexual people, although this result was less statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The pattern in Warsaw shared some similarities as well as differences with the Leeds results. Here, those respondents who identified that they had a family member from a different ethnic background demonstrated favourable attitudes towards travellers/gypsies/Roma people and Jewish people ($p < 0.01$) and towards lesbians and gay men and transsexual people and older people, albeit at a much lower level of statistical significance ($p < 0.1$). However, in contrast to the Leeds respondents, intra-familial difference did not have a statistically significant effect on the Warsaw respondents' attitudes towards refugees/asylum seekers, and either black people or Muslims (see Table 2).

In relation to sexual orientation, 6% of heterosexual respondents to the Leeds survey declared that they had immediate family members who were lesbian, gay or bisexual, and 10% that they had extended family members who identify in this way. Such familial relationships correlate with a very positive attitude (i.e. highly statistically significant different among the two groups) towards lesbians and gay men as a social group ($p < 0.001$), as well as producing positive attitudes towards transsexual people ($p < 0.01$) and less significantly different, yet still within a level of confidence, favourable attitudes towards Jewish and travellers/gypsies/Roma people ($p < 0.05$; see Table 3).

In Warsaw less than 2% of respondents stated that they had a lesbian, gay or bisexual family member, perhaps reflecting the stronger influence of the

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Table 2 The social attitudes of people with and without a family member from a different ethnic background in Warsaw, Poland

Attitudes towards	Ethnic family diversity	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1371	0.638	0.252	NS
	Yes	73	0.632	0.266	
People aged 65+	No	1088	0.837	0.191	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	64	0.790	0.199	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1241	0.501	0.303	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	64	0.576	0.322	
Muslim people	No	1299	0.533	0.272	NS
	Yes	71	0.572	0.308	
Disabled people	No	1017	0.855	0.195	NS
	Yes	56	0.820	0.205	
Black people	No	1367	0.685	0.267	NS
	Yes	73	0.708	0.277	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	1333	0.620	0.257	NS
	Yes	70	0.641	0.270	
Jewish people	No	1336	0.600	0.282	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	75	0.676	0.300	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	1272	0.500	0.276	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	70	0.590	0.309	
Transsexuals	No	1145	0.431	0.312	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	55	0.509	0.340	
White people (in-group)	No	1395	0.863	0.193	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	69	0.790	0.239	
Average attitudes	No	1412	0.610	0.200	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	77	0.651	0.215	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

Catholic Church in Poland and evidence of significant levels of homophobia which research suggests contribute to deterring lesbians and gay men from coming out (Graff 2010). Nonetheless, those respondents with a lesbian or gay family member had significantly more positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men as a social group as well as transsexual people ($p < 0.05$)[5]. However, there are highly significant differences in attitudes towards people of different ethno-religious background too ($p < 0.001$; see Table 4)[6].

Questions about disability are commonly formulated differently in the UK and Poland (e.g. in national censuses). In the UK people are asked whether they perceive that they have a limiting long-term illness, health problems or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do, including problems that are due to old age. In Poland people are only asked whether their daily activities are limited by disability or long-term illness. In the survey we asked 'Do you have any longstanding illness, disability or infirmity?'. Among people who do not perceive themselves to be disabled, or to have longstanding ill health, 13% of the respondents in Leeds and 6% in Warsaw stated that they have an immediate family member who is disabled and 13% and 9% respectively stated that they had an extended family member who is disabled.

In Leeds, people with a disabled family member have significantly more favourable attitudes towards disabled people as a group than those respondents who do not have a disabled family member ($p < 0.01$). They also identified a positive attitude towards the white majority population ($p < 0.01$) and a positive, though less statistically significant, attitude towards black people as a group ($p < 0.1$). Yet, in Poland the survey revealed there was no relationship between having disabled family membership and attitudes towards disabled people as a group. There was a weak relationship between having a disabled family member and holding less positive attitudes towards people aged 65 and over (although the difference is outside the 95% confidence interval: p=0.14).

In sum, the evidence of the *Living with difference* survey is that intra-familial diversity does appear to produce more positive attitudes towards the social groups that individual family members are perceived to represent. In other words, people with family members from different ethnic backgrounds are less prejudiced towards people from different ethnic

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Table 3 The social attitudes of people with and without gay/lesbian family member in Leeds, UK

Attitudes towards	Sexual minority in family	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1243	0.641	0.216	NS
	Yes	228	0.637	0.228	
People aged 65+	No	934	0.794	0.192	NS
	Yes	211	0.804	0.196	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1238	0.645	0.243	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	225	0.723	0.224	
Muslim people	No	1173	0.622	0.241	NS
	Yes	225	0.625	0.256	
Disabled people	No	1003	0.789	0.194	NS
	Yes	176	0.806	0.198	
Black people	No	1220	0.702	0.217	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	232	0.730	0.211	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	1019	0.523	0.248	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	209	0.556	0.263	
Jewish people	No	1230	0.696	0.209	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	230	0.699	0.216	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	1146	0.500	0.241	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	227	0.541	0.245	
Transsexuals	No	1197	0.573	0.243	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	214	0.626	0.227	
White people (in-group)	No	1137	0.765	0.199	NS
	Yes	219	0.762	0.214	
Average attitudes	No	1278	0.643	0.170	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	239	0.667	0.173	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

and religious backgrounds; those with a lesbian/gay family member are less prejudiced towards sexual minorities; and those with a disabled family member are less prejudiced towards disabled people (except in this latter case in Warsaw). However, there is limited evidence to suggest that intra-familial diversity has a significant impact on attitudes towards other differences beyond those which are intimately experienced within the context of the family (the exception being in Warsaw where gay/lesbian family members have more positive attitudes not only towards sexual minorities but also towards minority ethnic groups).

In the following section we draw on the qualitative research undertaken in this study to reflect on the participants' accounts of encountering difference within the context of family life and to explore how, and why, this intimate contact with difference has or has not changed the way their relationships are lived in the wider world.

Living with difference: how contact changes the way relations are lived over time

In a seminal study on prejudice reduction, Allport (1954) developed what has become known as the 'contact hypothesis'. Namely, that it is by bringing people from different social groups together that mutual respect can be developed. He identified optimum conditions for such contact between groups to be effective to include: the necessity for participants to have a sense of equal status and a common purpose, for the engagement to be realistic rather than artificial, as well as for such encounters to have the sustained support of the wider community within which they occur. Allport did not identify the home and the wider affective spaces of family life as such a site of contact, focusing instead on public or quasi institutional sites such as the workplace and educational programme; yet the quasi 'private' spaces of family life largely fulfil Allport's criteria for the conditions necessary to optimise meaningful contact.

In particular, most families have a sense of common purpose in that they are predicated on intimacy, which Jamieson (1998) defines as: knowing, caring for and loving each other. Implicit within these shared emotional bonds is a set of mutual obligations or responsibilities, albeit these are not fixed but are created over time through negotiation between family members and are embedded in particular material and local contexts (Finch and Mason 1993). In this sense, encounters with difference within the family

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Table 4 The social attitudes of people with and without gay/lesbian family member in Warsaw, Poland

Attitudes towards	Sexual minority in family	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1415	0.637	0.252	NS
	Yes	30	0.677	0.280	
People aged 65+	No	1123	0.834	0.192	NS
	Yes	29	0.856	0.178	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1282	0.502	0.305	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	23	0.643	0.246	
Muslim people	No	1342	0.531	0.273	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	29	0.707	0.263	
Disabled people	No	1051	0.853	0.197	NS
	Yes	22	0.893	0.143	
Black people	No	1411	0.683	0.268	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	29	0.844	0.170	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	1374	0.618	0.258	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	29	0.787	0.220	
Jewish people	No	1381	0.600	0.283	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	29	0.794	0.212	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	1315	0.502	0.278	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	27	0.631	0.259	
Transsexuals	No	1182	0.432	0.313	$p < 0.05$
	Yes	18	0.603	0.304	
White people (in-group)	No	1435	0.859	0.196	NS
	Yes	29	0.870	0.194	
Average attitudes	No	1459	0.609	0.201	$p < 0.001$
	Yes	31	0.754	0.152	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

also take place in a context sustained by wider 'community' expectations of familial duties to love and care for each other.

Families in our study encountered difference in a number of ways, including as a result of a family member having a relationship with someone of a different ethnicity or religious belief, the birth of a disabled or dual heritage child, and a family member coming out as gay, or developing a disability. The introduction of such 'differences' was described by some interviewees as being accepted unconditionally (in some cases immediately, in others after painful negotiations over time). These accounts of welcoming 'others' into the family came from both those who self-identified as holding progressive social attitudes and who might therefore be expected to embrace intra-familial difference; as well as those who admitted they held prejudices towards the social groups which their 'new' family members were perceived to represent.

One of the interviewees acknowledged that his attitudes are conservative and indeed that his adult daughter has often labelled him racist. His prejudices were therefore challenged when she announced that she intended to marry a First Nation Canadian. Although, he had reservations about the relationship, he was fearful of hurting his daughter by opposing the marriage. Instead he spent time getting to know his potential son-in-law. Romantic love, according to Johnson and Lawler (2005) emphasises the importance of *compatibility*, which they argue is made through a process of moral evaluation of each other (i.e. do we share the same values, want the same things?). They further argue that romantic relationships are supposed to be based on authenticity: knowing, caring for and loving another for '*who they are*'. In getting to know his future son-in-law the interviewee recognised the compatibility and authenticity of this man's relationship with his daughter, acknowledging the shared creative skills and cultural interests which brought them together. At the same time, he describes how spending time with his future son-in-law led, in effect, to a similar process of moral evaluation of each other. As a result he came to recognise that despite his ethnic and cultural differences from his son-in-law, nonetheless his son-in-law had a strong set of moral values, predicated on intergenerational respect, which demonstrated his compatibility with the family. In other words, the sort of emotional labour which is undertaken within families to find a connection across

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difference can enable people to recognise a moral proximity with 'others' (i.e. share the same values) which can challenge the fixity of their previous attitudes.

> My daughter is marrying an Aboriginal.
>
> Interviewer: Really?
>
> Yeah, and he has a Mohican haircut . . . and he does this traditional dancing.
>
> Interviewer: So, what did you think when you first met him?
>
> I had grave reservations. I still do have some – I think. Although I don't agree with him, he's been very beneficial to my daughter. It's funny, actually. I can quite understand where he's coming from . . . Originally, I was told that I was going to have to hand my daughter across to this fellow, and that really got me going in turmoil. I thought, there's no way I'm going to do that. Yet, if I didn't, it would hurt my daughter. Fortunately, that's not going to be the case . . . I've got on very well with my daughter . . . But she used to call me a racist. The biggest one, she did . . . But she's quite a clever lass. She's got her MA in photography and so she was involved in photographing all these cultural activities. Of course, he's involved in performing it. So that's where the two got together . . .
>
> Interviewer: So what did you think when you met this chap she bought into your life?
>
> It was towards the end of the evening. I know the beer was talking a little bit but it kept coming across that he respected me and I couldn't get over this. I said, what do you mean you respect every word I sort of say? You're making me feel uncomfortable now. He said, you're my elder, I respect everything that my elders tell me . . . I says, well don't listen to me [laughs]. But it must be a cultural thing, you've got to respect – which I thought was a nice thing – it would be beneficial here in some ways.
>
> Source 4, white British man, 59

Likewise, another interviewee and his sister grew up in a household with a father who was openly racist and lived within a wider white working-class community that he describes as characterised by intolerance. In his youth he was openly racist and flirted with involvement in far-right groups. For these reasons his sister was reluctant to tell him she was pregnant as a result of a relationship with a man of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Yet, as he explains (below), rejecting his dual heritage nephew is something which he *'can't do'*. Rather, he draws on a discourse of love with its obligation to care for another unconditionally to explain the change in his attitude. Moreover, he stresses his own sons' acceptance of their dual heritage cousin (which he is unsure whether to attribute to childhood 'innocence' of the significance of difference or, something they have absorbed in a multi-racial school environment) in reinforcing his personal commitment to accept his nephew within the family. In doing so, this interviewee acknowledges his newfound implicit proximity to the type of prejudice he previously espoused given the likelihood that his nephew may experience racism as he grows up. In this way intimate encounters with difference can change people's perspective by bringing the distant close – both literally in terms of regular contact and metaphorically in terms of emotional connectivity – which can unsettle the certainty of the way they see the world.

> me nephew is half cast. My sister was round with him the other day. He's just a little person and the boys love him to pieces, I love him to pieces. My sister were frightened to death of telling me that she were pregnant to somebody who were black because she knows how I've been brought up and what my thoughts were on it years ago. At end of day I can't do it. You've just got to get on with life and a change is as good as a rest [edit]. But your children and the rest of your family's got to live with that and go out and about in public you know, like at school. My little boy's . . . it's quite multiracial, again because we've got Indian, Polish, there's even a Chinese in his class and you know, he doesn't see them no different. They don't, kids don't . . . I don't know whether it's innocence or whether or it's something that's instilled in them . . . Like with my nephew, my eldest is his godfather, so my sister asked him to do that. And my little boy, just adores him, he just wants to be there with him . . . and as he gets older, I can see if there's any derogative comments thrown towards him, that those two will stand up for him.
>
> Source 4, white British man, 34

As this quotation hints, intimate encounters with someone who may face social stigma or discrimination in everyday public space can sensitise individuals to specific forms of prejudice. Interviewees described seeing prejudice differently because it was no longer an abstract harm but something which had the power to hurt someone they loved. There was also a recognition that they too may experience *vicarious prejudice* as a result of their relationship with, or connectivity to, the family member concerned (cf Valentine and Skelton 2003). A previous study of families of children with disabilities established that not just the disabled child, but also their parents and siblings, can experience disablism (Dowling and Dolan 2001). Other research with young people who have lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) parents found the majority were supportive of marriage equality for LGB people because they believed it would provide a buffer against some of the negativity they experienced as a result of their parents' sexual orientation (Goldberg and Kuvalanka 2012). In such ways, proximity to difference (literally in terms of

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living together or being in public space together, and metaphorically in terms of the connectivity of familial ties) can have an emotional impact on family members, including sadness, anger and fear, which by exposing the relational nature of their lives, can challenge individuals' social attitudes. Below, interviewees who have a disabled father and a sister who has married an Ethiopian describe how these intimate encounters have facilitated their recognition of disablism and racism respectively.

> Because of my father's sickness I became more understanding of disabled people. It's different when there is no such person in your family. I don't know, when you don't see it, then you can perceive it differently. But because of the fact that my father was sick, and it became worse and worse this disease, he was more and more, excluded from everything.
>
> Source 2, white Polish man, 36

> I thought to myself that as a country we are still very self-centred, we have little respect towards other people. And I dislike it, right? I mean it doesn't affect me, because I come from this country, I was brought up here and I pay taxes here . . . But such behaviours irritate me because my sister encountered them [she has married an Ethiopian man], typical racism . . . so I am sensitive [to prejudice] in this respect. I've got a certain radar which detects such things which other people don't, right? So it's had a certain impact.
>
> Source 5, white Polish man, 38

Although, the introduction of difference into a family was in some cases initially met with disapproval or hostility, intimate relations are the product of negotiation, and as such, can change over time. In particular, the way that families are created and lived together through sharing time–space (Valentine and Hughes 2012) means that familiarity can be produced through the repetition of contact in spaces of close proximity like the home or the family holiday [cf Amin's (2008) argument about the production of familiarity in micro public spaces; and Wilson's (2013a) study of familiarity generated between parents through repetitive meetings at the school gate].

In particular, nearness in space and time can bring with it a sense of shared identification which emerges as a result of the development of new shared practices, routines and rituals which can instil a more fluid sense of what constitutes 'family' and re-energise familial relations through this self-conscious collective effort to embrace difference. For example, interracial families often blend their cultural practices and beliefs over time to intentionally make new collective identities that embody notions of diasporic hybridity (e.g. Vucinic-Nescovic 2002). Even extended family members, such as adult siblings and grandparents, can be willing to move beyond their own ways of being and doing to embrace difference. Below an interviewee describes how he learnt Italian to communicate with his brother-in-law which enabled them to develop a greater intimacy and understanding of each other.

> I can talk to him now, but earlier our family communicated with him via my sister, who is a translator. Italians are different . . . you know, they are so cheerful, let's laugh, even if he doesn't understand a word, he just, sort of is so open and 'pro-family' that this language barrier wasn't so important. But when I started to speak Italian and understand it, then I could actually interact with him and become closer. . .
>
> Interviewer: Is this why you learnt Italian?
>
> . . . since [name removed] showed up and couldn't talk to anybody, and my sister had to help him in terms of language and translate everything, I thought that I would learn Italian. That was the main reason I learnt it . . . it wasn't something difficult for me but I also noticed an added value in the form of being able to understand more and I will play a role as language intermediary in the family.
>
> Source 4, white Polish man, 38

In the context of the increasingly diverse composition of contemporary families, and the potential fluidity of family relationships over time, Finch (2007) has argued that publicly conveying that relationships between individuals carry meanings associated with family, and confirm that these relationships *are family*, has become increasingly important. She argues that families need to be 'displayed' in order to be recognised by others and to have a social reality. Public recognition and acceptance by family members is a particularly meaningful form of support for lesbians and gay men who come out (Gorman-Murray 2008; Oswald 2002). Such forms of display where intra-familial 'difference' can be realised include family photographs, naming practices, collective outings or holidays and celebratory events. In such ways, ' difference' becomes part of the family narrative; that is, it is situated in and understood to be part of the accepted repertoire of what 'family' means. It is embedded in the dynamic stories that families tell about themselves (Finch and Mason 2000). Below two interviewees describe how their families have displayed acceptance of an interfaith marriage and homosexuality respectively. In some cases, such openness about 'difference' can facilitate or be mobilised in conversations with others and in doing so converted into wider social/cultural capital.

> I mean in my Mum's family there is a Roman Catholic guy who has a wife from the Orthodox faith. And to be fair they did wait a lot longer for parents to accept them, because they didn't want to go against them, they wanted

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for the parents to come to terms with them being of different faiths before they married. We were at the wedding and there were people from different faiths but they all acted normal. [Name removed] is a very nice girl. So it's no issue. I mean she was accepted by my whole family unconditionally.

Source 4, white Polish woman, 50

If you met my father you'd know what I mean . . . I inherited some very conservative thoughts about difference which I have had to make a decision to reject and overcome . . . my father is devoid of open-mindedness, but he is absolutely fine with sexuality issues. I mean he is, genuinely absolutely fine walking down the street in a public place with me holding hands with my partner, he's got no problem with that at all.

Source 2, white British man, 49

In summary, to date, geographical research has paid relatively little attention to the emotional work which is undertaken within families to get close to or accept 'difference' (notwithstanding the emergence of emotional geographies; e.g. Davidson *et al*. 2005). Yet, we can only understand how people relate to each other by understanding the emotions that constitute social relations. Smart (2007) argues that love is often treated with disdain by social theorists because of its association with romance, which is seen as overhyped, predicated on gender inequality, and ultimately usually considered either unfulfilling or unreliable. However, the evidence of this research is that familial love, rather than romantic love, is a crucial emotion in bridging 'difference', by creating an emotional connectivity that brings the distant closer (i.e. this proximity brings a recognition of moral compatibility; a sensitisation to the realities of prejudice; and the production of shared identifications and a social reality – in terms of the stories we tell about ourselves). Writing about travel and how it can invert one's identity, Minha-ha (1994, 23) says 'I become me via an other'. In a similar way, unconditional familial love can displace the way individuals see the world because through enabling 'difference' to be embraced in intimate encounters, it can unsettle prejudices that are experienced in public life.

Yet, while the dominant evidence of this research is that intimate encounters have a positive effect on people's attitudes towards specific differences in public life, the general prejudices of some participants had not been interrupted as a result of the emotional connectivity and proximity that family life brings. In the following section, we examine the reasons for this resistance.

The limits of contact: tolerance, secrecy, and shame

Despite the fact that people are often reluctant to talk to outsiders about bad relations or admit they do not like close kin, some interviewees did share their reticence to accept intra-familial difference.

Gillis (1996) argues that everyone lives in two families – *the one they live by* (i.e. the idealised vision of family life we aspire to) which serves as a moral anchor for the way we believe family life ought to be lived, and the *one they live with* (i.e. the families we share our everyday realities with) with all their contradictions and disorder. For some interviewees the introduction of 'difference' into their intimate relationships threatened their idealisation of 'family' and what it ought to be. In particular, parents and grandparents commonly regard their offspring as the means of securing their stake in the future. Lesbian/gay sexuality, a disability or the birth of a dual heritage child puts the family's perceived future at risk – in both genetic and social terms – which often produces emotions of anger, grief or denial.

when I had my son . . . he was about two years old when I found he's special needs. My mother-in-law, she was saying to me 'Why are you saying that he's special, why are you taking him to hospital, are you going to label him?' I said 'Hang on, you listen to me. I labelled him and that's the way he'll get help, he'll get support and he'll get better. If I don't take him to see any doctors . . . he won't get any help at all. How is he going to manage then if he's not getting any support?' [Mother-in-law] 'Yes but what will people say?' I say 'I don't give a damn about what other people say, he's my son and I'm his mother'.

Source 2, Asian British woman, 43

The youngest of my four step-brothers is gay . . . he didn't come out until he was 23 . . . but we don't really have a right lot to do with him . . . My eldest brother, half-brother, is . . . how can I put this? Very forthright in how he thinks, very prejudiced . . . To the point where he's been on marches, he was part of the BNP . . . He has very political views does my elder brother . . . But his other brothers all took it really hard . . . and my elder brother were like 'He's not coming to my house, I'm not having him in the house, he's gay'.

Source 2, white British woman, 42

In some cases the families' initial reactions to 'difference' included jokes, derogatory comments and the sort of outright hate speech that characterises the articulation of prejudice in public encounters. Although in recounting such instances some interviewees sought to justify or excuse these reactions and in doing so evoked ageism in their assumption that older people are necessarily more prejudiced than younger generations (Valentine 2015).

I remember how we laughed at my sister [when she announced that she was marrying a Bulgarian] – she will follow a donkey, her husband will ride a donkey [laughter]. Of course, it was a joke, but the joke has a subtext there.

Source 4, white Polish woman, 67

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She's quite old fashioned when you compare today's views with what she comes out with sometimes . . . I know that she's not very happy about her great granddaughter going out with black boys. Even though she tolerates it, I know she's not happy about it. I mean she's had lots of black boyfriends, my great niece, and my mother – they live together in the same house – and she tolerates it but she's not happy.

Source 2, other white background, woman, 36

Yet, despite personal negative responses, family members can work at managing their responses and at concealing 'difference' in order to ensure the continuity of the family, and the transmission of its traditions and identity. In particular, intra-familial and inter-generational pressure can be brought to bear to determine domestic practices such as eating habits, language use, religious rituals and child-rearing. By assimilating a newcomer into the family's collective identity, 'difference' can be minimised, absorbed, or denied, enabling an individual family member's prejudices towards wider social groups to remain uninterrupted. In such ways, families are literally made through the work undertaken by members to create a collective representation of themselves.

Here, interviewees commonly drew on discourses of unconditional 'love' to explain why they were compelled to accept a family member's new partner despite the persistence of their personal wider prejudicial attitudes. These interviewees described 'tolerance' as in effect a familial obligation, and a necessity to avoid the severing of family ties. They commonly rationalised or justified the presence of 'difference' in the family through a moral evaluation of the character of the individuals concerned ('He's a very nice man'. 'He's a good man'). Yet, such positive evaluations were not generalised beyond acceptance of these individuals to the particular groups they were perceived to represent (see also Valentine 2008; Valentine and Sadgrove 2012; Leitner 2012) in the way that some of the interviewees quoted in the previous section were able to do so. As such, these interviewees' general prejudices have remained unchanged by their intra-familial encounters with difference.

[His sister married an immigrant] He's my brother in law, so I must accept him, I have to treat him as a brother, there's no other way. Because he became a part of the family, let him feel like family, I can't reject him.

Source 2, white Polish woman, 67

My first cousin he has got a wife, two daughters. One of them went to England and she met a black man . . . At first, a baby was born, then they had to get married. In that order . . . And so, what can they [her parents] do? . . . After all, what choice did they have? They will either lose their daughter or gain a son-in-law and a granddaughter, right? He was a native Nigerian . . . And they had to accept it. They had to . . . They don't talk much about any failures . . . It all started from the fact that he is a good man, that he's a Catholic . . . and that's it. It was very difficult for them to come to terms with because they educated and brought up this daughter, they had plans for her and how they wanted her life to be and their life to be.

Source 4, white Polish man, 42

In some cases, 'difference' was tolerated within the family provided it remained a secret in extra-familial contexts. Such practices reflect an attempt to balance the freedom of individual family members to define their own lives with the social obligation which comes from being part of a 'family'. Yet, in doing so 'difference' is privatised rather than displayed (cf Finch 2007). In this sense, such relationships are in effect denied as constituting real 'family', rather they become shared secrets with connotations of shame. Writing about the moral significance of class, Sayer (2005) argues that the emotion of shame exposes normative social codes about acceptable behaviour and moral boundaries in public space, as well as the extent to which these values are internalised and treated as personal.

[His mother, a Catholic, married a Jewish man] I mean, from what I know . . . talking with my Mum, I know that my grandfather was reluctant to let my parents marry. He made a statement once that it was the introduction of a stranger into their home. But my parents had their way. Finally my grandfather gave way, but I mean I remember my grandfather and my father never talked about it for example. They never talked about religion. Once I hear they tried and actually it was my father who ended the conversation with a quarrel [laughter]. He got really upset and lost his temper . . . and since then they never, never talked about it again.

Source 2, white Polish man, 30

My mum also had a sister who married a Bangladeshi . . . she lives in Manchester. But I didn't have any contact with my aunt and uncle, so it was quite a closed family in many respects.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of why you didn't have contact with your aunt and uncle?

My mum's sister had tried to kill herself when she was quite young. I think early 20s and then she'd married someone who was Bangladeshi and I think it hadn't gone down very well with the parents . . . there was an issue because of the Bangladeshi . . . so we didn't really see them.

Source 2, white British woman, 31

As the above quotation demonstrates, emotions such as shame can be revealing about the nature of familial relationships across the generations. But more importantly, intimate experiences of hurt or disrespect within a familial context can shape the development

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Table 5 The social attitudes of people with and without a disabled family member in Leeds, UK

Attitudes towards	Disabled in family	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1039	0.639	0.214	NS
	Yes	432	0.644	0.228	
People aged 65+	No	802	0.791	0.191	NS
	Yes	344	0.806	0.198	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1027	0.654	0.241	NS
	Yes	435	0.665	0.244	
Muslim people	No	984	0.621	0.242	NS
	Yes	414	0.626	0.245	
Disabled people	No	884	0.782	0.196	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	295	0.818	0.189	
Black people	No	1017	0.699	0.218	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	435	0.723	0.212	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	847	0.530	0.243	NS
	Yes	380	0.526	0.268	
Jewish people	No	1030	0.691	0.210	NS
	Yes	429	0.710	0.209	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	959	0.505	0.236	NS
	Yes	415	0.510	0.256	
Transsexuals	No	991	0.581	0.237	NS
	Yes	420	0.581	0.253	
White people (in-group)	No	945	0.755	0.199	$p < 0.01$
	Yes	411	0.787	0.206	
Average attitudes	No	1064	0.645	0.169	NS
	Yes	453	0.651	0.173	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

of personal values and attitudes towards particular social groups which are then reproduced or materialised in public space. One interviewee, for example, only discovered when he was in adulthood that his father had been Jewish. As he describes below, his father was ostracised from his birth family when he married a Gentile and as a consequence Anglicised his name and kept his background a secret from his own children. On discovering his father's secret, the interviewee was so angry at the way the paternal side of his family had treated his father (and indeed responded to him when he traced them) that he translated this into a resentment towards all Jewish people as a social group. This in turn brought him into conflict with his sister, who in contrast, has embraced her Jewish heritage despite their family's history.

> I hate Jews now because of what they did to my dad. You don't throw people out because they marry somebody from a different faith . . . I've never forgiven them for that . . . I'm very bitter about it.
>
> Source 2, white British man, 68

In such ways, familial intimacy can have destructive consequences beyond the time and space in which it is experienced. Moreover, such negative emotions are a further corrective – if one were needed – to the assumption that families are necessarily always positive or supportive spaces. Rather, such narratives suggest that the ordinariness of emotions such as disappointment, shame and bitterness also need to have a place in the geographical imagination.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the neglected issue of encounters with difference within the context of family life at a moment in time when families are increasingly characterised by dissimilarity as a product of mobility and individualisation.

The evidence of our survey in two national contexts is that intra-familial diversity does produce more positive attitudes in public life towards the specific social group that an individual family member is perceived to represent (albeit the most visible ethnic 'differences' varied by context as a consequence of specific national histories and geographies). However, such positive attitudes are not translated beyond this specific 'difference' to challenge wider prejudices towards other social groups. The commonality of this

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Table 6 The social attitudes of people with and without a disabled family member in Warsaw, Poland

Attitudes towards	Disabled in family	*N*	Mean	Std deviation	Significance of difference
Homeless people	No	1170	0.634	0.255	NS
	Yes	275	0.651	0.245	
People aged 65+	No	932	0.840	0.192	$p < 0.1$
	Yes	219	0.814	0.191	
Lesbian and gay people	No	1050	0.507	0.299	NS
	Yes	255	0.493	0.326	
Muslim people	No	1113	0.529	0.274	NS
	Yes	258	0.557	0.270	
Disabled people	No	914	0.852	0.200	NS
	Yes	158	0.860	0.170	
Black people	No	1167	0.684	0.266	NS
	Yes	273	0.697	0.275	
Refugees/asylum seekers	No	1138	0.617	0.255	NS
	Yes	265	0.640	0.269	
Jewish people	No	1138	0.603	0.281	NS
	Yes	272	0.608	0.293	
Travellers/gypsies/Roma people	No	1086	0.507	0.280	NS
	Yes	255	0.494	0.273	
Transsexuals	No	969	0.439	0.313	NS
	Yes	231	0.417	0.316	
White people (in-group)	No	1188	0.863	0.195	NS
	Yes	276	0.845	0.199	
Average attitudes	No	1208	0.613	0.200	NS
	Yes	281	0.608	0.205	

Source: *Living with difference* survey (2012)
Note: two-tailed significance levels reported

finding across both national datasets suggests that this research might also have resonance beyond the European context within which this paper is framed.

Our qualitative research suggests that most families respond in this way because of the strength of their commitment to love and care for each other. As a result of their personal investment in ‘family’, individual members undertake emotion work to establish a sense of moral proximity to newcomers. Indeed, family is particularly valued in the Polish context because during the socialist era of totalitarian control, it was not only a space of intimacy but also a space of freedom from, and resistance against, the State (Heinen 1997). Specific differences become *appropriated* and invested with their own meanings, and by being *incorporated* into shared family practices they become *normalised* and *displayed* in ways which enable them to become *converted* into forms of social capital. In doing so, a specific ‘difference’ can be accepted in many families because it is in effect minimised, rather than extended as a wider openness to ‘otherness’.

However, not all family members learn to live with ‘difference’ in this way. Rather, our research suggests that the introduction of ‘difference’ into some intimate relationships can disrupt established normativities or idealised imaginings of how family ‘ought to be’. A common response is to tolerate intimate encounters with difference in private space so long as such relationships can be kept a familial secret. In other words, provided this difference is not normalised, displayed or converted in extra-familial public contexts. Here, the interviewees’ expressions of shame expose normative social codes about the acceptability of difference and moral boundaries in public space. To justify the contradiction between their publicly espoused prejudices and private tolerance of ‘difference’ some of these interviewees drew on discourses of unconditional love.

At the same time, the data also demonstrate the fluidity of familial attitudes with initial reactions to ‘difference’ sometimes being redefined over time. As such, this paper has highlighted the dynamism of personal life, recognising that relationships and values/attitudes are regularly renegotiated in response to changing social circumstances and opportunities in which family members must work out the contradictions and paradoxes of their ties to one another. It has also made more visible some of the processes through which emotions are managed

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within intimate relationships, recognising we can only understand how people relate to 'difference' by understanding such feelings. As such it has implicitly demonstrated the need to theorise family social relations as fluid relations of love, care and power; but its most important contribution is to expose the complexities and limits of intimate contact with difference in changing the way social relationships are lived in the wider world.

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Notes

1 Notwithstanding the difficulties that some individuals encounter coming out to their families and the persistence of homophobia.

2 The working population was defined as being employed or self-employed, and the not working population included the unemployed, economically inactive and full-time students.

3 We conducted a series of independent sample t-tests (at two-tailed level of significance) to determine whether differences among respondents with family members of different ethnicity, sexual orientation or with a disability are significantly different from attitudes of respondents without such family members.

4 The question that was asked was: 'People have different views on different people. For the next few questions, I would like to know how you feel about a number of groups of people. Please rate how you feel about them on a thermometer that runs from zero to a hundred degrees. The higher the number, the warmer or more favourable you feel towards that group. The lower the number, the colder or less favourable you feel towards that group'. Mean values of attitudes towards out-groups are reported on a scale of 0–1 in Tables 1–6.

5 Differences in attitudes between Polish respondents with and without a gay/lesbian family member are statistically significant, but because the sub-sample of people with a gay/lesbian family member is small, the explanatory power of these differences is low.

6 Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that attitudes towards minority ethnic and religious groups in Poland are more favourable among people who declared that they do not belong to any religion and have tertiary education.

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