ABSTRACT

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PRACTICES OF INTIMACY, FUTURES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Since the 1950s social change in family life in Europe and North America has been described as becoming more intimate and less hierarchical, more friend-like. Similar characterisations of change in personal life are also being made for countries across all of the continents of the globe. A more nuanced picture of the micro-dynamics of social change is gained through focusing empirically and theoretically on the repertoire of routine and mundane practices that build the quality of personal relationships. I have argued that thinking in terms of practices of intimacy in couple, parent-child, friendship and sexual relationships facilitates working across historical and cultural contexts and is helpful in assessing the limitations of digitally mediated forms of communication compared to face-to-face interaction for building intimacy. In this paper I consider whether a repertoire of practices that has the potential to build intimacy may also be implicated in reproducing hierarchy, inequality and division. In doings so I also discuss whether a focus on practices should encompass imagined future practices as well as routine or mundane practices in the here and now, while remaining mindful that both imaginaries and the enacted are socially produced.