The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800

Edited by Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills

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Also by Lucy Delap

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The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800

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Ben Griffin is a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, and Lecturer in History at Girton College and Fitzwilliam College. He is currently working on a book entitled *Feminism, Masculinity and Politics in Victorian Britain*, which reassesses the relationship between Victorian feminism, liberalism and conservatism, and which explores how competing models of masculinity shaped the actions of nineteenth-century politicians. He is also working on a history of child custody law in the nineteenth century. In 2005 his doctoral thesis was awarded Cambridge University's Prince Consort and Thirlwall Prize and the Seeley Historical Medal.

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the disciplines of history, sociology and theology to reassess the role of Christianity in twentieth-century Britain. Other journal publications have included an exploration of 1950s religious revivals in Britain and a comparative study of changes in the Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgies from the 1960s. Her current research interests are exploring the methodological and subjective aspects of contemporary 'lived religion', including an inter-religious case study of the faith lives of migrants in East London from the 1960s, and contemporary reasons for and experiences of pilgrimage to Lourdes, Fatima, Glastonbury and Stonehenge.

Siân Pooley is a postgraduate research student in History at St John's College, Cambridge. Her doctoral thesis is on parenthood and child-rearing in England, c. 1860–1910. From October 2009 she will be the Mark Kaplanoff Research Fellow at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where she will begin a new project on intergenerational intimacy in modern Britain. Her wider research interests relate to the history of the family, gender, class, and welfare. She recently published 'Domestic servants and their urban employers: a case study of Lancaster 1880–1914', *Economic History Review* (May 2009).

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and Historical Studies in Critical Demography, co-edited with H. Sholkamy and A. Dharmalingam (2004); and *Health and Wealth. Studies in History and Policy* (2005). He and Kate Fisher are currently completing a book for publication, provisionally titled *Private Lives. Sex, Love and Marriage in England 1918–1963*.

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Introduction: The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800

Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap and Abigail Wills

Beatrice Webb, born in 1858 to a servant-keeping family, recalled her development of consciousness of social station through observing her mother's exercise of domestic authority. Webb wrote, 'As life unfolded I became aware that I belonged to a class of persons who habitually gave orders, but who seldom, if ever, executed the orders of other people. My mother sat in her boudoir and gave orders – orders that brooked neither delay nor evasion.'[1] The power to give voice to one's will and compel obedience over others has long been a central part of personal and social identity, and consequently domestic authority has been a powerful and controversial theme in the political, social and cultural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether deployed by husbands, by public bodies such as Poor Law Guardians, Members of Parliament and judges, by masters and mistresses, by servants or by parents, claims to exercise domestic authority have been of central importance to the history of modern Britain.

As the influential work of Catharine Hall and Leonore Davidoff has shown, domestic authority played a vital role in the formation of social class in the nineteenth century, serving as a means through which social station might be established, enacted and contested.[2] Moreover, domestic authority formed an emotional resource and was implicated in the formation of individual subjectivities, as the work of Carolyn Steedman and Alison Light has shown.[3] It was central to the relatively restricted social positions open to women that they could construct themselves as authorities in the home, though to do so sometimes brought them into conflict with others who also laid claim to such authority. The home has been a key location for struggles around these issues, through negotiation and advice, manipulation and outright physical force, but the power-play of the home was also central to public political discourse, serving both as a metaphor and as a material constraint on who could be associated with political agency.[4] This aspect of domestic authority continued to mark British society and political culture. Writing of interwar Britain, Alison Light has pointed out the paradox that the most personal and intimate spaces should also be capable of being read

as the most national and public territories, sites at which gender norms and narratives of class and nation were acted out.[5] The chapters of this book take up the challenge of thinking about domestic authority in all its myriad forms. In the process, they add important insights to our understanding of 'domestic authority', both in terms of how it has played out historically in Britain over the past 200 years and as a theoretical construct.

The first aspect of this involves thinking in new ways about the meanings of familial authority, and in particular how it relates to other defining aspects of domestic relations, such as love, reciprocity, and consanguinity. Szreter and Fisher's chapter on the growth of 'companionate' marriage in mid-twentieth-century Britain suggests ways in which relations of equality and of authority were not mutually exclusive, but rather existed in creative tension. 'Love' was acknowledged to have complex meanings within relationships, and a commitment to mutuality could coexist with a continued gendered division of labour within the family. This suggests that subjective understandings of 'authority' within the family did not necessarily correspond to what one might expect, given the unequal distribution of power or resources.

Margaret Beetham expands on this link between authority and subjectivity in her chapter on reading and domestic service in the Victorian era. Beetham's discussion focuses our attention on the cultural and symbolic dimensions of the 'servant problem'. The management of servants took on a deeper significance than simply the ordering of individual households, illustrated through her account of the profound challenge that the 'reading servant' offered to the social and gendered order. Beetham's findings suggest that the control of the reading matter of domestic servants can be understood as an attempt to minimise opportunities for interiority as a strategy of asserting domestic authority. Reading, as she notes, was 'a place for the production of . . . the self', and was thus seen as a threat to the established hierarchies of the household. By reading to the children of the household and helping themselves to their employers' books, servants could disrupt the link between knowledge and power in a similarly threatening way. Domestic authority, then, did not just play out in material culture, but involved a complex interaction between culturally sanctioned hierarchies of power.

Related to this point is the question of how domestic authority extended beyond the family, most particularly in the context of growing state intervention into the family from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Anna Clark and Megan Doolittle, for example, look at the role of the state as 'substitute parent'. Doolittle makes the point that state recognition of domestic authority was contingent on the financial autonomy of the head of the household. Where this was absent, domestic authority could be practically and symbolically withdrawn: state welfare, as she puts it, was 'formulated as . . . a form of substitute fatherhood'. In this argument, the burgeoning welfare state did as much to undermine the working-class family as it did

to bolster it, forcing families into defensive positions. Ginger Frost, in her chapter on illegitimacy in Victorian England, makes a similar point about the ambiguity of public definitions of authority, and the difficulties this created for fathers – leading some to extreme violence in defence of their position as heads of family.

Yet at another level, as Siân Pooley notes in her chapter on parental authority in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Auckland and Burnley, the nascent welfare state provided an arena within which parental power was actively solicited. She argues that ideas of 'professional parenthood' developing in the early twentieth century meant that parents were expected to assert their authority vis-à-vis the welfare state. Moreover, as Deborah Thom suggests, the family also continued to be understood as essentially 'private' in significant ways well into the second half of the twentieth century. Her study of corporal punishment in twentieth-century Britain notes that despite a developing consensus against the practice within domestic advice literature, children continued to be punished physically in a majority of homes. Here, relations of authority and autonomy within families functioned as a force for continuity in socio-cultural norms. The idea of parental authority as independent of and ultimately superior to the state had powerful political and public support throughout the period under study.

The origins and meanings of such prevailing cultural models of domestic authority are a further important theme. Alana Harris, in her chapter on Catholic understandings of domesticity in post-war England, looks at the changing intellectual underpinnings of different models of family authority. She argues that the relationship between religious and 'official' understandings of family was far from unproblematic, and shows how Catholic model of family provided a resource for both reinforcing and challenging official norms. Valerie Sanders thinks in similar terms about family rituals, notably baptism, and explores their role in both bolstering and undermining established lines of authority. Christening ceremonies, she argues, were used by male heads of household as an occasion for 'secular networking', undermining the church and women's domestic authority.

Cultural norms could be quite distinct from legal precept when it came to domestic life. Gail Savage makes the point that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the legal authority of a man over his wife was in practice conditional on the extent to which his behaviour was seen as culturally acceptable. Thus while the law did not recognise that a husband could rape his wife, divorce could be granted to wives based on claims of cruelty by 'husbands who attempted to enforce their marital rights violently'. Judges' interpretations of legal doctrine were thus informed by wider cultural norms of appropriate husbandly behaviour. The construction of 'hegemonic' norms of domestic authority was a complex process, in which law, custom and evolving familial practices interacted.

Finally, several chapters call attention to the need to think about space – both within the home and within different localities – in understanding the lived experience of domestic authority. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century 'servant question', for example, made continual reference to the difficulties of managing the circulation of servants, guests and children within domestic space. 'Domestic space' is a construction that, as Davidoff and Hall suggested, and numerous other historians have elaborated, is particularly charged and changeable over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[6] Siân Pooley draws attention to the local dimensions of familial relations, noting that 'national' prescriptive models of childrearing were taken up in very different ways in different parts of the country. In Burnley, for example, ideas of 'professional parenting' had purchase as early as the 1860s, whereas in the coal-mining district of Auckland, these had little influence even by 1900. Jane Hamlett explores the spatial dimensions of familial life within the confines of the home, showing how 'parents controlled and constructed their relationship with their children by permitting or restricting their access to adult spaces in the home'. This study of space usefully brings to light 'hidden' or transgressive aspects of the network of family relationships, such as sibling rivalry, the arithmetic of parental attention, and the undermining of parental and class authority by servants. The mobility of different actors within these spaces, and how this shaped their interaction within them, is central to an account of authority and power within the home. As Hamlett's chapter suggests, children proved to be particularly adept at crossing boundaries, while also being prone to attempts to segregate them from other areas of the home, or from associating with servants. The chapter by Judy Giles points to the powers of servants to pervade many or all areas of domestic space, though mistresses often sought to limit their powers of circulation, or to render them invisible through manipulation of names and clothes.

The aim of this collection is thus both to acknowledge the flourishing nature of the study of authority practices and to enable a broad historical review of the household as a site of the 'micropolitics' of the negotiation of authority – the power to speak, to spend, to consume, to name, to command, to trespass and cross boundaries. The concept of domestic authority helps us to reconceive the home as an arena of active negotiation, agency and remembering. It should be seen as a site of flux for some central social identities, rather than a realm of constraint and timeless domestic labour. The contributions also point beyond the boundaries of the home to explore the way in which domestic authority was also being negotiated and contested in wider realms such as the courts, Parliament, the workhouse or the church.

The transformation of domestic authority?

A crucial part of this enterprise is to chart the changing contexts in which contests over domestic authority took place. The meanings of concepts like 'home', 'family', 'public' and 'private' are not historical constants, while

both prescriptive ideals and the practice of domestic authority have changed considerably since the late eighteenth century. This second half of this introduction will therefore chart some of the major transformations in the history of domesticity in the early nineteenth century in order to provide both a historical and a historiographical context for the chapters that follow, most of which deal with the period after 1850.

The agenda for historical research on domestic authority was set by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's pioneering book *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*. Davidoff and Hall argued that the period between 1780 and 1850 saw the formation of a middle class in Britain which distinguished itself from the working class and the aristocracy by its claims to moral and religious authority, much of which derived from the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century. Because evangelicals saw the world as full of temptation and sin they valued the home as a refuge from the sinfulness of the public sphere and increasingly sought to separate the public sphere of work and politics from the private sphere of the home. This separation of spheres was profoundly gendered: men were seen as better able to cope with the trials of the public sphere, while women were supposed to maintain their purity by remaining in the private sphere, where they could create a domestic environment in which family religion could prosper. By the 1840s they argued, these ideas 'which had originally been particularly linked to Evangelicalism had become the common sense of the English middle class'.[7] Since the publication of *Family Fortunes* all writing about the history of gender politics has taken place in the shadow of the debate about whether or not gender relations can be said to have been characterised by 'separate spheres', and this conceptual framework has informed nearly all studies of domestic authority in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8]

Regrettably, 'separate spheres' has become a straw man, a reductive caricature of an argument that presents an easy target for historiographical potshots.[9] A more constructive approach than attacking this straw man is to develop the agenda for further research set by Davidoff and Hall's book. Their argument about the development of 'separate spheres' referred to a number of distinct developments, each of which had its own chronology: an ideology of domesticity, the practice of a sexual division of labour, changes in patterns of women's work, the association of a conceptual division between public and private with male and female, and the separation of home and work. Some of these areas remain relatively unexplored even 20 years after the publication of *Family Fortunes*, while much confusion has been caused by the conflation of these separate features, as arguments about any one of these developments have been assumed to rebut theories about 'separate spheres' *tout court*.[10] There is a need for more detailed research on each of these areas, but it is possible to venture some suggestions based on the most recent research which support Davidoff and Hall's view that gender relations underwent significant changes in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries while at the same time qualifying some of its arguments. We will suggest that despite arguments in favour of a 'long eighteenth century' there are good reasons to treat the period since 1780 separately, and suggest that the meaning of domesticity and family life underwent major changes that raised difficult questions about how households should be ordered.

The recent surge of research on the eighteenth century has had an important effect on our understanding of developments which until recently nineteenth-century specialists called their own. Amanda Vickery's famous review article posited two fundamental challenges to Davidoff and Hall's chronology.[11] First, she argued that the rhetoric of 'separate spheres' was nothing new. This is incontestable, though it leaves open questions of whether or not there were changes in how these traditional ideas were understood, propagated and received – the purchase of separate spheres ideology on particular groups.[12] Second, Vickery pointed out that Davidoff and Hall's picture of class formation was incompatible with the growing scepticism about an 'industrial revolution' taking place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[13] Although some have attempted to rehabilitate the idea of an industrial revolution, the latest research has powerfully reinforced the basic picture that the British economy grew slowly but steadily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from a relatively high base, and only entered a 'take-off' phase in the 1820s.[14] The implications of this work promise a profound transformation of our understanding of the political and social history of Britain, but for our purposes it is sufficient merely to note that arguments about long-term continuities have prompted Davidoff and Hall to retreat from their earlier claims about class formation.[15]

And yet despite these arguments in favour of long-term continuities, the more that we learn about gender in the eighteenth century, the more different it seems from the nineteenth century. The codes of 'politeness' and 'sensibility' that had regulated eighteenth-century masculinity did not survive the political and cultural upheavals of the fin de siècle and by the middle of the nineteenth century 'refinement' had given way to 'character' as the crucial component of respectable manliness (though the legacy of 'politeness' and 'sensibility' on ideals of femininity perhaps lasted longer).[16] Philip Carter has noted that one aspect of this transformation was 'a desire to move . . . to more exclusive and intimate forms of sociability'; the assembly or public walk now gave way to the home as a site for sociability and 'the dining- and drawing-room became key locations for genteel contact'.[17] This retreat to the domestic arena was encouraged by the evangelical revival, which increasingly came to see the public sphere as a source of moral danger. While it is difficult to support claims that as a result of these developments women were increasingly confined to the home in practice, it is certainly true that in the period after 1780 public space was differentiated from the

home with increasing sharpness and this process can be traced through two significant semantic transformations.

The first change concerns that most basic of concepts, 'the family', which underwent a significant change some time after 1800. As Naomi Tadmor has demonstrated, when people in the eighteenth century spoke about 'families' they could have intended to refer to groups of kin, but more often 'what they had in mind was a household unit, which could comprise related and non-related dependants living under the authority of a householder: it might include a spouse, children, other relations, servants, apprentices, boarders, sojourners, or only some of these.'[18] At some point after 1800 this clearly changed as the word became more closely associated with the nuclear family. The second semantic transformation has been suggested by Lawrence Klein, who has argued that 'generally in the eighteenth century, the distinction between the private and the public did not correspond to the distinction between home and not-home.' Consequently, privacy was ascribed to forms of behaviour that we would consider public and time spent at home was not necessarily time spent in private, while the gendering of the various meanings of 'public' that Klein identifies was far more complicated than the existing literature has allowed.[19] That is to say that during the period covered by this book, distinctively modern ideas about a distinction between public and private developed. The years after 1800 saw significant changes in the way that key terms like 'family', 'public' and 'private' were conceptualised, even if the practice of work and family life remained much the same for large parts of the population. This process was fundamentally gendered, as Davidoff and Hall demonstrated: the home was increasingly seen as not only 'private' but also as a 'feminine' space. John Tosh's pioneering work has demonstrated that an essential feature of middle-class masculinities was the need to negotiate this shifting boundary, as men tried to find a domestic role within this feminised sphere alongside their responsibilities as breadwinners in the public sphere.[20]

Further research on the development of the concepts of 'the private' or 'the domestic' is needed, especially for the twentieth century: work that should be mindful of the fact that economic, political and social transformations were all changing the meanings attached to work, civil society and the state, creating multiple and shifting 'publics' against which to define the domestic.[21] The fierce controversies over the state in its relations with the Church throughout the nineteenth century clearly indicate the problems of defining the boundaries of 'the state', civil society and the private individual.[22] This complicates any attempt to claim that women were engaged in more 'public' activities in the nineteenth century than the eighteenth century, because we cannot assume that the meanings of either 'public' or 'private' activities were stable. Rather, the new activities and agencies that developed after 1800 were not self-evidently 'public' or 'private' to contemporaries, and at the heart of nineteenth-century gender politics were battles

over the public or private character of, say, the voluntary societies of the 1830s and 1840s, the anti-slavery campaigns, or new agencies of local government like school boards.[23] Was sitting on a school board an extension of women's domestic maternal role or an intrusion into the public sphere? At what point did participation in philanthropic societies become a public role? The creation of 'separate spheres' was not a dramatic change in lifestyles so much as a dynamic and never-completed process of labelling that shaped the terms in which men and women understood their social world. The struggle for domestic authority therefore took place in a domestic sphere whose boundaries were uncertain, changing, and constantly contested, but in a context after the 1770s when it was thought increasingly important to make the attempt to distinguish between 'public' and 'private'.

The case for seeing the 1780s as a point of departure has been made most forcibly by Dror Wahrman, who has argued that in the final two decades of the eighteenth century there was a revolution in the way that people conceived of personal identity. Across a range of discourses he identifies a shift from 'gender play' to 'gender panic': a mentalité 'which allowed eighteenth-century categories of gender to be imagined as occasionally mutable, potentially unfixed, and even as a matter of choice, disappeared with remarkable speed'. As part of this process, 'long-standing forms and practices that had formerly capitalized on (and sometimes wallowed in) the acknowledged limitations of gender boundaries now became socially unacceptable and culturally unintelligible.'[24] The explanation for this sudden change, he suggests, was the American War of Independence, a conflict which contemporaries found difficult to explain in terms of prevalent notions of identity, and consequently an event that prompted an effort to place categories of identity – especially race, class and gender – on more stable foundations. One aspect of this was an effort to reassert clear distinctions between gender roles and root them in essential biological differences between the sexes.[25] The belief that the conflict was an unnatural civil war 'was frequently expressed through images of an unnatural family affair or domestic strife', and the restoration of household harmony through the reassertion of clear gender roles and female submission therefore became a pressing concern.[26] In this respect 'gender panic' forms just one part of that broader movement for the reformation of manners that followed defeat in America – that national effort to set Britain's house in order and re-establish the nation's virtue by enforcing stricter adherence to particular moral codes.[27] The domestic values that were propagated were by no means new – the need for patriarchal authority and female submission – what was new was the urgency with which they were pressed on the attention of the public and the perceived risks of ignoring the increasingly strident warnings. This is reflected in the sheer scale of the production of literature urging the benefits of domesticity between 1780 and 1850.[28]

The evangelical revival lay at the heart of the movement for the reformation of manners and it was evangelicalism that raised the moral stakes so high in the rhetoric of domesticity, driving the relentless urge to categorise activities as either 'public' or 'private' and promoting the idea that women were innately morally purer than men. The evangelical belief that the home should be a refuge from the sinfulness of the public sphere exerted a powerful hold on the nineteenth-century imagination and made nineteenth-century conduct literature qualitatively different from what had gone before.[29] A conduct manual from 1850 was typical in insisting that 'It is home . . . to which we must retreat from the bustle of life, if we would find enjoyment. It is in the serene employments of that blessed sanctuary, that we must fortify our spirits against temptation, and prepare for a better world on high.'[30] It was at home that a man could find 'the strength by which he is able successfully to combat life's temptations'.[31] In this context it is possible to understand the obsessive concern that nineteenth-century men and women displayed about household discord. Given the centrality of the home to the moral and religious health of the nation, it was obvious that 'few arguments will be needed to enforce the common obligation to guard its sanctity with trembling care, and to watch against everything that threatens its harmony.'[32]

The pressing question was then how to preserve household harmony. The most basic answer was that harmony should be obtained through submission to the will of the male head of the household. Women were allowed to exercise 'influence', but decision-making was to be left to their husbands.[33] The core of nineteenth-century domestic ideology was the internal logic which reconciled male authority with the ideal of marital unity and household harmony by assuming that women would happily surrender their own opinions.[34] Elizabeth Sandford, for instance, wrote in the 1830s that 'Where want of congeniality impairs domestic comfort . . . it is for woman, not for man, to make the sacrifice'.[35] In response women like Sarah Stickney Ellis tried to manipulate separate spheres ideology to carve out a space for female autonomy in the home. She thought that a husband ought to leave domestic arrangements alone 'simply because the operations necessary to be carried on in that department of his household, are alike foreign to his understanding and his tastes'. 'Thus, unless a husband can feel sufficient confidence in his wife, to allow her to rule with undisputed authority in this little sphere, her case must be a pitiable one indeed.'[36] If women's natural role was the care of others and if women were naturally sources of beneficent moral influence then it became difficult to deny them authority in the home and possibly beyond.[37] This female subversion of separate spheres can be seen at one level as an alternative answer to the problem of maintaining household harmony: establishing a rigid sexual division of labour would minimise conflict between spouses, but it was not a position which challenged male authority head-on.

This is small wonder when we consider the powerful religious ideas legitimating male authority: in a deeply religious age these cannot be underestimated. Not only did wives normally make a religious vow to obey their husbands as part of the marriage service, but such submission was enjoined by scripture. In the book of Genesis wives were told that 'thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee', while St. Paul's letter to the Colossians unequivocally instructed, 'Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.'[38] It is little surprise that the most radical alternatives to patriarchal marriage were developed by groups far removed from the religious mainstream. Robert Owen's vision of communal childcare and easy divorce was made easier by his militant atheism.[39] Similarly, it is no surprise that the egalitarian vision of marriage that found its fullest expression in John Stuart Mill's essay on *The subjection of women* was developed in the 1830s by the circle of liberal Anglicans and Unitarians who clustered around W. J. Fox's chapel at South Place in London – precisely those groups who felt least bound by literal interpretations of scripture.[40] In this light it seems plausible to suggest that changing attitudes towards domesticity and domestic authority followed changing patterns of religious belief, although the lack of research on this is striking, given the importance that the secondary literature attaches to evangelicalism in the creation of domestic ideology. The transition from a primarily religious to a primarily secular understanding of gender roles is arguably one of the most significant changes in modern gender history. Even so, we should not get carried away by arguments about secularisation; as Alana Harris's chapter reminds us, religious language continued to inform ideas about domesticity long after the Victorian age. A more nuanced approach is needed that acknowledges variety and change within religious discourse. For instance, the transformation that Boyd Hilton has identified between the evangelical emphasis on the Atonement that dominated early nineteenth-century culture and the greater emphasis on the Incarnation that came to dominate after mid-century seems fundamental, not least because it brought in its wake new attitudes to 'manliness'.[41]

If domesticity rested in part on religious foundations then we should expect some differences in domestic ideology and practice between denominational groups. Linda Wilson's study of non-conformist women between 1825 and 1875 supports this contention, though further research is required to explore the differences between pre-millenialist and post-millenialist varieties of evangelicalism and the range of positions within the Church of England.[42] Wilson has found that women who were Congregationalists (like Sarah Stickney Ellis) or Baptists seem to have internalised the classic Victorian ideal of submissive, religious, domestic womanhood more than Wesleyans or Primitive Methodists.[43] Sandra Stanley Holton's study of Quaker women complements this by drawing attention to the unusual prominence of single women within the strong Quaker commitment to domesticity and family.[44] This raises the question of the purchase of the

domestic ideal described above – how many people were affected by 'separate spheres' ideology and the accompanying concerns about domestic authority?

Class has formed the basis of most answers to this problem, with Davidoff and Hall famously arguing that 'separate spheres' was characteristic of the emerging middle class. Subsequent research has shown that domestic ideology, separation of spheres and evangelicalism were by no means restricted to one sociological group, but this does not mean that class is not a useful concept. If we treat class as one category of identity that contemporaries used to interpret the social order rather than as a heuristic retrospective sociological category then class can still be productively brought to bear on the history of domesticity.[45] Historians of the early modern period have suggested that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries behaviour that had characterised certain types of masculinity became increasingly associated with emerging class identities. Over time certain models of early modern manhood 'rooted in values ranging across prodigality, excess, bravado, brawn, transience, and collectivism, were positively claimed by, and became increasingly associated (often pejoratively) with the "meaner" sorts of men'. Similarly, 'some of the attributes of patriarchal manhood in terms of orderly, rational self-control . . . were realigned with distinctions of social status, and became exclusively associated with the "better" or "middling" sorts'.[46] Domesticity should be seen in this light: as Dror Wahrman has convincingly argued, it was only after the debates on the 1832 Reform Act that the domestic ideal came to be seen as distinctively middle-class, part of the process by which the category of 'middle-class' became firmly entrenched in political discourse.[47] Since the meaning of 'domesticity' was no more fixed than the meaning of 'middle-class' the rhetoric of domesticity interacted in complex ways with fluid categories of social identity, as actors sought to locate themselves and others in schemes of social categorisation and hierarchy. The outcomes of these struggles were not simply political in their own right but also shaped a range of practices. For instance, Anna Clark's work has shown how working-class radicals abandoned older understandings of domesticity and tried to appropriate the evangelical ideal during the Chartist campaigns of the 1830s and 1840s.[48] Similarly, Elizabeth Foyster has shown how in the nineteenth century domestic violence became seen as primarily a working-class phenomenon, while Ben Griffin has argued that these perceptions of the abuse of male authority shaped parliament's reactions to demands for women's rights in the final third of the nineteenth century.[49]

It therefore makes no sense to set up 'separate spheres' as a straw man – a theory whose only utility lies in the insights we can develop by disproving it. The task of historians is to examine how the rhetoric of domesticity operated and was made meaningful in particular contexts, how contemporaries used it to make sense of their experiences, how it shaped the actions of particular

individuals or groups, and how it changed over time. What is needed then is a more sophisticated approach to the relationship between social identities, domestic ideology understood as a set of prescriptive norms, and the range of behaviours involved in the practice of everyday life. In this context Simon Szreter's model of changing patterns of fertility provides a helpful way of thinking about patterns of domestic practice. Szreter has argued that 'roles, norms and social identities . . . are constructed by and embedded in the shared social practices and values of social groups or what might more accurately be termed "communication communities" '.[50] Local neighbourhood or street communities, churches or chapels, schools, workplaces and the national media have all been sites where individuals participate in communication communities and where individuals are socialised into different sets of expectations, norms and values. At its most basic we can see this in the differences between the hard-drinking manual labourers and the self-improving artisans who populate Anna Clark's study of the early nineteenth-century working class: each had distinctive patterns of socialisation which were reflected in different models of masculinity.[51] Seen in this way it is clear that the middle classes participated in national communication communities, through national printed media and particular educational institutions for example, whereas working-class communication communities were predominantly rooted in shared localities, often with their own dialects, and face to face contact.[52] That is to say that the middle classes were exposed to a nationally standardised set of ideas about domestic practices through the vast outpourings of pamphlets and books on household management and marriage, while working-class domesticity was governed by local norms enforced by 'rough music'.[53] The intersection of these two cultures among the lower-middle-classes could produce serious strains as couples struggled to rework middle-class ideals, prompting the kind of ridicule visited upon Mr Pooter by George and Weedon Grossmith in *The Diary of a Nobody*.[54] Szreter has demonstrated that there were substantial variations in the norms and practices associated with fertility between different regional and occupational communities; for instance, between the Potteries, with its widespread domestic industry performed by household units, and mining areas like South Wales, where men earned high wages and there were few employment opportunities for women.[55] There is every reason to suspect that there were also different approaches to the exercise of domestic authority that can only be explored through the kind of regional case studies presented by Siân Pooley and Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher in this volume.

This focus on multiple domestic ideals and practices should not however obscure large-scale trends. The evangelical-influenced model of domestic authority described above *was* culturally dominant among the educated classes in the first half of the nineteenth century but came under increasing pressure in the second half. Growing concerns about negligent and violent

husbands, abusive and irresponsible parents, not to mention the dangers of unbridled male sexuality, prompted serious re-evaluation of the limits of male domestic authority.[56] The chapters that follow by Ginger Frost and Gail Savage pay eloquent testimony to this point. In a quieter way men were becoming dissatisfied with the emotional rewards of patriarchy as it had been practised by their fathers in the final decades of the nineteenth century, leading John Tosh to identify a 'flight from domesticity' for middle-class men in his major study of Victorian masculinity.[57] Other men experimented with new forms of emotional and sexual intimacy, leading some historians to propose 'companionate marriage' as a large-scale trend characterising the close of the nineteenth century.

Claims to novelty must be treated with caution. It is troubling that the move towards a more nuclear, socially isolated family and towards 'companionship' between couples in the home has been heralded and yet later 'rediscovered' on numerous occasions. Companionate marriage seems to be such a slippery and capacious concept that it offers little purchase for historians trying to map change over time. Ambitious accounts of courtship and marriage such as that offered by John Gillis have ended up posing continuity between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, failing to find a shift towards intimacy and understanding between spouses.[58] As suggested above, part of this problem is due to the failure to distinguish between various aspects of the social history of domesticity, which need to be carefully disaggregated, and their relationship to complicated and constantly changing ideologies of marriage and domesticity. The uncertain purchase of 'companionate marriage' points to some serious gaps in the historiography of domestic authority in the twentieth century, which lacks ambitious overarching texts such as *Family Fortunes* or explanatory frameworks such as 'separate spheres'. While there is a wealth of detailed empirical work, there are fewer more general concepts which attempt to capture social change on a broad scale. If our understanding of the development of Victorian domestic ideology is well developed, our understanding of its decline is still remarkably sketchy and the contributions to this book aim to fill some of the gaps.

'Companionate marriage' (or variants of this concept such as Marcus Collins' idea of 'mutualism'[59]) was clearly conceived of in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it has been seen by many as becoming broadly accepted and practised in the twentieth century. The tone of advice manuals became much more insistently dogmatic concerning the need to establish a marital complementarity that would enable deeper forms of intimacy, including sexual intimacy. In the nineteenth century the authors of advice literature had been predominantly clergymen or women writers like Sarah Ellis, but in the twentieth century new kinds of 'expert' emerged claiming new forms of knowledge and authority to pronounce on marriage: psychologists, sociologists and agony aunts, for example. The pronouncements of

such experts need to be carefully located in their social context. It may be that the twentieth century saw the decline of distinctive local patterns of domestic authority such as those described by Siân Pooley, in favour of a nationally more standardised set of norms and practices. Certainly, companionate marriage can be linked to some of the major changes in domestic living arrangements and fertility norms which do seem to make the twentieth century different. As couples began to produce smaller families earlier in their marriages, and as mortality rates fell, there were extended periods when adult companionship became the central mode of marital interaction. Some historians have argued that this created a more demanding emotional profile for marriage, and opened the door to more egalitarian family dynamics.[60] But demographic changes alone cannot account for the complexity of subjectivities and experiences that were encountered and produced through the discourse of companionate marriage. Relations of power, authority and intimacy between couples shifted with the new availability of sexual knowledge in the interwar decades, with women's changed citizen status in 1918 and 1928 and the feminist politicisation of domestic organisation that accompanied it. New patterns of paid employment taken up by women in manufacturing industries and the expanding service sector were also significant in refiguring marriages.[61] And the recent historical attention to masculinity suggests that it was not only women's work, but also the jobs taken up by men in new industries had the power to change profoundly relationships of domestic authority, as Pat Ayer's work on the balance between familial and personal consumption by men in different sectors of employment suggests.[62] Finally, the twentieth-century state came to interact with individuals in the domestic realm through new avenues – health visitors, midwives, teachers, nurses – which again reshaped the idea of authority in the home.[63]

One of the most profound transformations of domestic authority in the twentieth century was the changing institution of domestic service. Service formed a key realm in which middle-class women, and occasionally men, attempted to shape themselves as authorities within the home, and engaged with 'domesticity'. It was also an institution through which working-class women frequently subverted that authority and asserted their own. In the literature on domestic service, a similarly slippery concept to that of companionate marriage has been the idea of a shift from 'status' to 'contract', or from personalised service and its intense authority relations to a more professional or 'modern' relationship in which personal authority was, ideally, left out of play. Like companionate marriage, this 'shift' has been posited as a key symbolic moment, characterising the move to 'modernity', or a shift from 'community' to 'civil society', as a basis for social interaction. The changing legal norms of employment in domestic service, however, tell us little about how such a process of professionalisation might have been achieved.[64] The idea of contract is used by historians to indicate a far deeper

change, in realms beyond that of service employment. It has been used, for example, to shed light on the changes in twentieth-century marriage, from a realm of, ideally, material support and companionship, to romantic love, and finally to what Anthony Giddens has termed the 'confluent love' of the late twentieth century 'separating and divorcing society'.[65] But this shift to 'contract' in all its guises is variously located between the late eighteenth and the late twentieth centuries, and cannot easily be tied down to any particular evidential basis. It is clear that there has been a transformation of intimacy and authority within the home during the twentieth century, but that the basis of this is multifaceted and needs to be thoroughly historicised.

Historians of domestic service have tended to see the two World Wars as marking watersheds, in creating conditions allowing for a diminution of deference and personalised authority in the home, and with this, a growing refusal to serve in private residential service.[66] But we should be wary of overstating the nature of the change; there was no 'inevitable' decline of domestic service, understood as linked to the creation of a 'modern' nuclear family that no longer included the wide variety of kin, dependents and workers who had been found in households of earlier centuries. Indeed, households continued to be complex affairs, comprising lodgers, kin and domestic workers in the twentieth century, and domestic authority thus continued to be a contested and locally diverse set of prescriptions and practices. There was, however, a transfer of domestic labour from live-in service to more casual and marginalised domestic help – chars, cleaners and au pairs – that went with the transformation of middle-class feminine identity from 'mistress' to 'housewife'.

With this shift went a change in the symbolic value of the domestic interior and the practices of housekeeping. Becky Conekin has argued that in post-war Britain, the household and its material artefacts became a significant site of 'modernity', through discourses of design, taste and efficiency.[67] The workers who continued to 'help' housewives have tended to be historically invisible, eclipsed by the new importance attributed to the refrigerator or the 'hoover'. There has been little attempt to chart their experiences with the same fascination and attention that has been given to the maids, nannies and cooks that characterised the sector before the First World War. The contribution by Judy Giles to this volume examines such workers alongside more traditional 'servants', and provides a sense of the evolution of the 'servant problem' beyond the Second World War and into the second half of the twentieth century. While service was prominent in the first half of the twentieth century, the sharp fall in households employing servants after the Second World War has led historians to neglect this later period. However, both the persistence of casual cleaners *and* the continuing cultural prominence of servants lead us to look afresh at this later period, and to ask why the idea of domestic service has continued to have such salience and visibility in post-war British society.

Amongst the non-servant keeping classes, varieties of domestic authority were tempered and supported in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the power of neighbours and relatives to enforce and regulate communal norms, and to police any 'irregularities', particularly in poorer communities where housing conditions allowed for more intrusion.[68] The power of wives and mothers within households has been argued by Melanie Tebbutt to have depended on the degree to which they were able to tap into the networks of gossip and 'wary mutuality' that characterised working-class communities.[69] Access to these kinds of resources was strongly determined by ethnicity, gender and class. Neighbourliness was a major source of support to some working-class women, but, Tebbutt argues, was found intrusive by many working-class men, and increasingly, was avoided by families with aspirations for social mobility.[70] The experiences of immigrant families were varied, with neighbourly support being denied within some hostile neighbourhoods, and being a resource developed within immigrant communities themselves, to enable discrimination to be parried.[71] As the twentieth century brought technical and sanitary advances, and changes in the spatial layout and location of working-class housing, the ways in which neighbours and communities might intervene in or influence domestic authority became less marked. The increasing availability of council housing in new estates in the interwar decades, and of mass owner-occupation after the Second World War, created new domestic spaces that allowed for the reframing of social relationships and the undermining of the localised communication communities that had characterised working-class sociability. With the decline of multiple occupancy houses, there was a new isolation from the extended family and community in the domestic realm from the 1930s.

But this story is not one of a simple shift to a more intense and private version of 'domesticity', despite the common assertion of more domestic versions of both masculinity and femininity becoming popular in the interwar years. As Martin Francis has suggested, both men and women felt ambivalent about the idealised versions of domesticity presented to them in the interwar decades, and in revised form in the 1940s and 1950s. Companionate marriage provided no easy blueprint explaining how to construct intimate relationships, as men indulged in homosocial fantasies of 'flight from commitment', and women increasingly experimented with combinations of paid work and motherhood.[72] At the same time as some experienced more freedom to transform their domestic norms, some family forms became pathologised – the working mother in the 1950s, the single mother in the 1980s – and these marginalised households found it periodically hard to assert their authority vis-à-vis the state, kinship networks and communities.[73]

These tensions over authority played out in relation to neighbourhood, space and domesticity were perhaps most pronounced when it came to the

exercise of authority between generations. Recent work by Selina Todd has suggested that as younger women became more likely to take paid employment outside of the home in the interwar decades, their wages became a resource in determining their ability to marshal authority within the home.[74] Shifts in the nature of resources used to construct domestic authority from the mid-twentieth century led to strong generational divides, with tensions emerging between the divergent expectations and aspirations of parents and children. Such shifts were particularly marked in the south-east, where suburbanisation and changes in retail were widespread and greater mobility made for a more privatised family life. These changes reproduced similar tensions to those found between husbands and wives as married women had achieved greater economic independence in the course of the nineteenth century.[75]

We can also see a change in the authority exercised by older generations towards younger ones in the twentieth century, as pensions and decreased mortality allowed grandparents to be present and to marshal resources for longer in twentieth-century households. The small pensions available to the elderly poor from 1908 sometimes made them the sole breadwinners in households experiencing unemployment or ill-health, and until other welfare benefits became more widely available, pensions gave older generations new avenues of authority. The new role that grandparents took in caring for their grandchildren as more women worked in the early to mid-twentieth century also created new interdependencies, intimacies and points of conflict in households. These care relationships declined towards the middle to end of the twentieth century, as geographical mobility made grandparents less likely to live near their wider families, and as grandmothers became more likely to be working themselves when their grandchildren arrived.

Despite the appearance of such patterns of generational change and division, the historiography of intergenerational relations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain is still lacking in grand narrative frameworks. Two key transitions have emerged, and are held to have taken place first at the turn of the twentieth century and second in the 1960s. Viviana Zelizer's pioneering work, first published in 1985, established the notion of the new 'sacralisation' of childhood in early twentieth-century America, arguing that as the economic worth of children waned with the decline in child employment, so the emotional worth of the child within the family grew exponentially.[76] And with this shift went an intensification of parental authority over children, as 'care' of children intensified.[77] The second key transformation in parent–child relations is located during the 1960s, with the notion of the 'permissive shift'. The increasing consumer power of children and young people led to the growth of 'youth culture', which – it is assumed – led to the overthrow of traditional relations of authority between parents and their children.

Yet both these shifts need further elaboration. Their precise chronology is hazy. The focus of work on the 1960s in particular has been primarily 'public', with intergenerational relations studied through the lens of national or metropolitan cultural movements such as rock'n'roll and the beat poets, and through the activities of obviously 'rebellious' groups such as students and hippies.[78] This focus has ignored the importance of the domestic setting in coming to an understanding of 'public' generational conflicts. Historians such as Frank Mort and Peter Bailey have begun to explore the private dimensions of what they see as the radical intergenerational shifts of the post-Second World War period, looking in particular at the role of grammar schools in forging new class identities.[79] The contributions of this book highlight the importance of further detailed empirical work on this subject. Deborah Thom, for example, suggests that changing professional discourses on family – which are the focus of most historical research in this field – bear no straightforward relationship to practices within families. This in turn forces a reconsideration of the established chronologies of intergenerational relations in the later half of the twentieth century, and particularly the notion of a 1960s 'revolution' in parent–child authority.

More generally, we have encouraged contributions to this collection which look at some of the neglected actors and relationships of the domestic realm. Leonore Davidoff has suggested that historians should pay more attention to the domestic relationships that depart from the imagined ideal of the 'nuclear' family – the role of lodgers and landladies for example – or to those relationships that have escaped historical attention, such as sibling relationships.[80] Jane Hamlett's discussion of middle-class childhood takes up Davidoff's challenge to think about the relationships between siblings, and in her discussion of godparenting, Valerie Sanders sheds light on a historically neglected identity. It is notable, however, that certain groups still lack a presence in the historiography; most notably, the elderly represent an obvious gap in this collection. There is a pressing need to build on the work of Pat Thane in locating the elderly in the complex and reciprocal realm of the domestic.[81] Attention to issues of domestic authority that arise in households affected by migration would also seem a promising area of further research.[82]

However, while these neglected areas call for further attention, this should not be at the expense of a more holistic account of homes and households. Jane Hamlett points to the limitations of historical investigations which take certain relationships in isolation rather than situating them as part of a 'structural whole' – in other words, to focus on the elderly, parenting or marriage, at the expense of a wider landscape of the multiple relationships which go to make up 'the domestic'. This collection aims to remedy this gap in the literature both by offering accounts inspired by a broadly defined sense of domestic authority and by juxtaposing the chapters collected here so that an