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Wyness, Michael G.. (2014) Children, family and the State : revisiting public and private realms. Sociology - The Journal of the British Sociological Association, Volume 48 (Number 1). pp. 59-74.
Permanent WRAP url:
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Publisher's statement:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038512467712

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Family and the State: revisiting public and private realms

Abstract: The state is often viewed as part of the impersonal public sphere in opposition to the private family as a locus of warmth and intimacy. In recent years this modernist dichotomy has been challenged by theoretical and institutional trends which have altered the relationship between state and family. This paper explores changes to both elements of the dichotomy that challenge this relationship: a more fragmented family structure and more individualised and networked support for children. It will also examine two new elements that further disrupt any clear mapping between state/family and public/private dichotomies: the third party role of the child in family/ state affairs and children's application of virtual technology that locates the private within new cultural and social spaces. The paper concludes by examining the rise of the 'individual child' hitherto hidden within the family/state dichotomy and the implications this has for intergenerational relations at personal and institutional levels.

Key words: child, family, network, private, public, state, third party, virtual

Introduction

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the relationship between children, family and state has often been thought of as a conflict between private and public realms. The state conceived as part of the impersonal public sphere is often counterposed with the private family as a locus of warmth and intimacy. In more recent years this modernist dichotomy has been challenged by theoretical, social and institutional emphases on diversity and uncertainty. Recent sociological work has moved away from conflict theories towards a focus on individualisation, and social arrangements that emphasise networked horizontal relations between family and the external world (Beck 1992; Castells 2004). At the same time a feminist critique of family in the latter part of the 20th

century contributed to the opening up of family challenging the relationship between family and privacy (Delphy 1984). Moreover, in conceptual and policy terms the individual child has become a unit of analysis complicating a 'family perspective' and making it more difficult to map family onto the private realm. Given these trends and this shift in focus this paper will offer a timely reassessment of the modernist conception of family-state relations and its association with the public and private realms.

The paper is largely conceptual revisiting the relationship between two modernist dichotomies: the public and private realms and state and family. It will hopefully contribute to debate and discussions on the changing nature of the public and private realms and a discourse around the contested and constructed nature of these concepts (West 2009, Ribbens-McCarthy and Edwards; Fahey 1995; Pitkin 1981). The public/private is used in a number of distinct fields including Goffman's theorising on identity in terms of 'front' and 'back' regions, (1959) and economically in terms of public and private sectors. In this paper I want to discuss this dichotomy in narrower terms where it is has often been used to frame the nature of family and its relationship to the outside world, with a particular focus on the state. At the same time I will also refer to a culture of privacy. While Whitman (2004) discusses this in legal terms, in this paper I will refer to a culture of privacy as a set of ideas and social practices that underpin a modernist public/private dichotomy. The substance of my argument is that the concepts of private and public are more difficult to sustain in dichotomous terms when examining the changing nature of family-state relations. Within a more 'post-modern' context the meaning of both realms has been both stretched and contested, and while there is still a sense that the concept of private is related to what goes in within families, recent trends affecting families, children and state agencies suggest a more complex relationship between the two realms. In these terms it is now not so easy to locate family as a central feature of a culture of privacy.

In the first section of the paper I set out the modernist conception of family-state relations and the way that it maps on to private and public realms. I go on and explore recent challenges to this dichotomy in terms of four sets of underlying trends that have altered family-state relations. In part two I briefly discuss the changing nature of family in Western countries and the difficulties this creates conflating family with the private realm. In part three I examine the restructuring of the public realm and, in particular, major political and legal changes shifting the state's focus from the integrity of family to the welfare of the child. There is a much stronger emphasis here on parents' delegated responsibilities for children's welfare. This focus on welfare has converged with more global shifts on the status of children as independent rights bearers. A third and associated focus is the child's 'independence' as a third party and the implications this has for children with respect to family-state relations. This is discussed in section four. The restructuring of family and state and the changing status of children has generated greater demand from the latter for their own private spaces. This has altered the social landscape making it much more difficult for family and state to be mapped onto private and public realms respectively. Moreover, these demands have been both reinforced and complicated by developments in information and communications technology (ICT) which extend a virtual realm across the public/private divide. In section five I want to explore the relationship between these virtual spaces and the public/private divide with respect to a changing culture of privacy.

The public/private dichotomy has been a particularly potent frame of reference in the UK and much of my analysis applies directly to a UK context. However, the underlying trends discussed in this paper, particularly in relation to the status of children and the rise of ICT have more global significance and where appropriate I will refer to the restructuring of public and private realms in a number of disparate cultural and geo-political contexts. The material drawn on to support my argument similarly comes from a range of different sources. I draw on theorising and research on state regulation, work on family restructuring, material on the reconceptualising of childhood and the relationship between children and technology. In some respects this eclectic mix reflects the

diverse and contested nature of public and private realms. Hopefully this range of material suggests new ways of conceptualising public and private realms.

A modernist conception of family-state relations

In many Western liberal democracies and for much of the 20th century children were legally and politically subsumed within the family as dependents with parents representing their interests (Lewis 2006). This has generated a bipartite relationship between parents and the state. Throughout the latter part of this period in the UK this relationship has oscillated between a more supportive benevolent relationship from the late 1940s until the 1970s and a more critical association in the Thatcher years and beyond (Hendrick 2003). Nevertheless, there has been an uneasy tension between the proprietorial and particular interests of parents, and the welfare state with general interests in the well being of children as investments in the future. Dingwall et al (1995, p.220) clearly set out this ambiguity in their ethnographic study of encounters between social workers and parents

> They (the social services) cannot be given the legal power to underwrite an investigative form of surveillance without destroying the liberal family. At the same time, the state cannot opt out. There is a collective interest in the moral and physical well being of future citizens, in the quality of social reproduction…

One popular way of articulating this bipartite relationship is the opposition between private and public realms. The private realm can be conceptualised as a culture of privacy, a set of ideas on a dichotomous relationship between practices and contexts that are considered to be intimate, personal and private and those practices and contexts considered to be part of an external public and impersonal world. Drawing on psychological, social and political criteria there is a convergence

of opposites such as insider/outsider, intimate/distant, personal/bureaucratic that set the internal world against the external world. In relation to politics and the state Arendt (1959) most famously drew on the Greek conception of the polis in her political theory arguing that the public was the realm of politics which was supported by the domestic sphere of family as the private realm: "the private realm of the household was the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of the continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed" (Arendt 1959 p. 42).

While Arendt takes an essentialist line, others have argued that a public/private dichotomy is a contested and arguably socially constructed set of ideas, what West et al (2009, p. 617) refer to as a "discursive phenomenon"(Fahey 1995). Nevertheless, the public/private dichotomy has been a powerful structuring frame, subsuming the child within the family, and locating the family at a distance from a range of agencies with an interest in children's welfare. There are two powerful convergent refrains mapping the family onto the private realm and the state onto the public realm (West et al 2009; Fahey 1995). First the private family is viewed as the repository of human values set against the external world within which the state plays a powerful interventionist role. Various authors from a range of different ideological and political viewpoints have referred to the family as a retreat, haven or sanctuary vis-à-vis an interventionist political establishment (Mount 1980; Lasch 1977). Within a more global context, family acts as a bulwark against a politically oppressive state. Take, for example, the case of the former East Germany (GDR) where family in some cases was the only effective political opposition to the Soviet state (Du Bois-Reymond et al 1993). Legal scholars have also referred to a culture of privacy in the USA, where the private is conflated with the family and the concept of home as the sphere of individual liberty in and against infringements to privacy from the state (Whitman 2004).

Second, a range of social scientists throughout this period have posited that the public and private realms have different but complementary roles to play in constructing stable social and political orders. An array of sociological theory from structural functionalism to Marxism asserts the family as a self-sufficient unit for the socialisation of children into the public world of politics and

economics (Parsons and Bales 1956; Bernstein 1971). Others make similar claims from a social policy perspective, with the state providing varying degrees of support for parents that assume 'private' primary responsibilities for child rearing (Thomas 2000).

Family diversity

Whilst the modern relationship between state and family conflates privacy with the latter, in recent years a number of convergent factors have challenged the public/private dichotomy, generating more contested and more complex notions of the private realm. This complexity is in part due to the changing nature of family structure. Despite global trends towards single-unit families, there is still considerable variation in the form that family takes (Cheal 2008). This variation has become marked in the past 40 years in more affluent countries with significant differences in structure over time and across social space. In the USA the multi-generational family is becoming more popular. Around 12% of children live in these 'extended' family forms due to the impact of migration, economic recession and an ageing population (Pew Social Trends 2010). At the other end of the spectrum in the same period there has been a more longstanding increase in the number of children having to routinely negotiate different households as their parents separate and divorce. Just under a quarter of UK children have experience of parental separation and divorce (Social Trends 2010). The figures are much higher in Sweden (30%) and in Norway and USA the figure is around 40% (Bjorkland, Ginther and Sundstrom 2007). This generates diversity in the way children experience and negotiate family life, with many children having to cope with rapid and fluid movement between households across and over time (Neale and Flowerdew 2007). Within this context the conflation of family with privacy is more difficult to sustain with children and many parents having to create over time and sometimes with great rapidity, very different living arrangements.

There is also a strong association between family as the private realm and the concept of home. In these terms the private offers an emotional space within which family members have strong attachments (Munro and Madigan 1993). Moreover, the association of the private realm and

'home' is particularly strong in terms of the 'proper' place for children (Forsberg and Strandell 2007). However this association is problematic now within the context of children having to negotiate multiple family transitions. If we look a little more closely at the kinds of deliberations made by children and separated parents: research from the UK and Norway on the roles that children play in post-divorce families identifies the way that children try to maintain equality between separate biological parents household in terms of the amount of time they spend in each household (Neale and Flowerdew 2007; Haugen 2010). The concept of a unitary family, particularly the nuclear family form, associated with a unitary physical and social space that can be thought of in terms of the private realm, is difficult to sustain here. If family has fragmented with children having to negotiate different households, it will have implications for the way we see the private realm. Moreover this fragmentation will have implications for the way the concept of 'home' is understood.

Restructuring of the state

In turning to the role of the state with respect to the notion of a private realm, the one overriding change has been the shift in focus from family to child. This is articulated through a number of policies globally, including The Care of the Child Act (2004) in New Zealand, the 1992 Child Protection Act in Norway and through the 1989 Children Act in England in Wales (Goldson, 2006; Arild Vis and Thomas 2009) In the latter case this was clearly codified through the paramountcy principle whereby the welfare of child is the paramount concern of various agencies and professionals (AUTHOR 1999). At an international legal level this principle has been reinforced by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, where children have become independent rights bearers. The paramountcy of the child's welfare has been a prominent policy issue at both national and international levels due to the ongoing political and social concerns over the physical and emotional integrity of the child within the family and the inability of the welfare system to protect children. Critics have viewed the private/family/home associations as overly romanticised with home

and family a place from which some children need to escape rather than a retreat from the public realm (Hancock and Gillen 2007). Arguably now there is less trust in the family with more questioning of parent-child relations (Parton 2006). Thus the unit of analysis has shifted away from the integrity of the family towards the child. This has a number of possible consequences for children, family and state relations and by implication the public/private dichotomy.

First, one key feature of political language over the past two decades in England and Wales and a concomitant of the paramountcy principle is reference to 'parental responsibility'. The notion of the 'responsible parent' both strengthens and weakens the boundary between public and private. On the one hand, social policy relating to children provides limited public scrutiny of families whilst at the same time ensuring parents have sufficient state support. Parents are offered heavily circumscribed rights and powers over their children, which although complicating the human rights of children, strengthen the concept of the private realm by encouraging parents to discharge their 'natural' duties towards their children (Hollingworth 2007). Whereas, there is a stronger emphasis on the individual child, social policy focuses on the parent as the responsible agent ensuring that children follow appropriate moral and social trajectories. On the other hand, some groups of parents, those experiencing difficulties with agencies are more likely to interpret the emphasis on parental responsibilities as an implicit threat from outside. Family-state relations has a much more overtly hierarchical character here, with various state agencies having legal and social powers over families, and parents being delegated special rights and responsibilities for the care and protection of their children. Donzelot (1977) argues that in the 19th century it was politically and economically expedient for the modern nuclear family to take full responsibility for children's development and welfare. In the case of poorer working class families these responsibilities were heavily circumscribed by welfare professionals. The concept of the responsible parent has been used in child protection and care, education and criminal justice realms to 'police' and sometimes punish poor disadvantaged parents. The issue of truancy is periodically covered by the media in the USA and UK with parents being targeted for their inability to ensure their children attend school ('More parents

jailed as truancy rates soar', *The Guardian* 12th February, 2009; 'Parents serve jail time with children for truancy', *News Channel 25*, 27th May 2010). Within a criminal justice context parents are subject to a range of orders as a consequence of their children's criminal activities, including being "bound over to take proper care and exercise proper control over the child" (Hollingworth 2007, p. 193).

Second, in England and Wales the continual problems reported in protecting children and a stronger emphasis on children as investments in the future, has led to a much broader focus for supporting children (Parton 2011). 'Prevention' and 'risk' became buzzwords in the early 2000s as policy makers sought ways to support parents as early as possible and thus minimise difficulties they might encounter later on with their children. The UK Labour government in this period expanded the levels and forms of support for children through the *Every Child Matters* Initiative. This offered a more holistic conception of the child with the state investing more broadly in children as future moral, social, economic and emotional beings. It also attempted to break down the state- family dichotomy by offering a more networked support for children and their families with social services, health, education and other agencies working more closely together with children and their families in order to strengthen systems of state support for children.

Third, one interesting by-product of this trend is the difficulty that state professionals have assuming the sanctity of family as a private realm. One of the key reference points for professionals working within the child protection system during the earlier 'modern' period was the operation of what Dingwall and colleagues (1995) called the 'rule of optimism' (1). In the 1960s and 70s English social workers tended to err on the side of parents when they came to their attention in cases of alleged child abuse. When assessing the quality of parent-child relations, social workers made the presumption of the 'natural love' of parents towards their children (Dingwall et al 1995). 'Natural love' also characterised the emotional and moral basis to the family as a private realm, making it much more difficult to identify parents as blameworthy where allegations were made against them. It also made it more difficult for social workers to look for solutions to the difficulties that parents experience outside of the private realm of the family (2). One of the key aims of recent changes to

the child protection system is to make all agencies involved with children - schools and health centres as well as social services - more accountable, as Parton succinctly states the *Every Child Matters* agenda is supposed to "encourage partnership and sharpen accountability" (Parton 2006, p. 162).

Accountability means tighter reporting systems in a vertical sense through more robust line management structures and horizontally in terms of operating more effective lines of communication between relevant child related agencies. This makes it more difficult for child professionals to exercise the discretion that the rule of optimism implies. This is a point made by Dingwall and his colleagues (1995) in relation to the concept of 'failure of containment' where knowledge of particular cases goes beyond the social workers and parents directly involved in the case. A more extensive system of communication across a range of agencies makes it more difficult for professionals to contain the problem within the affected family making it less likely that professionals can invoke the rule of optimism. Thus whilst there is an attempt to create stronger links between the state professional and the family, a new more elaborate system for supporting families involving a range of agencies, makes it more difficult for professionals to view their relationship with the families in simple dichotomous terms.

Children as Third Parties

The focus on the child rather than the family discussed in the previous section has led to the child being disaggregated or separated from parents in legal terms. Children are now more visible entities making it more difficult to talk in terms of the perspective of 'the family'. The child as a separate entity is also a human rights bearing individual and cannot any longer be so easily subsumed within the family as a 'dependent'. Since the 1989 Children Act (England and Wales) state professionals are in a stronger position to remove a child from their family environment on the basis of what is taken to be in the child's best interest. In one sense this can be seen as reinforcing the interventionist powers of the state with parents being under more public scrutiny to ensure the integrity of

children's welfare. In another important sense this opposition between family and state is less relevant because of children's status as individuals located outside of the family. Rather than assuming a bipartite relationship, the child can be viewed as an independent third party, generating a more complex tripartite or 'triangular' relationship between the interests of the state, parents and children (Parton (2006).

The family as an undifferentiated entity was challenged in the 1970s and 80s by feminism focusing on how the public/private dichotomy oppresses and disadvantages women (Delphy 1984). The family as the private realm makes it more difficult for the domestic and child related work carried out by women to be recognised along the same lines as their male counterparts' work within the workplace. Feminists were also active in identifying issues of male power within the home that were hitherto viewed as private domestic issues. Domestic violence and latterly child abuse were recognised as public and political problems that demanded a response from professionals and policy makers across the public sector. Thus an ideology of privacy was challenged which focused on the invisible status of women within the home and offered the possibility for the concept of privacy itself to be re-evaluated and individualised in terms of spaces for women (Munro and Madigan 1993). More recently this framework has been expanded to incorporate the position and status of children within the family (Mayall 2002). Thus the third party status of children further compromises and complicates the simple dichotomy between public state and private family.

The opening up of the private realms to demands from women, children and those working on behalf of the latter has generated considerable debate about the role that children now play. There is only space in this paper to discuss two possible positions for children, a mediate role between family and state and children who inhabit the public or political sphere, and thus 'outside' of the family.

The mediating child

These new trends have created interstitial or mediate roles for children in negotiations and discussions between parents and professionals. Child care and protection policy in England and Wales through the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts emphasises the importance of consulting with children in matters relating to their welfare. Research in England and Norway has suggested that these new roles for children are limited in that adult and professional agendas still dominate proceedings involving children and professionals. Within a social work context, children themselves make the distinction between being consulted and taking an active role in decision-making with greater involvement in the former than the latter (Holland et al 2005). Moreover, children appear to lack trust in professionals and state bodies and are reticent to call on them for help when they have difficulties (Parton 2006). Despite these reservations, children's voices are now more likely to be heard in consultation with parents and professionals (Arild Vis and Thomas 2009; Holland et al 2005).

Within the educational realm the bipartite relationship between family and state was clearly evident in policy in the late 20th century. Education reform in English speaking countries was trying to shift the balance of power away from educational professionals towards educational consumers with parents rather than children identified as the latter (AUTHOR 1999). While the bipartite parent-school relationship is a still a dominant feature of education policy in the USA, more recent formulations of this relationship in England and Wales have started to incorporate the pupil as a third party (US Dept of Education 2010). For example, the notion of a partnership or a more contractual relationship between home and school has created more space for children to participate. Research on home-school relations picks up on the complexity of this tripartite relationship. Written communication between home and school in relation to activities that take place in the classroom and more formal reports now encourage contributions from children as well as parents. There is little consensus between school staff and parents over the presence of children at meetings involving parents and staff. However, children can sometimes use face to face contact

with parents and teachers as a way of strengthening their point of view and sometimes provide balance between any possible disagreements that parents and teachers might have (Beveridge 2004).

The Political Child

The political child is the child of the public realm and thus directly contradicts Arendt's notion of the private realm within which the child is subsumed. Bethke Elshtain (1996) offers a compelling critique of Arendt's conception of the polis. For Arendt the political or public realm has to be necessarily child free. Children are to be hidden within the private sphere of 'natality, love and intimacy' where children are protected from the pressures of the public realm (Bethke Elshtain 1996, p. 14). Arendt was highly critical of the 'racial' desegregation that took place in Little Rock schools in the USA in the 1950s as it exposed children to the politics of race before they were developmentally ready. This conventional view of childhood according to Bethke Elshtain is at variance with a range of historical events and situations where children have been highly political. In the 1970s children and young people were arguably at the forefront of the anti-apartheid movement which came to a head in the 1976 Soweto massacre when up to 200 school children were shot down by government forces (Bundy 1987). The impetus here was the introduction of Afrikaans, the language of the white minority rulers, as a compulsory language to the curriculum. Many children were highly politicised and engaged with the struggle to end Apartheid, working alongside their parents.

In more recent years children have been involved in political demonstrations against the UK's involvement in the war against Iraq and have been highly active in encouraging their parents to become more environmentally conscious (AUTHOR 2012; Bethke Elshtain 1996). At local levels children have been involved in a range of political activities from campaigning to support asylum seeking children and their families through to representing the interests of young people in local councils (Giner 2010; AUTHOR 2006). Here we have children that only bear a passing resemblance to the dependent child of the private sphere. Modernists including Arendt would see this as a form of

political indoctrination with vulnerable children being exploited by adults in the interests of political ideology. While there are indeed historical examples of this, Bethke Elshtaine (1996) advises us not to too be hasty in coming to this conclusion. She makes two important points. First, she distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' politics within which children can participate. While it is not always easy to draw the line between the two categories, at the very least it is not always appropriate to see the political child as a contradiction in terms. Second, political children are often of their time and social context: they can neither be protected from nor explicitly exposed to their circumstances; they are simply of their circumstances, as was the case in South Africa, part of ongoing struggles that many communities face on a daily basis. We can also refer to the 'new' childhood studies for a body of theory and empirical support for the political child and thus directly challenging Arndt's notion of the dependent child (James and Prout 1997; Christensen and James 2008). The notion of the child as a social agent is central here with children having participatory capacities to make a difference in their lives and the lives of those around them (AUTHOR 2012).

Children and New Forms of Privacy

A final factor that compromises the modernist dichotomy between public state and private family is the demands made by children for more privacy, what Munro and Madigan (1993, p. 29) refer to as the call for 'privacy within the private sphere'. Given the status of children as individuals within the family, we could argue that this is simply a mirroring of the demands that adults in the past made for greater privacy as the family became more 'nuclear' in form. These are global demands: recent research has suggested that privacy has become an essential feature of children's lives in a range of culturally disparate contexts from Glaswegian housing estates through to Urban Chinese households (Munro and Madigan 1993; Naftali 2010). In the latter case Chinese legislation, in particular, the Law on the Protection of Minors (1992) converges with the UNCRC article 16 recognising a child's right to privacy. From a slightly different vantage point In South Korea demands are made for children to be accorded the same degree of consumer privacy as adults are (Kim and Yi, 2010).

In many Western households these demands are both strengthened and reinforced by the rise of information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT has had a significant impact on issues of child protection and welfare with families and children now arguably more subject to public surveillance (Parton 2011). Much has been made of the rise of the surveillance state and the encroachment on privacy. Dowty (2010) links ICT to technological changes in society including the rise in the usage of close circuit television cameras and the potential for the use of biometrics in schools and pupil tracking devices. Attempts at reforming child protection were discussed earlier in terms of the expanding and tightening up of information networks within which data about children and their families are circulated. A number of data bases have been created – some of them now disbanded – such as Contact Point the National Pupil Database and the Integrated Children's System (ICS), which give child professionals more detailed profiles of children and their families. Yet there are problems in seeing this simply in terms of the encroachment of the welfare state on the private realm. For ICT has become a crucial medium within the economic sector speeding up the process of children's new status as consumers, and thus arguably separating children from their parents in economic terms. Consumer media culture has become a highly profitable feature of the global economy with ICT a crucial conduit in addressing children as consumers in their own terms (Kenway and Bullen 2001)

The rise of ICT has complicated notions of privacy and the idea of the private realm. For the former crosses the conventional public/private boundary creating an alternative 'virtual realm' through which children and young people create, distribute and exchange information. The greater mobility of privacy is clearly demonstrated by the popularity of the mobile phone among children, where ownership of a mobile phone is "associated with privacy, freedom and security" giving children a degree of autonomy in terms of where and when they gain access to their peers, friends and parents (Bond 2010). We can take another example, children's access to social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, which have grown immensely in terms of usage and popularity. The attraction of these sites is that they meet the demands of young people for greater privacy from

adults yet in the process challenge the conventional view of the private as a physical and social space such as family. Research suggests that the virtual realm has become an important channel of communication between peers and friendship groups. It has also arguably become a critical means of identity formation, creating an online DIY culture, with teenagers able to present themselves in a number of different ways to their peers (Harris 2008; Moinian 2006).

West et al's (2009) analysis of the role of social networking sites in the lives of young people identifies privacy not in contradistinction to a public realm but in terms of control of information about themselves. Thus young people have private accounts or portfolios within a virtual public domain that they can manage in terms of who has access to personal information. Users can set their accounts as 'private' but this still does not stop others from accessing their information and the authorities are still in a position to monitor their use of private accounts (De Souza and Dick 2008). Nevertheless, for children and young people the issue is one of control of data about the self that stretches across conventional public and private realms. West et al's (2009) sample were mainly concerned about their parents having access to their 'private' social networking sites. This does bring children into conflict with their parents. The latter seek to allay their fears that this new technology has insidious negative consequences for their children's emotional and moral integrity by encroaching on their children's 'privacy' (Livingstone and Brake 2010). At the same time children are committed to regulating the access that their parents have to 'private' data about themselves and their friends. De Souza and Dick (2008) argue that Australian children's use of these social networking sites is governed by a cost-benefit analysis with children's desire to present themselves in a positive light outweighing the cost of an invasion of privacy. As children, their parents and the state try to negotiate a more complex network of virtual and face to face interactions, the culture of privacy has become more multi-faceted and contested.

Discussion and Conclusion

Relatively recent social and political history in the UK and USA is of the private realm presupposing the emotionally and socially self-contained family in relation to a 'heartless' public realm of economics and politics (Goldson 2002). Political rhetoric in the UK and USA still refers to family as a distinctive unitary entity – witness for example, references to 'hard working families'. However, the conventional family has been opened up in a number of ways making it more difficult to conflate private with family. In this paper I have presented rather different conceptions of family and state which make it much more difficult for them to dovetail neatly with public and private realms. One particular motif theme that runs through the four themes discussed in this paper is the emergence of the child, hitherto hidden within the family as a dependent. The child now occupies a number of different roles within networks that complicate the family-state public private linkage.

First, the child has become a centripetal force within a reconfigured public realm. The focus on the child's welfare breaks down the ownership type relationship between parent and child with the latter becoming much more of a public investment in the future. While the separation between children and family is formal and to some extent legal, the relationship between parent and child has been intensified through an overarching system of social support and through a redefining of parents' responsibilities as public obligations. Second an emphasis on the child's welfare has generated debate over the extent to which children themselves take some ownership of their welfare. The child as a relatively independent third party, is moving along a public-private gradient, sometimes occupying an interstitial space between parents and professionals, on occasion standing outside of the family as a voice in his or her own right in relation to child-related and community based affairs.

Third, the shift towards more diverse family forms generates more complex networks of ties across a number of different households. One interesting if under-researched area is the way that children conceptualise home. We might speculate here that if children are having to negotiate change in family circumstances both across and over time, then links between family and private are

not so easily made by invoking the concept of home. Moreover, children are routinely challenging their dependent status by demonstrating their social and emotional competence in the way that they have to negotiate more complex living arrangements (Neale and Flowerdew 2007). Fourth, the demands that children make for their own private spaces challenges the modernist notion of family-state relations. For children now speak for themselves in making these demands, thus breaking down the polarity between parent and child professional. The global rights agenda has had a variable impact at a national level. Nevertheless, the Convention on the Rights of the Child invokes an individualism here with children having rights to physical and social integrity. In some respects this can be translated into physical private spaces within the home. Yet this is not just about creating private spaces within an overarching private realm the family. For children inhabit a virtual realm which cuts across the public/private dichotomy. Children and young people use semi-public social networking sites as a means of having some control over personal information about themselves in the process reconstructing concepts of privacy. Children invoke a conception of privacy akin to what Whitman (2004) refers to as a 'continental' culture of privacy with an emphasis on the right to respect and personal dignity, a right to control the way that we present ourselves to others. Children's third party role in family-state affairs positions them interstitially between family and the 'public' sphere. Their use and understanding of social networking sites is a means of generating private spaces for themselves complicating further notions of 'public' and 'private' with children positioning themselves across and over the public and private boundary.

These new positions taken up by children reinforce the idea that the boundaries between public and private have become more porous and contested generating more complex networks of relationships between child, family and state. Two broader trends are worth mentioning, individualisation that works across conventional social boundaries including the public/private dichotomy (Beck 1992) and a more networked society arguably challenges conventional hierarchies creating more possibilities for democratic relations (Castells 2004). If we take changes in family structure there are some grounds for thinking that generational relations have become more

democratic with space being created within and across private and public domains through ongoing negation between children, parents and new technologies (Williams and Williams 2005). Moreover the implications for child-family – state relations are flatter more networked relations between *individuals within* families and professionals, particularly where support structures for children are much more 'networked' now. Holland et al (2005) explore the possibility of more democratic relations between family and state in their analysis of family group conferences that were used by social workers when working with families in difficulty. Professionals here used these conferences as open forums within which children, parents and professionals talk through a range of problems.

In this paper I have argued that we can identify networks of relations rather than hard and fast dichotomies between family and state and 'private' and 'public'. Within these networks parents, children and professionals occupy positions that do not always neatly correspond to public and private realms. Moreover, there are some grounds for thinking that participants have opportunities to develop more democratic relations across these contested realms. At the same time we need to be cautious when making these claims. First, a more networked approach is unlikely to work for all families. Although Holland et al (2005) claim that family group conferences might work for families that regularly come to the attention of the state, agendas are still heavily institutionalised, the 'voicing' of children may be at the cost of parents creating conflicts within the family. Moreover, for some a more networked approach may not overcome structural problems of surveillance and institutional control. For child protection reasons some families are heavily regulated by the state generating conflictual perceptions of the state. A second note of caution is the current global economic crisis affecting many affluent countries. While this will have differential consequences for individual nation-states, in the UK the coalition government voted into power in 2010 is less committed to networked support for children and the repositioning of children as third parties (Parton 2011). Nevertheless, despite Conservative thinking within the UK coalition government that might suggest the return of old polarities between family and state, the general trend over the past couple of decades or so has been for families to fragment, children to have stronger independent

statuses and for state professionals to play a range of roles when working with children and families. Moreover, global trends on the shifting status of children and the rise of social media in their lives, has made it more difficult to map state and family onto a public/private dichotomy. These trends in the lives of children and families and the expanding roles of state professionals are reshaping public and private realms and creating new ways of thinking about a culture of privacy.

Notes

1. The focus of this paper is the state professional. However, I am well aware that the category of child professional also now incorporates the voluntary, private and social enterprise sectors as well as the statutory sector.
2. There are in fact two conditions that need to be met before the rule of optimism comes into operation, the other being 'cultural relativism' (Dingwall et al 1995).

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