

ARTICLE

Rethinking intimacy in psychosocial sciences

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Abstract

This article critically engages with the conceptualization of intimacy pertaining to the works of Anthony Giddens and Lynn Jamieson. Informed by insights from psychoanalysis, philosophy, and neuroscience, it challenges the two authors' assumed unproblematic ability to consciously access and communicate intimate knowledge. The article further explores the ontological differences between lived intimacy and symbolic intimacy, privileging the concept of lived intimacy as an experience that evades focused attention and refuses to conform to our will and rational thought. In addition, it disputes the assumption that individual autonomy is a necessary condition for achieving intimate bonds, highlighting instead the relevance of openness and vulnerability. Lastly, the article engages with the concept of boundary work, making the case that boundaries could be an effect of intimacy rather than a cause of intimacy. Reassessing boundaries as delimitations between ontological planes suggests that intimacy is enabled by keeping at bay the reign of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, namely finding a place where the subject can shield herself from the pervasive gaze of the Other.

KEYWORDS

autonomy, boundary work, disclosing intimacy, intimacy, pure relationship

A topic increasingly gaining the attention of prominent scholars in social sciences is the transformation of intimacy in late-capitalist society. Social scientists like Zygmunt Bauman (2003), Anthony Giddens (1992), Lynn Jamieson (1998), Sherry Turkle (2017), and Arlie Russell Hochschild (1969) are all interested in the ways in which global capitalism, coupled with technological innovations and various cultural reorientations, permeates our private lives and disrupts intimate relations. Alterations to intimacy have been explored in connection to a vast ensemble of recent social

transformations, including issues such as sexuality, the reworking of the traditional family structure, the ubiquitous presence of technology, and the commercialization of care. Mindful of these current studies, this article directs its efforts at unpacking and problematizing the very concept of intimacy. I start from the observation that, even though intimacy is often engaged with in research, its nature and complex meaning are frequently left vague. The concept of intimacy remains either insufficiently explored or problematically conceptualized.

In this article I critically engage with the insights on intimacy developed by Giddens (Giddens, 2010) and Jamieson (1998, 2005), who share to a large extent a common understanding of its nature. The article is divided into four sections, each one elaborating on an aspect considered most relevant in their conceptualization of intimacy. These aspects are: disclosing intimacy and its reliance on knowledge of a private nature, the voluntary nature of intimacy, individual autonomy, and boundary work as either enabling or preventing the formation of intimacy. I raise the concern that the two authors in focus here explore intimacy through a restrictive reliance on sociological insights, while the theme of intimacy has an ample presence in research pertaining to psychoanalysis, philosophy, and neuroscience. In this context, my goal is to open the exploration of intimacy and unpack its meaning via insights from multiple pertinent fields. This article, therefore, gestures towards the complexities lurking behind simple definitions of intimacy. It is my belief that only when we come to grips with the intricacies of intimacy will we have the capacity to pursue a more pertinent exploration of its transformation in contemporary society.

Personally, I am intrigued by the conditions that make the formation of intimacy possible at both individual and social levels. For this reason, the article contemplates whether intimacy is a product of voluntary conduct (e.g., a rational calculation) or is better conceptualized as a spontaneous, prediscursive encounter. There are several questions that guide my analytical exploration, namely: What constitutes human intimacy? Under what conditions is intimacy formed? Is intimacy discovered/revealed, or is it created? Does intimacy pertain to the social, spiritual, or political spheres? Can one find intimacy within the relationship with oneself, or must intimacy always involve another? What role does intimacy play at the individual and social level? How would a life devoid of intimacy manifest itself, and what would the experience of such a life feel like? Is intimacy objective or solely subjective? Is it solely experienced from within, or can intimacy be witnessed and observed from outside of the intimate space?

It is instructive here to direct our attention towards the etymology of the concept "intimacy." The word intimacy comes from the Latin "intimus," the superlative of interior, thus referring to "the most interior." In light of its etymology, we can posit that the intimate is what is most profound and most singular in the human experience (Kristeva, 2002). While representing what is most personal to us, paradoxically intimacy also stands for what is most fully shared with another (Jacobson, 2014). Throughout this article, in order to reveal the complexities associated with the intimate, I differentiate between three ontological manifestations of intimacy. More specifically, I engage with a Lacanian framework that distinguishes between three registers of existence: the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. One could argue that the human condition is characterized by a fundamental lack of unity because we human beings exist simultaneously within these three ontological registers, which function according to very different and, in many ways, incompatible principles.

In my analysis, I stress the importance of a subjective experience of intimacy—enabled, as we shall see later, by the limbic brain as well as by the right brain hemisphere. This subjective mode of experiencing is positioned within the register of the Real. The Real designates that which is impossible to symbolize and capture either in language or images. For Jacques Lacan, explanation of the Real is always in terms of the impossible, as the Real is that which is impossible to bear (Sarup, 1992). In addition, I will explore different attempts to represent subjective intimate experiences into language, namely within the Symbolic register. The Symbolic register is concerned with the function of symbols and symbolic systems. Through the process of representation, intimacy is transformed into what I refer to as "symbolic intimacy." In this regard, I make the case that the depth of lived experience of intimacy cannot be transposed within language or other forms of representation. For example, we get to know the nature of intimacy solely if we ourselves have experienced intimate bonds within our lives. It is utterly impossible to acquire an understanding of the nature of intimacy solely through language, in instances when one has never felt such a state through one's own being and senses. This is the case because lived intimacy evades the grasp of the Symbolic. Furthermore,

various attempts have been made to engineer and regulate intimacy with tools borrowed from the politico-economic spheres, and these attempts often undermine the depth of intimate experiences, rendering them elusive.

Lastly, intimacy materializes in the Imaginary register as an image of an intimate connection or as a fantasy. Here, intimacy is reduced to an image, which gives the subject a sense of control while the depth and complex nature of an actual experience of intimacy is lost. Relevant in this context is the current appeal of social media, where on platforms such as Facebook we engage in a construction of visual intimacy with our virtual friends. The ontological limitations of the Imaginary register prevent an actual experience of intimacy, as encountered in the Real. Instead, it offers the visual enjoyment of an image of intimacy. The appeal of this form of intimacy could be, as mentioned earlier, associated with the subject's ability to hold onto a sense of control, whereas intimacy in the Real requires a letting go of control, as one renders oneself completely vulnerable.

1 | DISCLOSING INTIMACY AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE

In *Intimacy: Personal Relation in Modern Societies*, Jamieson (1998) positions intimacy at the center of what is considered a meaningful personal life in contemporary society. She also acknowledges that intimacy has become a very fashionable word and one of intense preoccupation. We are increasingly aware of and concerned with our ability to access and enjoy moments of intimacy. Her definition of intimacy refers to a particular type of intimacy, which she calls "disclosing intimacy." Jamieson articulates it as a very specific sort of knowing, loving, and being close to another person. This type of intimate interaction is achieved through talking and listening, sharing one's thoughts and showing one's feelings. The emphasis here is placed on mutual disclosure, as those of us interested in intimacy are guided to constantly reveal our inner thoughts and feelings to each other in order to create and maintain intimate bonds (Jamieson, 1998). The creation of an intimate space through communication and self-disclosure is also an important element in Giddens's work. In his writings Giddens celebrates the contemporary creation of what he calls "pure relationship," defined as a connection mainly based upon emotional communication. Giddens believes that emotional communication, which he equates with intimacy, is becoming the key to the very existence of contemporary pure relationships (Giddens, 2010). Unlike the dynamics pertaining to traditional social ties, the pure relationship depends upon processes of active trust that enable one's opening up to the other—as disclosure, in Giddens's opinion, is the basic condition for intimacy (Giddens, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the writings of Jamieson (1998) and Giddens (1992, 2010) conceptualize intimacy as something enabled by individual conscious will and agency. More specifically, intimacy is formed by individuals who intentionally enter relationships with each other with the clear purpose of achieving intimate bonds, and who specifically choose to openly disclose their feelings as well as engage in emotional communication. This sort of intimacy has at its core the very act of knowing and the ability to communicate meaningful aspects of one's life. Giddens and Jamieson seem to have a certain type of individual in mind. We are dealing here with individuals who appear to have complete and clear knowledge of their most inward, private, and personal aspects. In addition, these individuals are thought to be able to clearly articulate the knowledge of their innermost being through the use of language. Furthermore, they have the ability to choose those with whom they want to share such personal knowledge, in order to enter a space of intimacy where the partner is expected to act in a similar fashion. This way of conceptualizing the individual resembles to a large extent the "rational actor" of neoclassical economics, who is regarded as having perfect knowledge of various opportunities available to her and an ability to choose freely amongst opportunities and, in addition, to maintain a detached, independent, selfish stance in the world (Becker, 2013).

The problem with this way of thinking becomes apparent when we turn our attention from the literature influenced by neoclassical economics and direct it instead towards that pertaining to psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic tradition insists that a conceptualization of intimacy ought to take into consideration the presence of unconscious experiences (Wilner, 1975). By making a strong case for the likelihood that the most intimate aspects of one's personality are located within the unconscious, it significantly complicates our understanding of an individual. In

psychoanalysis, to be intimate with another person implies something other than knowing in detail the facts of her life and habits. Instead, it refers to a special type of subjective connection that involves the level of the unconscious. Though there are different ways to understand the unconscious, these diverse ways hold in common the idea that the information it stores is not yet accessible to one's conscious experience. More specifically, one is not consciously aware of the knowledge that constitutes one's very core of being, even though this unconscious knowledge shapes and structures our conscious lives. There are several explanations for this situation. It could be that the knowledge is repressed, as it pertains to traumatic encounters (Fink, 2017), or that it constitutes one's very structure of phantasy, namely the fundamental organisation of one's view of and interaction with the world (Fink, 2009), or, according to a Jungian approach, the knowledge is apersonal as it pertains to the collective unconscious (Jung, 1990).

One can identify a significant gap between Giddens's (1992, 2010) and Jamieson's (1998) conceptualization of an individual and the psychoanalytic view. Where they describe a person with complete conscious access to the knowledge that defines her core of being, the psychoanalytic approach insists that this type of knowledge is unconscious (and hence not readily available within consciousness awareness). Bringing unconscious information into one's conscious awareness poses difficulties, as it is a process often accompanied by difficult or disturbing emotions such as awe, dread, loathing, and/or horror (Wilner, 1975). In addition, this process can trigger intense anxiety or, in extreme cases, the disintegration of personality (Wilner, 1975). Nevertheless, bringing different aspects of one's unconscious into one's awareness allows the individual to become more intimate with herself (Wilner, 1975). We are dealing here with an interesting paradox of intimacy—namely, that the more intimate one becomes with another or with oneself, the more unfamiliar one may seem to be (Wilner, 1975). This is the case because what one retrieves from the unconscious is perceived as foreign, and is usually associated with “not-me.” Acknowledging the “not-me” to be deeply personal opens the door to accepting the possibility that one's personality includes surprising elements. It creates the awareness of how much more there probably is to know, and the degree to which one is existentially foreign to oneself. This situation resonates with the work of both Sigmund Freud (2003) and Jacques Lacan (2013), arguing that what is most intimate to us is simultaneously what is most foreign. Foreignness resides within us, as we are our own foreigners (Keltner, 2009). For this reason, Lacan replaces the term “intimacy” with “extimacy,” a new concept of his own making. Extimacy refers to the way in which the subject is constituted in and through that which is radically foreign to her. Extimacy problematizes the traditional way of distinguishing between exteriority and intimacy (psychic interiority) because, upon closer investigation, the separation between these two spheres fades away (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014). Namely, the “not-me,” which has been excluded from the awareness of our inside, is extimate inasmuch as it constitutes our most intimate experience and the core of our being (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014). Conversely, what we usually take to be the most intimate part of our personalities (for example, our world views and life goals) might appear, at certain moments of existential clarity, to instead pertain to an ideological outside: the world of the Other, which we internalized and falsely considered to constitute the core of our being.

2 | THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF INTIMACY

Another aspect that stands out when engaging with the writings of Giddens (1992, 2010) and Jamieson (1998) is their emphasis on the voluntary nature of intimate relationships. Entering an intimate relationship is rendered an act of individual will, which is generally assumed to be informed and guided by rational choice principles. The individual elects to enter an intimate relationship solely because of the benefits it provides. Manifesting an equally powerful sense of agency, one can opt out of an intimate relationship without significant difficulties when the relationship proves to be no longer convenient. Anthony Giddens in *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) writes: “A pure relationship refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it” (p. 58). He further argues: “What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, ‘until further notice’, that each gains sufficient

benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile" (p. 63). In his articulation of a pure relationship Giddens, in addition to embracing a rational choice model, also engages with ideas specific to the political sphere—namely with democratic principles. He forcefully asserts (1992) that in our current society, intimacy implies a wholesale democratization of the interpersonal domain in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere. According to him also (2010), a democracy of emotions is just as important as public democracy in improving the quality of our lives. Giddens brings to our attention that our contemporary societal traditions dictate the path or possibilities of our intimate life increasingly less. Instead, the individual is now able to freely envision and pursue intimacy as she herself sees fit.

Giddens exclusively focuses on the forms or social arrangements that intimate relationships take. This is an objective approach to grasping intimacy, directing attention solely to what can be observed, measured, and regulated. The ontological plane that he addresses is that of the Symbolic. In approaching intimacy in this manner, Giddens neglects the subjective side of it—namely lived intimacy—and instead privileges symbolic intimacy, which takes the form of merely a concept or social arrangement. The expectation seems to be that, if the symbolic elements are set in place appropriately, the subjective aspect of the intimate experience will emerge unproblematically.

I propose that we juxtapose the conceptualization of intimacy as a voluntary choice with a different way of envisioning and articulating it. For this purpose, I call attention to Paulina Aronson's work, in which she contrasts a voluntary and utilitarian way of thinking about intimacy with a way of understanding it that emphasizes the agency of the intimate process itself and minimizes the agency of the individual's rational choice abilities. Aronson distinguishes between two romantic regimes, namely the Western "regime of choice" and the traditional Russian "regime of fate." She defines romantic regimes as: "systems of emotional conduct that affect how we speak about how we feel, determine 'normal' behaviors, and establish who is eligible for love—and who is not" (Aronson, 2015, para. 7). Aronson elaborates on the regime of choice, which she finds to be to a large extent influenced by the ethical principles of neoliberal and democratic societies. Like Giddens's and Jamieson's takes on intimacy, the regime of choice privileges the lover and her freedom, at the expense of the beloved and the intimate bond. More specifically, the precondition for achieving a successful romantic relationship, like what makes the actions of a rational economic agent possible, is the opportunity to choose freely among all the options available, unconstrained by tradition or strong commitment to a preexisting hindering relationship. In his book that critically explores the ways in which late capitalism alters romantic relationships, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) insists that the regime of choice teaches one to see long-term commitments as traps, citing what became a typical counsellor's advice: "When committing yourself, however halfheartedly, remember that you are likely to be closing the door to other romantic possibilities which may be more satisfying and fulfilling" (p. x). As a result, one is advised to maintain a reassuring emotional distance and to not make or demand commitments. Instead one has to "keep all doors open at any time" (p. x). Instead of succumbing to a sort of love that would enchant and overwhelm, one is advised to approach one's emotions in a methodical, rational way (Aronson, 2015). Aronson refers to a second romantic regime, namely to the traditional Russian way of engaging with love, which she refers to as a regime of fate. It stands out through its inclination to succumb to love as if it were a supernatural power, even when it proves itself to be detrimental to comfort, sanity, or life itself. According to this particular mode of feeling and thinking, intimacy and love require sacrifice and imply suffering and pain. In addition, this way of engaging with one's emotions transfers the agency from the individual to the intimate process itself. This is the case because the regime of fate does not hold that it is the individual who chooses when to enter or exit an intimate space. Instead, it suggests that one is chosen by it. The regime of fate associates maturity with the capacity to withstand emotional challenges and bear pain, sometimes to absurd degrees. This is in stark contrast with the regime of choice, which, as discussed earlier, sees committing oneself too strongly or too eagerly as a sign of an infantile psyche (Aronson, 2015).

Aronson's discussion of the tensions existing between the regimes of choice and fate resonates with the physiological exploration of the dynamics existing between the neocortical brain and the limbic brain, which cause the separation between our rational minds and emotions. These dynamics are explored in *A General Theory of Love* (2000) written by three psychiatrists—Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. They present an evolutionary

organization of the brain in three segments, which to a certain extent function separately from each other. Each produces distinct types of perceptions and interactions with the world. The oldest part of our brain is the reptilian brain, governing our most basic bodily functions (such as breathing and reflexes) and impulses. Evolved on top of and around the reptilian brain, the limbic brain is concerned with bonding, further enabling the protection of the vulnerable. The development of the limbic brain has been crucial for the evolution of mammals, as it has allowed them to experience emotional attachment—further enabling a sense of empathy and intimacy. Mammals and humans, as a result of activated emotional ties, can form close social groups—and, unlike reptiles, they will protect offspring or mates and emotionally engage with each other. The third part of the brain, the neocortex, is the most recently developed and largest section. The neocortex gives us the capacity to engage in reasoning, planning, and speaking. The authors stress that the physiological separation between the neural system responsible for emotion and that responsible for intellect generates a chasm between our experience of thought and emotions. More specifically, the limbic brain's structure does not answer to the rules of logic and rational thought as it facilitates our emotional connection with the world (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2000). While language and rational thought hold authority in the world governed by the neocortex, they have very little importance for the two other segments of our brains. So, analogous to the regime of fate's assumptions, a person does not have the ability to direct her emotional life in the way she directs her motor system. She cannot will herself to want the right thing, or to love the right person, or to be happy after a disappointment, or even to be happy in happy times. People lack this capacity not through a deficiency of discipline, but because the jurisdiction of our will is limited to the neocortical brain and its functions. While emotional life can be influenced, it nevertheless cannot be commanded (Lewis et al., 2000). As lived intimacy is an experience exclusively associated with the limbic brain, it has the potential to engulf our entire being—and at the same time to escape, to a large extent, the control and will of our neocortical processes. It has an independent volition that might come to appear to our conscious mind as mysterious or even magical. Intimate emotional responses are not formed or terminated at one's will, and they often take us by surprise. We cannot control with whom we are going to emotionally connect, nor with whom we will not be experiencing such connection. The logic of the unconscious processes that determine these sorts of outcomes usually remains hidden from our conscious control and awareness.

To further unpack the complexities of our intimate experiences, I am juxtaposing an additional organization of the brain on the three-types-of-brain map. This concept is offered by psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist (2019) in his fascinating study of the functioning of the human brain entitled *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. This study guides us to distinguish between the significant differences in the ways the left and right sides of our brains engage with the world. In his treaty on the complexities of the human brain, he argues that, for us human beings, there are two fundamentally opposed realities—or two different modes of experience—and that each one of them is of ultimate importance in bringing about the human world that we all share. The differences between the two, according to McGilchrist, are rooted in our bi-hemispheric brain structure (McGilchrist, 2019). McGilchrist further argues that the right hemisphere's broader field of attention is open and coupled with the ability of greater integration over time and space, making possible the recognition of broad and complex patterns. It also deals preferentially with subjective lived experiences and with memory of a personal or emotionally charged nature. By contrast, the left hemisphere deals preferentially with reason and facts. It allows us to have a conceptually represented version of our embodied experience, containing static and separable entities. This kind of attention isolates, fixes, and makes things explicit through language and reason. In doing so, it renders things mechanical and lifeless. The left hemisphere's mode of interaction with the world is usually driven by concrete pre-determined goals, while the open attention of the right hemisphere is motivated by curiosity and the sheer pleasure of exploring. Furthermore, the left hemisphere facilitates the emergence of a highly individualized world, where one sees oneself as separated, independent, and in constant competition with others (McGilchrist, 2019). McGilchrist's insights guide us to acknowledge that lived intimacy is an experience generated by the right hemisphere's specific interaction with the world. Namely, intimacy comes into existence not when one acts intentionally, with the pre-established goal of producing a space of intimacy. Instead, intimacy has the strongest potential to emerge when one engages with the world in an exploratory, playful way that is detached from specific results. McGilchrist insists that

one of the main differences between the *modus operandi* of the two hemispheres is that the left hemisphere always has an end in view, a purpose or use, and functions as the instrument of our conscious focus—quite the opposite of the right hemisphere, which is solely reaching out towards the world in an exploratory manner without a specific purpose (McGilchrist, 2019). This difference in mode of engagement with the world has significant consequences for our ability to experience intimacy. More specifically, intimacy simply cannot withstand being too closely attended to by our minds, as its nature is indirect and implicit. Forcing intimacy into explicitness changes its nature completely. Too much self-awareness destroys spontaneity and renders one's actions mechanical and lifeless (McGilchrist, 2019). Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) reinforces this argument, stressing that we owe the fascinating power of a state such as intimacy (similar to creativity, joy, love) precisely to the fact that it remains in transparency behind the sensible. Each time we want to get at such an elusive state immediately, or to lay hands on it, or to see it unveiled, we do, in fact, feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Utilitarian thinking makes the purpose of the action specific, and in this process lived experiences, such as intimacy, become elusive.

3 | AUTONOMOUS SUBJECTS IN INTIMATE BONDS

A third aspect of Giddens's analytical exploration of intimacy is the emphasis placed on the importance of individual autonomy when it comes to ensuring the formation of a pure relationship (1992). This emphasis mirrors the neoclassical conceptualization of an economic agent, envisioned to be rational, selfish, and separated from others. Likewise, for the intimate relationship to be labeled “pure,” the one entering it ought to be and remain autonomous. Giddens defines this condition in this manner: “Autonomy means the capacity of individuals to be self-reflective and self-determining: to deliberate, judge, choose and act upon different possible courses of action” (1992, p. 185). Here Giddens implies that the individual can have an isolated existence, as opposed to an interdependent one. It further encourages us to accept that her individuality is formed and stable in time. As such, she manifests her entrenched will, desire, and thinking independently from others, who are also envisioned in their turn to be clearly bonded and autonomous. Such an autonomous individual orients herself in the world through constant calculations of costs and benefits. According to the results of these calculations she deliberates, judges, and chooses whom to engage intimately with, as well as to what extent and for how long. This orientation towards the world encourages us to think of our identities as self-generated, fixed, and to a large extent standing clearly apart from the fabric of world and from others around us.

This mode of thinking leads to a failure in recognizing the extent to which our experience of ourselves and others is, in fact, made possible through a lived engagement with the other and with the world itself (Jacobson, 2014). For example, the visceral interconnection between the world and others has strong relevance in philosopher Merleau-Ponty's work—he articulates it as a primordial human condition, arguing that “I am conscious of my body via the world and I am conscious of the world through my body” (1962, p. 82). Furthermore, one could envision one's existence, instead of being set and stable in time, manifesting itself as a phase in a trajectory of becoming (Landes, 2018). A privileged focus on autonomy leads one unwittingly to ignore the generative agency of our intimate bonds. For instance, as advised by the regime of choice discussed earlier, an individual may feel compelled to abandon an intimate relationship when her calculation of costs outweighs that of the benefits drawn out of the intimate bond. This maintains the attitude that she individually is responsible for (and capable of) maintaining her subjective world—a world that is, in fact, opened up for her primarily through her engagement with the other.

In order to explore the stark discrepancies between views that privilege individual autonomy and views that consider our interconnection with others as primordial and unavoidable, I return to McGilchrist's insights regarding the nature of our two brain hemispheres (2019). McGilchrist argues that the connection with the world mediated through the left hemisphere is predisposed to include individuals as self-determined and autonomous. On the other hand, the right brain hemisphere acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness of beings and things, and

functions as a mediator of empathetic identification. Self-awareness, empathy, identification with others and more generally inter-subjective processes are largely dependent upon right hemisphere resources. In the absence of the right hemisphere, the left hemisphere manifests a purely utilitarian approach to the world—where others become the means to specific predetermined goals, and where one's world appears self-determined, separated from others, and stable (frozen) in time (instead of appearing in a perpetual process of becoming). The left hemisphere's *modus operandi* additionally shows a lack of curiosity and concern for others and their feelings. To illustrate these aspects, McGilchrist informs us that patients with right frontal deficits (but not left frontal deficits) suffer a change of personality whereby they become incapable of empathy. This condition profoundly affects their ability to form and experience intimate bonds because the left hemisphere simply cannot comprehend the nature of subjective lived intimacy. It simply does not have the means to generate such an experience. Instead, as its register is that of representation and language, it engages with intimacy as if it were solely a symbolic category and a social arrangement, focusing exclusively on the objective markers of intimacy. Intimacy becomes a matter of acting according to pre-established rules and satisfying specific conditions, such as the condition of autonomy (2019).

Instead of stressing individual autonomy as the key condition leading to intimacy, one could argue (according to the right hemisphere's predilection) that openness, interconnection, and vulnerability are the conditions conducive to an experience of intimacy. Here I invite a recollection of Judith Butler's (2006) claim that vulnerability is necessarily associated with our condition of being socially constituted bodies—attached to others and at risk of losing those attachments. Butler forcefully underlines our existential vulnerability to the world and others. In her words: "We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something" (2006, p. 23). While Butler brings attention to our social vulnerability to others, Lewis et al. (2000) emphasize the vital role that our emotional bonds with others play in rendering possible our physiological existence. They explain that our nervous systems are not self-contained. Instead, from earliest childhood our brains actually link with those of the people nurturing us in a silent rhythm that alters and molds our brain's very structure. This process establishes lifelong emotional patterns and shapes us into who we are. This is true not only for the duration of our childhood—throughout our entire lives we continue to require a source of stabilization outside ourselves. This open-loop design means that, in important ways, people can't be stable on their own—not should or shouldn't be, but simply can't. This prospect of profound openness and vulnerability might therefore become disconcerting, especially if we place significant value on individuality and autonomy (Lewis et al., 2000).

According to the insights discussed in this section, we might come to understand intimacy not simply as a mode of knowing another, or being known by the other (as if who we each are is already established and unchanging and we need only for our minds to comprehend each other's being). Instead, intimacy allows us to become (emerge as) ourselves through the other (Maclaren, 2014). Merleau-Ponty expands on this existential state of fluid openness to include not only our relationship with others, but also with the material world. In his words: "When I move towards a world I bury my perceptual and practical intentions in objects which ultimately appear prior to and external to those intentions, and which nevertheless exist for me only in so far as they arouse in me thoughts or volitions" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 82). In light of these ideas, one could argue that it is in relationship with the other that, for example, love ignites in my heart and I learn that the core of my being holds the ability to resonate in such an overwhelmingly profound way. This potential was dormant within me until the other's presence awoke it and drew it out of me. This state emerges as a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in the three dimensions at the same time (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). It is the world and the other that kindle in me awe, enchantment, fury, or joy. These states are awoken in me by my immersion within the world and not by my separation from it. As much as our bodies and our minds are requisite for revealing the world, these bodies and minds are equally shaped by the world that they reveal (Maclaren, 2014). If one is sympathetic to this vision of human existence, it becomes quite puzzling to encounter analytical explorations (especially on the subject of intimacy) that turn against our very nature—and instead of embracing openness and fluid change praise autonomy, permanence, and stillness.

4 | BOUNDARIES: A CONCEALED INTIMATE WORLD

A fourth area of emphasis in the writings on intimacy is the stress placed on boundaries. Lynn Jamieson (2005) argues that, in order to experience intimacy, one needs to engage in active boundary work—namely, the lowering of boundaries among intimates in comparison to the heightening of boundaries between intimates and those outside their intimate relationships. She insists that intimacy is dependent on boundaries—it is either impinged upon or contingent on them. Jamieson borrowed the notion of “boundary work” from anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969), who argues that the creation and maintenance of social boundaries is an effortful activity involving cognition and coordinated social action (Jamieson, 2005). In our case, boundary work is conceptualized as a conscious, coordinated effort directed at elevating or leveling out boundaries amongst people, with the specific purpose of generating a space of intimacy. Boundaries can take a variety of forms such as knowledge of private information, cultural awareness, gender identities, or hierarchies of power.

Here I invite the reader to consider a different take on the connection between intimacy and boundaries. Namely, that the formation of boundaries could be an effect of intimacy instead of a main cause of intimacy. Jamieson (2005) mentions that intimates are often described as if encapsulated together by a protective boundary that stops distractions that would otherwise interfere with their intimacy, or alternatively by an exclusionary boundary that keeps non-intimates out. When experiencing intimacy, we often appear to partake in a private subjective world that is cumbersome to access or comprehend from outside the intimate space. This chasm between the intimate and the outside world does appear to have the nature of a boundary. Nevertheless, the willful work of lowering boundaries amongst selected people and raising boundaries against others holds no guarantees that it will generate an experience of intimacy. Concluding that boundary work is conducive to intimacy could be attributed to an observation of the objective markers of intimacy, the visible ways in which this subjective state rearranges the social space, and an attempt to recapture the experience of intimacy by reproducing the social arrangements observed. An important point to re-stress here is that intimacy is a subjective state. While it may indeed manifest itself through a reworking of social boundaries, it is not necessarily directly caused by them. Attempting to engineer intimacy by adjusting boundaries comes across as a technique that's far removed from an understanding of the nature of intimacy.

It is also instructive to bring our attention to Jamieson's (2005) concern regarding the potential tensions between intimacy and community. These tensions emerge, in her understanding, because developing and maintaining intimate relationships requires effort and significant time commitment, and this infringes on the ability to engage in a meaningful way with the community. She includes in her argument the relevance of “exclusivity,” a concept borrowed from Giddens' work, which is considered to be a necessary aspect in creating intimacy (Jamieson, 2005). Exclusivity manifests itself in exclusionary boundaries that need to be drawn around intimate relationships in order to secure trust—which Giddens insists is not a quality capable of indefinite expansion (as cited in Jamieson, 2005). Consequently, creating and sustaining exclusivity in an increasing number of intimate relationships becomes impossible.

When one privileges the concept and logic of boundaries as a main element in achieving intimacy, one inevitably runs into the situation in which the more intimate relationships people engage in the more fragmented by boundaries a society becomes. Engaging in boundary work would facilitate, in Jamieson's (2005) opinion, the emergence of separate intimate self-contained personal islands, while impeding the formation of cohesive communities. This mode of articulating intimacy could be associated with the earlier discussed logic of the left-brain hemisphere, with its distinct emphasis on control, categorization, separation, and use. As previously mentioned, this part of the brain can only understand intimacy through its objective markers, and tries to produce it by rationally managing the distribution of knowledge of a personal nature, maintaining the autonomy of those involved, and building or lowering boundaries. It engages in a highly coordinated process that is aimed at consciously and precisely engineering intimacy. Nevertheless, efforts of this kind often lead to less intimacy rather than more. Laura Kipnis (2009), for example, noticed the extent to which the counselling industry, created to help our late-capitalist society maintain and strengthen its

intimate bonds (mainly taking the form of marriages), transforms our intimate relationships into places of work and rules, resulting in a frustrating defeat of its claimed purpose. In this context, it becomes imperative to expand the ways we think about the nature and causes of intimacy. For example, instead of associating intimacy with boundary work, Julia Obert (2016) privileges curiosity, vulnerability, and empathy, which, in her opinion, enable intimacy. These three ways of engaging with the world are made possible solely through the specific disposition of the right brain hemisphere. The right hemisphere's attention to the world is one of care, rather than control, while its motives for engaging with the world are curiosity and longing towards something unknown that lies beyond oneself (McGilchrist, 2019). When one embraces and nurtures, through curiosity, vulnerability, and empathy, a disposition of care and longing towards something that transcends the self, one will most likely become predisposed to creating communities instead of undermining them.

Most strongly invalidating the worries that an increase in the number of intimate connections will lead to precarious conditions for creating communities are the thoughts on intimacy stemming from the Jungian psychoanalytic approach. As specified earlier, the psychoanalytic approach insists that intimacy ought to take into consideration the dynamics of unconscious experiences. One of Carl Jung's distinguishing theoretical features is his broadening of our usual understanding of the unconscious to include archaic elements—referred to as archetypes—which are considered universal and do not originate from an individual's personal experiences. Jung introduces the concept of the “collective unconscious,” which refers to the ontological register held in common by the entirety of humanity. Jung argues that the collective unconscious is primordial, and is the level of consciousness that generates the appearance of separation and individuality. The collective unconscious accounts for the core of our being, which in this case is not personal but apersonal—connecting the individual to the inherent wealth of ancient spiritual human wisdom. One might say that this sort of wisdom resides already within the individual and that it is yet to be discovered, or it is yet to be revealed to (made part of) the individual's consciousness. Jungian thinking, when applied to intimacy, extends the boundaries of possible intimacy beyond what is personal to include yet-to-be-discovered universal dimensions of one's being (Wilner, 1975). According to this mode of thinking, intimate experiences allow us to rediscover the extent to which the very cores of our beings are primordially connected at the level of the collective unconscious. As such, experiences of intimacy with oneself and others are the paramount modalities for creating genuine communities.

Up to this point, my efforts have been focused on the problematic argument that boundary work generates intimacy. Now I would like to bring into focus a special case, discussed by Lacanian psychoanalyst Gerard Wajcman, which might stand as an exception. Wajcman (2008) explores the concept of “concealment” as a form of boundary affecting intimacy. He insists that concealment is a barrier or border that demarcates (carves out) the intimate, which is the site of the subject, from the field of the Other. The intimate is articulated as a site where one can feel “at home,” shielded from the gaze of the Other. While Jamieson's (2005) discussion of boundary work remained solely at the level of the Symbolic register, as the sort of boundaries that she addresses take the form of various types of knowledge or structures of power (all part of the Symbolic), Wajcman's discussion of boundary refers to delimitations between two ontological registers. More specifically, he centers his analysis on the expansion of the Imaginary register and its world of images (the reign of the Other) onto the register of the Real (the place of the subject). I argue that, for a more complete understanding of the intimate, we ought to include in our analysis the Symbolic register with its world of language and cognitive knowledge. In this case, the Other's gaze surveys not only the visible world but also the symbolic world—for example our thoughts, dreams, and personal narratives.

According to Wajcman's conceptualization of intimacy, the visual register and its world of images become paramount, colonizing the register of the Real (Wajcman, 2008). He joins McGilchrist (2019) and Michael Levin (1988) in making the case that our contemporary world is progressively becoming a world of representations, with ubiquitous effects for our social and personal lives. Nowadays the representation, instead of the world itself, is regarded as most valued and most real (Levin, 1988). In this manner, the depth of Being is reduced to the two-dimensional plane of the visual register, and we are increasingly compelled to think of ourselves and our lives at the level of the imaginary ontological plane. In a world dedicated to global visibility, the intimate entails being able to carve a space of existence

separate from the gaze of the Other, a space where one can avoid being reduced to a representation—to an object or to a set of data. The intimate is thus the site where the subject maintains herself as an enigma, avoiding a state of transparency under the gaze of the Other. There is no subject unless the subject cannot be seen or comprehended by the rational mind. Thus, in the modern era, Wajcman argues that the intimate—the secret territory of the opaque and of the unknown—is the very site of the subject (Wajcman, 2008).

Wajcman's concern with the obliteration of intimacy by the Other's pervasive gaze resonates with Iain McGilchrist's (2019) work. One of McGilchrist's main analytical interests is tracing the extent to which our contemporary society is increasingly colonized by the register of representation (through both images and language) and hyperrationalism, emerging into a world structured according to the logic of the left-brain hemisphere. In this context, McGilchrist is concerned with the increased prevalence of schizophrenia, a condition that traps the individual in a world where intimacy becomes elusive. McGilchrist (2019) explains that schizophrenia is a relatively modern disease, existent only since the eighteenth century. Relevant to our analysis is the fact that schizophrenia's principal psychopathological features, according to McGilchrist, have nothing to do with regression towards irrationality, lack of self-awareness, and a retreat into the infantile realm of emotion and the body. Rather, they entail the exact opposite: a sort of misplaced hyperrationalism, a hyperreflexive self-awareness, and a disengagement from emotion and embodied existence. This mental condition generates a sense of passivity and emotional alienation from one's own life. To illustrate this condition, McGilchrist refers to a recurring motif appearing in paintings drawn by those impacted by schizophrenia. These show an all-observing eye, detached from the scene it observes, floating in the picture. This illustrates the schizophrenic's sense of having no access to anything outside of the realm of the Other and its overarching power of thought and representation. The world comes to lack the ultimate unknowability that exceeds our grasp, further lacking a reality that exists apart from our will. In such a world, one oscillates between two apparently opposite positions: impotence and omnipotence. Either there is no self (as all there is appears structured by the deadening law of the Other) or all that the observing eye sees appears to be, in fact, part of the self. In this case, the schizophrenic identifies with the pervasive gaze of the Other. The world of the schizophrenic is a world in which intimacy becomes an impossibility, because when one is part of it one loses the ability to carve a territory separate from the Other's reign. In this context, we can best understand Julia Kristeva's (2002, 2014) claim that a return to the intimate, to a radical inner experience, is a political act: a new form of political, social, and personal revolt that she terms "the intimate revolt."

5 | CONCLUSIONS

This article critically engages with the conceptualization of intimacy in the works of Anthony Giddens (1992, 2010) and Lynn Jamieson (1998, 2005). More specifically, it identifies, and opens for analytical probing, four key aspects of the authors' particular articulation of intimacy. The first to undergo scrutiny is the concept of disclosing intimacy, which asserts that intimacy is enabled mainly through sharing information of a personal nature—information assumed to make up the very core of an individual. In order to disrupt the assumed unproblematic ability of gaining conscious access to and communicating to others intimate information, I bring attention to the psychoanalytic premise that intimate knowledge pertains to the unconscious—and, as such, is not yet part of our conscious awareness. Furthermore, retrieving information from the unconscious is not as unproblematic as the two authors imply. Instead, it usually proves to be a laborious as well as an emotionally and existentially challenging process. The second section of the article problematizes the argument that intimate bonds ought to be entered into on a utilitarian and voluntary basis. It contrasts the "regime of choice" that encourages a utilitarian approach to intimacy with the "regime of fate," which insists on the implicit and agential nature of the intimate. In this context, I explore the differences between symbolic intimacy and lived intimacy through the insights offered by neuroscientific research on the distinction between the limbic and neocortical brains, as well as between the left and the right hemispheres of the human brain. The section concludes, in agreement with Iain McGilchrist (2019), that lived intimacy hides from the glare of focused

attention—a prime example of a human experience that refuses to conform to our rational thought and will. Furthermore, dealing with intimacy through a rational and utilitarian framework transforms its very nature, rendering it merely a concept or a social arrangement. The article continues with a section disputing the assumption that individual autonomy is a necessary condition for achieving intimate bonds. It juxtaposes the emphasis on individual autonomy with the view that one emerges as oneself through the relationship with the other. This encourages us to envision our existence as a phase in a trajectory of individuation (instead of an existence that is already formed and stable), and to embrace the state of vulnerability as a necessary aspect for enabling an intimate experience. The last section engages with the concept of boundary work, which Jamieson (2005) positions as a requirement for generating intimacy. It finds that, while intimacy might indeed rework social arrangements and in the process generate boundaries, boundary work does not directly cause intimacy. The article further elaborates on ideas introduced by Gerard Wajcman, suggesting that intimacy is brought about by keeping at bay the reign of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers (namely, finding a place where the subject can shield herself from the pervasive gaze of the Other). In addition, it identifies schizophrenia as a mental state where intimacy becomes especially elusive, as in this condition the subject becomes completely transparent to the gaze of the Other.

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