



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Doolittle, Megan, Fink, Janet and Holden, Katherine

Blood, Contract and Intimacy: History and Practice with Leonore Davidoff

Original Citation

Doolittle, Megan, Fink, Janet and Holden, Katherine (2016) Blood, Contract and Intimacy: History and Practice with Leonore Davidoff. *Gender and History*, 28 (2). pp. 288-298. ISSN 0953-5233

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/28405/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden

Blood Contract and Intimacy: History and Practice with Leonore Davidoff

This piece celebrates the work of Leonore Davidoff by reflecting on the significance of an academic research, writing and support group set up by her in 1995 with the three authors of this piece, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden. We were privileged to share with Leonore nearly twenty years of collaboration and feminist scholarship through regular meetings, readings, editing, joint conference presentations, publications and many conversations over lunch. The group's primary purpose was to exchange thoughts and write about the fabric of family life in the context of British history since the early modern period, to consider what meanings have been given to the familial, what it means to live within kinship relationships, and how these saturated social worlds. The working title for our group, Blood, Contract and Intimacy (BCI), summed up the complexities and nuances of the familial which we fruitfully explored together. Working collaboratively was also at the centre of our project as way of deliberately growing our own feminist alternative to the lone scholar paradigm, invisibly supported by families and family-like hierarchies of students and junior researchers.

We start by tracing the origins of our group, the academic and personal contexts for our joint work, and how we came to work together. Our collaborative research and writing practices are then discussed in the context of Leonore's commitment to shared feminist scholarship, showing how we combined forces towards our shared purposes initially through the writing of *The Family Story*.¹ The key insights in this book originating in Leonore's innovative approaches to histories of gender and family are outlined, followed by examples from our research which show the ongoing influence of Leonore's ideas. Finally, we discuss the group's contributions, through collaboration and feedback, to her own research and writing on the history of kinship. .

Our joint biographies began when we had the good fortune to be PhD students supervised by Leonore in the Sociology Department at Essex University, all completing in 1996/7. A Sociology Department may not have been the most obvious home for social historians but, at Essex, social history was embraced within a culture of interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary. Exciting work and new disciplinary approaches were developing all around us in social theory, anthropology, oral history and psychoanalysis. Feminist scholarship was prominent during the 1990s in Sociology at Essex, home not only to Leonore but also Mary Mackintosh, Miriam Glucksmann, Catherine Hall and, in the History Department, Ludmilla Jordanova.²

In higher education more generally, feminist scholars like Leonore who had already battled their way into the academy welcomed older, less conventional students like us with open arms. This was a time when women brought a broad spectrum of previous work and life experiences to their studies and a move into academia could be supported by various kinds of state funding. Thus when we eagerly plunged into university life, we brought with us our knowledge of feminist politics, both personal and public.

When Leonore founded *Gender & History* in 1989, in the same year as the first UK Women's History Network conference, debates about the distinctions between women's history and gender history were lively. Fears about the de-politicisation of women's history by the apparently more neutral use of gender as a category were countered by the key insight in the Journal and elsewhere that gender divisions drove inequality; this had enormous potential for being more, not less, political than simply 'discovering' women's lives in the past.³ These debates drove an expansion of conceptual work about gender which we were keen to tap into. It was a good place and a good time to be thinking. In 1995 Leonore published *Worlds Between*, the collection of her most important shorter pieces, many of which developed conceptualisations of the interconnections between gender and family, including new work on sibling relationships.⁴ This marked the emergence of her growing

interest in kinship, family and horizontal generational relationships which flourished through our work together.

Our first joint venture, instigated by Leonore, was a panel for the Social History Society Conference in 1995, which had the theme of 'Theories, Methods and Concepts in Social and Cultural History', where we each presented papers on our doctoral research with Leonore providing a conceptual overview.⁵ This conference exposed some of the rifts in social history at the time, one of which was how to work across conceptual questions, historical contexts and specific or individual stories, and our panel reflected the tensions in this dynamic. Leonore's paper set out what was needed in the field of family history:

'We need to ask questions about how people lived, including how they related to the material world, how they used and imagined their physical bodies, intellects and souls. ... The boundaries of a kinships system, an economic system, a political system, the public and the private have to be breached, the power of dominant groups to define what are the 'interesting' questions must constantly be queried'.⁶

These questions established the core concerns not only of the BCI group but also our first common project, *The Family Story*.

However, before turning to assess what was to become our co-authored book and the directions we each took afterwards, we would like to explain how the group worked together. As is widely appreciated, Leonore was generous in sharing her work and encouraged both solidarity and collaboration between scholars of gender and women's studies not only in Britain, but across the world. She was certain that intellectual work is never the product of one individual but, like the middle-class entrepreneurs she wrote about with Catherine Hall in *Family Fortunes*, it relies on both acknowledged and less visible contributions.⁷ She also consistently championed the work of her students, offering not only intellectual inspiration but also practical help.

Collaboration was thus not a new way of working for Leonore but, in this instance, it was our shared interests in unravelling and reconceptualising histories of the family that coincided not only with Leonore's openness to our ideas, but also a desire shared by all of us for a nurturing space to articulate our struggle with the production of academic knowledge.⁸ The three of us were at the same time looking for mutual support in establishing our own academic directions and careers. Thus the dynamics of the group as a whole relied on interdependent relationships as each of us brought different life experiences, fields of scholarship and research skills to our joint discussions and writing. As we began to work together on *The Family Story*, our practices were deliberately developed to minimise the tensions generated by academic hierarchies. Right from the beginning, we agreed that we wanted the book to be a product of our joint thinking. Thus it would be unlike many publications with more than one author which are divided up between writers with relatively little input into one another's sections. In order to present our ideas as though we were speaking with one voice, we spent many hours in meetings discussing the structure and shape of the book and the content of each chapter. Drafts were sent round, views and comments exchanged, and alterations were made to both structure and language. Chapters were initially drafted by one person, and then edited by another, and sometimes by each of us in turn. Group discussions moved our ideas forwards and deepened them. We each contributed examples and suggested different angles which then had to be integrated, with sections often restructured to accommodate them. We all learned a great deal about how to give and receive feedback, suggestions and rewrites of our drafts.

We met in each other's homes and this always involved lunch, a time when we would share news about our own families. The stories we recounted often reflected the concerns of the book and then moved our thinking forward when we turned back to the work in hand. Our already well-established friendships and our commitment to a feminist academic practice were strengthened through the respect and confidence we placed in each other's ideas as well as the personal support we shared.

Nearly every conference paper, article, chapter and book each of us wrote at this time was subjected to in-depth discussion and revision.

We had come together at the University of Essex as Leonore's PhD students and through our individual attempts to locate within the historical landscape of British family life fathers in the nineteenth century, unmarried women in the inter-war years and lone mothers in the post-war period. With her support, these attempts also encouraged us to think critically not only about how the family was conceptualised but also the ongoing centrality of marriage, motherhood and fatherly authority in normative constructions of families through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We brought this thinking to *The Family Story* where, together, we continued to refine our ideas with the aim of writing a different history of the meanings and practices of family lives in Britain; one which turned attention to relationships that had not been regarded as pertinent to the study of families in the past. We added the empirical research from our PhDs to these conceptual discussions while Leonore extended their parameters with insights gathered from sociological and feminist theory relating to self and identity. In these ways, we established two key threads through which to weave the different elements of the book together. One was the challenge of enhancing existing concepts, such as home and household, in order to imagine families not as objects to be studied, but as relationships and practices woven through the messy and everyday realities of past social worlds. The other was to bring into view some of the absences and silences in histories of the family.

Holding apart the conceptual distinctions of home and household while holding together the complementary insights they brought to understanding the imaginary, idealised and spatial boundaries of family life was central to our thinking in *The Family Story*. It allowed each of us to focus on and interrogate the gendered meanings of *home*; a symbolic space where wives and mothers were presumed to nurture and care for the family while husbands and fathers provided the income to support this work. In this, the detailed empirical research that Leonore had conducted over many years, together with her feminist standpoint, was used to excellent effect. Her knowledge of the class

and gender order of nineteenth-century Britain, and the ways it coalesced in domestic service relations was, for example, ever-present. The detail she introduced into the chapter on domestic service and lodging in the book is a powerful evocation of this knowledge with its illustration of what ‘family work’ demanded and a reminder of how its daily disorderliness and the routines to manage it regulated the lives of girls and women. She wrote:

What did doing for someone [a man] entail? It meant having the house - including outside steps and surroundings – cleaned, clothes washed, ironed and mended, meals cooked and served, coal fetched, fires lighted and tended, bathing water carried to and from bedrooms, chamber pots emptied, errands run and messages carried. It might also entail ‘people work’: listening to grievances, being the repository of secrets, lying to save face, giving emotional support and sympathy. Only with wives were sexual services a legitimate part of the bargain, yet these too might often be included.⁹

By being attentive to the concept of *household*, the domestic space that is physically shared, we were also able to further integrate examples from our own research to identify the equally tangled family and family-like relationships that brought people together under one roof. For Megan, explicitly situating fathers in the domestic spaces of home and household, as well as in the public sphere, extended understandings of how working-class fathers’ authority was exercised, negotiated and challenged in the mid-nineteenth century. Katherine’s study of unmarried women in the mid-twentieth century illustrated the often crucial role they played in financially maintaining households and how their relationships as daughters and sisters could be of equal emotional importance in supporting family relations in the home and across households. The examples of twentieth-century family silences that Janet brought to the book – illegitimacy, domestic violence and the regulation of female sexuality – were similarly selected to unsettle normative assumptions about family practices within households and myths of the home as a safe and secure space for all family members.

These approaches all de-centred the married couple and their own children in our accounts of family life in the past and brought different ties of love, care and intimacy into view as well as the abuses of trust and power that can be concealed within the spatial and symbolic boundaries of house, home and household. Significantly this approach is echoed in the influential edited collection of sociological pieces, *The New Family?*, published in the same year as *The Family Story* and focused on the idea of *doing* family rather than *being* in a family.¹⁰ With its call for broader definitions and understandings of families, it is illustrative of the ways in which Leonore's work was always so successfully located at the cutting edges of historical, sociological and feminist thinking.

However, writing *The Family Story*, was just the beginning of a much longer collaboration. We continued to meet as the BCI group three or four times a year, whatever the other pressures on our work and personal lives, until Leonore's final illness in 2014. These meetings offered a space where we supported and challenged each other to develop and complete many of our own research and writing projects. Our methods of working together remained essentially the same and the close attention and detailed comments we have made on drafts of each other's individually authored articles and books have kept alive our commitment to feminist historical research as essentially a joint enterprise. Although we rarely collaborated on joint publications again, we continued to link our work through panels where the four of us spoke together at a number of international conferences. Leonore's gradually declining health meant that she could not always be present herself, but we were able to read her papers, while managing as best we could the disappointment of her friends and peers that she could not answer or discuss her work directly.

Working together in this way remained a productive activity because, although we had and still continue to have different research interests, we shared a common concern with the meanings and definitions of family. Each of us built on these shared conceptual frameworks, drawing on and developing them alongside Leonore's continuing work on kinship and siblings.

For Katherine, one of Leonore's most important findings in her early work on domestic servants, landladies and lodgers (revisited in *The Family Story*) was the close connection between emotional and physical aspects of service relationships. This insight was especially significant for her investigation of the lives of single men and women for her monograph *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England: 1914–1960*, and particularly pertinent for her most recent project, a history of nannies in twentieth century Britain.¹¹ *Nanny Knows Best* focused on the triangular relationship between nanny/mother/child; it exposed the hard physical labour of childcare, the pride nannies took in their knowledge and expertise, and struggles over maternal authority. These struggles were often related to the relative amounts of hands-on care undertaken by mother and nanny. The work of feeding, washing and dressing children created powerful attachments and rivalries; and the feelings generated between all parties were central to the dynamics of nanny employment, frequently affecting how long a nanny stayed in her job and her subsequent relationship with the family after she left.

The often isolated position occupied by mother and nanny, alone together at home with children, before the more recent norm of mothers having to be absent during the day, meant that whatever difficulties arose there was also a high degree of interdependency between them. And while their social positions may have been a world apart, their relationship occupied a 'world between', a place where they could give and receive companionship. Leonore's insights on this very particular relationship, shared in our group, arose partly from her personal experience in the 1950s and 60s when she took on Danish au pairs to help in the house when her children were growing up before she went back to academic work, a period when she was often lonely.

The age, class and ethnicity of a nanny were of great significance to dynamics of this kind within families and households. In our BCI discussions about *The Family Story*, Leonore had pointed out how hard it could be for a working-class girl scarcely past childhood herself who had to be an adult and be set a position in authority over middle-class children of similar ages.¹² This difficulty was exemplified in an interview Katherine carried out with Ada, a former nanny. Ada's first job was as a mother's help in 1942, and she

explained how at the age of 14 she was expected to do ‘anything and everything’ in a household with three children of whom she was sometimes left in sole charge:

You had to work because they just couldn’t afford to have you living at home and not bringing anything in. So she [her mother] found me a job and I went with a family, but the oldest child was a year younger than me and I don’t know, I felt as if she knew more than me.¹³

When Ada went on to become a nanny to another wealthier family a different kind of relationship was formed. She formed a deep mutual attachment to three young children whom she looked after for five years. Her departure from her job after the war to get married was traumatic for all parties and although Ada did not see her charges for over 50 years, in her mind they remained ‘her children’. She also described her employer as having been ‘just like a mother to her’ suggesting her attachment was not just to the children but also to their mother.¹⁴

The uncomfortable dynamics of blood, contract and intimacy in service relationships, to which Leonore was so attuned, can be seen in the affection but also the largely unspoken rivalries between mother and nanny. This can be inferred from Ada’s behaviour both while she was in the job and after she left. While she was working she took the baby away on holiday with her as if he had been her own child, but she felt demeaned by her employer’s request not long after leaving their employment that she might like to go back to tidy the house when the family were away.¹⁵ Ada’s reaction here supports Leonore’s argument that women’s move out of domestic service after both world wars can be connected not simply to the availability of other occupations but also to their own ambitions and desires for upward social mobility and feelings of shame about their ‘servile past’.¹⁶

This brief example illustrates how Leonore’s thinking reached into Katherine’s work and how the BCI group allowed a space for such connections to be teased out and developed in each new direction taken. One of the themes that Leonore had identified in our work on *The Family Story* was that ‘family’ was

everywhere but nowhere – permeating social, economic, personal and everyday life but rarely made explicit or its workings articulated – hiding in plain sight. This resonated with Megan’s work exploring masculinity and domestic life, drawing on readings of British working-class autobiographies. One feature of this source is that very few men wrote anything about their experiences of being a father, although almost all of them gave some indications that they lived within webs of kinship relationships which included their children. However, many described their own fathers who often appeared in their accounts of childhood. Unpacking these stories was one of the few ways to locate men’s domestic lives and familial relationships in order to shine a direct light on them.

This extract from George Steele’s autobiography formed the kernel of Megan’s work on domestic space and time, centring on the father’s chair:

After which [the evening meal] he would settle into that old mahogany-and-horsehair chair, so well worn and moulded to his convenience, and read – and discuss his readings with my mother, who sat knitting or sewing after clearing the tea-things away. And he would break off at times to tell us boys the most absurd tales. It was his humour to relate a funny story as though it were a fact and a personal experience, and leave it to Mother to reconcile his flights of fancy and square them (if she could) with the sober truth of everyday life.¹⁷

It was the chair in this account which launched a BCI discussion, and once identified, chairs became visible in a host of other descriptions of childhood as a site of both tension and cohesion. In this case, Steele’s father’s stories about the rest of the world from the newspaper and his life at work demonstrated that he had leisure time and a ready audience for expressing his opinions and exercising his imagination. His mother not only had to continue working, but also took on the difficult role of mediating these stories for her children so that their enjoyment was not spoiled but they would not be too misled by them either. However, as the autobiography develops, it is clear that this nostalgic family scene had a bitter subtext. This chair was one of the last of their possessions to be sold when

the family faced the workhouse, its sale representing the final break-up of their home. Steele went on to portray his father as an impossible dreamer, unable to provide enough to support his family, a subtle story of failure to be a 'real' father.¹⁸

The insights of the group were invaluable in interrogating this source, and Leonore was particularly helpful in pointing to material she had worked with herself to extend and deepen Megan's interpretation. Leonore drew attention, not least, to conceptual connections across periods, class positions, and demographic contexts, which brought out the historically specific meanings and practices of fatherhood through which fathers performed and lived those family relationships. Such analytical tools were crucial to revealing what was taken-for-granted at both levels.

The legacy of earlier work that Leonore brought to the BCI group was equally influential for Janet's study of residential care for children in the early to mid-twentieth century Britain. This research focused primarily on promotional materials produced by the National Children's Home (NCH) and more especially the implicit tensions in visual portrayals of the sites of care provided by the organization.¹⁹ On the one hand, the portrayal of children's everyday experiences was infused with a romanticized ideal of childhood and its associations with innocence, freedom and nature. Here residential care was presented as offering opportunities for young children to enjoy an unspoilt, natural environment – by the coast or in the countryside – where their health and emotional wellbeing would be assured. On the other hand, the promotional materials also included aerial photographs of the largest NCH residential Homes, which demonstrated the vast size of their buildings and grounds as well the boundaries which contained them. Walls, roads, hedges and railway lines typically encircled these Homes and powerfully illustrated how children were separated, physically and symbolically, not only from their own homes and families but also from the locality to which they had been moved. Interrogating the conundrum of these representations of NCH residential care as being an outwardly idyllic space for the support and nurture of children *and* an isolated and isolating place was a regular

feature of discussions amongst the BCI group. But it was another of Leonore's seminal pieces, 'Landscape with Figures', co-authored with Jeanne L'Ésperance and Howard Newby, that helped shed particular light on the ways a domestic community like an NCH residential Home 'could be not only an "earthly paradise" but its opposite, "a hell on earth", a prison'.²⁰ Leonore's identification of this specific spatial paradox proved to be an invaluable lens through which to explore the now extensive on-line commentaries posted by people who were in NCH care as children and the personal histories of the British post-war care system that are gradually emerging as a result. In particular it brought into view how this paradise/prison continuum was experienced and how it shaped children's everyday lives. Philip, for example, remarks that 'putting two different railway lines at the sides of the Home could not have worked better' in keeping the children confined to the Home's grounds while Rich describes the freedom he had as a child when he 'used to wander outside the Home quite often to play at the beach in the stream, or in the pill boxes beside the WW2 fort'.²¹

Leonore's contributions to the BCI group's discussions of Janet's analyses of NCH imagery were also influential in pinpointing how the photographs were saturated with middle-class ideals of family life, set out in carefully choreographed domestic scenes in which children are shown with their 'house-mothers' eating and playing together in calm, ordered and comfortable surroundings. The signifiers of home to which we had been so attentive in *The Family Story* were writ large in these portraits of the care and nurture provided by the NCH.

However Leonore's observation that 'family' is everywhere but nowhere was also used by Janet to explore how children in residential care experienced separation from their 'natural' families, sometimes for short periods and sometimes permanently. Many such children mourned the loss of parents and siblings from their lives, yearned to return home or were deeply critical of the lack of affection in their relationships with care staff in the Homes. For these children, the meanings and practices of 'family' were an absent presence in their lives and were constantly craved. For others, however, the close and nurturing bonds that denote 'family' were everywhere in their accounts of

relationships in the Homes as illustrated by Laurie's description of his relationship with one of the NCH's staff, Sister Ethel:

[Sister Ethel] had the firmest, safest hand hold I have ever felt. She called herself 'Tombstone Tessie' because of her very pronounced/shaped teeth. She gave us a safe place in a dangerous world [...]. We were special to Sister Ethel.²²

The BCI group's concern, then, with the intersections of concepts, contexts and individual stories powerfully influenced this study and its analytical foci. Moreover its findings about the meanings and experiences of home and family for those in residential care resonate deeply with *The Family Story* and complement what was identified there as a 'many-coloured, multi-layered picture which is the nearest to understanding we can hope for'.²³

These examples demonstrate that for all three of us, Leonore's critical eye and insights remained invaluable as we moved forward on our individual research paths. However, the BCI group also put a great deal of thought and support into Leonore's major project on sibling relationships which was published as *Thicker than Water* in 2012. As with *The Family Story* a central concern was how to clarify links between the conceptual sections of the book and those that engaged with lived experience. Leonore stressed the importance of making these connections in her introduction. She explained that her first objective was to interrogate beliefs and categories through which 'intimate relationships under the rubric of kinship stemming from sibling ties and the following generations of kin they create' are currently understood, both by experts and the general public. Her second was to examine these ideas through examples of people's experiences in the past. It was an approach which she acknowledged was unconventional because it involved telling two stories simultaneously, but her fundamental aim was clear: to explore the connections between public and private lives, institutions and cultures, and 'to throw light on how present concerns shape conceptions of the past and on the way the past illuminates the present'.²⁴

Leonore's approach to *Thicker than Water*, as with her contribution to *The Family Story*, was rooted in the interdisciplinary practices which have been so much a part of sociology at Essex, and thus the theories and methods she drew upon were wide-ranging. She engaged not only with historians, but also scholars within social science, psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, literature, law and genetics, as well as those looking at the significance of metaphor and myth. The views of almost anyone who had said anything of interest relating to siblings in any discipline over more than twenty years were incorporated into a voluminous filing system alongside an amazingly large number of historical sources which told sibling stories. This left her with two problems which it was the BCI group's task to help her resolve. The first was how to reduce the number of stories and to clarify what really mattered about each one. The second task was how to link the rich and fascinating empirical material she had unearthed to changes and continuities in ideas about siblings and kinship over time, including most importantly the present day. She knew almost too much about the subject, but the group was there to enable her to sift through and bring to the surface the material and ideas that would be most meaningful both to general and specialist audiences.

As always with Leonore's work, it was in the minutiae of everyday life that some of her most vivid insights emerged. For example, in the chapter on 'The Long Family and its Decline', close connections between sibling groups created through blood, marriage and friendship, and their emotional and physical consequences, are exposed through a father's graphic description of finding seventeen cousins all under the age of 12 'on the floor with inkstands, books, carpets and furniture in intermediate mixture and every form of fracture and confusion'. This image of household chaos gained greater salience through Leonore's comment that: 'this was in two wealthy families with an array of servants specifically detailed to look after children'.²⁵ She wanted readers not only to know about long families, but to feel what it must have felt like to live with a large numbers of siblings, the mixture of sometimes oppressive togetherness and complex networks of relatedness.

The group was also able to contribute more directly by finding and interpreting appropriate visual material, sourced primarily by Janet, to offer readers a further dimension. Leonore insisted that images placed within the text were not simply deployed as illustrations, but their content was explained in detail, offering evidence that reinforced the narrative. For example, a mother's effort to impose order on a long family of siblings is illustrated in a photo where all ten, from the baby to the young adults, are shown dining with their mother and father.²⁶ However we only know this was the case through an accompanying quotation (taken from the memoir from which the picture was sourced) describing the regimental style roll-call of names used by the mother to call her children down to breakfast.

One of the key roles undertaken by the group was to develop a workable structure to fulfil Leonore's multiple purposes and the tripartite division within the book took some time to emerge. Eventually Part I came to focus on questions about how siblings have been understood over the past two centuries and offered a frame of reference for the empirical material in Parts II and III; Part II explored different kinds of kinship structures and sibling webs in the long 19th century as well as sibling relationships through the life cycle; and Part III brought together a number of case studies to explore particular sibling themes. The conclusion moved the reader into the twenty first century to examine why and how sibling relationships continue to shape our personal and social identities. This ordering enabled the conceptual discussions in Part I to be revisited, exemplified and deepened in later chapters. For example, psychoanalytic perspectives on sibling relationships discussed in chapter two are drawn upon in Part III to illuminate the consequences of sibling incest and death, and also help to explain the paradox of the absent presence of siblings in the biography of psychoanalysis's founding father, Sigmund Freud.

Through many readings and discussions, *Thicker than Water* thus took shape, allowing Leonore to make the best use of her deep knowledge and understanding of kinship relations to make visible the social significance of inter-generational connections and how these have radically changed as

numbers of siblings in families have declined. Bringing to the surface the stories of anonymous, forgotten and famous families in Western Europe and North America allowed for complex interpretation through multiple conceptual lenses. We each brought our analytical skills, expertise and training from our student work with Leonore, along with our more recent and particular interests such as oral history, visual methods and historical biography to help bring this important work to fruition.

The psychic, political and material dimensions of siblinghood were also apparent within the BCI group. We were aware of, and discussed, our position not simply as an academic research group but also a fictive family, and we brought our own gendered understandings and experiences of kin to our discussions of Leonore's text, and indeed to all of our work. Our own kinship networks of brothers, sisters, parents, sons (though interestingly no daughters), aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins and grandchildren often wormed their way into our discussions, challenging us to make connections between the personal and intellectual worlds we shared. For example, as we grew older questions raised in Leonore and Katherine's work about the physical and emotional labour inherent in the caring responsibilities of adult siblings and domestic workers became more pressing in our own lives. This became apparent as members of our families came to need more support, both paid and unpaid.

Leonore was perhaps unusual in her insistence that feminist academic practice was best achieved through shared reading, discussing and writing with others. She put into effect her insights about the emptiness of the heroic figure of the lone researcher as a prime example of the mythical gendered, individualised self, a model which she found had not only concealed so much of the work done by servants, families and friends throughout history, but had also constrained her own potential. Through her generous and open spirit, we were able to experience multiple roles together as a group: as researchers, writers, critical readers and editors, and at the same time as nurturers, story-tellers, cooks and washer-uppers. Our work and our lives together have, as a result, been intellectually challenging

and profoundly enriching for each of us and all the more so for having had the privilege of sharing a ‘creative friendship’ with Leonore.²⁷

¹ Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London: Longman, 1998).

² Michael Roper, ‘On Social and Gender History’, in Ken Plummer (ed.), *Imaginations: fifty years of Essex sociology* (Wivenhoe: Wivenbooks, 2014), pp. 116–117.

³ Gisela Block, ‘Women’s History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate’, *Gender & History*, 1 (1989) p. 7–30.

⁴ Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁵ Social History Society Conference: Theories Methods and Concepts in Social and Cultural History, York (1995).

⁶ Leonore Davidoff, *Current Conceptual Issues in the History of the Family*. Social History Society Conference: Theories Methods and Concepts in Social and Cultural History, York (1995).

⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

⁸ An earlier example of a collaborative work was Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women’s History and Women’s Work* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1986).

⁹ Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 159.

¹⁰ Elizabeth B. Silva and Carole Smart (eds), *The New Family?*, (London: Sage, 1999).

-
- ¹¹ Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) and *Nanny Knows Best: The History of the British Nanny* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013)
- ¹² Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p 169.
- ¹³ Holden, *Nanny Knows Best*, p. 105.
- ¹⁴ Holden, *Nanny Knows Best*, pp. 60, 133, 181.
- ¹⁵ Holden, *Nanny Knows Best*, p. 181,
- ¹⁶ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 33
- ¹⁷ Frank Steele, *Ditcher's Row: A Tale of the Older Charity* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1939), p.39–41.
- ¹⁸ Megan Doolittle, 'Time, Space and Memories: The Father's Chair and Grandfather Clocks in Victorian Working-class Domestic Lives', *Home Cultures* 8 (2011), p.245–264.
- ¹⁹ Janet Fink, 'Inside a hall of mirrors: residential care and the shifting constructions of childhood in mid-twentieth-century Britain', *Paedagogica Historica* 44 (2008), pp. 287–307.
- ²⁰ Leonore Davidoff, Jean L'Esperance and Howard Newby, 'Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society', in Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp.41-72, here p. 58.
- ²¹ These comments are linked to particular NCH photographs made available through the work of Philip Howard who has committed enormous time and energy to making collections of NCH photographs available online at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/22326055@N06/sets/>. Other photographs and online commentaries about the NCH and its care provision can be found at: <http://www.theirhistory.co.uk/>.
- ²² Our History, <http://www.theirhistory.co.uk/70001/info.php?p=10&pno=0>.
- ²³ Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 8.

²⁴ Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their relations, 1780–1920*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 90.

²⁵ Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 2.

²⁶ Isabella Halsted, *The Aunts*, in Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 93.

²⁷ We dedicated *The Family Story* to ‘the spirit of creative friendship’.