Durham E-Theses

Accounting for intimacy troubles:: Sociological analysis and vernacular discourse.

Hill, Thomas Michael

How to cite:

Hill, Thomas Michael (2004) *Accounting for intimacy troubles:: Sociological analysis and vernacular discourse.*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3075/

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the full Durham E-Theses policy for further details.

Academic Support Office, Durham University, University Office, Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HP
e-mail: e-theses.admin@dur.ac.uk Tel: +44 0191 334 6107
http://etheses.dur.ac.uk

ACCOUNTING FOR INTIMACY TROUBLES: SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND VERNACULAR DISCOURSE.

THOMAS MICHAEL HILL

PH.D.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM.

SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES

A copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

2004

2 1 SEP 2005

ABSTRACT.

THOMAS MICHAEL HILL.

'ACCOUNTING FOR INTIMACY TROUBLES: SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND VERNACULAR DISCOURSE'.

Intimate relations are one of the most analysed aspects of human experience, and sociological interest in this topic has been sustained throughout the history of the discipline. This thesis begins with an analysis of existing sociological claims about intimate relations. It is suggested that these theoretical claims have largely coalesced around the issues of (a) the 'essential basis' of intimacy, and / or (b) the social and historical contexts in which such relationships are enacted. In contradistinction to academic psychology, sociological accounts have typically afforded intimacy troubles a supra-personal quality i.e. as arising from either the contradictory or dualistic nature of intimacy itself, or as a consequence of wider structural changes in specific social and historical locations. However, in making these theoretical claims, sociologists have typically muted or transformed vernacular voices.

This study has attempted to identify and analyse a series of vernacular accounts of such intimacy troubles by means of a hybrid of 'normal science' methodology (Lynch; 1993), and discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992). The data for this analysis comprises instances of Internet communications made over a three-year period within one 'on-line community' (www.divorce-online.co.uk). Three overarching, and highly integrated themes pervaded the exchanges on this Internet site: (a) 'reputation work', (b) the construction of 'heroic' identities, and (c) a concern with 'moral proceduralism'. It is suggested that these findings carry differentiating and therapeutic implications for existing sociologies of intimacy troubles. The thesis concludes by advocating a turn away from the familiar sociological tendency for abstract theorising in favour of the close analysis of lay accounting for these matters.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS.	PAGE NO.
ABSTRACT.	1.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	11.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.	12.
SOCIOLOGY, INTIMACY AND INTIMACY TROUBLES: AN OVERVIEW.	13.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.	21.
FORMAL SOCIOLOGY: THE ABSTRACTION OF SOCIAL FORMS.	21.
HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY: ANALYSING EVENTS AND CAUSATION.	22.
FORMAL ACCOUNTS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS AND INTIMACY TROUBLES.	24.
ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF INTIMACY.	24.
Intimacy Troubles in Aristotle's work.	26.
Stipulative features of Aristotle's Account.	27.
SIMMEL'S SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.	30.
Simmel's 'Philosophical' Sociology of Intimacy.	31.
Simmel's Formal Sociology of Intimate Relations.	34.
Intimacy Troubles in Simmel's Work	40.
Stipulative features of Simmel's Account.	42.
MURRAY S. DAVIS AND INTIMATE MOBILITY.	44.
Davis's Account of Intimacy.	45.
Davis's Formulation of Intimacy Troubles.	48.
BARTHES' LINGUISTIC FORMALISM.	54.
Intimacy and Intimacy troubles in Barthes' Work.	55.
HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGIES OF INTIMATE RELATIONS AND INTIMACY TROUBLES.	59.
INTIMATE RELATIONS IN PRE-MODERN WESTERN SOCIETIES.	62.
THE CONDITION OF MODERNITY AND INTIMATE RELATIONS.	66.
Modernity and Ideas about Intimacy.	68.
Cultural Modernity and the Mass Dissemination of Ideas about Intimacy.	72.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS (*CONTINUED*). PAGE NO.

Modernity and the Social Organisation of Intimate Relations. 74.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF INTIMACY TROUBLES. 75.

POST-CONSENSUS SOCIOLOGIES OF INTIMATE RELATIONS. 77.

A HERMENEUTIC ACCOUNT OF INTIMATE RELATIONS. 78.

A Hermeneutic Account of Intimacy Troubles. 80.

Hermeneutic Accounts: a priori Theoretical and Technical Commitments. 84.

GIDDENS AND 'THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY'. 86.

Giddens' concept of 'Transformed' Intimacy. 86.

The Transformed basis of Intimacy Troubles? 92.

Giddens' Transformation of Vernacular Concerns. 93.

BECK AND BECK-GERNSHEIM: THE NORMAL CHAOS OF LOVE. 97.

The Allegedly Chaotic Basis of Contemporary Intimate Relations. 99.

The Normal Chaos of Stipulative Social Theory. 101.

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS. 102.

Intimacy Troubles: A Feminist Analysis. 108.

Feminist Predeterminations. 110.

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN: INTIMATE RELATIONS AND POST-MODERNITY. 111.

Conceptualising Post-modern Intimate relations. 112.

The Moral Dynamics of Post-Modern intimacy. 113.

The Character of Post-Modern Intimacy Troubles. 115.

Bauman's Post-Modern Stipulations. 117.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONS & INTIMACY TROUBLES: EMERGENT THEMES AND ISSUES. 120.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONS: EMERGENT THEMES AND ISSUES. 120.

FOUNDATIONAL MATTERS. 120.

THE CONTEXTUAL BASIS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS. 124.

INTIMATE RELATIONS AS SOCIAL PROCESS. 126.

INTIMACY TROUBLES: THEMES AND ISSUES. 127.

INHERENT STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES. 128.

SHIFTING SOCIAL CONTEXTS. 129.

FAILURE OR MISMANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES. 130.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS (*CONTINUED*). PAGE NO.

BREACH OR TERMINATION OF CONTRACT. 130.

STIPULATIVE ACCOUNTS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS/TROUBLES: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT AND THEORETICAL PROPOSAL. 131.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE CURRENT PROJECT. 138.

Topic Choice. 138.

Research Design Issues. 141.

The Discursive Action Model. 144.

Data Collection. 148.

Internet Data. 152.

Post-Analytic Ethnomethodology. 158.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION. 162.

INTRODUCTION. 162.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF 'REFERENTS'. 162.

FAULTY PERSONS. 165.

Fundamental flaws. 165.

'Sicknesses'. 166.

'Badness'. 166.

'Madness'. 167.

'Unreasonable conduct'. 168.

FAULTY RELATIONSHIPS. 171.

What was I thinking of? 171.

Growing Apart. 172.

'I don't fancy you anymore'. 173.

'Taken for granted.' 174.

'You don't give me any attention.' 174.

'Do me a favour'. 175.

Betrayals of trust. 176.

BETTER OFFERS. 178.

'Falling in love again'. 179.

'The grass is greener on the other side'. 180.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS (*CONTINUED*). PAGE NO.

OUTSIDE PRESSURES. 181.

Family matters. 181.

Interference. 181.

Faulty upbringing. 182.

Money troubles. 183.

'YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE'. 184.

Things have changed. 184.

'I've changed / you've changed'. 185.

ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE. 186.

'AND ANOTHER THING'.... LITANIES OF TROUBLES. 187.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE BBS ACCOUNTS. 187.

FLOTATION – INITIATORS' ACCOUNTS. 192.

Biographical introductions. 192.

Establishing Grounds for intimacy troubles / initial details. 193.

Announcement of the affair. 195.

Delivery. 196.

'Additive' accounts of new intimate relations. 196.

'Other-focussed', and 'relationship-focussed' excuses. 200.

Reducing Agency. 201.

Endings. 204.

Defended Actions. 204.

Penitence: Confession and regret. 205.

'Seeking Advice'. 206.

The struggle to cope with new circumstances. 207.

FLOTATION – RESPONDERS' ACCOUNTS. 209.

Biographical introductions. 209.

Truncated Announcement of Intimacy troubles. 210.

The 'Suspicion' – 'confirmation' sequence. 213.

Effecting Favourable Comparisons. 219.

Consequences. 221.

Endings. 226.

Status announcements. 227.

The moral of the tale. 229.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS (*CONTINUED*).	PAGE NO.
FIXATION ACCOUNTS.	232.
Biographical introductions and early announcement of intimacy troubles.	233.
General Charges.	233.
Effecting comparisons and Specific charges (the case for the prosecution).	234.
Mitigating factors.	236.
Presentation of the dilemma - 'Why this really matters'.	238.
Endings: (A) Expressed intentions, (B) Warrants for support.	238.
BULLETIN BOARD CONTRIBUTIONS AS JOINT ACTIONS.	240.
THE SEQUENTIAL ORGANISATION OF (SHORTER) BBS CONTRIBUTIONS.	246.
RESPONSES TO FLOTATION INITIATORS' ACCOUNTS.	250.
Responses to Defended Actions.	251.
Responses to Expressions of Penitence / Regret.	254.
RESPONSES TO FLOTATION RESPONDERS' ACCOUNTS.	256.
Responses to Survivor Accounts.	256.
Responses to Victim Accounts.	259.
RESPONSES TO FIXATION PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS.	261.
MODERATOR'S RESPONSES.	262.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.	267.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION:	272.
TOPICAL RELEVANCE IN PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS: AREAS OF CONVERGENCE.	273.
CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT THEMATIC ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS.	277.
THE ISSUE OF GENDER: PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS.	277.
REPUTATION WORK.	278.
EXTRAORDINARY LIVES AND EVENTS.	283.
MORAL CONTINGENCIES: DEFENDING REPUTATION AGAINST WHAT?	287.
VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS, PROFESSIONAL COMMENTARIES, AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION.	292.
POSTSCRIPT.	295.
BIBLIOGRAPHY	299.

CHAPTER AND SUB-HEADINGS (*CONTINUED*). PAGE NO.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS. 316.

APPENDIX 2: SCREENSHOTS FROM WWW.DIVORCE-ONLINE.CO.UK 322.

APPENDIX 3: DETAILS OF WRITTEN CONSENT. 327.

FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

FIGURES & ILLUSTRATIONS	PAGE NO.
Figure 1: *Sociable Mobility Flow Charts.*	46.
Figure 2: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 1.*	56.
Figure 3: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 2.*	57.
Figure 4: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 3.*	57.
Figure 5. *Weber's distinction between the public and private spheres.*	74.
Figure 6: *Metaphysical claims about intimate relations.*	121.
Figure 7: *Intimate Relations and Social Contexts.*	124.
Figure 8: *Intimate relations as processes.*	126.
Figure 9: *Intimacy troubles: a tentative typology.*	128.
Figure 10: *The Discursive Action Model.*	145.
Figure 11: *The Initial Sampling Advertisement as it appeared in the Metro newspaper.*	149.
Figure 12: *A Typology of claims made by BBS contributors in relation to the 'substantive bases' of intimacy troubles.*	164.
Figure 13: *The sequential organisation of troubles-talk.*	189.
Figure 14: *The sequential organisation of flotation-initiators' accounts.*	192.
Figure 15: *The sequential organisation of flotation-responders' accounts.*	209.
Figure 16: *The sequential organisation of fixation accounts.*	232.
Figure 17: *BBS exchanges as 'Joint Actions'.*	242.
Figure 18: *Preference structures and hypothesised responses.*	245.
Figure 19: *Superficial coincidences in Vernacular Accounts, Professional Commentaries, and Cultural Representations.*	293.

The material included herewith is the sole work of the author and has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without their prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS

JOAN AND RONNIE HILL.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I am grateful to many people for their assistance in the completion of this thesis, not least those who contributed to the bulletin boards at www.divorce-online.co.uk. Mr. Mark Keenan (Legal Director, Divorce-Online Ltd.) kindly granted permission for the use of those bulletin board communications in this study. I am also grateful to Phoenix Telecom Ltd. for agreeing to the placement of my 'recruitment ad' in their *'Love on the Move'* column in the *Metro* newspaper. I am indebted to those who responded and subsequently gave up their time in order to be interviewed.

I am grateful to my family, and especially my children, who have tolerated my relatively diminished input into their day-to-day routines, especially during the writing of this thesis.

Many work colleagues have either given me encouragement or otherwise made working life easier whilst I was conducting this study. Professor Ralph Firth was instrumental in allowing me time to complete the writing of this work. Mike Kingham, as ever, provided a challenging and thought-provoking commentary upon the study as it unfolded.

There are two people to whom I am particularly indebted. My academic supervisor Robin Williams provided inspiration, tutelage, support, motivation, tolerance and insight in appropriate measure and at the appropriate times. My wife, Catherine Donovan, was unstinting in her support and encouragement, and has shown considerable forbearance in relation to my frequent physical or mental 'absences': ironically, not ideal conditions in which to conduct an intimate relationship. Without their combined efforts, this thesis would simply not have been completed, and I will be eternally grateful to both of them.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.

This study is concerned to analyse the nature and consequences of 'troubles' in intimate relationships. It begins with a review of established sociological accounts of intimacy troubles, and goes on to examine a number of empirical instances in which social actors provide and comment on accounts of such troubles to one another.

It is hard to overvalue the existential centrality of intimate relations in the conduct of everyday life. The capacity for intimate relations (arguably) constitutes one of the defining qualities of humanness itself, and many 'stipulative' claims regarding the 'essence' of intimate relations have been made and fiercely contested within the academy.[1] From within biology, socio-biology and evolutionary psychology, intimacy has been seen as emerging from the biological imperative for reproduction: all subsequent intimate forms are therefore simply expressions of the 'mating instinct'. Psychologists have framed intimacy as an expression of the fundamental human need for emotional attachment and belonging, and inseparable from (centred) notions of self-identity. Philosophers have pondered the moral basis of intimate relations as a form of virtue and fundamental human quality. For their part, sociologists have encompassed a number of these concerns whilst simultaneously emphasising the fundamentally social nature of intimacy, and / or the historical-cultural contingency of intimate social forms.

This academic cacophony is echoed within popular culture. Ignatieff (1988:15) declared intimacy 'a prisoner of discourse', and in addition to academic accounts, a plethora of other written material - religious, poetic, humanistic, literary, erotic, pornographic, therapeutic - make intimate relations one of the most described and analysed aspects of human experience. These diverse genres of representation tend to provoke a variety of understandings that are frequently contradictory and often diametrically opposed. All, however, perhaps converge in according intimate relations a privileged (or even central) significance in human existence: from whatever perspective, successful intimacy (however this might be defined) represents one of life's greatest prizes. Furthermore, this is perhaps more than ever the case in contemporary times. Person (1990:353), for instance, is emblematic of a variety of contemporary commentators in asserting that intimacy now occupies the role of 'perhaps the most important of our cultivated freedoms', the primary vehicle for self-realisation *and* the primary site of social progress. Similarly, Langford (1999:xi) asserted that we now stake

[1] The term 'stipulative' as it is employed in this study relates to the variety of 'professionalisation strategies' employed by theorists in order to 'explain', 'translate' or otherwise transform the vernacular topics of ordinary actors into the formal discourses or grand theoretical frameworks of the human sciences. The expression 'stipulative' is therefore employed here as a shorthand expression for a range of theoretical objections expressed by Lynch (1993).

much more upon intimate relations in expecting these attachments to satisfy a wide range of personal emotional and existential needs, including:

- sexual fulfilment;
- spiritual meaning;
- identity;
- self-expression;
- companionship; and,
- emotional security.

The (often understated) corollary of these claims is that intimacy troubles (however these might be defined) harbour the potential to undermine one's existential security. In entering into intimate relations, one is literally risking one's life: a gamble against the future in which the stakes could hardly be higher. Whilst successful intimacy might be one of life's greatest prizes, failing or failed intimacy may represent one of life's greatest liabilities. Whilst successful intimacy might be the primary vehicle of self-realisation, failing or failed intimacy may serve to thwart personal aspirations. Whilst intimate relations might be accorded the status of the primary vehicle for social progress, failing or failed intimacy imply perpetual injustice and inequality (at least between the concerned intimate parties). Clues that this might be the case pervade popular culture. For instance, Barthes (1990), in *'A Lover's Discourse: Fragments'* analysed a variety of popular cultural resources and provided a 'thesaurus' of discursive representations of intimacy: unquestionably, the 'darker side' of intimate life predominates his analysis (and by implication, his source material). Langford (1999:150) asserted that the pandemic of intimacy troubles afflicting (principally heterosexual) relationships ought to be self-evident given the proliferation of self-help texts, counselling services, and the like. Claims about the 'darker side' of intimate social life also pervade professional sociological analyses of intimacy: however, my contention here is that this aspect of intimate relations has lacked *systematic* sociological treatment, and furthermore, has rarely been the principal topic of sociological accounts of personal life.[2]

SOCIOLOGY, INTIMACY AND INTIMACY TROUBLES: AN OVERVIEW.

Intimate relationships have a fundamentally social quality, and it is therefore unsurprising that intimacy has been a topic for sociological analyses since the foundation of the discipline. Professional sociologies of intimate relations have animated and sustained debates about public and private spheres – now considered a core dichotomy in sociological analyses. Yet in

[2] In most cases, claims as to the 'cause', nature, and wider social consequences of intimacy troubles are implied rather than made explicit within sociological accounts.

spite of this historical legacy, some commentators have asserted a relative sociological neglect of this topic:[3] arguably, the basis of these claims reside in the tendency for sociologists to have focused upon the family when studying private lives (especially in the mid-twentieth century), the inherent assumption being that these institutional forms represent the primary site of intimate relations. Within the academy, sociological preoccupations with the family perhaps had the effect of ceding intellectual ground to psychology in the explicit consideration of intimate relations. Recent demographic changes, most notably the rise of cohabitation, divorce, and family reconstitution, have formalised the interests of professional sociologists in both intimate relations and intimacy troubles. However, sociologies of intimate relations arguably find themselves 'behind the game' within the public consciousness, and generally it is biological and/or psychological 'explanations' that enjoy popular currency in relation to intimate maters. For instance, Langford (1999:xi) observed the continuation of a powerful naturalising discourse that sponsors the view that being 'coupled' is the natural state to which adult humans ought to aspire, and thus sustains popular biological conceptions.

My contention throughout this review is that sociologists' interest in intimacy was early, and has been sustained all through the history of the discipline. To speak of intellectual neglect is therefore to misunderstand (a) the fundamentally social basis of intimate relations, and (b) the historical legacy of professional sociology. Featherstone (1998:1) and Langford (1999:xi) both claimed that, in one (culturally specific) form or another, the 'couple' has always been viewed as a fundamental human relationship in regards to the organisation of social, economic and domestic life. However, whilst sexual attraction and emotional attachment are virtually omnipresent human experiences, patterns of couple intimacy are unquestionably variable across cultures and historical time. For instance, within the Western context, 'falling in love' (with its accompanying biological / psychological sub-text) has been increasingly accepted as *the* basis for couple intimacy, but this is far from a universal phenomenon.

The agenda of early sociologists was to counter these individualist tendencies. Bailey (2000: 381) asserted that early sociologists were quick to collectivise (individuals) as an intellectual strategy towards colonising a distinctive academic niche. Furthermore, it is notable from the outset, that in establishing the collectivist focus of professional sociology, the topic of intimacy featured only as a corollary to a concern with larger institutional forms. Berger and Kellner (1964:1) typified sociology (from Durkheim onwards) as being pre-occupied by *anomic* states: However, they also asserted that 'if one speaks of [anomic states] than one ought properly to investigate also the *nomic* processes that, by their absence, lead to the

[3] For instance, Goode (1959: 38) asserted that 'serious sociological attention has only infrequently been given to love [as a field of investigation].' More recently, Jackson (1993a:201) claimed that 'Love like other emotions has received little attention from sociologists, although there have been a few recent publications, written from diverse perspectives which indicate a new interest in this area.'

aforementioned states'. In Durkheim's work (at least), intimate social relations received secondary consideration, in spite of the probability that intimacy in general, and couple intimacy in particular represented the most fundamental 'nomos-building' instrumentality. Other founding figures such as Weber and Simmel were less reticent about claiming intimate relations as sociological territory and their contributions are considered below. The hegemony of functionalism within the mid-twentieth century arguably turned the sociological gaze from the topic of intimacy *per se* towards the study of institutional forms in which intimacy (purportedly) inhered. Thus began a sociological pre-occupation with the family, although functionalist scholars would (perhaps justifiably) contend that they were observing and adding theoretical depth to the radical separation of public and private life that accompanied mass industrialisation.

Industrialisation, more correctly, heralded the separation of the domestic sphere from processes of production: a variety of nation-state and ecclesiastical apparatuses quickly served to reinforce a gendered demarcation between (overwhelmingly male) participation in the supposedly impersonal formal economy, and (overwhelmingly female) commitment to the personal-domestic sphere. Berger and Kellner (1964:7) asserted that the 'private sphere' crystallised around the (overplayed) idea that the public life entailed inevitable alienating consequences, regardless of the fact that 'large numbers of people in our society [were and are] quite content with a situation in which their public involvements have little subjective importance, regarding work as a not too bad necessity and politics as at best a spectator sport.' For Berger and Kellner the 'private sphere' thus represented an 'interstitial area', created as a by-product of the processes of industrialisation: a place where anybody can become somebody – perhaps even 'lord and master'.

The academic ossification of the public-private dichotomy, coupled with the theoretical conviction that the private sphere represented the cradle of 'nomos-building' instrumentality resulted in functionalist sociologists according the nuclear family the status of the cornerstone institution of civil society, at least in the Anglo-American liberal democratic tradition (e.g. see Fletcher 1966; Goode 1963; Parsons 1959). In turn this (supposedly) highly evolved basis for personal life stipulated that intimate relations ought to be understood in relation to four cardinal points, namely; heterosexuality, marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood. The pervasiveness of this vocabulary of the 'private' came to constitute a significant element of a 'standard' biography in which whether or not, and when (to marry) into a life-long union, were matters of fairly invariable cultural convention. Under such conditions, private life acquired a moral dimension insofar as the culturally endorsed model of heterosexual marriage became represented as a normatively desirable state for the overwhelming majority.

The impression that intimate social arrangements were relatively uniformly organised from the time of the industrial revolution until the last 40 years of the Twentieth century was supported by a range of and empirical studies: For instance, Gorer's (1971) anthropological account of intimate relations in the U.K. depicted a consensual domestic idyll in which marriage and family life were more or less predestined features of life's course. As suggested above, this sociological focus upon (relatively stable) institutional arrangements rather than the *enactment* of intimate relations enabled academic psychologists to attain a degree of discursive sovereignty in this field.[4] A variety of psychological approaches proffered stipulative understandings of the private and inner lives in which couple intimacy was theorised in terms of the actions of centred, autonomous, and self-directing individuals, underpinned by a number of 'inner' processes such as emotion, personality, and motivation.[5] Goode (1959:41) typified this approach as one in which 'love is defined as a strong emotional attachment, a cathexis, between adolescents or adults of opposite sexes, with at least the components of sex desire and tenderness.' This latter point appears to have been accepted as a stipulative 'truth', and within psychology 'academic debate' remained restricted to arcane questions of whether opposite or similar personality traits made for the most successful intimate unions. Certainly, the topic of intimate relations avoided any radical criticism from within the academy perhaps until the1960's.

The functionalist consensus of (implicitly intimate) family life appeared increasingly jaded during the course of the 1960's in the face of related secular, political, and academic developments, namely:

- the emergence of emancipatory social movements, especially those of feminism and gay liberation;
- the impact of these movements (especially feminism) within the academy; and,
- the beginning of a steady but inexorable rise in the divorce rate accompanied by a rise in co-habitation and remarriage.

Demographic trends alone appeared to evidence the end of the deterministic certainties enjoyed (or endured) by previous generations, and the continuous and rapid social change that has ensued fosters the sense that intimate relations are at the axis of an uncompleted social transition. Emphatically, the transmutation of private sphere has afflicted *heterosexual* couple intimacy. Feminist analyses such as that of Atkinson (1974) were overtly critical of prior

[4] Davis's (1973b) '*Intimate Relations*' provided a notable exception to this theoretical and analytical tendency by focussing upon the communicative dynamics of intimacy and intimacy troubles, and this work is subject to extensive review below.

[5] Paradoxically, psychological approaches (at the same time) diminished agency by championing the view that 'love' represented an irresistible and determining force.

constructions of the public-private dichotomy that constructed the private as a site of equality, emotional nurturance, and security in contrast to the instrumental and impersonal metric of the formal economy. The private sphere was hence recast in a darker light as a site of gender inequalities, forced domesticity, sexual violence and general exploitation of women. Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2001:772) suggested that, given this more critical view, prior conceptualisations of the private sphere could be read as part and parcel of the naturalising ideological tendency, deployed only in order to sustain gender inequalities. From the feminist theoretical standpoint, 'public' and 'private', rather than constituting separate spheres, are merely two sides of the same patriarchal coin.

Demographic changes in the U.K. such as those highlighted above have continued apace since the 1960's, and Langford (1999:2) is surely correct in her assertion that 'divorce, serial monogamy, and the 'reconstitution' of families are now commonplace phenomena to the extent that an everyday awareness exists of couple relationships being at the epicentre of rapid social change'. Furthermore, Simpson (1998:155) has claimed of emerging intimate relationships that they are 'new and, to a degree, unpredictable; they point to altered configurations of persons, resources, and relationships which are radically at odds with the pattern of family life which has been prevalent throughout most of this [Twentieth] century'. The rapidity and extent of these changes has thus provoked a varied range of bold assertions, such as:

- that a 'revolution' in personal life is in process;
- that new intimate arrangements mark a point of epistemological rupture with the past; and,
- that 'moral uncertainty' now afflicts intimate social relations, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

In relation to this (alleged) revolution, feminists have characteristically adopted an optimistic orientation, celebrating anything that promised to disrupt the inherently exploitative basis of the nuclear family (*see* Bradley 1992: 11ff; and Hakim 1996). Others, similarly optimistically, welcomed the demise of narrow definitions of intimacy and family, and the concomitant recognition and acceptance of a diversity of intimate social identities (*see* Weeks, 1985). In contrast, 'moral' conservatives such as Patricia Morgan (1995:152) bemoaned the 'death of the family' and furthermore, have implicated the transmutation of intimate social relations as underlying a range of social ills.

Regardless of the ideological orientation taken towards these transformations, what is clear is that earlier frames of sociological reference were patently ill suited to the analysis of newly-

configured intimate relations. Consequently, towards the latter part of the Twentieth century the issue of intimacy was subject to several speculative, yet broadly influential sociological analyses (e.g. Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). The impact of these relatively new theoretical explorations was to create the *impression* that (for the first time) the topics of intimate relations and romantic love were being placed firmly upon the (mainstream) sociological agenda.[6] Jamieson (1999:477), characteristic of this 'neophiliac' tendency, suggested that 'the sociology of intimacy is now a recognisable [sociological] specialism'. The works of Giddens (1992), and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have been received with various degrees of acceptance and are discussed below. However, these works do seem to coincide with a re-invigorated sociological interest in (predominantly) modernist pre-occupation with identity, emotion, intimacy, sexuality and the body (Taylor, 1989:419). Further, in common with earlier feminist sociologies, these works encompass an explicit consideration of intimacy troubles and the 'darker side' of intimate relations

Regardless of theoretical developments, the conceptual apparatus of the public-private dichotomy has remained remarkably intact. Fahey (1995:689) proffered a vernacular definition of the private sphere as 'areas of social life, which are relatively demarcated from all but the personal and domestic gaze' – in short, matters that are pragmatically defined by people in particular contexts as 'their own business'. In characteristic fashion, professional sociologists have sought to supplant vernacular definitions of 'private' matters with a variety of conceptual edifices. Bailey (2000: 381) suggested that at very least, the opposition of 'public-private' continues to constitute an ordering generative principle in professional sociology, and therefore persists as a core (stipulative) device in analysis, albeit in variable terms.[7] Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (1999) helpfully identified a variety of mechanisms by which a conceptual commitment to the 'public-private' dualism may peremptorily order the outcomes of sociological inquiry; namely by assuming:

- a 'taken for granted' quality of the 'public sphere';
- that the 'private sphere' and inner life have a conceptual equivalence;
- a quality of intimacy in social relations such as marriage and the family; and,
- a strict demarcation between the public and private spheres in which the former operates by means of instrumental concerns and power relationships, and the latter by means of particularistic intimacy.

[6] This particular interpretation is only sustainable once considerable amnesia is exercised in relation to the earlier contributions of Simmel, Weber and their intellectual heirs, and also those of feminist sociologists.

[7] Chamberlayne (1998) identified the variable substantive application of the concept of the 'private sphere' within professional sociology. Typically, the concept of the private has been used to denote either (a) specific social or geographical sites, or (b) a means of describing the value orientations of the actors present within those locations.

To summarise: my contention here is that sociological interest in intimate relations was early and has endured throughout the history of the discipline. The extent to which recent sociologies in these areas of personal life can be construed as novel rests upon their explicit acknowledgement of intimacy troubles. Recent interest in intimate relations by professional sociologists should therefore, more correctly, be considered as re-invigorated rather than novel, and renewed professional attention can be variously understood in terms of:

- attempts to explain the marked demographic trends that have occurred in Western societies since the 1960's onwards i.e. the decline in formal marriage, increasing divorce rates, and family re-constitution ;
- responses to conservative charges of 'moral crises' that have accompanied these social changes;
- particularised instances of the typically modernist preoccupation with inner and personal life;
- efforts to 'recover' theoretical and conceptual clarity following the growing acknowledgment that 'public' and 'private' spheres cannot be justifiably (strictly) demarcated; and,
- tendencies to territorialize or reclaim intellectual ground historically ceded to academic psychology.

Several of these (possible) 'reasons' for renewed professional interest coalesce around a (claimed) revolutionary transformation in the basis of *heterosexual* intimate relations. It is now virtually unquestioned that gay and lesbian relationships have been a primordial and ubiquitous feature of human intimacy: Plummer (1995:81) claimed that 'throughout time and space, the pleasures and displeasures of erotic experience between the same genders have certainly existed,' albeit being subject to differing cultural interpretations. However, both historically and culturally, homosexual intimate relations have endured overwhelming social disapproval.[8] Giddens (1992:135) is surely correct in asserting that (at least in the modern, Western context) homosexual intimate relations were enacted both in the complete absence of institutional support, and also (frequently) in hostile social circumstances. It is not the failure of gay relationships that have given shape to recent demographic trends or the accompanying claims of moral crisis, and my contention here is that the perceived 'crisis' afflicting intimate relations has relatively little to do with the (differently nuanced) difficulties facing gay or

[8] Plummer (*op cit*: 27) asserted that: 'To speak of being gay or lesbian in the early in the early part of the twentieth century in the Western world was to invite dramatic social exclusion in all of its forms: incarceration in concentration camps, criminal sanctions and imprisonment, medicalisation – treatments and therapies of all sorts, religious banishment, community ostracism and mockery.'

'straight' intimate partners, or whether or not these are different or similar.[9] Rather, the sense of 'crisis' arises precisely as a consequence of the fact that it is *culturally endorsed*, predominant intimate forms i.e. marriage and the nuclear family, which have been subject to significant transformation: the fact that these institutions (at least in this particular historical and social context) are heterosexual arrangements is largely coincidental.

An emergent body of social theory e.g. 'queer theory' now stipulates a distinctive sociological agenda in relation to understanding (specifically gay) intimacy troubles.[10] However, as suggested above, successive professional sociological interpretations have located heterosexual couple intimacy at the epicentre of social life, for instance:

- functionalist analyses accorded heterosexual intimacy (albeit in the form of the nuclear family) the status of the cornerstone institution of civil society;
- feminist analyses suggested that heterosexual intimacy (and specifically the inherent domesticity of this arrangement) constituted the key site of patriarchal oppression, masked by naturalising discourses; and more recently,
- 'democratisation' theories have suggested that heterosexual intimacy, freed from institutional constraints, constitutes the primary site of social progress.

The common thread throughout the theoretical resources reviewed below is that they stipulate interpretations of culturally predominant forms of intimacy, and for the most part, heterosexual relations are afforded topical prominence.[11] In the main, such theories focus on an assumed 'trouble-free' intimacy. Given that the issue of intimacy troubles is of primary concern to the current project, implicit assumptions as well as claims about these matters will be discussed in the following review.

---

[9] Vaughan (1990) contended that the same processes of declining intimacy afflict gay and straight relationships alike: however, the question of whether (or not) this is the case remains beyond the scope and intentions of the current study.

[10] Roseneil (2000:3) asserted that queer theory is ' a rather amorphous body of work [sharing] a critique of the minoritizing epistemology which has underpinned both most academic thinking about homosexuality and the dominant politics within gay communities.'

[11] Aristotle's (1975) '*Nicomachean Ethics*' provides the only exception to this rule: Plummer (op cit: 81-2) identified that in Ancient Greece a form of homosexual camaraderie between adult male tutors and 'beautiful' youths was culturally endorsed - a militaristic and pedagogic intimate arrangement that firmly excluded women. The key point in relation to the current study is that this historical arrangement appears to have been met with widespread social approval.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.

The intention of this review is to undertake a systematic audit of stipulative assertions about intimacy troubles. A number of theoretical 'genres' appear prominently within professional sociologies of intimacy / troubles. However, the order of presentation of these various 'genres' is not meant to imply any theoretical privilege: the review is (nevertheless) organised in terms of what might be called (after Lynch) two 'meta-stipulative' positions, namely those of (a) formal, and (b) historical sociologies. Each particular programmatic or theoretical approach reviewed below can be seen as (predominantly) conforming to one or another of these (more abstracted) meta-theoretical concerns, and it will be useful to consider their distinctive features here before proceeding to consider specific professional contributions.

FORMAL SOCIOLOGY: THE ABSTRACTION OF SOCIAL FORMS.

As much as can be (tautologically) said about formalism is that this philosophical approach seeks to delineate and describe 'forms'. However, ambiguity typically arises in relation to what 'forms' actually might be, and there are various senses given to 'forms':

- as idealised 'essences';
- as linguistic descriptive categories;
- as collections of objects, or classes; and,
- as (non-material) substances in themselves which exist independently of matter and serve as the basis for more generalised and abstracted forms.

Regardless of these specific readings of 'form', the most general aim of such analysis has been to categorise and describe 'essences': essential qualities (however defined) of a particular object which transcend both historical and cultural contingencies. Whilst it is possible to overplay the extent to which recently revived varieties of formalism coincide with the concerns of early theorists, ancient and modern versions of formalism do bear a clear family resemblance. Almost entirely, the intellectual origins of formal sociology can be located within the work of Georg Simmel (1858-1918), and formal sociologies of intimacy (e.g. Simmel 1984; Davis 1973b.) remain occupied with the identification and abstraction of transcendent social forms.

The theoretical style of formal sociology is typically concerned with the mundane and microscopic aspects of everyday life. Social reality is typically illustrated by means of fragmentary moments, or examples drawn from daily life. So far, these intentions could be

read as being concerned with describing 'vernacular examples': however, formal analyses routinely proceed to apply a type of *post-hoc* theorisation whereby an attempt is made to identify, or 'reflexively recover' (more abstract) forms of sociation from a diversity of particular grounded examples. The 'geometrical metaphor' perhaps most elegantly captures this approach to theorisation and still serves as a prominent device within formal sociology.[12]

Formal sociologies can be claimed to be inherently reflexive only insofar as the grounded examples provided are necessarily dependent upon the enactment of situated social relations, and in seeking to apply *post-hoc* theorisation formal sociologists stand accused of making unwarranted abstractions from specific contexts. In as much, critics have asserted that formal sociologies are possessed of a radically anti-historicist agenda. However, Ray (1991), and Frisby (1992:71) have both asserted that formal analyses do not entirely abandon attention to context, but rather specifically discard attempts at predictive causality. Frisby characterised this method as a 'cross-sectional approach to history'; an attempt to identify regularities of 'relational forms' demonstrated by a diversity of social groups in differing historical and cultural locations. Whilst not wishing to fully subscribe to Frisby's position, it will become apparent in the following review that formal sociologists have made (usually post-dictive) historical claims, just as historical sociologists have demonstrated formalist traits in conceptualising their particular problematics. It is therefore worth reiterating that the use of the formal-historical device here serves only as a means of organising and presenting a considerable body of professional sociological literature.

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY: ANALYSING EVENTS AND CAUSATION.

Abrams (1982: ix) asserted that most significant problems faced by sociologists require historical solutions: he identified two possible varieties of question typically pursued by historical sociologists; (a) questions concerning *eventuation* – how, or why, X happened, and (b) *'how-it-was'* questions - attempts to recover details of what the world was like at a given historical moment. In relation to the former, Hall (1992:7) suggested that historical sociologists characteristically aim to map *long-term* historical trends and changing social patterns, and usually this pursuit equates with generalisation at a more abstracted level than perhaps would be tolerated within the historical scholarship *per se*. By and large, questions of eventuation predominate historical sociologies of intimate relations, and usually these studies assert predictive, and / or post-dictive 'truths'. Making such claims, in turn, involves recourse to a number of typical stipulative devices, namely:

---

[12] Just as geometry seeks to abstract pure relational forms from the content of their material reality, so formal sociology seeks to abstract the reciprocal characteristics of relationships from their situated occurrences in social life.

- characterisation of historical location by means of periodisation, which is in turn dependent upon;
- claims about transition points, epistemological ruptures and the like;
- the selective / partial abstraction of specific details from a potential myriad of factors; and,
- the rhetorical construction of one particular factor (or combination of factors) as being central to understanding the historical object in question.

For instance, the claims of both Giddens (1992), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) are founded upon the stipulative periodisation of 'late modernity'. Both analyses temporally located the 'transition point' for intimate relations the 1960's - a (claimed) epistemological rupture point whereby moral certainty began to unravel only to be replaced by a volatile heterogeneity of intimate social arrangements. However, beyond this general level of consensus, these authors (and historical sociologists in general) differ considerably in terms of the various factors to which they afford causal significance. Hence, a heterogeneity of factors and events have been implicated in explaining changes in intimate relations, such as:

- changing cultural expectations (Stone,1990);
- radical restructuring of the moral order (Giddens, 1991);
- an expanding repertoire of cultural resources by which to inform actions (Evans,1988);
- the demise of grand moral certainties (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim,1995);
- transformation in the basis of personal identity (Giddens 1991; Lindholm, 1998);
- increasing secularisation of society (Luhmann,1986);
- escape from the increasingly formally rational basis of high modernity (Weber 1948; Bataille 1986);
- emancipation of women (Bradley 1992; Hakim 1996); and,
- the emergence of leisure culture (Lindholm, 1998).

In the following review, formal analyses are presented in order of their chronological appearance, although considerable cross-references are made between particular works. Historical sociologies of intimate relations are presented in sections as follows:

- intimate relations in pre-modern Western societies;
- the condition of modernity and intimate relations; and,
- post-consensus sociologies of intimate relations.

This is not to, however, to endorse any implied periodisation. Each substantive theory is presented in terms of:

- theoretical claims made about the nature of intimacy;
- theoretical claims made about the nature / causes of intimacy troubles; and,
- critical commentary in relation to the 'stipulative' features of these claims.

FORMAL ACCOUNTS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS AND INTIMACY TROUBLES.

ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF INTIMACY.

Aristotle was not the first formalist philosopher: Russell (1984:173) suggested that in reading Aristotle - it is especially necessary to do so with reference to his predecessors, in particular, Plato. The Platonic influence in Aristotle is beyond dispute; however, Aristotle diverged extensively from Platonic metaphysics and proposed his own alternative doctrine of universal essences. At times, Aristotle's concept of 'form' appears to be dependent upon the linguistic distinction between universal forms and specific instances of those forms: at other times Aristotle's work can also be read as stipulating an ontological distinction between matter and an altogether more ethereal property of objects.

The point of departure for Aristotle's speculative formal analysis of intimacy was to treat friendships as being based upon virtue. This idea proposed that intimacy represents a search for goodness, and received its most rigorous articulation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle (1975: 227-228) claimed that:

> 'such love has somewhat the character of a virtue, or at any rate involves virtue. Besides it is one the things which life can least afford to be without. So true is this, that the rich and men in positions of authority and power, stand, more than other people, in need of friends [....] in poverty also and all other misfortunes of life, the thoughts of men turn to their friends as their one refuge'.

Aristotle appropriated Plato's term *eros* in order to distinguish friendship from the 'lesser' relationship of sexual love. However, Singer (1984a: 93) noted that sexual love is afforded a much more restricted treatment in Aristotle's thought because features such as 'expression of emotion', 'sharing of feelings', and 'enjoyment of instinctual satisfaction' – each potential characteristics of intimate relations as they are understood in the contemporary sense - were disqualified as a forms of virtue.

Aristotle distinguished between three forms of friendship, based upon: (a) that which is pleasant; (b) that which derives utility for the parties involved; and (c) that which is good or virtuous (Aristotle, 1975: 230). He asserted that the former two types of intimacy are governed by self-interest and imply a material or hedonistic orientation; each protagonist is claimed to be *primarily* concerned with their own welfare. That these forms are considered as relationships of friendship at all, resides in the (co-incidental) degree to which disinterested affection towards the other persons may be present. In contrast, Aristotle claimed that true friendship (which he terms *philia*) is based upon virtue, and implied that people care for each other as separate individuals and not mere instruments. That these relationships are coincidently useful and/or pleasant occurs serendipitously rather than as a matter of calculation. True *philia* is therefore said to demand disinterested recognition of the unique qualities of the other person, and as such he suggested that these are relationships in which only the good or virtuous can partake. Even amongst virtuous people Aristotle suggested that the potential for *philia* is limited and bound by zero-sum calculability. The basis for this assertion resides in his claim that friendship implies more than the favourable dispositions of the parties concerned and depends upon situated social practices. Social practice demands both time commitment and commonality of experience and is thus ultimately constrained by the finite nature of being. Restricted by the contingencies of time and space only a certain number of 'true' friendships are possible. Without the resources of time and opportunity for interaction, *Philia* is not possible (Aristotle,1975: 234). Favourable disposition towards another person was therefore considered by Aristotle to be a necessary but not sufficient condition of intimate relationships.

In theorising the essence of *philia*, Aristotle unavoidably touched upon existential concerns which were evident in earlier religious practices and which remain features of more contemporary analyses of intimacy, namely the tension between: (a) the maintenance of a distinctive sense of self and identity within intimate social relationships; and (b) the contrasting imperative to subsume individual characteristics in favour of a shared / common identity. Ideas about existential 'merging' run counter to enlightenment thoughts of selfhood and presuppose a social basis for selfhood. These ideas are most clearly apparent in Aristotle's work when he attempted, by means of logic, to establish virtue as the only possible basis for *philia*. He claimed that only the virtuous can be interested in one another as persons as only they are able to recognise each other's virtuous traits in the first place. Rather tautologically, he then suggested that as one ought not to delight in that which is bad, only good men are worthy of being loved. Other conclusions include (1975: 267):

- what is loved is only the lovable;
- the good is lovable without qualification; and,

- for each person the loveable is what is good for that person.

Philia was therefore defined as a form of *self* regard: given that a good man is his own friend, the virtuous friend, in turn, can be regarded as an extension of self.[13]

In summary, (idealised) intimate relations in Aristotle are characterised by mutuality, and therefore his model of intimacy was one based upon sociability (which ultimately implied a model of citizenship). Only the morally virtuous could be friends in this distinctive way that did not reduce to either utility or pleasure. Friendship, being a valuable form of social capital, implicitly assumed an integral part of a system of social reward in which the most 'worthy' derive the greatest level of potential benefit from others. In focussing upon the moral context of friendship, Singer (1984a: 105) asserted that Aristotle touched upon 'a deep truth' concerning the nature of intimacy. True *philia* can be thought of as the apotheosis of a hierarchy of friendships that also include relationships primarily founded on instrumental concerns, which were viewed both as (a) less desirable, and (b) less virtuous because of their necessary contingency (and hence vulnerability) once the common grounds of mutuality are dissolved. Singer (1984a: 90) credited Aristotle with forcing a crude distinction between the love of persons and the love of things. However, the self-evident permeability of various forms of friendship ought to be noted; pleasure, utility, or disinterested affection may (coincidentally) feature in each of Aristotle's forms of intimate relations.

INTIMACY TROUBLES IN ARISTOTLE'S WORK.

The claimed basis of intimacy troubles, by and large, remains implied rather than specified within the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Intimacy troubles implied by Aristotle are claimed to arise from either:

- individual characteristics of either intimate party; or,
- problems with the basis of the relationship itself.

In Aristotle's formulation, intimate relations may be ill-founded from the outset since individuals may either (a) lack virtue (whatever this might be), or (b) be mismatched in terms of 'virtue'. Individuals may have different orientations towards the relationship: whilst one may orientate towards the relationship in terms of utility, the other party may have a more

[13] In contrast to the conceptual distinction implied between instrumental friendships and *philia*, Nussbaum (2001:328) defines *philia* as extensionally wider than friendship and including institutional arrangements such as family relationships, those between husband and wife, socio-erotic relationships as well as personal friendships. For Nussbaum the term *philia* represents a pure relational form of intimacy accounting for qualitative differences in relationships signifying the very strongest and most intimate affective ties.

altruistic commitment: this inference, however, is considerably complicated by Aristotle's *a priori* separation of sexual love and intimacy. Aristotle implied a 'desire for quick friendship' as something more superficial than 'authentic' intimate relations: thus being in love-with-the-idea-of-love itself, rather than in-love-with-persons implied a less-gratifying form of union. Whilst wishing to avoid the charge of presentism, the displaced intimate intentions described by Aristotle seem (at least) analogous to the situation occupied by some present day 'serial monogamists'. In Aristotle's formulation, the success or failure of intimate relations, to a large extent, derived from the virtuous (or otherwise) qualities that intimate parties exchange within a relationship. By implication, two possible pitfalls arise if this formulation is correct: excessively narcissistic individuals will be incapable of altruistic investment in others. At the other (opposite) extreme, individuals might thoroughly invest in an intimate relationship to the extent that they completely subsume individuality. In this sense, they may almost 'become' the other person, thus making any notion of 'exchange' meaningless. Aristotle suggested that true *philia* is a form of self-regard: the implication to be derived from this claim is that those of low self-esteem would be disadvantaged in terms of intimate exchange. Aristotle raised the possibility that intimate relations somehow depend upon mutual exchange, and may therefore run into difficulties if one or another party does not receive a 'fair rate' of exchange. In such instances, naked self-interest supersedes commitment to the relationship, which then assumes an other-than-intimate basis. Furthermore, Aristotle claimed that capacity to invest in intimate relations is 'calculated' on a zero-sum basis: hence, competing interests, distractions, or attempting to (intimately) invest in more than one relationship at one time inevitably diminishes existing intimate relations. Aristotle suggested that intimacy is a form of praxis, requiring opportunity for continuing interaction, and he therefore expressed a gloomy prognosis for intimates separated by physical distance.

STIPULATIVE FEATURES OF ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT.

Singer (1984a.) questioned Aristotle's partiality in conceptualising intimate relations in exclusively moral terms. Aristotle himself never sought to justify this conceptualisation, which appears all the more arbitrary considering his radical separation of emotional and erotic matters from the issue of *philia*. Putting this criticism to one side, it was noted above that Aristotle's formulation constituted a more general element of his (preferred) notion of citizenship. In this respect, Singer (1984a: 95) suggested that Aristotle's constant reference to a theory of justice when discussing intimacy risks conflating these two (largely separate) moral concepts. Suspicion (at least) must be raised that Aristotle's speculative account of intimacy was formulated in order to concur with wider elements of his metaphysics. However, as usual, theoretical consistency arrives at a price, and in the treatment of *philia* and justice as same-order phenomena, several logical tensions are created. If the love of another

person is proportionate to their 'merit' (which is never wholly defined), and the 'best persons' have the greatest claim upon the affections of others, then several evident difficulties inhere in this formulation. Firstly, there is an implied stasis in that (even if we could define 'merit') the possibility that individuals might become 'better' or 'worse' people over time is peremptorily eliminated.[14] Participants in intimate relations (especially the earlier stages) frequently refer to restorative effects of 'falling in love': in this sense it might appear as an *injustice* in itself if 'unworthy' persons were to be deprived of avenues of potentially restorative resources. Aristotle's difficulties in this example principally arise from an attempt to stipulate generalised moral precepts of justice, and then apply them to the domain of intimate relations in which they (at best) only partially apply. However, he is not alone in this enterprise, and the theme of intimacy as a form of citizenship has been revisited in recent sociological analyses, most notably Giddens' (1992:184) alleged *democratisation of personal life*. The extent to which this latter theoretical development can be warranted is subject to further discussion below.

On a separate issue, there is a sense in which Aristotle peremptorily 'solves' the question of intimate relations by recourse to *a priori* 'truth' claims embedded within his theory of forms. Aristotle's theory of forms has been subject to critical discussion almost since its origin: Russell (1984:178) suggested that Aristotle's claims that (a) form determines the nature of a particular object, and (b) that forms are substances that exist independently of matter, rather than heralding the end of metaphysical debate, simply commit to the same endless regression with Aristotle charged Plato.

Perhaps the most explicitly stipulative feature in Aristotle's account concerns the extent to which he asserted a rationally calculable basis of exchange within intimate relations. In doing so, Aristotle was perhaps the first amongst many theorists to employ economic metaphors in order to explain intimate relations.[15] Singer (1984a: 103) asserted that such econocentric

[14] Similarly, Aristotle's speculations seem predicated upon insular and static social groups.

[15] The intellectual origins of exchange theory reside within structuralist anthropology, and find sociological expression largely within functionalism. 'Exchange systems' have been variously hypothesised as being based upon; patterns of communication, favour, goods and services, and even, it was suggested by Lévi-Strauss (1969), women. The function of a particular exchange system is usually claimed to be oriented towards the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. Ekeh (1974) identified two principle strands: (a) individualist and (b) collectivist. Notable expositions of the individualist school include, Homans' (1958) *Social Behaviour as Exchange*, and Blau's (1964) *Power and Exchange in Social Life*, in which a two-person model is proposed. The individualist model is perhaps the most economically determinist of the two, and social interactions are generally framed as market transactions (between two individuals) in which equivalent return is expected upon social 'investment'. Blau for example asserted that people only marry those partners who are able to provide equal social assets. The collectivist model of social exchange is most readily associated with Mauss's (2002 [1925]) anthropological work *The Gift*, which emphasised the concept of 'reciprocity'. He suggested a tripartite structure of gift exchange (giving, receiving, and return) as creating social obligation and thus underlying the creation, alteration or maintenance of social relationships. A notable

approaches ignore the different and incommensurate ways in which people derive reward from intimate relationships, and if no assignable quality of intimacy is immediately apparent, then it is logically impossible to account for intimate relationships in terms of exchange. Perhaps Bell and Newby (1976:176) state this problem more eloquently:

> 'The crucial question is [....] what is the 'going rate of exchange, and how is this arrived at? How many hours of household drudgery are a bunch of flowers on the wedding anniversary worth? And who decides?'

Davis (1973b: 161) elaborated upon these difficulties: he suggested that no necessary correlation exists between (a) potential favours, and (b) the actual performance of such favours. The potential dividends of intimate relations (if indeed these are at the basis of intimacy) are therefore inherently unreliable, and either intimate party may cease to supply or return a range of favours for a whole variety of reasons that defy simple economic logic. He maintained that the exchange metaphor is difficult to reconcile with intimate relations in several other significant respects, including:

- deferred exchange – intimate parties may not feel obligated to give, or expect to receive specific repayment for each service rendered;
- intimate relations are often conducted upon utopian lines of boundless reserves, rather than on the basis of a zero-sum calculation;
- intimate relations blur the boundaries of existential separateness thus rendering the notions of 'whose benefit' exchange as problematic; and,
- the profit motive inherent in economic analogies is impossible to reconcile with moral discourses / rationalities framing obligation.

That Aristotle limited his formulations of intimacy to closed, externally hostile and internally homogenous social groups perhaps reflects his particular historical location. However, Aristotle sought to universalise his observations and claimed to have settled metaphysical debates by locating the essential form of intimate relations. The extent to which formal analyses reify particular historical moments remains a characteristic theoretical problem within the formal sociologies reviewed below. However, and aside from this debate, the basis for friendship suggested by Aristotle is socially static and confined to a particular class of persons. To this extent, idealised intimates are represented as so (narcissistically) similar that

---

sociological application of the concept of reciprocity is found in Gouldner's (1960) *The Norm of Reciprocity*. Lévi-Strauss (1969) appropriated Mauss's insights in order to propose a universal structural basis for marriage and kinship. In particular he suggested invariant regularities to the circulation of women within 'marriage systems'. He differentiated between (a) elementary (non-Western), and (b) complex (Western) modes of exchange but asserted that, regardless of complexity, the fundamental basis of exchange for all things – whether money, communication, or women was essentially homogenous.

Aristotle doesn't appear to describing intimate attachments to others at all (Singer, 1984a: 101). Similarly, the inescapable logic of Aristotle's formulation is that we never love or admire people for themselves, but rather we merely love their (moral) qualities. To base explanations of intimate relations upon an abstraction (in this case virtue) overrides the situated ways in which they are enacted. In the final analysis, Aristotle fails to explain why virtue ought to be abstracted from a potential range of other personal qualities (including utility and pleasure), and as such, his (idealised) intimates appear as rational, virtuous and wholly asexual (Singer, 1984a: 106).

Notwithstanding these stipulative features, Aristotle (and to a lesser extent Plato before him) can be credited with raising a number of enduring themes which are (at least) analogous to recurrent concerns raised in contemporary analyses of intimate relations. Without wishing to assert an evolutionary history of ideas, these include:

- the notion of 'forms' in themselves;
- the conceptualisation of intimate relations in essentially social terms;
- the accordance of a moral basis to intimate relations;
- the distinction between instrumental and intimate relations; and,
- the (primitive) acknowledgement of tensions between egoism and altruism in intimate relations.

SIMMEL'S SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.

The intellectual heritage of formal sociology resides primarily within the work of Georg Simmel (1858 - 1918), and scholars have increasingly appropriated elements of Simmel's work during the second half of the twentieth century. Of particular relevance to the current study is Davis's (1973b) application and (in some senses) extension of Simmel's formal analysis of intimate relations. Simmel claimed three distinctive modes of theorisation within his work, namely: 'general' sociology; formal sociology; and 'philosophical' sociology.

The differences between these three genres are not always clear, although (generally vague) distinctions were offered by Simmel himself. Most of Simmel's claims about intimate relations were framed within the latter two 'approaches'. Formal sociology involved the investigation and abstraction of societal forms or the documentation of forms of sociation. True to earlier versions of formalism, Simmel is never entirely clear in his definition of 'social forms'. However, certain organising features of this construct are apparent.[16]

[16] Wolff (1950: xxxix) suggested that the closest that Simmel gets to providing a satisfactory definition is: 'Form is understood as that element, which amongst the elements relevant to particular inquiry (as

Outhwaite (1983) contested that Simmel's most penetrating insights - derived from empirical observations of interaction - are valuable in their own right, and the question of whether or not these can be seen as constituting 'transcendent social forms' is of secondary relevance. For the most part, Simmel remained pre-occupied with the mundane and microscopic dynamics of everyday life. *'Quantitative aspects of the group'* [1908] (1950a), *'Flirtation'* [1923] (1984), and *'Types of Social relationship by Degrees of Reciprocal Knowledge of Their Participants'* [1908] (1950b) provide exemplars of Simmel's formalism and are discussed below. Further claims about the interaction dynamics of intimate relations appeared in Simmel's 'philosophical sociology', which primarily entailed reflexive metaphysical interrogation of the organising principles of particular topics and modes of inquiry. *On Love (a fragment)* [1918] (1984), and *Female Culture* [1911] (1984) provide relevant exemplars of this approach. Insofar as Davis's (1973b) work largely derives from, and in some places extends, Simmel's insights (especially in relation to intimacy troubles) elements of his work are also considered alongside Simmel's claims. Aspects of Davis's work that are distinctive are subject to separate review later.

SIMMEL'S 'PHILOSOPHICAL' SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMACY.

Simmel's [1923b] (1984) essay *'On love (A Fragment)'* comprises one of his more abstract metaphysical deliberations on the basis of intimate relations. From the outset, he adopted the strategy of defining intimacy by means of a series of negative conditions. He suggested that acting 'out of love' couldn't be readily understood as conforming to any given rationality, is typically indifferent to individual pleasures or hostility, and furthermore, blurs the existential separateness of the intimate partners.

In terms of a more positive definition, Simmel [1923b] (1984: 186) asserted that the essence of intimacy arises from the very specific 'combination or synthesis of sensuality and sentiment', and is not reducible to either one of these elements.[17] At the same time he acknowledged that conventional opinions that conceptually bind sexual drive and love could not be readily dismissed, and he suggested that whilst a biological drive may initially be solely orientated towards sexual fulfilment, this initial attraction merely creates the social space for intimate relations to develop. Once intimate relations are established, their sustenance transcends both biology and possible rational / teleological motives.

---

well as to the general viewpoint of sociology) is relatively stable as opposed to content which with the same specifications is relatively variable.'

[17] Echoing these claims, Davis (1973b: 107) asserted that 'the sex act itself is not the prototype of intimate knowledge but merely the particularisation'.

Simmel [1923b] (1984:164) challenged the notion that intimate relations could be understood in terms of crude economic analogies. Rather, he asserted that love for another person is more unconditionally linked with its object than any other human relationship or transaction. Respect, for instance, is always mediated by a person's quality of 'worthiness' (however this might be decided). In contrast, he claimed that intimacy is distinctive in the sense that, being largely independent of judgements of 'actual' or 'real' value, it may survive the collapse of the grounds upon which it was developed. Simmel therefore suggested that intimate relations constitute a *transformative process* that creates its own object of desire by means of actively bestowing value.[18] Davis (1973b:183) extended Simmel's claims in relation to bestowal: he claimed that 'the beloved generates an orientational field for the lover that gives a new vitality and meaning to aspects of his existence'. In this formulation, bestowal not only creates value in the 'love object, but also changes the 'entire self' of the lover. Intimate relations by this formulation are thus *doubly transformative.*

Consistent with the wider orientation of much of his work, Simmel [1923b] (1984: 172-3) was keen to claim dualistic features of intimacy. He asserted that (a) people 'in love' feel 'irresistibly grasped', *and* (b) being 'in love' is accompanied by a definite sense of freedom of choice in relation to the object of ones attentions.[19] A further prominent dualism in Simmel's speculative analysis concerned the tension between *I* and *Thou* in intimate relations; between the maintenance of self-identity and the desire for closeness or 'fusion'. Simmel suggested that tensions between *the general* and *the particular* are closely related to this paradox i.e. the extent to which intimacy rests upon general attraction to the other person as an exemplar of men, or women as opposed to their unique (irreplaceable) individuality. For Simmel, intimate relations were possessed of both (a) an internal, and (b) an external dynamic. On the one hand he implied that the particular form that intimate relations assume depends upon a number of external factors e.g. that which is culturally endorsed and institutionally supported. On the other, he discussed (without any particularly meaningful conclusion) the internal dynamics of intimacy – and in particular whether or not psychological dispositions towards intimacy qualify as intimacy in itself.

---

[18] Singer (1984a:5) adopted a very similar view to that expressed by Simmel as his central thesis: 'love creates a new value that is not reducible to the individual or objective value that a given object may have.' In this sense, love is always a way of valuing something or somebody in a manner quite special to itself, and actively creates value in the beloved beyond that which could be derived from a mere appraisal of the 'loved object.' Appraisal implies a process that requires a judgement of a person to be based upon their qualities (albeit against specific historical and cultural criteria of what is deemed desirable). In contrast, bestowal of value requires no such affirmation: rather it arises out of altruistic investment in the relationship itself - a pervasive means of actively valuing (as opposed to evaluating) 'the other'.

[19] The simultaneously empowering and disabling potential of intimate attachments may underpin recurrent theme of love as either a malady or medicine.

Both Simmel, and his follower Davis (1973b: 169) afforded analytical priority to the dualistic tension between (a) egoism, and (b) altruism.[20] These themes are inseparable from issues of trust and discretion, which Simmel [1908] (1950: 326) also characterised as [of] 'extreme importance to the sociology of intimate relations'. In summary, Simmel's metaphysical speculations concluded that intimate relations couldn't be reduced to associated phenomena such as procreation, sexuality, psychological constructs of inner life, or instrumental exchange. He also suggested that intimacy, being beyond scientific rationality, cannot be 'known' in any empirical sense, but only be experienced.

Simmel's central argument in *'Weibliche Kultur'* [1911] (1984) was that essential differences exist between males and females, and furthermore, that these differences influence the processes of objectification.[21] Simmel asserted that male (and not female) personalities are determined *by* and *for* the division of labour i.e. that men are more adept at engaging in activities which are invariably alienating to 'inner life', and engage in both public and private life in a more 'objective' and detached fashion (Oakes, 1984:22). On the other hand, he asserted that women tend to 'personalise' relationships, and are more given to direct and spontaneous emotional and 'subjective' expression. Furthermore, he asserted that whilst men constantly strive for achievement (to become something or the other), 'female personalities' exist in a state of relative repose.

Even sympathetic commentators such as Oakes (1984:23) agree that there are no immediately apparent or reasoned grounds on which to accept these claims: Simmel himself articulated no convincing evidence, and to this extent they appear as less-than-persuasive. Exercising considerable circularity Simmel suggested that (at the same time) (a) men were best suited to engage with the 'objectified' public sphere because of the above attributes, and (b) that the characteristically alienating properties of public life determined 'male personalities'. In this respect Simmel's essentialising ontology reads rather like a (thinly veiled) manifesto to justify

---

[20] Davis (1973b: 172-188) usefully conceptualised altruism in intimate relations in terms of shared domains of material, psychological, and social elements, such as: body, property and wealth; understandings, meanings, tastes, opinions, and dispositions; biography – with the ultimate goal of achieving a shared common narrative; subjective temporal experience - typified by mutual phenomenological experiences of engrossment; spatial environment; social circles – existing kinship and friendship networks; and communicative elements – collective terms of self–reference, semi-secret language.

[21] Simmel suggested that cultural values have a transcendent quality insofar as they serve to form pre-existent conditions under which individual personality and identity are constituted. By the term *objectification*, Simmel implied a process whereby certain cultural values acquire a supra-individual quality. However, he further suggested that <u>all</u> *objectified* cultural values originate within *authentic* cultural values, which in turn arise from the situated and mundane activities of persons who share meanings, and create artefacts, that express the energies of their everyday lives.

the continued exclusion of women from public life, and Simmel himself failed to articulate any convincing argument towards a 'separate spheres' model of gender relations.[22]

Sympathetic interpretations of Simmel's work suggest that he sought to explore the possibilities of what a separate (but equal) feminine, culture might appear like, and at one level, these proposals can be viewed as being consistent with (later) ontological and epistemological developments in feminist philosophy.[23] However, it is difficult to cast Simmel in the feminist role. In terms of understanding intimate relations, Simmel's (essentialist) speculations in respect of men and women imply that intimacy carries different meanings for men and women as they are differentially placed in relation to prevailing social structures, and also that men and women experience intimate relationships differently as a consequence of their differing 'personalities'. Both of these themes have endured throughout the history of ideas about intimacy, especially within academic and popular psychology, with Gray (1993) perhaps providing the latest exemplar of this dubious doctrine.

SIMMEL'S FORMAL SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONS.

Many of Plato's metaphysical speculations regarding intimacy are perhaps reducible to his claim that love represents an intermediate state between having and not having. For Simmel [1923a] (1984:133), this conceptualisation was too instrumental in its precepts, and failed to capture both the intensity and complexity of intimate relations. Significantly however, Simmel agreed with one aspect of Plato's analysis in particular – the idea that intimate relations are best characterised in terms of a process of rhythmic oscillation – moments of fulfilment invariably punctuated with more mundane concerns. Simmel asserted that the apparent attractiveness of an 'object' seldom determines the lengths that we are willing to go in order to secure 'possession'. Paradoxically, the object of our attention is frequently

---

[22] See Burstyn (1980) for a full discussion of the range popular justifications deployed in order to maintain separate male and female domains including elements of social, economic, psychological, anatomical, gynaecological, and theological discourses.

[23] The assertion that science (including the human sciences) is a fundamentally patriarchal enterprise has resulted in the development of distinctive feminist ontological principals. Harding (1987:182-184) identifies two main variants: (a) feminist empiricism, and (b) the feminist standpoint. Whilst *Feminist empiricism* challenges science's (claimed) self-image of value freedom, gender 'blindness', and political neutrality, it remains a stipulative undertaking in its own terms. In contrast, the *feminist standpoint* advocates that the situated social experiences of women as a starting point for inquiry, and asserts that feminist theorists occupy a privileged position from which to understand these social worlds. This latter position considerably resonates with Simmel's claims as stated here e.g. that male and female personalities are differentially determined by objective culture / social structures, and therefore men and women experience differently constructed inner and outer worlds.

attractive *precisely because* a high personal cost is entailed.[24] These themes, i.e. 'oscillation', and 'risk' underpinned Simmel's subsequent account of flirtation.

Simmel asserted that a flirt's desire to impress the object of their attention is insufficient to account for his or her actions: there are numerous occasions in which wanting to please does not constitute flirtation. Rather, he suggested that the essence of flirtation is captured by the simultaneous and symbolic combination of consent and denial, and this scenario serves to amplify awareness of 'having' and 'not having'. He asserted that this is even held to be the case when feelings are aroused as part of some playful scenario as opposed to being pursued to actual erotic ends. He offered the following vignettes as exemplars of flirtation:

- the sidelong glance with the head half-turned entails a hint of aversion but also connotes momentary submission or attention, in which consent and refusal are simultaneously combined;
- the strutting walk - which combines sexual connotations with distance and reserve; and,
- the use of extraneous objects such as dogs, children, or others as props for flirtatious purposes: because of my interest in you, I turn my attention to others in our immediate environs and simulate flirtation with the 'other' alongside you in order to flirt with you.

The implication to be derived from each of these instances is that self-presentation is never unreserved: each instance is marked by partial concealment on the part of the flirt. Counter-intuitively, rather than helping to preserve modesty, concealment simply acts to fire the imagination, and the unseen totality is fantasised more vividly: furthermore, he suggested that intellectual self-concealment serves as a more subtle and effective strategy in this respect. In this instance, the device of oscillation between affirmation and denial is intended to create a deliberate ambiguity in the mind of the recipient. Examples offered of this scenario include:

- the lightly thrown remark in which something said 'isn't really meant';
- the use of paradox whose authenticity is in doubt;
- threats not seriously intended; and,
- disparagement, or 'fishing' for complements.

[24] A general theme that pervaded de Rougemont's (1966) work concerns 'obstacles to love'. He suggested that an environment opposed to intimate relations - especially one in which social or spatial obstacles are actively placed between the intimates - is a necessary pre-condition intensification and ongoing sustenance of intimate relations.

Simmel suggested that the deployment of each of these strategies might vary between utterances made in complete seriousness to those made in complete self-deprecation or humility. In each instance however, the speaker stands 'partly veiled' behind the ambiguous remark, and thus partly concealed by problematic meaning planted in the mind of the listener. Simmel asserted that content of episodes of flirtation could broadly assume three possible forms:

- flirtation in the form of flattery – *'Although you might be able to seduce me, I won't allow myself to be conquered'*;
- flirtation as contempt – *'Although I am able to be seduced by others, you are not worthy of this achievement'*; and,
- flirtation as provocation – *'Perhaps you are able to seduce me – perhaps not; go-ahead, give it a try'*.

It is noteworthy that the same basic structure of ambivalence or ambiguity applies in each of these scenarios, which may be either brief or prolonged, and any conclusive decision on these matters brings flirtation to an immediate termination.

In keeping with the general thesis of separate male and female cultural spheres, Simmel [1923a] (1984:139) asserted that flirtation – both in its meaning and deployment – differs between men and women; the latter (allegedly) enjoying significant structural advantage in relation to consent-refusal strategies, and therefore being able to exercise a much greater range of choice than men. However, it is worth noting that this claim, once again, rests upon Simmel's essentialist distinctions between male and female culture.

Simmel asserted that the inherent uncertainty of the flirtatious episode - chance and fate - may in itself appeal as pleasurable: a wager in which anticipated pleasure or happiness are continuously 'played off' against the possibilities of rejection (Simmel [1923a] (1984:144). He argued that this element – the delight in risk – underpins flirtation in its the most pure form in which the entire process is entered into for its own sake and assumes game-like proportions. It is suffice to note at this point, that the theme of 'risk' continues to pervade contemporary theoretical accounts of intimate relations.

In *'Types of Social relationship by Degrees of Reciprocal Knowledge of Their Participants'*, Simmel [1908] (1950: 317) identified four forms of social relationship differentiated in terms of the reciprocal knowledge that participants have of each other, namely:

- interest groups;

- acquaintances;
- relationships of friendship and love; and,
- marriage.

In explaining the significance of degrees of reciprocal knowledge as the differentiating factor between these various forms, Simmel invoked two centrally important concepts: discretion, and confidence in others.[25] Discretion implies a degree of balanced self-restraint in terms of demanding so much (and no more) from any relationship, which both Simmel and (later) Davis suggested forms one of the most fundamentally important synthetic forces within social relationships in general, and intimate relations in particular. For purposes of the current exposition it will be useful to consider the concepts trust and confidentiality separately. Trust allows confidence in the colonisation of future time, and Davis suggested that in contemporary Western societies one's future has become elevated to the status of the most prized asset, thus accounting for the 'high stakes' entailed in either the success or failure of intimate relations. As the basis for practical conduct, trust acts as an intermediary between knowledge and ignorance of another person. The person who knows completely need not trust, whilst the absence of all knowledge of another person makes (even) speculative confidence impossible. Principally, Simmel [1908] (1950: 326) asserted that the quality or type (and not merely quantity) of knowledge is of most significance in determining trust. Acquaintance, or simply membership of an interest group by no means implies depth of knowledge, and indeed may involve no insight into another's most personal attributes. Acquaintance simply implies that one party has taken notice of another's existence, and this is even the case in being 'well acquainted'. As interest group members, individuals are merely the executors of prescribed functions, which at best, betray categorical knowledge. However, such categorical details about the abstract 'objective' elements of a person's biography are of limited utility in inspiring confidence. Yet paradoxically, Davis (1973b: 4) suggested it is just such knowledge that we must rely upon when meeting potential intimates. Deferment of all suspicion leaves the gullible individual vulnerable to a whole variety of exploitative relationships. Simmel [1908] (1950: 327) therefore claimed that investment without reservation is a dangerous enterprise that is potentially threatening to both the individual parties and future of the relationship. Conversely, if individuals are unable to trust potential intimates in a speculative sense, then clearly the possibilities for subsequent intimate relations are stultified.

In common with Simmel [1908] (1950: 330), Davis asserted that the social and spatially diffuse characteristics of advancing modernity ensure that individuals are placed in ever-

[25] Davis (1973b: 103) maintains the fundamental significance of these qualities but differs in terminology preferring to describe these matters as (a) confidentiality, and (b) trust.

greater control of information about themselves, and in turn this engenders a tendency towards secrecy. Secret-keeping has a mutually reinforcing effect, and whilst social conditions of strong personal differentiation *require* secrecy in high dose, at the same time, secrecy embodies and reinforces the tendency towards personal differentiation: to a certain extent a person may come to feel that (s)he is what (s)he hides. The near certainty that the 'hidden self' to some degree lies in contradiction of public selves promotes a guarded approach to the sharing of personal information. In contrast, the kind of familiarity, or the public image that acquaintances acquire of one another by association over a prolonged period of time fosters the impression of a unified self. Davis suggested that in spite of the human tendency to maximise sources of information about others in our environment, 'familiar knowledge' remains notoriously open to attribution errors.[26] Acquaintances will consider their constructs as valid and reliable only to the extent that they can make attributions in terms of the individual and the context of an individual's conduct and account for (in)consistencies within their explanations.

In complete contrast to the (typical) superficiality of interest groups or acquaintances, Simmel argued that intimate relations are rooted in an ideal of totality of reciprocal knowledge. The images that intimates construct of one another are significantly different from those of acquaintances, being based upon qualitatively and quantitatively different sources of information. The desire to update the informational aspects of intimate relations ensures reflection upon the minutiæ each other's lives following periods of separation. As well as being privy to a person's repertoire of public selves, intimates are also in possession of details of another's (possibly contradictory) private self and most crucial secrets. Simmel suggested that if intimate relations are to be possible at all, then this obstacle of secrecy must be mediated. On a related point, both Simmel [1908] (1950: 325), and Davis (1973b: 110) asserted that the spatial proximity of living together represents the ultimate development of the intimates' trust in each other by maximising the opportunity that each has to monitor the other's mundane secrets: should intimate relations falter, such private information can be used to inflict grievous damage to reputation. In this sense, the accomplishment of 'complete openness' is paradoxically both a utopian and dystopian prospect.

[26] Davis's (1973b) account of how people make judgements about potential intimates has commonalities with attribution theory in one of its most formulated guises (i.e. Kelley, 1967). Kelley suggested that a perceiver's impression of another can be thought of as an unstable contingent observation, liable to change as a function of change in *stimuli* (the 'target person'), *perceiver* (normative features of the person making the claim); *time* (when the observation was made); and *modality* (how the observation was effected). Nonetheless, Kelley suggested that initial attributions were liable to revision, especially if the original 'source' observation could be demonstrated as being in some way invalid and / or unreliable.

Simmel's essay *'Quantitative Aspects of the Group'* is held by some (e.g. Coser, 1977a: 186) to exemplify the central accomplishment of formal sociology: namely to elucidate and document forms of sociation. Within this work Simmel accounted for how group processes derive from the structural arrangements of the group – and in particular the number of participants. Simmel [1908] (1950:123) asserted that a dyadic relationship is qualitatively different from all other group forms insofar as participants are confronted by, and need only to account to, one another. Notwithstanding this feature, the 'intimate' character of the dyad is claimed to derive from the dyadic structure in itself as opposed to the *content* of the relationship (Simmel, [1908] 1950: 127). In terms of viability, the dyad is clearly the most fragile of group forms and subject to unilateral termination. Simmel suggested that it is for this reason that dyads in general do not bear the same sense of 'super-personal' life that serves to constrain the actions of members of larger groups. However, he also noted that monogamous marriage has certain features that place it outside of the essential sociological characteristics of the dyad e.g. institutional and cultural endorsement by the fact that the arrangement is socially regulated, historically transmitted, and cultural expectations (e.g. relating to the care of children), place personal and wider family reputations at stake (Simmel, [1908] (1950: 128). Furthermore, he claimed that whatever the extent to which the marriage dyad is dependent upon the personalities of each of the spouses, its distinctiveness arises from the fact that it assumes a character not coinciding with either of them i.e. bad marriages can and do exist between 'excellent' individuals, and conversely good marriages between 'dubious' ones.

Simmel therefore suggested that monogamous marriage acquires a distinctive, super-personal quality as a consequence of the incomparable closeness by which the egoism of each party is thoroughly suspended - not only in favour of the other - but also in favour of the relationship in general. However, before concluding that these arrangements represented a panacea, Simmel also claimed that marriage dyads are (specifically) susceptible to habituation and exhaustion of novelty.

The addition of another member to the dyad may seem outwardly an insignificant change, yet Simmel [1908] (1950: 135) asserted that triads qualitatively differ from dyadic arrangements to an immense degree.[27] He observed that triads represent the simplest structure by which groups can exercise constraint over individuals for collective purposes. The triad thus invokes the most enduring dualism in subjective human life; namely that of freedom and determinism,

[27] *c/f* Davis (1973b) discussion of the creation of dyads via the subtraction of one member of a triad. In 'pick-up' situations a third 'catalytic' party, with a common relationship to potential intimates may facilitate the development of intimacy by providing strangers or acquaintances with an introduction or 'opener'.

and the addition of a third member opens up a number of possibilities in terms of group processes. Simmel outlined three possibilities:

- the third party may assume the role of the mediator between the other members by exercising impartiality in situations where group coherence is threatened [1908] (1950: 145);
- the third party may assume the role of *tertius gaudens* (the third who rejoices) – seeking to gain advantage from conflict between the other two members, e.g. 'the competition between two persons of the same sex for the favour of one of the opposite sex.' [1908] (1950: 154); and / or,
- the third party may exercise a strategy of *divide et impera* by intentionally fostering conflict between the other two members in order to derive personal profit. [1908] (1950: 162).

The addition of a third member to a dyad clearly threatens its most intimate nature, and for example, the birth of the first child may serve to transform monogamous marriage in exactly this way. Davis (1973b: 248) highlighted the significance of the *intentions* of the third party. Broadly, third parties (other family members, ex-lovers, rivals, mutual friends) may serve as either 'catalysts' or 'antagonists' to the dyadic relationship. Simmel [1908] (1950: 135) asserted that this impact is difficult to predict *a priori*, and this is particularly so in relation to the first child example cited here. For instance, cold and 'intrinsically alienated' spouses may not wish a child, but might be 'unified' by the addition of a third member. Paradoxically, very passionate and intimate husbands and wives may not wish for a child out of fear of separation. Davis (1973b: 160) asserted that the dyad / triad distinction assumes particular relevance in the *post-hoc* allocation of blame when intimate relations decline or are terminated. In the case of dyads, the tendency is towards attributing the blame towards of the other person ('(s) he's incapable of showing affection'). In contrast, circumstances in which a third party is antagonistic to the symmetry of an existing dyad entail a much greater threat to self-esteem and Davis suggested that either party of dyadic pair are much more likely to self-question, if not self-blame. Perhaps Simmel's most significant sociological insight regarding intimate relations is his pervasive treatment of 'threats-to-intimacy' as a consequence of relationship structure itself rather than the personalities of individual members.

Intimacy Troubles in Simmel's Work.

The topic of intimacy troubles remains implied rather than explicitly stated within Simmel's work. However, several distinctive insights are derivable from the essays reviewed here. As reported, Simmel's assertion that intimacy troubles arise primarily from the structure of

intimate relationships (as opposed to the characters of individual participants) represents a radical departure from the individualising tendencies of academic psychology. Dyads, Simmel reminded us, are fragile constructions, and this appears particularly so in the case of intimate dyads where damage may occur as the result of addition or subtraction of members. Furthermore, these potentially disruptive effects are difficult to predict *a priori*, but nevertheless carry a disruptive potential. Similarly, dyads are uniquely susceptible to unilateral termination. Collectively, these changes accentuate the uncertain and unpredictable basis of intimate relations. As noted, the circumstances by which dyads are disrupted may influence post-hoc attributions of blame.

By nature of their incomparable closeness, the possibility remains that intimate dyads may become either (a) overbearing by 'crushing' individual personalities, or (b) habituated in which case their intimate qualities are lost. Loss of separate self-identity may leave individuals feeling 'subsumed' and feeling 'in need of space'. Habituated intimacy may leave the individual parties questioning exactly what they derive from the relationship. In this sense, intimate relations are represented as a requiring and ongoing process of remedial attention, and failure to adequately attend to the demands of others risks an imbalance between the mundane and novel aspects of intimacy. Exhaustion of novelty, in particular, might foster the impression that an intimate relationship has simply 'run out of steam'. For Simmel, sustaining 'successful' intimate relations demands a carefully managed combination of (a) proximity, and (b) distance: disturbance of this balance may in itself precipitate intimacy troubles.

Against the naturalising discourses of 'falling in love', Simmel suggested that intimate attachments are difficult to establish, and the seeds of their destruction may be present from the outset, leaving individuals with the (often *post-hoc*) evaluation; 'what was I thinking of'. This situation may occur precisely because intimate relations are always initiated from a position of incomplete knowledge. When new information comes to light over the course of the relationship, one party might interpret this as a fundamental change in the character of the other. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, people do actually change in a whole variety of ways: individual trajectories of self-development might diverge to the extent that the basis of the relationship is undermined, and in such cases, intimacy may decline without the active intent of either party.

Simmel located both discretion and trust as the foundational elements of intimacy: breaches of these two conditions would therefore invariably precipitate intimacy troubles. Without trust in another, the constant requirement for investment in intimate relations becomes impossible. Trust in another may be misguided from the outset of a relationship given that trust requires more-than-categorical knowledge of the other person. Conversely, as intimate relations

develop, particular individuals may have difficulties in 'opening out', or sharing secrets with their newly found intimates, and this scenario may foster the impression that the other person has 'something to hide'. Individuals may either appear secretive as a consequence of habituated failures to communicate, or conversely appear boring as their stock of intimate secrets becomes completely known to the other. Ownership of another's most intimate secrets increases the potential for the most damaging type of retribution should the relationship be unfavourably terminated.

For Simmel, heterosexual intimate relations must mediate a set of enduring (if not essential) differences in the male and female 'characters'. He claimed that men and women relate differently to intimate relations, as well as wanting/needing differing rewards from their relationships: whilst men are (allegedly) more instrumentally and objectively disposed, women relate to intimate attachments with (supposed) immediacy and emotionality. Simmel suggested that the Western cultural context hardly helps this fundamental divergence given enduring differences in the structural locations and cultural expectations of men and women. To the extent that these differences determine (differential) rules of flirtation, intimate relations are made difficult to initiate. As intimate relations arise from a specific fusion of 'sensuality and sentiment' i.e. people derive multiple 'rewards' from intimate relations, then by implication, sources of dissatisfaction may also be manifold. Simmel suggested that intimacy involves a process of bestowing value: selectively accentuating the 'positives', whilst simultaneously disregarding 'negatives' (however these might be defined). Given this formulation, it might be supposed that declining intimacy could be marked by an exact reversal of this process, whereby niggles and irritations that might previously have been ignored or disregarded as trivialities become elevated to the status of major 'bones of contention', obscuring the 'positive' attributes of the other.

To reiterate, almost all of the above assertions have been derived by inference from Simmel's work, which is overwhelmingly focused upon the conditions of 'normative' intimate relations. It was largely left to Murray Davis to systematise these ideas about intimacy troubles.

STIPULATIVE FEATURES OF SIMMEL'S ACCOUNT.

Several features of Simmel's social theory seem predisposed to an avoidance of *a priori* stipulations. His pervading interest in mundane, microscopic aspects of social life seem proximate to vernacular concerns. His avoidance of overarching, systematic grand theorisations seems to presage a commitment to transparent methodologies, even to the extent that Simmel has been accused of merely describing a collection of more 'interesting cases' (Durkheim, 1979: 327). The occasionality of his work gives the impression of mirroring the

variable metric of everyday life:[28] and yet, in several other respects, Simmel's work antagonises tensions between the technical and vernacular. More recent commentators such as Frisby (1984) have suggested Simmel's *apparently* disparate essays do in fact display an (emergent) unity of purpose when viewed as a whole, and clearly several stipulative features pervade his sociological project, most notably the (seeming) concern to make claims consistent with his rather deterministic theory of cultural modernity, and his *a priori* configuration of gender relations considered above.

The use of vignettes to illustrate examples of social-forms-in-action is one of the most notable aspects of Simmel's work, sustaining interest and possessing a certain amount of 'face validity'. However, this is not to suggest that these reported details portray vernacular concerns, and it should be borne in mind that each reported example has been carefully mediated through Simmel's theoretical lens. There is a sense in which Simmel's theory of forms can be read as positing an overly synchronic and consensual version of social reality. Lukács (1971: xxiii-xxiv) asserted that Simmel 'ontologised' historically situated phenomena and thereby assumed a static relationship between life and form, which advanced a 'timeless model of human relations'.

Simmel's treatment of 'female culture' perhaps provides the most transparently stipulative feature of his sociology of intimate relations. This essay (almost instantly) was countered by feminist objections to his particular version of gender essentialism, and his implied legitimisation of women's subjugation. Even in a sympathetic reading of this work, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Simmel asserted *a priori* configurations of status and power, and then proceeded to construct a set of theoretical justifications towards his conclusions. Marianne Weber [1919] (1977: 871) observed that 'psychological analysis and normative philosophical thinking are [....] so closely bound together that one finds a prescription for woman's destiny contained within the description of her being'. The detailed elements of her (comprehensive) critique of this work can be summarised as follows:

- objection to Simmel's radical polarity of the genders;
- rejection of the notion that female culture should be defined only in relation to objective (male) culture;
- objection to the neglect of the views of women themselves;

[28] Sympathetic and critical commentators alike have characterised Simmel's work as (variously) ambiguous (Wolff, 1950; Novak, 1976), unscientific, or descriptive (Durkheim [1900] 1979; Weber 1972). Both Durkheim, and Weber viewed the ambiguity inherent Simmel's sociology as a vice rather than a virtue. Durkheim (1979: 327) accused Simmel of 'unrigorous and illogical' thinking and questioned his use of 'rigorous demonstrations of no relevance'. Others, such as Novak (1976) more sympathetically suggested that Simmel's fragmentary and ambiguous style merely reflected his view of modernity i.e. fragmented, uncertain, and in constant flux.

- objection to Simmel's implied 'man-made ideal of womanly perfection';
- objection to Simmel's limited and limiting view of female abilities;
- objection to the romanticised ideals of home and service; and,
- objection to the implied passive role that Simmel assigned to women.

However, in making her critique Marianne Weber is guilty of advancing her own particular essentialist manifesto, revealing theoretical contradictions that continue to occupy second-wave feminism.[29] Later (sympathetic) commentators such as Coser (1977b: 876) were drawn to note that Simmel's sociological imagination faltered in relation to the issue of gender. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Simmel can be credited with firmly establishing the topic of intimacy (and by implication, intimacy troubles) within the sociological realm, thus establishing topical terms of reference that have set the parameters for successive professional sociologies.

MURRAY S. DAVIS AND INTIMATE MOBILITY.

The extent to which Davis's (1973b) *Intimate Relations* can be read as a contemporary application and extension of Simmel's insights regarding intimate relations ought to be evident from the above discussion. Notwithstanding, Davis's analysis also demonstrated several distinctive elements (not least an explicit consideration of intimacy troubles) and therefore this work is worthy of further review here. Like Simmel, Davis's analysis is predicated upon the structural features of communicative interaction. However, in contrast to Simmel, Davis (1973b: xviii) asserted that intimate relations could be investigated 'on a level of abstraction high enough to render inconsequential the sex roles of those who enter into them'. The intellectual climate in which Davis's work was produced was that of 1970's North America in which academic psychology held discursive sovereignty in regard to the academic study of intimacy. Davis's expressed theoretical intention was therefore towards a shift in analytical focus 'away from the psychological concept of *love* and towards the sociological concept of *intimate relations*', which he characterised as 'the study of all behaviours through which two interacting individuals construct and communicate an intimate relationship' (1973b: xiv).

[29] Bordo (1997) asserted that the most central dilemma faced by twentieth-century feminism concerns the tension between: (a) a constructionist agenda that rejects outright *biological* essentialism, and (b) implied essentialist notions of unity that underpin the basis of emancipatory feminist politics. Embracing the latter risks ignoring differences among women. Paradoxically, rejection of sex / gender categories altogether undermines the basis of the entire feminist project. The contours of this theoretical tension are further explored below in relation to feminist accounts of intimacy / troubles.

DAVIS' ACCOUNT OF INTIMACY.

Davis (1973b: 56) developed a large repertoire of terms for the analysis of the variety of forms taken by intimate relations: his most basic term is *'phileme'*, which he defined in terms of culturally-situated-intimate-behaviours. Davis delineated four 'species' of intimacy - examples of social arrangements that are (potentially at least) characterised by the ongoing exchange of relatively large numbers of *philemes*. The concept of intimacy itself was considered as part of a wider spectrum of possible social relationships, and to this extent intimate relations can be seen as part of a hierarchy or system of *intimate stratification* in which mobility is highly possible. For Davis, intimates consisted of: siblings, friends, lovers, and spouses: his cast of non-intimates included strangers, acquaintances, and role relations. His subsequent analysis was predicated upon a detailed account of the communicative basis of both upward and downward mobility (in which acquaintances become lovers, spouses become enemies, etc.): he suggested that the latter stands as a pervasive possibility within intimate relations, and furthermore, that instances of downward-mobility provide the singular most significant insight into the premises of intimate relations *per se*. Davis added a second layer of complexity to his stratification metaphor in claiming that it is possible to distinguish several dimensions of intimate relations: sexualised intimacy and marriage were represented as the apotheosis of intimate relations, implying a greater degree of intimacy than non-sexual friendships. These forms of accomplished intimacy, being predicated on choice, were deemed as differently intimate from (ascribed) family and wider kinship relations. For Davis, family ties only qualified as forms of intimacy to the extent that they inherently provide sustained structural opportunities for the exchange of *philemes*. Davis's schema can be diagrammatically represented as in *figure 1*.

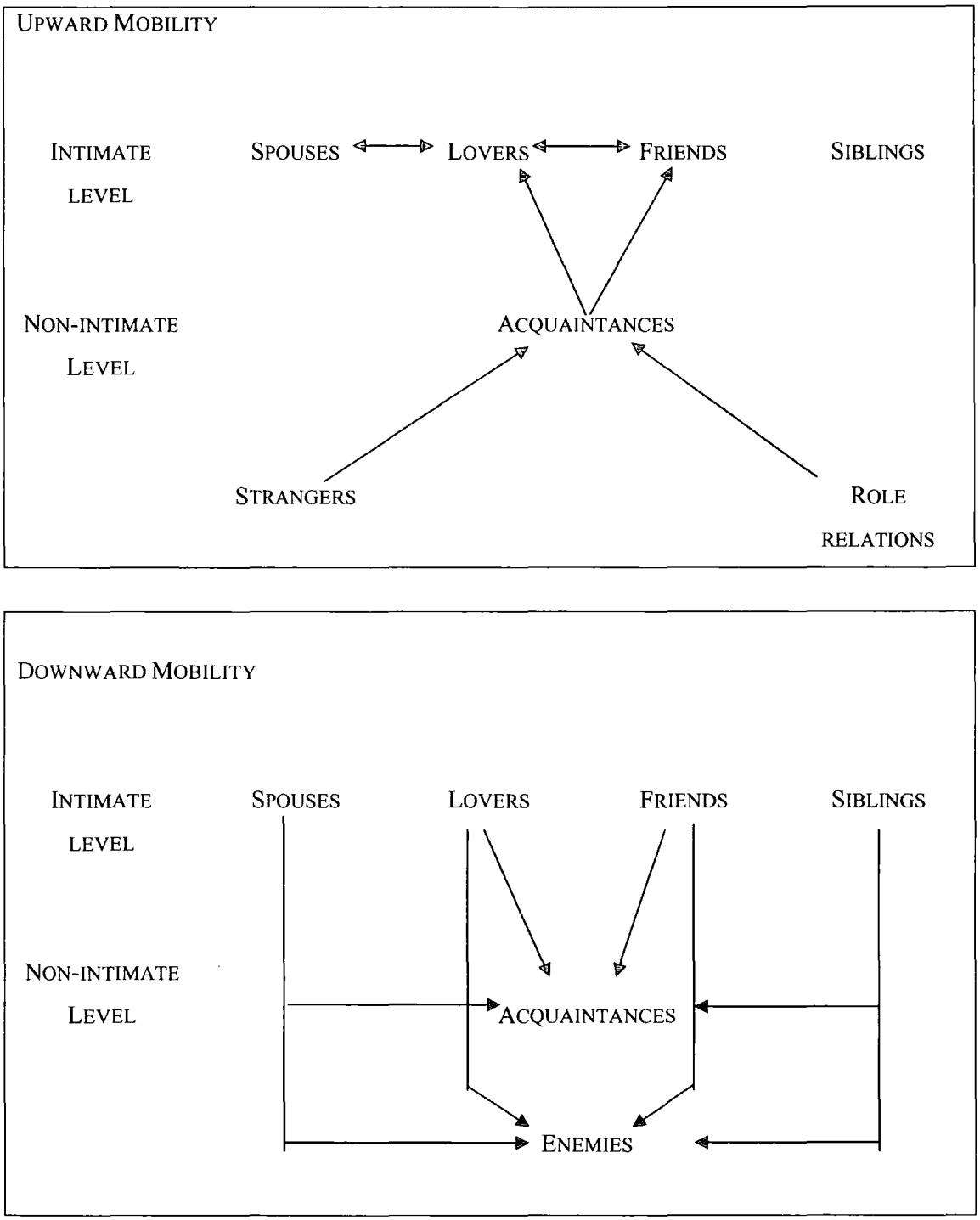

Figure 1: *Sociable Mobility Flow Charts.* **Source:** Davis (1973b:xx.)

In the first instance, upward intimate mobility is dependent upon being able to successfully initiate (potentially) intimate relations, and Davis (1973b: 4) suggested that this task, in itself, represents a complex accomplishment. Like Simmel, Davis claimed that prior biographical or reputational knowledge could facilitate a conversational opener and serve as the basis for common ground, and noted the professional commodification of this type of personal

information in the form of various 'dating services' (Davis, 1973b: 14).[30] However, manifest information (as opposed to interpersonal attributions) might serve in equal measure to either qualify or disqualify others as potential intimates. Aside from individual factors, Davis (1973b: 16) asserted that the social and spatial context of these encounters (e.g. transience, fixedness, the co-presence of others) makes a significant difference in their outcome. The interactional / structural complexities of initial encounters may therefore render successful accomplishment difficult; however, he claimed that these difficulties are considerably amplified in the Western context by virtue of wider considerations.

Davis (1973b: 30) asserted that the social and spatial dispersal of advanced urban societies make for relatively difficult circumstances in facilitating upward intimate mobility. Self-evidently, the possibilities of sustaining co-presence depend upon (at very least) being able to participate in common activities, and lack of suitable 'trysting' places or activities will clearly hamper intimate mobility. However, above all he asserted that upward intimate mobility is dependent upon communication, and especially the requirement to express sentiments of intimacy (Davis, 1973b: 56). Broadly accepting Simmel's speculations, he suggested that the use of particular speech devices reflect the changing balance between egoism and altruism associated with increasing intimacy (Davis, 1973b: 77). Interactional competence in this respect, in turn depends upon a stock of tacit knowledge of both linguistic and kinesic norms. In some languages the communicative elements of intimacy are incorporated into their particular linguistic structures:[31] by contrast, in English speaking countries, the far more tacit rules of informality fulfil this function.[32] Davis suggested that the most notable linguistic marker of intimacy involves the use of collective pronouns e.g. 'we' when speaking in the first person - '*we think*'- meaning *'I presume to speak for both of us'*.

[30] Jagger (2001: 39) suggested that the normalisation of this means of meeting potential intimates occurred during the 1980's when self-advertisement became a generally socially acceptable procedure. Coupland (1996) asserted certain structural regularities with small ads in general i.e. associated with the private sale of 'used goods'. Characteristically, information codified in these 'potted' biographies includes physical characteristics, personality factors, sexual orientation, marital circumstances (including previous history), residential status, parental status, occupational status and social class, material assets, preferences and distastes (including sexual preferences), and future intentions /aspirations.

[31] Note the differentiated use of second-person-singular pronouns in French, Spanish and German.

[32] Identified instances of informality include the use of forenames, surnames, nicknames, and terms of endearment, and in addition, a specific class of nouns (darling, mate, pal, chum) specifically for the purposes of indicating intimacy. Davis (1973b: 61) also noted certain formal regularities in the use of terms of endearment e.g. the higher-than-human (angel), the lower-than-human (chick, lamb, pet), or the pleasurable metaphor (sweet, honey, sugar).

DAVIS'S FORMULATION OF INTIMACY TROUBLES.

Like any other human construction, intimate relations are subject to deterioration, and for the sake of logical consistency (at least), any theoretical account of 'amplification' must also address the possibility of de-amplification. Davis (1973b: 247) claimed that in spite of the fact that the bonds of intimacy (are by design) difficult to casually dissolve, the loss of intimacy remains a pervasive possibility and he employed a combination of spatial and existential metaphors in order to construct an overarching theoretical framework of intimacy troubles. Firstly, he suggested that 'break-ups' assume a sort of trajectory dependent upon the particular afflictions and time scale of declining intimacy. Secondly, he discursively framed the termination of intimate relations in terms of death and dying.

In spatial terms, Davis (1973b: 260) claimed that intimacy troubles might occur as a consequence of zero-sided, one-sided, or two-sided 'subsidence'. In particular he argued that alterations in the relative proportions of intimate and instrumental exchanges over the 'natural history' of a relationship are responsible for zero-sided subsidence: novelty simply becomes overtaken by mundane concerns, and almost imperceptible changes may serve to amplify the internal strains upon the relationship. In the case of one-sided subsidence, one party may acquire new intimates, experiences or activities that serve to restrict the amount of time available with the other, and furthermore, these developments may restructure perceptions of what is regarded as desirable. Relative personal success (or failure) can precipitate a loss of commonality, whilst negative changes to the personal reputation of one intimate e.g. social disgrace, economic failure, or sickness, may provide an unwelcome form of 'novelty' and hence undermine intimate common-ground. Two-sided subsidence implies that both parties (not necessarily by intent) may become physically or psychologically distant. Moving away (physically, psychologically, or socially) may undermine the ground of the relationship: whilst neither party may wish to terminate the relationship, circumstances beyond their control may precipitate its demise. That these developments occur in real-time led Davis to suggest that intimate relations might be subject to either (a) sudden death, or the more lingering demise of (b) passing away.

Davis made a number of specific claims about the 'complications' that beset intimate relations at various 'stages'. In one sense, his presentation can be read as the discursive equivalent of a linear flow-chart: stages of downward intimate mobility are strictly delineated, and each is appended with reference to 're-integration strategies' by which the process can be arrested or reversed. Overall, he suggested that the processes of 'downward mobility' occurred as a consequence of (a) structural contradictions within intimate relations themselves, (b) environmental factors, or (c) communicative faults (or a combination of these

things). In particular, his claims regarding the formal communicative regularities of intimacy troubles are of relevance to the current study, and are therefore worthy of extended consideration here.

Davis broadly accepted Simmel's assertions in relation to the inherent structural weaknesses that beset couple intimacy, only adding that intimate relations are difficult to initiate as well as being difficult to sustain. In regard to environmental factors, he claimed that in certain circumstances, these alone might strengthen or weaken intimate relations, regardless of the individual personalities involved (Davis, 1973b: 211). Two contrasting environmental conditions were considered especially relevant; (a) fertile and benign social environments, and (b) barren and hostile social environments. Whilst benign conditions would be (intuitively) most beneficial to the ongoing viability of intimate relations, Davis suggested that intimates often become closer in the face of adversity - *through thick and thin.* Hostile and barren environments may serve to increase the amount of favours that intimates exchange as a matter of personal survival. Notwithstanding, Davis also identified that hostile or competitive environments engender threats to relationship integrity such as competition between intimates for something in their environment that they both cannot share e.g. a coveted job, or finite financial resources.

Davis (1973b: 217) reserved the majority of theoretical attention for the structure of interpersonal communication episodes underpinning downward intimate mobility. Using mechanical metaphors, he asserted that relationships become 'strained' whenever the bonds that hold intimates together become uneven or 'go out of alignment'. Once one or both parties recognise this asymmetry they may initiate intimacy troubles talk, which Davis suggested assumes two distinctive forms: (a) meta-intimate communication, or (b) contra-intimate communication. Davis claimed that meta-intimate conversations are typically structured as follows:

- a 'state of the relationship address' (summary of the relationship's past performance), is followed by either;
- proposals for potential improvement; or,
- a unilateral focus upon the faults of one party, the damage that these faults are doing to the relationship, and a range of potential solutions.

A 'proxy' technique of meta-intimate conversation may involve enlisting help from a third party, and to certain extent the emergence of relationship counselling has professionalised this function. In spite of the overtly re-integrative intentions of meta-intimate conversations, he suggested that their deployment might also imply a degree of ambivalence. On the one hand,

meta-intimate conversations only occur as a consequence of dissatisfaction, but at the same time, the fact that the relationship remains worth the effort of reintegration is tacitly acknowledged. Davis suggested that other reintegration devices could assume a more organised, or even ceremonial, form.[33] In all cases, the distinguishing element of these strategies is an (assumed) common understanding and orientation towards intimacy troubles.

In contrast, he asserted that contra-intimate confrontations (arguments and fights) have a different metric and are predicated upon conflicting perspectives (Davis, 1973b: 222). Paradoxically, the most frequent outcome of arguments and fights is eventual resolution: however, in comparison to meta-intimate conversations this outcome is far less certain. Characteristically, arguments increase interpersonal distance, and thus effect a (usually temporary) separation of shared identity. Following Simmel, Davis asserted that the relative balance of egoism-altruism determines both the form, and the outcomes of arguments: arguments being more likely to be sustained if the parties are either relatively close, or relatively distant from one another (Davis, 1973b: 222). He suggested that individuals in neither of these relative positions are more likely to terminate their association at an early stage of their disagreement. Davis claimed that arguments between intimates (at least those that are successfully resolved) have a broadly similar tri-partite structure that includes; (a) initial segregation followed by (b) conflict resolution that often produces (c) closer integration. In more specific detail:

- disputes about intimate relations, whatever their form, require a pretext;
- once the pretext is established e.g. the history of the relationship, the alleged 'unfairness' of the other person can then be stated;
- opposing assertions follow providing the content of the confrontation;
- arguments may be single-rounded or multi-rounded i.e. staged as a running battle; and,
- resolution (the most likely outcome) is accomplished by compromise or surrender, invariably accompanied by an agreed face-saving formula.

Simultaneous assertion of claim and counter-claim may be covertly orientated towards denying the other party a right to speak. Davis (1973b: 224) suggested that at some or another level, arguments *always* contain an implicit threat to end the relationship. In some instances, this threat is made explicit in the form of an ultimatum e.g. 'change or I leave'. However, he further asserted that arguments are intrinsically dangerous communicative episodes that can

[33] Davis asserted that formal commemorations and anniversaries could fulfil this function. Other (less formal) strategies identified include reminiscence of happier times, and hypothetical future talk. Davis further suggested (following Durkheim) that these re-integrative strategies functioned by *piacular* means i.e. they are designed to expiate guilt and at the same time, reaffirm collectivity.

readily get out of hand, and the use of an ultimatum is particularly hazardous in this respect. Intimates who wish their relationship to continue are generally cautious in deploying an ultimatum - and usually only do so in circumstances in which they firmly believe that the other will accept the alternative to termination. Backing down from an ultimatum signifies not only the loss of the argument (and loss of face) but an affirms dependence upon the relationship. He observed that 'intermissions' in arguments allow both parties the chance to take stock of the extent to which their intimacy has declined, how far the other has yielded, and the possibilities for compromise. 'Time-outs' thus serve an integrative function by allowing each party to formulate new reasons to support their position or new reasons for yielding.

Given the extent to which each intimate possesses private knowledge of the other (especially the other's vulnerabilities and secrets) a fight is relatively easily initiated by one or the other party to an intimate relationship. Davis (1973b: 222) asserted that fights differ from arguments by the degree to which they are orientated towards conflict resolution. Whilst during arguments each party remains broadly orientated towards conflict resolution (even if this remains carefully concealed), fights presume no such 'bottom line'. Characteristically, fights begin on the pretext of peripheral concerns and move inwards to encompass personal attributes. Davis asserted that simulated terminations are a common feature of both arguments and fights.[34] Davis (1973b: 236) suggested that attempts to 'work-it-out' often modulate between meta-intimate and contra-intimate exchanges.

The outcome of repair work is typically uncertain and frequently unsuccessful. Break-ups may be 'accidentally' precipitated as a consequence of faulty interaction. For instance:

- regardless of intention, and in the heat of an argument, one intimate may give the other an ultimatum whereby the latter is momentarily not disposed to defer;
- arguments may accelerate and get out of hand whereby the faults and weaknesses of either party are constructed and portrayed as irredeemable, thus producing an unintentionally fatal attack;
- failure to uphold the interaction rules of the relationship, such as disclosure of private information to third parties, may fatally undermine trust; and,
- the 'sudden' discovery of extremely divergent opinions upon some fundamental matter might precipitate a sudden distance between the parties concerned.

[34] Davis asserted that 'mock terminations' can assume a range of forms including: the simple assertion that the relationship has no future, the withholding of interaction, the treatment of the other as a stranger, or even as a sub-social object, the withdrawal of customary (and especially sexual) favours, as well as explicit threats to leave.

However, it remains the case that break-ups are often strategically affected and Davis (1973b: 249) suggested that one or another party might initiate termination tactics including:

- ceasing to consciously expand time or energy on the relationship;
- relapsing into the more formal pattern of exchanges associated with mere acquaintance;
- intentionally withholding intimate information or favours; and,
- deliberate uncoupling common activities.

Whichever scenario might unfold, the fact remains that break-ups are accomplished by means of communicative interaction. Davis asserted that open talk about ending a relationship is inherently difficult to enact as it involves an overwhelming threat to the identity of the 'diminishing intimate'. However, in instances where this strategy is enacted, Davis observed that the initiator must simultaneously act as both prosecutor - pursuing self-interest, and counsel - consoling or helping the other. The contradictions inherent in this anomalous 'role set' are obvious, and stakes are high as failure to negotiate this conundrum runs the risk of amplifying hostility. In consequence, he asserted that one commonly played-out resolution to this dilemma involves a deception whereby the diminishing intimate is so positioned as to appear be the initiator of the break-up. At any point the originator of the break-up may take pity on the other and commit 'relational euthanasia' by initiating termination, at risk of both integrity and self-esteem (Davis, 1973b: 265).

Once it is accepted (at least by one party) that the relationship is over, Davis (1973b: 270) suggested that 'termination talk' typically ensues in which:

- each party may present an inventory of reasons for the termination of the relationship, usually in the form of a selective summary or history;
- during such exchanges the others' 'data' are characteristically disputed;
- a contractual discussion might occur in which both parties agree upon (future) formal boundaries of communication, limits to exchange, and ownership of / access to indivisible common objects; and,
- a farewell oratory may comprise of a terse summary of the above areas.

In distinction to the 'cut-and-dried' delivery or 'clean break' implied in the above sequence, the various elements might be delivered slowly or in instalments, and given the multi-faceted and complex nature of the issues to be resolved, it is highly unlikely that loose ends will be tied off during a single communicative episode. Post-separation relationships provide fertile ground for ongoing conflict that afflicts not only the parties concerned and their immediate

family, but also wider kin and social circles. Davis observed that 'flashpoints' for ongoing conflict remain pervasive, especially in the cases where continuing contact is unavoidable such as the spatial proximity of a shared residence or workplace, or where both parties have a common emotional investment e.g. in children. Chronically unresolved issues typically include:

- the extent to which each party maintains confidentiality of others' (private) weaknesses, especially when seeking to justify their own actions to a third party;
- the extent to which each party continues to perform certain favours for the other, especially if these can be misinterpreted as lingering affection; and,
- the extent to which both parties can maintain mutual friendships.

Davis asserted that in one-sided termination of intimacy, the disposition of one of the parties is to maintain the relationship, and in these scenarios, 'termination talk' can in itself be very difficult to terminate. Whilst each of the above questions are intrinsically difficult to resolve (both in the practical and communicative senses), failure to bring matters to resolution risks a post-separation state characterised by modulating, unstable, and deeply unsatisfying states of conflict. Davis therefore viewed potential complicating factors as unsurprising: chronic doubt may emanate from ambivalence or wavering certainty on the part of the initiator of the break-up. Either party might seek new intimates as a means of coping with the magnitude of their losses. However, the habituated communication patterns of one intimate relationship do not usually support unselfconscious spontaneity required in establishing new relationships.

Davis's work demonstrates many of the same prior theoretical and methodological commitments that populated Simmel's formalism; however, he also subverted vernacular concerns in several distinctive ways. Davis's systematic catalogue of *more interesting cases*, like Simmel's, carefully avoids any reference to the situated actions of actual people, instead preferring to present idealised cameos of meta-intimate conversations, arguments, fights etc. As such, (a) it is impossible to exercise any judgement as to the validity of these claims beyond simple face-validity, and (b) it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which Davis's claims are the product of his theoretical and methodological commitments. Lukács (1971) criticised Simmel for (allegedly) granting transcendental status to what were actually historically and culturally grounded phenomena. On the basis of Davis's presentation (or any other formal analysis for that matter), it is impossible to judge the extent to which claimed social forms possess such status. However, discursively at least, the context in which this work was produced is readily ascertainable, and even a cursory inspection of this work

exposes the characteristic idiom and modes of expression of (1960 -1970's) North America. It is notable that both of these criticisms themselves rest upon a series of (differently) stipulative claims.

BARTHES' LINGUISTIC FORMALISM.

Representations of intimate relations assail both the news and entertainment media on a daily basis and Ignatieff (1988) suggested that intimacy could not be properly understood in abstraction from its (various) mediated portrayals. The inference raised by this claim is that a causal relationship exists between the practice of situated intimate relations, and popular cultural representations. However, the nature of this (alleged) interaction remains open to question, and broadly, three possible positions exist in relation to the *representation* and *practice* of intimate relations:

- that discursive representations faithfully reflect actual intimate relations;
- the opposite claim - that intimate relations mimic discursive representations;[35] or,
- that both practices and representations are reflexively related.[36]

At the purely discursive level, these positions are considerably complicated by the introduction of a distinction between mediated [37] and vernacular accounts, in which case the above stipulative distinctions could be read as:

- mediated accounts of intimate relations faithfully reflect vernacular representations;
- vernacular representations appropriate the discourse of (various) mediated accounts; or,
- the discourse of both mediated and vernacular accounts mutually inform one another.

[35] Typical of this type of claim, Stone (1997:191) asserted that; '[Romantic love] is a product, that is, of learned cultural expectations, which became fashionable in the late eighteenth century thanks largely to the spread of novel-reading [....] the romantic novel of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries has much to answer for in the way of disastrous love affairs and of imprudent and unhappy marriages'.

[36] Iliouz (1998: 183) suggested that the claim – 'love imitates art' - has become somewhat of a cliché, and asserted a (broadly) realist position in which intimate relations and their mass-mediated representation are reflexively related. Cultural representations (problem pages; novels; pornography; confessions etc.) are utilised by individuals as a discursive resource informing the practical conduct of intimate relationships: At the same time, cultural representations are inspired by, and parasitic upon the social practice of intimate relations.

[37] By mediated accounts, I mean those that have been represented by means of either (a) the technical discourses of professional science, or (b) various genres of mass media.

In this respect, Barthes' (1990) *'A Lovers Discourse: Fragments'* can be variously read as (a) an audit or catalogue of popular discursive representations of intimacy and intimacy troubles, (b) a thesaurus of discursive resources or *plot lines* that have historically informed intimate relations, or (c) as merely adding to the discursive cacophony that is the representation of intimate relations. It is not at all clear that Barthes ought to be cast in the role of a formalist, and his self-proclaimed assertions in this respect are ambiguous: the use of his work in this way therefore requires justification. Although Barthes dismissed the notion that his objective was to construct a highly formal system of classification of discursive elements, this is certainly the effect that is created. Rylance (1994: 117) - a sympathetic commentator - claimed as much in suggesting that Barthes examples presented a 'thesaurus of the lovers being'. Barthes (1990: 6-7) himself asserted that the work could be considered either as an 'encyclopaedia of affective culture' or an 'image repertoire of declarations' (1990: 4). Moriarty (1991: 6) observed that Barthes' work is 'subtended' by a stock of metaphors connecting texts that are remote in both time and theme: the result is the (typically formalist) abstraction of diverse discursive elements and their recombination for the specific purposes. The reliance upon vignettes (discursive in this instance) provides a further common feature with more conventional formal analysis. Furthermore, in common with Simmel, Barthes work is predominated by aesthetic concerns.

INTIMACY AND INTIMACY TROUBLES IN BARTHES' WORK.

In *A Lovers Discourse: Fragments,* Barthes (1990) presented eighty 'fragments',[38] which were alphabetically arranged with the intention of preventing the 'distortions' of a false narrative thread.[39] Indeed, taken as a whole, the figures or scenes have no consistent narrative thread. Barthes (1990: 6) justified their selection by claiming that 'throughout any love life, figures occur to the lover without any order, for on each occasion they depend upon an (internal or external) accident.' However, in spite of the absence of an overall narrative coherence, several consistencies pervade the text:

- the use of 'dramatisations' support the notion that intimate relations are conducted on a performative basis;

[38] The 'fragments' presented consist of a short defining paragraph outlining a common theme in discursive representations of intimacy. Each theme is in turn supported by a selection of extracts from diverse 'tutor texts' including the works of Goethe, Plato, Zen Buddhism, psychoanalysis, Nietzsche as well as 'conversations with friends' (1990: 8). No rationale as such is made for the selection of fragments, but all are referenced to multiple sources that are invariably remote in their origins.

[39] Although Barthes intention was to avoid the implication of a coherent 'plot line, this has not inhibited the efforts of some interpreters to force a *post-hoc* narrative structure with predictably abstruse results. For instance, Rylance (1994: 119) claims that 'the lover is a series of contradictions ... both the idealist and the nihilist, the solitary and the man in thrall of another ... hopes for the best but experiences the worst, ends in misery, but goes lightly to the next affair.'

- versions of self and agency support the notion of 'intimate selves' as opposed any centred, unified version of self identity;
- paradoxically, most of Barthes 'fragments' suggest a process of internal conversation;
- intimacy is represented as an inner experience of extremes (in various shades) of either ecstasy or agony; and,
- intimacy is invariably defined in solipsistic terms i.e. less in terms of a relationship with the another person, and more in terms of an investment in the *image* of the other (Moriarty, 1994: 184).

Nonetheless, Barthes (1990: 4) hinted that the elements of his (purely discursive) audit would bear some relationship to actual intimate lives / events. He suggested that:

> 'The figure is the lover at work. Figures take shape insofar as we can recognise, in passing discourse, something that has been read, heard, felt [.....] a figure is established if at least someone can say - *That's so true! I recognise that scene of language.'*

'Fragments' are supported by reference to *figures* and their *argumentum* (Barthes, 1990: 3). Figures are defined as internal conversations or plots and each *figure* heading is accompanied by a short exposition. However, he was emphatic (a) to avoid any implication of definition – even if this is the effect is created by his style of presentation, and rather self-contradictorily (b) to claim distance from extra-discursive concerns. He suggested that 'argumentum: exposition, account, summary, plot outline, invented narrative... the argument does not refer to the amorous subject and what he is ... but to what he says.' (Barthes, 1990: 5). In this latter respect, it is perhaps more correct to interpret Barthes work as making non-specific claims about a connection between (a) cultural / representational, and (b) vernacular discourses.
A number of Barthes fragments are consistent with formalist claims about the nature of intimate relations outlined above. For instance, in relation to secrecy and openness:

FIGURE	ARGUMENTUM
Dark Glasses (*cacher / to hide*)	A deliberative figure: the amorous subject wonders, not whether he should declare his love to the loved being (this is not a figure of avowal), but to what degree he should conceal the turbulences of his passion: his desires, his distresses: in short, his excesses (in Racinian language: his *fureur*).

Figure 2: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 1.* **Source**: Barthes (1990).

In relation to tensions between egoism and altruism:

FIGURE	ARGUMENTUM
"In the loving calm of your arms" (*étreinte / embrace*)	The gesture of the amorous embrace seems to fulfil, for a time, the subject's dream of total union with the loved being.

Figure 3: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 2.* **Source**: Barthes (1990).

Other themes include corporeality, ecstasy, affirmation and exchange / transaction. However, in spite of these seeming consistencies with formal analyses of intimate relations, thematically, the figures presented overwhelmingly tend towards the 'darker' aspects of intimate relations, expressing variously: nihilism, anxiety, disappointment / despair, injury, asceticism / sacrifice, conflict, complicity, and oppressive ruminations in the mind of the lover. For instance:

FIGURE	ARGUMENTUM
Events, Setbacks, Annoyances (*contingences / contingencies*)	Trivialities, incidents, setbacks, pettiness, irritations, the vexations of the amorous existence; any factual nucleus whose consequences intersect the amorous subjects will to happiness, as if chance conspires against him.
"I want to understand" (*comprendre / to understand*)	Suddenly perceiving the amorous episode as a knot of inexplicable reasons and impaired solutions, the subject exclaims "I want to understand (what is happening to me)!"

Figure 4: *Barthes' style of presentation; example 3.* **Source**: Barthes (1990).

Barthes work is of interest to the current study only in relation to his implicit claim that discourses of cultural representation (non-specifically) influence vernacular reports of intimacy troubles, although it is acknowledged here that any such insights are beyond Barthes

stated intentions.[40] Without submitting to any one of the hypothesised causal models concerning the relationship between culturally mediated and vernacular discourses (as briefly summarised above), the fact that Barthes claimed that cultural representations are predominated by troubles discourse suggests that this also ought to be the case for vernacular representations of intimate relations. Either this means that:

- intimate relations are inherently and fundamentally troublesome, and cultural representations merely reflect these difficulties; or,
- cultural representations provide a stock of negative plot lines and situated intimate relations merely particularise these difficulties; or,
- a mutually self-reinforcing arrangement exists by which both of the above processes occur at the same time.

From a feminist perspective, Langford (1999) suggested the widespread awareness of the darker side of intimate relations ought to be self-evident given the proliferation of self-help texts, counselling services and the like: however, feminists have frequently repeated the opposite claim in relation to romantic fiction. That fictional romance provides the narrative template by which women pursue their own intimate aspirations has been a leitmotif of feminist writers (e.g. Pearce and Stacey, 1995).[41] Putting aside vexed questions of the relationship between representations, the vernacular voice, and in-situ intimate practices, Barthes analysis contradicts feminist claims, and insofar as the claim that troubles pervade cultural representations of intimate relations can be sustained, there seems to be no convincing reason why women (allegedly) focus upon romantic fiction as a singular source of inspiration.

Several stipulative features pervade Barthes analysis, not least his *a priori* theoretical commitments to (a) the relationship between cultural representations and vernacular voices, and (b) a disregard for relationship between discursive and extra-discursive realms. Moriarty (1991: 7-9) characterised Barthes work in terms of a departure from de Saussure's (1915) structural linguistics.[42] Barthes only partially accepted de Saussure's theoretical account and

[40] The intentions of Barthes project can be properly understood as part of the 'linguistic turn' in Western philosophy: the collective description afforded to a disparate anthology of twentieth century thought, which (in its most simplified presentation) asserted that discourse (or forms of linguistic representation) are the furthest point that the human sciences can attain in the quest for truth / knowledge. Notable applications of this central precept include de Saussure's (1908) structural linguistics, Wittgenstein's (1953) claim that there are no facts outside of language, and Derrida's (1978, 1981) claim that meaning cannot be generalised beyond a particular situated text.

[41] See also Stone (1997).

[42] de Saussure (1915) broke with the Western philosophical tradition of viewing language as referential and proposed an alternative *conceptual* system based upon two central claims: (a) that the connection

he substituted the latter's concern with '*what* things mean', in favour of '*how* they mean' in particular cultural contexts. This theoretical commitment unavoidably disregards questions of the relationship between discursive and extra-discursive domains and has drawn significant criticism from alternative stipulative perspectives. For instance, Dunne (1995: 141) objected to Barthes particular brand of 'linguistic monism' in which (a) language is accorded the role of articulating experience, but (b) the process of signification is simultaneously disregarded, meaning that (c) language in itself, is claimed to be all that exists or is 'real' about a particular phenomenon. In this formulation intimate relations and intimacy troubles (in total) are reducible to modes of linguistic representation.

Several other features serve to amplify the gap between Barthes' own technical account and vernacular concerns, most notably:

- the extent to which meaning is abstracted from specific contexts;
- the overuse of ambiguous methodological jargon as a means of preventing outsiders criticising programmatic commitments;[43] and,
- the (implicit) *a priori* stipulation of stable gender relations in which women are predominantly represented in terms of passivity and suffering (Herrman, 1974).

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGIES OF INTIMATE RELATIONS AND INTIMACY TROUBLES.

Abrams (1982) suggested that appeals to history have become almost naturalised within the Western mind: it is therefore unremarkable that historical answers have been (and continue to be) routinely sought in relation to questions about intimate relations and intimacy troubles. That these questions typically coincide with sociological issues is perhaps predictable given the (claimed) extent of academic convergence between academic history and sociology.[44]

---

between *signifier* (Sr.) and *sign* (Sd.) is essentially arbitrary, and therefore that language does not 'nominalise' pre-linguistic categories but actually articulates them in the first instance; and (b) that language is structured in two distinctive dimensions. *Signifiers* are claimed to be (a) *paradigmatically* related to one another by means of their conceptual similarity, and (b) *syntagmatically* related to one another by means of the order in which they are discursively deployed within the course of an utterance. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic organisation imply that language is a relational or differential phenomena insofar as words only acquire meaning by virtue of their position in a system of other signifiers (*La Langue*) or during their deployment in speech (*La Parole*).

[43] Moriarty (*ibid*: 8) suggested that Barthes' texts are typically rife with uncertainty in which 'metaphorical slippages, successions of images, or stylistic effects [are] masquerading as logical arguments.' He nonetheless, applauds these features as virtuous.

[44] A historical dimension is arguably present in all sociological scholarship including the formal sociologies reviewed above (which collectively claim a transhistorical as opposed to ahistorical

However, beyond the (very broad) common ground of an orientation to historical concerns, individual studies diverge in terms of the specific historical questions they pose, and methodologies employed in answering these questions. Many attempt to establish patterns of eventuation, with the aim of claiming *predictive* or *post-dictive* certainties (e.g. Luhmann 1986; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Baumann 2001; Langford 1999). At very least, these studies treat historical questions as indispensable first steps in accounting for present experience. Studies of this nature rely upon what Whewell (1847) called the identification of *colligations*: the binding together of (often disparate) events in order to claim that they are in some way unified. The analytical centrality of events continues to loom large in historical analysis. Abrams (1982: 191) suggested that:

> 'An event is a portentous outcome; it is a transformation device between past and future; it has eventuated the past and it signifies the future. It is not just a happening waiting there to be narrated but a happening to which cultural significance has been assigned.'

Events are, in reality, no more than particular colligations of detail - specific bounded happenings that delineate their significance in the passage of time. Events, however, form the basis for claimed periodisations; attempts to establish that this or that era commenced (or ended) with this or that happening.

Other historical studies relegate or even dismiss issues of eventuation by addressing hermeneutic concerns in an attempt to establish what Samuel (1980) called a 'people's history'. Characteristically, these studies attempt to recover and describe the texture of daily life at a particular historical juncture. Some do so by means of documentary evidence, thus closely mirroring the concerns of classical hermeneutics (e.g. Stone 1990; Shorter 1976). Others attempt to apply interpretivist frameworks in order to grasp socially produced systems of meaning (e.g. Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1990).

Some studies of intimacy / troubles suggest a *process-oriented* view of history (e.g. Elias 1994; Giddens 1992). Characteristically, these works commence from the belief that the structure-action dualism represents the most useful stipulative device in accounting for human conduct and (adequate) explanations therefore demand an account of (a) social structures, (b) human actions, and (c) the relationship between (a) and (b).[45] The (self proclaimed) aim of the

---

perspective). Abrams (*op cit*: 301) asserted that 'sociologists need to ask historical questions and [the] distinctive subject matter of history does not defy sociological analysis'.

[45] Perhaps the most eloquent summary of this approach is found in Thompson's (1965) study of the origins of social class in England. He asserted that:

> 'Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly or in isolation but only in terms of relationship with

process-orientated historical sociologies summarised below is therefore to account for the 'happening' of intimate relations within historically specific configurations of social structures and power.

Comparative historical methods represent a further methodological variation. Weber (1948; 1949) attempted to establish historical truths about intimate relations by means of a comparative method; his (self-proclaimed) intention being to address concerns with both eventuation and meaning, by means of the 'ideal type'; essentially a heuristic devices that allows for the comparison of 'social reality' against (pre-stipulated) speculative criteria.[46]

All of the above studies (at varying levels of detail, and depending upon their time of production) make reference to a central periodisation founded upon a concept of modernity; the most recent claim epochal distinctions between (a) pre-modernity, (b) modernity, and (c) [variously] late-modernity or post-modernity. It is noteworthy that claims about the centrepiece of this periodisation (e.g. modernity), remain open to dispute.[47] For instance, Hall (1992: 1) noted the (simplistic) tendency to conflating (a) modernity, and (b) industrialisation. He further suggested that this conflation is inadequate in at least two respects:

- *complexity* - the neglect of influences other than industrialisation as well as unexpected outcomes of the modernisation process; and,
- *unwarranted colligation* – the affording of unity to what was not one, but in reality, a series of major historical transitions.

In relation to the latter point, Hall (1992: 6) implicated (at least) four major social processes at work, namely: the ascendancy of secular forms of political power, the emergence of monetarised exchange economy, the decline of the traditional social order, and, the gradual decline of the religious world view. These concomitant processes 'produced' societies of

---

> other classes; and ultimately the definition can only be made in the medium of time - that is, action and reaction, change and conflict ... *class is itself not a thing, it is a happening.*' [My emphasis added].

Thompson (1965:357).

[46] Weber (1949: 90) described the ideal type approach to comparative history as: 'ideas of reality, conceptual patterns which bring together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is conceived of as an internally consistent pattern'. This is not to assume any correspondence with reality: 'in it's conceptual purity this mental construct cannot be found anywhere in reality'. The construction of abstract 'ideal types' therefore serves as a set of pre-stipulated criteria against which 'reality' could be tested (Weber, 1949: 92).

[47] The temporal location of modernity remains elusive; historical records suggest the sporadic and uneven emergence of modern societies over an extended period of several centuries.

distinctive shape and form, with distinctive structures and sets of social relations, which were distinctly demarcated into zones of activity or social practice.

The following review of historical sociologies of intimate relations are presented in sections as follows:

- intimate relations in pre-modern Western societies;
- the condition of modernity and intimate relations; and,
- post-consensus sociologies of intimate relations.[48]

This mode of presentation, should not however, be read as an unreserved subscription to the dominant *pre-modernity / modernity / post- / late-modernity* organising device that prevails in existing literature: its use here is simply as an organisational device.

INTIMATE RELATIONS IN PRE-MODERN WESTERN SOCIETIES.

Two overarching concepts predominate historical understandings of intimate relations: courtly love (an allegedly pre-modern phenomenon), and romantic love (a concept based upon ideation pre-dating modernity, but purportedly reaching it's apotheosis in modern times).

Singer (1984b: 19) argued that the concept of courtly love did not, in fact, originate in the middle ages but rather was an invention of the late nineteenth century, deriving from an academic 'content analysis' of Twelfth century French poetry.[49] It was alleged that this essentially literary interpretation reflected a pervasive social ideation within medieval culture. Later academic 'developments' of this concept have (variously) referred to courtly love in terms of a 'code', a 'system', a 'body of rules' or even a 'way of life'. The essence of courtly love rested upon the description (in poetry and myth) of adultery against the background of knightly adventure, and within the context of a feudal theocracy that overwhelmingly observed the sanctity of Christian marriage. Specifically, the descriptions and invocations contained in the poetry and song portrayed adulterous intimate relations that were furtive and

---

[48] A range of historical evidence and sociological theory supports the impression that intimate relations were relatively uniformly organised from the time of the industrial revolution until the last 40 years of the Twentieth century. The term 'post consensus' is deployed here to signify various theoretical and empirical attempts to explain what Simpson (1998:155) called 'altered configurations of persons, resources, and relationships' that characterise contemporary intimate relations.

[49] Singer (1984b: 19) precisely located the introduction of this concept by the French medievalist Gaston Paris in 1883.

idolatrous, but yet at the same time, ennobling to their participants. Singer (1984b: 22) summarised the implied basis of courtly love as such:

- sexual love between men and women was constructed *in itself* as something splendid - an ideal worth striving for;
- love was claimed to ennoble both the lover and the beloved;
- the form of love pertaining to courtesy and courtship was not necessarily related to the institution of marriage;
- sexual love was constructed as rather more than mere libidinal effects; and,
- love was represented as an intense passionate relationship capable of establishing a 'holy oneness' between man and women.

Singer (1984b: 19-20) objected to both the conceptual clarity, and the historical basis of these interpretations. In the first instance he suggested that the concept of courtly love was (and is) too amorphous to be of any practical academic use, being reliant upon an unwarranted colligation of thought, literature, and social conduct (of many people in different countries) over several centuries. Accepting Singers objection, it would indeed be remarkable if there were any unified code or system of rules (beyond those dictated by the church) given the conditions of mass communication in pre-modern Europe. Secondly, he offered an alternative stipulative interpretation, suggesting that whilst changes in thought and conduct *may* have commenced at some point during the Twelfth century, it is far from certain that these changes had a revolutionary effect upon the basis of intimate relations. Specific questions about the unity of this concept might include:

- the extent to which this phenomenon was confined only to literature and song;
- the extent to which it pervaded vernacular understandings of intimate relations;
- the extent to which it remained the preserve of a privileged (leisured and literate) elite group; and,
- the extent to which ideas, once voiced, could have been responsible for promulgating social change.

Professional historical studies, to some extent, have addressed these questions although it should be noted these studies are themselves are confined both by their prior methodological commitments, and a dearth of documentary evidence. For instance, Shorter's (1976) study utilised data originating from 'the dawn of modernity' rather than contemporaneous medieval sources. What medieval sources do survive are only likely to record the experiences of people in relatively privileged positions within the feudal order. Nonetheless, Shorter (1976: 55) claimed that relationships between men and women in pre-modern Europe were:

> 'Usually affectionless, held together by considerations of property and lineage; that the family's business of carrying on the business of living enshrined this coldness by reducing to an absolute minimum the risk of spontaneous face-to-face exchanges between husband and wife.'

However, he also claimed that (limited) examples of affection in marriage occurred in terms comparable to contemporary intimate relations (Shorter, 1976: 57). Perhaps no amount of surviving historical documentation could answer questions that are raised (rather than answered) by Shorter's study. For example:

- whether the reproductive role was divorced from the purely erotic; and,
- whether husbands and wives related to sexual intercourse in terms of pleasure rather than function.

Stone (1990) suggested not: he claimed that in the context of a 'nasty, short, and brutish existence' the imperatives of survival (i.e. property, power and wealth) assumed primacy over questions of sentiment or lust. Consequently, he asserted three modes of courtship based upon property and wealth which were 'characteristic of, if not peculiar to' each of three social groups (Stone, 1990: 59).

Amongst the ruling elite Stone claimed that the procedure took the form of either an arranged pairing (in which the parties were allowed some latitude in suitor selection) or meetings that were socially effected on the basis of choice and attraction and then subjected to the retrospective approval of parents. Stone (1990: 61) suggested that such matters could be protracted affairs, and that material considerations were clearly interspersed by carnal (and or) emotional contemplations: he cited the case of Frederick Mullins, who perceiving the process to be of excessive length, complained to the trustees of his marriage that they were: '[unnecessarily delaying] the taking possession of my dear Pheobe [adding by way of explanation that they were] not so eager for a fuck as I am'.[50]

Amongst the 'propertied middling sort' he suggested that men and women enjoyed relative freedoms in terms of spouse selection and courtship rituals; however, this was not to claim that property and wealth were of no importance (Stone, 1990: 61). He claimed that the practice of 'bundling' was common in which male suitors were permitted to spend the entire night in the presence of their intended spouse (often in the same bed). Stone interpreted this practice as marking an incredible level of self-constraint, perhaps buttressed by an observed

[50] Stone (1990:61) confesses that 'the original reference has unfortunately been mislaid.'

moral order, and in turn supported by social sanctions of prospective stigma. Recorded rates of bastardy were low, even in the absence of mechanical contraception.

Stone (1990: 62) suggested that an absolute freedom of choice existed in matters of (heterosexual) intimate relations amongst the property-less poor. He asserted that, typically, the parents of those at the bottom of the social strata were either dead or had ceded economic responsibility for their offspring: in these circumstances, the basis of choice (variously love, lust, affection, or prudent economic calculation) simply varied from relationship to relationship.

It is noteworthy that Stone (1990) hinted at the existence of commonly observed moral order governing the conduct of intimate relations. Elias (1994) in '*The Civilising Process*' attempted to outline the emergence of these various moral codes (*manners* in his terms) that differentially governed social practices (including intimate relations) at various historical junctures. For Elias, manners provided both practical moral guidelines for day-to-day actions, and the basis of the historically diverse criteria by which certain social practices became culturally accepted as *civilised*, and others condemned as *vulgar*. Furthermore, he suggested that (over time) certain views about 'normal' or 'proper' conduct became institutionalised and increasingly well-policed, and thus provided the basis for novel forms of identity and social organisation. Elias (1994: 142) asserted that these collective effects could be particularly well observed in the changing basis of intimate relations, and specifically, he suggested that two aspects of intimate social life provide exemplars of the *civilising process*:

- rules governing the legitimacy of children's knowledge of sexual matters; and,
- rules framing the conduct of sexual relationships between adults.

The former issue was seen as particularly illustrative of the means by which children were socialised in preparation for (adult) intimate relations. Elias (1994: 143) cited the pedagogical text of Erasmus (1522) as his central example: this text was intended for use in the sexual instruction for (educated) boys, and Elias claimed that the Nineteenth century reaction to this work entailed a general repugnance that such matters should be discussed with children.[51] He suggested that what these Victorian sensibilities betrayed was:

> '[that] measured by the standard of medieval secular society [....] they embody a very considerable shift in the direction of the kind of restraint of drive impulses which the nineteenth century was to justify in terms of morality.' (Elias, 1994: 144).

[51] Elias (*op cit*: 143-4) acknowledged that Erasmus's text was not entirely uncontroversial at the time of its production, being variously received with religious and political objections.

Elias argued that Erasmus's texts suggested a (comparative) lack of concealment of sexual matters to children, and that this state of affairs merely reflected a relative openness amongst adults.[52] For instance, he suggested that during the Sixteenth century, prostitution was an integral part of civic life and a matter of public discourse amongst adults and children alike (Elias, 1994: 149). Furthermore, he cited European wedding customs in support of this claim in which a marriage was not considered properly established until the wedding guests had undressed the couple and placed them on the marriage bed.[53]

Elias's central claim concerning sexual relations was that various taboos and heightened secrecy became incrementally more evident as a consequence of the *civilising process*.[54] For instance, he claimed that the Middle Ages were a time of relative openness regarding intimate and sexual matters, and this extended to the rules governing what children were to be told about sex. Elias also claimed that extra-marital associations were, more or less, taken for granted, and depending upon the balance of power between the sexes, usually men (but also at times women) were unashamed of such liaisons.[55] However, with the advent of court societies, he suggested that intimate relations (and especially their sexual aspects) became generally more concealed (although he also alleged that extra-marital affairs continued to be conducted along, more or less, egalitarian lines). Notwithstanding the fascinating and often powerful insights yielded by the above studies, each has involved considerable speculation, and vernacular concerns have only been reported to the accidental extent to which these matters survive within documentary sources.

THE CONDITION OF MODERNITY AND INTIMATE RELATIONS.

It was noted above that the term 'modernity' implied a multifaceted concept encapsulating the coincidence of a range of specific social, economic, intellectual, and demographic trends. As Hall (1992:6) suggested, early modern societies assumed a distinctive form and possessed

---

[52] Elias (*op cit*: 148) claimed that medieval childhood and adulthood were closer given the relatively short lifespan: this proximity was reflected in aspects of daily life such as the common dress code of children and adults.

[53] This custom allegedly underwent modification whereby the only the groom was subject to such treatment. Whilst reserving judgement in relation to the historical truth of Elias's claims, the author is drawn to note a certain resonance with the contemporary treatment meted out to (especially young) men during 'stag' parties.

[54] Elias was keen to distance himself from charges of determinism in this respect. Whilst the logic of his claims is suggestive of progressive secrecy over the passage of historical time, he asserted that the civilising processes reflect both incremental and contingent social changes.

[55] Elias asserted that (at times) bastard children were frequently considered as part of the family throughout the Middle Ages.

distinctive social structures, which mediated particular sets of social (including intimate) relations. Specifically (and in contradistinction to medieval societies) modern societies heralded the demarcation of (public and private) zones of activity and social practices. However, descriptions of modernity purely in terms of these emergent social patterns are somewhat incomplete. Modern societies in Western Europe were predated (as well as underpinned) by the intellectual force of enlightenment thought, which also provoked unprecedented changes in the intellectual and moral climate. It was only after the secular deposition of Christian theocracy that (a) the processes of modernity became possible, and (b) those processes were constituted as objects of knowledge for (embryonic) human sciences. Therefore, in addition to emergent structural arrangements, the impact of modernity upon intimate relations demands an appreciation of the intellectual and cultural aspects engendered by these social changes. The claimed impact of modernity upon intimate relations can be summarised thus:

- a novel and distinctive ideation about the basis of intimacy coalesced around the doctrine of romantic love;
- these ideas were transmitted via an invigorated means of mass communication;
- the emergence of the nuclear family accompanied the strict demarcation of public and private life; and,
- the emergence of human sciences meant that, unlike their pre-modern counterparts, newly-emergent intimate relations were subject to professional sociological scrutiny.

The extent to which intimate relations were addressed as particular theoretical objects by early sociologists varied considerably between individual theorists. Bologh (1990:163) suggested that for both Durkheim and Weber, the essential object of scrutiny was the tension between 'an ethic of impersonal relations and one of personal relations': any explicit consideration of intimate relations was undertaken only insofar as they were topically relevant to the terms of this wider debate. Although Weber wrote specifically about intimate relations (and his speculations on these matters are summarised below), the main focus of his attention was elsewhere i.e. with the wider concomitant processes of rationalisation. For Durkheim, intimate relations did not constitute a central object of inquiry at all. However, his central problematic (the question of how social solidarity is possible following urbanisation / industrialisation) clearly incorporated issues concerning the social forms of (allegedly intimate) family life. Hall (1992: 2) asserted that the significance of 'these classical figures of modern sociology' resides in their intellectual heritage, and both Weber and Durkheim can be viewed as shaping the terms by which contemporary sociologists came to examine intimate relations, and subsequently intimacy troubles.

MODERNITY AND IDEAS ABOUT INTIMACY.

A number of historical analyses e.g. Stone (1997), and Evans (1998), suggested that conditions of modernity promulgated the idea of the romantic love complex as a necessary and sufficient basis for intimate relations. Somewhat critically, Singer (1984b: 283) suggested that the concept of romantic love represents an even more ambitious colligation than that of courtly love, and that it is probably more accurate to speak of a plurality of romanticisms (some of which are antithetical to one another), rather than one unified concept. However, Singer also emphasised the impact that (various) romanticism(s) exerted upon the basis of intimate relations in early modern Europe. To the extent that unifying claims are possible, the doctrine of romanticism may be summarised in terms of four distinctive elements, namely:

- the emergence and celebration of passion over reason;
- the idea that intimacy entailed a quest for unity or oneness with others;
- the idea that intimate relations depended upon the exercise of imagination; and,
- the suggestion that intimate relations offered a form of secular transcendence via the medium of romantic love.

Singer (1984b: 285-6) asserted that the prioritisation of feeling over reason resulted in a particular world-view in which:

- the essence of humanity was defined in terms of the capacity for passion or feeling;
- feeling for others was posited as the proper basis for moral conduct;
- sensibility was viewed as a virtue in intimate relations, and the ideal intimate partner was one who had a heightened capacity for experiencing/feeling; and,
- painful as well as pleasurable emotions were viewed as potential accoutrements of intimate relations.

Doctrines of romanticism coincided with (or possibly transmogrified) a number of religious concerns. The idea that intimate relations represented a quest for oneness or unity with others predates both the advent of salvation religions and romanticism.[56] However, romanticism(s) both (a) displaced the otherworldly quest for unity with God with the goal of oneness with others, and (b) elevated this quest to an end worth pursuing in itself, if not a fundamental human need. Singer (1984b: 288) suggested that this idea represented a particularisation of the (wider) romanticist doctrine that love is a 'metaphysical craving for unity between man

[56] Plotinus reported ancient Greek myth that predated both the writings of Plato and Aristotle, in which people were viewed (in comparison to deities) as 'half-persons'. Life's quest was therefore represented as finding ones other (lost) half as a means of 'merging' or attaining completeness.

and his environment, between one person and another, and within each individual'. When applied to the context of intimate relations, romantic love promised a means by which to know and appropriate the world via 'oneness' with another *particular* person. The quest for oneness is closely related to the idea of earthly salvation (as opposed to the otherworldly deliverance promised by religion). Invariably, romanticist philosophies represented imagination as the means by which to achieve this 'heaven on Earth': only through imagination could people sympathetically identify with others. Collectively, these disparate collection of ideas coalesced around a model of intimate relations which (exactly) reversed the Christian doctrine that 'God is love' to a one of 'love is God' (Singer, 1984b: 295). Weber's [1915] (1948) point of departure was to consider this tension between the 'religious' and the 'erotic' spheres of life, and moreover the prospects of both of these spheres in the face of the increasing formal rationalisation that, he alleged, relentlessly accompanied modernity.[57] The central theme of Weber's essay concerned the differentiation between *'Wertsphären'* (value spheres) and the increasingly irreconcilable conflict between these domains of social life under conditions of modernity. He suggested that, in total, the life-world was comprised of; religious, economic, political, aesthetic, erotic and intellectual value spheres, and that each was governed by an independent rationality that was (to some extent) irreconcilable with the others. As suggested above, modernity entailed a series of concomitant processes: the doctrines of romanticism and religion were set in uneasy tension, and an emerging scientific world view conflicted with both. With these historical developments in mind, Weber's deliberations about the religious, economic and erotic value-spheres are of principle concern in terms of the current project. However, he also identified a series of antagonisms between various aspects of these value-spheres, and the political, intellectual, and aesthetic domains.

In terms of the religious value-sphere, Weber (1948: 325) asserted that religious beliefs based upon a 'supra-mundane God and Creator' gave (otherwise brutalising) existences a sense of purpose by promising ultimate salvation. He suggested that in ascetic religions especially, commitment to this form of (other-worldly) rationality exerts an ordering influence upon actions, which furthermore, directly contradicted the interests of the capitalist economy. He argued that this antagonism was incremental: '[the] more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its maxims, the less accessible it is to any available relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness' (Weber, 1948: 331). Salvation religions fare little better in this formulation: he further claimed that 'no genuine religion of salvation has overcome the

---

[57] Weber's [1915] (1948) account of the basis of intimacy in conditions of modernity was originally published under the titles *'Zwischenbetrachtung'* (Intermediate reflections). However, under the editorship of Gerth and Wright Mills (1948) in *'From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology'* this essay appears under an English adaptation of its German subtitle *'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions.'* Weber's original title is suggestive of a greater significance of the work in relation to his wider theoretical enterprise – a (mid-point) stocktaking exercise of theoretical assertions.

tension between their religiosity and a rational economy'. Thus, for Weber, religious values (whatever the basis of their organisation) were inherently irreconcilable with the economic metric of capitalism. However, whilst religious and economic value spheres might be thought of as 'differently rational', Weber (1948:343) claimed that the erotic sphere and sexual love represent the 'greatest irrational force of life,' and therefore stood in complete antagonism to both. He suggested a number of (various) examples that made the tension between these spheres particularly visible:

- where 'following ones heart' potentially disrupts the religiously regulated duty of care for spouses and offspring;
- where antagonisms are made more apparent because chastity is demanded of priests;
- where religious life accuses demons of promulgating (libertine) sexual conduct, and therefore by association, all sexual matters are tainted as being unholy; and,
- where marriage is not widely observed, and therefore religion loses its regulatory capacity over sexual intercourse.

For Weber (1948:346) the remarkable quality of eroticism in modern times was that naïve (biologically determinist) views of sex were dismissed in favour of a cultivated view of sexuality, and 'the old, simple, and organic existence of the Peasant' [was] abandoned'. Once it had been conceptually transformed in this way, sex was elevated to the status of a culturally elaborated and conscious enjoyment. Moreover, the intensity of experience entailed within cultured (as opposed to functional) sexuality offered people the sense that somehow, their awareness was heightened by the experience. Therefore he claimed that the erotic sphere offered both an earthly alternative to 'other-worldly' discourses of salvation, and a refuge against the (otherwise pervasive) disenchanting effects of rationalisation. Specifically, Weber (1948:347) asserted that the erotic value-sphere contradicts religious rationalities in the following ways:

- the religious ethic of brotherliness is antagonistic to the erotic doctrine of 'uniqueness' of the other person;
- the religious ethic is oriented towards transcending the human condition, whilst the erotic celebrates that which is all-too-human;
- the erotic provides an alternative form of 'communion' or sacrament in the form of sexual fulfilment.

Weber (1948: 335), like his contemporary Simmel, suggested that the (modernist) cultured view of sexuality carried considerably different implications for men and women. For women, implied freedoms were, by and large, stymied by the prevailing social structural

arrangements of modern life to the extent that sexuality was little more than a 'life-fate'. To a certain extent, Weber implied that gender inequalities were ever thus. For him, the double standard of sexual life was therefore merely a modernist particularisation of earlier injustices such as the feudal notion of honour, in which men were judged 'in the face of the erotic interest of the lady' (Weber, 1948: 345). Similarly, he suggested that intimate relationships conducted upon an 'intellectual' basis (e.g. companionate marriage) could even-out inequalities; 'as the knowing love of the mature man stands to the passionate enthusiasm of the youth, so stands the deadly earnestness of this eroticism of intellectualism to chivalrous love' (Weber, 1948: 347). However, paradoxically he also suggested that such stable intimate relations were unavoidably 'brutal' in their consequences. By brutality, Weber did not imply (a) physical brutality, (b) conscious emotional brutality, or (c) jealousy towards the intimate other: rather, he claimed that intimate brutality involves the 'most intimate coercion of the soul of the less brutal partner', and furthermore, that this subtle quality is never actually noticed by intimate partners but instead 'masquerades as humane devotion' (Weber, 1948:348). He therefore remained thoroughly pessimistic about the prospect of intimate relations based upon equality.

Much of Weber's theoretical speculation was conducted on the same intellectual terrain as Elias's (1994) historical study of civilising processes, and both contradictions and similarities arise from a comparison of these works. Elias's central claim i.e. that a progressive civilising process has increasingly limited peoples conduct in relation to sexual matters is symbiotic with Weber's assertions about the progressive nature of formal rationalisation. Elias (1994: 150) asserted that the civilising process meant that by Victorian times, the relative openness about matters sexual that had characterised pre-modern European societies had be replaced by a more or less complete 'conspiracy of silence', profoundly influencing the practice of intimate relations, and like Weber, he argued that these changes were symptomatic of a wider tendency towards social regulation.[58]

Like Weber, Elias (1994: 154) noted the tensions between religious doctrine and the enactment of intimate relations. However, he suggested that whilst the church might have heavily promoted the idea of monogamous marriage, at the same time, the construction of marriage as an institutionally binding restriction on the conduct of both sexes was a relatively late development. Intuitively, the church ought to have more influence in this respect at the

[58] Elias (1994: 157) warned against a deterministic and linear interpretation of the civilising process: however, he consistently asserted the tendency towards progressive civilisation, even in the face of seemingly countervailing examples. For instance, Elias suggested that the relative immodesty that marked public bathing habits following World War I, rather than being a sign of greater openness, merely demonstrated a more highly developed sense of self-constraint. In short, he suggested that (previously taboo) public exposure of the flesh was only made possible under conditions of highly elaborated and observed codes of public conduct.

'dawn' of modernity, and in the face of the increasing secularisation that accompanied modernisation, one might expect the institution of monogamous marriage to have become similarly attenuated.[59] Elias therefore inferred that social codes (rather than religious observance) served to sustain a (self-regulated) culture of monogamy.

In contrast to Weber's existential pessimism, Elias (1994: 156) suggested that (at least when considered against a longer time scale) the civilising process, in spite of the restrictions it imposed, was also responsible for a series of diverse liberations. For instance, he asserted that cultivated manners (and by implication, cultivated intimacy) generally liberated people from their status as 'second rate persons' in the hierarchy of estates. Like Weber, however, he qualified these claims and suggested that as a consequence of the civilising process, intimate relations and concomitant sexual matters became 'hemmed in behind the walls of consciousness' within the context of the nuclear family. Any liberating effects were therefore more tangible for men than for women (Elias, 1994: 151).

Weber's work in particular has several distinctive stipulative features that demand some comment here. Like his contemporaries, Weber's sociology of intimate relations pre-figures power relationships between men and women. Bologh (1990), albeit from an alternatively stipulative perspective, effected a comparison between Weber's sociology of intimacy and feminist concerns. Specifically, she raised the following objections:

- whilst Weber recognised gendered inequalities in power and status, he naturalised these inequalities in terms of 'fate' (Bologh, 1990: 175); and,
- Weber's (implied) nostalgia for the ethic of 'religious brotherliness' neglected the extent to which this doctrine had underpinned women's exploitation (Bologh, 1990: 185).

CULTURAL MODERNITY AND THE MASS DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS ABOUT INTIMACY.

The issue of the relationship between (a) vernacular concerns, and (b) cultural representations of intimate relations was raised above. However, it is not necessary to subscribe to any particular model of the relationship between (a) and (b) in order to note that historical records suggest romantic ideation had vernacular currency from the advent of modernity. Evans (1998:260) asserted that fictional representations (such as those found in Nineteenth century romantic novels) were enacted in situated intimate relations, and claimed that certain phrases

[59] *c/f* the assertions of contemporary conservative moralists such as Patricia Morgan (1995) who have broadly asserted that a general 'demise' of public morality (and organised religion) have resulted in the accompanying demise of the nuclear family.

(contemporaneously) appeared in the vernacular e.g. 'being in love', 'love at first sight', 'true love', and 'endless love'.[60] Furthermore, Evans claimed autobiographical records confirm that, for women especially, 'being-in-love' (or not) assumed a heightened priority. In similar terms, Luhmann (1986) offered an alternative (but nonetheless, stipulative) account of how romantic language became part of vernacular lexicon, and how this development (allegedly) determined modernist forms of intimate relations. Luhmann arrived at this conclusion via an analysis of 'love literature' of the period, and theoretical application of his own particular version of systems theory.

Luhmann (1986: 6) asserted that the emergence of modern intimate relations ought to be understood *primarily* in terms of the differentiation of language used to describe those relationships, and he offered an (implicitly) evolutionary, and discursively deterministic history of intimate social forms. Specifically, he suggested that historical descriptions of intimate relations were (and are) determined by the primary social function that intimate relationships fulfil(ed) at particular historical junctures. He claimed that discourses of romance emerged during the Seventeenth century as a means of describing the altered basis of intimate relations i.e. from one of daily and generational (re)production, to one of cultivated pleasure Luhmann (1986: 46).[61] However, Luhmann also asserted that this transition occurred under cultural conditions that (paradoxically) strongly endorsed female purity and chastity. He therefore argued that romantic language represented a *codified* discursive form, intended to sublimate (or disguise) the actual intentions of each party (Luhmann, 1986: 50). Luhmann (1986: 134) claimed that later historical developments such as the (alleged) emergence of friendship-based intimacy during the Eighteenth century necessitated further re-formulations of codified intimate communication. Aside from the fact that Luhmann offers relatively little by way of historical material to sustain his assertions, there appears to be no (convincingly reasoned) grounds to accept his specific stipulative version of discursive determinism. I suggest that it is difficult to keep track of causal priorities throughout Luhmann's work: in some places he argued that novel intimate forms introduced new terminologies; at other times he claimed that the emergence of novel discursive codes (seemingly) gave rise to new forms of intimate relations.

[60] *c/f* Stone (1997), who asserted that the romantic novel was responsible for the cultural dissemination of romanticist doctrine, which subsequently became viewed as the most important basis upon which to conduct intimate relations.

[61] Luhmann offers no convincing account as to why this transition occurred in the first instance. Further, the suggestion that a distinctive mode of discourse emerged *following* functional differentiation appears to contradict his earlier theoretical claims.

Allan (2001: 326) summarised claims that traditional arrangements concerning familial and community integration underwent revolutionary transformation with the advent of modernity. Such claims coalesce around issues of 'breakdown and change' of traditional social orders in the face of the dual socio-economic developments presaged by industrialisation and urbanisation. As a generalisation, the dominant portrayal of the impact of urbanisation upon intimate relations is one in which family and community ties contracted, only to be replaced by a more restricted and privatised arrangement. These revolutionary changes to the basis of social order arrested the attention of early sociologists.[62] Subsequent to these developments, sociological analysis has broadly accepted a pre-figured separation of the public and private spheres. For example, Weber asserted that public and private spheres were underpinned by contrasting rationalities, and Bologh (1990: 131) usefully summarised his speculative claims in this respect as follows:

PUBLIC SPHERE	PRIVATE SPHERE
FORMAL PRODUCTION	REPRODUCTION AND RECREATION
ETHIC OF SUCCESS	ETHIC OF LOVE
• Rational-scientific.	• Emotional-aesthetic.
• Objective truth.	• Subjective feelings.
• Purposive, calculating.	• Contemplative, expressive.
• Aggressive.	• Receptive.
• Self-discipline.	• Self-love.
• (Male tool).	• (Female vessel).
• Ascetic.	• Mystical.

Figure 5. *Weber's distinction between the public and private spheres.*
Source: [Adapted from] Bologh (1990: 131).

[62] Early theorisations of these processes include Durkheim's (1984 [1893]), distinction between *mechanical* and *organic* solidarity, and Tönnies (1955 [1887]) differentiation of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemmeinschaft.*

Taken collectively (a) romanticism, (b) the mass cultural transmission of romantic ideas, and (c) revolutionary changes to the basis of social relationships meant that under conditions of modernity, intimate relations were:

- liberated from biological imperatives of reproduction;
- afforded the status of the most important of cultivated human freedoms;
- for the first time, subject to evaluation against universalistic standards proliferated by romantic fiction;
- conducted in the context of a more individualised social order;
- more privatised as a consequence of the separation of the public and domestic economies; and as a consequence of this,
- carried differential meanings form men and women.

Many contemporary sociological claims about the basis of intimacy troubles can be read as emanating from implied contradictions in the modernist formulation of intimate relations as reported above.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF INTIMACY TROUBLES.

With the exception of Elias's (1994) work, the historical studies of pre-modern intimate relations cited here (by and large) focussed upon the institutional basis of courtship and marriage. As both Shorter (1976), and Stone (1990) suggested, marriage in medieval times might (or not) have been characterised by aspects of intimate relations in the contemporary sense. However, several significant sociological conjectures may be raised in relation to intimacy troubles. The absence of an intimate basis for marriage (claimed by Shorter) serves to accentuate the multi-dimensional nature of contemporary intimate relations: when more is expected of these relationships, then, in simple terms, it is reasonable to conclude that more can 'go wrong', or at very least, greater grounds for complaint exist based upon heightened expectations. Perhaps the most important insight yielded by historical sociologies of pre-modern intimate relations concerns the claim that moral order(s) framed their conduct. Elias raised the possibility that, even in medieval times, conflicting moral imperatives governed intimate relations. He suggested that institutionalised codes, such as those enshrined in religion, conflicted with, and at times contradicted what might be called vernacular moral concerns. The existence of a moral order of any sorts both accentuates the social basis of intimate relations, and suggests that intimacy troubles have consequences beyond the realm of the individual parties concerned.

Historical sociologies of modern intimate relations also allow for conjecture about the nature and basis of intimacy troubles. The observation that the romantic ideal was subject to mass-mediated promulgation meant that situated intimate relations (perhaps for the first time) were subject to judgement against a set of (idealised) universal standards. At the same time, urbanisation and industrialisation meant that intimate relations were afforded a heightened (perhaps central) sense of significance in individual lives. For instance, Stone (1997) asserted that ordinary men and women were inculcated with unrealistic and heightened expectations about intimacy, and [those conducting] actual intimate relations found it difficult or impossible to match these standards. Whether or not this was the case, once cultivated and removed from the exigencies of daily and generational (re)production, and enacted on a more individualised and privatised basis, it is probable that more was expected of intimate relations. By implication, more individual investment would be required of intimate relations, and consequently, relatively greater levels of 'return' would be demanded.

The studies cited above suggested that under conditions of modernity, the romantic ideal coexisted in tension with parallel domestic, civic, and religious commitments. As a consequence it is possible that the range of (multiple, or even conflicting) demands placed upon modern intimate relations would require a managed compromise between competing imperatives. It could be conjectured that failure to strike an adequate balance might precipitate a diverse range of intimacy troubles within actual relationships, for example:

- observance of religious or civic codes might have outweighed the romantic ideal thus sustaining the form of *loveless marriage* frequently depicted in popular historical fiction; alternatively,
- once intimacy was afforded the status of being worthy of pursuit for its own ends, in *following ones heart* , individuals could possibly write-off existing domestic commitments.

In these terms, modern intimate relations could be viewed as inherently more complex, and relatively less stable than their pre-modern equivalents. Whilst pre-modern intimate relations were characterised in functional, contractual, and passive terms, representations of their modern equivalents implied something that was more significant in the general scheme of life and required the active management of multiple and competing imperatives. To reiterate, greater complexity raises (at least) the possibility that there is more 'to go wrong' within intimate relations.

Weber's (1948: 335) claim that all intimate relations were unavoidably brutal in their consequences i.e. that the 'seeds' of intimacy troubles are normatively inherent within all

intimate relations, and that intimate relations (by virtue of normative contradictions) are inherently unstable, constitute important arguments within a variety of 'post-consensus' studies reviewed below.

POST-CONSENSUS SOCIOLOGIES OF INTIMATE RELATIONS.

It was suggested above that functionalist sociologies predominated analyses of 'the private sphere' for the first part of the Twentieth century. Theoretical advocates of functionalism, by and large, remained preoccupied with two modernist orthodoxies:

- a broad acceptance of the stability and legitimacy of the public – private dualism; and,
- a theoretical commitment (and empirical focus) upon the nuclear family as the (presumed) site of intimate relations.

Specific features of the functionalist meta-narrative resulted in the question of intimate relations being stipulatively assessed in terms of a macro-sociological orientation that was constantly attempting to settle questions about the utility of these relationships to the wider social structure. As a consequence, intimate relations were predominantly characterised in terms of four (socially 'useful') cardinal points, namely: heterosexuality, marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood. As functionalist analysis (at large) enshrined the presumption of social order, little sociological attention was afforded to (even the possibility) of intimacy troubles,[63] and if at all considered, these problems were defined in terms of 'dysfunction': an aberration of normatively consensual domestic bliss. Furthermore, the responsibility for dysfunction was placed at the door of 'deviant' individuals, making this mode of analysis highly consistent with the individualising tendencies of academic psychology. To a certain extent, these (largely theoretical) speculations merely reflected a historical period of apparent stability in which a pervasive 'standard' biography meant that questions of whether or not, and when (to marry) were reduced to matters of (fairly invariable) cultural convention. However, during the course of the 1960's the functionalist orthodoxy began to appear increasingly jaded in the face of related secular, political, and academic developments, notably:

- the emergence of emancipatory social movements such as feminism and gay liberation;
- the beginning of a steady but inexorable rise in the divorce rate, and concomitant increase in rates of co-habitation and remarriage; and,

[63] *c/f* Goode (1956) for a notable exception to this tendency.

- the impact of social movements (especially feminism) upon the academy.

Overwhelmingly these changes were claimed to provide evidence of a crisis in (specifically) *heterosexual* intimate relations.[64] What can be claimed with relative certainty is that, as a consequence of these developments; (a) the pervasiveness of intimacy troubles was given voice within both academic and vernacular circles, (b) a (perhaps pre-existing) diversity of intimate forms became increasingly visible, and (c) the preceding functionalist orthodoxy was revealed as patently ill-suited to understand newly-configured (or newly visible) intimate relations. Diversity was duly reflected in the world of professional sociology, and the subsequent proliferation of perspectives might be understood in (variously) essentialist or constructionist terms.[65] For the purposes of the current study, I have characterised these perspectives as 'post-consensus' sociologies, and they include:

- the interactionist analyses of Berger and Kellner (1964), and Vaughan (1990);
- the democratisation hypothesis asserted by Giddens (1992);
- the 'reflexive modernity' hypothesis suggested by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995):
- the feminist analyses (e.g. Langford,1999); and,
- the 'post-modern' analysis presented by Baumann (1995, 2001).

As with preceding analyses, these studies vary in terms of the degree to which they explicitly address the basis or nature of intimacy troubles, and just as above, implicit claims regarding these issues, where possible, are extrapolated. These studies remain committed to the precepts of historical sociology in two senses; (a) they retain many of the stipulative features presumed by studies of pre-modern and modern forms of intimate relations, and (b) they are temporally located within a distinctive historical period i.e. 1960's to the present day.

A Hermeneutic Account of Intimate Relations.

Berger and Kellner's (1964) account of '*marriage and the construction of reality*' serves as an example of a historically situated hermeneutic study, which attempted to contextualise intimate relations in terms of (socially produced) systems of meaning 'affecting the individuals in any specific marriage' (1964:2). The theoretical points of departure for this work included claims that:

[64] Perhaps this effect was amplified by (a) the absence of gay voices within the academy, and (b) the invisibility of gay lifestyles within 'polite society'.

[65] An essentialist view on these matters would support the position that professional sociologies merely reported and theorised emerging intimate forms, whilst a constructionist stance would suggest that instantiations of intimate social life (such as gay relationships) were historically pervasive, and therefore their (seeming) proliferation only occurred as a consequence of increased academic attention.

- validation of self arises out of ongoing interaction with others; and,
- whilst all 'others' potentially serve a validating function, only a few occupy the position of 'truly significant other' (1964:4).

Conceding these theoretical points, Berger and Kellner asserted that the stability of individual social worlds are fundamentally dependent upon the strength of 'significant' relationships in which an ongoing (validating) conversation can be pursued, and furthermore, that 'marriage occupies a privileged status amongst the significant validating relationships for adults in our society' (1964:5). They further suggested that couple intimacy does not merely provide the opportunity for validating 'self' as a fixed entity: rather intimate relations constitute a creative process that provides opportunities for self-invention (or re-invention), consistent with the (Western) culturally dominant themes of romantic love, sexual fulfilment and self-realisation. Although Berger and Kellner (1964:6) characterised Western marriage (at the time of writing) as being essentially endogamous along the dimensions of ethnicity, class, and religion, they also recognised a level of relative free choice in comparison to marriages of earlier historical periods.[66] This tendency, they claimed, arose as a direct consequence of the processes of industrialisation and the 'crystallisation' of a private sphere.

The claim that only the private sphere allows individuals a relatively free hand in the construction of a meaningful biography and 'a world in which they can feel at home' is central to Berger and Kellner's thesis (1964:8). However, this level of freedom bears a particular cost; namely the ongoing effort required of both intimates in order to sustain their privatised reality, and the intensity intimate relationships only serves to 'accentuate their drama and precariousness' (1964:9). Berger and Kellner thus asserted that the establishment and maintenance of a particularistic social world places extremely high demands upon the principal protagonists involving extensive redefinitions of self, reality and almost all other horizons of daily life. In particular, the establishment of couple intimacy facilitates a reassessment of all pre-existing significant friendships, which are subsequently 're-perceived and regrouped' in accord with the newly emergent 'shared reality'. To this extent, they asserted that marriage constituted a nomic rupture (Berger and Kellner, 1964:11). Paradoxically, they claimed that intimate parties rarely perceive the seismic extent of these necessary realignments with any degree of clarity: only 'symptoms' such as tensions with in-laws or former friends overtly present themselves, and the source of these tensions may

---

[66] Berger and Kellner (*ibid*:18) qualify their claims in the following terms: 'we cannot discuss here such special problems as marriages or remarriages at a more advanced age, marriage in the remaining rural sub-cultures, or in ethnic or lower-class minority groups'. The analysis presented is therefore predicated upon observations in relation to white, middle-class U.S.A. of the early 1960's.

remain collectively obscured by rationalisations such as 'people change' or claims that one 'has become more mature'.

Berger and Kellner (1964:12) thus suggested that the central task of couple intimacy entails the discursive fabrication of a (relatively exclusive) 'joint image' or newly emergent shared identity via an arduous process of socialisation. The dominance of this collective 'marital conversation' is such that it forges a 'protective segregation' from other significant friendships. Conversely, significant others in the couple's social circle are implicated in redefining the newly emergent couple identity. They suggested that ongoing communication both facilitates and maintains emergent 'joint identity' and, as such, almost everything is subjected to 'talking through'. Successful accomplishment and sustenance of this joint biographical project not only requires a 'common objectivated reality' of the present, but also biographical reconstitution of the past in order to achieve a level of consistency with the current (shared) reality i.e. the sharing of secrets may be carefully tailored in order to 'fit' the current biography. In addition, shared identity entails the construction of joint 'future horizons', at least until further notice (1964:15). Counter-intuitively, Berger and Kellner asserted that the sum of this re-constitutive activity occurs and is typically experienced as an unintended and seamless transition. However, whilst interpretative retrojection and projection may serve to assuage existential anxieties, this 'world-building' exercise represents an inherently difficult and precarious enterprise that may eventually collapse, or be abandoned as an impossible undertaking in the face of specific disagreements (1964:16).

A Hermeneutic Account of Intimacy Troubles.

By in large, Berger and Kellner (1964) hinted-at, rather than identified specific sources of intimacy troubles. However, the following observations may be extrapolated from their theoretical claims:

- intimacy troubles are pervasively inherent within the structural arrangements for couple intimacy in contemporary Western societies;
- the experience of intimacy troubles is potentially existentially devastating for individuals concerned given the central (self-validating) role afforded these relationships;
- intimacy troubles may be unilaterally precipitated if either party desists from investment in a 'shared reality';
- intimacy troubles may occur if one or both parties fail to segregate or redefine pre-existing friendships and family relationships;

- intimate relations may founder from the offset if one or both parties fail to establish a shared view of reality;
- couple intimacy acquires a taken-for-granted quality, and this tendency towards complacency is paradoxical to the high maintenance demands of intimate relations;
- intimacy troubles are essentially rooted in failures of communication between the parties;
- intimacy troubles may occur if elements of one party's previous biography are discovered and adjudged to be irreconcilable with the current 'shared reality';
- intimacy troubles are inevitable if either party is unable to commit to a shared future vision; and,
- just as the sustenance of couple intimacy represents a process, by implication, declining intimacy must be accounted for in similarly processual terms.

In relation to the latter point, Vaughan (1990) offered a systematic and detailed interpretivist treatment of intimacy troubles, which she claimed to be predicated upon Berger and Kellner's analysis. Vaughan (1990:3) characterised intimacy troubles in general, and terminal intimacy troubles in particular, as simultaneously (and counter-intuitively) orderly *and* disorderly. She suggested a processual regularity to 'uncoupling' regardless of differences in gender, social class, sexual orientation, and marital status. Vaughan asserted that uncoupling is in fact two parallel processes: invariably one party to an intimate relationship wants dissolution, whilst the other wishes the relationship to continue. Inevitably, although both parties must transcend similar 'stages' of dissolution if uncoupling is to be achieved, each starts such transitional work at different points: as such, she claimed that understanding declining intimacy hinges upon whether it is examined from the perspective of the 'initiator' or the 'partner' i.e. the person 'left behind'. Her general assertion is that these features of intimacy dissolution can be understood as sociological processes (1990:7). Vaughan claimed a number of 'key transition points' in relation to dissolving intimacy, namely:

- secrecy;
- displays of discontent;
- mid-transition;
- collaborative cover-up;
- breakdown of cover-up;
- 'trying';
- going public;
- the partners transition; and,
- uncoupling;

Vaughan (1990: 11) shared Simmel's [1908] (1950: 330) view that secrets provide the central animating resource of intimate relations, and accordingly she claimed that the process of intimate dissolution also begins with a secret: namely, that one party is unhappy with the terms of the relationship. Vaughan (1990:13-14) asserted that, if initial unhappiness is concealed, then uncoupling commences as a unilateral process based on solitary reflection in the absence of the 'other', and in undertaking unilateral action the initiator (unwittingly) creates a power imbalance that precludes the 'other' from acting.[67] Parts of (previously shared) social life may become bracketed and further information withheld, thus increasing levels of (unilateral) secrecy.

In establishing self-validation beyond the confines of the relationship, initiators effectively seek to confirm an identity independent of that of the 'coupled identity', and Vaughan (1990:28) suggested that at this point, the possibility that the relationship is 'un-saveable' might first occur to the initiator. She asserted that initiators effectively engage in a narrative reconstruction of the history of the relationship in light of the current discontent. Typically, dissatisfaction is voiced in conversations with confidantes, carefully selected on the basis that they will most likely accept and agree with the initiators complaints. Vaughan (1990: 36) claimed that these 'transitional persons' are critical to the (eventual) accomplishment of uncoupling.[68] Vaughan (1990: 44) asserted that, characteristically, initiators do not abandon the security of the known for the unknown: the imagined destination of such a process must therefore appear better than the perceived circumstances of current intimate relations. She suggested that 'mid-transitions' are therefore characterised by a search for meaning amongst a variety of available cultural resources. Surreptitious (but nonetheless, studied) observations may be made of the lifestyles of single friends: it is noteworthy that at this point, the partner may be only dimly aware of dissatisfaction. She suggested that some partners, even at the point of separation, profess to remain unaware of the 'fact' that their relationship was deteriorating or breaking-up, and in these circumstances it is only after the break-up that a narrative re-ordering (similar to that undertaken by initiators) may be undertaken, which may accord *post-hoc* acknowledgement to 'warning signs'. However, rather than being duped or deprived of information, some 'partners' are seemingly complicit in maintaining the façade of normality (Vaughan, 1990: 71).

Vaughan (1990: 79) suggested that eventually, 'cover-up' breaks down and the initiator displays discontent with a clarity and force that the partner can no longer dismiss or

[67] *c/f* Bok (1982: 19).

[68] Vaughan (1990:37) characterised transitional persons as those who 'bridge the gap between the old life and the new': someone who comforts supports, or perhaps even instructs the initiator through the end of the relationship.

rationalise. Such realisation is typically momentous, and many in Vaughan's study discursively referenced the 'precise moment' at which they 'knew the relationship was over'. However, ambiguity, for some, was seemingly long-lived. Some of her respondents reported directly confronting their ex-partners about their (unsatisfactory) conduct, only to be met by denials. As a consequence, some reported undertaking 'detective work' in order to 'get to the bottom of things'

Vaughan (1990: 103) asserted that (paradoxically) confrontation opens-up the possibility of negotiation: however, and crucially, initiators and their partners enter into these negotiations in markedly different ways. Whilst the non-complainant partner might attempt to re-invigorate the relationship by attempting to become someone whom the initiator might (again) find attractive, initiators may not reciprocate, or merely maintain a charade of 'trying'. In the majority of cases, she suggested that both parties remained at 'cross-purposes'.
She claimed that throughout the entire process of 'trying', it is initiators who remain in control e.g. deciding whether or not to actually 'try', deciding when to split, or inducing the partner to take these decisions (Vaughan (1990: 125). Furthermore, such is the inherent power advantage of the initiator in being in control of the process of leave-taking, that this factor alone outweighs the effects of all other power imbalances such as age, sex, occupation, social class, or income (Vaughan, 1990: 127).

In common with Goffman (1971a), Vaughan (1990: 139) argued that there are strong social expectations during the normal course of a marriage that compel both parties to sustain a consistent public impression of that relationship. The public broadcast of intimacy troubles therefore entails far more that merely telling bad news (Vaughan, 1990: 140). The initiator, wary of condemnation, must construct a believable and socially acceptable version of events (and of the partner) that is 'sufficient' to justify their actions in leaving. She suggested that, as a 'rule of thumb', the person 'breaking the news' is generally afforded definitional privilege. In all cases, accounts are tailored to suit the recipient audience. In contrast, Vaughan (1990: 153) asserted that the partner's transition commences with a (post-mortem) search through events in history of the relationship in order to arrive at an explanation. This is not, however, to suggest that these transitions are simply negotiated, and her respondents reported engaging in a number of characteristic 'self re-invention' activities such as:

- increasing investment in longstanding interests or activities, which were perhaps curtailed in order to accommodate the relationship;
- maximising support from others such as friends or neighbours;
- extra investment in the parental role;
- 'converting' a friend into a lover;

- investing in the routine of work;
- finding an 'internal resource' that allows re-engagement with the wider world;
- acquiring a new intimate or 'fantasy' relationship;[69] and,
- finding solace in religion.

It might be hypothesised that each of these activities might support a narrative of 'moving-on'. However, other reported 'strategies' to deal with abandonment were less 'progressive', and included:

- mentally 'breaking down', or falling ill;
- assuming a role as a permanent victim;
- devoting oneself to destroying the initiators property or future happiness; or,
- regressing to a previous identity e.g. that of a dependent child.

Vaughan (1990: 173) asserted that uncoupling is complete only 'when participants define themselves and are defined by others as separate and independent of each other, and when being partners is no longer a major source of identity'. However, in common with Simpson (1998: 50), she identified that divorce and separation seldom signify the termination of involvement with the other. For Vaughan (1990: 174) 'getting over' a relationship therefore entails the (massive) task of developing of an account that explains the denouement of something that was once central to ones identity.

HERMENEUTIC ACCOUNTS: *A PRIORI* THEORETICAL AND TECHNICAL COMMITMENTS.

Several aspects of the above accounts suggest that *a priori* theoretical and methodological commitments have exerted a strong influence upon ensuing claims made about intimacy and intimacy troubles. Both Berger and Kellner, and especially Vaughan, can be read as (at best) abstracting accounts from the social contexts in which they were produced, and in doing so, their work demonstrates a studied disinterest in both the possible influences of wider social structures, and local contexts of production. Symbolic interactionist sociologies, in general, have been characterised as neglecting attention to wider social structures, although it is

[69] Vaughan (*op cit:* 161) suggested that abandoned partners are likely to seek 'safe' relationships i.e. those that avoid immediate long-term intimate investments. One such 'safe' option is to commence a relationship with someone who is geographically distant from oneself. The benefits of this arrangement (fantasy relationship) are that it allows for the discursive representation of the relationship as serious and / or intense, whilst at the same time, demanding relatively little in terms of effort.

difficult to see how these matters might be assessed without submitting to *a priori* theorisations.[70]

However, Vaughan's abstraction of meanings from local contexts perhaps goes much further in attenuating vernacular concerns. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) have usefully outlined the stipulative aspects of interview methodology, and many of these criticisms seem relevant to Vaughan's particular usage of this methodology. The rhetoric of Vaughan's justification for depth interviewing seems subject to charges made by Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 304-8), which (more specifically) include claims that such interview technologies:

- imply a face-value appeal to the authenticity of narrated accounts;
- replicate, in an uncritical fashion, features of the contemporary interview society;[71]
- are especially amenable to (particular) modes of public interpretation within this context;
- involve (mostly unacknowledged) asymmetries of status between interviewer and interviewed;
- ignore the extent to which data are jointly produced within the interaction-setting of the interview;
- ignore the extent to which the (presented) self is rehearsed;
- infer that the emergent discourse corresponds to the interiority of the subject; and,
- afford researchers (amongst an expanding diversity of methodological possibilities) a spurious sense of stability, authenticity, and security.

Following Gubrium and Holstein (1995), Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 305), asserted that 'biography work' undertaken in the context of an interview represents a co-construction: the joint outcome of both participants' creative activities. Furthermore, interviews never take place within a contextual vacuum, and instead 'reflect locally promoted ways of interpreting experience and identity so that what is constructed is distinctively crafted, yet assembled from the meaningful categories and vocabularies of settings' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995: 47). However, often (and this is the sense created by Vaughan's style of presentation) narratives of experience or confessional revelations are subject to an implicit truth-value assignation at

[70] Plummer (1995: 145) suggested that this charge parodies the interactionist position as narratives of personal disclosure are by no means idiosyncratic, and inherently, tend to recapitulate cultural frames of reference as well as structural dimensions such as class and gender.

[71] Atkinson and Silverman (*ibid.*) defined interview societies as those in which interviews of various kinds are relied upon disproportionately within academic and wider cultural circles alike in order to (supposedly) reveal private selves. Atkinson and Silverman suggested that the emergence of 'the interview society' has depended upon (a) the emergence (and endorsement) of the idea that 'self' is a proper object of narration, (b) technologies of the confessional in both disciplinary and therapeutic contexts, and (c) mass media technologies that sustain private-public and the routine-sensational dualisms.

several levels e.g. what is said is assumed to reflect what has happened, and what is reported is taken as coterminous with inner life of the subjects. Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 320) therefore concluded that, so used, interview technologies afford an uncritical view of the subject that includes an under-theorised and uncritical endorsement of personal narratives. I suggest that these stipulative features are apparent in Vaughan's work in which vernacular concerns are considerably obscured by both the research methods used and the style of reportage.

GIDDENS AND 'THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY'.

Giddens' historical sociology of intimate relations in late modernity has proved to be an influential reference point for subsequent professional sociologies. Indeed, hardly any contemporary study of intimate social life proceeds without making some reference to Giddens' theoretical constructs. Cassell (1993:2) suggested that Giddens' (1992) *'The Transformation of Intimacy'* should be properly understood as part of a wider project attempting to elucidate the historical novelty of contemporary society.[72] Giddens rejected the idea that classical sociological frameworks are capable of grasping the *radical novelty* of late-modernity. His theoretical alternative was to suggest a range of (newly emergent, and historically discontinuous) endogenous and exogenous processes that (allegedly) determine the basis and metric of late-modern social life.

GIDDENS' CONCEPT OF 'TRANSFORMED' INTIMACY.

'The Transformation of Intimacy' (1992) represents Giddens' most detailed characterisation of contemporary intimate relations. Allan (2001: 330) identified that dramatic recent changes in family life provided the substantive basis of this speculative study: however, almost equally, this work can also be understood in terms of Giddens' continuing theoretical commitment to his particular theorisation of *late modernity*. Giddens' central claim concerned the relationship between (a) apparent realignments in intimate relations, and (b) wider economic, social, and technological factors that are (ostensibly) independent of personal life. The essence of his argument can be summarised as follows:

- changes in the economic and social position of women (especially the development of efficient contraception and labour market participation) have significantly

[72] Cassell (1993: 22) suggested other works in Giddens cannon which maintain this focus include *'The Nation State and Violence'* (1985), *'The Consequences of Modernity'* (1990), *'Modernity and Self Identity'* (1991), as well as *'The Transformation of Intimacy'* (1992).

transformed 'traditionally gendered' patterns of economic dependence and resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the basis of the relationship between the sexes;

- as a consequence, there have been changes in cultural ideas of love and sexual commitment (most notably the emergence of a highly contingent form of intimate relations, *confluent love*); and,
- these changes are broadly indicative of a democratisation of personal life.

Giddens called emergent forms of intimate relations (based upon confluent love) *pure relationships*, the most prominent (alleged) feature of which is their essential contingency. He claimed that when pure relationships fail or cease to deliver expected satisfactions, then the moral course of action is to pursue ones intimate interests elsewhere. In this formulation, the pure relationship is therefore both a condition and a cause of the accelerated tendency towards separation and divorce, and Giddens insisted that this freedom for personal action signified the democratisation of personal life. However these relative freedoms come at a price: he asserted that pure relationships demand reinvigorated levels of responsibility – a form of (active) *intimate citizenship* that requires constant investment in order to sustain relationships with others.

Suggested changes in the economic and social position of women are probably the least contentious claims in Giddens repertoire. Giddens (1992: 26) asserted that effective means of contraception have resulted in both the tendency to limit family size in a rigorous way, and the effective separation of female sexuality from the chronic round of pregnancy and childbirth evident in the past.[73] However, beyond this (almost universally accepted) point, Giddens preceded to exercise considerable speculation. For instance, he suggested that the early sexual biographies of those over forty now stand in dramatic contrast to those younger age groups, and that nowadays, young people are given to more readily engage in sexual activity without the guarantees of commitment (Giddens, 1992: 9). Giddens asserted that this (allegedly novel) sexual adventurism is indicative of an exact reversal of the ethic of *commitment-before-sex* that predominantly framed sexual encounters for earlier generations. On this basis he suggested that sexual encounters are now prospective i.e. sexual favours are actively deployed as a speculative means towards establishing (eventual) intimate relations. Giddens (1992: 50) called this prospective deployment of sexuality *quest romance*, and suggested this mode of 'courtship' approximates the conduct of the current population cohort of girls and young women. He asserted that regardless of gender; a stock of previously acquired sexual experience is now viewed as an essential prerequisite to a rewarding sexual life, and thus a satisfactory marriage or partnership. This (claimed) tendency stands in direct

[73] Utilising insights from population demography, Giddens observed that contraction of family size is both a precondition *and* consequence of effective contraception i.e. the relative certainty that children will survive into adulthood has obviated the need for larger families.

contradiction to the ethical dualism of modern intimacy in which male conduct was judged in terms of an ethic of conquest, and female conduct by ethics of chastity and fidelity. Therefore, for Giddens (1992: 27), sexual identity and practices are much more negotiable and contingent matters than in the (even recent) past and he coined the term *plastic sexuality* in order to describe the ways in which sex serves the function of a malleable property of the self i.e. a point of connection between the body, self-identity, and social norms. He further suggested that plastic sexuality pre-dated the (alleged) 1960's sexual revolution, and that:

> 'Plastic sexuality' bears the hallmarks of institutional reflexivity: institutional in the sense that it serves as a basic structuring element of social actions; and reflexive in the sense of the transformative potential of its discourses which become part of the frames of action adopted by groups and individuals.'

Giddens, (1992:29).

This assertion broadly elaborated upon Giddens earlier claims regarding the self as an uncompleted reflexive project that is influenced by competing (mass-mediated) sources of expert knowledge e.g. therapy and self-help manuals. If Giddens' claims in this respect are accepted then intimate relations can no longer be thought of as regulated by either (a) the imperatives of reproduction / nature, or (b) the pathologising tendencies of psychiatry, psychology, and medicine: rather intimacy has been fundamentally recast as an integral property of social relations.

Furthermore, he suggested that intimate relations could no longer be adequately described in terms the romantic love complex (previously the most predominant mode of expression of passionate love in Western societies) (Giddens, 1992: 38). Rather, he argued that contemporary intimate relations are based upon *confluent love*, which he characterised in the following terms:

- as presupposing intimacy i.e. equality in emotional give and take;
- as assuming a stock of erotic knowledge, and valorising reciprocal sexual pleasure as the key element in intimate relations;
- as a potentially open arrangement e.g. sexual exclusiveness might be observed only to the extent that both parties deem this observance as mutually desirable or essential; and,
- confluent love is, above all else, a reflexive project (Giddens, 1992: 64).

Giddens asserted that the term *relationship* (at least in the vernacular), now acts as a shorthand reference to close and continuing emotional ties.[74] Giddens (1991: 87-97) called institutionalised forms of relationship based upon confluent love, *pure relationships*, which he characterised in the following terms:

- as free-floating and not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life;
- as purely reliant upon internal resources as a means to satisfying the partners involved;
- as reflexively organised, open, and subject to almost continuous (re) negotiation;
- as being highly reliant upon the continuous commitment and intimate investment of both partners;
- as mutually satisfying sexual relationships;
- as based upon mutual trust; and,
- as being a major (if not principal) source of self-identity and means of self-exploration in late-modern societies.

Pure relationships therefore have nothing to do with historical notions of sexual purity; rather a situation is implied in which a social relation is entered into for its own sake and (contingently) maintained for as long as each person derives satisfaction from their association with the other. Given both the availability of divorce, and women's (relative) economic independence, Giddens (1992: 58) suggested that marriages, for many, but by no means all, are increasingly underpinned by the precepts of the pure relationship. Similarly, the extent to which gay and lesbian relationships were (are) sustained in the total absence of institutional support means that they also represent a particularised form of the pure relationship (Giddens 1991: 135). Notwithstanding this generally optimistic gloss, he also hinted at the darker consequences of this arrangement. For instance, he noted that pure relationships may be terminated, more or less at will, and at any time, by either party: commitment therefore stands in uneasy (and uncertain) opposition to the risk of unilateral termination (Giddens, 1991: 137). Continuously investing in a relationship can only be undertaken from a position of certainty about the future viability of that relationship: the issue of trust is thus closely related to commitment. For Giddens, trust in pure relationships is reliant upon a sense of confidence that the relationship will be able to withstand future challenges and insults, and trust and (un)certainty therefore form the parameters of a continuous risk calculation: a gamble that the other party will act with integrity in their future

[74] In contrast, Morgan (1991) asserted that the discursive promotion of the term 'relationship' owes much to professional groups with vested interests in therapy. Furthermore, (contra-Giddens) he suggested that there is an indeterminate correspondence between the vernacular usages of this term and the mundane practices of intimate relations. Morgan therefore cautioned that 'relationship' represents an ideologically loaded term, deployed as a shorthand simplification for (claimed) egalitarian social change.

conduct and not disturb the negotiated terms of the relationship. A further potentially destabilising factor is introduced into the equation if we accept Giddens' assertions about the fundamentally malleable properties of self-identity e.g. the propensity for self-development or growth might further serve to undermine the certainty of predictions about future stability. Giddens (1992: 155) claimed that pure relationships were not the only possible expression of confluent love, and he claimed that *companionate marriages* (essentially enacted with the virtual or absolute absence of sexual activity) as an alternative form of pure relationship.

Giddens (1992: 87) suggested that certain forms of 'intimate' arrangements appear inimical to conditions of confluent love. He described *co-dependent relationships* as those sustained in spite of the personal costs and seeming lack of benefit to one (or both) partner(s). He asserted that these relationships are sustained purely on the basis of the normative demand to maintain a sense of ontological security.[75] Usually one (but sometimes both) individual(s) may be painfully aware of the inadequacies of their relationship but deem the costs of leaving as too high. Giddens suggested that the dynamic asymmetry of co-dependent relationships is such that, usually, one party is dependent upon the other in order to define their needs. As such co-dependent relationships are profoundly anti-reflexive – at least for the weaker party. Furthermore, Giddens (1992: 89) asserted that the activities of one of the parties are invariably compulsive, and therefore describable in terms of addiction. He claimed that these *addictive ties*:

- do not allow for the central requisite of the pure relationship, namely the (reflexive) monitoring of the self and other;
- subsume self-identity either in the other party, or in fixed routines;
- are averse to the sharing of intimate information, and thus undermine a fundamental precept of late-modern intimacy; and,
- tend towards the ongoing maintenance of gender disparities and iniquitous sexual practices.

(Giddens, 1991: 90).

Giddens (1992: 95) suggested that co-dependent relationships were aberrations of the normative basis of late-modern intimate life and that pure relationships are now so pervasive

[75] Existentialist psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1959) originated the term 'ontological security' in order to signify a psychological equilibrium equivalent to a sense of 'feeling at home' with oneself and ones place in the world. Ontological security implies low or manageable senses of anxiety. Ontological security is particularly threatened when boundaries are breached e.g. when ones bodily integrity is violated, or when the routine character of ones life is breached either by changes of context or practice. The concept of ontological security is arguably a derivative result of Laing's well documented reading of Sartre, and adjacent to the latter's notion of *epoche*.

as to effectively constitute a form of *intimate citizenship*. Furthermore, he alleged that the consequences this new form of citizenship carry the greatest implications for men. Giddens (1992: 111) asserted that until relatively recently, male sexuality was received as generally unproblematic, but that this is no longer the case given the changes highlighted above. He suggested that intimate citizenship means that male power is now highly dependent upon the emotional and economic compliance of women, and this development has threatened the legitimacy of masculinity (at least in its 'traditional' forms). (Giddens, 1992: 130-131). Notwithstanding, he regarded this (alleged) transformation in predominantly optimistic terms i.e. as providing for conditions that could bring about a more egalitarian relationship between the sexes. In general, he suggested that the need for greater creativity in intimate relations is to be celebrated as this development marks the concurrent decline of the characteristic (oppressive) moral and ethical lineaments of modernism that were maintained by recourse to naturalising, religious or medical discourses. Giddens asserted that, taken collectively, the above (alleged) changes add up to nothing short of a democratisation of personal life, and in making this claim he drew substantial comparisons with the notions of political democracy as characterised by Held (1986). Specifically, Giddens (1992: 184) suggested that autonomy represents the essential common feature of democracy (in both the political and personal senses). Extracting heavily from Held (1986) he claimed that the democratisation of personal life implies the following features:

- a balance of rights and responsibilities within intimate relations;
- a balance of accountability and authority within intimate relations;
- equality in influencing the outcomes of decision making;
- equal ranking to the expressed preferences of both parties;
- open debate based upon inherently democratic means of mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution;
- acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity based upon relative rather than absolute morals;
- active participation by both parties in determining the conditions of their association; and,
- the existence of a (usually unwritten) rolling contract.

Allan (2001:331) suggested that Giddens was partially successful in 'capturing the flavour of shifts occurring in sexual and domestic relationships'. As both matters of belief and practice, many now agree that terminating 'unsatisfactory' relationships (whatever their institutional status) represents a reasonable and rational course of action. Similarly, perhaps many would recognise the pursuit of personal happiness, emotional satisfaction and sexual fulfilment as matters of right.

THE TRANSFORMED BASIS OF INTIMACY TROUBLES?

Aside from his extensive discussion of co-dependent relationships, Giddens made few explicit claims in relation to the nature or basis of intimacy troubles. Notwithstanding, his conceptualisation of late-modern intimacy is based upon the assumption that these relationships are inherently, and irredeemably, unstable constructions. To the limited extent that Giddens explicated any causal mechanisms at all, then it might be suggested that he viewed the basis of this instability as predominantly structural (as opposed to personal) in origin. Principally, he suggested that changes in the meanings that people have of intimate relations result in a worldview that enshrines (from the very outset) a belief that relationships are unlikely to endure.

The implied levels of personal freedom in Giddens theory suggest that individuals may, at will, choose to leave a relationship at any time. Furthermore, this decision doesn't rest upon any shared dissatisfaction, but rather an individual perception by one party that their needs are not being satisfactorily fulfilled. Pure relationships are high-maintenance arrangements. Therefore, by extrapolation, failure to sufficiently 'work-at' a relationship may precipitate intimacy troubles. Giddens doesn't really get round to explaining either what constitutes 'failure' to invest, or potential reasons for this neglect: rather, he implied that one party's perception of the other 'not trying' constitutes sufficient grounds for the complaint of being 'taken for granted'.

The alleged prospective basis for initiating intimate relations i.e. the quest romance, once again accentuates ephemerality and uncertainty. If the basis of intimate relations is actually as uncertain as Giddens claimed, then it might be conjectured that compromise, incompatibility and instability could potentially be incorporated from the outset and intimate parties may be mismatched upon some important (but yet to be discovered) criterion. Matters that are framed as initially tolerable at the outset of a relationship might be subsequently re-assessed as unacceptable.

The implied malleability of self and sexuality in Giddens' formulation suggest that changes to the basis of an intimate relationship are inevitable. Self-development in one party may be (but not necessarily) matched by parallel developments in activities, tastes, preferences etc. by the other. However, the implication contained in Giddens' work is that this is less than likely, and intimacy troubles might therefore ensue on the basis of 'growing apart', or loss of common ground.

Giddens asserted that late-modern societies, in general, make the possibilities of trusting others difficult. In the context of intimate relations, trust of the other party is essential; and yet, in Giddens formulation, contemporary intimate relations are assailed by chronic doubt. Giddens therefore suggested that intimate relations represent a gamble or 'risk calculation' against ones future. Some people may be drawn to taking disproportionate risks in which case particular intimate relationships might be inherently trouble-strewn from the beginning. Others may be (unfortunately) 'intimately innumerate', and therefore lacking in the capacity to adjudge intimate risks. The concept of risk implies decision on the basis of partial information, and in developing intimate relations 'unacceptable' facets of the other may be either deliberately concealed or inadvertently undeclared: in such circumstance, subsequent discovery or disclosure may presage relationship difficulties.

Giddens treatment of co-dependent relations could be read as (implicitly) endorsing a distinction between (a) healthy, and (b) pathological intimacy. However, co-dependency is only constructed as pathological to the extent that the exploited, dependent party refuses to abandon the relationship. Herein lies the essence of Giddens claims about intimacy and intimacy troubles: whilst divorce and separation are pervasive, these phenomena are to be understood in optimistic terms. Whilst intimacy troubles may be omnipresent, these matters may be resolvable, and in any case, where they are not, relatively simple escape routes exist. For Giddens, endemic divorce and separation are constructed as positive for both individuals and society. For individuals, ready access to separation and divorce means that people are no longer 'trapped' in unsatisfactory private circumstances. In the case of society at large, Giddens suggested that the attendant contingency of intimate relations (of which increasing divorce rates are merely a symptom) implies a movement towards a more egalitarian form of gender politics. In turn, democracy within the personal sphere presages optimistic predictions of a (eventual) more democratic, humane society. Giddens therefore represented the (implicitly conflict-ridden) nature of intimacy troubles in terms of consensual optimism.

GIDDENS' TRANSFORMATION OF VERNACULAR CONCERNS.

Giddens theoretical project (in general) has been the subject of several systematic critical commentaries: [76] however, the current study is primarily concerned to explicate the means by which Giddens specifically subverts vernacular accounts of intimate relations. Some stipulative features of Giddens work reflect the stock-in-trade features of historical sociologies in general. For instance, causal claims are made throughout Giddens' oeuvre (even if, as Craib (1998:66) suggested, he never fully explicates these causal mechanisms). In this respect, Allan (2001: 331) asserted that even if some couples are at the vanguard of the

[76] For instance, see Craib (1998), and Boyne (1997).

democratising changes supposed by Giddens, there is no necessary causal imperative that others will follow.

Other aspects of his work serve to subvert vernacular concerns by more specific means. Firstly, his style of presentation and terminology are generally obscure and difficult. Furthermore, Giddens' compounded his obscurity by (frequently) borrowing theoretical constructs from other writers: however, their appropriation is typically partial, and he often distorts the theoretical intentions of the original authors.[77] Secondly, his work only addresses those issues that can be accounted for from within the terms of his wider theoretical project. This *a priori* imposition of topical precedence invites neglect of some elements of intimate social life that might reasonably be expected to arise in vernacular accounts of intimate relations / intimacy troubles. Issues such as disappointment, the moral basis of relationships, and the effects of break-up upon unwilling partners (or children for that matter) are neglected.

In terms of Giddens' favoured mode of presentation, Allan (2001: 331) asserted that his claims about intimacy were almost entirely speculative with 'little concrete evidence in support of the process he described'. The extent to which vernacular concerns were represented at all resided in their (possible) coincidence with the montage of cultural representations used by Giddens, which may or may not reflect ordinary peoples understandings of intimate relations. However, Giddens' tendency to shift the meaning of pre-existing theory perhaps represents the most efficient mechanism by which he was able to insulate his work from the scrutiny of a general readership. Furthermore, the extent to which he placed caveats upon some of his most important theoretical claims also makes it difficult to definitively criticise '*The Transformation of Intimacy*'. For instance, changes in intimate relations are sometimes called 'revolutionary' implying near totality; at other times they are stated as 'emergent processes', and at other points they are framed as variable i.e. affecting different groups within the population at different rates. As a result of these self-contradictory tendencies the reader might conclude that (a) a revolutionary transformation in intimate relations is underway, or (b) then again, this might not be the case, or (c) this might be the case for some (unstated) section of the population, but not for (unstated) others.

Giddens account of intimate relations (selectively) neglects some aspects of intimate social life such as:

---

[77] Boyne (1997: 279) accused Giddens of a 'piratical' approach to existing social theory i.e. taking theoretical elements without any real concern as to their origin or value within their proper context. He suggested that this mode of partial selection principally serves Giddens' own ends of achieving theoretical consistency.

- the issue of disappointment; and,
- the effects of separation / divorce upon reluctant partners or children.

There seems to be no apparent reason to peremptorily exclude these matters from theoretical consideration, and the fact that they remain unexplicated within Giddens work raises a suspicion that (spurious) stipulative parameters have been imposed upon what might, or might not, be considered salient aspects of intimate relations. For instance, Jamieson (1999: 479) identified Giddens tendency de-emphasise conflict and disappointment. Furthermore, Craib (1994: 72) maintained that messy disappointments and conflicts are pervasive features of 'real life' intimate relations, and that Giddens neglect of these matters owes much to his generally theoretically utopian dispositions.[78] Giddens, is however, hardly original in adopting this hopeful position and Jamieson (1999: 479) suggested that such claims-to-optimism have punctuated the history of professional analyses of intimacy.

Giddens most serious area of omission resides in his studied neglect of the effects of intimacy troubles upon unwilling others and related third parties such as children, especially when relationships are unilaterally terminated. He suggested that leaving an unsatisfactory relationship was both a moral course of action, and a matter of democratic right. However, in this formulation, there is only one apparent sense by which the unilateral termination of a relationship might be 'morally' justified; and that is by recourse to a form of moral individualism. Bauman (1993a: 367) suggested that partners that are less-than-willing to separate find themselves in a paradoxical situation insofar as 'partnership tends to be most indispensable when the supplies run out'. Furthermore, he accused Giddens of promoting a peculiar form of democracy: he asserted that, as with all freedoms, X's choice dictates Y's fate. For Bauman, the 'relationship market' (like the commodity market), does little to protect the vulnerable from the consequences of others' investment decisions: the 'transformation of intimacy' might therefore entail significant costs for unwilling others, including those such as children who find themselves (unwittingly) at the centre of intimacy troubles. Intimacy troubles, and possible break-ups unavoidably impact upon others who may live in the same household in ways that might be the very opposite of liberating or democratic. Giddens asserted that the uncertainties of *confluent love* are made bearable by the pervasive possibility of future relationships. However, in the context of unilateral abandonment, it is difficult to imagine how reluctant partners might summons the wherewithal or resources to pursue alternative arrangements (at least in the immediate aftermath of separation).

[78] Darhrendorf's (1964: 209 *ff.*) critique of Parsons' social theory suggested that the latter was guilty of employing descriptive devices towards the construction of a 'literary utopia'. Craib (1998) discerned a family resemblance between Parsons and Giddens projects: Whilst the former viewed stable personalities as the outcome of a functional social system, the latter views stable social systems as the outcome of ontologically secure individuals.

Jamieson (1999: 490-491) raised similar objections, and declared Giddens concept of the *pure relationship* both theoretically and practically bankrupt. She asserted that:

> 'Theoretically, the pure relationship seems to be a near impossibility for domestic partnerships and parent-child relationships that are necessarily embroiled in financial and material matters over and above the relationship [....] although the evidence suggests that most individuals now approach couple relationships with expectations which include mutual emotional support [....] this tells us relatively little about how people actually behave towards each other.'

Both Jamieson's and Bauman's objections coalesce around Giddens' treatment of intimate relations as exclusive dyads. In contrast, Simpson (1998: 101) suggested that more often than not, post divorce families were best characterised as 'fractured triangles'. Giddens implied that intimacy troubles were effectively over once one of the parties left a relationship. However, Simpson (1998: 50) following his ethnographic study of divorce asserted that many issues provided grounds for ongoing disputes that invariably occur following a break-up. Given shared property, friendship circles etc. relationships are seldom terminated by means of (physical) separation or (legal) divorce. He suggested that, most frequently, ongoing conflict centred on the care of children, and that typically both parties make (discrepant) claims to be acting in their 'best interests'. Simpson (1998: 52) concluded in relation to this issue by suggesting that 'best interest' usually referred to one person's perspective assembled from a range of residual post-divorce emotional and practical contingencies. Simpson (1998: 82) claimed that:

> 'Just at the point where a husband or wife might feel relief at never having to deal with an ex-spouse ever again, there is a compelling expectation from relatives, counsellors, judges, solicitors, and society at large that a former couple will cooperate emotionally and economically over their children and perhaps in ways they had never done before'.

It is difficult to avoid comparison between Simpson's (post-divorce) claims, and Giddens' claims about the grounds for break-up. Whilst Simpson described these disputes in multi-dimensional, contested, and discrepant terms, the subtext of Giddens arguments (again) imply non-problematic consensus, or at very least, he failed to explicate the forms that these conflicts might assume. Suspicion is therefore raised that the consensual gloss that Giddens applied to these matters, may not reflect the 'on the ground' or vernacular realities: rather, to take account of the (potential) disappointments of less-willing partners, the (potential) disruptions of childhood etc. would be to 'pollute' Giddens' (stipulatively pure) theoretical construction.

Finally, the extent to which Giddens based his explanation of intimate relations upon an abstraction (e.g. political democracy) perhaps overrides vernacular concerns and peremptorily stipulates the means by which intimate relations are enacted. Giddens himself fails to offer convincing reasons (at least beyond broad analogies) as to why theories of political democracy ought to offer a tutelary discourse by which to understand contemporary intimate relations.

BECK AND BECK-GERNSHEIM: THE NORMAL CHAOS OF LOVE.

At first blush, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) *The Normal Chaos of Love* appears to have been written as an addendum to Giddens (1992).[79] Like the latter, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim were concerned to explicate the ways in which (claimed) structural changes associated with 'late modernity' have impacted upon the conduct of intimate relations. Allan (2001: 331) enumerated the affinities between these two projects, notably:

- both asserted an epistemological rupture between the conduct of contemporary intimate relations and those of the preceding generation;
- both concurred in regarding women's freedom from traditional constraints as the key configuring factor in contemporary intimate relations;
- both claimed (and celebrated) nascent gender equality;
- both were optimistic about the (claimed) enabling qualities of advanced/late modernity.

However, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim considerably diverged from the most central aspect Giddens analysis i.e. the claimed democratisation of personal life. Like Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's specific claims relating to intimacy, can to some extent, be seen as an extension (or application) of previously asserted theoretical claims i.e. in this case, Ulrich Beck's (1992) theory of reflexive modernity. Lash & Wynne (1992: 3) identified that the Beck's theory rests upon a three-stage periodisation (e.g. pre-modernity / modernity / reflexive modernity). Beck claimed that each period could be differentiated in terms of the distinctive ways in which people perceive and respond to hazards, dangers, and risks. Three major related themes pervaded Beck's (1992) more general claims about advanced modernity:

- the risk society thesis;

[79] Lash & Wynne (1992: 7-8) noted this apparent confluence between these projects but also asserted their independent development. Lash and Wynne suggested that whereas Giddens reached his conclusions via abstract theoretical means, Beck's theoretical claims were grounded in (a largely empirical) sociology of institutions from which he claimed a macro-sociological theory of social change.

- reflexive modernization; and,
- the process of individualization.

Beck (1992:21) suggested that environmental threats in pre-modern societies were (are) treated as hazards - matters of pre-ordination attributable to gods, the forces of nature or malevolent spirits. In post-enlightenment modernity, Beck claimed that formal rationality presaged an optimistic worldview by which it was hoped that dangers might be avoided or otherwise controlled by (scientific) human intervention. However, he also asserted that this brand of optimistic scientism (as well as the modern social institutions this doctrine underpinned) were subject to incremental decline. For Beck, these (alleged) changes in the basis of knowledge marked the onset of advanced (reflexive) modernity.[80] Beck (1992: 30) suggested that 'risks always depend on decisions – that is, they presuppose decisions', and reflexive modernity is marked by contradictory and competing information upon which people are forced to make profound life choices. Therefore, in contrast to the (claimed) relative certainties of the past, the concept reflexive modernity suggests pervasive uncertainty, chronic doubt and a generalised failure of the means of risk calculation.

To the extent that Beck's allegations can be borne out, then they suggest profound implications for the stability of individual identities. Lash and Wynne (1992: 4) asserted that modernity imposed identities by means a series of rational frames or institutionalised discourses e.g. of sanity, sexuality etc. In contrast, in conditions of 'reflexive modernity' individuals are claimed to have little regard for the stability of institutional discourses and therefore are required to make decisions of existential consequence in the absence of stock formulæ by which to mediate life. The work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) can be read as an extended speculation about how these (alleged) processes (increasingly and unavoidably) impinge upon the conduct of intimate relations. For these authors, social trends such as the increasing tendencies to live alone, to cohabitate, to divorce (and re-marry), to live in gay partnerships, to have children (or not) all, to some extent, arise as the outcomes of *risk calculations* in response to the *individualising processes* implied by *reflexive modernity.*

[80] Beck (1996: 28) suggested that 'The concept of 'reflexive modernization [....] does not mean reflection (as the adjective 'reflexive' seems to suggest), but above all self-confrontation. The transition from the industrial to the risk epoch of modernity occurs unintentionally, unseen, compulsively, in the course of a dynamic of modernization which has made itself autonomous [....] risk society is not an option which could be chosen or rejected in the course of political debate. It arises through the automatic operation of autonomous modernization processes which are blind and deaf to consequences and dangers. In total, and latently, these produce hazards which call into question – indeed abolish – the basis of industrial society.'

THE ALLEGEDLY CHAOTIC BASIS OF CONTEMPORARY INTIMATE RELATIONS.

From the above theoretical basis, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 5) asserted that:

> 'It is no longer possible to pronounce in some binding way what family, marriage, parenthood, sexuality, or love mean, what they should mean or could be; rather these vary in substance, expectations, norms, and morality from individual to individual and relationship to relationship.'

As reported above, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 23-24) attributed the (alleged) generally uncertain state of intimate relations to the 'crumbling social order' of modernity, and specifically, a fundamental realignment of gender roles: insofar as this (implicitly causal) claim can be sustained, intimate relations are merely the setting and not the cause of the breakdown of traditional social order.

As a consequence, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 43) suggested that individuals are being conscripted into new modes of living, freed from traditional constraints, and hedonistically underpinned by an individualist ethic of 'ones duty to oneself'. However, they viewed these alleged changes in optimistic terms, and claimed that casting off the certitudes of the past effectively infuses intimate relations with a new degree of optimism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 45). Like Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 49) therefore accorded contemporary intimate relations a heightened sense of significance in the general scheme of life i.e. as a source of 'person-related stability'. However, contradictorily, they also asserted that extensive investment in intimate relations as a source of self-affirmation introduces it's own specific genus of risks in which the threat of disappointment looms larger than ever as a consequence of:

- the near total lack of mutually binding external support systems (1995: 85); and,
- the volume of (often complex and conflicted) choices that may render intimate relations as inherently open to conflict (1995: 82).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim asserted that the (alleged) heightened status of contemporary intimate relations have rendered these social forms susceptible to certain discursive frames of reference, such as:

- the religious i.e. that intimacy has assumed the status of a secular religion, and like religious institutions, provides sanctuary against the instabilities of an uncertain social order (1995: 170);

- the utopian i.e. that intimacy represents an irresistible panacea impelled by the power and persistence sexual drives of deep personal wishes (1995: 176); and,
- the anarchic i.e. that intimate relations are conspiratorial, respecting neither social boundaries or laws other than their own individualised conventions (1995: 187).

Even a cursory reading of preceding professional sociologies of intimacy / troubles would reveal that describing intimacy in these terms is hardly representative of a theoretical innovation. However, it is noteworthy that (contra-Giddens) Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's characterisation in utopian and/or anarchic terms is inimical to the concept of personal democracy. For these authors, intimate relations operate on the basis of (mutual) personal and emotional satisfaction and are therefore free from external regulation: under such terms any possible distinction between justice and injustice dissolves into relativism. In this formulation, there is no right of appeal should one party decide to end the relationship, and the logical conclusion to be derived is that intimacy and justice are mutually independent. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 194) suggested that:

> '[to the extent that] individuals have the right to judge each other, love is thus [....] a radical form of self-government, divested of checks and balances, acknowledging neither referees, norms nor legal procedures which might otherwise help to prise it's dilemmas out of the sordid swamp of accusations and take them to a neutral court.'

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995: 191-4) ensuing characterisation of the paradoxes afflicting *contemporary* intimate relations is similarly hackneyed, merely reflecting (antecedent) claims that have populated the history of ideas about intimacy, notably:

- the separateness-relatedness paradox i.e. that intimacy is contra-individual and yet simultaneously validates self-identity by reference to the other;
- the cognitive-emotive paradox i.e. that intimate relations presuppose (cognitive) decision-making, and yet are emotionally governed; and,
- the stability-insecurity paradox i.e. that intimate relations both promise stability, but at the same time, invoke a particular series of insecurities.

No novel insights about the nature or basis of intimacy troubles can be implied from this formulation. Furthermore, retracing these familiar contours hardly inspires support for claims about the recent, (supposedly) radical, epistemological rupture in the basis of intimate social life. Like Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, although proceeding from self-proclaimed structuralist-historical precepts conclude in terms that strongly assert a form of moral individualism.

Several stipulative tendencies of historical sociology in general are reflected in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's speculative analysis, and vernacular concerns are only acknowledged by happenstance i.e. to the extent that they coincide with the montage of anecdotal examples that these authors provide. Beck's (1992) periodising stipulations have been questioned by Turner (1994).[81]

Questions of causal priority remain noticeably vague within Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's theoretical formulation. Elliot (2002: 305) suggested that the relationship between (a) individualised risk, (b) social structures, and (c) processes of globalisation might be more systematic and complex than Beck's theory is able to accommodate. Alexander (1996) objected to Beck's use of a rationalistic and instrumental-calculative model of risk in the micro-sociological context. Alexander (1996: 135) asserted that these authors succumb to the tendency to over-rationalise intimate relations; he noted that:

> 'such a model has deep affinities with neo-classical economics and rational choice theory, and thus necessarily shares the conceptual and political limitations of these standpoints' [and furthermore, that Beck's] 'unproblematic understanding of the perception of risk' is utilitarian, objectivist, and unable to grasp the subjective and inter-subjective basis of intimate relations.'

Others with alternative (but nonetheless stipulative) perspectives have criticised Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work: for instance, Lash and Urry (1994: 10) suggested that Beck's (1992) foundational claims (dominantly) asserted a 'cognitive realism, moral proceduralism and lack of attention to aesthetic and hermeneutical subjectivity'. Hollway and Jefferson (1997: 256) accused Beck and Beck-Gernsheim of neglecting (inherent) affective elements of intimate relations. Contradictory choices and chronic uncertainties may indeed feature as omnipresent elements within contemporary intimate relations: nonetheless, there seems to be no apparent or convincing grounds by which to pre-emptorily position risk as the *central object* towards understanding intimate relations.

[81] Turner (1994: 180-181) suggested that 'serious criticism of Beck's arguments would be to suggest that risk has not changed so profoundly and significantly over the last three centuries [....] do Beck's criteria of risk, such as their impersonal and unobservable nature, really stand up to historical scrutiny? [....] If we take a broader view of the notion of risk as entailing at least a strong cultural element whereby risk is seen to be a necessary part of the human condition, then we could argue that the profound uncertainties about life, which occasionally overwhelmed earlier civilizations, were not unlike the anxieties of our own *fin-de-siècle* civilizations.'

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS.

Feminist analyses of intimate relations present a radical political challenge to the notion that the condition of intimacy is reconcilable with that of democracy: underpinning this scepticism is a persistent conviction of inequality between the sexes. For feminists such as Langford (1999) the 'darker side' of couple 'intimacy' continues to be characterised by cruelty, violence, and the economic / sexual exploitation of women. Morgan (1985: 28) noted the tendency towards the medicalisation of couple intimacy, and from a medical frame of reference features such as 'faulty' family dynamics or even overt violence are understood in 'pathological' terms i.e. in juxtaposition to 'healthy' intimacy. In contrast, feminist analyses tend towards viewing such features as an inevitable consequence of all intimate relations. Feminist analyses do however, retain notions of 'pathology' insofar as they present a contemporary manifestation of the 'love-as-sickness' hypothesis: typically, falling in love is represented as causing women to enter into a 'deluded' state.

Feminist analyses disturb the (presumed) public-private dichotomy stipulatively asserted by other theorists. Langford (1999: xii) advanced claims typical of this genre in suggesting that the private sphere merely serves to replicate the characteristic power dynamics of the public sphere, and therefore merely domesticates unequal, or even inhumane, social practices. All the while, it is claimed that these 'inhumanities' are obscured by the ideology of romantic love (Langford, 1999: 1). Feminist analyses therefore stand in outright opposition to narratives of social progress advanced by advocates of the democratisation hypothesis (e.g. Giddens, 1992).

The radical politicisation of the romantic love complex found most its most explicit articulation during the feminist movement of the 1960's, which gave praxiological expression to the earlier philosophical work of de Beauvoir (1972 [1949]). de Beauvoir (1972), in turn utilised insights derived from Hegel's (1931 [1807]) *phenomenology of mind* in order to express the basis of relations between men and women. Hegel's theoretical claim was that human consciousness, when it becomes aware of itself in a subjective sense, is simultaneously unable to cope with the notion of 'others' subjectivity. As a means of defence, the subjectivity of other people is therefore objectified, and this process, by implication, entails treating the other as inferior. For Hegel, the basic metric of human relations was thus one of master (domination) and slave (subordination). Accepting these speculations, de Beauvoir (1972) suggested that this tendency has a gendered dimension by which men (in general) treat women as objectified and inferior 'other'. In this case the 'other' is claimed to be directed towards a life of dependence, vulnerability, and self-sacrifice – or (at least) being vicariously reliant upon the 'master' as a means of self-validation. Langford's feminist study of intimate

relations accepted this theoretical apparatus, and furthermore she asserted that 'the ideology of romantic love plays a significant part in maintaining this pattern of social arrangements' (1999:5). de Beauvoir (1972: 653) similarly suggested that the paradoxical route to 'freedom' lies in the self-sacrifice of love: however, liberation through servitude proves to be a logical (as well as practical) fallacy, and as a consequence it is claimed that women are induced into a series of self-deceptions in order to sustain this iniquitous contract. For de Beauvoir, these self-deceptions provide a *prima-facie* example of the exercise of 'bad faith' in the existential sense.[82]

Although disagreeing in relation to the basis of patriarchy, both radical and Marxist feminist analyses demonstrate a broad consensus in the view that romantic love merely serves as a vehicle of patriarchy. From a Marxist – feminist perspective, Atkinson (1974: 43) claimed that 'love is the psychological pivot in the persecution of women', and furthermore was best considered in pathological terms. The New York Radical Feminists (1971:442) similarly suggested that 'love in the context of an oppressive male-female relationship, becomes an emotional cement [by which] to justify the dominant-submissive relationship'. In sum, the feminist view of (at least heterosexual) couple intimacy suggests a set of social arrangements that are variously pathological, delusional, parasitic, exploitative or otherwise oppressive.[83] The romantic love complex is framed as a pernicious ideology underpinning and obscuring these iniquitous and injurious social relationships: moreover, feminists invariably claim that the popularity of the 'myth' of romance allows for the trans-generational reproduction of patriarchal relations. From this perspective, it follows that any attempt to view the dynamics of couple intimacy as abstracted from wider gender relations is, at best misguided, and at worse part and parcel of an ideological process which both sustains and perpetuates women's oppression. In particular this later charge has been levied at 'malestream' sociological analyses of intimacy (Langford, 1999:8).

Several feminist theorists have asserted that fictional romance provides the narrative basis against which 'real' couple intimacy is best understood (e.g. Jackson, 1993b; Pearce and Stacey, 1995). Jackson (1993b: 46) suggested that romantic fiction serves as a powerful conditioning narrative that fosters women's (high) expectations of intimate relations. Plots in romantic fiction are (allegedly) centrally organised around narratives of transformation, as summarised by Christian-Smith (1990:89-91):

---

[82] Sartre (1958) famously asserted that humankind was 'condemned to freedom': he coined the term *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) in order to describe the characteristic tendency of evading the choices associated with the afore-mentioned freedom by its possessor.

[83] Later developments in feminist politics (e.g. see Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993) posited the view that heterosexuality rather than romantic love *per se* formed the basis of women's oppression.

- typically heroines are characterised as passive, vulnerable and uncertain in relation to their future security;
- conversely, the hero of the plot is represented as possessing ideal or exceptional qualities which are in some way related to the perceived 'deficits' in the heroines character; and,
- a narrative of transformation is presented which causally implicates the hero in the heroine's subsequent success and / or happiness.

Feminist theoretical claims regarding the pervasiveness of gender oppression have not always been supported by empirical studies of couple intimacy. For instance, Dunscombe and Marsden (1993) claimed to find an 'asymmetry' in emotional response between men and women in their study of couple relationships. These authors suggested that women in the study wanted to feel emotionally 'special' to their male partners but generally were disappointed by the men's lack of emotional competence and spontaneity. The authors posited that women (and not men) were responsible for, and actually performing, 'emotion work' within the relationship. However (and paradoxically), the interviewees were keen to present their relationships as not uncaring, and indeed conducted on a basis approximating equality. This particular finding, which is antedated by other similar work (see Mansfield and Collard, 1988) presents a particular problem to feminist claims, the theoretical resolution of which seems to rest upon either of the two related strategies reported above, namely:

- women are presented as having been conditioned into, and as acting-out a convenient but nonetheless powerful cultural fiction; or,
- women are presented as in some way psychologically deluded, or conducting their relationships upon the premise of 'false consciousness'.

To the extent that these related arguments could be separated, the latter strand has consistently fostered a theoretical alliance between feminist thought and a variety of 'psychologisms'. de Beauvoir's (1972) reliance upon the existentialist concept of 'bad faith' was noted above: others, such as Langford (1999) appeal to Freudian concepts. It is not intended to replicate Langford's subscription to Freudian speculations here, however, in all other respects her study is emblematic of contemporary feminist approaches to intimate relations, and it will be useful to summarise these aspects of her work.

Langford's (1999) empirical study addressed the 'hypothesis': 'Does romantic love involve the exercise of particular methods of power and control?' This question was pursued by means of retrospective interviews of fifteen women in which they were asked to reflect upon

their current and previous episodes intimate relations.[84] Langford (1999:25) suggested that women are pre-disposed to 'fall in love' in an effort to address perceived dissatisfactions with prior single status. She further asserted that single status provides for a negative social identity connoting undesirability or personal incompetence within a culture where 'falling in love with a special person appears to be the means of salvation' (Langford, 1999:28). However, she claimed that once intimate relations ensued, women found that their perceived prior needs were rarely satisfied. Employing a rather cyclical logic, she argued that this eventuality only serves to leave women feeling further devalued, accentuating already low confidence, and reinforcing feelings that they were not valued in their own right.

Langford (1999:30) noted three distinctive narrative strands in her respondents' accounts: romantic fiction, risk, and transformation. She suggested that women tended to 'write themselves into' love via the medium of romantic fiction. The notion that intimacy involves a gamble against ones future well-being and prosperity, especially for women, forms an important strand within feminist thought.[85] Many in Langford's study explicitly identified the transformative potential of intimacy, with some endowing their experiences with an almost religious or spiritual significance, thus yielding an altered sense of reality. The heightened 'spiritual' awareness of intimacy was variously described as being 'merged' with the other or being 'completely in tune', and usually accompanied by a gradual but significant withdrawal of interest from previous activities and friendships.

Langford (1999: 42) asserted that these observations collectively reflect the intensive, irrational, or rebellious qualities of love that serve to obscure the exercise of patriarchal power so effectively i.e. intimacy is, at the same time, experienced as extremely liberating, but also introduces a new set of constraints of which women are barely aware. She suggested that what induced the women in her study to emotionally invest in relationships from an early stage was the fact that their partners acted in ways which were 'atypical' of masculinity e.g. being communicative, caring, concerned, and emotionally transparent. She subsequently observed that *'a man in love is not a man at all'*, and therefore that the (supposed) liberating effects of couple intimacy, for both men and women, are arguably due to the culturally sanctioned licence to 'step-out' of the constraints of pre-figured gender roles (Langford, 1999: 55).

[84] The extent to which Langford employed feminist theoretical analysis (rather than particular methodology) procedures is of primary significance to the current study.

[85] McRobbie (1981:118) suggested that young women are culturally conditioned to load all of their 'eggs' into one romantic basket in the hope that this pays-off.

However, initial liberating experiences (allegedly) prove short-lived: feminist analyses of intimacy characteristically suggest a hiatus between early intimacy, and later intimacy in which the individual parties revert to gender type. Langford contended that women are therefore unwittingly lured into a system of exploitative patriarchal social relations through the vehicle of intimacy. Langford (1999: 65) further asserted that when intimate closeness evaporates this invariably results in an understandable sense of mourning and confusion experienced along strictly gendered lines: she claimed that whilst women wish for the emotional intensity of the early relationship to continue, men seek emotional withdrawal and distance. Both parties (but women in particular) remain at a loss to explain this existentially troubling transmutation as it frequently occurs without any clear precipitating 'cause'. Langford suggested that, typically, women's attempts to recover previous emotional intensity only served to accelerate men's emotional distance and reinvestment in other activities such as work or socialising with male friends. Men are most likely to report women's efforts towards emotional reinvigoration of the relationship as 'demanding', or reflect these demands back to the women as 'unreasonable'. Langford (1999: 71) asserted an irony in this situation i.e. whilst women's 'genuine' complaints are dismissed as 'neediness', men's needs are increasingly fulfilled.

Given these claims, one might be drawn to ponder reasons as to why the unfulfilling scenarios depicted by Langford are tolerated. Langford answered this conundrum by suggesting a range of rationalisation strategies and self-deceptions enacted in order to maintain the status quo, including:

- relative comparisons with the (even less favourable) conduct of other men;
- internalisation of the charge of unreasonableness; and most typically,
- the employment of 'absence of negatives' narrative strategies.

Langford (1999: 69) claimed that the latter strategy was evident within her respondents' accounts when men's conduct was calibrated against extremely unfavourable indices e.g. 'he doesn't keep me short', 'he's not violent' and so on. Furthermore, in an effort to 'hold it all together' women increasingly assume greater and greater levels of responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance of the relationship and household. Again adopting a cyclical logic, Langford contested that this 'uphill struggle' inevitably takes a physical and psychological toll on the women concerned, and others may interpret this as evidence of female fractiousness. Essentially, Langford suggested that women in this situation assumed a maternal role in relation to their infantile men. However, there is a counter-intuitive sense by which this role transmutation can be seen to empower female protagonists, as men seem to just 'go along' with whatever is suggested. Langford (1999: 75) argued that 'women's power'

in this situation derives from 'feeding egos and tending wounds' - a kind of 'maternal compensation' for the loss of the intimate qualities characteristic of their early relationship.

When intimacy troubles inevitably surfaced, Langford's respondents reported difficulties in engaging their male 'partners' in meaningful negotiations. A common scenario involved men assenting to 'relationship talks' as long as they were conducted on a 'rational / reasonable' basis. These would ensue, only for the woman to become frustrated / upset at the apparent inability of their male partners to 'understand': consequently, 'relationship talk' would terminate on the basis that the woman was irrational / too emotional. Langford (1999: 95) interpreted this scenario as a kind of emotional 'double-bind' that served to de-legitimise a woman's opposition to the unequal terms of the relationship. Seeking to describe this gambit, women adopted a variety of 'reasoning strategies' themselves including:

- self-blame – 'I was stupid not to see through him in the first place';
- pathologisation – 'he's a bad lot'; or,
- essentialism – 'all men are emotionally backward'

Langford (1999: 101-2) contested that, alongside these 'attempts' to deal with masculine failings, women also tended to experience de-legitimisation at an emotional level, and characteristically responded by self-objectification, and / or self-silencing. Self-objectification signifies a process whereby women apprehend themselves as an object – perceiving and evaluating themselves from the perspective of the male protagonists in the relationship. Langford suggested that such a strategy might entail the internalisation and unconscious enactment of patriarchal ideas of 'what women should be like'. She asserted that self-objectification could be manifested in conduct that seeks to retain love and approval i.e. regimes of beautification, and/or the cultivation of an 'attractive' (passive / compliant) personality. In adopting this cultural and personal manifesto, it logically follows that women might self-silence their own desires and needs if they are seen to contradict those of their male protagonists. Paradoxically, a valued social role arises from this dynamic – namely that of the amateur therapist.

Notwithstanding these claims, the women in Langford's study typically stated their belief that their views mattered to their partners and further, that they were respected and valued as individuals in their own right. Ironically, if women adopt the twin strategies claimed by Langford, and should these fail, the more likely it becomes that women might self-blame for the 'failure' of a relationship. Langford suggested that in these circumstances, women may lack the wherewithal to leave an unsatisfactory relationship, being either too insecure, or believing that their current 'partner' (however 'flawed' he might be) represents their best

hope of future happiness and security. 'Security', such as it exists, is therefore bargained against independent subjectivity, and for Langford (1999:131-132), entrapment in this 'security paradox' represents the antithesis of the democratic personal life described by Giddens (1992).

In summary, Langford (1999: 141) asserted that 'prevailing theories about love, like the contemporary romantic ideal itself, are deeply contradictory' i.e. promoting freedom, but only delivering (women's) servitude. Yet 'beliefs in love' as a means of self-development (or even salvation) remain pervasive. Langford argued that, given the proliferation of self-help texts, counselling services and the like, nobody embarking on an intimate relationship ought to be surprised that it (eventually) turns out dissatisfying and self-contradictory. However, she further asserted that the (seemingly apparent) 'darker-side' of intimate relations continues to be discounted by women in the face of the deeply ingrained cultural narratives of romantic love, which persist in promising fulfilment of a wide range of needs and desires. In direct opposition to this sentiment, Langford asserted that couple intimacy might actually threaten self-development and self-expression, and this might particularly (but not exclusively) be the case for women. Whilst intimates look towards love to provide a secure mainstay of social life, the dynamics of couple intimacy frequently result in women feeling especially devalued and insecure.

INTIMACY TROUBLES: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS.

By cancelling any clear demarcation between 'healthy' and 'faulty' (heterosexual) intimacy, it is difficult to extrapolate a distinctive feminist discourse of intimacy troubles that is separate from feminist perspectives about intimacy in general. 'Troubles', rather than being an aberration of intimate relations, in fact appear as both inherent and inevitable. Feminist analyses offer a number of further insights regarding intimacy troubles that are distinctive from other theoretical positions considered above.

Feminist analyses attempt to draw specific connections between patriarchal social structures and the reflective enactment of power inequalities in particularised private worlds. If a woman experiences heterosexual couple intimacy as *unequal*, then this is only because manifest power inequalities persist and are visible within the 'public' sphere, and no justifiable distinction can be made between public and private (both been opposite sides of the same patriarchal coin). This explicit anti-romanticist theme in feminist analyses views couple intimacy as, at the same time, a good and a bad thing i.e. good for men, and bad for women. Typical of feminist views of inequality in general, this formulation is constructed in zero-sum

terms with men's domination being accompanied by women's (equal) subservience, men's choices being met by women's (equal) manipulations etc.

One interesting theoretical consequence of an 'inevitability' hypothesis of intimacy troubles concerns the insight that the 'roots' of the relationship difficulties occur as a result of inherent contradictions which the protagonists may be hardly aware of (or even unaware of) at the beginning of their relationship. This notion that (expert) others may be aware of intimacy troubles ahead of the protagonists in a particular relationship appears elsewhere in feminist analyses and supports a theory of 'troubles without troubles'. The troubles-without-troubles theory is generally advanced to account for an apparent contradiction: as reported, from a feminist viewpoint, heterosexual couple intimacy appears as exploitative, parasitic, and otherwise iniquitous. However, and in direct contradiction to these claims, women in relationships rarely articulate these matters themselves, and instead (typically) employ discourses of equality when referring to their own intimate arrangements. In response to this contradiction, feminists have characteristically turned either to psychology, in order to assert that the women concerned are in some way 'deluded' or cultural theories that accentuate the conditioning effects of certain discourses, especially that of romantic fiction. Thereby, intimate relations that might not be defined as problematic by women (or even men) themselves can be considered as examples of troubled intimacy from the privileged vantage point of a feminist position.

The feminist analyses considered above generally did not seek to downplay the transformative power of love relationships: typically, criticism was reserved for the *eventual* outcome of intimacy rather than the initial experiences. Langford's (1999) assertion that a 'hiatus' occurs signifying the onset of a more habituated (and therefore less satisfactory) intimate arrangement serves as a particularly useful example of this theoretical tendency. Once lured and 'trapped' by intimacy, Langford suggested that women (and only women) bear the negative psychological consequences of habituation, which was then claimed to have a determining effect upon women's subsequent actions. Consequently women may stay with 'bad relationships' as the conditioning effects of habituated intimacy render them dependent and unwilling to risk the insecurity of being single. Security by means of subservience may serve to invite further exploitation at the hands of male protagonists as the extent of (women's) vulnerability is realised. To the extent that women can be seen as contributing to intimacy troubles, then strategies such as exercising moral judgement over the actions of their partners, manipulating the outcomes of 'joint' decisions etc. are framed in terms of being understandable responses to situations of powerlessness.

FEMINIST PREDETERMINATIONS.

Langford's work exhibits several distinctive features that (taken collectively) suggest an *a priori* commitment to the eventual outcomes of her study. Her wholesale acceptance of Freud's theoretical apparatus has been noted above. Craib (1984:19) suggested that all theory is possessed of an *affective dimension* i.e. that which rests upon particular 'articles of faith' to which adherents must (or not) simply commit. This affective dimension makes commitment to particular theoretical positions analogous to religious belief. Given the inherently un-testable substrate of psychoanalysis i.e. unconscious motives, Craib's observations are perhaps truer of Freudian theory than of most other theoretical positions: to apply Freudian analysis implies (peremptorily) accepting many issues as simply matters of faith. Williams (2000a: 69) asserted that Freudian psychoanalysis is dependent upon attributions of depth, and essence, at the expense of (typically) vernacular concerns of *how-things-appear-at-the-surface*. Accepting that things might not be as-they-seem, (or might even be the opposite of what they seem) involves a considerable leap of (theoretical) faith. Notable others have advanced more systematic theoretical critiques of Freudian theory, usually from alternatively stipulative perspectives.[86] It is sufficient to note here that three clusters of concern accompany Freud's stipulative constructions, namely:

- (un)testability (see Popper, 1986: 254);
- methodological inadequacy of free association in validating causal inferences (see Grünbaum, 1986:224)
- selectivity of tutelary data.

The latter point is particularly pertinent in relation to Langford's study. The stipulative features of interview methodologies were considered above in relation to Vaughan's (1990) project, and Langford's study is similarly culpable of pre-emptorily ordering outcomes by methodological means. However, certain other features compound this tendency. For instance, her sample of respondents (hinted-at but never explicitly confirmed) seems to have been comprised of *post-graduate women's studies students*. This is not to suggest that these people might not have had something (a) interesting, or (b) useful to say about their intimate lives; but does raise the prospect that these people might have been relatively well-acquainted with feminist concerns and possibly Freudian terminology. I suggest the possibility that their vernacular frame of reference might have been particularly distinctive, and Langford is guilty of a sin of omission in not acknowledging this possibility more clearly.

[86] For examples see Popper (1986) and Grünbaum (1986).

The difficulties associated with accepting essentialist notions of gender were reported above in relation to Simmel's work. Bordo (1997) identified the pervasive (and perhaps irresolvable) tension in feminist analyses between outright rejection of biological essentialism, and simultaneous retention of notions of homogeneity. Harding (1990: 98-99) asserted that this dilemma is only partially resolved by basing claims to homogeneity upon cultural or psychological (rather than biological) foundations. However, in order to retain any sense of meaning, feminist analyses must preserve claims that *all men* and *all women* are indeed alike in some critical respect, and these pre-emptive homogenising generalisations populate Langford's study, thus stipulatively cancelling possibilities of variability.

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN: INTIMATE RELATIONS AND 'POSTMODERNITY'.

Bauman's principal objection to Giddens's (1992) '*Transformation of intimacy*' concerned the 'amoral' character of the latter's analysis, and specifically Giddens' failure to adequately account for the effects of break-up upon unwilling partners and third parties such as children. Aside from this (substantial) objection, Bauman broadly concurred with Giddens in relation to (a) the essentially malleable characteristics of contemporary sexuality, and (b) the contingency of contemporary intimate relations. However these authors diverged in terms of their theoretical terms of reference. As noted above, Giddens' 'late-modern' characterisation of contemporary societies implied some degree of continuity with the institutional arrangements of 'classical modernity'. Giddens (1985: 33) asserted that although 'late modernity' is characterised by highly novel and dynamic structural principles, clear but limited continuities exist with earlier social institutions i.e. industrialisation and capitalism. In contrast, Bauman adopted a post-modern frame of reference, and accepted a three-stage historical periodisation that emphasised epistemological rupture and therefore radical discontinuity with the social institutions and forms of modernity.[87]

Cassells (1993:11) suggested that 'power is arguably the axial concept in Giddens' entire repertoire': In Bauman, a 'postmodern' ethics of human relationships arguably fulfilled the same function, and in adopting this theoretical focus Bauman affiliated with recurrent theme in sociological analysis (e.g. see Goffman 1971a,b and c; Foucault 1986; and Finch 1989).[88]

---

[87] Bauman (1987: 3ff.) asserted a view of modernity as comprised of 'an essentially orderly totality'. In contrast, he suggested that the post-modern condition was pervaded by an unlimited number of models of order, 'each one generated by relatively autonomous set of practices' (Bauman, 1987:4-5). In later work, Bauman (1988:225) characterised post-modernity as a permanent and irreducible pluralism of cultures, communal traditions, ideologies, 'forms of life', or 'language games'.

[88] Jayyusi (1991:227) asserted that questions of value and moral judgement have pervaded the human sciences since their inception, finding particular expression within the discipline of sociology. Specifically, Jayyusi suggested that questions of value in sociology have coalesced around two central

Bauman's theoretical account of intimate relations in post-modernity was given its most explicit rendition in three essays. In '*On postmodern uses of sex.*' (Bauman, 2001:220 ff.) attempted to provide a theoretical overview of the concept of intimacy by means of an exploration of the relationship between sex, eroticism and love. '*The Moral Party of Two*', (Bauman, 1993: 82ff.) and '*Does love need reason?*' (Bauman, 2001: 163ff.) are explicitly addressed to issues of enactment of contemporary intimate relations.[89] Later these insights were anthologised (Bauman, 2003), but not really extended.

CONCEPTUALISING POST-MODERN INTIMATE RELATIONS.

In *'On the postmodern uses of sex'* Bauman (2001:220 ff.) sought to delineate the boundaries between the (separate but related) concepts of sex, eroticism, and love under conditions of post-modernity: in the course of this speculative analysis, he posited several causal claims concerning the emergence of contemporary forms of intimate relations. Bauman (2001:220) noted that discursive representations of these concepts are notoriously interchangeable and given to imprecision. Following Paz (1996), he accepted that sex is a strictly natural (as opposed to a cultural product): however, he further asserted that 'creative erotic sublimations' of the sexual impulse are (almost infinitely) culturally variable once sex is liberated from the confines of biological function. In terms of this formulation, eroticism is therefore primarily (but not exclusively) a cultural phenomenon that depends upon the imbuing of the sexual act with surplus value over and above its 'natural' function. Bauman (2001:221) therefore asserted that the cultural and biological dimensions of these concepts exist in a constant and uneasy tension with one another requiring active management, and further, that this process of management explains many of the characteristic features of contemporary intimate relations. The notion that eroticism is essentially unregulated *nowadays* forms part of the basis of Bauman's claims about post-modern intimate relations. He argued that the distinguishing feature of eroticism in post-modernity is that it does not enter into conceptual alliance with either love or sexuality, and erotic practices are now justifiable in their own terms (Bauman, 2001:223). He suggested a number of characteristic factors (variously causes / manifestations) of self-sufficient eroticism, namely:

- commodification of sex solely for furthering commercial purposes;

---

themes: (a) the relationship of values to human conduct; and, (b) the conceptualisation and role of value in sociological inquiry.

[89] Characterisation of Bauman's work as either (a) purely historicist, or (b) purely formalist in orientation would be misleading. Of the above work, *'The Moral Party of Two'*, and '*On postmodern uses of sex.*' are clearly pervaded by concerns typical of historical sociology, whilst '*Does love need reason?*' dwells largely upon issues of social form.

- the collapse of panopticism and (earlier) overt institutional regulation of sexuality; and,
- heightened awareness of the ephemeral quality of contemporary intimate social relations.

(Bauman, 2001:223-224).

Bauman insisted that the commercial uses of eroticism are hardly surprising in those societies where human need is increasingly mediated via the commodity market. In terms of the decline of traditional forms of surveillance, he suggested that in modern times, most men would be highly likely to pass through the auspices of either the factory, or the army, thus ensuring obedience to order-constituting rules; habits that were typically transferred to their womenfolk. Bauman (2001:225) asserted that the collapse of these institutions coincided with the emergence of mass leisure culture, one specific manifestation of which is the concern with bodily *fitness*. For Bauman, the concept of fitness is emblematic of the properties of many (wider) postmodern concerns. Fitness entails a constant striving for maintenance of something that is never (satisfactorily) reached. In this case, it is the body that serves as the substrate for improvement projects: however, the enactment of intimate relations might also become the subject of this never-to-be attained-striving.[90] Bauman (2001:227) suggested that constantly striving for something that is never actually attained inevitably provokes situations of chronic anxiety: a distinctively postmodern affliction that is bereft of adequate resolution. Therefore, he argued that 'postmodern' love (like sex) is overburdened with anxieties, most notably the premonition of failure. Furthermore, he suggested that a general uncertainty about the 'proper' rules of conduct between the sexes in all contexts from the workplace to the marriage bed represented a further particularisation of this anxiety

THE MORAL DYNAMICS OF POST-MODERN INTIMACY.

In *'The moral party of two'* Bauman (1993b: 82ff.) characterised the moral basis of intimate relations as 'being with and for the Other' i.e. being an autonomous empathetic being alongside another autonomous being. He characterised this subject position as an essentially postmodern feature, standing in contrast to earlier intimate social arrangements, for instance:

- pre-modern intimate arrangements derived from the spatial proximity with kin and community;

[90] Bauman suggested that this shift in focus was most clearly reflected in the conceptual apparatus of Western medicine, in which a concern with objectively measurable health (especially in terms of function or productive capacity) became transfigured into a concern with wellness; a concept resistant to closure, and concerned with a (never to be reached) potentiality.

- modern intimate arrangements rested upon more abstract and codified rules of conduct; and,
- post-modernity (for Bauman) placed moral proximity centre stage in social relations.

Bauman (1993b:84).

Bauman's (1993:83) assertion that post-modern intimate relations are essentially moral in character owed much in conception to Lévinas' (1987) philosophy. Lévinas (1987: 149) suggested that the Other is now afforded a priority which was once unquestioningly reserved for self i.e. rather than self being defined in the self-contained, centred, terms which were characteristic of enlightenment thought, contemporary sources of identity are (claimed to) derive primarily from relationships with others. It follows that the (potentially) all-consuming totality of intimate relations signifies their heightened sense of significance in defining and maintaining (contemporary) self-identity. For Bauman (1993b: 85) this arrangement also amounted to a novel ethical situation in which being with the Other implies, above all, moral proximity. He suggested that in the absence of hard-and-fast rules, contemporary intimate relations are essentially choice-relationships. However, freedom of choice comes at a price: we choose to be *responsible for the Other,* and in doing so Bauman claimed that two distinctive forms of 'oppression' might arise: firstly, open-ended commitment to the Other might demand more than one can (or is willing) to deliver (Bauman, 1993: 86). Secondly, 'acting for the others sake' (or for the perceived good of the other person) is open to contradictory, or even contrasting interpretations. One might think that (s)he is acting in the others' best interest, but the Other may not share this interpretation.[91] Bauman (1993b: 92) suggested that this tension (or *alterity* in his terms) produces a structural weakness at the heart of contemporary intimate relations, which are simultaneously (a) oriented towards some future 'perfect state', and (b) underpinned by the urge for absolute possession in the present.[92] He therefore argued that the predominant dialectic of intimate relations is thus that of love and domination, and it is this central fault line that is exacerbated in intimacy troubles.

In *'Does love need reason'* (2001:163ff.), Bauman both confirmed and elaborated upon his claims about the essentially moral basis of intimate relations. He suggested that (at least on surface appearances) the rationalities of (moral) intimacy, and reason, seem incommensurable. However, in rhetorical response to the question 'does love need reason',

[91] Bauman (1993:97) suggested that this dilemma is discursively reflected in the uses of the term 'care': care of the other, whilst exuding humaneness, is also tainted by undertones of patronage and condescension. Bauman (1993:89) characterised this tension as the 'genuine aporia of moral proximity'.

[92] Bauman (1993:91) (Following Lévinas, *op cit.*) employed the metaphor of *the caress* in order to capture simultaneous closeness and separateness i.e. the caress violates the body space of the other, whilst at the same time doing so in a measured way i.e. not oriented towards harm.

Bauman (2001:172) answered in the affirmative suggesting that in spite of the ineffability of the concepts, intimate relations need reason in an instrumental sense. If intimate relations are (as Bauman claimed) unavoidably ambiguous, individuals are almost constantly required to ponder alternative courses of action, count risks and chances, and anticipate the outcomes of their actions. However, for Bauman, this does not mean that reason cancels moral concerns: rather, moral dilemmas, when they inevitably occur, are acted out and represented in terms of rational discourse.

Bauman's suggestion of an ambiguous but persistent tension between (ontological) 'is' and (ethical) 'ought' in intimate relations has been reflected in a number of recent empirical studies. For instance, Finch (1989:144), following her qualitative study of family obligations, asserted that regularities of conduct ('is') in no way implied that an underlying moral imperative ('ought') was at work. Similarly, Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2000:786-787) following a study of accounts of contemporary parenting, noted the volume and intensity of (rational) interactional work undertaken by their respondents in order to position themselves as (ethical) morally creditable subjects.[93] For these authors, (reasoned) claims to a 'morally creditable' identity entailed a number of discursive strategies, such as:

- discourses of evaluation;
- discourses of relative comparisons against others, or even against one's past 'self';
- discourses of (limited) confessional self-disclosure;
- the use of rationalised and selectively represented versions of grand moral narratives; and,
- 'reasoned' appeals to dominant cultural assumptions about what constitutes moral behaviour in intimate relationships.

THE CHARACTER OF POST-MODERN INTIMACY TROUBLES.

Bauman offered an explicit formulation of intimacy troubles, which he suggested are an unavoidable concomitant feature of intimate relations in general. As reported above, he asserted that intimate relations, are 'restless' by virtue of their inherent ambiguity - constantly seeking to transcend what has been achieved. Thus, it follows that intimate relations, if they are to be sustained, require constant new sources of energy: 'capital is eaten up fast if not daily replenished. Love is, therefore, insecurity incarnate' (Bauman, 1993:98). Given the

[93] Ribbens McCarthy *et al.* (2000: 792) coined the term 'moral bypass' in order to signify a range of discursive strategies employed by respondents when accounting for their own conduct in morally problematic circumstances. Most of these strategies appeared to be aimed at underpinning actions with legitimate 'reasons' including: claiming to be unknowing or inexperienced, claiming contrasting moral imperatives were at work, claiming ongoing 'struggles' with damaging life circumstances, or simply claiming that (a previously intimate) other had forfeited the right to normative moral considerations.

(claimed) pervasiveness of this insecurity, Bauman suggested that two palliative 'solutions' are possible in order to mediate the inherent structural weaknesses in intimate relations: fixation, and flotation. For Bauman (1993b: 103), what both strategies illustrate is an essential asymmetry of intimate relations in which 'equality represents mere rhetoric: the ideology of the stronger partner combined with the self-deception of the weaker.' He suggested that fixation is the 'solution' to insecurity favoured by the weaker partner and involves an effort to emancipate intimate relations from uncertainty by recourse to perfunctory routine. In contrast, he claimed that flotation is favoured by the strong and involves 'cutting ones losses' and seeking to establish subsequent intimacy with another person: in this strategy, insecurity is escaped rather than directly addressed.

Fixation involves the substitution of the unreliable sentiments of contemporary intimate relations with rules and routines, and entails the incorporation of a 'for better-for worse' philosophy that relegates intimate ambitions beyond the relationship as attendant imperfections of love itself. However, this strategy amplifies both the desire to control, and the will to possession: to use Bauman's analogy, an 'iron grip' in contrast to the 'light touch' of the caress. For Bauman (1993b: 103), the essential asymmetry of intimate relations means that one party inevitably has more to lose than the other, and he claimed that fixation offers some protection to the relatively weaker party. However, what (qualitatively) remains of intimacy in such relations is questionable: 'the gentle touch of love becomes an iron grip of power. Nothing but the vocabulary (or, more exactly, the rhetoric) of love and care has survived the transformation' (Bauman, 1993:101). Thus the removal of ambivalence / alterity signifies the end of intimacy. Ironically Bauman (1993b: 98) noted a close parallel between this strategy and the palliative solutions offered by much of professional marriage-guidance counselling: both remedy troubled intimacy by means of the reduction of relationships to rule-bound entities.

In contrast, flotation is the strategy favoured mostly by the strong: mollifying the tensions of intimate relations by forcing an exit before stakes are too high to leave (or perhaps, with disregard for the other, after the stakes are too high). Intimate relations are imbued with the tension between joy and sacrifice, and flotation preserves the promise of future happiness (apparently) without paying the heavy prices of the latter. However, this formulation only holds true for the individual who leaves and the consequences of flotation are potentially brutal for those (perhaps unwillingly) left behind. Bauman (1993b: 103) noted that what Giddens (1992) describes as 'pure relationships' are largely those in which flotation is an ever-present possibility, and this is precisely the basis of his criticism of Giddens 'amoral'

formulation.[94] It is only when responsibility is disposed of that flotation becomes possible. As noted above, *being with and for the Other* implies responsibility for both ones own actions, and the impact of those actions upon others: In other words, intimate relations are consequential, and intimacy presumes an acceptance of consequences for the other parties involved – spouses or children. Rather than displaying the characteristics of open-ended orientation to the Other, Giddens' pure relationships are episodic - to be lived through. However, for Bauman (1993b:106), such episodic arrangements are perhaps antithetical to intimate relations in assuming that whatever actions the intimate parties perform in the present have no bearing upon binding the future. He suggested that:

> 'Being episodic' means, in other words, being of no consequence (that is a consequence lasting longer than 'the drawing of satisfaction') [....] floated love leaves in its wake a thick precipitate of misery.'

In summary, intimacy troubles merely serve to amplify the unavoidably moral basis of intimate relations. The 'solutions' to the moral dilemma of intimacy suggested by Bauman both have attendant dissatisfactions: the ambivalence of fixation consists of the simultaneous presence of security and dependence. In contrast, the ambivalence of flotation promises freedom, but never completely buries insecurity (Bauman 1993:106). Both of these contradictions present distinctive moral dilemmas in the day-to-day conduct of intimate relations. Notwithstanding, Bauman (2001:172) asserted that there is one (critical) respect in which intimacy troubles depend upon rational (as opposed to moral) grounds: in giving an account of troubled intimacy, individual protagonists, either explicitly or implicitly, must unavoidably claim to speak in the name of reason. This is reflected in the discursive lexicon in justifying actions: 'stands to reason' or (s)he is an 'unreasonable person'. He suggested that reasoned discourse offers a mode of retreat or shelter from moral responsibility; 'an escape from a moral predicament, not the chance to cope and deal with its genuine dilemmas' (Bauman, 2001:174).

BAUMAN'S POST-MODERN STIPULATIONS.

To all intents and purposes vernacular voices have been pre-emptorily excluded from Bauman's (entirely speculative) repertoire: rather, he deployed a mode of reasoning which rhetorically positioned specific events as the (analytically central) departure point from which to make qualified claims about causation. To this extent, Bauman's essays demonstrate

[94] Bauman (1993: 105) asserted that; 'Giddens' pure relationship is pure not just in the fact of being emancipated (in the self awareness of the partners, even if not objectively) from the social functions which intimate relations were once meant to serve, but also, and I would say primarily, for the fact of neutralising moral impulses as well as eliminating moral considerations from the partners definitions and accounts of their intimacy. 'Pure relationship', I would suggest, is the intimacy of persons who suspend their identity of moral subjects for the duration. Pure relationship is a de-ethicized intimacy'.

several features that are the stock in trade of historical sociologists more generally. In delineating specific 'events' (i.e. the demise of panopticism and other modes of institutional regulation), Bauman abstracted only certain aspects from an undoubtedly complex and dynamic historical reality. In this case, as ever, event selection is dependent upon an act of theoretical imagination that endorses particular happenings as significant markers of transition, and concomitantly excludes others. In common with others who claim post-modern credentials, Bauman alleged the decline of the predominant institutions of modernity: once this decline is rhetorically established, further (speculative) causal claims follow concerning social change in general, and in this particular case, changes in the basis of intimate relations.

Bauman's 'postmodern' periodisation therefore heavily depends upon *a priori* acceptance that these changes, have in fact, occurred, and that they are of true significance in determining the basis of intimate relations. The basis of these claims have been subject to challenge (albeit from alternatively stipulative positions). Kellner (1988:76-80) suggested that ambivalence and pluralism (emblematic of post-modernity in Bauman's formulation) also featured as significantly understated aspects of modernity. In Bauman's conception of modernity, men and women are represented as almost completely determined by institutionalised imperatives, and he thus denied 'theoretical house room' to the possibility that our forbears also might have faced (undoubtedly different) dilemmas of stake. Furthermore, Kellner accused Bauman of theoretical circularity e.g. of assuming that the post-modern paradigm was already at work (and established in its dominance), and then working back through time on the basis of this assumption.

Turning to Bauman's specific claims about intimacy, there seems to be no apparent reason (other than the logic of his theoretical argument) to peremptorily prioritise the moral dimensions of (inherently complex and manifold) intimate relations. Jayyusi (1991:235) suggested that abstraction of specifically moral concerns is impossible given that 'the normative, logical, and practical is always [....] laminated in actual real worldly contexts of action and discourse.' Furthermore, Bauman never fully articulates the ethical basis of actions beyond *being for and with the other.* In this respect, he neatly sidestepped questions of wider cultural imperatives and local settings in determining whether or not conduct might be (variously) adjudged as *moral*, *immoral*, or *amoral.* As is unavoidably the case with all theoretical analyses of moral phenomena, it is impossible to avoid positing normative claims e.g. the 'description' of a particular phenomenon becomes more than its mere analysis, implying *what ought to be* rather than simply *what is*. In Bauman's case, the strategy of flotation is particularly represented in (variously) amoral or immoral terms. Yet it is conceivable that departing an established relationship unavoidably entails moral choices that might conceivably be adjudged as *the-moral-course-of-action* in particular local settings.

Leaving aside the question of whether (or not) intimate relations ought to be conceived of in exclusively moral terms, Bauman's stipulative moral apparatus can be seen as suppressing vernacular concerns in several distinctive respects, namely by means of:

- a dependence upon an implied (but never fully articulated) pre-specification of (more or less) universal moral criteria;
- a (stipulative) theoretical economy that imposes a relatively restrictive parameters upon what might (or might not) be considered in moral terms; and,
- a theoretical invariance stemming from *a priori* cancellation of what may (or may not) be considered as morally accountable issues in particular localised settings.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONS & INTIMACY TROUBLES: EMERGENT THEMES AND ISSUES.

The preceding review has provided an overview and consideration of some of the main ways in which professional sociologists and philosophers have sought to analyse intimate relations / troubles. Each of the theorists reviewed made a number of specific claims. Some were explicit about the nature and origin of intimacy troubles; however, the majority addressed these issues only by implication. Certain topical and thematic similarities have emerged across theoretical 'genres'. However, this is not to overestimate sociological consensus about intimate relations / troubles, and on the whole professional commentaries about these matters continue to occupy a contested discursive space.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONS: EMERGENT THEMES AND ISSUES.

In spite of specific technical or theoretical points of disagreement, the studies presented above coalesce around a number of central themes, which I wish to characterise as:

- foundational matters;
- the contextual basis of intimate relations; and,
- intimate relations as social process.

FOUNDATIONAL MATTERS.

The work described above exposed a range of metaphysical disputes about the basis of intimate relations. One prominent fault line concerns whether intimate relations can be primarily understood as possessing some or other distinctive 'essential' basis, or, rather, whether these arrangements can be understood in more generic terms i.e. as a particularisation of more general issues of sociation. Foundational claims made about intimate relations can be summarised thus:

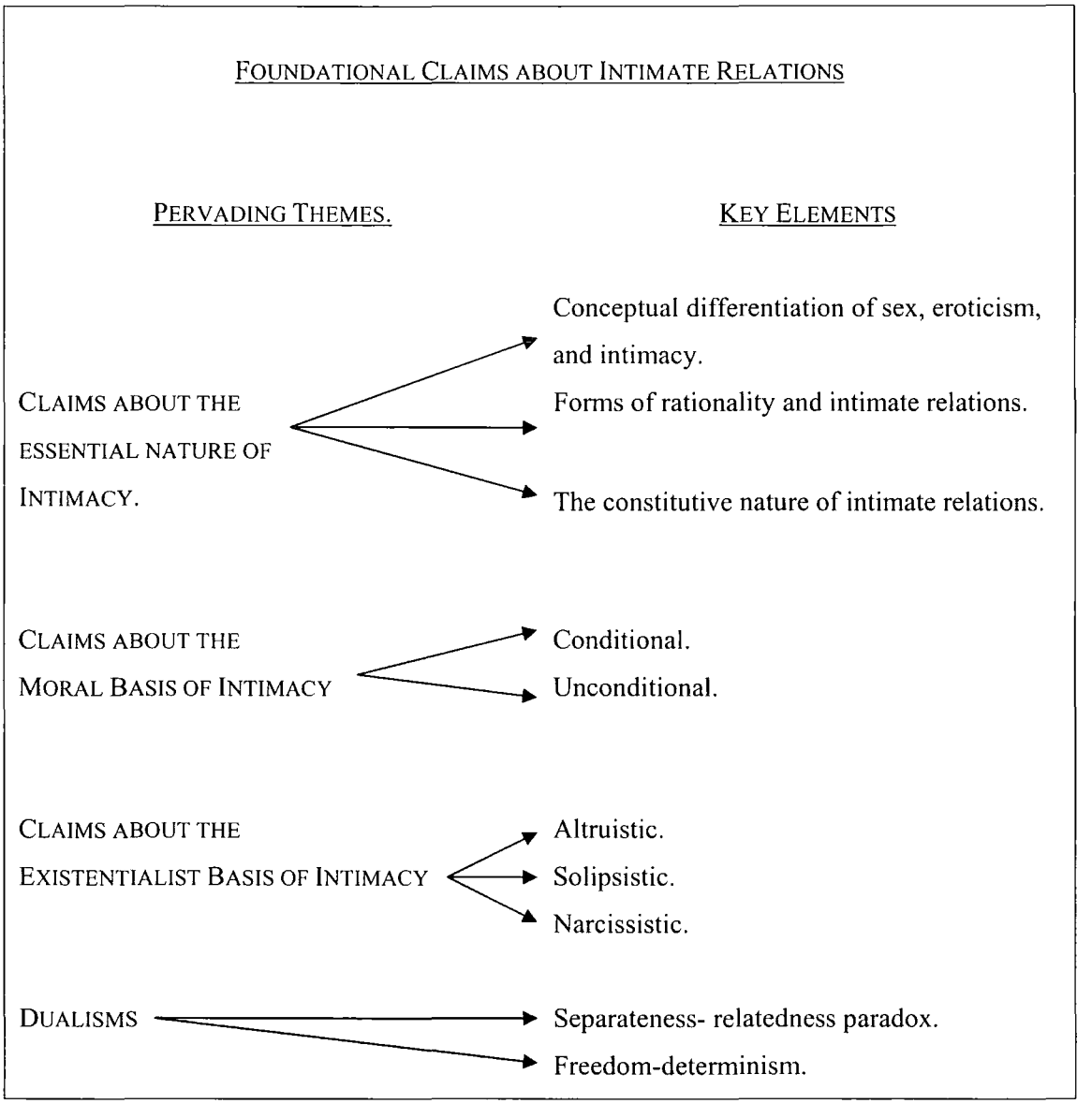

Figure 6: *Foundational claims about intimate relations.*

Various conceptualisations of sex and/or gender featured prominently in professional accounts of intimate relations, such as:

- theoretical speculation about the relationship between (biological) sex, and (cultural) intimate relations; and,
- contested assertions about the gendered (or gender-blind) nature of intimacy.

A general consensus existed in relation to the claim that sex, intimate relations, and eroticism were distinct (but related) concepts. Furthermore, sociological commentaries generally concurred that whilst sex is reducible to a biological substrate, intimate relations (and by

implication, intimacy troubles) are ineradicably social matters (Weber, 1948; Paz, 1996; Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2001b).

Several authors introduced essentialist claims, specifically in relation to the issue of gender. Instances of such claims included:

- that women were given to more direct and spontaneous emotional and subjective exchanges, and men, conversely disposed to a more 'objective and detached' transactions (Simmel [1911], 1984); and,
- that women (*en masse*) are more inclined to relate to others in emotional terms, whilst men (similarly invariably) intimately engaged on a more utilitarian basis (Langford,1999).

All professional commentaries allude to the issue of gender in some respect, but perhaps Davis (1973b) was unique in treating this matter as inconsequential in terms of the conduct of intimate relations.

Several theorists attempted to articulate the underlying rationalities of intimate relations. Weber (1948:346-347) suggested that intimate relations could only be understood in terms of a distinctive rationality of the 'erotic domain'. For his part, Simmel (1984 [1923b]) argued that intimate relations involve a means-ends inversion: instead of love merely serving the purposes of life (via procreation), he suggested that life served the purposes of intimacy i.e. in terms of the overwhelming personal investment required to sustain these arrangements. Further claims included:

- that the erotic sphere and sexual love represent the *greatest irrational force of life*, antithetical to the disenchanting effects of formal rationalisation and standing in profound (and irresolvable) tension with other value spheres (Weber,1948:343);
- that intimate relations could be generally understood as depending upon market transactions e.g. exchange in which equivalent return is expected upon social 'investment' (Blau,1964);
- the closely related claim that women (*en masse*) are systematically 'short-changed' in the intimate economy (Langford, 1999:13-14);
- that intimacy is thus a wholly (aesthetic) subjective state that can only be experienced rather than known in any primary empirical sense (Simmel, [1923b] 1984: 186); and,
- that intimate relations are inter-subjective (rather than individually subjective) phenomena (Berger and Kellner, 1964; Vaughan, 1990).

The issue of *creativity* evident in the latter claims also pervaded professional accounts more generally. Such claims varied on the basis of whether intimate relations were framed as (a) *providing the context* for creativity in social life or, (b) as consequential i.e. as *creating their own context.*

Typical of the former claim, Giddens (1992: 27) emphasised the essentially negotiable and contingent nature of contemporary intimate relations therefore implying that these arrangements, not so much require, but *demand* a level of creativity. On the other hand, both Simmel [1923b] (1984:164), and Singer (1984a: 5) viewed intimate relations as essentially *context-creating* phenomena. They (separately) suggested that love for another person is more unconditionally linked with it's object than in any other human relationship. Intimate relations could therefore be described in transformative terms insofar as acts of intimacy imaginatively bestow value upon another person. Further, in this formulation intimate relations are cast as *doubly transformative* i.e. the process of loving another not only creates its own object but also fundamentally transforms oneself.

Several professional accounts emphasised the moral basis of intimate relations. These claims were further differentiated on the basis of whether 'moral regard' for the other is accorded upon conditional grounds (*see* Aristotle, 1975: 230), or unconditional grounds (*see* Bauman, 2001:164-166).

All professional commentaries unavoidably posited claims about selfhood. Usually such claims were made in terms of the changing relationship between self and other in the context of intimate relations. Specifically, various claims about self / identity in the intimate context included:

- that intimate relations demand an altruistic suspension of the ego in favour of both the other, and the relationship itself (Simmel, [1908] 1950: 128);
- that intimate relations entail a solipsistic commitment to *the image of the other* (Barthes, 1990);
- that intimate relations are conducted upon the basis of self-delusion (Langford, 1999); or,
- that intimate relations demand a level of *narcissistic* self-regard (Aristotle, 1975).

Derrida (1981) suggested that the tendency towards dualistic speculation represents (Western) philosophy's most spontaneous gesture, and professional accounts of intimate relations are exemplary in this respect. For instance, the following dualisms feature prominently in some professional commentaries:

- freedom-determinism (Simmel [1923b]1984);
- egoism-altuism (Simmel [1923b]1984); and,
- love and domination (Weber, 1948; Bauman,1993b).

THE CONTEXTUAL BASIS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS.

Both historical and formal sociologists posited claims about the extent to which intimate relations are determined (or at least influenced) by social contexts. The overwhelming theoretical tendency of historical sociologists was to implicate macro-sociological contexts e.g. social structures, central value systems, and mass-mediated cultural resources. Formal sociologists characteristically placed greater emphasis upon *interaction order*. These themes can be summarised thus:

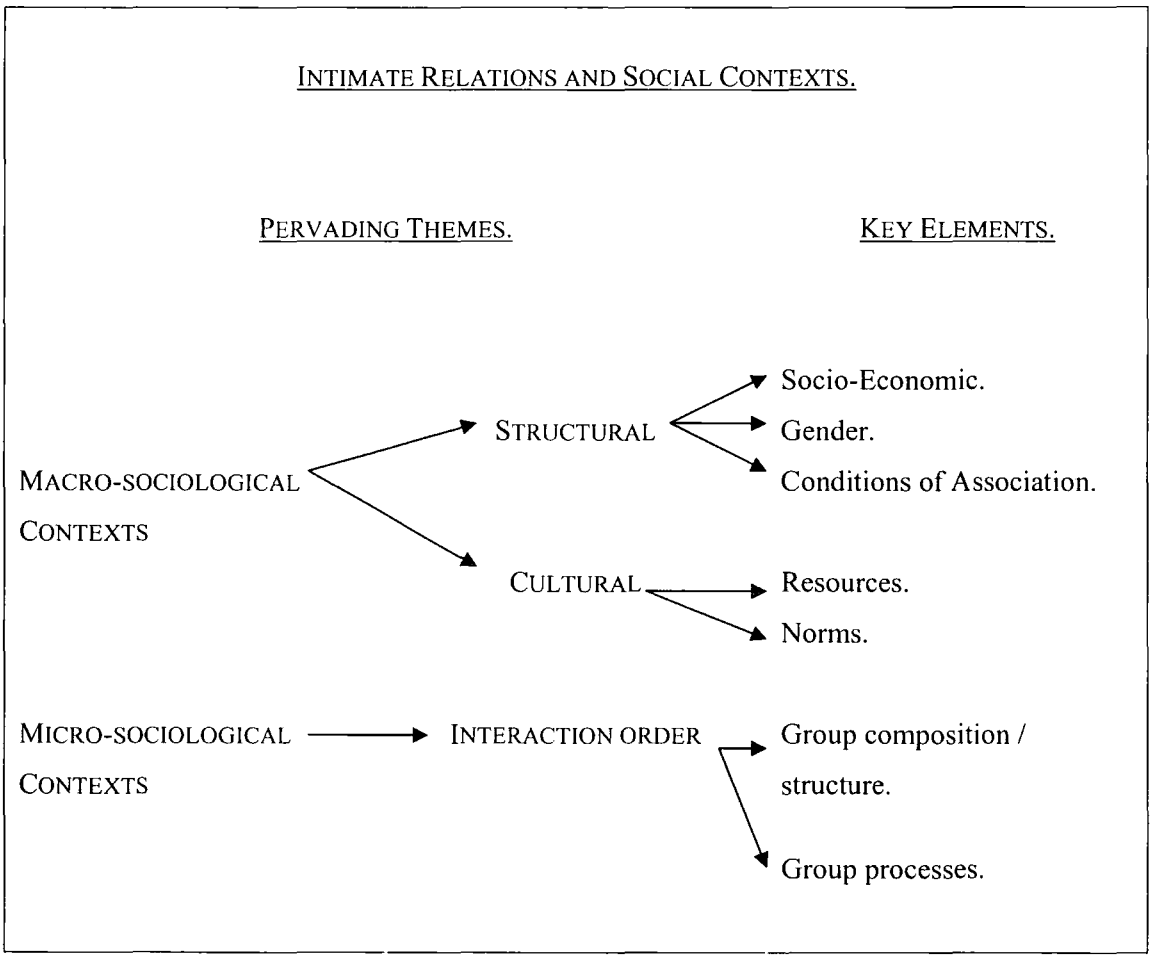

Figure 7: *Intimate Relations and Social Contexts.*

The leitmotif of historical sociologies of intimate relations was to assert causal relationships between various social structural factors, and intimate social forms. Several commentaries

made causal claims in relation to egalitarian changes in the basis of gender relations (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Others such as Langford (1999), whilst retaining an analytical focus upon gender, vehemently rejected any notion of egalitarian social change.

Allan (2001: 330) asserted that the enduring sociological apparatus of the *public- private* dualism arose from attempts to understand changes in conditions of association that accompanied urbanisation and industrialisation. Typically, those professional accounts that assumed a periodising frame of reference (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Bauman, 1993b) maintained the view that changing rules of association have a determining effect on the situated enactment of intimate relations.

Claims that generalised cultural contexts circumscribe particular forms of intimate relations have typically assumed two distinctive forms:

- that generalised *cultural norms* (or even central values) serve to constrain or otherwise delineate intimate social practices; and / or,
- that particular contexts provide a range of *cultural resources* to be appropriated in service of intimate relations.

Several authors asserted a causally deterministic relationship between generalised cultural norms and both the form and enactment of intimate relations (Elias,1994; Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2001). Others emphasised cultural contexts of intimate relations in terms of predominant (usually mass-mediated) cultural artefacts. Singer (1984b: 19-22) suggested that the underlying narrative of *courtly love* (which he viewed as a historical [re] construction) was that cultural resources (in terms of poetry and song) subsequently influenced the enactment of situated intimate relations. This mode of reasoning persists in a number of professional commentaries (*see* Luhmann, 1986; Christian-Smith, 1990). Others, such as Barthes (1990), claimed a more complex and variable relationship between life and art.

In contrast, some professional commentaries focussed predominantly upon the microstructures of interaction order. For instance, Simmel [1908] (1950: 127) asserted that closeness arose from the *structure* (as opposed to the *content*) of intimate relations, and Davis (1973b) claimed formal communicative regularities within the enactment of intimate relations.

INTIMATE RELATIONS AS SOCIAL PROCESS.

A variety of (otherwise divergent) professional commentaries claimed that intimate relations are most convincingly portrayed in terms of social process. Historical sociologists characteristically tended towards emphasising (usually modified) versions of reciprocity / exchange. For their part, formal sociologists typically emphasised the self-presentational / performative (and hence, communicative) processes. Other sociological accounts implicated (or modified) psychological processes e.g. cognitive (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), 'emotional' (Dunscombe and Marsden, 1993; Mansfield and Collard, 1988), or Freudian psychodynamic (Langford, 1999). All of these claims converge insofar as they suggest that intimate relations require action i.e. that their enactment requires continuous investment or 'work'. Claims about social process can be summarised thus:

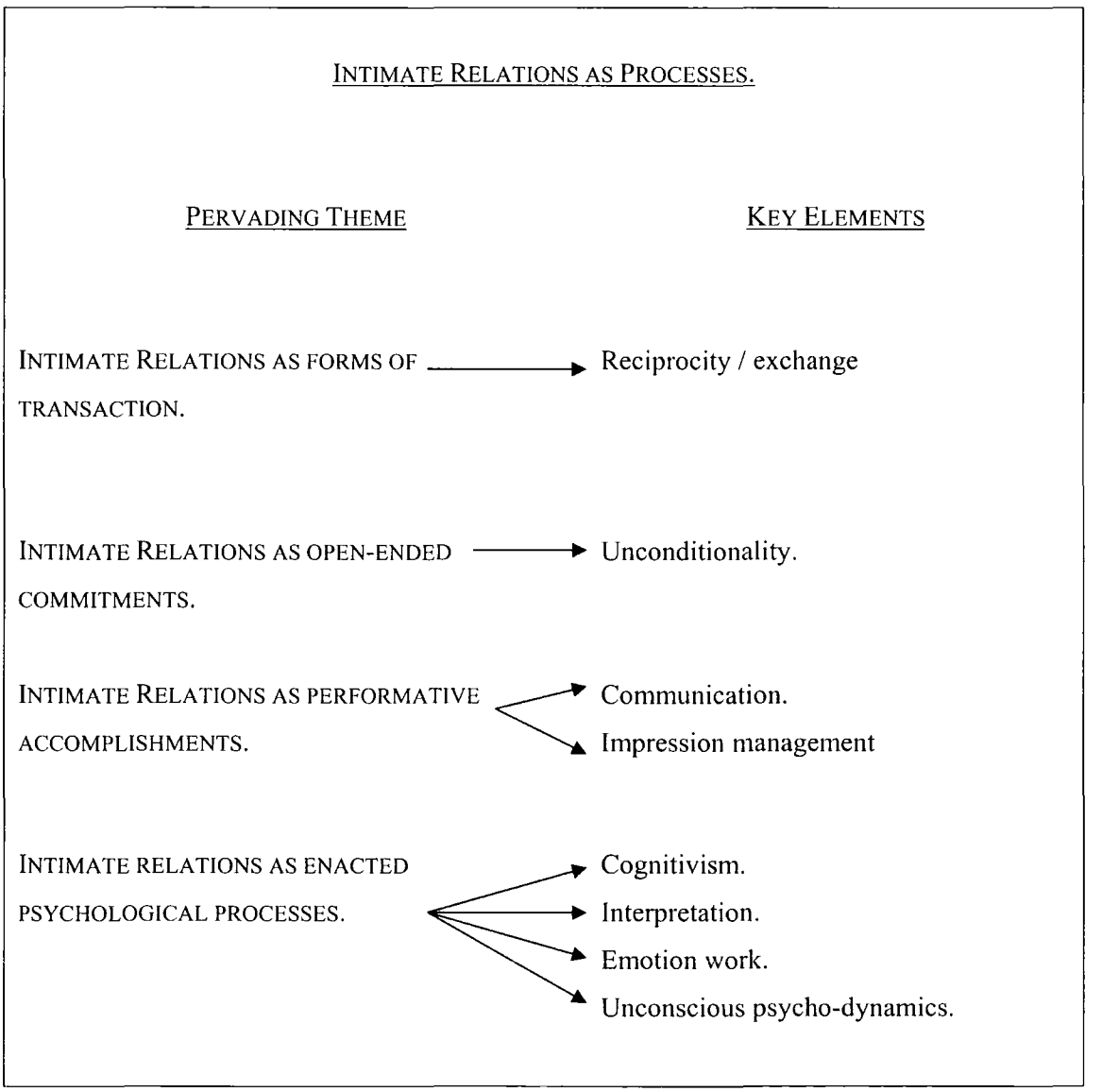

Figure 8: *Intimate relations as processes.*

INTIMACY TROUBLES: THEMES AND ISSUES.

In seeking to explicate the social basis of intimate relations, the analyses described above have unavoidably advanced claims about intimacy troubles (either directly, or by implication). As reported above, Davis (1973b) offered a typology of declining intimacy based upon temporal considerations: he suggested that intimate relationships either (a) chronically 'passed away', or (b) terminated in an acute 'sudden death', and for the purposes of summary it will be useful to retain Davis's temporal distinction. 'Passing away' suggests a series of insults to the basis of particular intimate relationships over an extended period of time. As the metaphor suggests, these developments might cumulatively herald the eventual demise of the relationship. However, this outcome is not invariable, and as Davis himself suggested, 'remedial interventions' might re-establish intimate relations to the satisfaction of the protagonists. Similarly, 'sudden death' implies that catastrophic events, once discovered, irreparably and fatally damage the basis of intimate relations. Most frequently, these claims arise in relation to the (claimed) discovery by one partner, of the other's (previously 'unknown') infidelity. In addition to this distinction, four broad themes encapsulate claims about the social basis of intimacy troubles, namely:

- inherent structural weakness;
- shifting social contexts;
- failure or mismanagement of resources; and,
- breach or termination of contract.

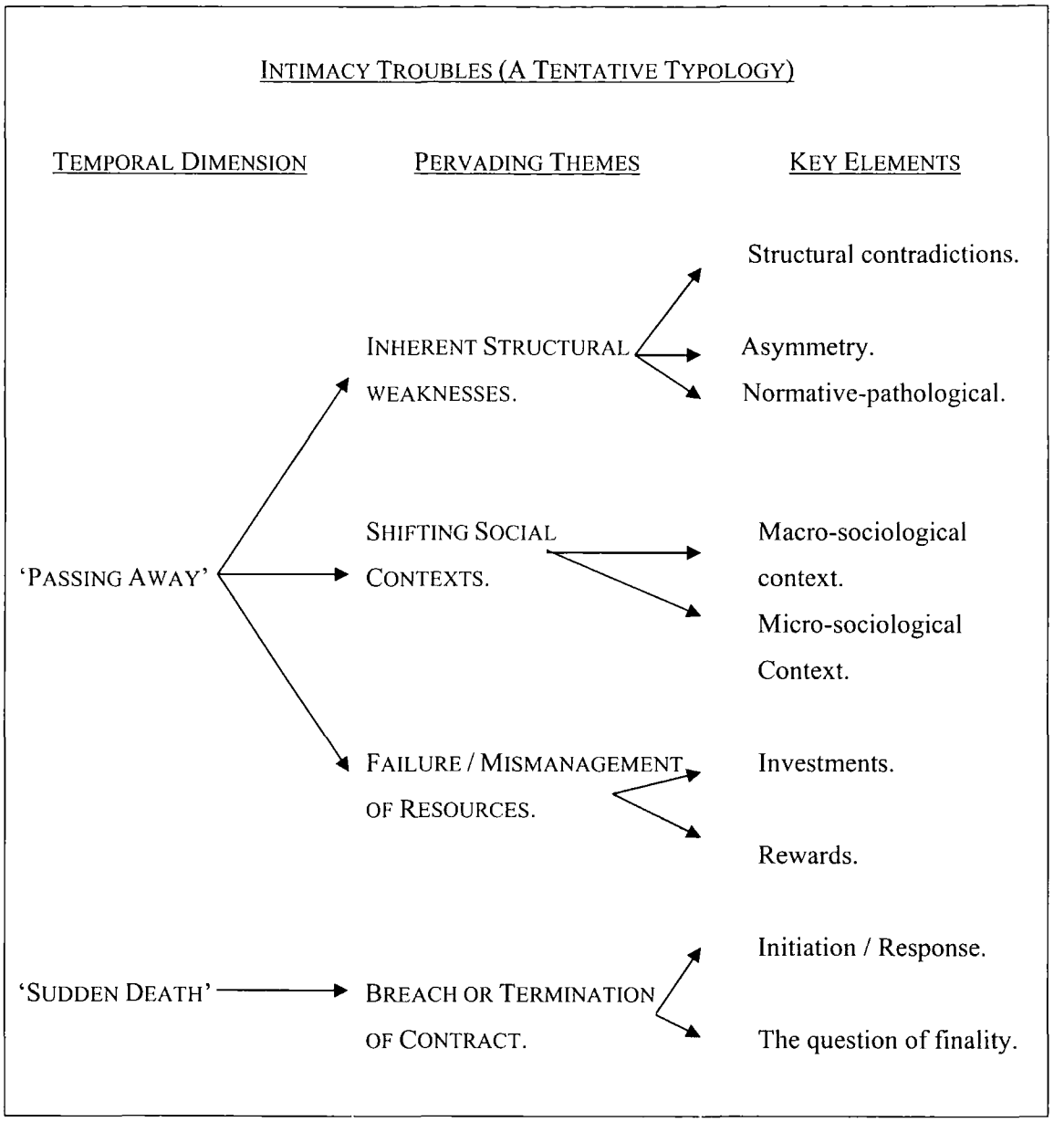

Figure 9: *Intimacy troubles: a tentative typology.*

INHERENT STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES.

Several professional commentaries located the ultimate source of intimacy troubles with 'unavoidable weaknesses' at the heart of all intimate relations (Simmel, [1908] 1950; Weber, 1948; Davis, 1973b). Some suggested that these fault lines arise as a consequence of asymmetrical power relationships (Vaughan, 1990; Bauman, 2001): others claimed that these differences crystallise around the issue of gender (Weber, 1948; Langford, 1999). The common element of all of these claims is that intimacy troubles are portrayed as arising from *the structure of intimate relations in themselves*, and not because of either (a) the content of the relationship, or (b) the individual characteristics of the protagonists.

The tendency to theorise intimacy in dualistic terms was noted above, and as a 'rule of thumb', those who have considered intimate relations in this way have also tended to locate intimacy troubles as a consequence of those (irresolvable) tensions (Simmel, [1908] 1950; Davis, 1973b; Bauman, 1993b). In contrast, others claimed that structural contradictions only surface in the context of intimacy troubles (*see* Vaughan, 1990). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 82) suggested that the metric of contemporary intimate relations ensured that protagonists are constantly assailed by ambiguous and contradictory choices: in such social milieu, conflict about the correct course of (joint) action seems assured.

Morgan (1985: 28) noted the tendency towards the medicalisation of intimate relations. As in Western medicine more generally, medical understandings of intimacy rest upon a series of normal-pathological distinctions. The therapeutic models spawned by such a view claim that issues such as 'family dynamics' can be differentiated into healthy or pathological modes. Several professional commentaries have retained modified versions of this device (see Giddens, 1992: 87*ff.*)

Shifting Social Contexts.

Psychological and therapeutic accounts of intimacy troubles have overwhelmingly asserted that conflict should be properly understood as arising from either the individual characteristics of the protagonists, or at very least, from events and processes within particular relationships. Like those who claim that intimate relations are percolated by irresolvable underlying tensions, sociologists who assert *shifting social contexts* models suggest that intimacy troubles originate at a level beyond either individual protagonists, or particular intimate relationships. Adherents of this view have variously implicated transitions in macro-sociological, or micro-sociological contexts. Those authors implicating the potentially negative effects of (macro) social change include Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992), and Bauman (2001). In contrast, feminist analyses of intimacy troubles are characteristically predicated upon synchronicity: whatever novel terms are used to represent women's exploitation, these merely reflect an age-old, constant, and contradictory asymmetry at the heart of intimate relations.[95]

Whilst the preceding claims implicated macro-sociological changes, other authors accentuated the role of troubles-precipitants in the immediate social environment. Typical of such claims were e.g. that the addition of a third party (Simmel, [1908] 1950: 135), or the

[95] The qualification ought to be added that these claims only apply to women. Once this theoretical point is accepted, it might be conjectured that the only possible basis for intimacy troubles as reported by men is that their 'partners' fail to meet, or otherwise disrupt, prior (male) expectations.

emergence of hitherto unknown biographical detail (Berger and Kellner, 1964; Davis, 1973b) could profoundly disrupt the intimate basis of a relationship.

Failure or Mismanagement of Resources.

The idea that intimate relations entail *work* arises (in one form or another) in most professional accounts of the topic. It is therefore unsurprising that many authors also identified failure (or at least mismanagement) of resources (however these might be defined) as the primary 'cause' of intimacy troubles. For instance:

- Bauman (1993b: 98) asserted that intimate relations require constant new sources of 'energy';
- Simmel [1908] (1950: 325) and Davis (1973b: 4) implicated secrecy / trust as the most significant resource;
- Davis (1973b: 222) emphasised the issue of common 'ground' (shared interests), and shared time;
- Giddens (1992:62) suggested a 'stock of erotic knowledge' as an (increasingly) important intimate resource; and,
- Langford (1999) claimed two necessary intimate resources - emotional work and 'tangible practical benefits'.

Other professional analyses suggest that 'resources' may be plentiful, but at the same time, misappropriated. These claims (particularly) pervade those analyses that prioritise the essentially communicative basis of intimate relations (e.g. see Davis, 1973b; Vaughan, 1990).

Breach or Termination of Contract.

Several professional commentaries highlighted the possibility of catastrophic events 'causing' sudden and irretrievable break-up: the most frequently suggested precipitant is presumed transgression of some fundamental article of trust. Accounts differ as to the origin and terms of the intimate 'contract' between the protagonists: whilst some have represented this as a private matter to be agreed and negotiated between the individual parties (*see* Giddens, 1992), others have claimed that varying degrees of 'public morality' operate in order to sustain intimate relations (*see* Vaughan, 1990).

A further area of theoretical dispute concerns the finality (or otherwise) of break-ups: some accounts suggest that break-up / divorce heralds the effective termination of mutual involvement; others prefer to speak of post-intimate relationships i.e. ongoing and insoluble

connections between (ex) intimates. Giddens (1992) suggested that the *'pure relationship'* presumes that once terminated, intimate relations are brought to an absolute and immediate end. For Vaughan (1990) this issue was a matter of personal meaning i.e. to be settled in the minds of the individual protagonists. In contrast, Simpson (1998: 50) asserted that divorce and separation seldom signify the termination of the relationship, and that post-intimate relations provided fertile ground for ongoing conflict that afflicts not only the immediate parties concerned but also their wider kin and social networks

STIPULATIVE ACCOUNTS OF INTIMATE RELATIONS/TROUBLES: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT AND THEORETICAL PROPOSAL.

The professional sociological accounts reviewed here have (collectively) served to highlight the fundamental social qualities of intimate relations, as well as their (perhaps central) social significance. For instance, it has been asserted (in various theoretical guises) that:

- intimate relations provide perhaps the most important *nomos-building* capacity in collective social life; and,
- intimate relations serve as a centrally important (if not the most important) source of self affirmation.

Historical sociologies have typically sought to isolate the causal conditions that have generated particular intimate social forms, whilst formal sociologies have posited claims about the essential and enduring properties of intimacy. All of the theoretical / empirical projects examined above have therefore proceeded from the basis of bold agendæ i.e. no less than explicating 'the truth' about intimate relations/troubles, and in most cases these projects can be viewed as having failed, at least by their own postulates of adequacy.

Rather than offering alternative stipulations under the guise of 'theoretical/methodological criticisms', I have sought to draw attention to the *stipulative tendencies* inherent in professional accounts of intimate relations/troubles. In general, vernacular concerns have been largely unexamined except for the (accidental) extent to which these matters:

- have coincided with reported empirical observations;
- were reflected in the variety of cultural montages chosen as representative of intimate relations/troubles;
- were filtered through various theoretical and technical pre-commitments; or,
- were spuriously documented in a range of historical 'source' materials.

Much of this presumed coincidence is of course, unknown. Authors have (in various combination) (a) studiously avoided representations of the vernacular voice, or (b) exercised considerable editorial control in reporting the details of what has been said, or (c) heavily mediated vernacular concerns through the stipulative lenses and prisms of professional sociology. These stipulative distortions have not, however, been randomly applied, and Lynch (1993) usefully summarised the stipulative stock-in-trade of professional sociologists as follows:

- attentiveness to 'larger' social and historical forces that give rise to and maintain systems of economic production, labour markets, bureaucratic organisations, religious and political ideologies, and social classes (Lynch, 1993: xii), *in extremis* positing a scenic overview of society (in total) (Lynch, 1993: 30);
- commitment to the view that society is a 'big thing' that contains actions and events we witness in everyday life (Lynch, 1993: 30);
- de-politicisation of vernacular concepts in order to treat these things as variables in explanatory models (Lynch, 1993: xiv);
- peremptory 'solving' of questions by a combination of *a priori* programmatic claims about 'truth' and intelligibility and/or an accumulation of empirical findings, which are then employed to 'call an end to metatheoretical debate' (Lynch, 1993: xx);[96]
- assumption of a virtual scientific standpoint in order to assess the rationality of any practice (Lynch, 1993: 9), and similarly, an assumptive acceptance of the efficacy and universality of formal scientific methods as a primary basis for legitimising sociological enquiry (Lynch, 1993: 17);
- adoption of forms of methodological jargon as a means of preventing outsiders criticising programmatic commitments (Lynch, 1993: 28);
- assertion of *a priori* configurations of status and power (Lynch, 1993: 31), thus reducing the field of study to a 'docile projection of theoretical will' (Lynch, 1993: 35);
- assumption of an abstracted and unproblematic relationship between the investigator/theorist and the field described (Lynch, 1993: 37); and,
- assumption of homogenous, consensual, stable, and objective realities (Lynch, 1993: 38).

[96] Jayyusi (1991:232) has suggested that data presented in support of these claims is often underpinned by an implicit 'truth value' assignation – the assumption that what is reported as having been said actually reflects or represents the world outside *as it is*. Such an approach would overlook the practical conduct of ordinary persons, and the actual ways and contexts in which they conduct their mundane actions.

For Garfinkel (1991:13) the stipulative social-theoretical enterprise of sociology usually eventuates in:

> 'the construction of a formal scheme of types, giving their formal definitions an interpreted significance with which to explain the orderly property of types as ideals, and then assigning the properties of the ideals to observable actions as their described properties of social order'.

Garfinkel (1991:12).

This is not to say that such stipulative sociologies of intimate relations/troubles are without merit – but their chief accomplishment has been to establish the discursive relevance of sociological claims about intimate relations within academia.[97] For instance, Jamieson (1999:477) recently suggested that 'the sociology of intimacy' is now a recognisable sociological specialism: possibly this declaration represents the realisation of Davis's (1973b: xiv) stated aspiration to effect a shift in analytical focus 'away from the psychological concept of *love* and towards the sociological concept of *intimate relations*'. However, it is arguable that this (substantial) success i.e. establishing that professional sociologists have something relevant and/or interesting to say about intimate relations/troubles, simply amounts to the supplantation of one set of (psychological) stipulations with another (sociological) set. On closer inspection, establishing the (legitimate) status of sociological accounts of intimate relations/troubles appears a less radical accomplishment than it might seem at first blush. To the extent that these bodies of academic work can be viewed as distinctive 'sets', both have a common lineage, and therefore demonstrate a striking family resemblance. The principal differences between these cousins are reducible to their use of different theoretical apparatuses, and different emphases in regard to technical/methodological commitments, and these must (at best) appear modest variations to those unaccustomed to the technical argot of the human sciences. Duck (1999) identified the most notorious stipulative tendencies of various psychologies of love/intimacy, which he claimed were 'unwanted' theoretical legacies of the past that nonetheless continue to haunt (if not to populate) contemporary academic psychology. It is these theoretical devices that professional sociologies of intimate relations have characteristically sought to dispute, and have to a partial extent, been successful in supplanting:

[97] May (1998:126) has suggested that, in the absence of attention to what people actually do, social theoretical discourse risks over-extending itself by allowing the 'theoretical brush to glide too easily over everyday social practices'. The primary object of social theory in this respect seems to be theoretical closure in terms of self-contained discourses written in the name of descriptive purity. As May (1998:128) asserted that: 'All too often social theory asks us to see differences when we are tempted to find sameness, or ignore differences in the name of universals [...] and so places limits upon understanding.'

- that intimate relations arise as a consequence of the 'chemistry' of partner attributes;
- that the conduct of the intimate partners is typically un-reflexive, consensual, and carries undisputed meanings of *what actually happened*;
- that intimate relations comprise a unitary and distinctive phenomenon capable of being isolated and studied under more or less experimental conditions;
- that intimate relations are conducted by rational actors in a orderly and logically consistent manner; and,
- that intimate relations are conducted only with reference to the partners directly involved.

The 'magnetic metaphor' i.e. the notion that the success or failure of any relationship is predictable from the individual characteristics of the protagonists is seemingly made valid by common sense. For Duck (1999*:* 116) such approaches tend towards assuming the absolute effects of such factors as pre-existing personality characteristics, attachment styles, and cognitive schema, whilst simultaneously ignoring the social and communicative contexts of intimate relations. Consequently, Duck (1999*:* 117) asserted that such an approach invites the abandonment of the (inter)subjective aspects of intimate relationships. When applied to the issue of intimacy troubles, these *a priori* theoretical stipulations have typically yielded the following species of claim(s):

- intimacy troubles arise as a consequence of one or both of the protagonists being *faulty individuals*;
- intimacy troubles represent deviant or pathological states, to be understood in opposition to 'healthy' relationships;[98] and,
- intimacy troubles can be predicted by means of their correlative associations with a variety of demographic characteristics.[99]

However, in spite of the legacy of these differences in emphasis, more contemporary professional psychologies display a definitive sense of convergence with the sociological concerns reported above. For instance, Duck (1999: 113) characterised contemporary professional psychologies of intimate relations thus:

[98] Duck (*op cit*: 85) asserted that much early psychological work on intimacy troubles (especially in the U.S.A.) was conducted within a cultural context in which divorce was an unquestionably deviant phenomenon i.e. to be prevented or 'cured'.

[99] Duck (*op cit:* 86) identified that amongst factors variously implicated by this approach were; age (younger at marriage), (lower) socio-economic status, (lower) educational attainment, experience of parental divorce, differential demographic backgrounds of the partners, and ethnicity.

- as stressing the behavioural, cognitive, attitudinal, and attributional components of intimate relationships;
- as being sensitive to the practical contexts and social networks in which intimate relations are embedded and conducted; and,
- as taking account of interpersonal communication 'by which psychological and cognitive structures act upon this world'.

So, for Duck (1999: 114) the psychology of intimate relations has become 'truly social' and will continue to develop in this direction.[100] Similarly, Duck's (1999: 88-90) claims about intimacy troubles in general, and break-ups in particular, are framed by means of a common *lingua franca*: Specifically, he suggested that break-up characteristically proceeds on the basis of:

- ineptitude or lack of skills in expression on the part of protagonists, as a consequence of social skills deficits and personality traits such as shyness;
- tiredness / boredom and lack of stimulation – failure of the relationship to meet the developmental expectations of one or both parties; and / or,
- 'other factors' including physical distance, and the presentation of opportunities for new relationships.

I suggest that these specific claims occupy the same topical ground as for instance:

- Simmel's (1984) [1923], and Davis's (1973b) accounts of the communicative dynamics of intimate relations (and particularly their accounts of flirtation);
- the *intimate resource* issues highlighted by Bauman (1993b:98); and,
- Giddens' (1992) exposition of the 'contractual' basis of *pure relationships.*

Whilst the issues that these 'differing' approaches have made topically relevant are broadly the same, the impression of academic distance (created by means of dissimilar technical / theoretical commitments) is instantiated in the surface appearances of their respective discourses. Whilst academic psychology has tended towards a type of *mentalism* emphasising, for instance cognition and (centred versions of) emotion, sociologists have concurrently emphasised the social contexts and dynamics of intimate relations/troubles. Surface appearances notwithstanding, it would be incorrect to treat these disciplinary contributions as hermetically sealed, and in some cases intellectual convergence is transparent e.g. in Giddens'

[100] Duck (*op cit:* 114) defined intimate relations as supra-personal phenomena whose bases include 'mental associations made by people [....] historically derived representations of experience as much as they are interpersonally communicative entities [that are] open-ended, processual, unfinished, and fluid'.

(1991) willingness to partially embrace psychological concepts of the unconscious, Davis's (1973b) theoretical incorporation of attribution theory, and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) reliance upon a particular version of 'cognitive realism'. Button (1991:4) asserted that these convergences ought to come as no surprise:

> 'Despite the arguments between bodies of thought within a discipline, and despite the claims made by different human sciences disciplines to be addressing different phenomena, there is a common epistemological and methodological womb from which the bodies of thought in a discipline, and the human sciences in general have sprung.'

It was noted above that thematic similarities suggesting either acceptance of, or piecemeal modification of previously expressed ideas pervade professional sociologies of intimate relations/troubles. For Button (1991: 3-4) the extents to which this is the case stem from the fact that professional sociologists engage in the 'mutually understood and mutually ratified business of sociology', in which 'the proliferation of new ideas are ordered in accordance with the stable foundations of the sociological enterprise'. In this sense, whilst disputes might arise in regard to the nature and properties of intimate relations/troubles, and theoretical constructs or findings may be subsequently challenged, the disciplinary foundations that give rise to these versions of events remain starkly intact: and from within this orthodoxy, professional sociologists have sometimes muted, and at other times muffled vernacular voices by means of a *theoretical nudge* here, a *methodological wink* there, towards the *promise-of-the-God's-eye-truth* about intimate relations/troubles.

The remainder of this study is therefore oriented towards explication of (hitherto neglected / suppressed) vernacular accounts of intimacy troubles. In adopting this particular orientation I do not, however, propose the summary dismissal of the theoretical legacy of professional sociologies of intimate relations/troubles. Both vernacular and professional sociological accounts are reducible to the common denominator i.e. that of discursive representation, and in this much, comparative analysis is possible. This is not to submit to the temptations of disappearing up any one of several alluring (stipulative) 'garden paths', for instance:

- assuming that vernacular world views can cancel the validity of theoretical contributions;
- assuming that vernacular accounts form an appropriate basis from which to evaluate or otherwise modify prior theoretical or empirical claims; or,
- presuming that a more adequate stipulative theory of intimate relations/troubles can be derived if only 'authentic' vernacular sources could be isolated.

Rather, my intentions in the remainder of this project are (a) to focus upon (vernacular) *reported actions* of doing intimacy troubles within a specific social context in which these actions are embedded: and (b) initiate a 'dialogue' between abstract ideas and theorisations and *in-situ* vernacular concerns, simply noting where points of topical relevance coincide, diverge, are discursively similar or different, and accord with or contradict one another.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE CURRENT PROJECT.

My intention in this chapter is to describe the key methodological features of this research. In particular I will consider

- the origins of the topic selection;
- the research design process;
- the main methodological assumptions and preferences of the study;
- how the data was (eventually) selected; and,
- the approach taken towards data analysis.

Following Silverman's (2000: 236) recommendation as well as suggestions by Howard Becker, these issues are presented here as a 'natural history' of the current project.

TOPIC CHOICE.

Like most social research, the genesis of the current project owes much to personal experience: a series of events of which I am barely more certain now than I was at the time of their occurrence. Without subscribing to any particular theoretical interpretation, I can say with honesty that there remain many 'black holes' in my memories, and I cannot claim any status for the version of events that I offer here other than to say with complete honesty, it is how I (entirely subjectively) see matters today: undoubtedly, and with equal claims to veracity, my ex-wife would offer a differing interpretation. I married for the first time in 1984 at the age of 22 years (my ex-wife was 1 year younger). In retrospect, this relationship, although always to some extent stormy, also had much in compensation. Although money was 'tight' to begin with, we enjoyed an active social life and a good circle of similarly disposed friends. In retrospect, I believe that it would also be true to say that many of the activities that we enjoyed were conducted separately, and we had little common interest beyond work and socialising. From a purely personal perspective, the main source of troubles during this period of the relationship was an ongoing conflict between my parents and ex-wife: hostility that sometimes placed me in an impossible position, and which (then, as now) I attribute to my ex-wife's intransigence and seeming inability to compromise. Nonetheless, in 1989 she gave birth to our first son (the result of a planned pregnancy). To a certain extent, a 'working compromise' was reached between my (then) wife and parents, and together with her mother, they provided massive support in all ways possible. Whatever troubles existed before the birth soon became extraordinarily amplified: my (then) wife was medically

diagnosed with Post-Natal Depression. From my perspective she was angry - and angry to the point of rage - with me, with our new baby, with my parents, with her mother, with the world, and our newfound circumstances in general. Our son was undoubtedly a difficult baby: he didn't sleep and suffered 'infant colic' and that meant that he was frequently crying and/or distressed. Things eventually 'settled down' but at a heavy price to the relationship: matters broke down irretrievably between her and my parents, and I found myself in a bizarre and contradictory position. My parents provided the majority of childcare (I was working full-time, and my [then] wife returned to work for 3 days a week). At the same time, she refused to speak to my parents, and moreover, never missed an opportunity to pour scorn on them and otherwise condemn their individual characters in the most vitriolic ways possible (usually to me, but occasionally to her friends). At this point (*circa* 1990), the relationship was running on a (more-or-less) functional basis: we were held together by the common interest of our first son. Paradoxically, my career was going well, and I was offered a chance to undertake further education: this would involve me living away from home Monday to Friday, and returning at weekends. I accepted this, and although she agreed that it would be a 'good move', it quickly (e.g. in six weeks) became apparent that the situation was untenable and I began commuting a round trip of 180 miles a day in order to complete the course. Following the course, things again 'settled down' although for me (and I suspect for her also) the relationship was now approached on a more perfunctory and cynical basis.

The relationship might have ended here - life for me (and again, I suspect her) was less than happy: however, matters took an unexpected turn when she became pregnant with our second son. Ending the relationship in these circumstances, for both of us, was not a justifiable proposition: before the birth, we moved to her home town in order to make it easier in terms of family support: again, my ex-mother-in-law (then as always) was magnanimous in this respect. Things 'staggered-on' for a further year with daily open conflict. The factor that brought about the eventual end (for me at least) was the involvement of my oldest son in these conflicts, and his frequent and obvious distress. Underlying tensions had become completely unmanageable – between me and her, her and my parents, and me, her, and our oldest son. On my youngest son's first birthday, I left the family home and never returned. The most that I can say with any certainty about these times was that they were personally very dark indeed: I took solace (variously, and in no particular order of priority) in work, in my studies (I was a part-time post-graduate student in sociology at the time), in alcohol, in a series of transitional sexual relationships, in renewed childhood friendships, and leisure (mountaineering, and physical exercise more generally). During this time (as now), I continued to have heavy (and irregular) childcare commitments due to the nature of my ex-wife's work. I can say two

things with utter certainty: I might not have survived without (a) the love, care, and accommodation of my parents, and (b) two particular re-kindled friendships.[101]

Lynch (2000: 29) suggested that reflexivity has become a canonical feature of qualitatively based social science inquiry. Furthermore, such claims to self-consciousness, although *in extremis* appearing unduly mawkish, can be used to support a case for 'standpoint reflexivity'.[102] I claim no such status for the above confessional account, however, without revealing these personal details (and my conclusions below) the current study would appear (at least to me) to be incomplete. I remain uncertain to as to the extent to which the above circumstances exerted an influence upon the current study beyond stimulating initial sociological interest. My personal conclusions based upon these experiences of intimacy troubles (not that these deserve any privileged status) are that:

- intimacy troubles are best represented as process rather than event;
- the experience of intimacy troubles is (deeply) existentially troubling and severely impacts upon ones personal identity;
- the ending of intimate relationships entail much thought that creates the impression of 'déjà vu'- new events are perceived as consistent with previous happenings; and,
- definitive action in relation to the ending of intimate relationships involves much reflection and rehearsal – a series of emotional 'what if' experiences, as opposed to consciously calculable activity.

One means of dealing with the difficult circumstances leading up to and after the separation involved reading sociological material about the issues of intimate relations / troubles: I suspect a more conventional response might have been to turn to the available self-help texts on these topics. For the most part I found this reading unconvincing: texts seldom explicitly addressed the topic of intimacy troubles. Furthermore, with only a few exceptions, those studies that did so seemed to describe events in a manner that was alien to my recent experiences and understandings, offering only occasional insights viewed 'through a glass darkly'. Empirical papers such as that of Dunscombe & Marsden (1993) only addressed narrowly defined questions, without any specific treatment of intimacy troubles. Psychological texts (even those written from a broadly social psychological orientation such

[101] The (childhood) friends who rallied to my cause were Colin Calcut and Adrian Hocking. Their contribution in this respect is sufficient to override usual protocols of confidentiality / anonymity.

[102] Lynch (2000: 31) characterised 'standpoint reflexivity' as the idea that social scientists, either individually or collectively, are possessed of a 'special courage' or the ability to step-back from culturally –laden prejudices in order to assume standpoints that provide the existential conditions for reflexive critiques of dominant discourses: rather than providing the basis for claims to 'objectivity', such exercises are intended (at least to create the impression) that one is subjecting one's own perspective to critical self-reflection.

as Duck, 1999) seemed too individualistic and missed the 'social chaos' that seemed to me to be part and parcel of separation. Work such as Giddens (1992), although critically acclaimed at the time, seemed to me to be too orderly in its description of troubles, separation, and divorce. In this latter work (as with much of social theory in general) I was struck by the absence of vernacular concerns: much that had been written appeared to have been assembled from sources other than the mundane accounts of 'ordinary' individuals.

RESEARCH DESIGN ISSUES.

In relation to the latter point, Williams (2000b: 73) asserted that like human sciences in general, sociology has had a recurrent concern to clarify the ambivalent relationship between professional and lay understandings of social reality. In earlier chapters of this thesis I have already discussed some of the former, and the concern of the current study (at least in part) has been to transcend such 'professional visions' (Goodwin 1994). In seeking to accentuate the significance of vernacular concerns, a choice of several practical and textual strategies presented themselves, namely:

- Direct representation and/or 'reflexive' interpretation;
- dialogical analysis, co-authorship and 'respondent verification'; and,
- analytical focus upon the co-construction of accounts.

Strategies of direct representation find their most salient expression within empirically grounded ethnographic sociologies (e.g. see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Hammersley, 1990). Broadly, these approaches proffer a twofold methodological solution in response to the problem of authentic representation of vernacular voices: (a) that vernacular voices can be elicited by means of meticulous field observations, and preserved by means of similarly detailed field notes, and (b) that vernacular voices can be unproblematically re-contextualised and integrated with that of the author in the narrative of the final presentation. Several of the stipulative tendencies identified earlier in relation to other sociological traditions remain salient here; not least the fact that the researcher retains authorial control in selectively determining what appears (and how it appears) in the final text. As Williams (2000b: 76) suggested, 'much of the claim to validity of such studies is predicated on their promise of the delivery of "authentic" participants voices.' However, the authenticity of direct representations has recently been subject to challenge (e.g. see Atkinson, 1990, 1992; van Maanen, 1988). The gist of such challenges focuses upon claims that the reportage of vernacular voices are both generally subject to simplification and editorial transformation, and also that their final presentation owes much to literary conventions (i.e. in the

presentation of a seamless narrative in which vernacular and professional concerns are seen to demonstrably coincide and mutually reinforce one another).

A second means of incorporating the vernacular voice within sociological accounts was offered by varying forms of dialogical analysis derived principally from the literary-philosophical insights of Bakhtin (1981), in which the inter-subjectivity of language is afforded prominence.[103] Bakhtinian insights have been employed in order to provide a critical commentary upon the extent to which ethnographers have represented lay voices within their accounts. It is sufficient to note here that conceiving language as a constitutive and inter-subjective phenomenon means conceding that subject voices cannot be muted by researchers, and nor can utterances be dislocated from the original context of their production. Such axioms serve to focus attention upon the timing, sequence, and otherwise performative characteristics of interaction, and transform analytical priorities away from what utterances *mean* within a particular text to what utterances *do* in a particular interactive sequence. The stated object of study in dialogical analysis is therefore always the progressive exchange and mutual modifications of individual claims within any given sequence of interaction. Strategies for presentation and analysis characteristically preserve sequences of interaction (e.g. between researcher and subject, and between subjects) and therefore unavoidably include vernacular voices.

However, as Williams (2000b: 80) argued, 'even when studies like this are arranged to display many voices, the author of the final text orchestrates those voices and contextualizes their representation. 'Polyphonic ethnographies' therefore fail in their efforts to fully transcend the stipulative characteristics of ethnographic representation *per se*. Taking matters one step further, co-authorship presents a (seemingly) more radical strategy for representing vernacular concerns. However, at worst, offering 'respondents' the final text in order to elicit validation can be viewed as a form of tokenism; at best, they may recognise their own contributions and at the same time be alienated by the professional interpretations placed upon their words. Perhaps more tellingly, Bakhtin (1981: 340) himself suggested that to the extent that another's 'speech' is placed within different context (regardless of how faithfully this is transcribed and represented), then it is unavoidably subject to semantic change. In other words, framing utterances in another context e.g. that of a research study as opposed to the context in which they were made, unavoidably brings about a change of meaning, regardless of the accuracy of the presented quotation. Collectively, these strategies (against the spirit of vernacular representation) imply that some special (professional) competence is required in order to understand the 'true' meaning of the vernacular voice: they therefore dismiss the possibility that, as I have argued above, mundane social interaction might be mutually

[103] See Todorov (1984) for an extended exposition of Bakhtin's philosophical assertions.

intelligible to 'ordinary' actors and researchers alike without the requirement of specialist frames of interpretation.

A third and more seductive position was offered by a family of research approaches that, as Williams (2000b: 88) suggested, do not 'introduce an exogamous perspective into endogenous events'. These approaches, which include ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), conversation analysis (Sacks 1972; Schegloff, 1968; Jefferson, 1972), membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1974), and discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992) call for a fundamental reorientation of sociological inquiry in favour of the mundane intelligibility of social life in a manner consistent with the aims of my study. Within these approaches, vernacular concerns are inescapable, and furthermore ordinary social actions in normal circumstances are viewed as already intelligible to actors and others in their environment: these approaches therefore undermine claims that specialist human sciences are required in order to understand the vernacular voice. Furthermore, these approaches demand a fundamental respecification of conventional research problematics, according to which issues such as the meaning of intimate relations/ troubles, motives towards continuing or ending relationships, 'causes' of intimacy troubles etc. are not treated as specialist empirical concerns and/or abstract theoretical problems.[104] Instead these approaches demand the study of such phenomena by reference to the ways in which they are made intelligible, relevant to co-participants, and deployed within everyday interaction.

I was initially attracted by the insights offered by conversational analysis (here onwards CA): however, the strictness demanded by this approach in adhering to instances of naturally occurring interaction as data made this approach unfeasible as the possibilities of obtaining, transcribing and analysing this data in relation to intimacy troubles seemed unlikely. I could imagine few possibilities of gaining access to 'naturally occurring interaction' in this respect. One such possibility might have been realised by being able to record and transcribe the contents of relationship counselling or mediation sessions: however, I wished to avoid the inescapable 'therapeutic' parameters that these interactions unavoidably imply. Furthermore, CA studies have characteristically concentrated in minute detail upon the detailed sequential organisation of interaction fragments (Woofit, 1992), and in this respect, this approach seemed ill suited to my purposes of saying something more general about vernacular accounts of intimate relations/ troubles.

[104] Button (1991: 6) asserted that 'ethnomethodology [*and related approaches*] respecify sociology and the human sciences at large with respect to *reflexively accountable action'*. Respecification entails a departure from image of stability fostered by adherence to the 'foundational properties of sociology' e.g. theory, epistemology, method, methodology &c. and instead reframes these matters in terms of practical intelligibility, or how they are understood by ordinary actors engaged in mundane social interaction.

THE DISCURSIVE ACTION MODEL.

The methodological options offered by discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992) seemed to present a means of both (a) respecifying intimacy troubles, and thus remaining faithful to the intentions of exploring vernacular concerns, whilst at the same time (b) maintaining a more general focus upon the wider context on intimacy troubles.[105]

Potter, Edwards and Wetherell (1993: 383) asserted that discourse analysis is 'the theory of, and methods of studying, social practices and the actions that constitute them'. This orientation forms the basis of a distinctive approach to social psychology – *discursive psychology* - advocated by these authors (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992). Potter (1997: 146) defined discursive psychology as being concerned with ' the way versions of the world, society, events, and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse': such an empirical focus is therefore principally oriented towards the performative aspects of discourse as a means of accomplishing actions. Potter, Edwards and Wetherell (1993: 389) summarised the theoretical assumptions underlying the component aspects of their model as outlined in *figure 10.*

[105] Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards (1990: 205-6) asserted that at least four distinctive strands of work have laid claim to the title of discourse analysis. They are (a) those empirical works which are primarily concerned with discourse processes (e.g. van Dijk & Kintch, 1983); (b) those empirical works preoccupied with speech-act theory (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975); (c) social philosophy and cultural analysis inspired by Foucauldian insights (e.g. Foucault, 1971, 1972; Hacking, 1991), and (d) a distinctive group of analyses concerned with the sociology of scientific knowledge (e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). For the remainder of this project, the term discourse analysis should be read as synonymous with the discursive action model (DAM) articulated by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edwards and Potter (1992).

[1] ACTION.

❶ The research focus is on *action* rather than cognition or behaviour.
❷ As action is predominantly, and most clearly, performed through *discourse*, traditional psychological concepts (memory, attribution, categorisation, etc.) are reconceptualised in discursive terms.
❸ Actions done in discourse are overwhelmingly situated in broader *activity sequences* of various kinds.

[2] FACT AND INTEREST.

❹ In the case of many actions, there is a *dilemma of stake* or *interest*, which is often managed by doing attribution via factual reports and descriptions.
❺ Reports and descriptions are therefore constituted/displayed *as* factual by a variety of discursive devices.
❻ Factual versions are *rhetorically organised* to undermine alternatives.

[3] ACCOUNTABILITY.

❼ Factual versions attend to agency and accountability *in the reported events.*
❽ Factual versions attend to agency and accountability in the current speakers actions including those done *in the reporting.*
❾Concerns ❼ & ❽ are often related, such that ❼ *is deployed for* ❽*, and* ❽ *is deployed for* ❼.

Figure 10: *The Discursive Action Model.*

Source: Potter, Edwards and Wetherell (1993: 389).

As well containing theoretical and epistemological commitments, this model also implies an empirical manifesto, which can be restated as the following set of practical instructions:[106]

[1] Select a setting in which it is possible to observe the discursive actions of others, or participate in discursive actions with others and record/ transcribe the resultant interaction.

Potter and Wetherell (1995: 217) asserted that the distinction between instances of 'natural language', and instances of what has been 'got up' by research practices is somewhat

[106] The term *epistemological* is employed in qualified sense here. As suggested above, respecification projects are notable for their transformation of traditional ontological and epistemological concerns into topics for empirical investigation. As such, Lynch (1993: 162) suggested that ethnomethodologists (and adherents of related approaches) characteristically execute a 'praxiological turn', consistent with (if not strictly inspired by) an antiscepticist interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy (e.g. see Sharrock & Anderson, 1984; Coulter, 1989: 30*ff.*). Lynch (1993: 200) asserted that ' the extension of Wittgenstein's later philosophy produced in ethnomethodology is therefore not a move into empirical sociology so much as an attempt to *rediscover* the sense of epistemologies' central concepts and themes.' By analysing mundane and situated activities, ethnomethodologists (and adherents of related approaches) provide descriptions of the situated production of observations, explanations &c. and thus provide a 'more differentiated and subtle picture of epistemic activities than can be given by the generic definitions and familiar debates in epistemology' (Lynch, 1993: 201).

overplayed. A preoccupation with the former (an enduring characteristic of ethnomethodological and CA studies) suggests that interaction that is influenced by the researcher is somehow ephemeral or otherwise inauthentic. In contrast Potter & Wetherell asserted that interaction generated within interviews, focus groups and the like is 'genuine' i.e. a 'genuine' instance of the type of discursive work which typically occurs within research interview settings. As such, they advocated that 'we can treat them [interviews] as a form of natural interaction by analysing them in the same way that we might a telephone conversation between friends or the cross-examination in a court room' (Potter and Wetherell, 1995: 218). However, these authors also qualified their claims about the admissibility of interview data as instances of discursive action by advocating both a distinctive set of interview practices, and subsequent treatments of consequent data. In the first instance, they reject the 'standard injunction' for qualitative interviews to be conducted in a neutral pseudo-therapeutic style, and instead advocated in favour of an active, or even 'argumentative' style of exchange. Their preferred analytical treatment of such materials is further explained below: suffice to note here that they reject the use of *a priori* analytical schema, the tendency to assume truth-value correspondence between what has been said and extra-discursive events, as well as interpretations that treat what has been said as residues of putative intrapsychic processes. This is not, however, to say that analysis ought to dismiss the content of what has been said in favour of discursive sequences: as Wetherell (1998: 403) suggested, the issues made topically relevant in discursive actions serve as part of the 'warp and woof' connecting such actions to a wider extra-discursive domain.

[2] Examine the discourse for evidence of repetitive patterns or sequences.

Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards (1990: 212) suggested that 'interpretative repertoires' represent a central analytical object in discourse analysis; they defined interpretative repertoires as 'broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, 'common-places', and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles. They suggested that characteristically, repertoires differ between different practices and contexts.

[3] Throughout this exercise, maintain a focus upon functionality e.g. asking ***what words do*** *rather than* ***what words mean.***

As Wetherell (1998: 403) asserted, this involves asking the question 'why this utterance here?' Such an approach advocates an analytical focus upon the practical activities of description, blaming, attributing etc. in which particular terms are used so as to accomplish particular effects or actions. Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards (1990: 208) asserted that the

presence of variation can be used as an analytical clue towards the functional orientations of speakers (Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards, 1990: 209).

[4] Treat [3] as heuristic devices providing clues as to dilemmas of stake or interest.

Potter, Edwards & Wetherell (1993: 398) asserted that reports, versions and practical descriptions are invariably drawn upon whenever a sensitive or otherwise problematic issue is at stake. Therefore, a further analytical object implied by this methodology (in addition to the sequential concerns highlighted above) involves accommodating and explaining participants orientations. As participants themselves rarely treat such descriptions as straightforward, then there appears no valid reason as to why researchers ought to do so. For instance, these authors suggested that in order to 'successfully manage the dilemma of stake or interest via a factual version, it is necessary to produce a version that can actually be accepted as factual or at least one that is rhetorically organised in such a manner that it is difficult to undermine or rebut' (Potter, Edwards & Wetherell, 1993: 393).

[5] Explain the structural detail of how accounts (discursive actions) are rhetorically organised towards achieving particular ends, and in particular pay attention to [6].

Potter, Edwards & Wetherell (1993: 386) asserted that particular descriptions, or particular styles of description, and the use of particular words represent the chief means by which actions get done. Wetherell (1998: 388) therefore asserted that the aim is to produce a fine-grain analysis that is focussed upon the way that participants orientate to disputes or conflicts of interest and the like.

[6] Explicate the means by which accountability of self and agency of self and others are managed.

Potter, Edwards & Wetherell (1993: 395) suggested that versions of events are invariably constructed in order to imply responsibility: furthermore, within any such account, two levels of agency can be seen as interacting – namely the attributed agency of the *dramatis personæ* that populate the account and that of the current speaker. One object of inquiry is therefore the means by which speakers manage inferences about their own accountability when they are making descriptions.

In summary, Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards (1990: 207) asserted that the empirical approach implied by the DAM implies that (a) the primary object of inquiry is the functional orientation of language, and that his can only be adequately explicated by (b) attentiveness to

the constructive processes that are part and parcel of this functional orientation, and (c) an awareness of the variability of accounting practices.

Potter, Edwards & Wetherell (1993: 397) qualified their theoretical / empirical claims by suggesting that:

- the DAM does not suppose to offer a complete model of discourse processes, nor even one that is finished in relation to the use of descriptions in activity sequences;
- the sequential stages offered by the DAM should not be viewed as a stipulative prescription towards how research ought to be organised;
- a number of different features of the model are likely to be simultaneously relevant within actual accounts; and,
- research should remain sensitive to the particulars of discursive practice rather than the categories of the model.

DATA COLLECTION.

My initial intention was to gather instances of data via the use of research interviews, and subsequently subject this material to analysis via the insights of the above DAM. As I have previously criticised the use of interviews as research tools on stipulative grounds, their initial use in the context of the current project therefore demands some further explanation. Silverman (1985: 156) asserted that the distinction between 'artificial' (e.g. interview data), and 'naturally occurring' data represented a methodological 'red-herring' as neither variant is intrinsically better than the other: rather how each is analysed provides the basis of distinctive research approaches. Much of the earlier criticism of interview data based upon Atkinson and Silverman (1997) related to either (a) the extent to which the content of interviews can be held to imply a level of truth-value assignation, and (b) the means by which interview findings are represented in genres familiar to 'an interview society'. However, like Potter and Wetherell (1995), Silverman (1985: 157) suggested that it is possible to analyse the findings of research interviews in terms of *formal* concerns i.e. in terms of conversational sequencing, or praxiological considerations, and it was this latter approach that inspired my initial data collection.

As the overall purpose of the current study was to examine empirical instances of accounts of intimacy troubles in light of established sociological concerns, a 'lightly structured biographical-narrative depth interview' schedule (Wengraf, 2001: 11 *ff.*) was assembled from insights offered by established sociologies of intimate relations/troubles. My intentions in constructing these interviews in this way were to offer respondents the opportunity to

comment directly upon professional sociological claims.[107] Rather than the more conventional concerns of biographical interview i.e. life history, my interview schedule aimed to ensure that what might be termed issues of 'relationship history' were made topically relevant. Labouring under the suspicion that variation might exist between accounts based upon matters such as sexual orientation, gender, marital status, and generation, my intention from the outset was to recruit a wide sample base. My original recruitment strategy, which I suspect might have proved relatively unproductive if it had have been pursued over any length of time, involved placing an advertisement in the 'dating column' of a local free newssheet distributed to commuters (*see figure 11*).

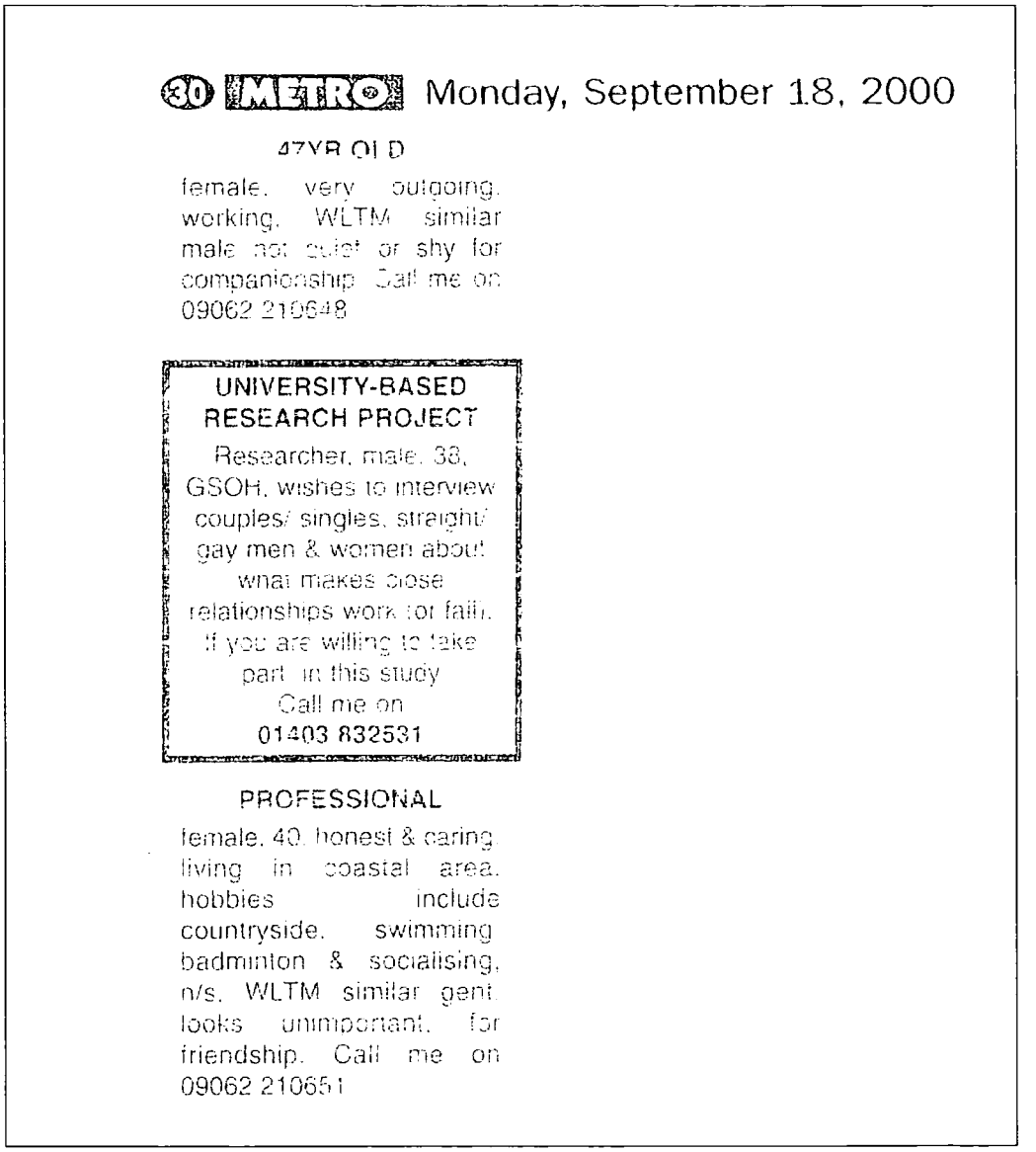

Figure 11: *The Initial Sampling Advertisement as it appeared in the Metro newspaper.*

[107] In adopting this strategy I remained conscious of the possibilities of introducing an underlying circularity to the research process.

The reasoning behind this strategy derived from Coupland's (1996) insight that these compressed biographies (dating ads) demonstrate certain structural regularities with small ads in general i.e. those associated with the private sale of 'used goods'. My intuition was that those who regularly read, or perhaps responded to these ads would have some experience of intimacy troubles. Negotiating the use of this recruitment strategy proved relatively straightforward: a preliminary approach was made to the telecom company operating the service, in which I explained the intentions of the research . They readily agreed to my request to 'bracket-off' the ad in order to distinguish it from those seeking to initiate intimate relations with others, and placed the ad, free of charge, for one week. A voicemail service was set up and administered by the telecom company, who later sent-on the details of those who had agreed to be interviewed. Five people agreed to be interviewed following the first ad (*see appendix 1 - interviewee characteristics*).[108]

I contacted interviewees by telephone and invited them to attend at a time of their convenience. All interviews were conducted on university premises, and travel expenses to and from the interview were reimbursed. I anticipated that the issues that were most likely to be made topically relevant during the course of the interviews would be sensitive in nature.[109] Brannen (1998: 553) asserted that four sets of considerations are brought into play when researching sensitive topics, namely:

- approaching the topic;
- dealing with contradictions, complexities and emotions in the interview situation;
- the operation of power and control in the interview situation; and,
- the conditions under which the interview takes place.

Lee (1993: 2) suggested that it is especially incumbent upon researchers addressing sensitive topics to be aware of their ethical responsibilities in terms of research participants. In introducing the research, I was careful to distance myself from the notion that I might analyse the interviewees in a clinical or therapeutic sense: I was also at pains to emphasise that I was not qualified in counselling (nor did I intend) to counsel or offer advice. I explained why I

---

[108] I intended to increase the number of respondents by supplementing the newspaper announcement with a snowball sampling strategy. Three further people agreed to be interviewed on the basis of the 'recommendation' of those who responded to the newspaper ad: however, these interviews were not carried out given the early decision to abandon this research approach.

[109] Lee (1993: 5) suggested that what might be considered as 'sensitive' in a given research setting is highly contextual. Whilst certain topics such as intimacy troubles may (inherently) induce 'emotionally charged' communication, much depends upon how the participants in the research process view these matters in terms of wider cultural considerations.

was doing the research, and what I would be doing with the data once it was gathered. I also explained the extent to which I could offer confidentiality and anonymity, and reassured respondents that although they might have been able to identify their words in the final text, it was highly unlikely that anyone would be able to identify them individually from what was published. Before each interview, I asked the interviewees for their permission to audio-record the interaction, adding by way of qualification that they could terminate the interview at any point, or if they got to the end of the interview and were unhappy about what they had said, could take the tape away with them. Furthermore, I suggested to respondents that, if on reflection, they were unhappy about taking part in the research, they could contact me and I would return their tape as well as withdrawing any data from the final analysis. In the event nobody requested such actions. Throughout the interviews, I was sensitive to the potential of either 'interfering' in existing relationships, and in the case of the divorced or separated, the potential for provoking unease by asking people to revisit (relatively recent) painful events. Although some of the interviews were clearly 'emotionally charged', no one objected to my line of questioning, and in *post-hoc* reflection, I can conclude with reasonable confidence that none disclosed anything beyond that which they were comfortable disclosing. On the other hand, I was at the same time surprised at exactly what interviewees were willing to disclose. The one-off nature of the interview experience perhaps facilitated this frankness. For Lee (1993: 113) this feature can be explained in terms of Simmel's ([1908] 1950) insight regarding the curvilinear relationship between intimacy and disclosure. Simmel suggested that strangers are often the recipients surprising levels of confessional openness, and are advantaged over more closely related persons in this respect.

At the end of each interview, I took it as my responsibility to return the conversation to present: each interviewee was offered refreshments, and with the exception of interviewee # 2 who was late for a social appointment, all accepted. During these 'post interview socials' the interviewees typically asked about my own relationship history and status, or otherwise asked about life at the university.

Lee (1993: 2) asserted that given the sensitivity of certain research topics, relationships between researchers and researched might be hedged with mistrust, concealment and dissimilation. On reflection, those who were interviewed were selective in their revelations: given that the current project is (to a large extent) unconcerned with the verisimilitude of extra-discursive issues and events, then issues such as recall and 'truth telling' were of secondary concern. However, more significantly, from the very first interview I sensed that there was more going on in these encounters than a public-spirited contribution to sociological inquiry. Whilst accounts varied in content and emotional tone, I also became acutely aware of an underlying functionality of what was been said. To repeat, although I had

no prior conceptions of about the veracity of the extra-discursive events outlined, it was clear that what I was being told was designed to fulfil a specific purpose for those who were doing the telling.

I sensed that interviewee #1 was engaged in flirtation, tentatively exploring the possibilities of a relationship with me beyond the confines of the interview setting. On post-interview reflection, I also felt that this woman engaged in the interview on a somewhat confessional basis – telling me, a stranger, information that she hadn't shared with her husband of almost 20 years. I understood interviewee # 2's motives in terms of his wanting my permission to 'come out' in relation to his (rather ambiguous) sexual identity. Interviewee # 3 sought validation and advice in relation his ongoing legal dispute: in the post-interview 'social' he tentatively broached the subject of whether or not I would provide him with some sort of testimony as to his motives in wanting contact with his son. For interviewees #'s 4 and 5, validation seemed to be the key issue. Lee (1993: 5) has remarked that the disclosure of private information within the interview context might, in itself, be threatening as privacy can induce pluralistic ignorance. If individuals only 'know' about their own 'private' context, it is difficult for them to judge their own conduct in relation to wider normative standards. Throughout these interviews I was aware of the recurrent (but unstated) question *'we are normal – aren't we?'* At the end of these interviews I was left with an overbearing sense that the data that they yielded would not be fit for the intended purposes of the current project. Whilst it was clear that 'discursive actions' were being enacted during the course of the interviews, at the same time it was also apparent that 'lay accounts' were also being constrained by the stipulative restrictions of the interview agenda. As Williams (2000a: 110) has stated:

> 'The conversation analytic view of the use of such [interview] materials is simply that their analysis will be forced to take into account the ways in which the relevance systems of human science and other professionals have been allowed to structure the events as recorded – something that might undermine the spirit, if not the letter, of the respecification programme to which both conversation and discourse analysis seemed to be committed.'

INTERNET DATA.

This point in the project represented a serendipitous moment. Whilst I was sure of the inadequacies of the interview-generated data, I was also uncertain as to how I might derive a source of data that was fit-for-purpose in terms of explicating vernacular understandings of intimacy troubles. During this time I was immersed in 'cultural resources' surrounding the research topic: for instance, I was building a steady archive of newspaper and magazine

articles offering a view of intimacy troubles. I was also reading literary accounts of the same, such as Texier's (1998), *Breakup. The end of a love story*, and Kureishi's (1998) *Intimacy.*

At the same time, I joined an on-line community forum at www.divorce-online.co.uk. Divorce-online is essentially a commercial concern offering 'an authoritative source of information, advice, and commoditised legal services both online and offline for people who are touched by divorce.'(*See appendix 2).* In addition to the sale of legal products, the site offers a series of 'community' features such as a bulletin board / web forum(s) and diary pages for those experiencing intimacy troubles or contemplating separation / divorce.'[110] Bulletin board discussion topics were determined by the site moderator / editor and included:

- keeping the marriage together;
- men who have affairs;
- women who have affairs;
- 'can ex-spouses be friends?'; and,
- dating after divorce

The diary pages of the site were predicated upon a therapeutic purpose:

> 'Here at Divorce-online we offer you the opportunity to keep your very own personal account of your divorce in the form of a diary or journal.'
>
> 'Research has shown that putting down your thoughts is therapeutic and can aid the healing process'.

I was immediately struck by the relatively unmediated textual richness of contributions made to the site, in which ordinary actors seemingly related their accounts of intimacy troubles. I decided to access and analyse this material in the course of my research.[111] No prior permission was sought in relation to using this material as research data; however, the consent of the site moderator / editor was established *post-hoc* (see appendix 3).[112]

O'Connor and Madge (2001:1.1) suggested that the potential of the Internet as a valuable tool for social science research is gradually being realised. Cyberspace provides an opportunity by

---

[110] Bulletin boards (BBS) have been defined by Hine (2000:157) as 'forum(s) accessible over a network, where messages can be placed. Users can access the bulletin board to leave messages or reply to those of other users. The bulletin board can be a discussion forum or information source.'

[111] Although my membership of this web-community entitled me to access password-protected areas of the site, I made a decision to only use material that was fully within in the public domain for the purposes of the following analysis.

[112] The British Sociological Association's (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice* suggested that 'ideally, where informed consent has not been obtained prior to the research it should be obtained post-hoc.'

which to interact with people who would otherwise be 'difficult to reach' either by virtue of geographical dispersion, or the inherent sensitivity of the topic under consideration. Furthermore, they claimed that the qualitative nature of the data yielded by e-mail communication, bulletin boards (here onwards BBS) and discussion groups is eminently suitable for a range of analytical approaches including discourse analysis. Notwithstanding claims about the relative advantages of this method of data collection, they noted three specific areas of concern in relation to these kinds of data source, namely:

- authenticity;
- participation and exclusion; and,
- structure.

The former two issues are more peripheral concerns in terms of the current study, as data analysis depended neither upon (a) claims to truth-value assignation, nor (b) generalisation of the findings: however, as the structural features of these interactions were a central object of my analytical scrutiny, this matter demanded much greater attention. In relation to extra-discursive considerations, Hine (2000:118) suggested that the anonymity of computer-mediated communication introduces 'fundamental problems for judgement of what is and is not authentic'. In part, this perceived problem stems from the degree of ephemerality entailed in computer-meditated communication (here onwards CMC) i.e. that which is easily posted is also easily deleted. Ward (1999: 1.11) asserted that in any online aggregation it is possible to communicate with someone once and never do so again. However, the main 'threat' to the authenticity of this data arises from the conditions of potentially total anonymity the Internet offers to participants. For instance, Plant (1997:46) asserted that:

> 'with no limit to the number of names that can be used, one individual can become a population explosion of the Net: many sexes, many species, ... there's no limit to the [identity] games that can be played in cyberspace.'

The suspicion raised by Plant's claim (perhaps borne-out by recent press reports concerning instances of 'identity theft' and 'paedophile grooming' via the Internet) is that people using this medium are not necessarily who or what they claim to be, and nor have they necessarily experienced what they claim to have experienced. Compounding the sense of anonymity characteristic of such virtual environments, contributors invariably assumed stylised pseudonyms when making contributions, such as:

- *cleangirl2;*
- *sadangrytony; and,*
- *thebadger.*

These pseudonyms offer very few biographical clues: in contrast, some contributions were ended by the inclusion of a full name, possibly with the intention of creating the effect of authenticity in this relatively anonymous environment. Perhaps it is the (current) near total absence of visual cues in hyperspace that makes this medium particularly anonymous. Featherstone and Burrows (1995:5) suggested that 'the face and the body are the only *true* sources which can reveal the character of a person.' As such, the disembodied nature of CMC does not serve as a proxy to studying talk in interaction, as data are likely to differ in significant ways.[113]

In contrast, other authors have treated the anonymity of Internet communication as a virtue. For instance, Chen and Hinton (1999:11.4) asserted that the lack of physicality could be useful in communicating with those who wish to retain a degree of anonymity, and further, that this can facilitate the collection of data about 'sensitive topics'. Similarly, Poster (1995:90) saw relative advantages in the absence of visual cues in this medium as 'without visual clues about gender, age, ethnicity, and social status, conversations open up in directions which otherwise might be avoided.' O'Connor and Madge (2001:11.2) suggested that the physical environment in which people post contributions to BBS (usually their own homes) could possibly further enhance the candour of accounts. The collective claim of these authors was that freedom of expression is enhanced by the unique combination of the anonymity of the virtual environment and the security of ones own home.

Of more significance for the current study, Nguyen and Alexander (1996:104) asserted that the absence of visual 'barriers' to communication allow Internet communicants to 'better control the presentation of self': given that the structural organisation of vernacular accounts was of central analytic concern, one must acknowledge that Internet communication offers (at least) the opportunity to draft and redraft accounts, and further that this 'advantage' might serve to amplify formal or intended functional features of those accounts.

One often-claimed advantage of using CMC as a research medium is that it allows access to geographically dispersed communities of interest. Some have taken this assertion to imply that research participants may be similarly socially dispersed. For instance, Spender (1995) claimed that the concepts of race, gender, age and sexuality do not necessarily apply in CMC.

[113] Both Boshier (1990) and O'Connor and Madge (2001:8.1) agreed that 'human factors' are impaired or even obscured by the use of CMC e.g. paralinguistic cues and even obvious status differentials between users. As such the suggestion is often made that CMC provides a poor substitute for materials 'got-up' through face-to-face interaction. However, as Chen and Hinton (1999:12.3) suggested, whilst many social research texts stress the importance of observation and non-verbal cues, few provide procedural information as to how these cues may be interpreted (see Schegloff 1984; and Atkinson 1984, as notable exceptions to this rule).

Others have claimed that CMC sets up a 'democratisation of exchange' relative to other research technologies. Similarly, Boshier (1990:51) asserted that:

> 'email appears to provide the kind of non-coercive and anti-hierarchical dialogue that Habermas claimed constitutes an 'ideal speech situation', free of internal or external coercion, and characterised by equality of opportunity and reciprocity in roles assumed by the participants.'

In contrast, others have objected to pseudo-utopian visions of cyberspace. For instance, Ward (1999: 1.6) claimed that many studies 'romanticise the virtual to the extent that it is seen as possessed by almost divine characteristics.' Other authors are more circumspect about claims made regarding inclusive participation: Chen and Hinton (1999:11.6), and Selwyn and Robson (1998:2) asserted that members of on-line communities are essentially self-defining (and self-selecting) groups. Clearly participation is limited to those who have access to a networked computer, and as such potential participants might be differentiated on the basis of dimensions such as class, age, gender, income and ethnicity. Coomber (1997:1.1) thus asserted that 'the relative exclusivity of current Internet and e-mail use needs to be considered seriously but it does not preclude attempts to do useful and informative sociological research'.[114] Perhaps the defining difference between verbal interaction and CMC is that of structure. Slaughter (1985:122-3) outlined several key differences between written and spoken discourse:

- written words are unable to convey specific nuances of context characteristic of speech (see the brief discussion of paralinguistic cues above);
- as a consequence written discourse tends towards a greater explicitness;
- written discourse, as it is governed by grammatical rules etc. bears a more (immediately apparent) formal structure than spoken language, and;
- the activity of writing allows the separation of the author from the text in a way which the immediacy of spoken language does not allow.

CMC also differs from conventionally written text in further respects, and Murray (1995) characterised e-mail communication as a hybrid between oral and written language. For instance, on occasions, contributors to the BBS have attempted to compensate for the absence of paralinguistic cues by the use of 'emoticons' (the typing of [:-)] or [:- ( ] after a

[114] The U.K. *Office for National Statistics* (2001) identified that 56 % of men and 47% of women claimed to regularly participate in CMC. Participation also differed on the basis of age / generation: whilst 85% of 16-24 year olds claimed regular use of this medium, this proportion declined incrementally with age, and only 10% of the population who were 65 years and older regularly used this medium. Whilst the most frequently stated reasons for Internet use were 'seeking information about goods and services' (79%), and 'e-mail' (72%), only 18% of Internet users claimed to regularly use chat-rooms or bulletin boards.

sentence in order to claim emotional emphasis. Sometimes multiple vowels were deployed in order to mimic rising intonation e.g. *sooo*. Selwyn and Robson (1998:4) asserted that that the content and style of CMC lies somewhere between the telephone call and the memo i.e. tending towards a simplified register of language due to the time/space constraints of this medium.

Temporal considerations provide a further significant difference between verbal communication and CMC. The temporal possibilities raised by CMC far from guarantee contemporaneous exchange. Selwyn and Robson (1998:2) characterised electronic communication as 'asynchronous' in which users are free to respond (or not) when and how they like. More subtly, Chen and Hinton (1999:4.3) suggested that CMC is typically conducted in rounds; one participant enters a message and another (or others) respond. These sequential features suggest a more strictly limited and ordered structure to CMC in comparison to the complexities of ordinary talk. Not only is the communication conducted in chunks, but also the time lag between message and response ensures a diminution of spontaneity, and (significantly) allows for rehearsal. Paradoxically Weiss (1994:65) suggested that this obvious limit to immediacy of communication could act as to convey a sense of 'greater attention' between the respondent and interlocutor.

In terms of the sequential organisation of interaction, Dicks and Mason (1998:3.5) asserted that non-linearity allows for readers of hypertext to establish their own pathways through the text, and as such, hypertext environments are best characterised as shifting matrices of nodal connections rather than fixed grids of self-contained narratives: such non-sequentialism perhaps problematises the issue of 'versions' by amplifying the possibilities for multi-perspectivalism. Whilst I remained cognisant of the above particularities, I also retained a sense that the BBS data remained capable of providing rich detail of discursively accountable actions that occur as a mundane part of intimacy troubles, and consequently the following analysis was derived from contributions made to the public diaries and bulletin boards available at www.divorce-online.co.uk over a three-year period between July 2000, and August 2003.

In seeking to explicate the vernacular understandings of intimacy troubles instantiated in these materials, my data analysis was predominated by a concern to avoid superimposing an exogamous 'professional vision' of my own. At first blush, many of the insights offered by the Discursive Action Model seemed to offer a viable means of achieving this aim. McCarthy (1990) characterised this (and other ethnomethodologically informed) approaches as facilitating 'anti-foundationalist' understandings of discourse and social practices. However, the question arose as to whether *any* data analysis (including those methods that are consistent to the spirit of the respecification programme outlined above) could possibly avoid all *a priori* stipulation. Lynch (1993: xviii) highlighted this paradox in claiming that the research agenda of contemporary ethnomethodology has veered considerably towards a 'foundationalist position': he suggested that this is most notably the case within the CA research programme. The extent that CA (arguably) now represents the pre-eminent research programme within the wider ethnomethodological enterprise seems to subvert Garfinkel's originally expressed intentions. For instance, Lynch (1993:203) asserted that a 'mythological conception of natural science has now become entrenched in CA's observation language and conventions for presenting and disseminating analytic reports'. Lynch's arguments rest upon the gradual professionalisation of CA. He characterised CA (at its outset) as sharing common ground with the broader ethnomethodological project to the extent that both approaches were centrally occupied with a praxiological and accountable understanding of ordinary actions (Lynch, 1993:24).

However, he also asserted that the seeds of CA's divergence from the wider ethnomethodological project were present at the former's inception. Specifically, Sacks explicitly proceeded with the intention of creating a nascent behavioural science substantively based upon existing models of natural science. In particular, Lynch (1993:205) identified parallels between early the early CA work and primitive natural science by which scientific observations, replications and reports are viewed as primarily accountable and reportable matters.[115] Reflecting this ordinary and non-specialised version of scientific practice, Sacks proposed that CA presented the opportunity for a 'primitive social science' in which the accounts of professional sociologists were de-privileged in favour of the study of the orderly details of ordinary interaction that are intuitively recognisable by any 'ordinary member' of a given social situation. However, for Lynch (1993:215) CA gradually assumed a more 'disciplined and scientist cast' and abandoned some of Garfinkel's central commitments. It is

[115] In 'primitive' variants of natural science, relevant techniques for the replication of scientific 'discoveries' were (by in large) considered as non-specialised matters: anyone – including laymen – could replicate early experimental findings given the relevant recipe of technical equipment and procedures.

not intended to replicate Lynch's extensive account of how CA became transformed into (a) a mode of technically specialist inquiry, with (b) a distinctive foundationalist leaning, and (c) an overbearingly fetishist concern with certain structural features of ordinary conversation. However, (in summary) he suggested that the following technological features pre-figure the outcomes of CA studies:

- *a material technology* – tape-recording and playback facilities which preserve singular conversations for later detailed inspection;
- *a literary technology* – a detailed transcription system developed by Jefferson for codifying both lexical and non-lexical features of talk; and,
- *a social technology* – a relatively circumscribed membership of an analytic culture with an attendant set of common sensibilities and analytic priorities.

It seemed to me that (to a varying extent), these concerns might also apply should the methodological prescriptions of the Discursive Action Model be followed to 'the letter of the law'. By comparison, the methodology advocated by Lynch (1993) offered a means by which both (a) a concern for the intuitive adequacy of communicative interaction (that which is recognisable by any 'ordinary member' in a given social situation) could be maintained; and (b) at the same time, the critical insights yielded by existing *philotopics* could also be accommodated. Lynch (1993:272) advocated a return to the 'transparently intelligible and intuitively obvious – and yet defeasible – workings of language and practical action that compose an uninvestigated and unjustified situation of inquiry.' In recommending this manifesto, he concurred with Garfinkel's invocation for an abandonment of the 'sociological core', and its replacement with an array of 'primitive sociologies'. In particular, he urged an investigation of what he called 'primitive epistopics' – the primitive structures of accountability that compose the 'instructable reproducibility of social actions' (Lynch, 1993:299). For Lynch, the investigation of 'epstopics' entailed a stock-taking exercise of 'vernacular topics that a science attempts to professionalise'. In respect of existing sociologies, Lynch suggested that the key question concerned 'what more could be done with this work?' and his own exercise in this respect can be read as a set of practical instructions in how to initiate an 'academic dialogue' between 'primitive' and professional sociological analyses ('translated' as follows in terms of their use in the current study):

[1] 'Begin by taking up one or more of the *philotopics*' – existing histories, philosophies, and sociologies constituting the existing literature (including insights derived from CA studies). For Lynch (1993:299) these resources provided 'foci for classical epistemological and methodological discussions' and in spite of their stipulative roots they remain critically

relevant for vernacular inquiry in allowing for a continuation of an 'academic conversation' between the technical and vernacular.

[2] 'Search for primitive examples' – Lynch (1993:300) asserted that the practices of observation, description, truth-telling, and strictly-ordered sequential phenomena are not the exclusive preserve of professional sociology but are also an immanent feature of vernacular accounts.

[3] 'Follow the *philotopics* around and investigate actual cases in detail' – Lynch (1993: 301) suggested the search for 'naturally –occurring language games [in order] to investigate their performance in detail'.

[4] 'Investigate each case in accordance with a unique adequacy requirement' – Lynch (1993: 302) urged the demonstration of what descriptions say about a practice by allowing the reader to see what is said for themselves by 'entering into the phenomenal field of that practice' without pre-judging matters through the lenses of grand theories.

[5] 'Apply ethnomethodological indifference to the fact of the existence of established sociologies (existing *philotopics* in the case of the current analysis). For Lynch (1993: 303) this recommendation does not equate to the abandonment of the findings of stipulative analyses – but rather a suspension of judgement in relation to these analyses.

[6] Use a 'normal science' methodology – in Lynch's (1993:304) terms, 'nothing fancy' but the 'juxtaposition of (arguably) comparable cases, citing testimonies and reports, drawing out common themes, noting relevant discrepancies and trends, and [especially] appealing to common intuitions and judgements.' Lynch recommended that such analyses be expressed in vernacular terms and be 'doubly transparent'. In the case of the current study, as the language games examined are about describing something – intimacy troubles – a test of the adequacy of the analysis is that the descriptions ought to be recognisable to the readers, and furthermore thematic presentation of those descriptions must be similarly recognisable. In short, studies should aim to adequately reproduce vernacular accounts in both their content and organisation from the vantage point of ordinary (non specialised) competencies.

[7] Relate the findings back to the classic literatures - Lynch (1993: 306-7) asserted that 'particular findings are likely to hold differentiating and therapeutic implications for classic epistemological and methodological versions' - in this case, of intimacy troubles. However, rather than being orientated towards building a 'better' description, theory etc. the analysis as outlined here is intended to subvert efforts to build such models or theories. If the established

sociologies reported above were to be treat as merely 'empty words', then Lynch's prescriptions would involve submission to a variety of negativism: however he asserted that 'As constituents of a *linga franca*, they permit a way of talking that glosses over deep and mutual misunderstandings; they provide interdisciplinary conversation starters, nominal bindings, verbal passage points, and literary escape hatches.' Any attempt to dress-up the inherent (but useful) vagueness of vernacular accounts into a general theory would ultimately founder upon grounds of unwarranted abstraction: rather than settling epistemological and methodological debates, Lynch's recommended approach allows for inspection of these disputes, albeit from another angle.

The following analysis has therefore sought to apply a hybrid of (a) Lynch's (1993) methodological recommendations, and (b) a modified or 'underbuilt' rendition of the Discursive Action Model (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992) to instances of 'intimacy troubles discourse' revealed within the BBS forums.

To summarise:

- the corpus of data was derived from contributions made to the public diaries and bulletin boards available at www.divorce-online.co.uk over a three-year period between July 2000, and August 2003. All of the data examples reported (below) derive from instances of Internet communication that were enacted entirely within the public domain;
- throughout the analysis, I have remained cognisant of the particular conditions imposed by Internet communication, and particularly those related to issues of 'authenticity', 'participation/exclusion', and the structural conditions imposed by this medium;
- the general intention of the analysis has been to explicate what Lynch (1993:302) called 'naturally occurring language games';
- the analysis is intended to be 'synthesising' in it's effects, building upon, and re-engaging with established (stipulative) analyses of intimate relations/troubles; and,
- (again) sharing Lynch's assertions, the analysis makes use of many of the social and interctional insights derived from Conversational Analysis while not seeking to utilise directly its formal procedures or contribute to its corpus of findings.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.

INTRODUCTION.

This analysis focuses principally upon the following features of contributions made to the BBS forum:

- the immanent features of intimacy troubles discourse i.e. issues made topically relevant and subsequently described;
- the discursive practices of 'making observations', reporting events, and 'truth-telling' about intimacy-troubles; and,
- the 'intuitive adequacy' of these claims i.e. how they are recognised, understood, and responded to by co-participants.

As a consequence, findings are presented in three distinctive sections.

The first details the *substantive claims* made about the basis of intimacy troubles in BBS contributions and applies the principle of *per genus et differentiam* – a perhaps dated (but useful) point of departure for studying anything.

Subsequent sections detail the *structure and discursive effects* of a variety of longer BBS contributions, and the *substantive content and structure of responses* made to BBS contributions.

It should be noted that grammatical and typographical errors (as they were made in original BBS contributions) have been preserved in the data cited below.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF 'REFERENTS'.

As noted above, Davis (1973b) suggested that 'declining' intimate relationships either (a) chronically 'passed away', or (b) terminated in an acute 'sudden death'. This metaphor was found useful in characterising existing *philotopics* (established sociological theories of intimacy and intimacy troubles). In addition to Davis's broad distinction, four thematic regularities pervaded professional commentaries about intimacy troubles, namely:

- the *inherent structural weaknesses* of (all) intimate relations;
- *shifting social contexts* problematising (pre-existing) intimate forms;
- *failure or mismanagement of resources* problematising (specific) intimate relations; and,
- *breach or termination of contract* disturbing the (presumed) contractual basis of particular intimate relations.

Contributions made to the BBS differed from these concerns in terms of the range of factors cited by contributors as the *prima facie* reasons for intimacy troubles, and attributions of 'cause', 'fault', 'blame' etc. Smith (1978:33) asserted that 'for any set of actual events, there is always more than one version that can be treated as what has happened, even within a simple cultural community': in this instance, one person's 'we've grown apart' could be told and heard as 'being cheated on' by the other party to the relationship. It is therefore accepted as axiomatic that many (unknown, and unknowable) alternative perspectives exist in relation to the events discursively represented by contributors to the BBS. In addition, the relationship between discursive and extra-discursive domains is made more complex by the particular conditions imposed by Internet communication considered above. With these provisos in mind, the thematic analysis of referents (issues made topically relevant by BBS contributors) can be summarised as follows:

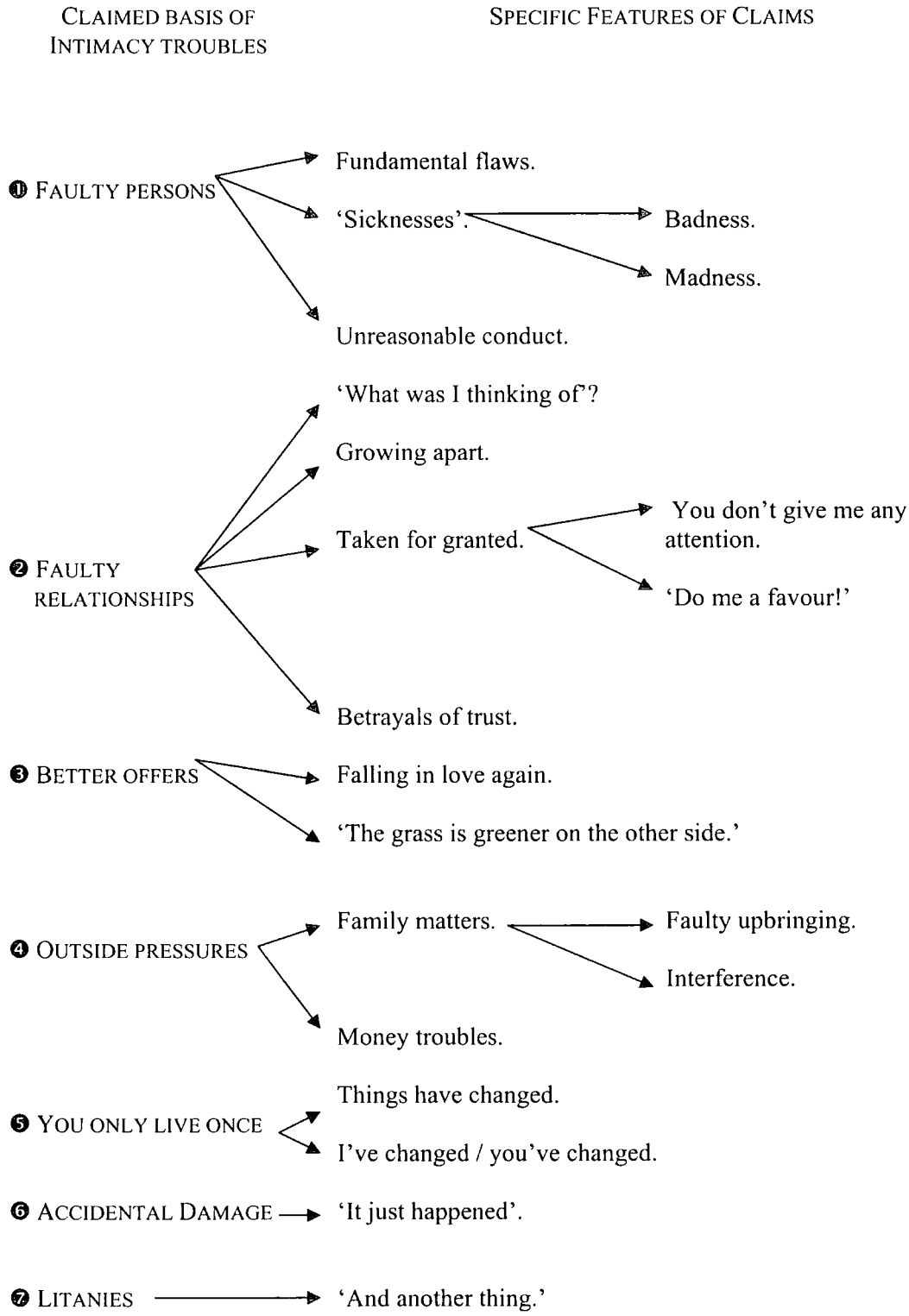

Figure 12: *A Typology of claims made by BBS contributors in relation to the 'substantive bases' of intimacy troubles.*

FAULTY PERSONS.

The common feature of the following contributions is that they implicated the (somehow inadequate) characteristics or actions of the 'other' as the primary source of intimacy troubles. In some cases (data 1 & 2) the 'causes' of these inadequacies were located in essentialist claims i.e. the other person was flawed on the basis of membership of a (usually gender) category. Other contributors (data 3-8) drew attention to various 'pathological faults' of a particular other person.

FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS.

Fuss (1991) asserted that it was useful to distinguish between two different 'species of essentialism' based upon Locke's distinction between 'real' and 'nominal' essences. In Locke's schema, real essences are suggestive of objective, verifiable and physical bases for differences in form between objects. In contrast, nominal essences imply a constructionist agenda - essences exist only in the sense that they are constructed in the human mind and utilised as a means to classify objects. In the case of the latter, the fundamental 'sameness' of people is claimed upon the membership of a social (as opposed to biological) category. The contributor of datum 1 claimed that men (in general) are collectively prone to adultery on the basis of their biological make-up.

(1) **[MWHA: 1884-6]**

Men are as one user says prone to adultery because of our genetic heritage. We are designed to breed and we have been blessed with higher sex drives than women per se. 1884 1885 1886

When nominal essences were employed by women in support of general claims about men's conduct, these most usually assumed a variant form of the modern idiom *'all men are bastards'*. For instance;

(2) **[WWHA: 2805-6]**

All men are capable of being bad, full stop period. They cannot help themselves, that's my opinion, anyone care to argue. 2805 2806

The deployment of essentialist claims as a means of explaining gender differences coincides with a number of established *philotopics* (*see* Simmel, [1911] 1984; Langford, 1999), and the theoretical difficulties associated with these strategies have also been noted (*see* Bordo, 1997; Harding, 1990).

'SICKNESSES'.

In contrast to essentialist claims, several contributors located the source of intimacy troubles with the particular characteristics of the 'other party' (data 3-8). In making these claims, contributors aligned themselves with the theoretical tendencies of early psychological work on intimacy troubles (see Duck, 1999: 85). Typically, once implicated, individuals were subject to interpretations of deviance or moral pathology. As reported above, Morgan (1985: 28) noted the similarly pathologising effects of 'marriage guidance' and 'relationship counselling'. Two variants of pathological claims – moral and medical – were in evidence in the vernacular accounts made on the BBS.

'BADNESS'.

The following claims (data 3&4) commented upon a number of prior contributions that had attributed the source of intimacy troubles to moral defects in (named) 'others'. These types of claim typically related to a (perceived) 'breach of trust', and accorded pathological levels of narcissism or self-interest to (specific) 'others'.

(3) **[WWHA: 1278-80]**

Women and men who have 1278
affairs are self centred and don't stop to think about anybody but 1279
themselves, if you think you are happily married you are only kidding 1280
[yourself].

(4) **[WWHA: 2944-8]**

Reading through at least some of the threads on this subject of women 2944
having affairs, it does seem clear that the majority of respondents are 2945
overtly selfish and self-centred, (but also bluntly honest), by giving 2946
the impression that there's really no moral factor at issue, to what in 2947
fact, is cheating on someone who has put faith and trust in you. 2948

Datum 4 is interesting insofar as the contributor challenges a notion commonly made by those who initiate 'extra-partnership' liaisons: namely, that they have 'fallen in love', or have met a 'uniquely-qualified-other-person'. These claims are subject to further analysis below; however, the contributor in this case drew attention to the social usefulness of these discursive devices, and offered an alternative reading (lines 2946-8).

What distinguished these contributions from those visible in data 1&2 is that both maintained a certain level of generalisation by asserting (universal) moral imperatives as opposed to gender essentialisms. Doubtless that in expressing these sentiments, the contributors had

particular instances in mind: however, to make these claims in relation to specific others (perhaps with whom the contributors were intimately involved) risks inviting some reflected moral approbation. Aristotle (1975: 267) first claimed that the success of intimate relations depended upon the virtuous qualities of the protagonists involved. Failure to recognise the 'moral flaws' of others might invite the interpretation that ones own moral judgement is in some way 'faulty'. In criticising qualities or traits (as opposed to individuals) the authors of (data 3&4) perhaps instantiate the theoretical dilemma posed Singer (1984a); namely whether or not the love of qualities can be distinguished from the love of persons bearing those qualities.

'MADNESS'.

As reported above, Morgan (1985) highlighted an emergent 'medical model of marriage' based upon technologies of guidance and counselling. Professional discourses of 'marriage guidance' and 'relationship counselling' bear several resemblances to both the ideation and practice of medicine, such as:

- parallels between the doctor-patient relationship and the professional-client relationship in marital counselling;
- an emphasis upon 'cure' in the case of 'marriage guidance' and palliation (or the hastening of a peaceful end) in 'relationship counselling' (1985:29);
- a stress upon counselling as a form of 'practice', with special emphasis on the relationship between research and 'practice'; and,
- an ethic of professional detachment or distance present in both medicine and marriage guidance.

These parallels were viewed as unremarkable by Morgan, given the symbiotic relationship between counselling and the (specifically medical) technology of psychiatry. The following contributions (data 5-8) shared this orientation by appearing to locate the 'cause' of intimacy troubles as residing with others who are 'defective' in the medical or psychological sense.

(5) **[MWHA: 1539-42]**

I think you are not only immature you are also an emotional cripple 1612
because you cannot commit yourself to a real person. 1613

Whilst datum 5 commented upon the reported actions of others from a vernacular basis, datum 6, in contrast, appealed to a more formal psychiatric discourse.

(6) **[WWHA: 988-92]**

My wife and I are going through a fairly torrid time following her affair. I have reached some conclusions about the direction I wish to take. However, I am acutely aware that my wife could well be suffering from depression - I have been on a number of web sites and she is displaying a number of classic symptoms.

One specific sub-group of these pseudo-medical claims discursively referenced alleged psychosexual pathologies as the underlying 'cause' of intimacy troubles. As reported, Giddens (1992: 30-1) asserted that sexuality has assumed a 'malleable property' in conditions of late-modernity, and specifically, that sexuality has largely been liberated from 'the pathologising discourses of psychiatry, psychology, and medicine'. Counter to this claim data 7 and 8 both asserted 'psycho-sexual defects' as topically relevant 'causes' of intimacy troubles. In datum 7 the contributor cited her husband's (implied negative) use of the term 'frigid' as a source of intimacy troubles.

(7) **[WWHA: 1767-9]**

My husband made me feel unattractive, he didn't say so in a direct way, its just the way he was with me, he did say on a few occasions that I was frigid, that alone cant do ones self esteem much good....

Datum 8 was interesting insofar as the contributor cited a combination of 'faulty person' referents considered thus far. Firstly, this contribution could be read as implying a negative moral interpretation of those who conduct 'extra-partnership liaisons' [lines 1897-1900]. However, what began as an implied criticism of conduct was supplanted by allegations of psychological (line 1900) and psychosexual (line 1902) disorder.

(8) **[MWHA: 1896-1902]**

Did anyone watch that ITN programme on Adultery on ITV on 5th July. There is this agency that puts married people with other married people so they can have affairs.

I thought do what, until I saw the people on it. Weirdo's! One was a fat blonde lady, the other an upper-class type and the blokes were all paedophiles by the look of them.

'UNREASONABLE CONDUCT'.

The concept of 'unreasonable conduct' was, until recently, institutionally supported in British law as legitimate grounds for seeking divorce. Smart and Neale (1997) have documented the convoluted relationship between public and social morality and the consequent influences of these contrasting commitments upon UK social policy. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (1973) effectively abandoned public morality in favour of 'no fault' divorce. However,

Smart and Neale (1997:9) asserted that those advocating reform of the 'fault system' had to strike a compromise with opponents. Hence, under the terms of this legislation, divorce became available upon the sole grounds that the marriage had 'broken down irretrievably', but at the same time previous 'matrimonial causes' were retained as means of demonstrating 'irretrievable breakdown'. Petitioners were thus required to demonstrate one or more of the following 'matrimonial causes':

- the respondent had committed adultery;
- the respondent had behaved in such a way that it would not be reasonable to expect further cohabitation ('unreasonable behaviour');
- the respondent had refused to live with or support the petitioner ('desertion');
- the partners had lived apart by mutual agreement for at least two years, and both partners agree to the divorce; or
- the partners had lived apart by mutual agreement for at least five years.

Whilst adultery, desertion, and living apart constitute (ostensibly) more specific and demonstrable grounds for divorce, the charge of 'unreasonable behaviour' left much to subjective interpretation within the legal process, and as such, tended to act as a 'catch-all' category in those cases in which divorce petitions were contested. As in law, the category of 'unreasonable conduct' as it is used here, could be deemed to rest upon similarly aesthetic criteria. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the defining characteristics of this family of referents were that:

- contributors discursively referenced 'unacceptable-actions-of-the-other' as the principle 'cause' of intimacy troubles; and,
- particular 'others' were accorded agency in these reported instances i.e. the 'cause' is not merely a matter of omission.

The most commonly cited examples of 'unreasonable conduct' related to the evaluation of one party's conduct as overbearingly controlling, morbidly jealous, unduly suspicious. For instance, in datum 9 the contributor reported the 'manipulation' of various aspects of her life, implying a lack of choice on her part.

(9) **[WWHA: 3059-61]**

I was unhappy for a number of reasons, but at the end of the day the 3059
main reason being the way he manipulated my life in a variety of ways, 3060
i.e.; with money - holidays - our social life (or lack of it), etc. 3061

Datum 10 inferred a generally more pernicious variety of 'unreasonable conduct': in this case, the threat of violence (line 1723) compounded claims that the contributor's life was otherwise subject to an undue level of surveillance and control.

(10) **[KTMG: 1722-5]**

I've been married for 7 years and have a 2 year old son. My husband is 1722
insanely jealous and very aggresive (but not violent). We have got to 1723
the stage where I feel I am unable to have any sort of life outside of 1724
the marriage for fear he thinks I am having an affair. 1725

In some instances (such as datum 11), BBS contributors cited examples of enacted physical violence as compounding an underlying manipulative relationship:

(11) **[KTMG: 1654-61]**

My husband has always been controlling and possessive 1654
but it is getting worse again. It last came to a head a few years ago 1655
during my uni fginals and no-one understood why I stayed - I dont 1656
eiother and wish I had left then. I went round to my friends house to 1657
talk under the pretence of her having a problem. He came and picked me 1658
up and demanded to know what we had been talking about. He said, and I 1659
quote, 'I have the right to know, you have taken my wife away from me 1660
till 9 oclock at night'. A few days bbefore he threw me across our living room. 1661

Several established *philotopics* made claims with regard to 'normal' or 'proper' conduct. Elias (1994) argued that these judgements were subject to considerable historical contingency, and in this respect it is fair to speculate that the above claims (all made by women) could have been regarded (in even recent history in some spheres) as acceptable variants of 'normal' gender relations. The instances reported here, if taken literally, would appear to be irreconcilable with the presumed democratic basis for intimate relations claimed by Giddens (1992), and rather may instantiate his concept of 'co-dependent' unions.

Overall, claims that intimacy troubles resulted from the particular characteristics of 'faulty persons' are difficult to reconcile with the majority of established (sociological) *philotopics* and appear to have a greater affinity with the discourses of academic and/or popular psychology. Duck (1999: 85) argued that such individualising claims were emblematic of psychological accounts of intimacy troubles produced during the 1960's and 1970's. Typically 'deviant' individuals (or deviant actions) were subject to (negative) judgement against various frameworks of moral or pathological interpretation. Hazleden (2003) attributed similar individualising tendencies to variants of 'popular psychology', which find expression in contemporary (relationship) self-help manuals to the extent that:

- 'the self' is framed as an uncompleted and malleable project and afforded primary ethical significance;
- all other relationships are claimed to follow from one's relationship with one's 'self';
- relationship difficulties are framed in terms of an individualist '*psy ontology*';
- individual responsibility and change are discursively advocated; and,
- certain 'technologies of the self' – principally self love and self-knowledge are similarly advocated.

It was reported above that the leitmotif of established sociological *philotopics* has typically been to counter the individualising tendencies of psychology, and instead emphasise the relational basis of intimacy e.g. the structural or communicative aspects of intimate relationships. The remainder of contributors' claims reported below place a similar emphasis upon relationship (as opposed to individual) factors.

FAULTY RELATIONSHIPS.

In the following contributions various aspects of (typically, specific) intimate relations were cited as being the primary 'cause' of intimacy troubles.

WHAT WAS I THINKING OF?

A number of contributors (retrospectively) attributed intimacy troubles to the notion that their relationships were ill thought out in their conception, or entered into too hastily. Vaughan (1990:11) noted that feelings of dissatisfaction with intimate relations often occurred from the outset of marriage or cohabitation: a number of her respondents (retrospectively) claimed to have been aware of 'making a mistake' on 'moving-in', their wedding day, or honeymoon. 'Mistake claims' made in the BBS forum typically referenced either (a) that the parties were insufficiently mature, or (b) that protagonists were 'mismatched' on some critical criterion. For instance, datum 12 (line 1725) cited immaturity as being a significant factor in the break-up of her own (and her new intimate's) pre-existing marriages.

(12) **[WWHA: 1724-8]**

Both of us were married at a 1724
young age and seemed to reach the same point in our relationships that 1725
we wondered if this was all there was to life. 1726

In datum 13 (line 240) the contributor implied (rather than specified) a fundamental 'mismatch'.

(13) **[KTMG: 238-41]**

We are both in our mid thirties. *238*
He loves me and I love him, but we come from very *239*
different backgrounds and sometimes this makes it *240*
very difficult for me. *241*

A variety of established sociological *philotopics* e.g. Simmel [1923a] (1984:144), Davis (1973b: 4), and Giddens (1992: 50) have highlighted (in various ways) the element of risk entailed in initiating intimate relations. Each of these authors characterised intimacy in terms of a 'gamble' against the future, taken against uncertain odds: to a certain extent, the instances reported here could be read as reconcilable with these claims.

GROWING APART.

Several contributors to the BBS forum cited declining intimacy as a normal developmental feature of relationships in general. In relation to their own specific experiences, an inverse temporal metric was (typically) implied between (a) the longevity of the relationship, and (b) the 'intensity' of the intimate attachment. These discursive claims parallel assertions made in a variety of established *philotopics* e.g. Davis's (1973b) account of the 'passing away' of intimate relations; Aristotle's (1975: 234) deployment of the metaphor of exhaustion; and Bauman's (1993b: 98) characterisation of intimate relations in terms of constant striving. Collectively, these sociological discourses emphasised the inherent resource intensity of intimate relations. Characteristically, the vernacular claims made in the BBS forum referenced the 'fact' that the intimate parties had simply 'grown apart'. Frequently, these contributions were punctuated with specific temporal marker points highlighting key transitions marking the decline of intimacy:

(14) **[WWHA: 282-6]**

I was married for 10 years, no kids, everyone thought that we had a *282*
great life and we did make a good team. But through our change in *283*
interests we started to do our own things, and neither of us minded *284*
that. I was not really unhappy but knew that I was missing the *285*
affection and and yes maybe lust that makes a relationship buzz. *286*

In datum 14 the contributor effected a contrast between her seemingly idyllic married life (at least as viewed by outsiders) and her own experience – namely that her and her partner were 'growing apart'. She reinforced the normative-developmental aspect of this transformation (lines 285-6) by making explicit reference to the 'fact' that there was no (other) specific identifiable source to this reported loss of satisfaction.

'I DON'T FANCY YOU ANYMORE'.

A particular 'family' of discursive claims referenced loss of sexual interest or habituation as a specific form of 'resource failure'. For example, in datum 15 the contributor related a loss of sexual interest on the part of his wife: his further claim that other aspects of the relationship remained broadly amicable was a typical feature of BBS contributions of this nature.

(15) **[KTMG: 1038-41]**

My wife has just told me she doesn't fancy me anymore, she says she loves me dearly but as a friend not a lover and sees no way to change things. Our sex life has never been good as she suffers from Endometriosis and to conceive we had to go through IVF. 1038 1039 1040 1041

Similarly, the contributor of datum 16 reported the maintenance of a 'filial' intimacy with her husband, whilst at the same time attributing a renewed sexual interest in others to declining sexual satisfaction within her marriage. It is noteworthy that this contributor further discursively referenced 'immaturity' as the underlying 'cause' of this state of affairs.

(16) **[WWHA: 2884-7]**

It didnt matter how nice to me my husband was I still found other men more attractive than him. It is strange because he is very good looking but after nearly 10 years, and I am still only 25, it started to feel like I was in bed with my brother and sex became so uncomfortable. 2884 2885 2886 2887

(17) **[WWHA: 1858-9]**

He is totaly uninterested in me sexually, although I have lived in hope that this would change. I feel so rejected and alone. 1858 1859

The contributor of datum 17 emphasised the negative emotional consequences of these perceived losses. In the following extracts (data 18 & 19), such loss of sexual satisfaction was discursively referenced as providing a 'reasonable warrant' for embarking upon 'extra-partnership liaisons':

(18) **[WWHA: 833-4]**

People do not have affairs unless they are either unhappy or their sexual needs are not being met at home. 833 834

(19) **[WWHA: 267-8]**

Why did I? Well, I was craving attention - sexual, intimate, friendly, etc. I met someone who fulfilled the things I was missing.... 267 268

These claims resonate with those made in several established sociological *philotopics*. For instance, Giddens (1992: 62) suggested that contemporary intimate relations (a) assume a stock of erotic knowledge at their inception, (b) place a high premium upon continued sexual satisfaction, and (c) demand exclusivity only to the extent that this condition is deemed desirable by both protagonists. Others afforded less centrality to the issue of sexual satisfaction (*see* Simmel, [1923b] 1984; Davis, 1973b; and Bauman, 2001).

'TAKEN FOR GRANTED.'

Several (complainant) contributors to the BBS forum cited habituation or being 'taken for granted' as the primary 'cause' of intimacy troubles. Typically, these BBS contributions discursively referenced a generalised failure of investment in mundane aspects of the relationship, and they are therefore distinguishable from the (specific) claims made above in relation to sexual dissatisfaction. Similarly, these claims can be distinguished from those made in relation to 'unreasonable conduct' insofar as they were typically discourses of (passive) neglect as opposed to (active) abuse. In this respect, these claims perhaps resonate with aspects of established sociological *philotopics* e.g. Simmel's [1923b] (1984:164), and Singer's (1984a: 5) assertion that intimate relations entail a process of 'active bestowal' and concomitant disattention to negative aspects of that person's identity. Typically in the examples cited below, 'being taken for granted' seemed to sanction the (at least discursive) accentuation of 'negative' aspects of the other, which were then usually reported as a serious (if not terminal) threat to the ongoing viability of the relationship. Two specific variants of 'being taken for granted' are described here, namely (a) lack of attention, and (b) lack of practical assistance.

'YOU DON'T GIVE ME ANY ATTENTION.'

The following contribution (datum 20) claimed incremental unilateral dissatisfaction with the terms of the relationship. The contributor referenced his wife's incremental loss of interest in various aspects of his life, but also emphasised (line 1758) that her actions constituted omissions rather than intentional 'wounds'. Lines 1759-61 provided specific instances in support of the general charge of neglect. This particular account subsequently terminated with the disclosure of the 'discovery' of an extra-marital liaison.

(20) **[MWHA: 1757-1761]**

Interestingly, she made life hell for me during the 2 years leading up 1757
to me confronting her - nothing really nasty, just withdrawal of moral 1758
support for everything that I did - no congratulations for promotion, 1759
no thanks for a great holiday never saying ILU, rarely saying ILU2, 1760
never initiating sex, ranting at me, ranting at the kids etc. 1761

Other contributors also claimed that 'being taken for granted' served to legitimate subsequent 'extra-partnership liaisons': the generalised imperative comprising datum 21 was typical of such claims.

(21) **[WWHA: 1782-4]**

If we don't get the love, attention 1782
and respect that we feel we deserve, it is only natural that we look to 1783
someone else more willing to provide it. 1784

As suggested, the *leitmotif* of this group of referents was that of complacency rather than active 'damage'. Datum 22 provided an interesting variation upon this theme. In this case the contributor reported his awareness of his wife's extra-marital liaison [line 1694]. However, rather than choosing to confront her (the most usually reported course of action in BBS contributions), he deliberately opted to 'turn a blind eye'. Later elements of this account imply that his (now ex) wife blames his failure to act as hastening the termination of the relationship.

(22) **[MWHA: 1694-6]**

I was in the same boat, my ex was having an affair and i let it go. she 1694
left me taking our son, and 5 years on its like she is out to get me as 1695
if i was in the wrong. 1696

The theme of 'being taken for granted', with it's attendant features of complacency and habituation, perhaps instantiates Bauman's (1993:103) notion of 'fixation' in which fixed rules and routines are substituted for the unreliable sentiments of intimacy. Bauman asserted that successful fixation entailed a stoical 'for better-for worse' attitude. In terms of Bauman's schema, data 20-22 could be framed as instances of 'failed fixation'.

'DO ME A FAVOUR'.

Omissions of practical support were considered to be primary 'cause' of intimacy troubles by a number of contributors: similarly, such claims were also made topically relevant within a number of established sociological *philotopics*. For Davis's (1973b) successful intimate relations depended upon and ongoing exchange of favours i.e. actions that are culturally-

accepted-and-mutually-understood-as-intimate. As reported *above*, in contemporary intimate relations both sexual and communicative exchanges seemingly qualify as 'currency' in this respect. However, Davis also emphasised more pragmatic actions, and adopting an ecological frame of reference, claimed that the 'other' acts as an extension of the self in dealing with the contingencies of the environment.[116] Datum 23 was typical of a number of BBS extracts in which contributors (problematically) referenced being unable to rely upon the 'other party'.

(23) **[KTMG: 242-3]**

I expected to be able to rely on my husband for help, but 242
the fact is, if I have a problem, I can only rely on myself. 243

Overall, the notion of being 'taken for granted' may invite an econocentric interpretation of intimacy which underplays the different and incommensurate ways in which people derive rewards from relationships. The notion that 'exchange' may indeed be important for the sustenance of intimacy is perhaps made valid by common sense. However, established *philotopics* invariably shed little light upon to the manifold, (sometimes) subtle and complex ways in which matters of 'fairness' are discursively referenced and made topically relevant such as in the data reported here.

BETRAYALS OF TRUST.

Several established *philotopics* afforded central significance to the role of trust in sustaining intimate relations. For instance Simmel [1908] (1950: 317) asserted that discretion and confidence in others, constituted the most central pre-condition for intimate relations.[117] Lack or failure of trust, when cited by BBS contributors, was typically discursively constructed as the basis for terminating intimate relation, such as is the case in datum 24.

(24) **[MWHA: 240-44]**

I know exactly what you mean - the lies & deceit, and knowing the trust 240
is gone has led me to the same conclusion - that I have no option but 241
to divorce him, but I still wake up every morning wondering if it's the 242
right decision, and go to bed every night wondering if there is any 243
possible way I could make this work if I tried again. 244

Similarly, the contributor of datum 25 referenced the (negative) transformative effects of such a breach:

[116] Davis suggested that 'favours' not only included physical favours such as completing tasks on behalf of the other, but also psychological favours – in particular, emotional support.

[117] Simmel suggested that these qualities serve as the most important synthetic forces within social relationships in general.

(25) **[MWHA: 1794-96]**

Gutsy? - I dont think so. Maybe I am an Idiot? I want a wife, not a pet 1794
that I have to constantly check up on. If I cant trust her there is no 1795
point in going on. 1796

Discursively referenced 'breaches of trust' were most typically found within longer BBS accounts of extra-partnership liaisons: the notion that one has been cheated or deceived rests upon the presumption of an existent 'contractual' obligations in support of intimate exclusivity. In spite of claims to the counter (*see* Giddens, 1992: 63) the prevailing sentiment expressed within the BBS forum was that of a pervasive normative expectation of monogamy within intimate relations. The following group of referents shared a characteristic implication: namely that intimacy troubles were attributable to the suspicion or confirmation of an 'extra-partnership liaison'. In datum 26 (line 1597) the contributor claimed the 'discovery' of his partners alleged misdemeanour. Discourses of discovery / detection provide an important element in longer BBS accounts of 'betrayal', and the structural significance of these claims is subject to further scrutiny *below*. However, (and atypically) the contributor went on to claim that he and his wife are attempting to resolve the issue. The variable use of both collective and personal pronouns (lines 1600-1) served to simultaneously imply that whilst both parties wished to 'repair' their relationship, the blame for this situation should be firmly located with the actions of his wife.

(26) **[KTMG: 1597-1601]**

i discovered that my wife of 20 years has been having an affair with an 1597
old boyfriend she contacted through friendsreunited. She had not seen or 1598
heard from him in 26 years but now says he is the love of her life and 1599
that she no longer has any feelings for me. I initally wanted to divorce 1600
but we are trying counselling to see if we can understand why she 1601
feels this way.

More typically, (truncated) references to extra-partnership liaisons pre-monitored the announcement of separation / divorce. For instance:

(27) **[MWHA: 935-7]**

Having found out that my husband of 7 years has not only been leading a 935
double life for the last 4 years but has just become a father again 936
(not with me!), I have made the decision to divorce. 937

(28) **[MWHA: 570-1]**

My husband recently informed me that he is in love with another woman 570
and would prefer to be with her. I asked him to leave. He went to her. 571

In data 26-28 the contributors all implied that they had 'the whip hand' in decisions as to whether to initiate remedial or terminating actions. The work accomplished by such assertions of agency is (again) subject to further elaboration below: it is suffice to note here that the general impression created is one of powerfulness. However, an opposite discursive tendency was also noted within the BBS data: a strategy that typically made implicit or explicit reference to difficulties in coping with the novel circumstances in which contributors found themselves. Datum 29 was typical of such expressions of vulnerability. In lines 769-70, the contributor professed his ongoing love for his wife in the face of her rejection and extra-marital affair. The remainder of datum 29 - which is part of a much longer contribution (and subject to further analysis *below*) - was consistent with similarly themed examples in referencing the prevailing negative consequences of the new situation. In lines 775-6 the contributor raised the possibility of his culpability in these matters: however, this (weak) claim should be taken within context, and information presented prior to this point is difficult (if not logically impossible) to reconcile with this conclusion. Finally, in line 777 the contributor explicitly warranted the help of others. The discursive usefulness of claiming vulnerability is again examined below in relation to the structural organisation of these types of account.

(29) **[WWHA: 769-77]**

I still love her so much and I want to work things out but 769
she is still seeing the other guy. I feel so much pain I had to go for 770
an AIDS test because I don't know when it started. I have trouble 771
sleeping I feel sick thinking about it. I miss not seeing my little boy 772
everyday...I don't know if I should divorce her if so on what 773
grounds....all my friends have been so supportive she has cut off 774
contact with all my friends..I feel that its all my fault that she did 775
it because of me that I wasn't good enough. I feel so betrayed!!!!!! 776
Please help!!!!!! 777

BETTER OFFERS.

This group of referents appeared most frequently as adjuncts to longer accounts detailing new relationships. The introduction of a 'new intimate' self-evidently spells (often terminal) trouble for existing intimate relations. In some cases, new relationships were accounted for in purely positive terms i.e. noteworthy aspects or special qualifications of the new intimate were presented as 'sufficient cause' to terminate pre-existing intimacy (data 30-32). Other contributions seemed elaborately organised in order to support the implication that the new intimate remedied some (alleged) lack in the pre-existing relationship. In such cases, negative information about former intimates was (unavoidably) presented. Often these contributions were supported by reference to a diminished sense of agency. In such cases, the new intimate relationship was typically presented as unavoidable as the contributor was (allegedly) helpless

in the face of 'the power of love'. In other cases, new intimacy was discursively presented as more-or-less occurring by accident.

'FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN'.

Several established *philotopics* have made the notion that intimates might be 'in love with love' itself theoretically relevant. For instance, Singer (1984b) suggested that courtly love (at least in the guise constructed by Victorian medievalists) perpetuated the idea that love is a (self-contained) end worth pursuing in and of itself. Typically, within this form of ideation, sexual love between men and women is presented as something splendid and unattainable by other means. Later romanticism(s) arguably augmented this doctrine by submitting to the *Humean* manifesto that reason ought to be the slave of passions. Singer (1984b: 295) thus claimed that the primacy of feeling over reason resulted in love assuming a greater significance than the attributes of any given object, exactly displacing the Christian idiom that 'God is love' with that of 'love is God'. Similarly, Weber (1948:343) claimed that the erotic sphere and sexual love represent the 'greatest irrational force of life', offering the possibility of 'escape' from iron cage of formal rationality. In the following data (30-32) love was affirmed as a positive value in itself, obviously heralding trouble for existing intimate relationships in which the contributors were (coincidentally) involved. However, it should be noted that all data were couched within the rhetoric of struggle; initiating a new intimate relation whilst not being entirely at liberty to pursue this course of action involves inherent conflict, and all contributors seemed at pains to reference that this was the case. The discursive effects of 'struggles discourse' are further reported below.

The contributor of datum 30 (characteristically) presented a 'power-of-love' argument in support of his reported actions i.e. the initiation of a new relationship over existing commitments. The deployment of these claims allowed the abandonment of his existent relationship, as reported in [lines 780-2] to be framed in terms of a 'moral' course of action.

(30) **[MWHA: 779-782]**

I speak as a man recently seperated from my wife after I fell deeply in	*779*
love with another woman. I realised that I could not in conscience stay	*780*
married, despite the severe financial implications, and impact on my	*781*
kids.	*782*

In contrast, the contributor of datum 31 sought to support her reported actions by means of temporal reference: in line 914 she reported that the affair pre-existed the other party's marriage. The provision of such detail implied awareness on the part of the contributor that the situation (as reported) could have potentially been read as morally problematic. In line

915, the 'power of love' was implicated to the effect of attenuating agency, and this short contribution ended with the characteristic deployment of 'struggles discourse'.

(31) **[MWHA: 913-916]**

I have started having an affair with a married man but he has been *913*
married for only 3 months and we have been seeing each other for 4 *914*
months. We are in love with each other and this weekend we have decided *915*
to go for it after alot of soulsearching and tears on both sides. *916*

The short example of datum 32 was typical of those contributions that referenced the self-affirming qualities of intimacy.

(32) **[WWHA: 1796-1798]**

Then suddenly *1796*
someone came into my life and showed me compassion and feeling like I *1797*
did I suddenly realized that I was a beautiful person. *1798*

'THE GRASS IS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE'.

As suggested above, this family of referents served to strike a contrast between the contributors (allegedly unfavourable) current or previous intimate relationship, and the (allegedly special) qualities of a new liaison. Reports of new intimate relations did not necessarily imply termination of pre-existent intimate relations. For instance, in datum 33 the contributor reported such an arrangement. The detail that her (new) co-intimate was 'younger' (line 114) effectively invited negative comparisons with her husband. In lines 114-6, the contributor documented a number of 'complaints' against her husband in a style characteristic of this group of BBS referents. Finally, in lines 116-7 the contributor claimed that the new arrangement was capable of fulfilling a previously (unmet) need.

(33) **[WWHA: 114-7]**

Well I currently am having an affair with a younger man. I feel trapped *114*
by my hubbie. We have been together for far too long and have grown *115*
apart. I have never felt complete with him and feel that I can with my *116*
lover. *117*

Datum 34 was effectively the introduction to a much longer account, which is subjected to further analysis below. In lines 189-90 the contributor was at pains to emphasise the longevity and intensity of (failed) efforts in attempting to 'repair' her marriage. In characteristic manner, the contributor 'catalogued' the various specific elements that comprised her marital dissatisfaction. Finally, in line 194 the contributor 'admitted defeat' in her reported efforts

(and employed capitalisation in order to emphasise the point being made): the detail that she was conducting an extra-marital relationship immediately followed.

(34) **[WWHA: 189-95]**

In my particular case, after years of asking, pleading, shouting, and 189
any other way I could try to get thru to my husband that I wanted and 190
needed more of a physical and emotional committment from him--that his 191
low requirement of verbal communication, and low interest in the 192
physical and emotional part of our relationship just wasn't enough--I 193
FINALLY GAVE UP. I didn't consciously make a decision to "have an 194
affair" 195

What data 24-34 (perhaps unwittingly) emphasised is the essential fragility of couple intimacy; a common theme in a number of established sociological *philotopics* e.g. Giddens (1991, 1992); Bauman (1993b); Simmel (1984 [1918); Weber (1948); Vaughan (1990); and Simpson (1998).

OUTSIDE PRESSURES.

The following collection of instances collectively identified issues within the immediate social environment as the 'cause' of intimacy troubles; typically 'pressures' were defined in terms of either (a) 'family interference', or (b) financial difficulties.

FAMILY MATTERS.

Characteristically, families of origin or wider kin relationships were implicated as the source of intimacy troubles, either by virtue of 'interference' or (more subtly) by virtue of their (alleged) negative socialising influence upon one or other of the protagonists.

INTERFERENCE.

It was noted *above* that most (if not all) established sociological *philotopics* were to some degree centrally predicated upon a distinction between the private and public spheres. The relatively 'closed' quality of intimate relations was most notably theoretically referenced by Simmel [1908] (1950:123), who asserted that intimate relations are distinctive in the degree to which both parties are confronted by (and therefore need only to account to) one another. However, intimate relationships remain to be conducted in the context of wider family life, and several contributors implicated members of (usually the other partner's) extended family as guilty of effectively breaching the 'boundaries' of the intimate dyad, and thus precipitating intimacy troubles.

(35) **[KTMG: 408-411]**

this year we got married at 28 i was quite new at the marrige thing and 408
we had a lot of problems in the family (his family kept interfering in 409
our lives then i got pregnant so i wasnt feeling so good we started 410
argueing daily i couldnt stand anymore so i asked him to move out. 411

In datum 35 the contributor implicated (her husband's) family in compounding co-existent difficulties. Datum 36 differed somewhat insofar as the 'other's' family were implicated in the intimacy troubles by virtue of their inclusion in intimate secrets: in this case, the intimate dyad was breached less by interference, and more by virtue of her husbands (alleged) indiscretion.

(36) **[KTMG: 1901-5]**

I met Gray and 1901
thought he's so cute and fun, but after a while I realised how clingy 1902
he was and everything that we did or everywhere that we went, his 1903
sister or mother were asking me about the next day (there was nothing 1904
that went on in our relationship that his family didn't know about). 1905

FAULTY UPBRINGING.

One particular (indirect) mechanism by which the families of origin were implicated as the 'cause' of intimacy troubles concerned the charge that one partner to a relationship had been 'damaged' by virtue of faulty socialisation. The (invariably) claimed upshot of 'faulty upbringing' was that one of the co-intimates had been rendered incapable of successful intimacy. Data 37 & 38 were typical of such claims.

(37) **[KTMG: 256-8]**

He comes from a very disjointed family, had a tough 256
upbringing and has never had anyone who has 257
unconditionally loved him. i think this is to blame.... 258

(38) **[WWHA: 651-3]**

I'm from the US and have been married almost 30 years. In the 30 years 651
I can barely remember any happiness-my husband was brought up to not 652
show emotions (including love)--that love was shown by worth ethic. 653

In datum 37 the contributor implicated her husband's 'tough upbringing' as being causative of his current disposition, and therefore their troubled relationship. Similarly, the contributor of datum 38 appealed to cultural stereotypes of (working class) masculinity in claiming her husband's commitment to paid (as opposed to emotional) work. Why these (claimed) disincentives failed to deter intimate investment in the first instance characteristically

remained a moot point within extended versions of these accounts: however, failure to spot 'flaws' in the other might be read as evidence of contributors' culpability in the 'cause' of subsequent troubles.

MONEY TROUBLES.

In this collection of referents, intimacy troubles were attributed to (alleged) financial and 'other' difficulties that reportedly befell the intimate protagonists. As reported, (and counter-intuitively), both Davis (1973b), and de Rougemont (1966) highlighted the role of barren and hostile environments in reinforcing intimate relations: intimates become closer in the face of adversity - *through thick and thin*. However, in datum 39 the contributor located the beginning of her intimacy troubles with attendant financial difficulties, which resulted in her effective abandonment in the parenting role.

(39) **[KTMG: 1934-9]**

We were very happy but hit a very financial rocky patch about 1934
2 years after we married which put us under tremendous strain. As a 1935
result, my husband was working all hours to try and meet our financial 1936
commitments, of which, there were many. I started to feel as though I 1937
was bringing up our daughter as a single mum, as ungrateful as it 1938
sounds, I was lonely and fed up with him never being there. 1939

In datum 39, attributions of responsibility for the reported state of affairs were at best equivocal. Similarly, in datum 40, it was implied that difficulties in the relationship arose from the (joint) decision to move home.

(40) **[WWHA: 1636-40]**

But things have been not so good for various 1636
reasons for 6months+ made worse by the strain of moving out of our 1637
previous (rented) home prior to completion of our first (owned) marital 1638
home. That emotionally & financially put us under strain, but it woulda 1639
been worth it. 1640

In contrast, the following contributor (datum 41) implicated (and emphasised) her husband's 'drinking' as generating subsequent financial difficulties.

(41) **[WWHA: 1110-3]**

Then (through 1110
drinking too much) his company went bust, and I had to close it down 1111
for him, and I was forced to go back to work full-time and leave my 1112
children with him whilst he stayed at home and did nothing. 1113

'YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE'.

In this group of referents (data 42-46), intimacy troubles were attributed to the incongruity of current circumstances with (professed) firm articles of personal belief. All examples implicated changes in either personal or (wider) social circumstances in accounting for how contributors' intimate relations had become less than wholly satisfactory. To this extent, these vernacular examples are consistent with contemporary sociological attempts to understand intimate relations, which Allan (2001: 330) suggested derive impetus from dramatic changes in the demography of domestic and family life. These claims were frequently (but not invariably) appended by statements emphasising the finite nature of existence.

THINGS HAVE CHANGED.

In datum 42 the contributor justified her self-confessed sexual hedonism in existential terms, and urged others to emulate her, both in philosophy and action. Changes in wider normative expectations concerning sexual mores were implied but not explicitly stated by the contributor.

(42) **[WWHA: 1150-4]**

I am in a very happy marriage but I enjoy having affairs - some more casual than others. Just because you married a man, should you have to endure a less happy relationship? Is that it, one chance of happiness and it's no longer there? Let me tell you, life is too short and is for living. Go out and enjoy yourself, find the man of your dreams.

1150 1151 1152 1153 1154

In datum 43 the contributor stated that once the mutuality of relationship has been breached, subsequent breaches are of lesser consequence: this personal statement was appended by a tentative conjecture about the prevailing 'moral climate'.

(43) **[MWHA: 1403-5]**

Once you've had your first affair, it gets easier to have more. And morals seem to have 'slipped' in the last five years or so...everyone is sleeping with everyone else, no?

1403 1404 1405

Other contributors (e.g. the author of datum 44) asserted how the 'shifting sands' of gender relations had rendered (previously acceptable) modes of masculinity as inadequate.

(44) **[WWHA: 651-3]**

In the 30 years 651
I can barely remember any happiness-my husband was brought up to not 652
show emotions (including love)--that love was shown by worth ethic. 653

Several contributors implicated 'unrealistic expectations' as underpinning intimacy troubles: the obvious secondary question raised by such claims concerns the origins of these unattainable aspirations. The contributors of data 45 & 46 cited the role of women's magazines in generating images of 'ideal intimacy' that are either difficult or impossible to emulate: whilst the contributor of datum 45 adopted a position of dismissive stoicism, the author of datum 46 posited a more sceptical proposition.

(45) **[WWHA: 2909-10]**

I think all the rubbish you read in women's glossies only adds to the 2909
sense of "there must be more to life" when really there isn't. 2910

(46) **[WWHA: 2940-42]**

A person might be considered old fashioned if they didn't subscribe to 2940
the acceptability of affairs as promoted by those whose job it is to 2941
sell magazines. 2942

'I'VE CHANGED / YOU'VE CHANGED'.

Several established *philotopics* (most notably those adopting a historical sociological frame of reference) claimed altered structural conditions were causative of contemporary intimate forms. Giddens (1985, 1990), as noted above, asserted that 'late modernity' could be characterised by highly novel and dynamic set structural principles, which serve to render the 'self' as an uncompleted, creative, and reflexive project. However, Giddens's generally optimistic projections were tempered by a claimed persistent (relative) anomie, which animated questions about how life ought to be lived in the context of relatively emancipated and ambiguous social circumstances. Several contributors implicated their (ex) partners quest for an 'authentic' self as underlying their current intimate predicaments. The brief example cited in datum 47 is typical of such claims.

(47) **[CESBF: 523-4]**

My wife 523
walked out on me because she felt she needed to find herself.... 524

In contrast, other contributors related how a 'change of mind' by the other had precipitated the termination of intimate relations. Typically (as is the case in datum 48) changes of mind related to weighty existential matters such as the decision to start a family.

(48) **[MWHA: 2921-5]**

We had both *1459*
planned to have kids and when I found out I was pregnant he went off me *1460*
and decided that he had changed his mind. *1461*

ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE.

In this family of referents, (invariably terminal) intimacy troubles were afforded an accidental (or even chaotic) quality. Davis (1973b: 260) asserted that the termination of intimate relations could be precipitated by circumstances beyond the control of either party. Data 49-52 served to minimise or deny the agency of one or both parties in the demise of intimate relations. These examples may be distinguished from data 30-32 insofar as the discursive substance differed in relation to claims about 'diminished agency'. In data 30-32, contributors discursively constructed themselves as 'gripped by an irresistible force' and powerless to act in the face of love. In the following data, agency was typically diminished by other means. Datum 49 outlined a contributor's general claim in relation to the unexpected nature of 'extra-partnership' affairs, whilst datum 50 discursively referenced an actual 'affair' that happened 'out of nowhere' – *a bolt from the blue.*

(49) **[MWHA: 406-8]**

While there may be a lot of guys that have always played the field *406*
there are occasions when an affair happens more or less completely *407*
unexpectedly. *408*

(50) **[MWHA: 868-71]**

I have been married for 11 months. In April I began seeing someone else *868*
(who I had known before and happens to be a friend and my boss. This *869*
relationship was borne out of nowhere and yet has convinced us (both) *870*
that we should be together (she is engaged). *871*

Datum 51 portrayed a complex series of alleged events that are consistent with data 50 & 51 only insofar as the contributor sought to minimise his own agency. However, rather than reading as a *'tale of the unexpected'*, the following can be read as an attempt to convey a *'tale of the unintended'*. Nonetheless, the contributor consistently denied his own culpability in bringing about his (rather chaotic) predicament.

(51) **[MWHA: 838-46]**

Hi i'm 28 and been married for 10 months. It's a long story but 838
basically i had one night fling with my old girlfriend, then 3 months 839
later i get a call saying she's pregnant, loving kids i decided to give 840
it a go and we got married, although at the time i never loved her i 841
thought i could make it work. It hasn't really worked out though and 842
need to be away from her. It doesn't end there though, she has recently 843
fallen pregnant again, without much planning much to my annoyance, and 844
timing being my worst asset i've also gone and met the girl of my 845
dreams! Any advice is welcome! 846

'AND ANOTHER THING'.... LITANIES OF TROUBLES.

Occasionally, contributors to the bulletin boards discursively referenced multiple (as opposed top singular / discrete) problems as the basis of intimacy troubles. Datum 52 provided one such illustration:

(52) **[WWHA: 1104-9]**

I'm one of those women having an affair. I'm 9 years younger than my 1104
husband, we have two children. It was fine at first but my husband 1105
became more and more dependent on me, little things at first, I paid 1106
all the bills and decorated and gardened and sorted the car but didn't 1107
really mind as I was pretty organised. Then he wouldn't call friends or 1108
attempt to make any of his own, or go out. Then he said he'd only have 1109
sex if I initiated it, not that he'd ever been rejected. Then (through 1110
drinking too much) his company went bust, and I had to close it down 1111
for him, and I was forced to go back to work full-time and leave my 1112
children with him whilst he stayed at home and did nothing. The house 1113
is a wreck. After about five years of this (I asked him to go to 1114
counselling, but he refused) I fell in love with a guy a work. 1115

The source of intimacy troubles were variously claimed to arise from: (i) age differentials (line 1104); (ii) increasing dependency (line 1106); (iii) declining sociability (line 1108); (iv) loss of sexual interest (line 1109-10); (v) 'drinking too much' (line 1111); (vi) financial difficulties (lines 1111-12); (vii) unequal contributions to the material circumstances of the relationship (lines 112-13); (viii) failure to seek 'help' in the face of 'strong evidence' supporting this course of action (lines 1114-15); and finally, (ix) the introduction of a antagonistic third party (line 1115).

STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE BBS ACCOUNTS.

The following section is concerned to explicate the structural (and related) features of BBS accounts. It is acknowledged from the outset that this mode of analysis can invite 'a catalytic'

approach to data – abstracting elements or 'discursive devices' as a means to explicate particular structural features; however, throughout this section I have attempted to simultaneously preserve the 'whole package' effects of these accounts. I will treat them as what Lynch (1993:300) refers to as 'primitive examples': that is vernacular accounts in which practices of observation, description, truth telling, and strictly-ordered sequential phenomena are available for analysis. In relation to the latter point, the accounts offered by participants in the BBS forums all displayed signs of organisation and conveyed particular discursive effects, which were closely related to 'category-bound' features: as such some analytical resources and findings (but not formal procedures) of CA studies proved useful in fully explicating such organisation and effect. All accounts displayed distinctive beginnings, 'middles', and endings and are thus summarised below in terms of this simple sequential arrangement. In addition to these concerns it was apparent (at certain points) that contextual factors (the normative, institutional features of the website) modified, shaped, influenced or otherwise constrained communication, and the following analysis has attempted to remain sensitive to these issues throughout.

Jefferson's (1988) examination of a number of instances of 'naturally occurring' troubles talk served as an important reference point in the following analysis. She asserted that 'troubles talk' represents as a 'socially organised package' with standard components in a standard order of occurrence' (Jefferson 1988: 418). By means of comparative analysis she concluded that troubles talk was typically 'amorphous', but that (rather contradictorily) a 'shape' as well as a sense of design and function could be discerned within different examples derived from a variety of contexts. Typically, troubles telling was long, multifaceted, and best characterised as being vaguely (as opposed to strictly) ordered. I suggest that the BBS accounts examined below bear some of the characteristic hallmarks of 'troubles discourse' as identified within Jefferson's model, which can be summarised thus:

SEGMENTAL ORDER	ELEMENTS / INTERACTIONAL DEVICES
[A] Approach	[1] Initiation. [a] Inquiry; [b] Noticing.
	[2] Trouble Premonitor. [a] Downgraded conventional response to inquiry; [b] Improvement marker; [c] Lead-up.
[B] Arrival	[1] Announcement.
	[2] Announcement response.
[C] Delivery	[1] Exposition / description of troubles / events.
	[2] Affiliation.
	[3] Affiliation responses.
[D] Work-up	(Includes diagnoses, prognoses, reports of relevant 'other' experiences, 'relationalized' remedies, etc.).
[E] Close Implicature	[a] Optimistic projection; [b] invoking the status quo; [c] making light of the trouble.
[F] Exit	[1] Boundarying-off. [a] Conversation closure; [b] conversation restart; [c] introduction of pending biographicals; [d] reference of getting together.
	[2] Transition to other topics.

Figure 13: *The sequential organisation of troubles-talk.* **Source**: Jefferson (1988).

In the BBS accounts presented below, both the order in which accounts were presented and the topics made discursively relevant differed considerably on the basis of whether contributors had (reportedly) initiated or responded to relationship break-ups, or were reporting (alleged) intimacy troubles. In effect, by their 'confessional accounts' contributors placed themselves within one of a number of 'membership categories'.[118] This finding mirrors the sentiments expressed by Hester and Eglin (1997:2) in which:

> '....both the sequential and the categorizational aspects of social interaction inform each other. Thus, the production of particular types of sequential

[118] Hester and Eglin (1997:4) explained Sacks' definition of membership categorisation devices (MCD's) as 'any collection of membership categories, (containing at least a category) which may be applied to some population (containing at least a member) so as to provide, by the use of some rules of application, for the pairing of at least a population member and a categorisation device member.

> items is informed by an orientation to the membership categories of speakers, just as these items contribute to the categorisation of speakers. Social identity provides for a sense of the (sequentially organised) talk, just as the talk provides for a sense of social identity .... in practice these aspects (the sequential and the categorizational) are so closely intertwined as to be separable only for the purposes of analysis'.

Furthermore, a sense of 'category membership' was (to some extent) reinforced by means of the characteristic repertoire of ways in which BBS co-participants responded to one another. This observation compares with Psathas's (1999:142) assertion that (demonstrable) 'identities' of participants become manifest in the variety of ways in which they 'invoke, formulate, and orient to contingent membership categories'.[119] In many instances, respondents demonstrated shared understandings of contributors' claims, and furthermore, by seemingly relating to claims made by respondents, they demonstrated an understanding of 'who was allowed to say what'. Sacks (1974) employed the term 'category-boundedness' in order to account for this association i.e. between 'membership of a particular category, and activities that are expectedly and 'properly' done. To paraphrase Sacks, category membership brings particular normative expectations into play, and this tendency was evident in the accounts analysed below.[120] Once either the contributor (or other *dramatis personae*) became described

---

[119] Sacks (1974) identified two rules for the application of membership categories:

(a) The economy rule - in which one membership category is asserted to be adequate for describing some member of a population. This does not imply that more than one category cannot be used, but simply that referring to another person in terms of just one category membership is adequate.

(b) The consistency rule – in which 'if some population of persons is being categorised, and if a category from some device's collection has been used, (to categorise a first member of the population) then that category or other categories of the same collection may be used to categorise further members of the population' (Sacks 1974:219).

[120] Sacks (1974) suggested that the following 'rules' existed for discerning category membership and category-bound activities / predicates:

VIEWERS MAXIMS: If a member sees a category-bound activity being done, then, if one can see it as being done by a member of a category to which the activity is bound then: see it that way. e.g. category bound activity is relevant for identifying the person performing the action.

If one sees a pair of actions that can be related via the operation of a norm that provides for the second given the first, where the doers can be seen as members of the categories the norm provides is proper for that pair of actions, then: (a) see that the doers are such members, and (b) see the second as done in conformity with the norm.

E.g. Inferences are made about people's identities (and therefore category memberships) on the basis of assumptions about how norms 'properly' relate to particular activities.

HEARERS MAXIMS: If two or more categories are used to categorise two or more members from some population, and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, then: hear them that way. If a category bound activity is asserted to have been done by a member of some category where, if that category is ambiguous (i.e. is a member of at least two different devices) but where, at least for one of those devices, the asserted activity is category bound to the given category, then hear that at least the category from the device to which it is bound is being asserted to hold.

E.g. Sacks' (1974) illustrated the operation of hearers' maxims using the example of 'the baby cried the mommy picked it up'. The category of 'baby' is ambiguous belonging either to the collection of; [1] baby / toddler / child / adolescent / adult / old person, or [2] that of; mother / father / child / brother / sister / grandparent etc. In this instance crying can be seen as a category bound activity related to collection [1]. However, 'baby' and 'mommy' also belong to the same collection [2]. Sacks suggested that, combining the two maxims, the association is made

as 'partner' or 'intimate', (recently) ex-partner etc. certain activities such as moral and financial support, exchange of sexual or other favours etc. (or withdrawal of these favours) became implicated. In this respect, Watson (1978:106) suggested that what is actually category bound is a 'class of predicates' such as motives, rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes, and competencies that may then be employed in describing the activities and conduct of someone who has been categorised in a particular way.

As previously reported, the predominant 'membership categories' evident within the data were (a) initiators of relationship break-up; (b) responders to relationship break-up, and (c) those reporting ongoing intimacy troubles. These categories bear comparison to a number of established *philotopics*: most notably Bauman's (1993) assertion that two (broad) potential 'solutions' exist in relation to intimacy troubles, namely (a) fixation; and (b) flotation. Bauman (1993b: 103) asserted that:

- intimate relationships are essentially asymmetrical, and therefore:
- unavoidably contain the 'seeds' of their own difficulties;
- fixation entails seeking to repair defects in the relationship by recourse to more ordered or perfunctory basis; and,
- flotation involves 'cutting ones losses' and seeking to establish a subsequent intimate relation with another person.

In the examples reported here, BBS contributors repeatedly made both strategies of fixation and flotation topically relevant. Therefore, in the following analysis, Bauman's terminology is adopted in characterising 'membership positions'; accounts are therefore presented below as:

- flotation initiator's;
- flotation responder's; and,
- fixation participant's.

Characteristically, accounts produced from each of these 'membership positions' differed considerably in significant aspects such as:

- issues made discursively relevant;
- strategies of presentation;
- their sequential ordering; and,
- subsequent discursive effects.

---

that the 'baby' in question becomes the 'baby' of the 'mammy'; and, the activity of crying is category bound to the category 'baby'.

FLOTATION – INITIATORS' ACCOUNTS.

SEQUENTIAL ORDER	EXAMPLES OF DISCURSIVE DEVICES EMPLOYED.
BEGINNINGS	Biographical introduction.
	Grounds intimacy troubles / initial details.
	Announcement.
DELIVERY	'Additive' account of new intimate relations.
	'Other-focussed', and 'relationship-focussed' excuses.
	Reducing agency.
ENDINGS	(a) Defended actions; (b) penitence / regret; (c) 'seeking advice'.
	The struggle to cope with new circumstances.

Figure 14: *The sequential organisation of flotation-initiators' accounts.*

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

In most of the following examples from the BBS accounts, contributors tended to begin their reports with biographical information e.g. usually temporal details of marriage, and the birth of children. Occasionally, other background details such as geographical location were reported. In all cases, reported details served as a very brief preface to the explicit troubles claims. This feature of these accounts is perhaps a direct function of the fact that BBS participants shared a common understanding about the normative business of the website i.e. the reporting of intimacy troubles. The following examples provide typical instances of these introductions.

(53) **[S13:1933-4]**

My husband and I first married 12 years ago and a daughter soon followed. *1933 1934*

(54) **[S3:651]**

I'm from the US and have been married almost 30 years. *651*

BBS contributors reporting flotation (extra-relationship liaisons) were faced with two principal communicative tasks:

- the need to construct an adequate account of the circumstances foregoing the affair, that would appear to serve as a 'good enough' to warrant for reported actions; and simultaneously,
- the need to account for increasing intimacy with another party.

A number of potential risks present themselves in making such details available for scrutiny. In the first instance contributors might be viewed as being 'morally weak' in not persevering with the relationship (regardless of the difficulties reported). A similar judgement might have been arrived at if accounts were suggestive of purely hedonistic or self-interested motives. The first communicative task is therefore to report circumstances in a manner, which others could generally read as providing a 'good enough' warrant for reported actions. Concomitantly, contributors were also faced with the task of justifying increasing intimacy with another person: this enterprise is similarly prone to the negative moral evaluation. For example, in order to convince readers of the propriety of their actions, contributors typically endowed the new intimate with some distinguishing characteristic justifying their novel intimate investment. Failure to produce a 'good enough' account in this respect might risk the evaluation that the contributor was a person of 'easy virtue' i.e. that 'anyone' would do. In reading these accounts as a whole, even if these delicate tasks were seemingly accomplished, the acknowledgement that other parties (ex-spouses and particularly children) had been damaged by the reported events risked undermining the whole effect. The examples cited here are demonstrative of careful organisation perhaps in order to avoid these difficulties.

ESTABLISHING GROUNDS FOR INTIMACY TROUBLES / INITIAL DETAILS.

Typically contributors attempted to paint discursive pictures of utter futility in attempting to make prior relationships work. BBS contributors were discursively represented as doing all of the 'emotional work' in this respect, whilst the other parties to prior (or existing) relationships were typically represented as more or less completely indifferent, incapable, or damaged by circumstances.

(55) **[S1:189-199]**

In my particular case, after years of asking, pleading, shouting, and 189
any other way I could try to get thru to my husband that I wanted and 190
needed more of a physical and emotional committment from him--that his 191
low requirement of verbal communication, and low interest in the 192
physical and emotional part of our relationship just wasn't enough--I 193
FINALLY GAVE UP. 194

In lines 189-90 the contributor discursively referenced her exhaustive efforts in order to make her spouse more responsive to existent intimacy troubles, which were implied to be self-evident. Lines 191-193 catalogued the (chronically) unsatisfactory elements of the relationship, whilst the emphatic use of capitals (line 194) reinforced the general impression of frustration following intensive efforts.

(56) **[S3:652-7]**

I can barely remember any happiness-my husband was brought up to not show emotions (including love)--that love was shown by worth ethic. Over the years I have tried literally everything from talking to him, threats of leaving etc. Because I spent all my years raising our kids (who now are on their own) I have no other means of income but that of my husband.

In this example, the contributor discursively referenced a 'loveless marriage' as a consequence of her husband's 'faulty socialisation' (lines 652-3). Similarly, lines 654-5 conveyed a sense of (failed) intensive remedial efforts on the part of the contributor. The failure of these efforts is not explicitly referenced, but is nonetheless implied. In line 655 the narrator highlighted her responsibility in caring for the children: this claim might serve a triple function in; (a) 'locating' her as an otherwise 'morally creditable' person (almost regardless of what is to follow), (b) implying that her long-standing, but ultimately unfulfilling relationship with her husband was sustained by financial dependence: this point (lines 656-7) appeared to be particularly organised to defuse the question of why the contributor did not leave the relationship at an earlier stage. Finally, (c) these claims also effectively introduced a narrative theme (financial dependency / exploitation), which was subsequently developed at a later stage in the account.

The following contributions differed insofar as the discursive work undertaken appeared to create a more equivocal effect in relation to the 'unsatisfactory' features of the relationship. Also these examples avoided 'strong reference' to either futility, or the finality of the relationship break-up. As a consequence, the grounds for (subsequently acknowledged) affairs appeared to be less forcefully established.

(57) **[S13:1934-41]**

We were very happy but hit a very financial rocky patch about 2 years after we married which put us under tremendous strain. As a result, my husband was working all hours to try and meet our financial commitments, of which, there were many. I started to feel as though I was bringing up our daughter as a single mum, as ungrateful as it sounds, I was lonely and fed up with him never being there. We were never able to spend time together as family as weekends were spent working as well.

In line 1934 the contributor referred to her marriage as generally satisfactory. The 'cause' of intimacy troubles was attributed to external circumstances i.e. financial difficulties (lines 1934-5). Subsequently, the contributor referenced effective abandonment (lines 1937-41); the effects of this state of affairs were, however, mitigated by the acknowledgement that she accepted that her husband had no choice in working long hours (line 1938).

(58) **[S5;1458-64]**

It all started when the christmas before last 1460
I was spending alot of time surfing the net. I decided to join a few 1461
chat rooms involving the hobbie that I have. After a while of joining 1462
in the conversations I started to get regular e-mails from a man who 1463
was on the group. 1464

In this example, the contributor alluded to her extra-marital affair implicitly by stating that 'it all started' (line 1460). In adopting this strategy, she avoided explicitly naming the phenomenon at stake. By claiming that she was engaging in a legitimate interest or hobby, the contributor established an (almost) accidental metric to subsequent events (lines 1461-2). As such, the ensuing regular communication (via e-mail) with one particular man can be presented and read in (at least potentially) innocent terms.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE AFFAIR.

(59) **[S13:1941-44]**

Even though I knew he was working to support us and 1941
make life easier for us all, I began an affair with a close friend of 1942
my husband's who at that time was not married but had been in a 1943
relationship for many years. 1944

In line 1941 the contributor (again) diminished the intentional culpability of her husband by re-stating her 'understanding' that his excessive workload was undertaken in good faith. In line 1942 she (typically) reported in a 'matter-of-fact' manner that she began having an affair. However, the additional detail included at this point is of significance: in lines 1942-3 it transpired that her new lover was 'a close friend' of her husband's and not a mere stranger. Two discursive effects were brought into play here. Firstly, in identifying the other person as a 'close friend of her husband's', the contributor signalled a degree of prior knowledge of her new paramour and this (to a certain extent) suggested that her actions were 'considered' rather than 'random'. In making this claim the contributor perhaps mitigated against charges of being of 'easy virtue'. Secondly, the detail that the other person was friend of her husbands introduces material that was subsequently referenced as relevant at a later point.

Woolgar (1980:253), Woofit (1992:102), and Smith (1977: 28) have each suggested that statements such as these made at the beginning of accounts (textual or spoken) serve to place

an interpretative framework around events which implicitly instruct the reader / listener on the manner in which subsequent information should be understood: ensuing information is then specifically presented in a way as to portray a quest to 'discover the truth' (Woofit. 1992:103). A large part of the instructive power of these statements therefore resides in their mode of presentation e.g. as 'factual'. Similarly, Woolgar (1980:253) asserted that opening statements seek to establish the 'objectivity' of the account by creating 'a pre-existence, a quality of *out-there-ness*' which serves to provide the reader / listener with an 'instructional' framework for understanding the remainder of the account.[original emphasis].

The early assertions of the nature of intimacy troubles in the above examples, may thus have served two (instructional) discursive functions:

- to establish that the circumstances related were an *a priori* 'fact' and were to be treated as such; and,
- to provide a preliminary set of instructions of how to read subsequent instances of the conduct of other parties referenced in the contributors account.

In Smith's (1978:34) terms, such claims assign definitional privilege to the person making them. Smith further noted the obvious 'logical circularity' of this state of affairs whereby:

- definitional authority is validated by reference to prior claims; and,
- subsequent claims made in accounts are validated by reference to the definitional authority.

The inherent 'circularity' of this process seemingly does little to undermine the effect of authenticity. Defining another person as morally questionable early in the account serves to rule their assessments of events as inadmissible as evidence. Smith (1978:37) defines this strategy as a 'cutting out' operation. Similarly, Psathas (1999:147) also noted the agenda-setting qualities of first utterances in 'making relevant' a wide variety of topical issues. He suggested that 'what is *ruled out* is extensive. What is *ruled in* is also extensive.'

DELIVERY.

'ADDITIVE' ACCOUNTS OF NEW INTIMATE RELATIONS.

Davis (1973b: 56) asserted that intimate relations are, by in large, accomplished and sustained through communication: however, it should be noted that Davis's claims in this respect were circumscribed to examples of interaction between the individual parties to an intimate

relationship (and more specifically to the requirement to express 'sentiments of intimacy'). He concluded that demonstrating intimacy represented a communicatively complex task whose successful accomplishment depended upon (amongst other things) a stock of tacit knowledge of linguistic norms and structures. In the following examples, contributors faced the complex communicative task of conveying a trajectory of increasing intimacy to potential readers who were not only distant from the circumstances represented, but were also unlikely to ever receive any third party 'confirmation' that things transpired as claimed. Davis was surely correct in suggesting that communicating intimacy (in this case to strangers) requires a stock of tacit knowledge of linguistic structures; evidence of as much was present in the following examples, particularly in contributors' transition from the use of first-person to collective pronouns. However, I suggest that to focus exclusively upon either (a) 'intimate' word-tokens, or (b) grammatical forms (as Davis did), risks neglecting a critical issue: namely how carefully organised accounts are rhetorically deployed in particular (situated) contexts in order accomplish a number of discursive effects. In the case of the current study, BBS contributions seemed particularly organised to accomplish 'moral effects': the failure to produce a 'good enough account of events' would risk a range of negative moral evaluations by co-participants. Evidence of sensitivity to these moral concerns was demonstrated by contributors' attention to detail and 'orderliness' in relation to a number of dimensions, specifically:

- temporal – given that these BBS contributors were already in (or were in the process of leaving) existing relationships, their accounts appeared as carefully crafted to avoid accusations of 'undue haste' in commencing new relationships;
- upward intimate mobility – accounts appeared as carefully designed to portray the new relationship as developing in 'proper' incremental stages i.e. in which introductions precede friendships, which in turn precede intimacy; and,
- justification – some accounts appeared especially concerned to discursively demonstrate the special qualifications of the new partner, or how the new partner was able to fulfil (a previously unsatisfied) need. Other contributors justified their new relationship by means of reducing agency e.g. the contributor was 'powerless' to resist.

In datum 60, the contributor discursively referenced the circumstances by which she became friends with a man whom it subsequently transpired became her new partner. It will be recalled that this contributor justified her legitimate 'presence' in the chat-room on the basis of a hobby / interest.

(60) **[S5:1462-73]**

After a while of joining 1462
in the conversations I started to get regular e-mails from a man who 1463
was on the group. I was just being friendly to start with, he was 1464
having problems back home with his wife and felt that he could talk to 1465
me about it. 1466

In lines 1462-4 the contributor inferred that general friendliness and initial Internet communication with a number of people became restricted to the exchange of e-mails with one man in particular. In claiming that she 'was just being friendly', the contributor was able to distance herself from the charge that she was somehow seeking to initiate (what transpired to be) an extra-marital affair. In lines 1465-6 the inference was made that this situation occurred because of her willingness to 'listen' to the other person's complaints about his existing relationship. At a subsequent point in this account the contributor related how the nature of communication with her new friend acquired added significance.

(61) **[S5:1467-71]**

Well we would write very long letters to each other and then it 1467
progressed to us chatting in the chat rooms until 3 & 4 in the morning. 1468
I got addicted to this and very soon that's all my life would be. My 1469
husband started to comment on how long I would be on the computer and I 1470
would just laugh it off and tell him to stop nagging me. The friendship 1471
I had soon turned into a cyber affair. 1472

In lines 1468 the contributor explicitly referenced the progression from e-mails to contemporaneous chat-room exchanges. In claiming 'addiction' (line 1469) she effectively minimised her culpability in this development, but however signalled (line 1470) that this development was a source of conflict in her (existing) relationship. In line 1471 the contributor acknowledged that the (virtual) relationship had acquired the status of an extra-marital affair – even though the two parties had not physically met at this point. In cases where contributors were introduced in a virtual environment, subsequently arranged physical meetings mark a transition point towards heightened intimate relations. In the following examples, contributors discursively referencd such transition.

(62) **[S1:208-11]**

When an opportunity arrived after over 9 months of daily talking, I met 208
my friend. We were both "gobsmacked"...we both were a bit shy and 209
hesitant but after a week togther...lots of talking, hand holding, some 210
sex...we realized that at the age of 50 that life was passing us by. 211

Following prolonged periods of Internet communication, physical meetings were typically discursively represented as being cathartic in some respect: contributors were, however, also careful to include oblique references to 'propriety' in these circumstances. The relative

anonymity of Internet communication (discussed above) in addition to the proliferation of press reports concerning the dangers of this means of communication perhaps exacerbates this need to demonstrate caution. In lines 209 - 211 the contributor outlined how talking, then physical proximity, and finally sexual intimacy succeeded initial reticence. The contributor's reference to existential matters (line 211) served as means of justifying actions, and this theme is subjected to further elaboration below. The following example also amplified the cathartic effects of 'the meeting', but did so by alternative means.

(63) **[S3:670-72]**

We met recently and I can only express that it was far more wonderful 670
than we ever hoped it could be...a sense of happiness, a sense of 671
cohesion, love, respect, companionship.... 672

In datum 62 the contributor carefully ordered a 'staged' account, and explicitly referenced the (ultimately) sexual nature of the meeting: by comparison, this account left the exact nature of the intimate exchange at the level of inference to be drawn by readers. Furthermore, by exclusively referencing the emotionality of the meeting (lines 671-2) the contributor insulated herself against the possible accusation that the meeting was intended for purely sexual or hedonistic purposes.

At some point in these accounts of unfolding intimacy, a transition invariably occurred between the use of first person and collective pronouns. Davis (1973b: 61) asserted that the deployment of collective pronouns e.g. 'we' when speaking in the first person - 'we think'- meaning 'I presume to speak for both of us'- supposes intimacy (at least on the part of one of the intimates). Typically this transition was discursively downplayed (or even disguised) in the contributors' accounts.

(64) **[S1:201-11]**

When I did meet someone online, I found that we had the same 201
communication skills--we were friends talking about common interests. 202
In time our friendship grew to the point where we both confided in what 203
sort of lives we spent with our respective spouses. 204

In datum 64 the switch from the use of 'I' to 'we' occurred within the same discursive utterance (lines 201-2). The stealthy introduction of the collective pronoun potentially created a number of discursive effects. Firstly, these casually presented (and otherwise underplayed) transitions may act as to present the development of increasing intimacy as a to-be-expected or 'natural' occurrence. Secondly, the adoption of second person pronouns when speaking or writing in the first person sends a powerful message in terms of announcing that the 'we' concerned are an intimate 'item'. Any formal announcement or overt reference to this linguistic shift may invite the interpretation that the contributor is excessively concerned

with justifying their new relationship – effectively acknowledging that they themselves are sensitive to the fact that such developments are open to negative moral evaluation in these particular circumstances. Thus surreptitious transitions may effectively serve as to close down discursive opportunities for readers to explicitly challenge the propriety of the newly intimate arrangement. Many of the following examples include the 'I becomes we' device as described here.

'OTHER-FOCUSSED', AND 'RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSSED' EXCUSES.

The tacit understanding that (a) embarking upon an extra-marital affair, or (b) leaving one intimate relationship in favour of another are morally problematic (and therefore highly vulnerable to negative evaluation) perhaps provided the central organising principle of flotation initiators' accounts. In this sense, these accounts as a 'whole packages' can be read as being organised towards the justification of reported actions. However, a triad of specific 'excuses' typically appeared somewhere within accounts, and by deploying these 'reasons-for-the-affair', implicit undercurrents of justification became overt and available for readers' inspection. Typically, overt justifications for an affair employed the following discursive devices:

- '*other-focussed*' - emphasising the excellence of the new partner in terms of their special qualities;
- '*relationship-focussed*' – emphasising the qualities of the new relationship in terms of fulfilling some (previously unmet) need; and,
- '*self / agency- focussed*' - reducing agency and otherwise emphasising the general powerlessness of the contributor to 'resist' the new intimate arrangements.

(65) **[S3:657-61]**

Over the past two years, I have become friends with a 657
wonderful man from the UK and we truly enjoyed a friendship that seemed 658
to give me the things I truly needed. 659

In this example, the contributor explicitly referenced her 'wonderful' new intimate partner (line 658), and 'truly' emphasised this point several times. However, much more typically, contributors tied claims about 'special qualifications' to assertions that new intimates fulfilled an unmet need in their lives. Most frequently, these 'needs' were explicitly mentioned only in passing, as in most cases, information referenced earlier in the account provided clues to understanding exactly which needs were 'unmet'. At first blush, these examples were indistinguishable from the 'other-focussed' variety (above). In emphasising the qualities of a new relationship, the merits of the (new) other are perhaps unavoidably referenced: however,

in these examples the impression created is that any benefits derived from the new relationship were in fact reciprocal and more or less exactly the same for both parties:

(66) **[S3:667-8]**

When we met, we both had no idea that we would ever find something 667
that we had both been missing. 668

(67) **[S13:1944-47]**

We both seemed to find something that was 1944
missing in both our relationships but had never realised. 1945

The following example (datum 68) differed in that the contributor not only referenced the identical benefits derived by both parties from the new arrangement, but also suggested in line 663 that their prior relationships were troubled by 'symmetrical' deficits i.e. the contributor claimed (a) that her new partner is ideally placed to offer what her husband could, or did not, and (b) that she was ideally suited to compensate for the claimed deficits of her new partners wife. A 'jigsaw solution' was thus offered – in which the new pairing was discursively represented as being ideally matched. Thus in addition to emphasising the 'special qualifications' of the new intimate, or 'unmet needs' (in the general sense), this type of construction served to close down the possibility that *any* other person would do i.e. actions are justified by reference to the (absolutely) unique special qualifications of each person to the other.

(68) **[S3:663-66]**

The man I met is in the UK and has had the reverse situation. He has 663
been with the same woman for almost 25 years, and his relationship has 664
been (FOR YEARS) one of being used for a paycheck and all the things he 665
holds dear have been relegated to a tiny room in their home. 666

The temporal reference in line 664 (25 years) appeared to mitigate against the specific charge that the new intimates were being fickle in choosing to reinvest in another relationship.

REDUCING AGENCY.

The common thread to each of the following examples is that they were concerned to portray reduced agency in either:

- the contributor (I couldn't help it); or,
- the (recently) ex-partner (he / she couldn't help their unfavourable conduct).

(69) **[S1:194]**

I didn't consciously make a decision to "have an affair"... *194*

This (brief) example effectively denied any premeditated intention on the part of the contributor by explicitly downplaying cognitive awareness. However, the presumption remains that something or other must have borne causal influence upon her actions in conducting an extra-marital affair, and the (earlier) discursive presentation of specific dissatisfaction with her (recently) ex-partner did not entirely answer this question i.e. she could have left without investing in a new relationship. A number of possibilities are 'opened-up' at this point, including:

- that the contributor required a new partner in order to compensate for unmet needs (in the culturally or biologically essentialist sense);
- that the contributor required the new intimate in order to resolve a long history of dissatisfaction with her previous relationship (i.e. the new intimate acts as a catalyst in the chemical sense); or
- that the contributor's actions were guided by some super-ordinate force (e.g. in the metaphysical or theological sense).

In leaving the basis of her actions to conjecture the contributor availed herself of the 'not-naming strategy' discussed above. However, in 'not naming' this contributor perhaps also invited speculation about the latter possibility i.e. the super-sensible option. The following example similarly alludes to a 'power-of-love' argument.

(70) **[S5:1480-81]**

I know this sounds stupid but I did truly fall in love with *1480*
someone on the net, I knew I loved him before we met. *1481*

In line 1480 the contributor acknowledged that both falling in love with relative strangers (the authenticity of whose identity is in some doubt), and the Internet as a communicative basis for intimacy could be open to sceptical interpretation. However, by acknowledging these questionable features she effectively defused such criticisms. In the following example, the contributor adopted a different discursive tactic in order to assert diminished self-agency: rather than claiming to be compelled by some external motive, she suggested that she was incapable of initiating an extra-marital affair as a consequence of a spoiled identity.

(71) **[S1:193-99]**

I have never been tempted and actually had such a low self 195
esteem because I felt that I obviously didn't deserve to be talked to, 196
to be touched, or even to be called by my name...Just "Hey, this and 197
Hey, that" that if a man ever looked at me I thought they were snearing 198
at or laughing at me. 199

In lines 195-6 the contributor made the initial claim of 'low self esteem' and on this basis dismissed the possibility that she might be in a position to initiate an affair. In lines 196-8 she reinforced this claim by elaborating what this meant in psychological terms: however, at this point, by (obliquely) referencing her ex-partner's conduct as the 'cause' of this state of affairs, she was further able to claim a reasonable warrant for her actions. This effect was perhaps further heightened by the contributor's use of reported speech. Finally, in lines 198-9, by claiming perceived (rather than enacted) stigma she produced an effect of diminished agency.

Several contributors attributed reduced agency to their ex-partners in representing their versions of events surrounding relationship failure. There are several possibilities as to why this discursive style might be especially consistent with the 'whole package' effect of accounts, namely:

- by appearing to put 'both sides of the story', contributors could create the effect that they were 'cognitively reasonable', thus enhancing the overall effect of 'truthfulness' of their accounts;
- reducing agency of the 'other' might also have indicated the possibility of resurrecting the relationship, and to assert too strong a condemnation at this point would risk dissonance in (potential) future actions; and / or,
- attributing reduced agency to the other party might have served to facilitate a particular type of ending to accounts.

In datum 73, the contributor effectively reduced the agency of her (recently) ex-partner by suggesting that he was a product of faulty socialisation, and therefore not to be held as 'blameworthy' for the events that transpired.

(72) **[S3:652-3]**

I can barely remember any happiness-my husband was brought up to not 652
show emotions (including love)--that love was shown by worth ethic. 653

In the following example, rather than diminishing the agency of her ex-partner, the contributor appeared to be at pains to cast him as blameless (lines 1941-2) in relation to the circumstances that resulted in intimacy troubles.

(73) **[S13:1941-47]**

Even though I knew he was working to support us and 1941
make life easier for us all, I began an affair with a close friend of 1942
my husband's who at that time was not married but had been in a 1943
relationship for many years. 1944

ENDINGS.

The endings of the 'flotation initiator' accounts described here varied according to their discursive effects. Typically, contributors either (a) sought to defend their actions by means of strong assertions, (b) confessed penitence or regret for their actions, or (c) sought 'advice' in relation to an ongoing dilemma. In strongly defending their actions contributors appeared to be attempting to warrant the support of potential readers. In contrast, by adopting confessional frames of reference contributors seemed to be explicitly inviting the moral approbation of other BBS participants; however, the discursive strategy of 'coming clean' also seemed to be specifically organised in order to attenuate any potential censure, and even warrant expressions of sympathy. The discursive effects of (ostensibly) seeking advice appeared to be, on the whole, more ambiguous than is the case in either (a) or (b). On the one hand, it is possible that calls for advice / guidance were simply just that. On the other hand, there are certain respects in which these endings can be read as canvassing support for pending actions.

DEFENDED ACTIONS.

Predictably, contributors seeking to justify their actions to other participants concluded their accounts with statements strongly defending their (represented) actions. The most common strategy marshalled in claims to validation involved discursively referencing 'existential matters' (typically the finitude of life) in order to explain why they had embarked on their particular course of action.

(74) **[S1:211]**

we realized that at the age of 50 that life was passing us by. 211

[and later in the same account] ....

(75) **[S1:222-4]**

Now is our time 222
to be with someone who wants to communicate, emote and show the 223
affection we all so richly deserve. 224

Datum 76 expressed similar sentiments:

(76) **[S3:674-5]**

Our problems are not only the fact that we want divorces from our 674
spouses because we truly want to spend the rest of our lives together, 675

It is noteworthy that 'you only live once' could be read as an essentially hedonistic claim and thus invite the moral inspection and possible disapproval of other participants. However, neither of the examples cited here created the impression that contributors were seeking 'serial monogamy': rather, both discursively referenced the (intended) permanence of their new relationships, either implicitly (datum 74), or explicitly (datum 76). Neither of these accounts could be read as expressing dissatisfaction with existing institutional arrangements for intimacy: rather, for these participants, the attributable source of disappointment resided with their (recently) ex-partners. 'You only live once', in this context, perhaps instantiated claims in established *philotopics* that intimacy has assumed the proportions of 'a secular religion' (*see* Weber, 1948; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

PENITENCE: CONFESSION AND REGRET.

In the following examples, contributors concluded their accounts by means of expressing regret at having 'cheated' on their ex-partners (and at having been discovered doing so) or at initiating an extra-marital affair. As well as ostensible expressions of regret, these 'endings' typically fostered the impression of a 'cautionary moral tale' designed to act as a warning to others. Discursively 'seeking to warn others' seemed to be particularly suited to creating the impression of (genuine) penitence, and thus weakening any potential moral approbation. The following example concluded an account that can be summarised as such:

- the contributor ('innocently') engaged in chat-room exchanges;
- after some time, communication with a number of people became confined with communication with one particular man;
- the principal topic of conversation became narrowed to his intimacy troubles in an existing relationship;
- the contributor claimed to have became 'addicted' to these exchanges and subsequently (variously) claimed to have 'fallen in love' or been engaged in a 'cyber-affair';
- both of the participants left their partners and began cohabiting; and,
- the newly formed intimate arrangement was beset by difficulties and proved unsustainable.

(77) **[S5:1493-1502]**

I have finished my relationship with this man, to try 1494
a last chance of saving my marriage. But this time my husband does not 1495
want to know and has said he has moved on and doesn't love or want me 1496
anymore. 1497
So I have ended up with nothing and no-body to love me and I beleive I 1498
am getting what I deserve. "What goes around comes around". 1499
Sorry it's been a bit long I have still left alot out. 1500
Regards 1501
Zoe 1502

In lines 1494-5 the contributor referenced her desire to resurrect her marriage: however, in this instance her husband seemingly did not share this aspiration (lines 1495-6). In lines 1488-9 she both (a) referenced the extent of her 'loss', and (b) acknowledged culpability in this outcome. These essentially confessional claims are followed by the assertion of a general moral principle more commonly a feature of the flotation-responders' accounts described below. By exposing her vulnerability – 'I have ended up with nothing and no-body [*sic.*] to love me', the contributor perhaps effectively pre-empted others in making this judgement; similarly in making the claim that justice was being served, she engaged in a strategy of self-deprecation which perhaps effectively diminished the potential for the 'all-out' moral approbation of others. As a whole this account appeared to be organised so as to warrant interpretations that the contributor had 'made a silly mistake' and thus, sympathy would be a more appropriate response than condemnation in this instance.

'SEEKING ADVICE'.

The following example ends a convoluted account, which can be précised as follows:

- the contributor's marriage became difficult because of financial problems;
- her husband [A] subsequently started working long hours in an attempt to remedy these problems;
- she consequently claimed to have been effectively 'deserted', especially in relation to the business of childrearing;
- the contributor claimed to understand her husbands (honourable) intentions but nonetheless engaged in an extra-marital affair with his 'best friend' [B], which culminated (after detection) with divorce from her husband;
- the contributor claimed that the affair with [B] ended as a consequence of her guilt;
- the contributor and [A] were re-married;
- she ('inadvertently') reengaged in communication with [B], which re-ignited their (previous) extra-marital affair.

(78) **[S13:1970-78]**

I just can't put him out of my mind. I do not want to jeapardise my marriage for a second time but I'm really struggling to keep him at arms length. Our financial situation has improved somewhat over the years due to luck more than anything else – windfalls etc. Is there anyone out there who could offer me some support or maybe you've been there yourself. Thankyou so much for listening, it feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Thanks again, Nicole

At one level, the ending of this account could be read as a (genuine) warrant to remedy the contributor's uncertainty. However, there are several features which are suggestive of the fact that the contributor was seeking approval for future actions (the restoration of her affair with B), which may be more-or-less settled in her own mind. The 'struggle to cope' (line 1971) represents a consistent concluding theme to all flotation initiators' accounts, and is subject to further elaboration below. In lines 1972-3 the contributor (somewhat contradictorily) dismissed (relatively) comfortable economic circumstances as a matter of happenstance; the implication being that previous financial difficulties may re-emerge at some future point in time. Most significantly, in 'calling for advice', the contributor was doing so on the basis of a (restricted) discursive representation of circumstances. The 'evidence' presented to potential readers seems organised to invite others approval for the proposed resurrection of her affair with [B].

THE STRUGGLE TO COPE WITH NEW CIRCUMSTANCES.

The 'struggle-against-the-odds' represented a common concluding element to all flotation initiators accounts regardless of whether they appeared organised (a) to warrant approval for actions (future or pending), or (b) mitigate against the strong moral disapproval of others. The following example ended an account that sought endorsement for an extra-marital affair.

(79) **[S1:218-222]**

So we are hoping and trying to plan for a future for us TOGETHER... it is very hard to do when we are thousands of miles apart...but it is a test of resolve..of committment..and a hope that we can at last find some true happiness that we have TRIED to have with our spouses (a combined amount of years between the two of us is 55).

The use of capitalisation (line 218) served to amplify the strength of the contributor's asserted intentions. However, in lines 219-20 it transpired that there are several (significant) barriers to the continuing viability of this new relationship i.e. matters of nationality and distance. In lines 219-20 the contributor explicitly represented these barriers as a trial; an 'epic struggle against the odds'. Finally, in line 221-2 she expectantly asserted that both her and her 'new

intimate' are up to this challenge given that they have both (successfully) faced adversity in the past.

One possible explanation for the recurrent reference to 'struggle' across a variety of these accounts (seemingly organised towards differing effects) resides in de Rougemont's (1966) claims in relation to 'obstacles to love'. de Rougemont asserted that environments explicitly opposed to a 'love relationship' (and especially situations in which social or spatial obstacles were actively placed between the intimates), only serve to intensify and otherwise sustain intimacy: in short, intimate relations are made possible only in opposition to the environment. However, this hypothesis falls on the fact that even the confessional accounts described above - which strongly referenced 'intimate misadventure' - continued to place emphasis upon 'the struggle to cope'.

A more plausible explanation of this phenomenon perhaps resides in Featherstone (1992) and Seale's (1996) accounts of 'heroic [social] identity'. Both authors asserted that the (typically) religious societies of the past were essentially 'heroic societies' in which the 'nasty, short, and brutish' effects of mundane, everyday life were, to some extent alleviated by judgement (at death) according to some higher purpose. However, in a secularised, late-modern context, what might be considered 'heroic' rests upon the (self) construction of a meaningful narrative that emphasises ones (extraordinary) engagement in moral behaviour, sacrifice, bravery, spiritual adventure etc. against a backdrop of the mundane, humdrum concerns of daily life. To be sure, many of the intimacy troubles referenced by participants in these accounts (assuming actuality) would pose a great threat to 'ontological security' (Laing, 1959; Giddens, 1992). However, the fact that these events are inherently 'identity-threatening' does not in itself necessarily account for the styles of discursive representation adopted by the BBS participants. Rather, discursive representation of actions as moral, brave, tragic, self-sacrificing, adventurous etc. may create discursively useful effects – namely the reclaiming of 'heroic identity' from morally questionable circumstances.

FLOTATION – RESPONDERS' ACCOUNTS.

SEQUENTIAL ORDER	EXAMPLES OF DISCURSIVE DEVICES EMPLOYED.
BEGINNINGS	Biographical introduction. 'Approach work' and biographical details.
	'Truncated announcement'.
DELIVERY	'Suspicion' – ' confirmation' sequence.
	Effecting favourable comparisons.
	Consequences – 'the struggle to cope'; 'second chance offers'; 'within-limits loss of control'; 'gists and upshots.'
ENDINGS	Status announcements
	The moral of the tale; ❶ moral indicatives, and ❷ moral imperatives.

Figure 15: *The sequential organisation of flotation-responders' accounts.*

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

In common with the (*above*) flotation initiators' accounts, the examples cited below tended to arrive at the discussion of intimacy troubles by means of introductory biographical details. However, in contrast to the accounts of flotation initiators, the level of detail provided was (in some cases) far more extensive.

(80) **[S4:706-8]**

I live in the UK so I hope you don't have trouble understanding me. 706
I have been married for just over a year and I have a little boy who is 707
also a year old. 708

In line 706 the contributor referenced the fact that a previous contributor to this BBS discussion strand was from the US.

(81) **[S11:310-11]**

This is something I never really thought I would be doing, talking 310
about me on a chat forum! here goes..... 311

Several of the contributors professed a degree of 'discomfort' at sharing intimate information with strangers, such as in datum 81. Berk (1977) asserted that a certain degree of social stigma pervades situations of 'purchased intimacy' i.e. situations in which people pay for introductions to strangers etc. Although the BBS did not, strictly speaking, require any payment in order to participate, perhaps these expressions of awkwardness are a residual effect of a (perceived) stigma associated with the sharing of intimate information with strangers. In datum 82 the contributor of datum 81proceded to spell out the chronological order of events in considerable detail, as well as providing supplementary biographical information (line 321). The relevance of this material at this particular point is not immediately apparent, but this is not to say that these details were either redundant or superfluous: rather their discursive effects became more apparent as the account unfolded. Woofit (1992:107) suggested that details provided at the beginning of an account ('setting sequences') could serve as a powerful device by which to create an effect of objectivity. Detailed *'settings work'*, such as is the case in datum 82 is suggestive of careful organisation as these initial details subsequently mesh or coincide with (more contentious) information provided later in the account.

(82) **[S11:312-21]**

I am 34yrs old and my wife and I have been married for 13yrs together 312
for 15yrs. I have worked away in the oil industry for about 12yrs 2 313
weeks away 2 weeks at home. This year I have had an injury which meant 314
I was off work for about 5 mths then there was the threat of redundancy 315
on top of this. My wife was very supportive through all this as always. 316
Then a friend of mine who decided he did not want to be with his wife 317
any longer came to stay with us (I invited him to stay for a while to 318
help him out). Anyway he also was off work due to an ilness, I 319
recovered from my injury and was also offered a new position working 320
onshore which is something we have always wanted. 321

TRUNCATED ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTIMACY TROUBLES.

Early announcement of intimacy troubles provided a common feature of flotation responders' accounts. In the examples cited below contributors discursively registered the fact that intimacy troubles were at issue, but typically did so by means of a non-specific or 'matter-of-fact' style of presentation.

(83) **[S11:322-28]**

It all seemed to go wrong late in July we were at an open air concert 322
with friends and the (lodger friend) anyway I had been feeling 323
increasingly uncomfortable with the situation at home, me at work and 324
my wife at home with my two children and the lodger, anyway I had a 325
little too much to drink and someone jokinly threw some wine over me, I 326
saw red and threw wine back but with a little more venom! I just lost 327
the plot really stupid I know but it happened. 328

This example (datum 83) illustrated a non-specific allusion to intimacy troubles. The effect fostered by such non-specificity is that of a 'mystery' in which the contributor is deliberately vague about events-as-outlined. For instance, in line 326 the contributor was vague about the person whom he reportedly 'threw the wine over': of more significance is the question of why this detail ought to have been relevant at this point in the account. Direct clues were, however, provided concerning existent intimacy troubles i.e. 'things were not going well at home' (lines 323-25). Woofit (1992:100) observed how voicing implicitly contentious claims is frequently accomplished by means of oblique reference – *'it happened'*. The 'it' in this particular instance refers to a 'falling-out' with a friend whom, had he been on speaking terms, seemingly could have confirmed the contributor's initial suspicions in relation to his wife's adultery. This account differed from the examples below (data 84 & 85), which (typically) announced the presence of the intimacy troubles in a 'matter-of-fact' style.

(84) **[S7:210-212]**

After getting a phone call out of the blue at work one morning telling me that my husband, had been the co-respondent (un-named) in a work colleagues divorce.

(85) **[S8:935-7]**

Having found out that my husband of 7 years has not only been leading a double life for the last 4 years but has just become a father again (not with me!), I have made the decision to divorce.

The common denominator to data 84 & 85 is that both juxtaposed ordinary, matter-of-fact, and otherwise controlled announcements against (claimed) extraordinary circumstances. It is sufficient to note these discursively constructed contrasts at this point, the salience of which is subject to further discussion below. For instance, in datum 85 (line 937) the contributor's 'decision to divorce' was discursively presented as a cognitively orderly and otherwise rational judgment. However, this inauspicious reporting of extraordinary events could have left contributors vulnerable to alternative (sceptical) interpretations by other participants e.g. that events were being disingenuously underplayed. The matter-of-fact style evident in data 84 & 85 perhaps approximate what Woofit (1992:136) called 'state formulations'. He asserted that the principle discursive effect of state formulations is to position the speaker / writer as calm and otherwise 'cognitively rational', and thus minimise the possibility that subsequent claims could be subjected to sceptical inference.

The use of the discursive device *'I was just doing X when Y'* outlined by Woofit (1992) characterised a number of 'truncated announcements' of intimacy troubles. Woofit's (1992)

study of the discursive presentation of paranormal phenomena concerned, above all, the narrated recollection of dramatic personal experiences. He asserted that the device *'I was just doing X when Y'* appeared as a recurrent feature of such accounts in which: 'the X component is used to describe the speaker's activities at the time, and the Y component refers to the speaker's first awareness of the phenomenon' (1992:118). The mundane (X) details typically reference routine activities and the places in which they occur, and are specifically designed to convey the minimal character of the activity in question. Woofit (1992:127) suggested that X components of accounts are therefore a specialised version of 'state formulation'. However, he further asserted that on some occasions, state formulations may assume the form of 'Gists' or 'upshots' in which the material furnished earlier in accounts is used to construct or 'explain' why the contributor was doing a particular activity at a particular point in time: in terms of the current study, datum 86 *et sequale* provided particularly potent illustrations of this point, which is subject to further analysis (*below*).

(86) **[S6:71-3]**

I had no idea that my husband was having an affair. I decided to drive 71
home a different route from work one day and saw my husbands car parked 72
outside a house that I didn't know. 73

In datum 86 (lines 71-3) - 'X': I was just driving home from work, when 'Y': I spotted my husband's car in an unexpected place.

(87) **[S11:330-333]**

A week later we went to another open air concert (I know you must think 330
Why!) anyway I did not drink anything that night. Upon our return home 331
I had to take my sister home when I got back home I found my wife and 332
the lodger kissing 333

In datum 87 (lines330-333) - 'X': I just took my sister home, when 'Y': on my return I found my wife and our houseguest kissing.

(88) **[S7:210-212]**

After getting a phone call out of the blue at work one morning telling 210
me that my husband, had been the co-respondent (un-named) in a work 211
colleagues divorce. 212

In datum 88 (lines210-212) – 'X': I was just at work when 'Y': I got a phone call alleging my husband's adultery. In each instance considered here, contributors juxtaposed a normalising statement at 'X' with the extraordinary discovery of their partners' infidelity 'Y'. In each of these 'Y' components, the contributor could be adjudged gullible but giving the 'benefit of the doubt' to the other party. On the other hand, these 'Y' components were similar to those described by Woofit (1992:138) as 'first-thought' formulations i.e. organised to demonstrate

that the person reporting events had not 'jumped to conclusions'. However, such discursive 'strategies' also invite the inference that the reported first impressions are not all they seem to be. Typically, such mundane and otherwise unremarkable first reports are corrected, often in favour of extraordinary conclusions. Woofit (1992:141) asserted that the '*Just doing X when Y*' arrangement works as it allows an account of mundane activity to be interrupted by something truly extraordinary: by creating a contrast, the mundanity of one activity is affirmed by the unusual qualities of the subsequent event and *vice versa*.

THE 'SUSPICION' – ' CONFIRMATION' SEQUENCE.

There were several structural similarities in the claimed awareness of the others 'breach of trust' in BBS accounts and Glaser and Strauss's (1965) description of the means by which information about terminal diagnosis is controlled, withheld, or shared by hospital staff and their patients. Glaser and Strauss (1965) asserted the following four 'awareness contexts' in order to describe interaction around the issue of terminal illness in the structural setting of a hospital:

- *closed awareness* – in which hospital staff are aware of the terminal diagnosis, but patients and their families are 'kept in the dark';
- *suspicion awareness* – in which the patient suspects what hospital staff know (terminal diagnosis);
- *mutual pretence awareness* – in which both hospital staff and patients are cognisant of the terminal diagnosis but neither party openly makes reference this fact; and,
- *open awareness* – in which all parties are aware of the terminal diagnosis and communicate this understanding openly.

Timmermans (1994:324) criticised Glaser and Strauss's account on the basis that this formulation is overly cognitive in nature and downplays the emotional dimensions of terminal illness. Timmermans suggested that something else aside from an increase in information is required in order to foster open awareness, and further sub-divided the context of open awareness on the basis of how patients comprehend and react emotionally to information. He suggested the following 'additional' contexts of open awareness:

- *suspended open awareness* – in which terminal diagnosis is explicitly shared between hospital staff and their patients / relatives, but the latter disregard this information;
- *uncertain open awareness* – in which terminal diagnosis is explicitly shared but patients / relatives prefer uncertainty to the explicit acknowledgement of terminal diagnosis; and,

- *active open awareness* – in which patients and their families actively assimilate terminal diagnosis.

In the case of flotation responders' accounts as outlined here, 'awareness contexts' might (by analogy) look something like this:

- *closed awareness* – in which one party remains unaware of the others breach of exclusivity of the relationship;
- *suspicion awareness* – in which one party suspects the other's infidelity;
- *mutual pretence awareness* – in which the infidelity of one party is discovered / confirmed but the other party 'turns a blind eye' to this indiscretion, and furthermore, the issue is not referenced as constituting intimacy troubles; and,
- *open awareness* – in which one party's infidelity is discovered / confirmed and referenced as grounds for action – either repair or termination of the relationship.

Glaser and Strauss posited a process of transition from one information context to another in order to account for the sequence by which patients become progressively aware of terminal diagnosis. By analogy the BBS accounts described here could be viewed as being organised as to create the effect of an unfolding cognitive / emotional awareness of another's transgressions. As such, 'awareness categories' – in the sense that they are used in the current analysis – refer to issues of discursive deployment rather than underlying cognitive or emotional states. Edwards (1991) asserted that the overt cognitivism of categorical schema (such as that proposed by Glaser and Strauss) distorts the true nature of categories by abstracting them from the situated contexts of social action. In contrast Edwards (1991: 517) suggested that categories, rather than implying underlying cognitive structures are '*something we do*, in talk, in order to accomplish social actions (persuasion, blaming, denial, refutation, accusation, etc.)' [original emphasis]. In short, Edwards claimed that the experiential basis of categories is both sensitive to context and designed for talk: descriptive categories are consequential and implicative (and accountably so) by participants. In this view categories are not merely ways of seeing but rather a means by which to construct the seeing of something. The ethnomethodologically sensitive approach recommended by Edwards suggests that any study of categorisation should commence with the use of the categories being studied – and especially a concern with what is being accomplished by their deployment. Furthermore, he asserted that the rhetorical construction of categories is nowhere more evident than in situations where people are 'reporting, or making knowledge claims about, disputed or unusual events, where their own credibility is potentially at issue' (Edwards, 1991:530). The rhetorical deployment of categorical devices thus serves as a warrant to notice (in particular) some features of an account, and invite interpretation; in these terms, their deployment is

carefully organised to achieve some broad rhetorical ends. It is this mode of discursive deployment of 'awareness categories' that is of concern in the current study. The creation of a mystery pre-supposes a (at least hypothesised) solution, however convoluted or unlikely this ultimately appears to be. In the following examples, intimations were provided that some trouble or other was afoot, and these were delivered in the form of an 'additive' structure. By 'additive structure' I mean the provision of clues on a cumulative basis inviting the reader towards their own 'explanation' of events.

(89) **[S4:708-16]**

The begining of December I found out my wife had taken	*708*
out a large money loan from the bank without discussing it with me. We	*709*
had a massive arguement and but in the end everything was ok. The	*710*
following week my wife went out with her work friends and came home	*711*
really late I asked her who dropped her home and she told me it was a	*712*
work friend (who I never knew and I knew all her work friends). She	*713*
acted really unsual and werid and I asked what was going on and she	*714*
said she had been smoking (she never has smoked). That weekend I felt	*715*
very upset I felt there was something wrong.	*716*

In line 709 the contributor related how a large amount of money was loaned from the bank, which was explained (line 710) to his (apparent) satisfaction. In lines 711-12, his wife is reported as returning home late, and (by implication) the explanation offered on this occasion was less than satisfactory. Finally, in line 714 his wife's 'unusual and weird' conduct was counted against the claim that she has started smoking and this excuse fails to convince the contributor (line 715). Taken individually, each of these claimed irregularities as discursively represented could be (more-or-less) viewed as explicable or independently unremarkable. However, as an effect of their adjacent location within this account, the presenter effectively implied a 'package' of related happenings to be read collectively: in turn this perhaps invited the interpretation of general disorder in relation to his wife's conduct. However, one danger inherent in the 'additive' presentation of clues (as illustrated by this example) is that this strategy 'runs the risk' of stretching credibility. Clues are presented to readers with the intention of inviting interpretation: however, once a reader arrives at that interpretation, the participant, by presenting further claims, runs the risk of appearing especially gullible. This in turn perhaps undermines the authenticity of the entire account in inviting the judgement 'how could you not have known'.

The announcement of 'open awareness' (a key transition point in 'flotation responders' accounts) was invariably accomplished by means of one of two alternative discursive sequences, namely:

- confrontation-confession; or,
- detection.

Datum 90 was discursively characteristic of (an alleged) confrontation-confession scenario. It will be recalled from datum 86 *above,* that the contributor claimed to have been driving home from work by a different route when she spotted her husband's car.

(90) **[S6:76-86]**

I was intrigued as to his 76
reasons for being there so decided to wait and see if he returned to 77
his car. He returned about 45 minutes later, not from the house where 78
his car was parked but one about 6 doors away - he was acting really 79
strange, looking over his shoulder, when, all of a sudden a woman came 80
running out of the house which he had just left and handed him his tie 81
and kissed him in such a way that there was no doubting what had just 82
been going on!!! I was rooted to the spot yet somehow found the 83
strength to get out of my car and run over to them and ask just what 84
the hell was going on. Imagine their horror, she didn't know me from 85
Adam but my husband nearly had a fit! 86

After confirming the identity of the vehicle (see datum 98), she detailed her 'intrigue' as to why the car (and by implication her husband) ought to be there (line 76). The use of the term *'intrigued'* is in itself noteworthy, implying a neutral, of even playful (rather than suspicious) orientation towards the 'mystery'. Following a protracted wait, the contributor reported that her husband appeared 'acting really strange, looking over his shoulder' [lines 79-80]. The dual discursive effects accomplished by this detail are that (a) the style of presentation served to deepen the general effect of mystery created thus far; and (b) such description of [the husband's] actions was perhaps commonly recognisable / readable as suspicious, or as having 'something to hide'. In line 80 the contributor (dramatically) detailed how an unknown women then appeared and kissed her husband, and invites the inference that the two had recently been engaged in sexual congress. In line 83, by claiming to be paralysed by what she had (allegedly) just witnessed, the contributor maintained a sense of 'innocence' in relation to her anomalous discoveries by creating an impression of 'shock'. Conversely, the confrontation (lines 83-4) was perhaps presented in such a way as to favour the interpretation that her husband experienced an amplified sense of 'shock'. The inference invited by this presentation (but not actually confirmed by ensuing details), is that the contributor's husband did not deny ensuing accusations of infidelity. The discursive features of this example, typical of other 'confrontation sequences' are:

- the circumstances which led up to the actual confrontation were presented as 'accidental';
- the (alleged) gap between suspicion and confirmation of the extra-partnership liaison is short rather than protracted; and,

- the confronted party is reported as (either explicitly or by implication) as not refuting the alleged misconduct.

In contrast, the following (data 91-3) detailed typical 'detection' sequences in which:

- contributors invariably presented themselves as harbouring gradual (but protracted) suspicions as to the fidelity of their partners;
- confrontation is effected but the allegations are denied by the partner;
- denials are presented as being either (a) only temporarily convincing, and doubts soon re-emerge, or (b) unconvincing, and as a consequence;
- contributors claimed to engage in a detailed and 'forensic' investigation in order to assuage lingering doubts, the culmination point of which is that;
- sufficient (robust) evidence is gathered in order to confirm the contributor's original suspicions; and,
- the 'partner' is again confronted, but denial is made impossible on this occasion as a consequences of 'overwhelming' material evidence.

Datum 91 was somewhat atypical insofar as the contributor reported hiring a private detective in order to 'gather evidence'. The reported penitence on the part of his wife (lines 474-5), and the contributor's refusal to countenance the alleged misdemeanour (lines 475-7) were typical features of some flotation responders accounts and are subject to further elaboration *below*.

(91) **[S2:473-477]**

Eventually due to her behaviour I hired a private detective and got the	*473*
evidence just at the time when she says she had finally realised how	*474*
much she really did love me. The problem is that 5 months of lies and	*475*
promises that she was not seeing him anymore has totally destroyed my	*476*
trust and respect for her.	*477*

In contrast, datum 92 demonstrated some of the more typical characteristics of 'detection sequences'. In lines 741-2 the writer re-iterated lingering suspicions raised earlier in the account (see datum 89), and referenced his 'need' to settle these matters in his own mind. Typically contributors reported an act of, literally, 'searching' for evidence (line 742), or alternatively laying a trap in order to 'catch out' their co-intimate. Once discovered, contributors 'spelled out' the particular relevance of the 'new discovery' (which may not be immediately apparent to readers). In this case (line 743), the contributor's suspicions were confirmed by means of *'the date on the box.'* These sequences were typically punctuated with reports of the contributor's emotional reactions to each new 'discovery' (lines 744-5). Reports of the enactment of (second) confrontations often detailed the 'fact' that they were carried out in front to others. In line 746 the contributor reported that his wife's parents were present. The

inclusion of others within the account perhaps serves to increase the overall discursive effect of authenticity i.e. by implying that events were 'witnessed'. 'Witnesses' in such reported scenarios were sometimes represented a 'neutral' third parties. In the current example, the inclusion of his wife's parents (who might be usually be expected to take their daughter's part) carried the implication that the 'evidence' was so overwhelming it served as to neutralise normative family obligations. The (rather precise) detail regarding the *accused's* initial avoidance of the confrontation (lines 746-7) is open to a number of possible readings. Firstly, an inference may be drawn that the 'accused' was unable to refute the allegations, and therefore they must indeed be 'true'. However, in this case the contributor also reported that his wife took some time to 'compose herself' before 'confessing' to a (one-off) 'fling'. Subsequent detail provided in this account details how the contributor remained unconvinced by his wife's explanation on this occasion, and a further 'search for evidence' was reported.

(92) **[S4:741-750]**

After the way she acted I knew there was more to it than that....I just	*741*
had to prove it. So I went through cupboards in the bedroom and found	*742*
the morning after pill. I knew that she had slept with someone else it	*743*
was dated for that day on the box. I was so hurt, shocked,I cryed so	*744*
much.	*745*
She came back and I confronted her in front of her parents...and she	*746*
got upset and ran into the bathroom. About ten minutes later she came	*747*
out and told me that it was a fling with a guy from colleage were she	*748*
was doing her course and that it was a one off. And that he was good to	*749*
talk to.	*750*

Similarly, (but with somewhat less complexity) the contributor of datum 93 reported his 'search' for evidence (line 373). In this case, the 'find' was reported as accidental i.e. when engaged in the 'normal' business of 'putting the bins out'. It was noted above that 'accidental discovery' claims such as this often formed the opening move within 'confrontation-confession' sequences (*above*). Possible inferences to be drawn from such reports include that (a) contributors were actively engaged in a 'search' for evidence, but at the same time (b) were at pains to deliberately downplay agency by discursively presenting their actions as either passive or accidental. In the case of the current example, to openly admit to have been searching through the bins could possibly have invited a range of negative inferences e.g. that the contributor was morbidly suspicious or otherwise acting in bad faith. As such 'accidental discovery' can appear as a discursively useful device common to both 'confrontation-confession' and 'detection' sequences. The remainder of the 'evidence' discovered on this (reported) occasion included the absence of a *'champagne bottle'* (line 374). The discursive effect of this information is vague, and perhaps amplifies the sense of 'mystery': the fact that this detail was offered as a question maybe invited sceptical inference e.g. that some (clumsy) attempt at concealment had been made by the contributor's wife and her new intimate. The discovery of the matching horoscopes (lines 374-5) was perhaps represented as the most

convincing 'discovery'. However, no further discussion of this matter ensued, creating the impression that (a) the contributor accepted this 'find' as confirming his suspicions, and (b) that this information ought to be similarly accepted as valid by readers.

(93) **[S11:370-383]**

This basically brings me upto date, she went away this weekend to get away because I questioned her about the fact she had the X lodger around when I was away in the S of France, I found a champagne cork when I was putting the bins out but no champagne bottle in the recycling box? plus a horoscope print out her star sign and the X lodgers.

In ensuing claims, the contributor detailed how his suspicions were finally 'confirmed' by a person with whom he had previously 'fallen out' with (and thus had no contact with during the duration of his wife's affair). In datum 83 *above*, it was noted that the reasons for providing details of this altercation were unclear. However, almost at the end of this account (datum 94) the 'reasons' for the inclusion of this information are finally revealed: the reported disagreement had effectively separated the contributor from someone in possession of the information necessary to 'confirm' his wife's affair. The reconciliation between the contributor and his friend (lines 379-80) reportedly resulted in the exchange of information, which seemingly, settled matters for the contributor. By claming to be only suspiciously aware of the details of his wife's affair (the position maintained for almost the entire duration of this account), the contributor was perhaps allowed extended licence to detail his wife's 'deceitfulness' and moral culpability in bringing about the termination of their relationship.

(94) **[S11:379-383]**

I talked with a friend who I had not spoke to for a few months and told him what was going on. He was at the concert back in the summer and he said that he saw my wife and the X lodger kissing and he interupted them and said Hi. His words were they were F%£ing suprised!!!! He had not told me before because he did not want to stir anything.*

EFFECTING FAVOURABLE COMPARISONS.

The distinctive use of comparisons and contrasts in the following examples effectively served to position troubles tellers as morally praiseworthy parties, whilst simultaneously representing 'others' as errant. In each of the following examples, the authors effectively positioned themselves as 'cognitively reasonable' in affording the 'benefit of the doubt', or *in extremis* even being willing to forgive the offending party.

(95) **[S2:467-71]**

Our problem is that when I found out, she agreed to end it with him and realised from my reaction that I must truly love her, which I do. She did end it but he kept trying to contact her and she went back to see him (to see if he was ok??). The inevitable happened and she saw him and had sex with him on a number of occassions. 467 468 469 470 471

In datum 95 (line 467) the contributor (implicitly) alluded to the offer of a 'second chance' as a response to his wife's (confirmed) adultery. However in lines 470-71, she is reported as declining this proposal in favour of engaging in a sexual relationship with another party. A similar impression i.e. that of 'reasonableness' was created by being wiling to present 'both sides of the argument' or acknowledge (usually attenuated) culpability in the intimacy troubles to some extent. This was the favoured strategy in the following examples.

(96) **[S2:461-465]**

She had an intense relationship with this predatory man who approached her at a vulnerable time. I am not blameless as I was responsible for not cherishing her enough and failing to show how much I loved her. She accepts that this does not condone her actions and is not seeking to excuse what she sees as unacceptable behaviour. 461 462 463 464 465

In datum 96 (line 462) the contributor appeared to admit some culpability in bringing about his wife's affair; however, the underlying 'reasons' for this culpability were presented as to invite the interpretation that the author was being unduly harsh on himself. The effect of this 'culpability' was further diminished by discursively enlisting his wife's reported agreement with his interpretation of events.

(97) **[S8:937-41]**

Things have been rocky for the last 2 or 3 years and we even went to marriage guidance at his suggestion a year or so back but the weird thing is that since last September I truly thought we had turned the corner .... until this bombshell came to light just a few days before Christmas. 937 938 939 940 941

By her acknowledgement that 'things had been rocky' (datum 97:937-38) the contributor implicitly acknowledged some degree of culpability. In making these assertions, it should be noted that the contributor has employed the 'not naming' strategy reported above. By referencing the willingness to attend marriage guidance, the contributor (ostensibly at least) further acknowledged certain culpability in the intimacy troubles.

In datum 98 the contributor effected a comparison by means of (a) the provision of non-specific or sketchy details – accompanied by the attendant possibility that she might be wrong in her initial perception, followed by (b) the provision of more specific information, which

seemed to correct initial 'misperceptions'. In lines 71-2 the contributor related the 'fact' that she decided to drive home by taking a different route: no information was offered as to why she chose to do this. However, en route she spotted her husband's car '*outside a house that I didn't know*'. In lines 73-5 the contributor offered a number of initial 'reasons' as to why this couldn't be the case. However, on further inspection (line 76) the identity of the vehicle is confirmed.

(98) **[S6:71-83]**

I decided to drive	*71*
home a different route from work one day and saw my husbands car parked	*72*
outside a house that I didn't know. I was firstly surprised as he	*73*
should have been at work about 20 miles away, I then thought I must	*74*
have the wrong car so I turned round and went passed again just to make	*75*
sure - no doubting it was his this time.	*76*

Woofit (1992:110) coined the term 'second-settings' in order to describe the provision of qualifying (or more detailed) information as a means of (self) correcting earlier claims. The discursive usefulness of second-settings appears to be that they serve to 'defuse or mitigate the likelihood of sceptical or negative inferences'. In datum 93, by initially expressing a degree of disbelief or mistaken perception, the contributor constructed herself as cognitively reasonable and as someone not readily given to hasty conclusions. However, immediately following these equivocations, the contributor confirmed the identity of the vehicle by means of double-checking. The dual impression created was therefore one of both (a) open-mindedness, and (b) attention to detail. By offering precise detail (line 74) 'about 20 miles away' the contributor further augmented the impression of authenticity. In general, all of the 'comparison devices' outlined *above* appeared to comprise important elements of flotation responder accounts, which were perhaps organised specifically towards inviting readers to attribute authenticity to events as related.

CONSEQUENCES.

The discursive presentation of 'consequences' or 'reactions' to the discovery of an 'affair' marked a significant transition point in accounts i.e. the contributor unequivocally signalled 'open awareness'. A key issue for contributors at this point concerned the need to discursively demonstrate conduct that will be read by others as 'morally creditable'. Allowing public inspection of the fact that a 'partner' has sought intimacy elsewhere is a risky venture. Public confession might variously (a) invite sceptical interpretations of the claims made; (b) leave contributors open to the charge that they are 'airing their dirty linen in public'; and (c) reflect poorly upon the contributor's own actions. Therefore, the following examples (data 99-107) appeared to be carefully organised in order to achieve two principle discursive effects,

namely: (a) salvaging the contributor's dignity and reputation from the situation; and (b) simultaneously casting the 'errant' co-intimate as morally flawed.

In datum 99 the contributor discursively detailed an episode of what I wish to call 'within-limits-indignation', following (a) the (claimed) 'accidental discovery', and, shortly afterwards (b) the 'confirmation' that her husband was conducting an extra-marital affair (see data 86, 90, & 98).

(99) **[S6:86-91]**

I just saw red and lashed out at	*86*
both of them and was shouting at the top of my voice - not my usual	*87*
approach but one that just seemed to get the better of me. He tried to	*88*
assure me that there was nothing going on but I was having none of it.	*89*
Eventually I left them to it telling him that he needn't bother coming	*90*
home which he didn't that night or the night after! I was left to stew	*91*

In lines 86-88 the contributor detailed a sense of 'loss of control', and this type of discursive display of 'extreme reaction' was characteristic of 'flotation responder' accounts more generally. However, in lines 88-9 in (reportedly) refusing to accept her husband's explanation of events, she also implicitly acknowledged some degree of cognitive mastery over the situation. The (apparent) loss of control therefore seems compare with the 'within limits' variety described by McAndrew and Edgerton (1969) in their study of *Drunken Comportment*. By 'within limits' McAndrew & Edgerton (1969:67) suggested that even in cases of the most supposedly disinhibited conduct, there are self-imposed limits beyond which 'one does not go'. The existence of limits of any kind therefore contradicts notions of 'impulsiveness' or 'loss of control': in datum 99 and the further examples cited below I suggest that what are ostensibly reports of 'impulsive' actions are in reality, discursive constructions which were reflexive to a (pervasive) moral order.

In relation to such 'moral order', McAndrew & Edgerton (1969:167) asserted that in each society, a repertoire of potential 'excuses' exist by which people are able to claim legitimacy for (seemingly uninhibited) conduct. Instances of such conduct (either threatened or enacted) can thus be framed in terms of the interplay between: (a) the normative expectation of accountability for ones actions; (b) the self-recognition by contributors that their reported conduct would ordinarily be considered as problematic; and, (c) the potential repertoire of 'good enough' excuses by which to 'write off' actions. 'Reactions', as detailed in these examples, were perhaps intended to be read and understood as an indication that the contributors were 'not really themselves' at the reported point in time, thus effectively diminishing agency and any possible attribution of moral culpability. What others accept as a 'good enough' excuse is dependent upon (presumed) shared understanding of the normative expectations surrounding each reported scenario. One apparent norm seemingly related to the

expectation / obligation to demonstrate 'offence'. When seemingly warranted by the reported actions of another, failure to demonstrate a sufficiently convincing display of indignation might invite negative moral judgement upon oneself. As such, recounting episodes of 'within limits' loss of control, anger, or indignation may create the primary effect of demonstrating one's moral probity to the readers of this material by means of:

- demonstrating one's understanding that one or more normative expectations have been transgressed;
- affirming to readers that one upholds these normative expectations even if other *dramatis personae* do not; and,
- demonstrating understanding that one is not merely entitled, but rather, obligated to enact 'indignation'.

(100) **[S11:332-335]**

I had to take my sister home when I got back home I found my wife and 332
the lodger kissing 333
I could have so easily have (killed him) but I just went upstairs and 334
said nothing. 335

When reported by men, 'within limits' effects most often took the form of (a) an explicit (datum 100: 334), or implied (datum 101:494) threat of mortal violence coupled with (b) a 'reason' as to why the threat was not enacted. Subsequent to the short extract of datum 100, the contributor claimed that his wife's conduct was a temporary aberration, and thus not worthy of conflict at that point in time. In datum 101 (line 494) the contributor claimed he was prevented from inflicting his mortal revenge by the interventions of close friends. The extreme nature of the threats perhaps derives from the normative expectations of masculinity in certain quarters.[121]

(101) **[S2:491-94]**

Now we are both in pain, our children are in pain, our families and 491
even the bastard who had the poor morals to start the affair with a 492
married woman (though i hope he suffers for a long time and if I hadn't 493
been stopped by good friends he would never have felt anything again!. 494

'Gists and upshots' comprised second typical 'consequence' reported within flotation responders' accounts. Invariably these discursive features appeared following the discursive

[121] Whilst the issue of gender appeared to exert no *overarching* influence upon the structure and organisation of flotation responders' accounts, this is not to assert that this factor had no influence upon particular modes of expression. Perhaps one such gendered difference was instantiated in the characteristic ways in which male and female contributors reported threatening violence towards their ex-partners (or ex-partner's new paramours). Specifically, women's reports of threatened (or even enacted) violence were characteristically less extreme (*c/f datum* 99) than those of male contributors (*c/f data* 100 & 101).

acknowledgement of 'open awareness'. By 'gists and upshots', I mean those elements of accounts which variously detailed:

- the (alleged) consequences of the other person's actions;
- a précis of the current situation; and / or,
- hints in relation to the contributor's current (reported) self-image.

Gists and upshots typically pre-monitored the endings of flotation responders' accounts, by discursively positioning the contributor as either (a) 'in control' of matters, or (b) vulnerable, as a consequence of their reported experiences.

The following data (102 & 103) seemed organised as to invite the interpretation that the respective contributors were 'self-possessed' or in control of the situation, in spite of (alleged) extraordinary circumstances. These examples therefore seemed specifically suited to pre-monitor (concluding) claims that one has survived the personal traumas of the reported intimacy troubles.

(102) **[S6:92-95]**

I was dying to go back round to her 92
house but stopped myself. He returned and said he was sorry and that it 93
was all over with the other woman and that she meant nothing to 94
him!!!(anyone heard that one before?). 95

(103) **[S7:226-8]**

Even now, I wonder whether I am doing the right thing, but the affair 226
has been going on since early 1998, and is as far as I know still going 227
on. 228

In their explicit use of comparisons, both of these examples acted as to invite rhetorical interpretation in favour of the contributor. In datum 102 (line 92) the writer claimed a strong temptation to visit her (recently) ex-partner with the implied intention of effecting reconciliation. However in line 93, by not doing so she effectively signalled a level of self-control, and in line 95 effectively ridiculed her ex-partners' claims of contrition. Similarly, (datum 103: 226) (weakly) expressed an element of self-doubt: however, this was followed by the strong assertion that the extent her husband's betrayal would make any reconciliation impossible. As such both of these contributions may be considered as particular variants of the 'second setting' devices discussed above.

In stark contrast to discursive displays of self-possession or self-control, several of the BBS contributors referenced their ongoing struggle or inability to cope with new circumstances.

Whilst the above examples were seemingly structured to pre-monitor claims of 'survivor' status, the examples given below invited the interpretation that the contributor was a 'victim'. I suggest that in claiming 'victim' status, these elements of accounts effectively invited compassionate readings and special displays of moral support from others.

(104) **[S11:359-365]**

She told me 2 weeks ago that she had made an appointment to see a solicitor to start divorce proceedings. I knew I would not be strong enough to cope with the prospect of this, so I decided to go away and visit friends in the South of France, this by the way was something totally out of character for me to just up and do something very spontaneous.

In datum 104, the contributor discursively referenced the impact upon himself of his wife's adultery – to the extent that he claims he was 'forced' to (literally) take flight from the situation. This (typical) embellishment of accounts by the provision of specific (and generally unpleasant) detail served to amplify the impression of vulnerability. A more characteristic means of signalling vulnerability entailed the introduction of other *dramatis personae* – especially children. Once 'vulnerable others' were introduced, they were most usually represented as suffering or struggling to cope with their realigned family situation.

(105) **[S4:766-71]**

Since then I only get to see my son at weekends, me and my wife hardly speak now. I still love her so much and I want to work things out but she is still seeing the other guy. I feel so much pain I had to go for an AIDS test because I don't know when it started. I have trouble sleeping I feel sick thinking about it. I miss not seeing my little boy everyday.

Datum 105 provided an example of the use of both types of 'vulnerability device'. Multiple references were made to the alleged effects of the break-up upon the contributor's son (datum 105:766, 770). In addition, the contributor's vulnerability was underscored by the provision of vivid, explicit personal details. The following examples (data 106 & 107), demonstrated a more subtle discursive strategy in relation to 'vulnerable others'. In these examples, the (reported) 'effects upon children' either; (a) were afforded only passing mention; or (b) merely served as a pretext to claims of 'damage' relating to the contributor or their (recently) ex-partner.

(106) **[S2:479-83]**

I have now left her and we have the terrifying and horrible task of telling our two children that we are separating. We now lose our lovely house and good standard of living and the pain is heartbreaking. The greatest cause of pain is that I always loved her and still love her intensely now but cannot trust her.

In datum 106 most of the discursive 'work' seemed to be reserved for the consequences upon the (recently) ex-partner, although not in overt terms. Whilst ostensibly orientated towards signalling vulnerability, this fragment of the account might be paraphrased as *'look what she's done to the children, look what we've lost, and look what she's lost'*. The implicit assertion was that although the contributor was 'struggling' at the time of reporting, a greater 'loss' awaited his (recently) ex-wife at some (unspecified) future point. In explicitly referencing the issue of trust (lines 482-3) the contributor provided a foretaste of how these accounts are (in general) concluded in overtly moral terms.

(107) **[S8:949-57]**

The problem I have is with our 4 and half year old daughter. She adores	*949*
her daddy and I don't want to cut him off. He is saying that we can	*950*
stay in the marital home and that he will continue to provide 50% of	*951*
all expenses (mortgage, bills, etc) and will pick her up from school 3	*952*
days a week. It seems perfect as I then don't have to see him too often	*953*
but our daughter gets some quality time with him. I have told her that	*954*
daddy doesn't live with us anymore and she seems OK with this as she's	*955*
seen him almost as much since the break up as before but should I be	*956*
telling her more?	*957*

Datum 107 appeared as ostensibly oriented towards providing details of continuing domestic and fiscal arrangements following the contributor's marital break-up. However, I suggest that the subtext of this passage served as a disguised attack upon her (recently) ex-husband. In line 949 the contributor seemed to afford discursive priority to the needs of her daughter. However, immediately afterwards (line 950) she conveyed an implied threat; namely, to deprive her ex-husband of access to their daughter. Furthermore, her willingness to deploy this sanction seemed to contradict prior assertions made in relation to the child's welfare. Subsequently, lines 950-54 the conditions for 'allowing' continued access were related in almost contractual detail. In lines 954-7 the contributor can be paraphrased as complaining (albeit in a rhetorical manner) that she found it difficult to maintain a façade of moral neutrality with her daughter in relation to her ex-partner's conduct. However an alternative reading of this fragment might suggest that the contributor; (a) seen no reason as to why matters ought to be represented to their daughter as 'morally neutral'; (b) wished to involve her daughter in the moral condemnation of her ex-husband; and (c) was seeking the approval of others for this proposed course of action.

ENDINGS.

In common with the 'flotation initiator' accounts described above, the endings depicted here varied according to their (apparent) discursive effects. These utterances appeared typically

concerned to achieve one of two effects, namely; (a) warranting moral condemnation of the other party; or (b) warranting the social support or 'sympathy' of potential readers. In the former, contributors explicitly referenced moral concerns – either by advancing 'idiomatic' moral principles, or 'cautionary' moral tales. These endings implied that there was some more general 'moral lesson' to be derived from the (reported) experiences and characteristically detailed a variety of unpleasant outcomes for (recently) ex-partners. In seeking to warrant sympathy from other participants, BBS contributors typically accentuated ongoing struggle / vulnerability, and tended to represent themselves as either 'recovering' or 'damaged' by their (reported) experiences.

STATUS ANNOUNCEMENTS.

By the term 'status announcement' I am referring to the implicit or explicit methods by which BBS contributors discursively located themselves as either (a) survivors, or (b) victims of their reported experiences. Typically, 'survivors' referenced moral strength by (usually implicitly) invoking a variety of moral principles. On the other hand, 'victims' statements typically appeared structured towards achieving quite the opposite effect i.e. emphasising ongoing 'struggle'.

Data 108 & 109 demonstrated the characteristic features of 'survivor' announcements.

(108) **[S6:97-100]**

I was not going to be treated like that and although I	*97*
hadn't had a great deal of time to think things over have never	*98*
regretted my decision. My absolute came through 4 months ago and I now	*99*
have a new partner who is wonderful.	*100*

In datum 108 (line 97), the contributor asserted that some (unspecified) moral 'bottom-line' had been reached with her (recently) ex-partner. She then proceeded (lines 98-9) to convey a strong sense of self-assuredness in relation to her decision, in spite of the difficult circumstances under which it was taken. This fragment can be understood as a particular variant of 'state formulation'. State formulations described above appeared organised to create a variety of effects, for instance:

- those employed to effect 'truncated announcement' of intimacy troubles - designed to portray contributors as 'cognitively reasonable'; and,
- those employed to describe 'within-limits loss of control' – designed to reference moral indignation.

By comparison, the instances reported here effectively created the impression of self-confidence. In line 99, by claiming to have no regrets, the contributor banished any possibility of self-doubt: these two elements (a) self-confidence, and (b) 'no regrets', effectively mutually reinforced one another. In lines 99-100 the contributor amplified the impression of her rectitude in these matters by asserting that her new relationship was preferable to her previous marriage. The contributor of datum 109 assumed a different strategy of asserting 'moral strength'.

(109) **[S11:473-476]**

I told her I want her to be happy and if she 473
cant find it in her to give me the chance to show her then she should 474
follow her heart. It is the hardest thing I have ever done to tell my 475
wife whom I adore to go and be happy with someone else. 476

In this example the contributor portrayed himself as 'morally strong' by referencing self-sacrifice (rather than asserting matters of principle). Immediately prior to this discursive fragment, he confessed his ongoing strong feelings for his (recently) ex-wife. However, in lines 473-5 he claimed to have placed her interests above his own happiness, and in line 475 emphasised 'struggle'. Taken in isolation, this statement would appear to be somewhat incredulous and open to sceptical reading: however, in subsequent concluding sentiments (datum 112 below) the broader discursive effects of these assertions became more transparent.

Victim statements differed from those of 'survivors' in several important respects: firstly, they characteristically accentuated vulnerability and the ongoing struggle to cope. Secondly, and most importantly, 'victim statements' typically terminated these accounts, whilst survivor statements (in all cases) pre-monitored a (further) conclusion. The account preceding this ending (see data 80, 89, 92, & 105) may be précised as such:

- the contributor's wife started 'acting strangely' in a number of respects – drawing money from their bank account, keeping irregular hours, smoking etc.;
- the contributor concluded that there is 'something wrong', but when he challenged his wife, she denied this;
- his wife left the marital home in order to live with her parents;
- at a later date, the contributor 'investigated' and confirmed his wife's infidelity by means of 'detection'; and,
- the contributor discursively referenced the unfavourable consequences of her actions by providing details of the effects upon their son and the fact that he had to submit to an 'AIDS test'.

Finally:

(110) **[S4:772-5]**

all my friends have been so supportive she has cut off 772
contact with all my friends..I feel that its all my fault that she did 773
it because of me that I wasn't good enough. I feel so betrayed!!!!!! 774
Please help!!!!!! 775

The leitmotif of this discursive fragment was one of desperation in an ongoing 'struggle to cope'. However, 'struggle' in this context differed considerably from the form 'heroic struggle', represented by datum 79. In datum 110 (lines 773-4) the contributor repeatedly 'self-blamed' himself as the architect of his own misfortunes; however, these claims of culpability were in marked contrast to earlier statements in which the actions of his (recently) ex-wife were causally implicated in the intimacy troubles. In lines 774-5 he reinforced his desperation, and explicitly warranted 'help' (both warrants are amplified by the use of multiple exclamation marks). Ostensibly this terminal feature of the account appeared designed to warrant special expressions of sympathy or support from other participants; however, taken as a 'whole package' the general impression created was one in which his ex-wife has acted with extreme duplicity and bad faith. In light of this 'whole package' effect, I suggest that the additional (if not primary) effect of this account may be to specifically warrant strong moral condemnation of the contributor's ex-wife, and therefore this ending might create the specific effect of amplifying such condemnation.

THE MORAL OF THE TALE.

In contrast to datum 110, survivors' accounts were characteristically terminated by reference to some particular 'moral purpose'. As such, the 'whole-package' effect of these accounts seemed analogous to that of the 'moral fable'. In the instances reported below, the 'moral of the story' differed: some utterances were framed in individual terms (cautionary moral tales), whilst others seemingly referenced more general moral concerns (idiomatic moral principles). Hare (1978:5) distinguished between the discursive devices of 'moral indicatives' and 'moral imperatives'. Moral indicatives are typically employed in order to tell another that X, Y, Z is the case, and in the examples cited below these 'statements' characteristically assumed the form of 'cautionary moral tales'. On the other hand, Hare suggested that moral imperatives are employed in order to instruct someone to make X, Y, Z the case, and are consistent with 'general / idiomatic' conclusions. This is not to claim that idiomatic principles cannot be derived from 'moral indicative' conclusions; indeed, these endings may 'work' precisely by inviting participants to 'do' the moral work of deriving general moral principles. The distinguishing feature 'moral imperative' endings in general (e.g. datum 111) was that they explicitly asserted general moral principles. 'Moral indicative' endings characteristically

served to (a) reinforce 'survivor' status; and / or (b) invite a contrast with the (unfavourable) outcomes for (recently) ex-partners.

(111) **[S6:99-103]**

My absolute came through 4 months ago and I now 99
have a new partner who is wonderful. As far as I know, the other woman 100
tired of him after a couple of weeks and asked him to leave. He now 101
rents a one-bed flat in a crummy part of town and all for what - a bit 102
on the side!! 103

In (lines 99-100), the contributor highlighted the fact that she has 'moved past' her (unfavourably represented) past experiences and had invested in a new relationship. In contrast, her (recently) ex-partner's relationship, which commenced as an extra-marital affair, had floundered, and as a consequence (line 102) he was reported as living in undesirable conditions. In contrast to unfavourable relationship or material outcomes, other contributors alleged that (recently) ex-partners had markedly aged or declined in health as a consequence of their 'amorous misadventures'.

Rather than individual circumstances, data 112-4 explicitly referenced general moral principles, rather in the style of '*Aesop's fables*'.

(112) **[S11:486-8]**

I suppose Christmas 486
showed her what families are all about and she longed for that, but in 487
the end the sugar coated person wins the day. This is a person who has 488
lied to her, lied about me to her, declared himself bankrupt recently, 489
told her how important he is viewed in his job, remember I work for the 490
same firm and his opinion of himself is highly overrated. But all this 491
is seems to be forgiven by my wife because of his hold he has over her. 492
Love is truly blind. 493

In datum 109 above, it was noted that the contributor asserted 'moral strength' by means of discursively representing self-sacrifice: datum 112 concluded this account by referencing two idiomatic principles: 'moral of the story' # 1 (line 488) *'all that glistens is not gold'*, and 'moral of the story' # 2 (line 493) *'love is blind'*. The combined discursive effect of these assertions served to create an impression of the contributor's ex-wife as gullible, otherwise foolish, and as a consequence, now in an ongoing exploitative relationship. Furthermore, in juxtaposing (a) a statement of moral strength, against (b) the (allegedly) questionable moral qualities of his (recently) ex-partner's new intimate, the contributor seemingly invited the favourable evaluation of readers.

(113) **[S9:1189-92]**

I was	*1189*
hopelessly in love with my husband and in many ways still am but it's a	*1190*
huge mistake to think that you can ever go back when the person you	*1191*
love has treated you so appallingly. Once a rat always a rat.	*1192*

In datum 113, the 'moral of the story' appeared in line 1192 – *'a leopard cannot change it's spots'*. The discursive impression fostered by this moral imperative was one of finality; that extra-marital affairs entail 'high stakes'. In datum 114, the contributor employed 'reported speech' in order to reinforce the assertion of a particular moral idiom. Woofit (1992:155 ff.) asserted that 'reported speech' is a powerful device by which those relating an account can amplify the effect of authenticity. Typically, reported speech is used to greatest effect when others are represented as being in agreement with the contributor's version of events, thus corroborating claims. Alternatively, reported speech might be variously used in order to:

- allow subtle modification of what was *actually said* in support of contributor's claims e.g. upgrading the severity of assessments; or,
- imply that certain utterances should be heard as a contemporaneous commentary by others upon the events related by the contributor e.g. that they *actually* happened and that others share the (reported) assessment.

(114) **[S2:496-500]**

My wife wrote me a beautiful, remorseful letter saying in essence that	*496*
she would advise any woman to reconsider and if things are bad enough	*497*
to have an affair then you should leave the relationship or seek help	*498*
to fix it. Do not embark on what is almost always a highly destructive	*499*
and painful course of action.	*500*

Datum 114 was prefaced by the claim that the reported sentiments were in fact those of the contributor's (recently) ex-wife. The ensuing material was discursively presented as if to read as a 'cautionary moral tale'. In lines 497-8 the contributor reported his wife's regret at her course of action, and again in lines 499-500 reported his wife's penitence, implying that she had 'suffered' as a result of her actions. However, the preceding detail of this lengthy BBS contribution (see data 91, 95, 96, 101 & 106) was comprised largely of various forms of 'struggles discourse': the contributor's struggle to 'know', his subsequent struggle to cope with his new circumstances; and, his struggle to restrain himself from effecting mortal revenge on his wife's new lover. To all intents and purposes, the contributor discursively positioned himself as the 'victim' of circumstances, although the possibility of 'retribution' is implied throughout. The overall impression created by this conclusion was that the 'tables have been turned' on his ex-wife, and the contributor was enjoying a certain amount of *schadenfreude* at his ex- wife's expense.

FIXATION ACCOUNTS.

SEQUENTIAL ORDER	EXAMPLES OF DISCURSIVE DEVICES EMPLOYED.
BEGINNINGS	Biographical introduction and announcement of intimacy troubles in general terms.
DELIVERY	General charges.
	Effecting comparisons.
	Specific charges (the case for the prosecution).
	Mitigating factors.
	Presentation of the dilemma - 'Why this *really* matters'.
ENDINGS	Expressed intentions.
	Warrants for support.

Figure 16: *The sequential organisation of fixation accounts.*

The following accounts discussing intimacy troubles and (ostensibly) raising the possibility of the continuation / repair of relationships appeared to be more overtly adversarial in nature than either the 'flotation' variants described above. That accounts of intimacy troubles in which relationship repair was allegedly possible (if not desirable) should read as more overtly conflictual, would, at first sight, appear to be counter-intuitive. However, one possible explanation underpinning this seeming anomaly may reside in the fact that 'flotation accounts' characteristically detailed matters, which to an extent, were already settled (even if this resolution was not in favour of the BBS contributor). In contrast, the accounts reported in this section made ongoing dissatisfactions / conflict topically relevant, and their consequent discursive organisation characteristically reflected this disputational basis. Metaphorically at least, these accounts appeared as similarly ordered to the formal processes of the courtroom in which the contributors cited below, for the most part, positioned themselves as delivering 'the case for the prosecution'.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTIONS AND EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTIMACY TROUBLES.

In the following fragments (data 115 & 116) contributors characteristically made various biographical details relevant, and followed this information with abrupt announcement of alleged intimacy troubles.

(115) **[S12:1814-7]**

I am a 31 yr old male, and have been married 15 months. My wife is 26 1814
this year. I left home when I was young (18, to go to UNI) , and my 1815
wife left home to live with me when we married (she was 24). We met and 1816
fell in love a year before we married. 1817
Safe to say that I feel like getting out. 1818

In datum 115 (lines1814-17) the contributor referenced the temporal details of his short marriage. It was noted above, that writers have licence to make an almost infinite range of topics discursively relevant in opening contributions. In common with other account-genres considered above, such introductory material transpired to be far from redundant, and typically, information cited at the beginning often transpired to provide the organising basis for the remainder of the account. Abrupt announcement of the 'fact' that the relationship was experiencing difficulties followed in line 1818. The absence of premonitory detail to this announcement made it impossible to discern the nature of the reported troubles. However, the instructional discursive effect created is that one should read ensuing detail in light the allegation that the relationship is terminally threatened.

(116) **[S10:237-41]**

I have known my husband four years and we have been 237
married a year. We are both in our mid thirties. 238
He loves me and I love him, but we come from very 239
different backgrounds and sometimes this makes it 240
very difficult for me. 241

In datum 116, the contributor again referenced temporal indices (lines 237- 8). In contrast to datum 115 the announcement of intimacy troubles was first qualified; *'he loves me and I love him'* (line 239). Ensuing detail hinted at (rather than formally announced) alleged difficulties, which were claimed to rest upon the protagonists differing social backgrounds (lines 240-41).

GENERAL CHARGES.

In data 117 & 118, contributors outlined the 'nub' or general nature of (alleged) intimacy troubles. Effectively, these fragments served to 'charge' intimate partners in general terms. Characteristically, these general claims served to pre-monitor more specific allegations

against the other. Invariably, the actions of the 'other' were represented as militating against the harmonious conduct of the relationship.

(117) **[S10:242-44]**

I expected to be able to rely on my husband for help, but 242
the fact is, if I have a problem, I can only rely on myself. 243
he helps if he wants to, if it's easy, or if he has time. 244

In the case of datum 117 the contributor's husband was 'charged' with providing inadequate support, which failed to satisfy her prior expectations of the relationship. In datum 118 the contributor implied some (limited) culpability in the reported difficulties. In lines 1818-9 he informed readers of his 'argumentative' and relatively distant family background. In turn, this information is contrasted against the claimed 'closeness' of his spouse's extended family. In lines 1820-1, the writer then articulated his belief that conflict represents a normative aspect of intimate relations. Having 'laid the ground' by explicitly referencing a principled basis for his objections, he implied that these differing perspectives provided fertile grounds for disagreement between himself and his wife.

(118) **[S12:1818-23]**

My family argue and we keep 1818
each other at arms length. My wifes family are very close, and I find 1819
that hard. I am argumentative. I believe in a good healthy argument, 1820
and see it as a healthy aspect to marriage. It's the thrill of the 1821
debate. It can be heated, but never violent, and always with a view of 1822
making up afterwards. 1823

EFFECTING COMPARISONS AND SPECIFIC CHARGES (THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION).

Typically, having 'laid the charge' against the other partner, account authors proceeded to present specific instances of 'evidence' in support of their general assertions. It is notable that in data 119 & 120, the impression of grievance was amplified by means of a contrastive structure which assumed the form of *' whilst (s)he does X, I do Y'*: in each case 'X' was framed as a blameworthy aspect of conduct, whilst 'Y' was reported as a normatively expected or otherwise 'reasonable' course of action. Thus 'evidence' presented was invariably discursively structured to invite interpretation in favour of the complainant.

(119) **[S10:245-52]**

Otherwise, if I need emotional support (eg i suffered 245
from depression two years ago and he left me in 246
casualty crying and feeling desperate because he had 247
things to do) or practical assistance (my car got a flat 248
and because he couldn't fix it he left me in the street on 249
my own to sort it after loudly and aggresively shouting 250
and swearing at me in front of everyone passing by), I 251

In datum 119 it should be noted that the order of 'X' and 'Y' were reversed: 'X' (the blameworthy aspect of conduct) follows the presentation of the (normatively expected) 'Y', however this reversal does not diminish the discursive effect i.e. in inviting interpretation in favour of the contributor. In line 245, Y - *I needed emotional support*, but found that (lines 246-7) 'X' – that *he left me crying in casualty*. In line 248, 'Y' *I needed practical support with a task* (changing a wheel), but found that (lines 249-50) 'X' – *he left me to deal with this problem on my own*. In the latter case, the 'failing' presented by the contributor was compounded by her (alleged) public humiliation.

(120) **[S12:1818-25]**

However sometimes when we argue, it has gone a	*1823*
bit pear shaped. My wife has gone home to her folks, and then leaves me	*1824*
on my own...sometime for days or a whole weekend. This has happened	*1825*
several times now. It's almost as if they think 'What a horrible man he	*1826*
is.'	*1827*

In the example datum 120 (line1824), 'X' – *my wife has gone home to her parents*, whilst the (unstated) 'Y' – *she ought to have remained to resolve matters between us*. To compound this 'charge', the contributor claimed that this was a recurrent event, and in including this detail, perhaps defused the possible interpretation that his wife's departure was occasioned by extraordinary circumstances such as a particularly virulent disagreement. The reader is thus invited to make the attribution that the circumstances as discursively represented (wife's repeated departure) were to due an inadequacy in his wife's character, as opposed to either the character of the contributor, or the particular detail or context of the disagreement. In line 1826 the contributor reinforced the 'veracity-effect' of his account by the use of the reported speech of (unspecified members) of his wife's family.

The discursive effects of the 'X-Y' contrasts as detailed here appear to be consistent with the reported effects of 'contrast pairs' in talk-in-interaction. Smith (1978) explicated the use of this device as a means of creating authenticity in an account of someone 'becoming' mentally ill; Atkinson (1984) described the use of contrasts in political speeches; and Woofit (1992:141ff.) described the use of contrasts in reports of 'paranormal experiences'. Smith (1978:41) suggested that the effectiveness of 'contrast structures', in part, derives from the fact that they pose a paradox. Characteristically, paradoxes require resolution, and in the absence of an offer of an overt 'solution' from the speaker, recipients are invited to arrive at conclusions on their own account. However, details are invariably presented so as to invite listeners / readers to reach a conclusion that is consistent with the speakers / writers original

sentiments. Characteristically, the first part of a paradox implicitly asserts some generally understood rule or standard, to which a 'predictable outcome' or mode of conduct might be expected. However, the second part of contrast structures invariably assume the form of the logical expression:

'Given X, one could expect Y – but in contrast we have Z'.

The assertion of the general rule X often appeals to either (a) nature, or (b) (assumed) normative expectations; therefore, the conclusion to be derived from the above expression is that Z is not merely a matter of 'normal incompetence' but in fact is almost 'against nature' or oversteps the limits of social acceptability. Above all, Smith (1978:45) asserted that contrast structures work by 'cutting out', or supplying instructional contexts by which the conduct of *dramatis personae* is to be judged. At the same time, as long as contrasts are *collectively* deployed towards inviting the *same conclusion*, then weaknesses in individual elements of an argument remain disguised (Smith, 1978:50).

MITIGATING FACTORS.

In the following examples, having (a) 'laid charges' against the other, and (b) provided specific instances of evidence in support of those charges, contributors typically proceeded to provide mitigating factors in defence of the 'other'. At this point, it ought to be remembered that the relationships discursively referenced in this genre of accounts were ongoing, and (ostensibly at least) open to remedial intervention. Outright moral condemnation was noted as a recurrent feature of the various 'flotation accounts' considered above. However, to adopt this discursive strategy in fixation accounts could be imprudent given that contributors might be forced into dissonant circumstances following any repair or reconciliation. The provision of mitigation as a feature of these accounts may have therefore derived from a number of possible contingencies, for instance:

- contributors exercised constraint as a consequence of the fear of inadvertent disclosure to the other partner (even given that this is an unlikely contingency);
- outright condemnation, whilst possible in this forum, might have generated an uncomfortable degree of psychological dissonance for the contributor should intimacy troubles be resolved;
- contributors may have retained genuine hopes of repairing of the relationship, and thus 'complaints' were balanced with optimism; or

- other normative considerations may have ruled out condemning the 'intimate other' in outright terms, and these conventions were observed even in the absence of surveillance.

(121) **[S12:1827-33]**

They see that as supporting her, and my view is that she should stand on her own two feet and support herself. And in fact, I would support her more if she did that. Because of this, (which I see as family interferance of a sort) she has also used it as a tool not to discuss things with me. It's almost as though I am the outsider, and that her mum and eldest sister know everything about us, and I know nothing about what goes on in her family. 1827 1828 1829 1830 1831 1832 1833

In this example (datum 121) the contributor mitigated in favour of his wife by claiming that her agency was effectively diminished as a consequence of the (undue) level of influence exercised by her birth family. In making this claim, the contributor therefore partially shifted the focus of dissatisfaction from his wife to her family.

(122) **[S10:253-60]**

in other ways we have very good fun together - he makes me laugh, makes my tummy turn over when I see him, and we have lots of joint interests. He comes from a very disjointed family, had a tough upbringing and has never had anyone who has unconditionally loved him. i think this is to blame, as he doesn't really understand the notion of being there for someone when they need you. 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260

In datum 122 the contributor assumed a more usual strategy. In this case mitigation was initially achieved by discursively referencing the positive characteristics of the 'other'. This was followed by the effective reduction of agency of the 'other' by (implicitly) claiming that he was not culpable in any unkindness, being a product of his unfavourable socialisation.

The placement of both of these examples within the (total) account is noteworthy insofar as they appeared adjacent to statements of the current dilemma in which the contributors claimed to find themselves. In many senses, the presentation of the dilemma served a similar purpose to that of moral imperatives / moral indicatives in the flotation responders accounts i.e. as the culmination 'point' of the entire story. However, rather than articulating a particular moral statement, or asserting some general moral principle, the presentation of a dilemma effectively situated contributors within a 'moral maze' i.e. in a quandary and uncertain as to how to act in the face of relative arguments and contrasting circumstances.

PRESENTATION OF THE DILEMMA - 'WHY THIS *REALLY* MATTERS'.

In data 123 & 124 the presentation of the dilemma facing the contributors assumed the form of *'I want – but'* in which the *'I want'* element was comprised the desire to consolidate, or increase the stakes of the intimate relationship, and *'the but'* element was a précis of previously stated intimacy troubles. In datum 123 the contributor expressed the wish to invest in a new home with his wife, whilst datum 124 (implicitly) expressed the contributor's wish to have children. Typically, the *'but'* element of these contributions served to remind readers that complaints voiced were serious enough to threaten the ongoing viability of the relationship. In datum 123 (lines 1855-6) the contributor questioned the wisdom of potential (financial) investment in the relationship against a background of uncertainty, whilst in datum 124 (line 265) the contributor inferred that it would be imprudent to have children given her partners alleged unreliability. In both of these cases, the juxtaposition of these contrasting elements may have served as a particular type of 'contrast pair'. However, both examples were open to ambiguous interpretation and could be read as either (a) expressing genuine uncertainty, or (b) as disguised attacks on the other party.

(123) **[S12:1854-7]**

15 months *1854*
of my life has gone with this happening, and If I make further major *1855*
financial commitments together I want to be sure that we are a married *1856*
couple first!! *1857*

(124) **[S10:264- 68]**

We have no children and it scares me to think that I may *264*
have to bring up children in this environemnt, though *265*
there is no doubt in my mind that he would love them *266*
dearly - though his own experience of family has not *267*
taught him how to love children or anyone. *268*

ENDINGS: (A) EXPRESSED INTENTIONS, (B) WARRANTS FOR SUPPORT.

Fixation accounts in the BBS were typically ended by provision of a résumé of the current crises, coupled with either (a) a statement of intent, and / or (b) an explicit request for advice or support. The examples cited here differed in terms of how intentions are discursively conveyed.

(125) **[S12:1857-8]**

So safe to say, I am considering leaving this short *1857*
marriage. Does anyone else know this feeling? *1858*

In datum 125 the complainant overtly expressed his intention to leave the relationship, suggesting that; although having expressed the dilemma, he had in fact resolved this issue in his own mind. The seeming finality of this expression raises questions as to why the contributor should have taken such elaborate care in articulating his case in the first instance.

(126) **[S10:269--76]**

Am I backing out and not sticking to a marriage that is	*269*
going through a hard time? Or have I married a man	*270*
who isn't ready to be married to someone?	*271*
i am very confused. i don't want to walk away and back	*272*
out but I don't want to stay in a marriage where I am	*273*
being walked over by the very man who is supposed to	*274*
look out for me.	*275*
Any advise?	*276*

In contrast, in datum 126, the contributor returned to the dilemma in an elaborated form, which in effect provided a précis of the current troubles. At first blush, it appeared that the contributor was simply (re) articulating the dilemma; however, at this point in the account (lines 273-4), the *'I want'* component of the dilemma also discursively referenced the contributor's intention to leave the relationship. 'I want' was no longer 'I want to consolidate the relationship' but 'I'd be justified in leaving'. The 'blameworthy' aspects of her husband's conduct were placed immediately adjacent to the contributors (weakly stated) intentions, thus perhaps inviting readers to conclude in favour of her expressed intentions. Both data 125 and 126 terminated by explicitly requesting advice / help.

Returning to the issue of the discursive effects of this genre of accounts, it is possible that they were structured towards achieving their ostensible purpose i.e. warranting advice and support from others who may have experienced similar circumstances. However, I suggest that the case for transparency - that these accounts are what they seem to be - is unconvincing given the extent of evidence of careful organisation presented above. An alternative possibility might be that fixation accounts effectively signal contributors' acknowledgement that their relationship is in grave jeopardy, and to a certain extent this seems to be the case in the examples provided here. However, more than this I suggest that the main effect created by these accounts was to provide their contributors the opportunity of partaking in a publicly visible exercise in moral accounting, thus 'testing the water'. However, as noted above, the discursive presentation of assertion and counter-assertion does not appeal to a 'neutral court', and by-and-large these accounts seemed to be structured in terms of inviting approval for contributors' proposed courses of action.

BULLETIN BOARD CONTRIBUTIONS AS JOINT ACTIONS.

The remainder of this analysis is concerned to explore co-participants' responses to BBS contributions, and subsequent contributor – co-participant (computer mediated) interactions. As in the preceding sections of this analysis, some analytical resources and findings (but not formal procedures) of CA studies have proved useful in fully explicating the meaning and discursive function of interactions. Pomerantz (1984:57) in a study of 'assessments' and 'second assessments' suggested that participating in an event, and assessing that event are related enterprises; an implicit connectedness therefore exists between the discursive production of an assessment and the speaker's / writer's presumed access to and knowledge of assessed referents. I suggest that the BBS contributions considered above can be read as 'assessments' in the sense implied by Pomerantz. Similarly, as contributions invariably elicited *specific* responses from co-participants in the forum, these replies could be read as 'second assessments'. The isolation of BBS co-participants from one another has been reported (above) in terms of the issue of 'authenticity': I assert that being deprived of access to the extra-discursive domain of actual events / lives served to problematise responses to 'first assessments' in this context (and in CMC in general). Specifically, in order for BBS exchanges to be fully considered as what Blumer (1969:70) has termed 'joint actions', co-respondents are faced with complicated the task of (a) identifying with the contributor, and (b) establishing the relevance of their reply, whilst at the same time (c) being 'blind' to the represented events / lives. Without relevant identification BBS contributions would simply have been reduced to a series of disconnected monologues. However, in almost all cases of BBS interaction cited below these complicated circumstances were successfully mediated by co-participants. Characteristically, replies acquired relevance by means of an appeal to a more abstract extra-discursive domain of knowledge / belief /experience. The relationship between discursive and extra-discursive elements of joint actions in the BBS context is diagrammatically represented in Figure 17. (*below*).

Pomerantz (1984) asserted that in ordinary talk (at least), insufficient knowledge of events / circumstances is often specifically referenced as a means of declining invitations to present a second assessment of events. The conditions of BBS interaction made it impossible to know how many readers declined to respond. However, in most cases BBS contributions received multiple replies – and in all cases (attempted or actual) relevance was established upon grounds other than direct knowledge / experience. Turner (1972: 382) defined these bases of gaining access to interaction as 'category-generated topics' and suggested that these strategies represented a formal property of 'small-talk'. The fact that establishing 'common ground' was only possible by means of appeal to meta-discursive considerations would expectedly render BBS exchanges as prone to greater levels of disagreement than is the case in face-to-face

interaction. The success of attempts to identify with co-participants rested upon the assumption of shared perspectives in relation to issues made topically relevant. The following example was illustrative of such a mismatch of perspectives and ensuing disagreement. Datum 127 represented a response to a contributor who related how his wife left him six months previously stating that she no longer loved him. In spite of this abandonment, the contributor claimed his continued desire to be reconciled with his recently ex-partner – and proceeded to document the deleterious effects of these events upon his mental health (including details of an un-enacted suicide plot). The contributor concluded by re-emphasising his ongoing despair.

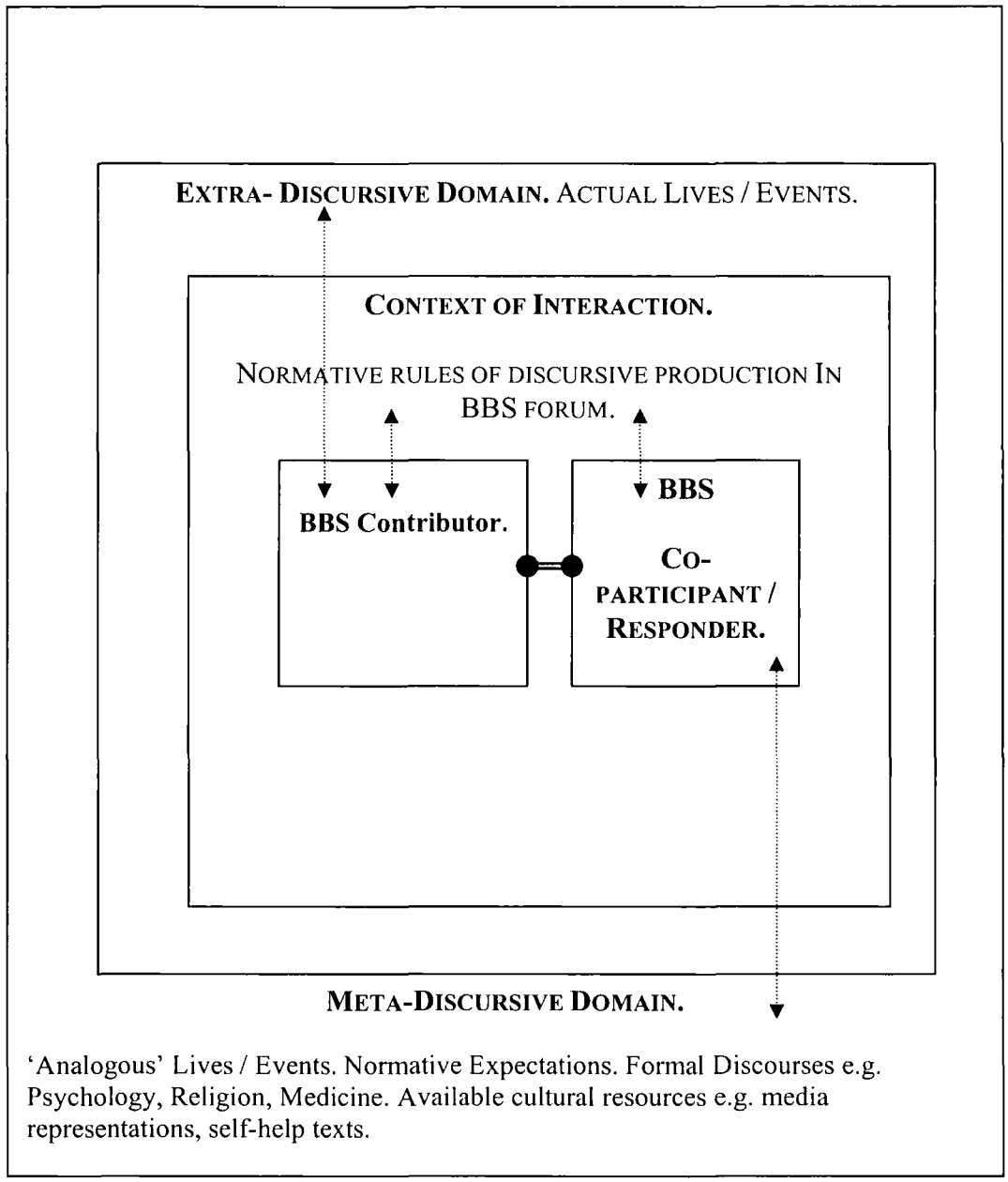

Figure 17: *BBS exchanges as 'Joint Actions'.*

(127) **[KTMG: 1356-72].**

Hope! Read what's changed Then contact me. In the meantime two pieces of advice. 1356 1357

Respect your own life even if no one else appears to. 1361

Expect nothing of anyone, then every thing is a bonus. 1365

*Believe me the real world is good, the facade we all subscribe to is basically evil. (I am not religious by the way) if you want to talk I am around but have to continue with my life despite the **** that is going on.* 1369 1370 1371 1372

Overall, this response was comprised of elements that might imply agreement with the contributor's predicament. However, in this case, whilst the respondent appeared to be fully accepting of the substance of events as outlined by the contributor, mild approbation of the contributor's means of dealing with these events was also implied. In line 1356 it is not clear whether the contributor was urged to read a private communication from the respondent, or to re-examine the events as they had (allegedly) occurred. In lines 1361,1365, & 1369, the contributor was offered 'advice' in the form of general ethical principles in relation to the value of oneself against the (implied) hostility of 'the world'. The combined effect of this 'advice' was to assert the respondent's world view or perspective upon life. The reply was terminated by means of an (qualified) offer of further communication. Datum 128 comprised the contributor's immediate response to these observations / offers.

(128) **[KTMG: 1383-86].**

David-you seems to be bitter and twisted and blame everyone except yourself. I on the other hand recognise that it takes two to mess things up. The real problem is, that doesn't help. Also with all my pride and self-esteem gone the rest of your letter is absolute crap 1383 1384 1385 1386

In common with Pomerantz's (1984) observations, the 'strong disagreement' outlined here was entirely comprised of disagreement components. The strength and content of the message implied that the contributor may have been privy to information that was privately shared between the co-participants. In lines 1383 - 5 the 'individualist' perspective advanced by the respondent was rejected, and compared with the contributor's own philosophy of 'collective responsibility'. Finally, in line 1386 the value of 'advice' was dismissed in strong terms. Overall, whilst the version of events discursively represented by the contributor appeared not to have been disputed, the respondent mistakenly assumed a common perspective, and the ensuing disagreement seemingly proceeded on these grounds.

Notwithstanding disagreements on the basis of authenticity or perspective, Pomerantz (1984) suggested that agreement or disagreement (in part) derived from certain structural features of

'first assessments'. Whilst she asserted an *overall* normative tendency in interaction towards maximising agreement and minimising disagreement, she claimed that certain modes of initial assessments establish preference structures so as to influence the *preferred* next action. Pomerantz (1984:63) identified two preference structures, namely:

- agreement preferred / disagreement dispreferred; or
- agreement dispreferred / disagreement preferred.

Claims that include positive descriptors appear designed to invite subsequent agreement (agreement preferred / disagreement dispreferred), whilst self-deprecating remarks are structured so as to invite disagreement (agreement dispreferred / disagreement preferred). Both agreements and disagreements differ in terms of degree: for instance, agreements might be:

- strong agreements, in which upgraded / stronger evaluative terms are used;.
- agreements which merely proffer the 'same evaluation'; and,
- weak (downgraded) agreement, which use weakened evaluation terms.

Significantly, Pomerantz noted that same and downgraded evaluations in some cases are also an integral part of certain modes of disagreement. Disagreements (when agreement is preferred) typically made use of devices such as 'no-reply', requests for clarification, partial repeat, or prefaced 'agreements'. In the case of the latter device, the *apparent* 'agreement' element is invariably minimal or weak. In such cases, the disagreement components that follow are also typically weak and are designed to lessen the impact of overt disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984:74).

The normative preference structure for agreement is typically inverted in situations in which communicants proffer self-deprecating remarks. Pomerantz (1984:86-9) observed that disagreements with self-deprecations are typically strong and are constituted by unequivocal 'disagreement components'. She asserted that these disagreements are typically accomplished by means of:

- proffering a contradictory (but nonetheless complimentary) assessment;
- by 'reframing' the parameters of the self-deprecatory assessment;
- by asserting that self-criticism is an improper activity for the speaker to be engaged in; or,
- by the respondent producing a similar (comparative) self-deprecatory remark.

In relation to the current study, I suggested (above) that BBS accounts appeared organised so as to invite various responses. In this respect, the concluding elements of the accounts reviewed above can be read as either (a) self-assertions, or (b) self-deprecations. In each case, the preference structures identified by Pomerantz (1984) might expectedly have a bearing upon subsequent responses. For instance:

ACCOUNT TYPE	ENDING VARIATIONS	IMPLIED SELF-ASSERTION / SELF-DEPRECATION.	PREFERENCE STRUCTURE.
FLOTATION INITIATORS'.	❶ Defended Actions.	Self-assertion	[agreement preferred / disagreement dispreferred]
	❷ Expressing penitence / regret.	Self-deprecation	[agreement dispreferred / disagreement preferred]
	❸ 'Seeking advice'.	Equivocal	Equivocal
FLOTATION RESPONDERS'.	❶ 'Survivor' status announcement.	Self-assertion	[agreement preferred / disagreement dispreferred]
	❷ 'Victim' status announcement.	Self-deprecation	[agreement dispreferred / disagreement preferred]
FIXATION PARTICIPANTS'.	❶ Expressed intentions	Self-assertion	[agreement preferred / disagreement dispreferred]
	❷ Warrants for support	Equivocal	Equivocal

Figure 18: *Preference structures and hypothesised responses.*

To summarise, agreements or disagreements with BBS accounts were seemingly a function of (a) judgements about the 'authenticity' of the claims being made, (b) the degree of commonality of perspective in relation to the matters made topically relevant, and (c) the relevant preference structures inviting agreement or disagreement.

THE SEQUENTIAL ORGANISATION OF (SHORTER) BBS CONTRIBUTIONS.

Not all instances of 'joint actions' in the BBS forum concerned responses to the extended accounts considered above. One (characteristically shorter) class of exchanges concerned the sharing of information / advice on what might be termed 'post divorce matters'. Simpson (1998:52) asserted that:

> 'Long after the dust has settled on divorce petitions and court orders, disagreements over the minutiæ of day-to-day parenting such as dress, discipline, and care arrangements for children regularly rise and submerge in the routine chaos of life after divorce.'

It was noted (above) that the inclusion of children as *dramatis personae* in accounts of intimacy troubles acted as a means by which to amplify moral concerns. However, post-relationship disputes are not confined to matters of parenting. Simpson (1998: 81) asserted that in part, post-divorce disputes are simply (amplified) continuations of the conflicts that typically tend to arise within nuclear family households e.g. concerning money, debt, stifled aspirations, equality, sex, and perceived breaches of trust. The following data (131-133) were illustrative of the characteristic means by which these issues were made topically relevant, discursively represented and responded-to within the BBS forum. Typically, these shorter contributions differed from those considered above in terms of their relative simplicity, and seeming transparency of purpose. In relation to the latter point, shorter BBS posts appeared to serve a variety (or combination) of ostensible 'purposes' for contributors, for example:

- interrogative- seeking specific topical advice;
- confessional – seeking to 'offload' hitherto guarded secrets;
- cathartic- seeking to 'give voice' to painful experiences and / or elicit validation or support of others;
- experiential - sharing of (often bitter) experiences;
- inquisitive – seeking to clarify prior contributions; and,
- directional – proffering specific courses of action.

The above list, whilst being far from exhaustive, summarises the more common (seemingly intended) purposes of these exchanges, which characteristically appeared more akin to 'real time' chat-room interactions in both style and organisation.

(129) **[CESBF: 712-719].**

I am at nisi stage right now. I share care of my daughter (6) - I have her every weekend and 1 or 2 nights in the week. My wife's partner who she denied for many months (despite admitting adultery) has all but moved in with her and is now beginning to have contact with my daughter. I am having great trouble coming to terms with losing my wife to another man but the thought of my daughter with him is tearing me apart. How do you deal with it? My wife says get used to it, as it is inevitable.

Datum 129 was typical of these shorter 'posts' insofar as only one central issue was made topically relevant – in this case the post-divorce childcare arrangements. In lines 716-7 the contributor characterised the specific issue as the emotional impact (on himself) of contact between his daughter and his ex-wife's new partner. Whilst the content of this short message was clearly morally and emotionally laden (and therefore perhaps might have served some cathartic effect), by ending with an interrogative (line 718), supplanted by the inference that he regarded his ex-wife's advice in this matter as 'less than helpful', the contributor invited response(s). Datum 130 represented one such (almost immediate) response.

(130) **[CESBF: 743-754].**

When my husband has the children, I know that the other woman is present (my sister) although I have expressed wishes that she not be there. My children have not yet asked too many difficult questions but I know it is only a matter of time. I don't want to confuse them any more than they need be but the fact that she is there with them absolutely tears me to pieces. She obviously knows them so well anyway and I feel as though she is trying to step into my shoes. I don't know how I get through a weekend when I know they are with her - thank God for good friends that's all I can say. Like you say, I wonder how my husband would feel if it were his brother that I was involved with? I am trying to maintain a relationship of sorts with my husband but it is proving to be most difficult.

In lines 743-5, the respondent made (minimal) reference to the version of events outlined by the contributor: however, 'category-generated' relevance was maintained. Lines 745-750 appeared to serve a primarily cathartic purpose, although as is the case with longer floatation responders' accounts, the content might be read as inviting moral condemnation of the other *dramatis personae*. In line 751 the respondent (again) made reference to the contributors' 'post' – in this case by paraphrasing his original question. Finally, in line 754 the respondent re-emphasised her continuing difficulties, and by framing matters as 'unresolved', implicitly invited response(s). This response warranted (an almost immediate) reply from the author of datum 129, which whilst being 'minimally referenced' to the specific content of datum 130, again maintained topical reference. Characteristically, these exchange sequences were punctuated by minimalist responses - short bursts of opinion, advice, or requests for

clarification such as datum 131. The meaning and significance of 'minimally referenced responses' is subject to further elaboration *below*.

(131) **[CESBF: 778].**

Tell me did you start off being friendly about the whole thing? *778*

The (non-linear) interactive complexity of shorter BBS exchanges often made it difficult to discern who is replying to whom. Dicks and Mason (1998:3.5) suggested that the essentially non-linear nature of hypertext problematises notions of sequence, and furthermore that this non-linearity potentially gives rise to multi-perspectivalism. These claims are supported / revealed in particular when examining responses to BBS accounts. The following tables summarise the characteristic sequential organisation of BBS exchanges. Datum 132 summarises the sequence of responses to a question posed by the site moderator 'can ex-spouses be friends?'

(132) **[CESBF: 1975-2168]**

TURN NUMBER	CONTRIBUTOR	NATURE OF TURN / CONTRIBUTION.
1.	[G]	Raises a general question of 'where to start' being friends with her (recently) ex-partner.
2.	[H]	(Minimally referenced) response to [G] (turn 1.) - outlining his own circumstances.
3.	[G]	Response to [H] (turn 2.) - providing further details of her circumstances (disagreement implied).
4.	[H]	Response to [G] (turn 3.) - providing further details of his own circumstances (disagreement implied).
5.	[G]	Response to [H] (turn 4.) - overt disagreement.
6.	[I]	(Minimally referenced) response to [G] (turn 5.) - outlining own problems.
7.	[J]	Response to [I] (turn 6.) - (strong) agreement and outline of own circumstances.
8.	[K]	(Minimalist) contribution to general tenor of 'debate' - doesn't specifically reference any contribution.
9.	[L]	Response to [K] (turn 8.) - (strong) agreement and outline of own circumstances.
10.	[K]	Response to [L] (turn 9.) - (weak) disagreement – further details of own problems.
11.	[M]	(Minimalist) contribution to general tenor of 'debate' - doesn't specifically reference any contribution.
12.	[K]	Response to [M] (turn 11.) - (overt) disagreement and further exposition of his own problem.
13.	[N]	Response to [K] (turns 8, 10, & 12.) – agreement offering an optimistic prognosis.

Similarly, datum 133 documents the sequential order of responses to a question posed by the site moderator 'when does the pain (of relationship break-up) subside?'

(133) **[KTMG: 1158-1591].**

TURN NUMBER	CONTRIBUTOR	NATURE OF TURN / CONTRIBUTION.
1.	[A]	Account of own circumstances - (shortened) flotation responder's account.
2.	[B]	Account of own circumstances - (shortened) flotation responder's account (not referenced to [A]).
3.	[B]	Further instalment of (turn 2.).
4.	[A]	Response to [B] (turn 3.) - (strong) agreement.
5.	[B]	Further instalment of (turn 3.) – minimally referenced to (turn 4.).
6.	[C]	Response to [B] (turn 5.) - (strong) agreement.
7.	[B]	Response to [C] (turn 6.) - (strong) disagreement.
8.	[D]	Response to [B] (turns 2,3, & 5.) - (strong) agreement.
9.	[B]	Brief comment on [D] (turn 8.) - (implied) disagreement.
10.	[D]	Response to [B] (turn 9.) - disagreement and self-deprecatory comment.
11.	[A]	Response to [D] (turn 10.) – (weak) disagreement.
12.	[D]	Response to [A] (turn 11.) – (weak) disagreement.
13.	[E]	Response to [B] (turns 2,3, & 5.) - agreement.
14	[F]	(Topically relevant) account of own problems – unrelated to any preceding contribution.

The non-linear structure of BBS exchanges may be analogous to that of the group therapy situation as described by Turner (1972: 383), in which no apparent procedures exist for deciding when, how much, or in what order 'patients' should contribute to the interaction.

RESPONSES TO FLOTATION INITIATORS' ACCOUNTS.

It was asserted (above) that flotation initiator accounts appeared organised to create three distinctive effects, namely: (a) to defend the actions and moral identity of the contributor (e.g. warrant approval); (b) to express penitence / contrition for actions, thus salvaging the moral identity of the contributor (e.g. warrant attenuated or qualified disapproval); or, (c) canvas moral support for pending (desired) actions. 'Defended actions' invariably concluded by means of a series of strong assertions and thus occasioned a preference structure favouring agreement. Ostensible expressions of contrition for previous actions invariably concluded with (implied) self-deprecation, and thus occasioned a preference structure favouring disagreement. Those contributors seemingly seeking to canvas support for or otherwise justify pending actions typically ended their accounts in a more equivocal manner that carried no clear inferences in terms of agreement / disagreement.

RESPONSES TO DEFENDED ACTIONS.

Datum 134 was posted to the BBS in response to the following account: The contributor related how she has been 'just existing' in a 'loveless' marriage for almost 30 years. She attributed this state of affairs to her husband's faulty socialisation, and went on to reveal that she had 'met' a man on-line whose circumstances closely matched (if not mirrored) her own. The contributor then explained how a relationship had developed between herself and her new companion, which resulted in them effecting a physical meeting. The account concluded by (a) referencing existential issues - 'we feel a sense of time'; (b) claiming that all legitimate avenues of repair / fixation have been exhausted with both existing spouses; and (c) emphasising the struggle to maintain the new relationship (e.g. she lives in the USA whilst he in the UK). [See Datum numbers 54, 56, 63, 65, 66, 68, 72 & 76].

(134) **[WWHA: 695-701].**

Hey green-eyes - my husband was exactly the same but still waters run 695
deep and after 33 years of marriage we are divorcing due to his 696
adultery. If you and your UK lover are so desperate to be together and 697
the love you have for one another is true then you will both walk away 698
from your marriages penniless if need be so that you can be together. 699
There are always ways and means of getting what you need to spend the 700
rest of your life happily. Go for it 701

In lines 695-697 the respondent signalled (strong) identification with the contributor by means of an upgraded response - 'exactly' - but proceeded to explain that she is now seeking a divorce on the grounds that her husband was in fact engaged in an adulterous relationship. This level of identification, at first blush, seems odd given that the contributor described initiating an extra-marital affair, whilst the respondent is (briefly) described being the 'wronged party' in such an arrangement. However, what the respondent appeared to be most saliently identifying with is the notion off an unfulfilling relationship. In lines 697-99 the respondent signalled her support for and agreement with the contributor's actions, albeit with certain qualifications – 'if you are desperate to be together, and if your love is true'. Pomerantz (1984) noted that the inclusion of modifying terms such as 'if' allows respondents to claim (weak) agreement with the expressed sentiments / version but at the same time allows for a shift in the parameters of the first assessment. In line 700 the respondent signalled further agreement with the contributor by seeming to accept the notion that the new arrangement represented a struggle against the odds. Finally, in [line 701], the reply was terminated by means of an 'optimistic token'. Pomerantz (1984) asserted that a range of same / similar elements could comprise *both* agreement and disagreement sequences: the structure of datum 134 was typical of a response pattern found in many replies to BBS posts, which can be summarised thus:

- greeting sequence or token, often personalised by the use of the contributors username;
- identification (at least attempted) with the circumstances as outlined by the contributor;
- elaboration / explanation of the respondent's 'qualification' to comment on the matters outlined (when extensive, this element can appear to be serving some cathartic purpose for the respondent);
- advice or direction based upon experience or some other stated basis; and,
- conclusion by means of an 'optimistic token' such as 'good luck'.

Datum 135 provided an instance of (strong) disagreement with the version provided within the contributor's original account. This complicated tale detailed how the contributor (a) initiated an extra-marital affair with X, (b) divorced her husband, (c) ended the 'affair' with X, (d) re-married her husband, and (e) was struggling to resist the renewed advances of X – and was précised above . [See Datum numbers 53, 57, 59, 67, 73 & 78].

(135) **[KTMG: 2038-56].**

Sorry - but I find something in society hard to accept. Firstly, we work on the premise that if we marry it is for life (in theory anyway) and if you have married, you are spending life together as a team, in order to bring up a family and prepare for your old age. If your husband was out working to save the family from going under, then he is doing what he had to do when times were tough. At the risk of sounding old fashioned (when I actually believe in equality) If the other partner has more free time to bring up the children then that is team work. As you have said, times are better after many years. And you now have some windfalls...Maybe they would not have been better if your husband had not fought so hard for it. I appreciate the pull to his friend, but where have did we forget the whole thing that we agreed to when we started out, marriage was a promise wasn't it? I do not want to be directive....but if I discovered my wife with my child, sleeping with my friend, while I was working to make ends meet, (despite the fact that i would much rather be sharing time with them...) I would find it very hard to give her a second chance..Your husband has, and I suggest that the qualities he is displaying are very rare, and you should cherish them...

2038
2039
2040
2041
2042
2043
2044
2045
2046
2047
2048
2049
2050
2051
2052
2053
2054
2055
2056

It is noteworthy that on this occasion, the respondent avoided the use of any 'greeting token' – a typical feature of other (even strong) disagreements, and thus avoided the impression that he wished to affiliate with the contributor. Line 2038 is communicatively dense i.e. performs much discursive work with relatively few words. The opening use of the term 'sorry' signalled that the ensuing response was negatively disposed towards the contributor's version. As Pomerantz (1984) has outlined, the use of modifiers such as 'sorry'/'but' /'if' allow for the parameters of 'assessment' to be shifted – in this case away from the personal circumstances

outlined by the contributor, to issues of wider public morality. This one discursive utterance also performed the task of stating overt disagreement with the contributor's (reported) actions. In lines 2039-2045 the respondent outlined the basis for his disagreement with the contributor's actions – in this case by appealing to contrasting models of public morality and family life. It is noteworthy that additional posts made by this respondent identify him as a member of a British Asian minority ethnic group. Whilst wishing to avoid assumptions of cultural homogeneity, ethnicity (in this case) may go some way towards accounting for proffered differences in perspective concerning family life. In line 2039 the respondent affirmed his belief in life-long union. In lines 2040-41 he asserted a 'conservative' perspective on the relationship between the family and wider social structure. In lines 2042-3 he affirmed the value of the 'work ethic'. Lines 2043-5 referenced (qualified) beliefs in relation to a 'separate spheres' model of public and private life. Line 2046 served as a transition point in the response, by shifting the focus from public to private matters. Pomerantz (1984) noted that partial re-statements frequently serve as a means of accomplishing disagreement. In lines 2046-50 the respondent paraphrased aspects of the contributors account and employed the modifier 'but' in order to append each claim with an overt challenge. In lines 2050-54 the respondent again made use of 'but' in order to assert a directive 'moral indicative' i.e. that the contributor was lucky to have a second chance at making things work with her husband. Finally, in lines 2055-56, the respondent affirmed his affiliation with the contributor's husband, and proffered advice in the form of a moral imperative – 'cherish your husband's [very rare] qualities'. Although relatively detailed, this response was in many ways typical of many in the BBS forum that were seemingly organised to signal overt disagreement. The specific features of this group of responses can be summarised as such:

- minimal / absent attempts were made to affiliate with contributors' circumstances;
- 'greeting tokens' – invariably used in agreement responses – were largely absent in disagreement responses;
- modifiers such as 'but' / 'if' were used to alter the parameters of the assessment e.g. from issues of private to public morality;
- the grounds for disagreement e.g. differences in perspective were made explicit;
- partial repeats and modifiers were employed to directly challenge the (reported) actions of the contributor;
- overt affiliation was often made with other *dramitis personae* populating the contributor's account; and,
- explicit reference was made to either (a) 'moral indicatives' or (b) 'moral imperatives' – often as the terminal feature of responses.

The following response (datum 136) was elicited by a contributor's account, which can be summarised as follows. The contributor reported how her 'innocent' participation in a hobby resulted in her exchanging online information with others via a chat room forum. Initial communication with a number of co-participants eventually became restricted to (lengthy) exchanges with one particular man, and the topic of communication became similarly limited to the (reported) problems in his existing relationship. The contributor suggested that these problems closely matched problems within her own marriage. A 'cyber affair' was reported as ensuing, during which the contributor claimed she became 'addicted' to this mode of exchange – often going without sleep. A physical meeting ensued, following which both the contributor and her new intimate left their respective marriages. The contributor reported how the newly-forged intimate relationship failed, and expressed her wish to be reconciled with her (recently) ex-husband. Her ex-husband was reported as 'not wanting to know', and the contributor terminated her account by means of a self-deprecation inferring that she 'deserved' the ongoing struggle with her new circumstances.

(136) **[WWHA: 1512-1538].**

It was amazing reading your posting. Appart from a couple of months in 1512
date, my Wife did the same. Oh and she didn't tell me I found the e- 1513
mails while doing a PC cleanup. 1514
1515
I remember conversations about sole mates and watching her go to have 1516
sex with some one she didnt know, but had met on the internet. I was 1517
still living in the house, but trying despatately to move out of the 1518
purgatory I was in there. 1519
There are some memories that will be with me for a very loong time. 1520
1521
I wanted her to discover that the person on the internet wasn't a real 1522
person and that the real person would be different, hoping she would 1523
come back. 1524
1525
I worked hard for 9 years building up what I could and supporting my 1526
wife in doing everything she wanted i.e courses, learning to drive, art 1527
etc. 1528
I looked after the children as often as i could & tryied to do my share 1529
of house work. All this was to be taken away because of a virtual 1530
personality. 1531
1532
It seems to me that my wife was chasing a dream or perfect 1533
relationship. I guess I knew as the effort I was putting in was never 1534
enough, though I tried to do more and more. 1535
1536
My only problem now is how to start again without carrying all the 1537
financial risks for her as well. 1538

The absence of any overt comment on the contributor's actions represented a remarkable feature of this reply (given that the respondent claimed to have been on the 'receiving end' of

similar circumstances). The absence of a 'greeting token' was a noteworthy feature, which acted as to maintain a 'distance' between the contributor and respondent. However, in line 1512 the respondent indicated an affiliation / agreement with the *version* of events (if not the actions) as represented by the contributor by the (upgraded) use of the term 'amazing'. In common with other 'floatation responders' accounts explored (*above*), the respondent indicated how the 'betrayal' of his wife was discovered / detected. The ensuing 'response' (lines 15116-1531) appeared to be only minimally referenced to details contained within the preceding contribution: rather the respondent strongly affiliated with the general 'metric' of events expressed in the contribution (albeit from a different perspective) as opposed to the person making these claims. The respondent's own account discursively represented his struggle to cope with his wife's affair, his desire to 'mend' things, and (lines 1526 –30) the (implied) 'injustice' of the situation given his commitment to family life. In line 1533 – the moral of this short account became apparent – that his wife was engaged in a chasing a (solipsistic) illusion, and in doing so failed to appreciate the respondent's (morally creditable) qualities. Lines 1537-38 implied (weak) identification / affiliation with the contributor insofar as they are both reportedly struggling with a newly acquired (solitary) status. Overall, this 'response' could not properly be considered as either an agreement or a disagreement in the terms outlined by Pomerantz (1984): however, it remains worthy of comment in a number of respects. In the first instance, it was suggested (above) that confessional variants of flotation initiators accounts appeared organised to the effect of attenuating potential moral approbation, and thus partially salvaging (normatively problematic) reputations. To these ends the contributor's account appeared to be successful in that neither moral support or moral approbation were proffered. In this case, this 'outcome' appeared to have been achieved by offering potential respondents a generalised set of circumstances with which to identify, thus shifting the parameters of the assessment away from the reported actions of the contributor. This scenario was typical of a relatively high proportion of BBS 'responses', in which first contributions seemed to serve primarily as a warrant for respondents to 'tell their own tale' (perhaps to cathartic effect), however minimally referenced to the original contribution. Characteristically, these responses:

- made (minimal) or 'token' reference to the preceding contributor (in some cases this reference was restricted to a 'greeting token' indicating that the response is *supposedly* related to a prior instalment);
- provided extensive details of the respondent's own circumstances (these reports appeared as 'discursively-compressed' versions of the flotation initiators / responders / fixation accounts outlined in detail *above*); and,
- ended by, again, offering only 'token' references to the preceding contribution.

An unanticipated (and perhaps even the primary) effect of BBS accounts (in spite of differing organisational features) therefore seemed to be that of providing the 'discursive space' in which others were induced to relate their own narratives. These minimally referenced responses (from this point onward, referred to as MRR's) appeared to arise as a direct function of the fact that respondents were compelled (as in 'small talk') to initiate responses upon category-generated grounds.

Responses to Flotation Responders' Accounts.

The flotation initiators' accounts reviewed above could be collectively considered as working to discursively restrict, de-emphasise or otherwise downplay moral issues. In the case of 'defended actions', moral concerns were carefully delimited to activities associated with defending (normatively / morally problematic) conduct. The 'confessional' variant of these accounts i.e. those acknowledging culpability in morally problematic actions, characteristically attenuated the potential evaluations of others by expressions of remorse, and / or discursive representations of ongoing difficulties. In contrast, the efficacy of flotation responders' accounts appeared to rest upon the amplification of moral concerns. Therefore instances of overtly evaluative terminology tended to be upgraded, and moral principles expressly articulated. Given this contrast, it could be hypothesised that agreements and disagreements with the views expressed would be more marked. 'Survivor' accounts invariably concluded by means of a series of strong assertions of the 'case against the other' contrasted against the contributor's (continued) morally creditable conduct and ongoing struggle to cope against the odds, and thus engendered a preference structure favouring agreement. In contrast 'victim' accounts almost always concluded with overt self-deprecation, and therefore occasioned a preference structure favouring disagreement.

Responses to Survivor Accounts.

Datum 137 represented a typically (strong) agreement posted in response to a BBS account in which the contributor outlined a number of (seemingly unexplained) facets of her (recently) ex-husbands conduct such as keeping irregular hours, and receiving 'strange text messages'. It subsequently transpired (through 'detection') that he was conducting an extra-marital affair, which eventually floundered. The account was terminated by an outline of the contributor's steadfast refusal to grant a 'second chance' to her errant spouse. [See Datum number 113].

(137) **[MWHA: 1247-53].**

Bunny, 1247
A positive attitude like yours is certainly the best way to move on 1248
from this. All men are not like your husband and given time, you will 1249
trust again, although it may take longer for that certain person to win 1250
your trust as you will probably be wary. Enjoy your new found single 1251
life and enjoy the friends you have around you without dwelling on the 1252
situation with your husband. 1253

This response was completely comprised of (positive) agreement tokens, characteristic of 'strong agreements' of this type. In line 1247 the respondent provided a greeting / affiliation token in the form of the contributor's username. In lines 1248-9 the upgraded terms 'positive' and 'best' were employed in order to indicate the respondent's strong endorsement of both (a) the version of events as outlined by the contributor, and (b) the sentiments expressed / actions taken. Lines 1249-50 expressed an optimistic prognosis to the contributor's current predicament i.e. that she would eventually 'trust again', and find another intimate more worthy of her attentions than was her errant husband. This short response concluded (lines 1251-3) by urging the contributor to 'enjoy' her newly acquired single status: more an endorsement of the contributor's reported actions as opposed to a token of advice *per se*.

Datum 138 represents an infrequently occurring phenomenon within the BBS forum: namely, overt disagreement with a 'survivor's account'. This datum was posted in response to a contribution in which the following events were discursively represented. The contributor suspected, and subsequently 'proved' that her husband had been conducting an extra-marital affair with her 'so called friend'. The contributor claimed that the 'betrayal' was compounded by a number of factors; notably (a) that she and her husband continued an active sexual relationship for the duration of the affair, and (b) that she had been pressurised into allowing her (ex) friend to accompany the family on holiday abroad whilst remaining unaware of the extra-marital liaison. The contributor ended the account by explaining her continued hostility towards, and continued struggle to maintain a distance from her (soon to be ex) husband.

(138) **[MWHA: 36-57].**

My parents separated when i was a teenager for the same reason. They worked it out although they did seriously consider divorce (my dad lived away for 9 months).

They are still happily married now 20 years later.

I can't say what to do - every situation is different. Counselling did help my parents - but my mom's personal counselling helped a lot more than the marriage counselling because it helped her decide how SHE was going to deal with it. The whole injured air thing is natural - you are hurt and therefore you take it out on him. But after a while this becomes a drain on your marriage and it reaches a point where no one can be made to feel that bad for that long. I am not saying what he did was right by any stretch of the imagination - he was the one with a wife (she was separated) and what he did was wrong. Absolutely. But you need to work through your feelings to decide if you can get to a place where you can be happily married again. If you can't then there is no point. But you say you still love him and from your email it appears that he loves you. For that reason alone I would think it was worth trying. If you don't believe in counselling, there is a good book called Relationship Rescue by Dr Phil Macgraw which is really helpful. Good luck.

In lines 36-38 the respondent identified with the content of the contributor's account, and established his 'credentials' to comment upon this matter i.e. his childhood experiences. In line 40 he (implicitly) disputed the inevitability of divorce in these circumstances citing the 'evidence' of his parents' continuing (apparently successful) marriage. In line 42 the respondent prefaced the pragmatic advice that follows with the qualification that 'every situation is different': nonetheless he proceeded to assert the value of personal (as opposed to relationship) counselling (lines 43-4), and advocated against maintaining an 'injured air' as this inevitably occasions break-up (lines 45-48). Lines 48-50 represent what Pomerantz (1984) identified as a 'prefaced agreement'. The respondent employed upgraded terms such as 'by any stretch of the imagination' and 'absolutely' to signal his (apparently strong) disagreement with the actions of the contributor's spouse. However, in line 50 the use of the modifying term 'but' shifted the parameters of the contributor's assessment from her husband's actions to that of the contributor's own frame of mind. The respondent subsequently asserted that the marriage appeared to be redeemable and urged the contributor to reformulate her perception of events by seeking counselling and recommended a particular self-help guide. The response was terminated by the use of an 'optimistic token'. Overall, this (weakly stated) disagreement appeared to be based upon matters of perspective as opposed to the authenticity of events as outlined by the contributor, and represented the only instance of 'disagreement' in response to the survivors' accounts contained within the BBS forum.

RESPONSES TO VICTIM ACCOUNTS.

As stated above, victims' accounts (in all cases) were terminated by means of self-deprecatory claims, often highlighting an ongoing (desperate) struggle to cope with new circumstances, which are not of the contributors' choosing. The preference structure occasioned by these accounts is therefore (expectedly) towards disagreement with the invariably self-deprecating assessments. The following responses (data139 & 140) were made in reply to the following discursive claims. The contributor 'explained' how he invited a friend to stay in the family home following the break-up of his (the friends) marriage. An intimate relationship subsequently developed between the contributor's wife and the new lodger, which he inadvertently 'discovered'. The contributor claimed to be very angry in response to his discovery, but allowed the status quo to be maintained within the household. The contributor's wife sought a divorce: following this, the contributor discovered further 'evidence' highlighting the extent of his wife's betrayal. He terminated this instalment of his account by declaring his continuing love for his wife, which he claimed was unrequited, and voiced a dilemma as to whether (or not) to move out of the family home.[122] [See datum numbers 81, 82, 83, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 109, & 112].

(139) **[KTMG: 506-517].**

Tony,	*506*
	507
	508
	509
Don't despair & don't blame yourself. I have very similar circumstances	*510*
and am going through the mill at the moment. You're not alone.My wife	*511*
is infatuated with her lover (they both say it is finished). I know she	*512*
pines for him & is hurting emotionally. It is so difficult to live with	*513*
someone who is like that. I'm giving it a few more weeks - trying	*514*
desperately to be myself, not get annoyed etc. In the end though if the	*515*
other party isn't able to move on, then there is no point in sticking	*516*
with it. You have to move on to keep our sanity & dignity.	*517*

The above response was emblematic of disagreements with self-deprecations found throughout the BBS forum. In line 506 the respondent offered an identification / greeting token by employing the contributor's Christian name. In line 510 (effectively the first line of the response), the respondent overtly disagreed with the self-deprecatory sentiments (but not the version of events) offered by the contributor. However, practically the whole remainder of this minimally referenced response (MRR) was devoted to outlining the respondent's own circumstances, which could be variously read as:

- an attempt at empathetic identification with the contributor;

[122] Subsequent instalments of this tale appear more akin to a 'survivors account'. However, the responses cited were made following the first instalment of this contributor's account as précised here.

- an extended attempt to establish credentials / qualification to speak on the matters made discursively relevant; or,
- a (rather narcissistic) catharsis, minimally referenced to events as outlined by the contributor.

The tendency for respondents to (primarily) read contributors' accounts as warrants to 'tell their own tale' has been noted *above*.

Datum 140 represents an instance of (weak) disagreement with the sentiments (as opposed to the version of events) expressed by the contributor. The basis of this disagreement appeared to rest upon the respondent's identification with the contributor's wife, citing gender grounds.

(140) **[KTMG: 528-536].**

hello sadtony	*528*
	529
this is a difficult one, but being a woman myself, I know we do have a	*530*
tendancy to say things that we dont necessarily mean. I think if you	*531*
give her too much space you could have the opposite affect. I have	*532*
friend that are in a trial seperation situation, and although are	*533*
leaving almost seperate lives are still living under the same roof.	*534*
Its really working for them, and it seems to be helping, have you	*535*
thought about maybe doing that?	*536*

In line 529 the respondent employed the contributor's username as an identification / greeting token. Line 530 was discursively dense: by stating 'this is a difficult one', the respondent effectively introduced a 'modifier' and at the same time gave a clue that ensuing response was intended to disagree with the contributor's perspective. In stating 'being a women myself', the respondent intentionally identified with the contributor's spouse. In lines 530-31 the effects of the earlier modifier became fully apparent and the parameters of the contributor's assessment were shifted from (a) the issue of the contributor's wife's actions to (b) the contributor's interpretation of what his wife is reported as saying. The respondent subsequently advocated that the contributor shouldn't move out of the family home (line 531), on the basis of a claim that a similar 'solution' was proving efficacious for friends of the respondent. Overall, the disagreement elements of this response were implicit (rather than overtly stated), and therefore it could be read as an instance of 'weak disagreement'. However, in confining the stated terms of the disagreement to the contributor's interpretation of events, the respondent failed to reference (and therefore implicitly failed to disagree with) the contributor's self-deprecatory statements counter to the expected preference structure framing this exchange.

RESPONSES TO FIXATION PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS.

It was suggested (above) that fixation participants' accounts appeared specifically organised towards two potential purposes, namely: (a) the elicitation of specific advice, or (b) seeking moral approval / justification for pending actions, which the contributor may have (more or less) resolved to undertake. It was further asserted that the 'versions' contained in these accounts were frequently equivocal and therefore no clear inferences could be drawn from these contributions in relation to preference structures favouring agreement or disagreement. The following response (datum 141) was made subsequent to discursive claims that can be summarised as follows. The contributor related that whilst herself and her husband were 'in love', difficulties existed in the marriage because of the fact that they come from 'different backgrounds'. The contributor proceeded to detail specific instances where she felt that she ought to have had her husbands support, but this was not forthcoming. She concluded her account by stating her uncertainty in relation to the future of the relationship – particularly given that 'starting a family' now appeared to be on the agenda: the contributor requested specific advice (invariably a means of ending such fixation accounts). [See datum numbers 116, 117, 119, 122, 124 & 126].

(141) **[KTMG: 292-304].**

Do you know what, this reads as if I were writing this for my own	*292*
situation. I am almost in the exact same boat as you although for	*293*
different reasons. I also am mid 30's and only been marrried 10	*294*
months. I feel like im giving up if I walk away, but dont know how much	*295*
more I can take.	*296*
The other person that replied said get counselling, a very good point I	*297*
add, and if the waiting lists weren't so long a good option. but unless	*298*
you have the money to go to private counselling, what the hell do you	*299*
do next?	*300*
I'm afraid if i had the answer to your dilema I would be using it for	*301*
myself, but i unfortunately dont. However I thought it might be of	*302*
some comfort to you that someone out there knows exactly what you are	*303*
going through.	*304*

In line 292-3 the respondent signalled his complete acceptance of the contributor's version as well as strong agreement with the sentiments expressed by means of an upgraded response: 'as if I were writing this from my own situation'. In lines 293-4 the respondent further strongly identified with the contributor, and characterised his own circumstances as being 'in the exact same boat', and furthermore, (lines 294-6) stated that he is drawn towards the same actions as were previously outlined by contributor. In lines 297-300, the respondent minimally referenced an earlier (minimalist) response that suggested that the contributor and her husband seek counselling: however, this respondent outlined pragmatic obstacles in the way of this course of action. In lines 299-300 the respondent effectively further identified with the contributor by expressing his own uncertainty in relation to future actions.

Consequently (lines 301-2) he was unable to offer specific advice. Lines 303-4 appeared to encapsulate the purpose of this response, namely to create the effect of empathy: although the respondent's own circumstances were made topically relevant, this reply differed markedly from the minimally referenced responses (MRR's) discussed earlier in as much as:

- relatively less prominence was afforded to the specific details of the respondent's narrative;
- such details seemed primarily deployed in order to establish the respondent's credentials to comment upon the contributor's situation; and,
- multiple / repeated attempts were made to identify with the contributor.

MODERATOR'S RESPONSES.

One distinctive set of BBS exchanges concerned those that occurred between contributors and the site moderator. Sacks (1974) identified as 'category bound', those activities that are 'properly' performed by incumbents of particular identifiable (role) categories. Much of the preceding analysis has suggested that 'joint actions' were only made possible via the use of 'category-generated topics' in which co-participants identified and orientated responses to one another on the basis of similarities in experience or perspective. Expectedly, the site moderator's replies would differ from those of other forum users given the implied 'expertise' of her self-defined therapeutic role, and the implied (personal) detachment of the moderator from those issues made topically relevant by co-contributors. The following data (142 -144) were characteristic of interactions between contributors and the site moderator. Datum 142 was comprised of the moderator's response to a contributor who reported the following set of circumstances. The contributor began by stating his 'discovery' that his ex-wife engaged in serial extra-marital relationships (with men from a nearby military base) during her nurse-training course, which required her to be absent from the family home for part of each week. The relationship ended, ostensibly on other grounds (the contributor being unaware of the alleged adultery at the point of break-up). The contributor continued by claiming 'pure hate and loathing' towards his ex-wife, and suggested that the strength of these negative emotions had ruined his subsequent intimate relationships, and were preventing him from 'moving on'. The contributor ended with a direct request for help.

(142) **[CESBF: 1846-52].**

The continual hatred will just eat away at you if you let it. Try to 1846
focus on the present and maybe the women you have dated were perfectly 1847
fine but you will not find a replica of your wife out there so stop 1848
torturing yourself by looking for one. I do hope you manage to find 1849
some happiness. 1850
Good luck 1851

It is noteworthy that this advice was dispensed directly, un-prefaced by the attempted greeting / affiliation tokens discussed above. This mode of abrupt, depersonalised delivery may have served as to convey (implicit) disapproval towards the contributor's emotional state. In line 1846 the contributor was advised (non-specifically) about the negative consequences of hatred: significantly, the problem became individualised at this point. It was suggested that a remedy for this state of affairs was within the contributors wherewithal, and furthermore [line 1847], the contributor was accorded full culpability for difficulties in subsequent relationships. Rather at odds to the detail provided in his short account, the contributor was advised to stop looking for a 'replica' to his wife as a means of dissipating his (claimed) anguish (lines 1848-9). The response was concluded by means of a series of optimistic tokens.

Datum 143 was comprised of the moderator's response to the following series of (claimed) events. The contributor stated that her circle of friends were 'all couples', and that this presented difficulties as her own relationship had recently broken-up. Specifically, she maintained that mixing with others in relationships resulted in her depression. The contributor admitted to being overcome with 'self-pity' and absolved her friends of blame in this state of affairs: she stated that she had resolved to stop socialising with this group, and invited response(s) by use of the interrogative 'what is everyone else going through'.

(143) **[CESBF: 14338-50].**

Jenny,	*1438*
Why not try just going out with your girlfriends rather than with their	*1439*
other half as well - sometimes a good natter with the girls is a	*1440*
brilliant tonic. Don't cut yourself off from them because you are on	*1441*
your own - the focus on your own emotions will only increase. Of course	*1442*
not all relationships end in divorce or separation so try as hard as	*1443*
you can to be happy for those of your friends who have decided to tie	*1444*
the knot. Of course you wonder why you have to go through this and it	*1445*
can be isolating but be the one to initiate a night out and don't think	*1446*
that people will feel sorry for you if you do.	*1447*
I do hope that cloud starts to lift soon and that you can start to have	*1448*
a social life again.	*1449*
Good luck	*1450*

The moderator's response (datum 143) differed significantly in several important respects from that made to the prior contributor (datum 142). In line 1438 she made use of a greeting token, addressing the contributor by means of her Christian name. A (brief) pragmatic solution was offered: why not just go out with 'girlfriends' (line 1439). This advice differed markedly from that offered to the above respondent (datum 147), insofar as the 'problem' was framed in terms that implicated others as opposed to being individualised. However, following this pragmatic token the parameters of the moderator's evaluation became narrowly

focussed upon the contributor's own emotional state. She was variously advised not to overly focus on her own emotions (line 1442); 'try hard' to appreciate the success of her friends' relationships (line 1444); and don't think that others will feel sorry for you (lines 1446-7). The advice to initiate 'singles only' nights out was paraphrased / repeated (line 1446). The advice was concluded by means of a series of 'optimistic tokens' (lines 1449-50).

Datum 144 represents the moderator's response to the circumstances outlined in datum 129 *above*. This short account can be summarised thus: the contributor claimed to share the care of his daughter following his recent divorce. He asserted that his marriage broke-up 'as a consequence' of his ex-wife's adultery. He subsequently claimed that childcare arrangements had been made problematic by a (recent) re-arrangement of domestic circumstances i.e. his ex-wife and her new intimate had recently set-up home together. The contributor maintained that he felt threatened that his ex-wife's new partner would seek to replace him as a father figure. He concluded his (short) account with a specific request for advice adding that his ex-wife was dismissive of these claims.

(144) **[CESBF: 727-37].**

I think your wife might be a bit less brutal when tackling this 727
subject. I wonder how she would feel if it were the other way round? I 728
think it's important to hang onto the fact that this other man will 729
never replace you and will not be her 'dad'. Just because he may be in 730
the house with her at the same time does not mean that your daughter 731
will even like him! Try to keep focused on your relationship with your 732
daughter and try not to question her about the other man as this will 733
only make her feel awkward and make her feel that she needs to take 734
sides. As difficult as it may be, for your daughters sake, try to 735
maintain an amicable relationship with your wife. 736
Good luck 737

In line 727, the moderator expressly accepted and validated the claims of the contributor by characterising the actions of his ex-wife as 'brutal': she further implied moral approbation of the contributor's wife by conjecturing that she would not have coped easily if roles were reversed in this instance. Subsequently, the contributor was optimistically advised (without any obvious evidential basis) that the new intimate will never replace his parental role (line 730); and that his daughter may not even 'like' the other man (line 732). However, following these points, the parameters of the moderator's advice, once again, became individualised and focussed upon the contributor's own (future) conduct. The contributor was advised to (a) keep focussed upon his relationship with his daughter (lines 732-3), (b) not to question his daughter about his ex-wife's domestic arrangements, and (c) to attempt to maintain an amicable relationship with his ex-spouse (line 736). The advice was concluded by means of an 'optimistic token'.

Given the claimed therapeutic purposes of the BBS forum, some elements of site moderator - contributor interaction might have expectedly bore resemblance to features of the 'therapeutic interview' as outlined by Labov and Fanshel (1977:30-32) in which:

- [A] therapist seeks to abstract elements of biographical information from [B] client in order to effect 'helpful' interventions;
- helpful interventions in this case are exclusively based upon interaction;
- a power differential exists between [A] and [B] on the basis of 'expertise' and the fact that the act of seeking 'professional' help in the first place may be viewed as an instance of purchased intimacy, and therefore potentially socially stigmatising; and,
- 'therapists' go to extremes to avoid any hint of instruction.

Clearly, in the examples cited above (data 142-4) the moderator's communication differed markedly in both content and style from Labov and Fanshel's characterisation. Firstly, the moderator's responses appeared to be confined (by-in-large) to the specific biographical information and circumstances claimed by contributors. Secondly, the advice offered by the moderator could be characterised as a hybrid of pragmatic and psychological measures. Thirdly, no attempt was made at the avoidance of direction or judgement, which characterise 'therapeutic interventions' more generally.

Labov and Fanshel (1977: 35-6) suggested that contradictory pressures present within the therapeutic situation were responsible for the creation of several distinctive fields of discourse within those settings, including:

- *the style of everyday life* – in which the patient narrates salient events in colloquial style;
- *the interview style* – in which specialised vocabulary and overtly interpretive language is employed, and issues of emotion and behaviour are made topically relevant; and,
- *the family style* – characterised by the use of idiom and slang, and in which strong emotions are given expression.

Instances of each of these 'discursive fields' appeared within the moderator – contributor joint actions, for instance:

- *the style of everyday life* – pervaded contributors' discursive presentations;
- *the interview style* – the use of interpretive language, and heightening of emotional / behavioural referents e.g. see datum 143 (line 1442), datum 144 (lines 731-6); and,

- *the family style* – the use of idiom or slang in order to express strong emotional content similarly pervaded contributor accounts e.g. the antecedent to datum 144.

However, this is not to claim that the moderator-contributor interactions reviewed here shared the style and structure of the therapeutic interview. Labov and Fanshel (1977: 37) concluded that although 'narratives and discussions of *everyday life* are embedded within these [therapeutic] exchanges', in the last instance the therapeutic context remains principally determined by the meta-language of 'the interview style': this was clearly not the case in relation to these moderator – contributor interactions. Furthermore, Labov and Fanshell noted (after Goffman, 1971c) that therapeutic interviews, like instances of 'ordinary conversation', are characterised by shifts from one frame to another. In the case of BBS exchanges on the other hand, the medium clearly lacked the interactive flexibility by which to allow shifts of frame (at least in an immediate sense), and perhaps this constraint partially determined the style of guidance offered.

As noted above, Hazleden (2003) documented a contrasting 'therapeutic' modality – that of the 'self-help' approach, and asserted that the seeming widespread popularity of this (self) 'treatment' mirrors growing uncertainty in relation to self and identity. In contrast to the claimed dynamics of the therapeutic interview as summarised above, self-help discourse is characteristically replete with direction and advice, and in several respects the moderator-contributor interaction reported here appears to coincide with the discursive features of the self-help genre, for instance:

- data 142-144 demonstrated clear tendencies towards the individualisation of 'problems';
- psychological frames of reference are frequently (but not invariably) made relevant e.g. datum 143 (line 1442);
- self-control was emphasised e.g. datum 143 (lines 1443-4), datum 144 (lines 732-3); and,
- self-control and monitoring are represented as difficult accomplishments e.g. datum 143 (lines 1445-6), datum 144 (line 735).

However, at the same time, the site moderator's 'advice' (as reported here) also differed from 'self-help' discourse in several significant respects. Characteristically, the 'advice' offered was often overtly partisan and directional in nature. In the main, no apparent reticence existed on the part of the moderator in seeking to cast judgement upon e.g. ex-spouses and other *dramatis personae* who populated accounts. Typically, such 'advice' was delivered in 'the style of everyday life' as identified by Labov and Fanshell (1977). The interventions of the

site moderator could be therefore be characterised as a discursive hybrid between (a) the 'technology' of self-help, and, (b) 'the style of everyday life'. In these respects, the moderator's interventions typically bore a family resemblance to the discursive style of 'agony columns' in women's magazines and the popular press, and by in large, appeared grounded in a colloquial discursive frames of reference.

It was noted (above) that a significant component of co-participants' responses involved establishing the 'qualification to speak' about the matters made topically relevant: characteristically, qualification claims were grounded upon analogous or similar experiences (see datum 134: line 695; datum 136: lines 1512ff.; datum 138: lines 36-8). However, 'qualification to speak' discourse was notably absent in the moderator's responses, and therefore it could be conjectured that the validity of any advice offered by the moderator rested upon the category-bound presumption of expertise.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.

The preceding sections of this analysis have been concerned to explicate features of BBS accounts as discursive actions. Thematic analysis of issues made topically relevant by contributors in discussing intimacy troubles included the following 'families' of referents:

❶ *'faulty persons'* – that intimacy troubles occurred as a consequence of characteristics or actions of a 'faulty other';
❷ *'faulty relationships'* – that intimacy troubles arose as a consequence of issues specific to particular relationships (as opposed to relationships in general);
❸ *'better offers'* – in which one party abandoned an existing relationship in favour of another;
❹ *'outside pressures'* – that intimacy troubles were precipitated as a consequence of hostile circumstances such as financial difficulties, or the 'interference' of extended family members;
❺ *'you only live once'* – that intimacy troubles were precipitated by the coincidence of (a) perceived dissatisfaction with the relationship coupled with (b) a raised awareness of [finite] existential parameters; and,
❻ *'litanies'* – various combinations of the above 'reasons'.

These issues raised by participants were seen to variously coincide with or differ from claims made within established *philotopics*.

The structural and organisational features of BBS accounts were explicated, and these findings were used in order to conduct an 'academic conversation' with a number of CA and

interactionist studies.[123] The accounts were analysed in terms of discursive organisation, and the specific deployment of rhetorical devices towards the accomplishment of certain effects. Accounts were found to differ on the basis of differential 'status positions' claimed by contributors. The most important distinction rested upon whether contributors' accounts detailed (a) flotation – the 'flight' of one party from intimate relations, or, (b) fixation – ongoing attempts to 'repair' the relationship. Furthermore, the (alleged) role of the contributor in relation to the issues detailed e.g. whether (a) contributors claimed to have initiated events, or (b) claimed to be responding to events initiated by others, exerted a significant influence upon discursive organisation and subsequent effect(s). It was noted that the various 'status position's' claimed by participants could be read as belonging to a 'membership categorisation device' as described by Sacks, (1974). Following Sacks, claiming to be a member of a particular category seemed to invoke a series of normative expectations to act in certain ways, and contributors (by in large) demonstrated an awareness of this implicativeness. For instance:

- floatation initiators' accounts typically conveyed the effect of either minimising or attenuating potential moral approbation, or occasioning the approval of others for reported actions;
- flotation responders' accounts typically conveyed the effect that they were organised in order to elicit (a) sympathetic readings / moral support, whilst at the same time (b) inviting moral disapproval of the other; and,
- fixation participant accounts conveyed the effect that they were organised in order to to seek others' approval for pending or proposed actions.

Those accounts that referenced 'flotation', from either an initiator's or responder's perspective, characteristically detailed terminal intimacy troubles. Those accounts that referenced 'fixation' were more ambiguous in their organisation, and (perhaps counter-intuitively) more adversarial in style than 'flotation' accounts. Given that aspects of contributors' reputation were at stake, unsurprisingly, all BBS contributions appeared organised to be read as 'factual', and a variety of discursive devices were deployed towards this effect. It was noted (*above*) that having an account read by others as 'authentic' presented distinctive difficulties for those communicating over the Internet. Those reading the accounts were highly unlikely to have access to extra-discursive domain of lives or events as represented by the contributor given the abstracted and geographically dispersed nature of this medium. Co-participants in the forum were therefore unlikely to be in a position to either verify or dispute 'facts', and conversely, contributors were unable to present 'credible witnesses' or third parties in support of their versions. In ordinary talk, 'versions' are

[123] See Lynch, (1993: 299).

characteristically vulnerable to dispute, disagreement, or challenge mediated via an elaborate turn-taking structure. However, in these BBS accounts contributors had generally unfettered licence to elaborate details at will, with disputed facts, challenges etc. being deferred until after the account was related in full. It was suggested that the effectiveness of these accounts i.e. that they were read by others as 'truthful' or 'authentic', rested upon a form of 'logical circularity' similar to that identified by Smith (1978); Woolgar (1980); and Woofit (1992), which can be summarised (and paraphrased) as such:

- contributors are afforded definitional privilege in terms of characterising others and defining topical relevance;
- information is imparted by means of an 'additive structure', which encourages interpretation in favour of the speaker's / writer's original claims; and,
- information is discursively presented in such a fashion as to invite the hearer / reader to arrive at the same conclusion as the speaker / writer.

Responses invoked by BBS accounts were found to be far from passive: rather, they characteristically bore the same hallmarks as other BBS contributions e.g. being indexical (to an extent) and sequentially implicative, effectively inviting further responses from others. Responses therefore also demonstrated evidence of a variety of organisational features and effects e.g. to proffer agreement / disagreement in varying strengths, or allow for catharsis on the part of the 'respondent'.

In attempting to identify with contributors, respondents invariably made reference to a more generalised and abstracted extra-discursive domain of 'analogous' lives or events, normative expectations, and other cultural and technical discourses. This means of gaining access to interaction was observed to be most powerfully effective when contributions were read as 'coinciding' with respondents' personal experiences. In these circumstances, respondents tended to 'upgrade' the extent of coincidence between their own experiences and those reported by the contributor. It could be conjectured that 'upgraded identification' with other contributors simultaneously acted to downplay differences in (reported) circumstances. This tendency perhaps represented an instantiation of over-generalised, or gender essentialist claims that characterise debates about divorce or intimacy troubles in the public arena. Turner (1972: 382) argued that gaining access to interaction by means of these 'category-generated topics' is a formal property of 'small-talk'. However, the primary topics of consideration within this BBS forum - intimacy troubles and relationship 'failure' – were beyond the characteristic 'cannon' of small-talk. This coincidence of circumstances i.e. the *gravitas* of the issues made topically relevant, and identification with others by means of

'category-generated topics' also provided fertile grounds for disagreement. Disagreements and disputes between BBS co-participants were variously:

- disputes about the authenticity of versions as discursively presented; or,
- disputes based upon differing perspectives about the matters made topically relevant.

The responses analysed above provided *some* corroborative evidence for claims made in earlier sections of the analysis i.e. that the discursive organisation of these accounts facilitated the accomplishment of a number of specific effects. However, a further more generalised and unanticipated property of responses was also observed: 'minimally referenced responses' frequently occurred, in which respondents availed themselves of the opportunity to relate an account of their own intimacy troubles whilst paying only token attention to the content of prior contributions. It was concluded that the inherent reliance upon 'category-bound topics' as a means of identification with others, at the same time, induced respondents to pursue their own agenda whilst simultaneously maintaining the appearances of properly responsive action and interaction.

Responses to contributors' accounts made by the site moderator, to an extent, differed from responses made by other participants in the BBS forum. The introduction pages to the BBS forum are highly suggestive of a 'therapeutic purpose' [see appendix 2]: however, it was not specified as to whether the role of the site moderator was intentionally therapeutic in the formal sense. In common with other responses, identification with contributors preceded on the basis of 'category-generated topics'. Any advice or direction proffered was therefore also similarly generalised.

The structure and content of the moderator's responses were compared with the findings of Labov and Fanshel (1977: 35-6), who claimed that therapeutic exchanges routinely alternate between the 'discursive frames' of the colloquial, the technical, and the idiomatic. In responding to contributors, the site moderator typically avoided technical frames of reference, although superficially, 'advice' did coincide with some discursive features characteristic of self-help discourse. By-in-large, moderator responses remained grounded in a colloquial discursive frame of reference, and in this respect they resembled the responses of other participants. It was noted (*above*) that a significant component of (co-participants) responses involved establishing 'qualification to speak' about the matters made topically relevant, and characteristically, qualification claims were grounded upon analogous or similar experiences. However, 'qualification to speak' discourse was notably absent in the moderator's responses, and therefore it could be conjectured that the validity of any advice offered by the moderator rested upon the category-bound presumption of expertise.

Overall, the BBS 'joint actions' considered above were typically more consensual than conflicted, suggesting a normative predisposition favouring agreement. Once again, insights derived from CA studies proved a useful comparative resource. The implications of Pomerantz's (1984) concept of 'preference structures' were considered in relation to instances of BBS communication where either (a) agreement, or (b) disagreement might ordinarily be expected to occur. Pomerantz (1984:77) suggested that communicants across a variety of contexts invariably orientate towards demonstrating support, fellow feeling, or like-mindedness with their co-participants, and the instances of joint action considered above were (by-in-large) consistent with this normative tendency. However, it was also noted that the potential for anonymity, and (moral and geographical) distance between co-participants did, on occasions, seem to act as to attenuate (consensual) normative considerations that might routinely be expected to operate during face-to-face interaction.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.

My approach to the topic of intimacy troubles has tried to avoid what Lynch (1993:309) called the 'familiar epistemological tendencies' of professional sociologies, in particular their intention to secure a 'vantage point' (seemingly) outside of vernacular language and epistemic commitments. The review of existing *philotopics* revealed that sociological treatments of this topic, like others, are characterised by internal contradictions, theoretical tensions, and differences. Furthermore, each analysis reviewed in earlier chapters subverted vernacular accounts of intimate relations/troubles by means of varying theoretical and/or methodological commitments. As Lynch (1993:310) suggested, this is:

> 'done by converting practical activities into detachable configurations of signs that can be integrated with collections of similar cases, descriptions of contexts, similucra, maps, cases, archival records, and other texts.'

In contrast, the style of analysis adopted in the current study has attempted to apply a hybrid of approaches derived from discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992), and Lynch's (1993) 'postanalytic ethnomethodology'. Rather than strictly adhering to the empirical prescriptions of discourse analysis, a deliberately 'underbuilt' methodological approach was taken, which Lynch (1993:304) characterised as 'nothing fancy' and the 'juxtaposition of (arguably) comparable cases, citing testimonies and reports, drawing out common themes, noting relevant discrepancies and trends, and [especially] appealing to common intuitions and judgements.' Subsequently, discursive representations of issues such as the meaning of intimate relations/ troubles, motives towards continuing or ending relationships, the 'causes' of intimacy troubles etc. were explained as a series of practical actions *within the context* of the BBS forum: no assumptions were made concerning the correspondence between these discursive actions and extra-discursive happenings / events.

My initial analysis of existing *philotopics* might be regarded as a rather negative programme. However, in common with Lynch (1993:315) the intentions of the current project were to create a productive synthesis by 'getting ordinary life' (in this case relatively unmediated reports of intimate relations/ troubles) from out of the shadows of professional sociological, psychological, and therapeutic interpretations. This is not to dismiss various forms of professional analysis as worthless or irrelevant, but rather to inspect these issues from a different angle i.e. by using vernacular concerns to illuminate classic epistemological and methodological versions of intimate relations/troubles. Following (Lynch, 1993: 201), the remainder of this concluding chapter is oriented towards conducting an 'academic

conversation' between technical and vernacular versions, with the possibility that the orderly and describable features of ordinary action might hold differentiating and therapeutic implications for established *philotopics*.

Given that all of the professional commentaries considered above imply a broadly realist orientation (and that my analysis makes no such claims), questions might be raised concerning commensurability i.e. how can the outcomes of these divergent approaches be compared?[124] Resolution to this problem has been achieved by (a) suspension of judgement in relation to the 'realist credentials' claimed by various studies, and instead (b) treating these claims as discursive actions in themselves - as 'members intuitions within more specialised circumstances' (Lynch 1993:313). In the following discussion, substantive findings and conclusions of the current study are distinguished by the use of italics.

TOPICAL RELEVANCE IN PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS: AREAS OF CONVERGENCE.

On surface appearances at least, most of the issues made topically relevant by BBS contributors coincided with familiar themes within professional commentaries. These included:

- faulty persons;
- faulty relationships;
- better offers;
- outside pressures;
- 'you only live once';
- accidental damage; and,
- combinations or litanies of these things.

In claiming that intimacy troubles were attributable to 'faulty persons', BBS contributors typically alleged that the other party was either individually flawed, or flawed by virtue of some category membership.

These claims were thematically similar to those made in several professional commentaries; for instance, that:

[124] The use of the term 'realist' here relates to implicit or explicit claims made within established *philotopics* that their theoretical and/or empirical descriptions of intimate relations/troubles are either generalisable and / or correspond with the enactment of situated intimate relations.

- individual traits could form the basis of intimacy troubles (Aristotle, 1975: 227-228) and (*c/f* data 45, 51, 55, & 117);
- intimate relations follow a doctrine of 'uniqueness-of-the-other'(Stone, 1997; Evans, 1998; Langford, 1999) and (*c/f* data 32, 63, & 66);
- particular intimate relations are subject to judgement against mass-mediated universal standards (Evans, 1998) and (*c/f* data 18 & 119);
- that intimate relations arise as a consequence of the *'chemistry'* of partner attributes and (*c/f* data 64 & 70);[125]
- that the success or failure of any relationship can be predicted from the extent of mutual attraction between the protagonists (the *'magnetic metaphor'*) and (*c/f* datum 8);
- that contemporary Western societies are characterised by relatively greater levels of moral individualism, and more ephemeral social relationships in general (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Bauman, 2001) and (*c/f* data 117 & 119);
- that personal dissatisfaction must be 'weighed' against the costs of dissolving intimacy (Giddens, 1992) and (*c/f* datum 122); and,
- that an individual may be irredeemably flawed by virtue of category membership (Langford, 1999) and (*c/f* data 1 & 2).

In citing faulty relationships, BBS contributors characteristically asserted a fundamental flaw in the relationship between individuals (not reducible to the characters of either party) present at the outset, or arising as a developmental consequence over the course of the relationship.

Professional claims about faulty relationships have characteristically cited the following (analogous) concerns as underpinning intimacy troubles:

- structural features of particular relationships (*c/f* datum 36);
- the birth of a first child, or the presence of a (perceived) rival (Simmel, [1908] 1950) and (*c/f* data 22 & 48);
- influences of wider social structures such as gender politics (Langford, 1999) and (*c/f* datum 9), or social class (*c/f* datum 13);
- the issue of power differentials (Weber,1948) and (*c/f* data 11 & 120);
- issues of exchange of resources (Blau, 1964; Langford, 1999) and (*c/f* data 52 & 119);
- failure to 'work at it' (Bauman, 1993; Berger and Kellner, 1964; Giddens, 1992) and (*c/f* data 21 & 96);

[125] see Duck (*op cit:*117) for a discussion of this (allegedly unwanted) psychological tendency.

- failure of trust (Simmel, [1908] 1950) and (*c/f* data 24 & 25);
- developmental concerns such as habituation (Davis 1973b; Bauman 1993) and (*c/f* data 12, 15 & 16);
- conscious deployment of 'habituation' in order to hasten the end of a relationship (Davis, 1973b: 249) and (*c/f* datum 20); and,
- overbearing control (Weber 1948; Simmel, [1908] 1950; Langford 1999) and (*c/f* data 9 & 10).

Sometimes BBS contributors cited issues within the immediate social environment as the 'cause' of intimacy troubles: typically either (a) 'family interference', or (b) financial difficulties.

Professional commentators' claims concerning the issue of 'interference' can be differentiated by whether 'intrusion' into the private world of the intimate parties is claimed to arise within the immediate, or wider, social environments (*c/f* data 35 & 121). Most usually professional sociological commentators claims about 'interference' referred to changes in the macro-sociological context, which typically were claimed to destabilise conditions for intimate relations in general. For instance:

- loss of certainty due to decline in institutional codes, such as those enshrined in religion (Durkheim, 1985:35) and (*c/f* datum 43); and,
- changes in the economic and social position of women underpinned by developments such as efficient contraception and increased labour market participation (Giddens 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995) and (*c/f* datum 47).

Some BBS contributors accounted for new relationships in purely positive terms in which noteworthy aspects or special qualifications of the new intimate were presented as irresistible 'sufficient causes' to terminate pre-existing intimate relations. Others claimed that newly found intimacy was appealing because the new person precisely remedied some (alleged) deficiency in an existing relationship.

Professional commentaries, in all cases, acknowledged that 'being in love' is an extraordinary experience bearing (at least) a transformative potential (*c/f* data 63 & 65).

Most professional commentaries made extensive claims about the essential nature of intimate relations, and specifically the inter-relationship between the concepts of love, sex, and eroticism. It is noteworthy that such claims were singularly absent from the vernacular

accounts considered in the current study. Typical claims made in professional commentaries included:

- the sexual impulse merely serves as a precursor to culturally elaborated intimate forms (Davis,1973b; Giddens, 1992; Simmel, [1923b] 1984; Paz,1996; Bauman, 2001);
- intimate relations arise as a specific synthesis of elements such as 'sensuality and sentiment' (Simmel, [1923b] 1984), or the 'emotional and intellectual' (Bauman, 2001);
- intimate relations are creative social processes that bestow value upon the intimate (Simmel, [1923b] 1984; Singer, 1984a), and yet at the same time are transformative, providing opportunities for self-invention or re-invention (Berger and Kellner; 1964, Davis, 1973b); and,
- love is a form of delusional sickness underpinned by a pernicious ideology that merely serves to obscure iniquitous and injurious social relationships (Langford, 1999).

On occasions BBS contributors appended claims about the unsatisfactory nature of their intimate relations with references to the finite nature of existence implying that life is both too short and too precious to 'waste' on unfulfilling relationships.

Several professional commentaries converged on the assertion that thinking about intimate relations in existential terms only became possible once human existence was liberated from the exigencies of biological survival (Stone, 1997; Elias, 1994) and (*c/f* data 74, 75 & 76).

On occasions BBS contributors afforded intimacy troubles an accidental (or even chaotic) quality.

The above professional commentaries variously claiming: the fragility of intimate relationships; the possibilities of unilateral termination (as well as the practical means of achieving this outcome); and, the unavoidable developmental consequences which beset relationships, serve to cumulatively create the impression that one might not have to do very much at all in order to disrupt or damage these arrangements (*c/f* datum 50).

Invariably, the above issues made topically relevant by BBS contributors featured only as elements of more extensive accounts, which in themselves, raised further questions concerning organisation and functionality.

CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT THEMATIC ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS.

THE ISSUE OF GENDER: PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS.

Gender (and specifically the relative status positions of men and women) has been consistently represented as a prominent theoretical object in professional commentaries. Typically, gender is claimed to differentially determine experiences of both [heterosexual] intimate relations and intimacy troubles. In the accounts that have provided the material examined in this thesis, this factor was seldom made topically relevant, and furthermore, no evidence was found to suggest that this factor played any differentiating role in the organisation of accounts.

Several 'classical' sociological accounts suggested that men and women both view and experience intimate relations differently (*see* Simmel, [1911] 1984; Weber, 1948). These claims were extended to their apotheosis within feminist analyses (e.g. Langford, 1999; Jackson 1993b; Pearce and Stacey, 1995) which, taken collectively, have asserted that heterosexual intimate relations represent a 'bad deal' for women, both historically and contemporarily speaking. For their part, post-consensus commentators such as Giddens (1992), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have implicated a variety of technical, medical, legal, and economic changes as transforming the status of women, and hence the basis upon which contemporary intimate relations are conducted.[126]

Whilst Langford (1999) interpreted her respondents' accounts as particularised instances of enduring structural gender inequalities, Vaughan (1990) asserted that accounts of intimacy troubles were predominantly organised in relation to the circumstances by which couple broke-up. She suggested that such was the inherent power advantage of the initiator in being able to control the process of leave-taking from the relationship (either actual, or *de facto* in terms of ongoing participation), that this factor alone appeared to outweigh the effects of all other structural power imbalances i.e. such as based upon age, sex, occupation, social class, or income. The most significant factor structuring respondents' accounts was therefore whether one was in the role of initiator or respondent in relation to intimacy troubles and subsequent break-up. *The current study makes no claims in relation to political issues such as patterns of disadvantage. However, in common with Vaughan, I suggest that the vernacular accounts that have provided the material examined in this thesis varied primarily upon the basis of*

[126] N.B. Davis's (1973b: xviii) assertion that intimate relations could be investigated 'on a level of abstraction high enough to render inconsequential the sex roles of those who enter into them'.

whether the writer had initiated, or was responding to intimacy troubles / break-up. The predominant 'membership categories' evident within the data were (a) initiators of relationship break-up; (b) responders to relationship break-up, and (c) those reporting ongoing intimacy troubles.

Both Davis (1973b), and Vaughan (1990) suggested that the process of declining intimacy could be represented in terms of discrete 'stages'. Whilst the current study has found that post-hoc accounts demonstrated regularities in terms of organisation and 'effect' to the extent that certain tropes marked off beginnings, middles, and endings, this is not however, to suggest that extra-discursive events can be demarcated in any such orderly way.

Three overarching, but highly integrated, themes did however pervade almost all of the discursive activities undertaken within the BBS forum: they are separated here only for the purposes of discussion:

- *'reputation'* – the central discursive function of all accounts appeared oriented towards (at very least) defending the contributor's reputation, and the normatively consensual context of the BBS ensured that (generally) respondents were careful not to challenge contributors' claims in this respect; and,
- *'the extraordinary'* – many contributors surpassed the point of merely defending reputation by accentuating extraordinary events or ('heroic') actions.

Defending one's reputation (reputation work, herewith) begs an important 'second order' question: namely, that of moral contingency. Discursively constructing a creditable (or even 'heroic') reputation accentuates questions about criteria against which such a positive reputation is being claimed, and as such:

- discursively reported actions in relation to intimacy troubles appear organised to be read as displaying a concern with *moral proceduralism.*[127]

REPUTATION WORK.

BBS contributors characteristically employed a number of strategies noted in other studies (Woolgar, 1980; Woofit, 1992; Smith, 1977) in relation to creating the effects of 'credibility' e.g. 'not naming the problem, establishing definitional privilege, delivering accounts by

---

[127] Craib (1994:173) coined the term 'procedural ethics' in order to describe ethical codes which place greater emphasis upon the arrival at any decision as opposed to the moral content of any conclusion reached, and various versions of this 'ethical form' have appeared in established sociological discourse.

means of an 'additive structure', and juxtaposing ordinary and extraordinary events within accounts. The characteristic additive structure of BBS accounts meant that vague or questionable information was invariably subject to self-correction as the account unfolded. Definitional privilege served as the basis from which BBS contributors were able to establish the reputation of self and others, appear as 'cognitively reasonable', establish 'culpability', heighten or diminish agency, defend a position, display naïveté, express regret and otherwise give or display cues to readers that they were cognisant of that their claims might be read as morally problematic.

Accounts differed in terms of both complexity and the levels of detail provided. In general, flotation responders' accounts were longer, more complex, and more detailed. This finding possibly reflects a level of shared understanding that rejection represents a greater threat to self-esteem, and consequently more work might be entailed in defending reputation.

Professional commentaries about intimate relations/troubles have invariably made (implicit or explicit) claims about self and identity. Several commentators have claimed that a tension between the maintenance of a distinctive sense of self and identity, and the contrasting imperative to subsume individual characteristics in favour of a shared identity (Aristotle, 1975; Simmel, [1923b] 1984).

Most typically, formal sociologies asserted a performative view of self (e.g. see Simmel, [1923a] 1984; Davis, 1973b).[128] Both authors asserted that intimate relations/troubles were accomplished via a process of impression management, involving face-saving formulae and the like. Vaughan (1990) asserted intimacy troubles could be viewed in similar terms, the primary goal being that of seeking validation for a particular version of reality. The corollary of these claims is that intimacy troubles (however these might be defined) harbour the potential to almost panoramically de-stabilise self-identity. In particular, ex-intimates are privy to a person's most private selves and most crucial secrets, which might later be revealed to damaging effect (Simmel, [1908] 1950; Davis, 1973b).

It was noted above, that the prevailing normative order within BBS forum appeared to favour consensus: BBS respondents, for the most part, agreed (either tacitly or openly) with the claims made by contributors.

Disagreements, when they were occasioned, were often delivered in a 'weak' form. These observations bear comparison with Goffman's (1971a, 1971b) claims in relation to the

[128] N.B. that both of these authors carefully avoid any reference to the situated actions of actual people, instead preferring to present idealised cameos of the mundane and microscopic dynamics of intimate social life.

ineradicably moral basis of 'interaction order'. Goffman (1971a), although mostly describing instances of face-to-face interaction, asserted that normative rules in any given interaction setting are, first and foremost, oriented towards preserving and maintaining the valid social identities of participants: 'norms' are therefore primarily 'norms about personal qualities,' (1971a:186). In these terms, participants in interaction are engaged in a process of impression management in order to 'sustain a viable image [of themselves] in the eyes of others' (1971a: 185). For, Goffman (1971b) consensus in interaction settings arises primarily from interaction processes favouring the mutual acceptance identity claims. Under such consensual conditions, explicit threats to others' reputation might in turn risk the approbation of others within the same interaction setting (Goffman, 1971b:14), and therefore, disputing reputation is characteristically enacted by means of communicative strategies such as:

- claiming to have acted innocently, unintentionally or unwittingly (*c/f* datum 136);
- claiming that any offence caused has arisen as an unanticipated by-product of action (*c/f* datum 99); or,
- employing the language of innuendo and implication, as implied communication is also deniable communication (*c/f* datum 95).

Broadly, these three 'qualifying features' of interaction can be seen to emerge during the various attempts to diminish agency of self or others in the BBS accounts analysed above (*c/f* data 69-73). BBS contributions were also replete with examples of implied (rather than explicit) meaning.

Goffman (1971b: 5) coined the term 'face' in order to portray the positive social value that a person claims for himself within any given interaction setting. To be *'in face'* involves *'acting out a line'* – that is a pattern of actions or evaluative discursive elements, which express a view of the situation, of self, and of co-participants.[129] For Goffman, 'face' (or reputation) is therefore fundamentally dependent upon the cooperation of others for its bestowal. In terms of the current analysis, the presence of an 'audience' allowed BBS participants to introduce favourable 'facts' about themselves, and (frequently), unfavourable 'facts' about others. Goffman (1971b: 9) suggested that once others validate face, an expectation of consistency ensues, and should a contributor radically alter his line, then this places both reputation claims

[129] Goffman (1971b:5ff.) suggested that:
To be *'in face'*, or have face relates to instances when an actor's account is internally consistent and supported by judgements and 'evidence' conveyed by other participants.
To be *'in the wrong face'* relates to situations where information is revealed during accounts that are difficult (if not impossible) to reconcile with the wider claims that an actor makes of himself and his situation.
To be *out of face* relates to situations where a contributor participates without insight as to the 'normative expectations' of others in relation to his reported actions.
'Loss of face' is feared as others may take this as a sign that (normative) considerations in respect of feelings need not be observed.

and 'versions of events' under question. However, the validation of face by others is not a once and forever phenomenon: face must be continuously maintained.

Being in the *wrong face*, or *out of face* risks two forms of sanction, namely (a) the recognition by others that the speaker (writer in this instance) is 'socially inept' or unaware of normative expectations of others, and (b) the possibility that prior claims to reputation may be challenged. In such circumstances, actors may be forced to re-evaluate their favoured line, or else cease participation within the interaction setting in question. This latter point remains unknowable in relation to BBS exchanges: however, a number of participants did 'post' their contributions only once and did not subsequently respond to others' interpretation of their (reported) circumstances.

Goffman (1971b: 12) designated the term *'face work'* in order to signify actions taken by a person to make whatever is reported consistent with 'face'. By analogy, I suggest that the overall effect of specific discursive features and devices deployed within BBS accounts was oriented towards 'reputation work'. Goffman asserted that 'poise' forms a significant element of face work in the context of face-to-face interaction: in the instances of Internet communication considered here it is possible (if not likely) that rehearsal and careful design towards the discursive ordering of events fulfilled much of this function. For instance, it was suggested above that the logically circular processes identified by Woofit (1992), Woolgar (1980), and Smith (1978) were primarily deployed in accomplishing the appearance of authenticity. In the case of the BBS accounts (as well as in interaction more generally) 'authenticity' serves as a necessary pre-condition by which to gain and maintain reputation in the eyes of co-participants. Goffman (1971b: 12) suggested that maintenance of face is a condition of interaction, not the primary objective: such primary objectives might include:

- gaining face;
- giving expression to one's true beliefs;
- introducing depreciating information about others; and,
- solving problems or performing tasks.

Given the virtual setting in which these claims were made, and particularly the complex relationship between discursive reporting and extra-discursive events, the current study did not seek to impute the 'actual' intentions or motives of BBS contributors. This is not to claim that 'objectives' were absent, and the organisation of particular accounts provided clues as the pursuit of particular ends, for instance:

- all contributions were organised as to accomplish authenticity so as to make opinions expressed appear 'true';
- both flotation initiator and responder accounts appeared orientated towards 'gaining face';
- flotation responder accounts routinely introduced depreciating information about others; and,
- fixation accounts were (ostensibly at least) characteristically oriented towards problem-solving.

The procedural maintenance of reputation within the BBS forum also differed from Goffman's formulation in some important respects. As noted above, BBS contributions were (not infrequently) one-off events: once reputation claims were made, the choice of whether or not to respond to favourable responses, or defend claims against any ensuing challenges remained within the control of the original contributor. Only some participants chose to enter into protracted exchanges (see data 132 & 133), and perhaps this observation derives from the relatively ephemeral character of this means of communication. If unfavourable readings resulted from BBS contributions, it would be perhaps easy to minimise the effects of these reputational threats by rationalising that:

- the respondent didn't really know the full circumstances underlying (reported) actions;
- it was unlikely that the co-participants would ever meet; and therefore,
- the likelihood of 'contamination' of one's immediate social circle was minimal.

Other elements of 'face work' identified by Goffman (1971b: 15) were also evident within the BBS data; namely:

- (the likely) avoidance of topics that might possibly represent the contributor in a poor light, and in which loss of face is a potential outcome;
- selective reporting of events;
- claims made with belittling modesty, disguised or otherwise under-represented (*c/f* data 81, 82, 83, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 109, & 112 from the same account);
- 'hedging', or avoiding conclusions by which contributors (implicitly) acknowledge that claims by others may be read as morally problematic (*c/f* datum 78);
- deliberate belittling of others by means of a 'joking' or ironic manner (*c/f* datum 102); and,
- indirect or disguised condemnation typically inviting co-participants to come to their own conclusions (*c/f* datum 107).

EXTRAORDINARY LIVES AND EVENTS.

All accounts referenced the claim that intimacy troubles, break-ups and/or new relationships were to be understood as a 'struggle against the odds'.

In the case of flotation responders' accounts, more use was generally made of the juxtaposition of ordinary and extraordinary events. The additive nature of these accounts was analogous to the narrative structures of 'detective stories', and unfolding awareness was indicated and managed in a way that also bore resemblance to narratives of terminal illness. Further, these accounts demonstrated some awareness of the fact that if these strategies were 'overdone', then they risked inviting the interpretation that the contributor was 'flawed' by virtue of gullibility. Managing this particular interaction dilemma therefore appeared to present a complex challenge.

The notion that the conduct of intimate relations represents a quest or struggle against unfavourable circumstances is a familiarly recurrent claim within professional commentaries. Historical accounts variously implicate courtly love (Singer, 1984b: 22), or the romantic love complex (Weber, 1948; Christian-Smith, 1990) as the origins of this form of ideation. Claims that 'hostile' social environments paradoxically act as to both amplify the attractiveness of the forbidden, and strengthen existing intimate relations have been noted above. Other professional commentaries (Simmel, [1923a] 1984; Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) have framed intimate relations in terms of a gamble taken at high stakes.[130] Several post-consensus sociologies have claimed variations upon this theme. Bauman (2001) characterised postmodern intimate relations in terms of a constant striving for something that is never satisfactorily attained.

In a discussion of the discursive representation of chronic illness, Kelly (1994) identified a range of possible narrative 'genres' including:

- epic-heroic;
- tragic;

[130] A recent episode of BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Disc's* featured mountaineer Joe Simpson (Simpson, 2004). Simpson's celebrity has accrued from a near-fatal accident whilst climbing Suila Grande in the Peruvian Andes in 1985, an account of which was later published (Simpson, J. 1997 *Touching the Void*. London: Vinatge.), and made into a documentary film of the same name. Simpson and his climbing partner Simon Yates successfully completed the climb, only to for Simpson to be badly injured early in the descent. The story details his subsequent (but highly improbable) survival. When asked by presenter Sue Lawley if he had ever been tempted to marry, he responded that he would never accept a challenge at such unfavourable odds!

- comic-ironic;
- romantic; and,
- didactic.

Whilst not wishing to over-stretch the metaphorical connection between maladies of the body and intimacy troubles, the BBS data abounded with examples of the discursive deployment of these concerns. This is not to suggest that BBS contributions could be themed into distinctive genres: as reported above, various discursive elements were purposely deployed within BBS accounts, and to suggest a typology of unifying 'themes' to these accounts would be to downplay their characteristic complexity. Single BBS accounts contained many (and in some cases all) of the themes of each of these 'genres'. However, one common discursive 'common denominator' was evident across flotation initiators, responders, and fixation accounts: namely, that contributors' reported actions were in some way 'extraordinary' and therefore to be understood in contrast to the mundane concerns of day-to-day life. To this extent, I suggest that BBS contributors frequently went beyond the mere defence of reputation and sought to imbue their reported actions with positive value i.e. as an extraordinary (heroic or epic) struggle against the odds.[131] The predominant vehicle by which to claim and extraordinary / heroic identity was that of 'struggles discourse'.

Featherstone (1992:164-5) suggested that in contemporary terms a 'heroic life' can only be claimed in juxtaposition to 'the mundane', and is comprised of the following features: [132]

- emphasis is placed upon the extraordinary (*c/f* data 85, 86, 189);
- the possibility of return to everyday routines is denied (*c/f* data 47, 51);
- emphasis is placed upon overt risks to future security (*c/f* datum 79);
- emphasis is placed upon the 'courage to struggle'(*c/f* datum 26);
- departure from the sphere of care for women and children is routinely emphasised (*c/f* datum 30);

[131] Featherstone (1992:159) noted the problematic status of the 'heroic' within the cultural spheres of contemporary Western societies. In contrast, Seale (1995) characterised the religious societies of the past as offering individuals (institutionalised) opportunities to understand their lives as standing out from mundane concerns: within the terms of religious discourse, actions (or entire lives) could be defined as moral, brave, spiritually adventurous etc. As noted above, several professional commentaries claimed that established religion, or grand moral narratives, or both, have lost much of their regulatory force. For Seale (1995:607) psychological discourse in general, and struggles discourse in particular have replaced the ritual elements of organised religion as a means of reordering experiences into a 'heroic narrative'.

[132] Featherstone (1992:160-1) characterised 'everyday life' as comprised of the following features:

- an emphasis is placed on what happens every day i.e. routine, repetitive taken-for-granted experiences, beliefs and practices;
- the everyday is regarded as the sphere of daily reproduction and maintenance i.e. activities in the domestic sphere which sustain those in the public domain;
- a (non-reflexive) emphasis is placed upon the immediacy of experiences and activities; and,
- togetherness, spontaneity, frivolity, and playful sociability are often accentuated.

- emphasis is placed upon the deliberate courting of risk (*c/f* datum 78);
- extraordinary displays of courage, or self-sacrifice are made relevant (*c/f* datum 109);
- instances of fate and destiny in which the hero/ heroine is driven by forces outside him/herself are emphasised (*c/f* data 63, 70);
- the hero routinely claims to be self-possessed with an inner sense of certainty (*c/f* data 111, 113); and,
- emphasis is placed upon craft, circumspection, and compulsion in being able to overcome the greatest misfortunes and (in effect) make ones own fate (*c/f* data 90, 91).

The above characterisation shares many features with the classical conception of heroism, which was typically a cultural script open only to men. Perhaps cognisant of these classical features, Bologh (1990:17) asserted that prevailing (contemporary) concepts of 'the heroic' were heavily gendered in favour of males, and suggested an alternative female construct of the 'heroic' would emphasise passive resistance to powerlessness, vulnerability, and the desire for attachment.[133] However, instances of the 'heroic' made topically relevant within the BBS accounts examined within this thesis were not obviously differentiated along gender lines, with (ostensibly) female contributors being as likely to reference extraordinary feats, courage, strength etc. as their male counterparts.

Featherstone (1992:167) suggested an abundance of contemporary cultural resources from which to discursively construct a 'heroic' identity. Both the entertainment and news media celebrate a constant flow of 'ordinary heroes': people thrust into danger by circumstances beyond their command, in response to which, they are represented as displaying extraordinary courage. Although not reported above, several BBS contributors made reference to prominent events in both the news and entertainment media (although these claims typically referenced the lives of celebrities). For instance:

(145) **[MWHA:682-5]**

Given the recent publicity surrounding Ali McCoist and his affairs, I'm 682
intrigued to know whether I am alone in thinking that it is harder 683
knowing that your husband has had an affair with just one woman for a 684
long time rather than several that probably didn't mean so much? 685

[133] Langford (1999:78) suggested an alternative feminist narrative of struggle i.e. that of 'maternal compensation' in which the cultural identity of 'strong woman' is juxtaposed against that of 'hopeless' (or even destructive) man.

(146) **[MWHA:667-8]**

so how did noel gallagher get a divorce on the grounds of adultery when it happened after they had separated? 667 668

Regardless of analogous lives or issues made topically relevant, Seale (1995:518) identified that 'struggles discourse' provides a vehicle by which anyone can rescue meaningful identity from unfavourable circumstances. This discursive strategy resonates with the theme of identity-as-an-unfinished-project that populates a number of established *philotpics* (see, in particular Giddens,1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, Bauman, 2001).

Seale (1995) noted in relation to struggles discourse that:

- themes of suffering, struggle, and 'redemption' resonate strongly with religious and secular versions of morality (*c/f* datum 31);
- individual pain and distress is typically portrayed in romanticised or sentimental terms, regardless of possible extra-discursive *actualité* (*c/f* data 109, 114); and,
- resolution by means of 'survival claims' afford individuals the status of having 'beaten the odds'(*c/f* datum 108).

Several affinities between the discursive representation of death and dying and (specifically terminal) intimacy troubles have been noted above.[134] Extending this analogy further, Seale (1995:602-8) identified the following discursive elements as constituting the (contemporary) cultural script of 'heroic death', and, as noted, I suggest that these elements resonate most closely with the discursive organisation of 'flotation responders' accounts. For instance:

- the struggle to know – the movement from mere suspicion to conformation (*c/f* data 89, 91);
- the struggle with knowing – the struggle to cope with 'information', once suspicions are confirmed (*c/f* data 101, 104); and,
- facing difficulties – affirmation of the self in the face of overwhelming threat to ontological security (*c/f* data 106, 107).

Struggles discourse is therefore routinely populated with self-defining moments in which adversity is conquered by means of (albeit discursively represented) acts of courage or sacrifice. Seale (2001:326) asserted that the principle discursive function of 'struggle language' is therefore in allowing unfavourable personal experiences to be represented in terms of a psychological and spiritual journey towards a satisfying resolution. In the case of

[134] The current analysis noted the deployment of 'awareness contexts' (Glasser and Strauss, 1965) as a means of discursively representing 'flotation responders' experiences.

the BBS accounts considered above, it seems that even 'losing' can be represented as 'winning' providing that reputation-gains are made along the way.

MORAL CONTINGENCIES: DEFENDING REPUTATION AGAINST WHAT?

All the accounts offered by BBS participants displayed sensitivity to moral concerns insofar as they inherently invited the judgement by others. In some instances, the topical relevance of issues raised ensured that accounts were imbued with displays of moral indignation, or even overt claims in relation to the 'moral-of-the-tale'. The conclusions of 'fixation' accounts typically sought co-participants' prior endorsements for proposed actions.

Jayyusi (1991:227) asserted that the questions of value and moral judgement have pervaded professional sociology since its inception and coalesced around two central themes:

- the conceptualisation and role of value in sociological inquiry; and,
- the relationship of values to human conduct.

With regard to the latter point, a number of established *philotopics* e.g. Aristotle (1975), Bauman (1993b, 2001), and Finch (1989), asserted the ineradicable moral basis of intimate relations (albeit differing about the basis of 'morality'). Most usually, professional commentaries attempted to pin down the existence of an overarching moral code governing the conduct of intimate relations. Historical accounts (Stone, 1990; Elias, 1984) hinted at the existence of a commonly observed moral order governing the conduct of intimate relations. In terms of modernity, Simmel [1908] (1950: 128) suggested that marriages were culturally reinforced and socially regulated arrangements, which, if not 'properly' enacted, placed personal and wider family reputations at stake. The much-vaunted 'crisis' afflicting heterosexual intimate relations has (in some quarters) been predominantly represented as a crisis of moral order, afflicting not only personal life but also allegedly underpinning a range of other social ills.[135] As noted, post-consensus sociologists accentuated claims about moral individualism (e.g. see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992).

Notwithstanding the above discussion in relation to the (unavoidably 'moral') concept of reputation several further features of the BBS accounts reported in this thesis are emblematic of moral discourse:

[135] For instance, see Dennis, N. and Erdos, G. (1993) *Families without Fatherhood. 2nd. Edition*. London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

- both the substantive basis and organisation of these accounts effectively invited the overt evaluations by co-participants (*c/f* datum 135);
- as noted, subtle and complex modes of discursive organisation were routinely oriented towards gaining approval for reported actions;
- consequences of reported actions were regularly made discursively relevant e.g. for ex-partners, new partners, children, extended family and friends (*c/f* data 101,105);
- discursive activities such as blaming or praising frequently featured in accounts (*c/f* data 96, 101);
- accounts employed discursive strategies such as relative comparisons (*c/f* datum 68), and confessional self-disclosure (*c/f* datum 77); and,
- cultural assumptions (and even grand moral narratives) about what constitutes 'moral' conduct were routinely referenced (*c/f* data 113, 126).

Finch (1989: 148) highlighted a long-running debate within moral philosophy regarding the relationship between moral codes and actions. An 'autonomous morality' position is suggestive of a causal relationship between articles of faith or matters of principle at a general level and 'consequent' actions. As such, autonomous morality is dependent upon ethical codification. In contrast a variety of versions of 'social morality' highlight contextual and praxiological concerns and, as such, social morality accentuates either the uncodified 'moral condition', or locally constituted normative order. The principle difference between these positions therefore lies in the definitional basis of the concept of 'morality' itself: whilst the former asserts a rule-guided deontological worldview, the latter emphasises ambiguity, choice, and agency. Typically, (secular) versions of the former view animate established theories of social structure, and as noted, several professional commentaries sought to 'specify' the nature of (allegedly overarching) moral order(s). In contrast, accounting for the basis of 'social morality' forms an indispensable pre-condition of adequacy in established theories of social action.

The three-fold basis of Goffman's (1971a) account of the moral order was noted above. In order for actions to be considered as 'moral' actions (a) the actor must have a number of alternative courses of action from which to choose; (b) an actor must be able to account for choice of action; and (c) the accordance of moral competence (or incompetence) resides with others in a particular interaction setting, being subject to judgement against commonly understood normative expectations. Bauman's (1993,1995, 2001) *philotopic* accorded with Goffman in relation to issues of choice and accountability, but differed considerably as to the contextual basis of 'moral' actions. In relation to choice, Bauman (1993b: 11) asserted that moral phenomena are invariably *aporetic* i.e. few choices are unambiguously good or bad, but rather the majority of moral choices are between contradictory impulses. Similarly, Bauman

shared Goffman's orientation in relation to the indeterminacy of 'moral' actions in suggesting that virtually any moral impulse, if acted upon, may result in immoral consequences. However, Bauman departs from Goffman in refusing to accord 'moral' status to locally constituted normative orders. Bauman (1993b:11) followed Lévinas (1987) in asserting that the 'uncodified moral condition' arises as a consequence of (a) 'being with and for the other', and (b) facing up to the pervasive ambivalence that is responsibility for one's actions without being tempted to escape. For Bauman, 'morality' can exist only within a dyadic structure, and rests upon the unique and irreplaceable qualities of 'the Other'.[136] Bauman's assertions in this respect are heavily indebted to Simmel's [1908] (1950: 135) claim that the addition of a third party to a dyad clearly transforms its most intimate nature. For Bauman (1993b: 12), no longer being 'with and for the other' alters the basis of the relationship from 'moral' to something 'other than moral', invoking two alternatives, which masquerade as moral bases for action:

- promoted 'moral codes' reflecting political parochialism rather than the 'uncodified' moral condition (1993:14); or,
- the collective 'morality' of the crowd by which the uniqueness of 'other' dissolves in the many (1993:113).

The issue of whether locally constituted normative orders can be properly considered as 'moral' phenomena remains a second order question (and beyond this or any other empirical evaluation). However, Bauman's distinction between unified moral codes, and aesthetic morality serves as a useful basis from which to initiate 'an academic conversation' between his work and the findings of the current study.

Bauman (1993b: 115) asserted that 'those who no longer rely on discretion become badly indebted to rules', and followed Victor Turner (1969) in suggesting that 'rules of conduct' derive from two principle sources, namely:

- *societas* – seeking justification of conduct against the 'unified moral codes' of society; or,
- *communitas* - seeking justification of conduct against the 'aesthetic morality' of the crowd.

[136] Bauman asserted (1993:112) that the 'moral party' instantiated within couple intimacy is more fragile than any other collective, because neither the 'I' or the 'Other' are replaceable. It is this essential irreplaceability that gives intimate relations their moral quality.

Bauman (1993b: 124-5) suggested that moral capacity, being without external authority, cannot be codified and therefore 'escapes' heteronomous discourse. For Bauman, actions justified in terms of such rules are, correctly speaking, *adiaphoric*[137], or measurable against technical rather than moral criteria, and as such only serve to reduce moral capacity by a variety of mechanisms including:

- determining choices and thus denying people the chance to consider the intentions which their actions are supposed to serve (*c/f* datum 24);
- dehumanising others by placing them 'beyond the moral pale' and effectively denying their capacity as moral subjects (*c/f* data 5,8);
- dissembling individuals into traits or collections of attributes, thus denying ascription of moral subjectivity (*c/f* data 2,3,11); and,
- disguising 'domain assumptions' as the advice of so-called experts who have been conferred the authority to pronounce judgement upon others actions (*c/f* datum 144).

Smart and Neale (1997: 8) identified that UK law (prior to the Divorce Reform Act, 1969) rested upon 'public morality', and demanded proof of innocence or guilt (as well as punishment of the guilty) in relation to divorce. Whilst the principle of 'public morality' was essentially discarded by the Divorce Reform Act (1973), the categorical framework of guilt or innocence was retained by means of a compromise with (conservative) opponents to this legislation: this particular version of 'public morality' was discursively referenced by several BBS contributors (*c/f* data 88, 91).

In contrast, Bauman (1993b: 130) characterised the 'aesthetic morality' of *communitas* as replacing the 'face' of the other with the relatively anonymous togetherness of the crowd. Whilst the basis of crowd 'morality' nullifies unified moral codes, for Bauman, this form of togetherness also implies the suspension of 'truly moral' considerations in favour of an instantaneous (but brittle and ephemeral) sociality. Bauman asserted that the 'ethic of togetherness' inherent in intimate relations i.e. 'being for and with the Other', is replaced by an ethic of collectivity i.e. 'we are all in this together'. The general sense of uncertainty that pervades the uncodified moral state ('what to do') is instead replaced by the principle 'just do as others do' which pervades collective action. Bauman (1993b: 143) suggested a variation of this collectivist principle aptly captured by the dynamics of vestigial crowds (such as the ephemeral, physically, and socially distant collectivity under consideration in the current study). Rather than being consumed by the mob mentality of collective actions, vestigial

[137] Bauman uses the term *adiaphoric* (borrowed from ecclesiastic discourse) in order to account for actions that can be deemed neither moral nor immoral: such judgements are thus best thought of as amoral.

crowds serve to diminish moral agency by allowing an opportunity for the dispersion of the probabilities of action (*c/f* data 125, 126).

Bauman concluded that regardless of whether 'unified moral codes', or 'aesthetic morality' are employed as a basis for rationalising action, both allow for the *ex-post facto* discursive (re)construction of previously intimate relations. In such accounts:

- objectivity replaces and predominates over affection;
- reason (the antithesis of passion in Bauman's terms) is deployed in order to rationalise actions;
- naivety and passion are edited out; and,
- the Other is 'dissolved' into the otherness of the many.

I suggest that many, if not all, of these elements appeared as recurrent features of the BBS accounts considered above.

Jayyusi (1991:235) avoided questions of whether particular actions could (or could not) be described as 'moral' actions. Rather, she asserted that 'the normative, logical, and practical .... come laminated in actual real worldly contexts of action and discourse.' Similar 'practical action' concerns recur in a number of established sociological discourses. The praxiological basis of Goffman's (1971a, 1971b) work has been noted above in respect of negotiating reputation. Similarly, Douglas (1971) emphasised the continuous and situated negotiation of creditable (moral) identity. Douglas (1971: 243) suggested that (regardless of the particular interaction setting) people making 'moral' claims to strangers (especially if these accounts are to be placed 'on the record') typically organise their claims in accord with the 'lowest common denominator morality' - an interaction strategy oriented towards offending the fewest possible people.

I conclude that although BBS contributors occasionally made discursive reference to (a) unified moral codes, or (b) [presumed] cultural conceptions of 'moral' conduct, these matters were deployed principally as a means of demonstrating moral proceduralism to co-participants. In demonstrating to others that moral considerations mattered, contributors were effectively able to reinforce prior reputational claims. In common with Jayyusi (1991:234-5) I therefore conclude that the accomplishment of 'moral status' is dependent upon the means by which such claims are made topically relevant to others, including:

- having one's version read or heard as authentic;
- the practical intelligibility of claims to co-participants;

- reflexive awareness of the practical procedures of agreement, disagreement etc.
- reflexive awareness of what can be claimed as a reasonable warrant for certain sorts of action; and,
- reflexive awareness of others' expectations to account for reported actions in 'moral' terms.

VERNACULAR ACCOUNTS, PROFESSIONAL COMMENTARIES, AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION.

It is possible to read the foregoing comparison as demonstrating a level of coincidence between professional and vernacular understandings of intimate relations/troubles. Further, with a little more conjecture, it might be suggested that such convergence ought to come as no surprise given the extent of wider cultural dissemination and awareness of the 'substance' of intimacy troubles. Consider the following comparison between themes that have emerged from the material analysed in this thesis, common formulaic expressions, and the titles of popular songs.[138]

[138] Van Lancker-Sidtis & Rallon (2004:208) defined formulaic expressions as containing lexical terms with non-literal or non-standard meanings, generally imbued with connotation. They suggested that formulaic expressions are 'familiar' to the extent that members of particular linguistic communities recognise their use as bearing this special status.

AREAS OF TOPICAL CONVERGENCE.	THEMES / ISSUES.	FORMULAIC EXPRESSION(S)	POPULAR SONG TITLE(S)
FAULTY PERSONS.	Badness; Madness; Fundamental flaws.	*'(s)he's a bad lot'; 'all men are bastards'; 'once a X, always an X'.*	*'Cold, cold heart'; 'How men are'; 'Don't go breaking my heart'.*
FAULTY RELATIONSHIPS.	Mistakes; Habituation; Developmental issues; Betrayals of trust.	*'what was I thinking of'?; 'marry in haste, repent at leisure'; 'love is blind'; 'we've run out of steam'; 'we've grown apart'.*	*'You can't hurry love'; 'After the love has gone'; 'Everybody hurts'; 'Tainted love'; 'Good lovin' gone bad'; 'You've lost that loving feeling'.*
BETTER OFFERS.	Love as a motive force / determining factor.	*'love at first sight'; 'true love'; 'love makes the world go round'.*	*'The power of love'; 'Falling in love again'; 'Addicted to love'; 'All I want is You'; 'I Can't help falling in love again'.*
OUTSIDE PRESSURES.	Difficult circumstances; Interference; Financial difficulties.	*'the course of true love never runs smooth'; 'when poverty comes in the door, love flies out of the window'.*	*'Love hurts'; 'Love is a battlefield'; 'Love is a long road';*
'YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE'.	Special persons; Changing contexts; Existential concerns.	*'you only live once'; 'life is too short'; 'marriages are made in heaven'.*	*'Love of my life'; 'All you need is love' 'Everybody needs somebody to love'.*
ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE.	Unpredictability ; Chance.	*'one cannot love and be wise'; 'lucky at cards, unlucky at love'; 'marriage is a lottery'.*	*'Careless whisper'; 'It's too late'; 'Please forgive me'.*
REPUTATION / MORAL CONCERNS.	Face; Reputation; Moral codes.	*'(s)he's no good'; '(s)he's a bad lot'; 'once a X, always an X'.*	*'(Gonna) do the right thing'; 'Keep the faith'; 'Good man, good woman';*
HEROIC IDENTITY.	Struggle; Risk.	*'through thick and thin' 'faint heart never won fair lady'; 'love will find a way'. 'all relationships have their difficulties'*	*'Against all odds'; 'Every rose has its thorn'; 'I will survive'.*

Figure 19: *Superficial coincidences in Vernacular Accounts, Professional Commentaries, and Cultural Representations.*

According to Barthes (1990), evidence of a pervasive cultural awareness of intimacy troubles ought to come as no surprise, given (a) their presence in popular literature, and (b) the penchant for consumption of these materials. As noted above, an ongoing debate exists about the relationship between the practice of situated intimate relations, and popular cultural representations of the same, in which three broad positions are possible: (a) that representation faithfully reports the practices of actual intimate relations; (b) the opposite - that intimate relations are merely particularisations of a wider cultural script; or (c) that practice and representation are reflexively related.

My intention in effecting the above comparison is neither to assert a form of lyrical realism,[139] nor to imbue formulaic expressions as bearing a level of meaning beyond the specific context of their deployment.[140] I wish to simply note the existence of a wider cultural awareness of intimacy troubles topics, and (at least in this topical sense) it might be concluded that professional commentaries about intimacy troubles offer little by means of revelation.

My conclusion to the forgoing comparison of professional and vernacular concerns is that, whilst these areas of discursive representation appear to coincide on matters made topically relevant, superficial surface similarities conceal deeper differences reducible to the differing contexts of production and the different discursive functions of these modes of accounting. Following Lynch (1993:311), I suggest that the business of professional sociology (in this case when directing attention towards intimate relations/troubles) engages in practices that are no less 'locally organised' than those of BBS contributors. In these terms, to the extent that professional commentaries represent one particular 'mode of representation', positions (a-c) above are misguided on grounds of the incommensurability of these discursive acts.

Hackneyed claims are frequently made in relation to the relative merits of technical and vernacular accounts, and are typically predicated upon variant forms of the following arguments:

- that professional commentaries are made more valid by virtue of their 'systematic' nature and seeming technicality; or,

[139] Peatman (1942-3) asserted that all successful popular songs about romantic love conformed to relatively restricted stock formulæ: the 'happy love song', the 'frustrated in love song', and the 'novelty song with sexual interest'. Frith (1988) suggested that lyrical realism involves the assumption of correspondence between song lyrics and the social or emotional conditions described or represented.

[140] Several authors have studied the use-in-context of formulaic expressions. Tannen (1989) asserted that these 'stock phrases' might be deployed in certain contexts as a means of establishing rapport and solidarity. Drew and Holt (1988) noted the effects created by employing formulaic expressions in the context of complaint or disagreement. More recently, Gandara (2004) asserted that these devices are frequently deployed as part of argumentation to the effect of creating illocutionary force, summarising a point of view, or in the case of proverbs, implying a 'cause and effect' relationship.

- that professional commentaries simply cloak commonly-understood experiences within scientific rhetoric.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis (and brief comparison with intimacy troubles themes in popular culture), I wish to conclude that both of these positions are misguided. As reported above, any thematic resemblances between (a) professional commentaries on these matters, (b) the vernacular material analysed in this thesis, and (c) popular cultural representations are superficial and conceal deeper differences. As such, I contend that all three discursive 'genres' might be considered as part of different 'language games' in the Wittgensteinian sense,[141] *and in these terms, attempts to settle the nature of the relationship between practices reported in the vernacular, and those reported in more mediated forms (whether literary or 'scientific') appear essentially misplaced: each genre might more correctly be represented as 'differently complex', related to different activities performed in the distinctive contexts in which these matters are reported.*

POSTSCRIPT.

Rather than 'ending the debate', the current study has sought (in it's own limited way) to shift the sociological focus away from the domains of theorising to those of social practices and reporting actions: to the extent that the 'mutually ratified' business of professional sociology is oriented towards the illumination (if not the explanation) of actual lives and events, future sociologies of intimate relations/troubles might do well to maintain this orientation. In attempting to execute such realignment, I am aware of limitations that have arisen as a consequence of both my theoretical orientation, and specific chosen method.

The analysis of BBS accounts and the writing of this work have at times been emotionally turbulent, reawakening past experiences and inevitably forcing me to self-examine in relation to my own previous break-ups. On occasions, I was reminded of the pervasiveness of these matters. Several work colleagues were divorced over period of time that I was conducting this work. Knowing the nature of my research, each took it upon themselves to 'offload' their experiences, and it was difficult not to listen to and understand these confessions as *in-vivo* enactments of 'flotation initiators / responders' accounts. In contrast, and perhaps as a consequence of direct personal involvement, the emotional turmoil around my brothers pending divorce was much more difficult to assimilate in these terms. In any case, in reporting these matters here, I do not pretend to understand how or why they might have

[141] Wittgenstein (1953:7) defined language-games as consisting of 'language and the actions into which it is woven'. He further asserted that 'the term language-game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity or form of life'.

subtly refocused my analytical gaze, but simply acknowledge that events outside of the confines of the BBS forum could have influenced the process of analysis.

The specific limitations of using instances of Internet communication as a form of data were reported above: particular difficulties included the issues of authenticity, participation / exclusion, and structure. Put bluntly, not only might extra-discursive events differ from their representation (in common with more 'traditional' research approaches), but also the individuals making such claims might not be who they claim to be. In terms of participation, BBS contributors (potentially) represented a highly self-selecting sample. Issues such as age and socio-economic circumstances especially, in all probability circumscribed the population of potential contributors. From that (already self selecting) population, for whatever reasons, an unknowable proportion was motivated to post details of their intimate lives for public consumption. The structure of Internet communication also differs from instances of face-to-face, or verbal interaction in some further respects.

As I reported above, Internet communication imposes particular (restrictive) conditions upon participants. Of particular significance was the fact that those who responded to contributors were highly unlikely to have access to the extra-discursive events described. Given this restriction, there was some evidence that responders instead appealed to a more abstract (meta-discursive) domain, consisting of similar happenings and commonly available cultural resources as a means of establishing rapport, which Turner (1972) identified as a characteristic of 'small talk'. Paradoxically, the substantive matters raised within the BBS forum were (if taken at face value), far from trivial.

Insights that have been gained from studies of face-to-face, or verbal interaction did not necessarily apply in the case of the BBS exchanges. In particular, participant responses appeared to be less predictable in terms of 'preference structures' (Pomerantz, 1984). In comparison to what is known about *troubles-talk* in face-to-face interaction, BBS contributors appeared less constrained by tensions of attending to 'business as usual' and 'attending to trouble'. In the absence of the temporal and paralinguistic cues associated with face-to-face interaction, Internet communicants resorted to a number of strategies in order to augment or inflect what they were 'saying' e.g. by using capitalisation, underlining, additional vowel sounds, and 'emoticons', which only served to reinforce the impression that the data analysed was limited in some important respects.

Throughout the current analysis, claims have been made in relation to *the appearance of design*, purpose, intention etc. This, however, is not to claim that BBS contributions arose as a consequences of either conscious awareness or rational agency. My intention was simply to

note the *effects* of certain utterances. In conventional ethnomethodological studies (and especially those of the CA genre), the issue of 'uptake' is helpful in determining whether others hear researchers' interpretations in the same way. The non-linearity of Internet communication, and the possibility of multiple and sometimes contrasting responses (see data 132, 133), made it difficult to conclude with complete conviction that this was unambiguously the case in all instances. Although the normative tendency towards consensus characteristic of all face-to-face interaction was also broadly evident in BBS exchanges, I have also reported some instances of strong disagreement, and perhaps this phenomenon arose as a consequence of the relative anonymity of this medium.

There were also some clear advantages in studying instances of 'intimacy troubles discourse' made during Internet communication, most important of which was that the content of accounts was relatively unmediated i.e. produced in the vernacular, clearly intended for vernacular consumption, and as such they were ideally suited to the purposes of the study. This was even the case with the 'friendly advice' style adopted by the site moderator, which bore little resemblance to 'therapeutic' modes of communication.

In terms of methodological orientation, several criticisms have been levied against ethnomethodologically inspired research. Coser (1975) asserted that ethnomethodology was so preoccupied by method as to lose sight of substantive historical forces that have constituted societies. Furthermore, he claimed that the entire enterprise was self-evidently trivial, merely trading upon descriptions of what ought to be 'common-sense'. To the extent that these charges might be levied against the current study, I can only respond that: (a) a deliberately 'underbuilt' methodological approach has been maintained throughout; and (b) to the extent that my findings make 'sense', then it seems far less convincing that such insights are 'common', especially not, it seems, to established sociologies of intimate relations/troubles. Of course, it is possible to understand Coser's criticisms as themselves being reflexively constituted in relation to a particular community of meaning, in this case one sharing the view that an objective assay of 'society' and history might be accomplished. However, his call to declare ethnomethodology bankrupt did contain the germ of a more serious methodological charge concerning *issues of scale* i.e. that ethnomethodology takes no account of broader social, economic or historical contexts (Lynch, 1993: 28). As Lynch asserted 'context is a word that does heavy duty in sociological discourse', and definition rests upon one's favoured view of (typically) class, gender or ethnicity as being of particular relevance. Whilst it is true that the current study reveals little or nothing about macro-sociological contexts, consideration of the immediate context of the BBS forum has been laminated into methods and analysis. Lynch suggested that 'context' informs the very basis of ethnomethodological

inquiry, in which case criticisms made from contrasting theoretical perspectives rest upon disputes about what 'context' means.

Questions concerning the uses of sociological research and theory are less easy to counter: feminists for instance approach both writing and researching as a means of emancipation. Ethnomethodologically inspired works such as this thesis are clearly not aligned (perhaps more correctly, not aligned clearly) to such aims, being self-avowedly dismissive of pre-configurations of status and power. Most people who have experience of heterosexual intimacy troubles (at whatever level) probably have views in relation to gender politics. BBS participants, as well as myself, are inescapably participants in gender politics. However, how these wider political matters have influenced the construction of the above accounts is not clear, and is to a certain extent unknowable in terms of the material analysed within this thesis. Whilst the findings of this study were not intended to serve *a priori* political commitments, this is not the same as denying the reality of gender politics, nor to dispute the legitimacy of those who write or research towards gender political ends.

Atkinson (1988) suggested that studies like the present analysis lack any particular means by which to assert referential meaning, and instead are focussed upon (rather dry) explications of sequential order. To the extent that this criticism applies here, I leave it to readers to cast judgement about the 'dryness' of the sequential regularities outlined above. To reiterate what I have asserted throughout this work, I have deliberately avoided any conclusions in relation to extra-discursive events. Linking utterances to subjective states unavoidably involves an *a priori* theoretical reliance upon 'a familiar roster of ghostly entities' (Lynch 1993: 35) such as motive, meaning, and consciousness, and I have purposely avoided any pre-configured view of these matters on the basis that they would have, in any case, have been impossible to impute from the corpus of data studied. Instead, I have attempted to demonstrate the foundational role of discursive actions in accomplishing particular versions of 'reality'. This aim is clearly at odds with the approaches of established *philotopics*: however, rather than become involved in a pantomime exchange of assertion and counter assertion, my intent has been towards productive synthesis. In common with Lynch (1993:38), I view the current study as being parasitic upon established *philotopics*, but this is not to imply a detrimental effect upon the host: rather, my hope is that (in their own limited way) these findings may influence the re-orientation of professional commentaries about intimate relations/troubles back towards mundane practical actions such as 'lay' accounting for such matters.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Abrams, P. (1982) *Historical Sociology.* Bath: Open Books.

Alberoni, F. (1983) *Falling in Love.* New York: Random House.

Alexander, J.C. (1996) 'Critical Reflections on "Reflexive Modernization"', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 13(4): 133 -138.

Allan, G. (1989). *Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective.* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Allan, G. (2001) 'Personal Relationships in late Modernity', *Personal Relationships*, 8 (4): 325-339.

Aristotle (1975) *Ethics. 16th Edition.* [TRANS.] J.A.K. Thomson. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Atkinson, J.M. (1984) 'Public speaking and audience responses: some techniques for inviting applause'. IN J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage [EDS.] *Structures of Social Interaction: studies in conversation analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Atkinson, P. (1988) 'Ethnomethodology: a critical review'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14: 441-465.

Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality.* London: Routledge.

Atkinson, P. (1992) *Understanding Ethnographic Texts.* London: Sage.

Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D. (1997) 'Kundera's Immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (3): 304-25.

Atkinson, T. (1974) *Amazon Odyssey.* New York: Link Books.

Bailey, J. (2000) 'Some Meanings of 'the private' in Sociological Thought'. *Sociology,* 34, (3): 381-401.

Bahktin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogical Imagination.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Barthes, R. (1990) [1977] *A Lovers Discourse: Fragments.* [TRANS.] R. Howard. London: Penguin.

Bataille, G. (1986) *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* [TRANS.] M. Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity, and Intellectuals.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (1988) 'Is There a Post-modern Sociology?' *Theory, Culture, and Society,* 5(2-3): 217-238.

Baumann, Z. (1993a) 'Review Article: The transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies'. *The Sociological Review,* 41 (4): 363-368.

Bauman, Z. (1993b) *Postmodern Ethics.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Bauman, Z. (1995) 'Forms of Togetherness' IN Z.Bauman. *Life in fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society.* Cambridge. Polity.

Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds.* Cambridge: Polity.

Bebel, A. (1971) [1883] *Women Under Socialism* [TRANS.] D. de Leon. New York: Schocken.

Beck, U (1992) *Risk society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage.

Beck, U. (1996) 'Risk Society and the Provident State', IN S. Lash, B. Szerszynski and B. Wynne [EDS.] *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology.* London: Sage.

Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995) *The Normal Chaos of Love*, [TRANS.] M. Ritter and J. Wiebel. London: Polity Press.

Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1976) 'Husbands and Wives: The dynamics of the deferential dialectic' In D.L. Baker and S. Allen [EDS.] *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage.* New York: Longman.

Berger, P. and Kellner, H. (1964) 'Marriage and the construction of reality'. *Diogenes,* 46 (1): 1-25.

Bergson, H. (1960) [1910] *Time and Free Will.* New York: Harper and Row.

Berk, B. (1977) 'Face saving at a singles dance'. *Social Problems*, 24 (5): 530-44.

Bertilsson, M. (1986) 'Love's Labour Lost? A Sociological View', *Theory, Culture & Society* 3(2): 19-35.

Blaikie, N. (1993) *Approaches to Social Enquiry.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blum, L. (1980) *Friendship, Altruism and Morality.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Blau, P. (1964) *Power and Exchange in Social Life.* New York: Wiley.

Bok, S. (1982) *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation.* New York: Pantheon.

Bologh, R.W. (1990) *Love Or Greatness: Max Weber and masculine thinking – A feminist inquiry.* London: Unwin Hyman.

Bordo, S. (1997) *Gender / body / knowledge : feminist reconstructions of being and knowing .* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Boshier, R. (1990) 'Socio-psychological factors in electronic networking'. *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 9 (1): 49-64.

Boskovik, A. (2000) 'Review: Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy', *Sociological Research Online*, 5 (2). < http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/2/luhmann.html>

Boyne, R. (1997) 'Power-Knowledge and Social Theory: The Systematic Misrepresentation of contemporary French Social Theory in the Work of Anthony Giddens'. IN C.G.A. Bryant and D. Jary [EDS.] *Anthony Giddens; Critical Assessments Vol. 1.* London: Routledge.

Bradley, H. (1992) 'Changing Social Divisions: Gender, Class, and Race'. IN R. Bocock and K. Thompson [EDS.] *Social and Cultural Forms of Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brannen, J. (1988) 'The study of sensitive subjects', *Sociological Review*, 36: 552-563.

British Sociological Association (2002), *Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association.* Durham: BSA.

Bruner, J. (1987) 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research* 54(1): 11-32.

Burstyn, J.N. (1980) *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood.* London: Croom Helm.

Button G. (1991), 'Introduction: Ethnomethodology and the foundational respecification of the human sciences'. IN Button G. [ED.] *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Cassell, P. (1993) 'Introduction' IN P. Cassell [ED.] *The Giddens Reader.* Stanford. Stanford University Press.

Chamberlayne, P. (1998) *'Cultural analysis of the informal sphere'.* Unpublished paper presented to the International Sociological Association Conference. Monteal. Cited in Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Edwards, R. (2001) 'Illuminating meanings of 'the private' in Sociological thought: A response to Joe Bailey', *Sociology*, 3 (3): 765-777.

Chen, P. and Hinton, S.M. (1999) 'Real time interviewing using the World Wide Web'. *Sociological Research On-line,* 4 (3). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/3/chen.html>

Christian-Smith, L. (1990) *Becoming a Woman Through Romance.* London: Routledge.

Coomber, R. (1997) 'Using the Internet for survey research' *Sociological Research Online*, 2 (2). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/2/2.html>

Coser L.A. (I958) 'Georg Simmel's Style of Work: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Sociologist', *American Journal of Sociology*, 63 (6): 635 -641.

Coser, L.A. (1975) 'ASA presidential address: two methods in search of substance', *American Sociological Review*, 40: 691-700.

Coser, L.A. (1977a) 'Georg Simmel's Neglected Contributions to the Sociology of Women', *Signs*, 2 (4): 869-876.

Coser, L. A. (1977b) *Masters of sociological thought: Ideas in historical and social context. 2nd. Edition.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Coulter, J. (1989) *Mind in Action.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Coupland, J. (1996) 'Dating Advertisements; discourses of the comodified self', *Discourse and Society*, 7(2): 187-207.

Craib, I. (1984) *Modern Social Theory. From Parsons to Habermas.* Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books.

Craib, I. (1994) *The Importance of Disappointment.* London: Routledge.

Craib, I. (1998) *Experiencing identity.* London: Sage.

Darhendorf, R. (1964) 'Out of Utopia: Towards a Reconstruction of Sociological Analysis.' IN L. Coser and B. Rosenberg [EDS.] *Sociological Theory.* New York: Collier Macmillan.

Davis, M.S. (1973a) 'Georg Simmel and the Aesthetics of Social Reality', *Social Forces*, 51: 320-29.

Davis, M.S. (1973b) *Intimate Relations.* New York: Free Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1972) [1949] *The Second Sex.* [TRANS.] H.M. Parshley. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

de Rougemont, D. (1966) *Love in the Western World,* [TRANS.] M. Beljooh. Princetown: Princetown University Press.

de Saussure, F. (1960) [1908] *Course in General Linguistics.*[TRANS.] W. Baskin. [ED.] C. Bally, A. Sèchehaye, and A. Reidlinger. London: P. Owen.

Delphy, C. and Leonard, D. (1992) *Familiar Exploitation: A new analysis of marriage in contemporary Western societies.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Denzin, N.K. (1989) *Interpretive Biography. Qualitative Research Methods* series #17. London: Sage.

Derrida, J. (1978) *Writing and difference* [TRANS.] A. Bass. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Derrida, J. (1981) *Positions.* [TRANS.] A. Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dicks, B. and Mason, B. (1998) 'Hypermedia and ethnography: reflections on the construction of a research approach', *Sociological Research Online*, 3 (3). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/3.html>

Douglas, J. (1971) *American Social Order.* New York: Free Press.

Drew, P. and Holt, E (1988) 'Complainable Matters: the use of idiomatic expressions in making complaints', *Social Problems*, 35: 398-417.

Duck, S.W. (1999) *Relating to Others. 2nd. Edition.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dunne, J. (1995) 'Beyond sovereignty and deconstruction: the storied self', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 21: 137-157.

Dunscombe, J. and Marsden, D. (1993) 'Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and "Emotion Work"', *Sociology*, 27 (2): 221-241.

Durkheim, E. (1979) 'Review of Georg Simmels *Philosophie des Geldes*', *Social Research,* 46(2): 321-328.

Durkheim, E. (1984) [1893] *The Division of Labour in Society.* [TRANS.] W.D. Halls. London: Macmillan.

Durkheim, E. (1985) *Readings from Emile Durkheim.* [ED.] K. Thompson. London: Routledge.

Edwards, D. (1991) 'Categories Are for talking. On the cognitive and discursive bases of categorization', *Theory and Psychology*, 1 (4): 515-542.

Edwards, D. and Potter, J. (1992) *Discursive Psychology.* London: Sage.

Ehrenreich, B. (1983) *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment.* London: Pluto.

Eiser, J.R. (1978), 'Interpersonal Attributions' IN H. Tajfel and C Fraser [EDS.] *Introducing Social Psychology.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Ekeh, P. P. (1974) *Social Exchange Theory: The two traditions.* London: Heinemann.

Elias, N. (1994) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations.* [TRANS.] E. Jephcott. Oxford: Blackwell.

Elliot, A. (2002) 'Beck's Sociology of Risk: A Critical Assessment', *Sociology*, 36(2): 293-315.

Engels, F. (1968) [1884] *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State.* Moscow: Progress Books.

Erasmus (1522), 'De civilitate morum puerilium' Cited in Elias, N. (1994) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations.* [TRANS.] E. Jephcott. Oxford: Blackwell.

Evans, M. (1998), 'Falling in Love with Love is Falling for Make Believe: Ideologies of Romance in Post-Enlightenment Culture', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 15(3-4): 265-275.

Fahey, T. (1995) 'Privacy and the Family: Conceptual and Empirical reflections', *Sociology,* 29 (4): 687-702.

Featherstone, M. (1992) 'The Heroic life and Everyday Life', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 9 (1): 159-182.

Featherstone, M. (1998) 'Love and Eroticism: An Introduction',. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15(3-4): 1-18.

Featherstone, M. and Burrows, R. [EDS.] (1995) *Cyberspace / Cyberbodies / Cyberpunk: Cultures of technological Embodiment.* London: Sage.

Finch, J. (1989) *Family Obligations and Social Change.* Cambridge: Polity.

Fletcher, R. (1966) *The Family and Marriage in Britain.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1971) 'Orders of Discourse', *Social Science Information*, 10: 7-30.

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* London: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1981) *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1.* Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Foucault, M.(1986) 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', IN P. Rabinow [ED.] *The Foucault Reader.* Harmodsworth: Penguin.

Frisby D.P. (1984) 'Georg Simmel and Social Psychology', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 20: 107-127.

Frisby, D. (1992) *Sociological Impressionism: A re-assessment of Georg Simmel's social theory*. 2nd. Edition. London: Routledge.

Frith, S. (1988) *Music for Pleasure*. Cambridge: Polity.

Fuss, D. (1989) *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference.* London: Routledge.

Gandara, L. (2004) ''They that sow the wind...': proverbs and sayings in argumentation', *Discourse and Society*, 15 (2-3): 345-359.

Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Garfinkel, H. (1991) 'Respecification: evidence for locally produced, naturally accountable phenomena of order, logic, reason, meaning, method etc. in and as of the essential haeccity of immortal ordinary society, (I) – an announcement of studies'. IN Button G. [ED.] *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gerth, H.H. and Wright Mills, C. (1948) 'Introduction' IN Weber, M. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* [ED. AND TRANS.] H.H. Gerth and C Wright Mills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Giddens, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory.* London: MacMillan.

Giddens, A. (1984) *The constitution of Society: outline of the theory of structuration.* Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. (1985) *A contemporary critique of historical materialism, Vol. 2: The nation state and violence*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. (1987) *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The consequences of modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy.* Cambridge: Polity.

Gilbert, G.N. and Mulkay, M. (1984) *Opening Pandora's Box: A sociological analysis of scientists' discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Glasser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L (1965) *Awareness of Dying.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Goffman, E. (1971a) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Goffman, E. (1971b) *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order.* London: Allen Lane.

Goffman, E. (1971c) *Interaction Ritual. Essays on face-to-face behaviour.* Harmondsworth: Allen Lane the Penguin Press.

Goode, J.E. (1956) *After Divorce*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Preess.

Goode, W.J. (1959) 'The Theoretical Importance of Love', *American Sociological Review,* 24: 38 - 47.

Goode, W.J. (1963) *World Revolution and Family Patterns.* London: Collier MacMillan.

Goodwin, C. (1994) 'Professional Vision', *American Anthropologist,* 96 (4): 606-633.

Gorer, G. (1971) *Sex and Marriage in England Today.* London: Nelson.

Gouldner, A. (1960) 'The Norm of Reciprocity', *American Sociological Review,* 25 (1): 161-168.

Gray, J. (1993) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: a practical guide for improving couple relationships.* London: Thorson.

Gregory, C. A. (1982) *Gifts and Commodities.* London: Academic Press.

Grünbaum, A. (1986) 'Précis of The foundations of psychoanalysis: A philosophical critique', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences,* 9: 217-284.

Gubrium, J. E. and Holstein, J. A. (1995) Biographical work and new ethnography. IN R.E. Josselson and A. Lieblich [EDS.], *Interpreting experience: The narrative study of lives.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hacking, I (1990) 'The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse', *Critical Inquiry,* 17 (Winter), 253-288.

Hakim, C. (1996) *Key Issues in Womens Work: Female Heterogeneity and the Polarisation of Womens Employment.* London: Athlone Press.

Hall, S. (1992) 'Introduction' IN S Hall and B. Gieben [EDS.] *Formations of Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity

Hammersley, M. (1990) *Reading Ethnographic Research.* London: Longman.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice.* London: Tavistock.

Harding, S. (1987) 'Conclusion: Epistemological Questions' IN S Harding [ED.] *Feminism and Methodology.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Harding, S. (1990) 'Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques.' IN L.J. Nicholson [ED.] *Feminism/postmodernism.* London: Routledge.

Harding, S. and Hintikka, M.B. (1983) 'Introduction'. IN S. Harding and M.B. Hintikka [EDS.] *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy.* Dordrecht: Reidel.

Hare, R.M. (1978) *The Language of Morals.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harrington, C.L. and Bielby, D.D. (1995) 'Where did you hear that? Technology and the Social Organisation of Gossip', *The Sociological Quarterly,* 36(3): 607-628.

Hazleden, R. (2003) 'Love Yourself: The relationship of the self with itself in popular self-help texts', *Journal of Sociology,* 39 (4): 413-428.

Hegel, G.W.F. (1931) [1807] *The phenomenology of Mind.. 2nd. Edition.* [TRANS.] J.B. Baillie. London: Allen & Unwin.

Hegel, G. (1948) *Early Theological Writings.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heidegger, M. (1979) 'The Age of the Worldview'. [TRANS.] M. Greene. IN V. Spanos [ED.] *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature: toward a post-modern literary hermeneutics.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heider, F. (1958) *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations.* New York: Wiley.

Held, D. (1986) *Models of Democracy.* Cambridge: Polity.

Held, D. (1992) 'The Development of the Modern State' IN S. Hall and B. Gieben [EDS.] *Formations of Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity.

Herrman, C. (1974) 'Le Sexe du Langage', *La Quinzaine Littéaire*, 31: 25-27.

Hester, S.K. and Eglin, P. (1997) 'Introduction' IN S.K Hester and P. Eglin [EDS.] *Culture in Action: Studies in Membership Categorisation Analysis.* Washington D.C: University of America Press.

Hine, C. (2000) *Virtual Ethnography.* London: Sage.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (1997) 'The Risk Society in an Age of Anxiety: Situating Fear of Crime', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48(2): 254–66.

Homans, G. (1958), 'Social Behavior as Exchange', *American Journal of Sociology*, 62: 597-606.

Ignatieff, M. (1988) 'Love's Progress', *Time Literary Supplement,* April: 15-21.

Illouz, E. (1998) 'The Lost Innocence of Love. Romance as a Postmodern Condition', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15(3-4): 161-186.

Jackson, S. (1993a) 'Even Sociologists Fall in Love – An Exploration in the Sociology of Emotions', *Sociology*, 27(2): 201-220.

Jackson, S. (1993b), 'Love and Romance as objects of Feminist Knowledge.' IN M. Kennedy, C. Lubelska, and V Walsh [EDS.] *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives.* London: Taylor and Francis.

Jagger, E. (2001) 'Marketing Molly and Melville: Dating in a Postmodern, Consumer Society', *Sociology*, 35(1): 39-57.

Jamieson, L. (1998) *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jamieson, L. (1999) 'Intimacy Transformed? A Critical Look at the 'Pure Relationship'', *Sociology*, 33(3): 477- 494.

Jayyusi, L. (1991) 'Values and moral judgement: communicative praxis as moral order'. IN G. Button [ED.] *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jefferson, G. (1972) 'Side Sequences.' IN D. Sudnow [ED.] *Studies in Social Interaction.* New York: Free Press.

Jefferson, G. (1988) 'On the sequential Organisation of Troubles talk in Ordinary Conversation', *Social Problems*, 35(4): 418-441.

Kelley, H.H. (1967) 'Attribution theory in social psychology'. IN D. Levine [ED.] *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 15: 192-238.

Kellner, D. (1998) 'Zygmunt Bauman's Postmodern Turn', *Theory, Culture, and Society.* 15(1): 73-86.

Kelly, M. (1994) 'Coping with chronic illness: a sociological perspective'. Inaugural lecture. University of Greenwich. Cited in Bury, M. (2001), 'Illness Narratives: Fact of Fiction?', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 23(3): 263-285.

Kureishi, H. (1998) *Intimacy.* London: Faber and Faber.

Labov, W. and Fanshel, D. (1977) *Therapeutic Discourse. Psychotherapy as Conversation.* New York: Academic Press.

La Gaipa, J.J. (1982) 'Rules and rituals in disengaging from relationships'. IN S.W. Duck [ED.] *Personal Relationships 4: Dissolving Personal Relationships.* London: Academic Press.

Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space.* London: Sage.

Lash , S. and Wynne, B. (1992) 'Introduction' IN Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage.

Laing, R.D. (1959) *The Divided Self.* London: Tavistock.

Langford, W. (1999) *Revolutions of the Heart. Gender, Power, and the Delusions of Love.* London: Routledge.

Laslett, P. (1965) *The World We Have Lost.* London: Methuen.

Lee R.M. (1993) *Doing research on sensitive topics.* London: Sage.

LeFort, C. (1986) *The political forms of modern society: bureaucracy, democracy, totalitarianism.* [ED.] J.B. Thompson. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969) *The Elementary Structures of Kinship : (Les structures élémentaires de la parenté)* [TRANS. / ED.] J.H. Bell, J.R. von Sturmer, and R. Needham. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode

Lévinas, E. (1987), 'No Identity' IN *Collected Philosophical papers* [TRANS.] A. Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Lindholm, C. (1998) 'Love and Structure', *Theory, Culture & Society*,15 (3-4): 243-263.

Linton, R. (1936) *The Study of Man.* New York: Appleton-Century.

Lukács, G. (1971) *History and Class Consciousness* [TRANS.] R. Livingstone. Boston: MIT Press.

Luhmann, N. (1986) *Love as Passion: the Codification of Intimacy.* [TRANS.] J. Gaines and D.L. Jones. Cambridge : Polity.

Lynch, M. (1993) *Scientific practice and ordinary action. Ethnomethodology and social studies of science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lynch, M. (2000) 'Against Reflexivity as an Academic Virtue and Source of Privileged Knowledge', *Theory, Culture & Society* , 17(3): 26–54.

McAndrew, C. and Edgerton, R.B. (1969) *Drunken Comportment. A Social explanation.* London: Nelson.

McCarthy, T. (1990) 'Private irony and public decency: Richard Rorty's new pragmatism', *Critical Inquiry,* 16: 355-79.

McRobbie, A. (1981) 'Just Like a *Jackie* Story.' IN A. McRobbie and T. McCabe [EDS.] *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mansfield, P. and Collard, J. (1988) *The Beginning of the Rest of Your Life: A Portrait of Newly-Wed Marriage.* London: Macmillan.

Mauss, M. (2002) [1925] *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies.* London: Routledge.

May, T. (1998) 'Postmodernity and It's discontents', *Theory, Culture, and Society.* 15(1): 117-130.

Mead, G.H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mill, J.S. (2002) [1869] 'On the Subjection of Women' IN J.S. Mill. *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill.* New York: Random House.

Mills, C. W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Moore, W.E. (1978) 'Functionalism' IN T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet [EDS.] *A History of Sociological Analysis.* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Morgan, D.H.J. (1985) *The Family, Politics, and Social Theory.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Morgan, D.H.J. (1991) 'Ideologies of Marriage and Family Life' IN Clark D. [ED.] *Marriage, Domestic Life, and Social Change: Writings for Jaqueline Burgoyne (1944 – 1988).* London: Routledge.

Morgan, D.H.J. (1996) *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies.* Cambridge: Polity.

Morgan, P. (1995) *Farewell to the Family? Public Policy and Family Breakdown in Britain and the USA. Institute of Economic Affairs, Choice in Welfare Series No. 21.* London: IEA.

Moriarty, M. (1991) *Roland Barthes.* Cambridge: Polity.

Murray, D.E. (1995) *Knowledge Machines: Language and Information in a technological Society.* London. Longman.

New York Radical Feminists (1971) '1969 – Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for New York Radical Feminists.' IN J. Hole and E. Levine [EDS.] *Rebirth of Feminism.* New York: Quadrangle / New York Times Book Company. Cited in Langford, W. (1999) *Revolutions of the Heart. Gender, Power, and the Delusions of Love.* London: Routledge.

Nguyen, D.T. and Alexander, J. (1996) 'The coming of cyberspace and the end of polity.' IN R. Shields [ED.] *Cultures of the Internet: Virtual space, Real Histories, Living Bodies.* London: Sage.

Novak, M.W. (1976) 'An Introduction to Reading Georg Simmel's Sociology', *Sociological Inquiry*, 46 (1): 31-39.

Nussbaum, M.C. (2001) *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy. 2nd. Edition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oakes, G. (1984) 'Introduction' IN G. Simmel. *On Women, Sexuality and Love.* [TRANS. / ED.] G. Oakes. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Oakes ,G. [ED.] (1984) *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

O'Connor, H and Madge, C. (2001) 'Cyber-mothers: Online synchronous interviewing using conferencing software', *Sociological Research Online.* 5, (4). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4/o'connor.html>

Office for National Statistics (2004), *Dataset IIA6: 'Adults who have accessed the Internet by purpose of Internet use (personal use): Individual Internet access.* <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase.asp>. Accessed 22nd. January 2004.

Outhwaite, W. (1975) *Understanding Social Life: The method called verstehen.* London: Allen Lane.

Outhwaite, W. (1983) *Concept Formation in Social Science.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Parsons, T. (1951) *The Social System.* New York: Free Press.

Parsons T. (1959) 'The Social Structure of the Family' IN R. Anshen [ED.] *The Family: its Function and Destiny.* New York: Harper and Row.

Paz, O. (1996) *The Double Flame: Essays on Love and Eroticism.* London: Haverill.

Pearce, L. and Stacey, J. [EDS.] (1995) *Romance Revisited.* London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Peatman, J.G. (1942-3) 'Radio and Popular Music' IN P.F. Lazersfeld and F. Stanton. [EDS.] *Radio Research.* New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.

Person, E.S. (1990) *Love and Fateful Encounters: The Power of Romantic Passion.* London: Bloomsbury.

Petersen, A. (1996) 'Risk and the Regulated Self', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, 32*(1): 44–57.

Plant, S. (1997) *Zeros and Ones Digital Women and the New Technoculture.* London: Fourth Estate.

Plato (1951) *The Symposium* [TRANS.] W. Hamilton. London: Penguin Books.

Plummer, K. (1995) *Telling sexual stories: power, change, and social worlds.* London: Routledge.

Pomerantz A. (1984) 'Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred / dispreferred turn shapes.' IN J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage [EDS.] *Structures of Social Interaction: studies in conversation analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Popper, K.R. (1961) *The Poverty of Historicism.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Popper, K. (1986) 'Predicting overt behaviour versus predicting hidden states', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 9: 254-255.

Potter, J. (1997) 'Discourse analysis as a way analysing naturally occurring talk.' IN D. Silverman [ED.] *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method, and Practice.* London: Sage.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology.* London: Sage.

Potter, J. Wetherell, M. Gill, R. and Edwards, D. (1990) 'Discourse: noun, verb or social practice?', *Philosophical Psychology*, 3 (2): 205-217.

Potter, J. Edwards, D. and Wetherell, M. (1993) 'A Model of Discourse in Action', *American Behavioral Scientist,* 36 (3): 383-401.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1995) 'Natural Order: Why Social Psychologists Should Study (a Constructed version of) natural Language, and Why They Have Not Done So', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 14 (1-2): 216-222.

Poster, M. (1995) 'Postmodern virtualities.' IN M. Featherstone and R. Burrows [EDS.] *Cyberspace / Cyberbodies / Cyberpunk: Cultures of technological Embodiment.* London: Sage.

Psathas, G. (1999) 'Studying the Organisation in Action: membership Categorisation and Interaction Analysis', *Human Studies,* 22 (1): 139-162.

Ray L [ED.] (1991) *Formal Sociology.* Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Ribbens McCarthy J. and Edwards, R. (1999) *'Gendered lives, Gendered Concepts? :The significance of children for theorising 'the public' and 'private'.'* Unpublished paper presented to the British Sociological Association annual conference. Glasgow.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Edwards, R. (2001) 'Illuminating meanings of 'the private' in Sociological thought: A response to Joe Bailey', *Sociology*, 3 (3): 765-777.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. Edwards, R.. and Gillies, V. (2000) 'Moral Tales of the Child and the Adult: Narratives of Contemporary Family Lives under Changing Circumstances', *Sociology,* 34 (4): 785–803.

Richardson, D. (1998) 'Sexuality and Citizenship', *Sociology*, 32 (1): 833-100.

Roseneil, S. (2000) *Why Should We Care About Friends? Some thoughts about the ethics and practice of friendship.* Workshop Paper 22. ESRC Research Group on the Care, Values, and Future of Welfare. University of Leeds.

Russell, B. (1984) *A History of Western Philosophy.* London: Unwin Paperbacks.

Rylance, R. (1994) *Roland Barthes.* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Sacks, H. (1972) 'An Initial investigation of the usability of conversational data for doing sociology.' IN D. Sudnow [ED.] *Studies in Social Interaction.* New York: Free Press.

Sacks, H. (1974) 'On the analyzability of stories by children.' IN R. Turner [ED.] *Ethnomethodology*. Harmondworth: Penguin.

Samuel, R. (1980) 'History Workshop Methods', *History Workshop*, 9: 168-177.

Sartre, J-P. (1958) *Being and Nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology.* [TRANS.] H.E. Barnes. London: Methuen.

Sartre, J-P. (1968) *Search for a Method.* London: Vintage Books.

Schaff, L.A. (1988) 'Weber, Simmel, and the Sociology of Culture', *Sociological Review*, 36(2): 1-30.

Schegloff, E.A. (1968) 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings', *American Anthropologist*, 70: 1075-1095.

Schegloff, E. A. (1984) 'On some gestures' relation to talk.' IN J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage [EDS.] *Structures of Social Interaction: studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schutz, A. (1972) *The phenomenology of the social world.* London: Heinemann Educational.

Seale, C. (1996) 'Heroic Death', *Sociology*, 29 (4): 597-613.

Seale, C. (2001) 'Sporting cancer: struggle language in news reports of people with cancer', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 23(3): 308-329.

Selwyn, N. and Robson, K. (1998) 'Using e-mail as a research tool', *Social Research Update*, 21.

Sharrock, W. (1989) 'Ethnomethodology. What's the Score?', *The British Journal of Sociology,* 40 (4): 657-677.

Sharrock W.W. and Anderson R.J. (1984) 'The Wittgenstein connection', *Human Studies*, 7: 375-386.

Shilling, C. (1997) 'The Body and Difference.' IN K. Woodward [ED.] *Identity and Difference.* London: Sage.

Shorter, E. (1976) *The Making of the Modern Family*. London: Collins.

Silverman, D. (1985) *Qualitative Methodology & Sociology.* Aldershot: Gower.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research. A practical handbook.* London: Sage.

Simmel, G. (1908) 'Soziologie, Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung' IN G. Simmel, (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* [TRANS./ ED.] K.H. Wolff. New York: Free Press.

Simmel,G. (1911) 'Weibliche Kultur.' IN G. Simmel (1984) *On Women, Sexuality and Love.* [TRANS. / ED.] G. Oakes. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Simmel, G. (1917) 'Grundfragen der Soziologie (Individuum und Gesellschaft)' IN G. Simmel, (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* [TRANS./ ED.] K.H. Wolff. New York: Free Press.

Simmel, G. (1923a) 'Die Koketterie' IN G. Simmel (1984) *On Women, Sexuality and Love.* [TRANS. / ED.] G. Oakes. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Simmel, G. (1923b) 'Über die Liebe (Fragment)' IN G. Simmel (1984) *On Women, Sexuality and Love.* [TRANS. / ED.] G. Oakes. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Simmel, G. (1923c) 'Das Relative und das Absolute im Geschlechterproblem' IN G. Simmel (1984) *On Women, Sexuality and Love.* [TRANS. / ED.] G. Oakes. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Simpson, B. (1998) *Changing families: An ethnographic approach to divorce and separation.* Oxford: Berg.

Simpson, Joe. (2004) 'Desert Island Discs.' *BBC Radio 4.* Broadcast on 24.09.04: 09:00-09:45.

Sinclair, J.M. and Coulthard, R.M. (1975) *Towards an Analysis of discourse: the English used by teachers and pupils.* London: Oxford University Press.

Singer, I. (1984a) *The Nature of Love, Vol. 1: Plato to Luther.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Singer, I (1984b) *The Nature of Love, Vol.2: Courtly and Romantic Love.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Singer, I (1988) *The Nature of Love, Vol.3: The Modern World.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Slaughter M.M. (1985), 'Literacy and Society', *International Journal of Language*, 56 (2): 113-39.

Smart, C. and Neale, B. (1997) 'Good Enough Morality? Divorce and postmodernity', *Critical Social Policy*, 17(4): 3-29.

Smith, D.E. (1978) ''K is Mentally Ill'. The anatomy of a factual account', *Sociology,* 12(1): 23-53.

Smith, D. (1998) 'Review Article: Anthony Giddens and the Liberal Tradition', *British Journal of Sociology,* 49 (4): 661-669.

Solomon, R. (1981) *Love, Emotion, Myth and Metaphor.* Garden City: Anchor Books.

Spender, D. (1995), *Nattering on the net: Women, Power and Cyberspace.* Melbourne. Spinifex Press.

Stone, L. (1990) *Road to Divorce: England, 1530-1987.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stone, L. (1997) *Broken lives: separation and divorce in England 1660-1857. 2nd Edition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strauss, A. (1977) *Mirrors and masks: The Search for Identity.* London: Martin Robertson.

Tannen, D. (1989) *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Texier, C. (1998) *Breakup: The end of a love story.* London: Review.

Thompson, E.P. (1965) 'Peculiarities of the English' IN R. Miliband and J. Saville [EDS.] *The Socialist Register.* London: Merlin Press.

Thompson E.P. (1980) *The Making of the English Working Class.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Thorne, B. (1993) *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Timmermans, S. (1994) 'Dying of awareness: The theory of awareness contexts re-visited', *Sociology of Health and Illness,* 16(3): 322-337.

Titon J.T. (1998) cited in Dicks, B. and Mason, B. (1998) 'Hypermedia and ethnography: reflections on the construction of a research approach', *Sociological Research Online*, 3 (3). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/3.html>

Todorov, T. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical principle.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Tönnies, F (1955) [1887] *Community and association.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Turner, B.S. (1994) *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism.* London: Routledge.

Turner R. (1972) 'Some Formal Properties of Therapy Talk.' IN Sudnow D [ED.] *Studies in Social Interaction.* New York: Free Press.

Turner, V.W. (1969) *The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure.* London: Routledge & Paul.

Van Dijk T.A. and Kintch, W. (1983) *Strategies for Discourse Comprehension.* London: Academic Press.

Van Lancker-Sidtis, D. and Rallon, G. (2004) 'Tracking the incidence of formulaic expressions in everyday speech: methods for classification and verification', *Language & Communication,* 24 (3): 207-240.

van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the Field.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vaughan, D. (1990) *Uncoupling. Turning Points in Intimate Relationships.* New York: Vintage Books.

Vromen, S. (1987) 'Georg Simmel and the Cultural Dilemma of Women' , *History of European Ideas,* 8 (4-5): 563-579.

Ward, K.J. (1999) 'The Cyber-Ethnographic (Re)Construction of Two feminist Online Communities', *Sociological Research Online*, 4 (1). <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/1/ward.html>

Watson, D.R. (1978) 'Categorisation, authorisation, and blame-negotiation in conversation', *Sociology*, 12 (2): 105-113.

Weiss, R.S. (1994) *Learning from strangers: the art and method of qualitative interview studies.* New York: Free Press.

Weber, M. (1948) 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions', IN H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills [EDS.] *From Max Weber.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weber, M. (1948) *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology.* [TRANS. / ED.] H. Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Weber, M. (1949) *The Methodology of the Social Sciences.* [TRANS. / ED.] B. Schils and F. Finch. New York: Free Press.

Weber, M. (1972) 'Georg Simmel as Sociologist', *Social Research,* 39: 155-163.

Weber, Marianne (1919) 'Women and Objective Culture' cited in Coser, L.A. (1977a) 'Georg Simmel's Neglected Contributions to the Sociology of Women', *Signs*, 2 (4): 869-876.

Weeks, J. (1985) *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Weingartner, R.H. (1962) *Experience and Culture: The Philosophy of Georg Simmel.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Weintraub, J. (1997) 'The Theory and Politics of the Public / Private Distinction' IN J. Weintraub and K. Krishnan [EDS.] *Public and Private in Thought and Practice; Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods.* London: Sage.

Wetherell, M. (1998) 'Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue', *Discourse and Society,* 9 (3): 387-412.

Wetherall, M. (2001) 'Themes in Discourse research: The case of Diana.' IN M. Wetherall, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates [EDS.] *Discourse Theory and Practice. A Reader.* London: Sage.

Whewell, W. (1984) [1847] *Selected Writings on the History of Science.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (1993) *Heterosexuality: A Feminism and Psychology Reader.* London: Sage.

Williams, R. (2000a) *Making Identity Matter: Identity, society, and social interaction.* Durham: Sociologypress.

Williams, R. (2000b) 'Sociology and the vernacular voice: text, context, and the sociological imagination', *History of the Human Sciences,* 13 (4): 73-95.

Williams, S.J. and Calnan, M. [EDS.] (1996) *Modern Medicine: lay perspectives and experiences.* London: UCL Press.

Willmot, H.C. (1986) 'Unconscious Sources in the Theory of the Subject: An exploration and Critique of Giddens's Dualistic Models of Action and Personality', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 6 (1): 105-121.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953), *Philosophical Investigations.* [ED.] G.E.M. Anscombe, [TRANS.] G.E.M. Anscombe & R. Rhees. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wolff, K.H. (1950) 'Introduction' IN Simmel, G. (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* [TRANS. / ED.] K.H. Wolff. New York: Free Press.

Woofit, R. (1992) *Telling tales of the Unexpected. The organisation of factual discourse.* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Woolgar, S. (1980) 'Dicovery, logic and sequence in a text.' IN K.D. Knorr, R. Krohn, and R. Whitely [EDS.] *The Social process of Scientific Investigation.* Dordrecht: Reidel.

Wouters, C. (1998) 'Balancing Sex and Love since the 1960s Sexual Revolution', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15(3-4): 187-214.

APPENDIX 1.

INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS.

INTERVIEW RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS & SYNOPSIS OF ISSUES MADE TOPICALLY RELEVANT.

RESPONDENT.	NAME.	GENDER.	AGE.	(CLAIMED) SEXUAL ORIENTATION.	OCCUPATION.	INTERVIEW DURATION.	RELATIONSHIP STATUS	SYNOPSIS OF ISSUES MADE TOPICALLY RELEVANT / (CLAIMED) EVENTS.
❶	*'Grace'*	F.	33 years	Straight.	Nursing Sister.	75 mins.	Married.	▪ Early marriage following an unconventional courtship; ▪ 'Good relationship' in the early days – active social life with a wide circle of friends (husband worked away from home); ▪ Birth of son and daughter in relatively quick succession; ▪ Extra Marital affair with Alex lasting 2 years (claimed husband is still unaware); ▪ Troubles 'caused' by unwilling move to another region of the UK. ▪ Serious illness causing further intimacy troubles; ▪ Now 'mature' relationship: tacitly acknowledged 'open' basis in which both Grace and her husband engage in frequent extra-marital relationships but never openly discuss these matters.

Respondent.	Name.	Gender.	Age.	(Claimed) Sexual Orientation.	Occupation.	Interview Duration.	Relationship Status	Synopsis of Issues made topically relevant / (Claimed) Events.
❷	*'Jeff'*	M.	38 years.	Not known.	Care Home Worker.	35 mins.	Single.	▪ Troubled early life, perceived social stigma from father's decision to leave his mother in favour of another women in the immediate neighbourhood; ▪ Mother's death when he was aged 16 years; ▪ Subsequent 'parental' role to remaining 5 younger brothers and sisters; ▪ 'Serious' relationships with two (married) women; ▪ Sadness at the end of the last of these relationships in which his (ex) lover opted to remain in an (allegedly) physically abusive relationship rather than 'start a new life' with him; ▪ Cynicism about marriage in general; ▪ Closeness of bonds with same-sex friends. Implication (but not explicit acknowledgement) of his aspiration for one of these friendships to develop into sexualised intimate relationship; and, ▪ Guardedness / defensiveness in relation to this issue.

Respondent.	Name.	Gender.	Age.	(Claimed) Sexual Orientation.	Occupation.	Interview Duration.	Relationship Status	Synopsis of Issues made topically relevant / (Claimed) Events.
❸	*'Craig'*	M.	19 years.	Straight	Perform-ing Arts	85 mins.	Separ-ated / Single.	▫ Playing the field; numerous sexual (if not intimate) liaisons; ▫ First serious girlfriend met at work during a theatre production; ▫ One-year relationship – never cohabited; ▫ 'Accidental' pregnancy followed by the birth of a son: however, the relationship was ended on the wishes of his (ex) partner prior to the birth; ▫ Basis of 'break-up' attributed to the (allegedly) overbearing demeanour of his (ex) partner's mother; ▫ Stated wish to rekindle the relationship with his (ex) partner; ▫ Sadness at having never seen his son - ongoing legal struggle to rectify this situation; ▫ 'Solace' in frequent casual sexual relationships; and, ▫ Guardedness / reluctance about 'getting too serious' with his current intimate.

Respondent.	Name.	Gender.	Age.	(Claimed) Sexual Orientation.	Occupation.	Interview Duration.	Relationship Status	Synopsis of Issues made topically relevant / (Claimed) Events.
❹	*'Clive'*	M	44 years.	Straight	Skilled Manual Worker / Technic-ian.	90 mins.	Divorced / Co-habiting.	▪ (Young) age at time of first marriage; ▪ Birth of 3 daughters; ▪ Eventual lack of satisfaction / habituation after 17 years of marriage. ▪ Meeting with Amy at a residential training weekend and ensuing extra-marital liaison; ▪ Request for workplace re-location to another region of the UK (to be near Amy): represented to (ex) wife as a company instruction; ▪ 'Double life' – Monday to Friday with Amy, weekends with (ex) wife and daughters. Disclosure of this scenario to (ex) wife by a mutual acquaintance. Subsequent divorce. ▪ (Alleged) financial difficulties imposed by divorce settlement. (Claimed) injustice at this scenario given that all 3 daughters now reside with himself and Amy; ▪ Sadness at the loss of former friends and estrangement from some of his wider family; and, ▪ Satisfaction with new intimate arrangements / struggle with practical / financial circumstances.

Respondent.	Name.	Gender.	Age.	(Claimed) Sexual Orientation.	Occupation.	Interview Duration.	Relationship Status	Synopsis of Issues made topically relevant / (Claimed) Events.
❺	*'Amy'*	F	37 years.	Straight	Sales / Admin.	65 mins.	Divorced / Co-habiting. (current partner of ❹ *'Clive'*).	▪ Affectionate but 'unfulfilling' first marriage. ▪ Birth of 2 daughters ▪ 'Accidental' meeting with Clive at a residential training weekend and ensuing extra-marital liaison; ▪ 'Accidental' quality of ensuing relationship i.e. just *going-with-the flow.* ▪ Request for workplace re-location to another region of the UK (to live with Clive): represented to (ex) husband as a company instruction; ▪ 'Double life' – Monday to Friday with Clive, weekends with (ex) husband and daughters. Disclosure of this scenario to (ex) husband by Clive's (ex) wife. Subsequent divorce. ▪ Sadness/guilt about her treatment of her ex-husband. ▪ Practical and financial difficulties of current scenario (Clive's 3 daughters and Amy's younger daughter live with the couple); and, ▪ Implication (but not tacit acknowledgement) of doubts about the current tenability (and future viability) of the current scenario.