

# Aquiring culture

## Why do we have families?

### Introduction

#### Bullets

- There is a vast difference between the image of the traditional family and the type of families that exist in Britain today.
- There is a wide range of families in Britain today.
- The family is important to socialise children.

#### Text

Most people in Britain today are born and brought up in families - and most will have children of their own some day and form their own families.

For most of us, it appears that family is a normal, familiar and natural part of everyday life. This belief is reinforced by the images of the family as portrayed by the media - adverts, soap operas and comedies which are family orientated.

The family is regarded as a cornerstone of society and an essential unit for keeping social order. Up to the 60s, sociologists hardly questioned its importance; however more recently research has explored the reality behind the everyday images.

Social research shows that our image of what family should be varies considerably from that of other cultures, or even other groups within our society. The nature and structure of British families has changed a great deal historically and is constantly changing. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible to have one definition to suit all variations of families.

The changes will be explored in detail in the next units, but here is a summary of the main changes:

- More people get divorced.
- Fewer people choose to get married
- Many couples live together and have children out of wedlock
- We have seen an increase in the number of one-parent families
- We have seen an increase in the number of single person households
- It appears that the traditional division between the roles of men and women are changing.

Non-sociologists often consider the family as one of the few 'natural' institutions of society. People often express concern about its 'condition/health'. They consider 'healthy' families to be a good thing for society, and feel relatively confident that they know what makes a 'healthy family.' The 'ideal' family is considered to be a family which is made up of two opposite sex parents, and one or more children - their own children if possible. This model of the ideal family is shared by some sociologists.

Others tend to describe it as a 'cereal packet family' - a dream which is promoted by advertisers to sell things, or an ideology designed to promote the static concept of society - ignoring the diversity of life world-wide and in our society today.

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It therefore appears that some kind of social network is needed to introduce children to their own culture. Humans take longer to develop and they must learn the culture of their own society if they are to survive/live in that society in an acceptable manner - this process is called socialisation.

Evidence of 'feral' children and those who have not been socialised by their parents shows that humans need to be taught about norms e.g. saying thank you and values e.g. tolerance. Sociologists call this process socialisation. It teaches us about norms (expected behaviour) and values that are related to particular roles or positions in society; such as how to be a student, a shop assistant, a teacher, a friend or parent.

Families are often described as 'primary agents of socialisation'. This is usually the first group where we learn about aspects of our culture. However, we continue to learn new roles, norms and values throughout our lives. We also learn through other secondary agents of socialisation agents such as school, peer groups, work, partners, and the media.

## Questions

- Why do sociologists question traditional images of the 'family'?
- What are feral children? What do they show about the socialisation process?
- Why is socialisation important?

## Keywords

1. Culture - a society's way of life; beliefs, norms and values of a group of people.
2. Roles - expected behaviour in specific situations.
3. Socialisation - the process by which norms and values are transferred and learnt.
4. Primary socialisation - socialisation by parents and family.
5. Secondary socialisation - socialisation by agents apart from the family e.g. at school, work.
6. 'Feral' children - 'wild' children who haven't been socialised.
7. Norms - expected behaviour.
8. Values - beliefs that reflect what is considered as important or desirable.

## Defining the nuclear family

### Bullets

- The traditional family structure is called a 'nuclear family'.
- Functionalists believe that the nuclear family is the basic form of family in every society and that it is essential for the sustainability of society.

### Text

The nuclear family is made up of a husband, wife and their children. Often when sociologists (especially up to the 1960s) refer to the family, they mean the nuclear family. The Functionalists who regard the traditional family framework as being essential for the sustainability of society and for passing on the culture of any social group to the next generation, offer quite a narrow definition, e.g. Murdock (1949):

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"The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults".

Murdock believed that the nuclear family was a universal social grouping' - in other words, the nuclear family is a universal form of the family seen in all types of society worldwide. Murdock said that this nuclear family share the following features:

1. Families living together - sharing the same home.
2. They work together and pool resources - to some extent, they share domestic tasks and income.
3. They reproduce -have children.
4. They consist of a male and female adult who have a sexual relationship with each other and are accepted by society e.g. marital relationship.
5. The heterosexual couple has at least one child - biological or adopted.

In light of the changes to British 'families', Murdock's definition is now considered to be dated to explain the structure of modern British families. Giddens' definition (1993) is more flexible and therefore useful:

"A family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children."

Although there are issues with the definition, the term 'family' is still used, as it is such an important social institution - even if the framework is variable, flexible and different.

## Questions

- Explain the meaning of a nuclear family.
- How does Murdock define the family?
- What are the functions of the family according to Murdock?
- Discuss the differences between the definitions of Murdock and Giddens.

## Keywords

1. Nuclear family - a family consisting of two parents and one or more children.
2. Functionalists - sociologists who explain social institutions in terms of their functions to society.

## Defining the extended family

### Bullets

- Extensions of the nuclear family are called extended family.
- The extension can either be vertical or horizontal.
- The beanpole family is a relatively new form of the extended family.
- The term modified extended family is used for families who often see and support each other.

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## Text

Murdock saw other family forms as extensions of the nuclear family. These extended families included kinship-relations based on 'blood' or marriage - in addition to the nuclear family. Apart from partners through marriage, the nuclear family can be extended in several different ways e.g. an extended three generation nuclear family can include grandparents within the family unit. Also, an uncle and auntie (brothers and sisters of the married couple) can form part of this family unit.

Functional sociologists, Bell and Vogel, define the extended family as "any grouping broader than the nuclear family which is related by descent, marriage or adoption."

Extended family is the name given to the unit which is larger than the nuclear family. These families can be regarded as extensions of the basic nuclear unit. The 'extended' connection can either be horizontal or vertical.

Horizontal extension consists of members of the same generation such as aunties and uncles (brothers and sisters of the husband and wife).

Vertical extension consists of members of the third generation e.g. grandparents; and/or old uncles/aunties. During the past years, there has been an increase in four generation families. Many of these families are long and narrow (Brannen 2003). The term beanpole is used to describe them. These families form as horizontal connections reduce at the same time as vertical connections increase. Reference is made to factors such as high divorce rates, lowering fertility rates, one-parent families and longer life expectancy to explain the increase in beanpole families.

Historical research by Michael Anderson suggests that the early stages of industrialisation encouraged the formation of extended families. Anderson took a sample of 10% of households in Preston and used information from the 1851 Census. He found that 23% of the households consisted of families outside the nuclear family. Most households were working class. This was a period of global poverty with high birth and death rates. Without the Welfare State, people tended to depend on their extended families for care and emotional and practical support. Anderson's research suggests that extended families within the working class work together to provide support in testing times. Evidence of the unity between extended families within the working class has continued into the 20th century.

Although the number of extended families reduced during the second half of the 20th century, research by the building society 'Skipton' (2004) anticipates an increase of approximately 70,000 to 200,000 of extended families. They explain the increase in terms of the high cost of residential care for the older generation, longer life expectancy, and high cost of being first time buyers.

The term modified extended family is sometimes used to describe family members coming together for important events and providing support when required. Better communication with e-mail, mobile phones, cars and aeroplanes means that keeping in contact is easier than ever before.

Research by Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason in the Manchester area indicated that 90% of their sample had given or received support from a relation. About 60% had shared a

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house with an adult relation, other than their parents, at one stage of their life. Many had given or received practical support, emotional support and had helped to look after a family member's children. Although they emphasise that family relationships are based on the attitude that this has to be done, Finch and Mason found that the support wasn't given automatically.

There is evidence that there is less contact between relatives. Surveys in 1986 and 1995 have shown a substantial decrease. These figures suggest that people are less likely to be visited by family or friends. The distance between families has increased slightly since 1986. The most feasible explanation is the increase in the number of women working outside the home therefore having less time to spend with the family. The largest decrease in contact is to be seen amongst women in full-time employment, for example, there has been 20% decrease in the number of women who see their mother on a weekly basis.

## Questions

- What is an extended family?
- Beanpole families often have many women. Why?
- Why have the numbers of extended families reduced during the 20th century?
- Give possible reasons for increasing extended families today.

## Keywords

1. Extended family: a unit which is larger than the nuclear family.
2. Vertical extension: extension of the nuclear unit which consists of members of the third generation e.g. grandparents.
3. Horizontal extension: extension of the nuclear unit which consists of members of the same generation such as aunts and uncles.

## Definitions of households and kinship

### Bullets

- Households can consist of members who share the same kinship.
- They can also include people who aren't related.

### Text

People who establish households have to live under the same roof and share a number of domestic chores. For example, they share meals, housework and expenditure. A number of people who share a household have a kinship tie. For example, most households include members of a family living together.

But some households are made up of people who aren't related - for example students. And, also, recently, there has been an increase in single person households - individuals living alone. This increase is mostly evident amongst young people, the elderly and men.

Kinship refers to people who are related through 'blood' or marriage. 'Blood' relatives are

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people who have a genetic or biological relationship. The concept of kinship is difficult to define and raises questions e.g. Where does kinship begin and end? How close does a genetic relationship have to be for people to be considered as kins - first/second cousin, or beyond? Does divorce end some kinship ties, and does re-marrying create a new kinship tie? Do people who co-habit - living as a couple without being married - have a kinship relationship? These questions suggest, to some extent, that kinship depends on personal choice.

Research by the University of Wales, Swansea (exploring changes in family life in Swansea since the 1960s), suggests the following:

'Support and contact are key to who is counted as 'family'. Kin can lose the status of family members if they do not provide support and there is little contact. By the same token, friends can become 'family' and distant relatives become 'close' if they are seen often and help each other out.'

Robert Chester argues that taking a snapshot of types of households is misleading. Over a life cycle, most people live in families and depend on kinship connections. However, post-modernists argue that no type of family can be called a 'norm.' It is more accurate to say that the nuclear family is one of a number of common family patterns in modern society, therefore it is impossible to present one theory of the 'family.'

## Questions

- What is 'kinship'?
- What is the Post-modernist argument?
- What is Robert Chester's argument?

## Keywords

1. Kinship - people who are related to each other through 'blood' or marriage.

## What key demographic changes are affecting families in Britain?

### Fertility

#### Bullets

- Fertility has fallen in the past years.
- More women are remaining childless.
- Women are having children later in life.
- There are more births outside of marriage.

#### Text

Recent statistics show that women are having fewer children and more women aren't having any children at all.

Fertility rate refers to the number of births for every 1,000 women aged 15-44. In 1900, the UK's fertility rate was 115, in 1961 it was 91, and in 2000 it had fallen to 54.5. This was the

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lowest rate since records began. (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2003).

Childless women: the falling fertility rate in the past years is partly due to childless women. According to the figures of the Joseph Rountree Foundation, about 9% of women born in 1946 in England and Wales were childless at 45 years old, which increased to 16% to those born in 1952, and forecasts suggests that 25% of women born in 1973 will be childless at 45. This increase in childlessness since the 1950s appears to be voluntary - it is a matter of choice.

Being voluntarily childless affects between 5% and 8% of couples - there is no reason to think that this is increasing. (Coleman & Chandola 1999).

Age and fertility patterns show that women are having children later on in life. In England and Wales, the average age of giving birth rose from 26.1 in the early 1970s to 29.1 in 2000. While the fertility rate of women under 30 has fallen, the rate for women aged 30 and over has risen since the mid 1970s. (Ghee 2001).

Births outside marriage: More and more children are being born outside wedlock. In 1900, births outside were 4% compared to nearly ten times more a century later. The largest increase has been in the past years - from 8% in England and Wales in 1971 to 39% in 2000.

The majority of this increase in births outside of marriage has been amongst cohabiting couples - to parents living at the same address. In 2000, 80% of births outside marriage were registered by both parents - 75% of these births were to parents living at the same address.

The number of births outside marriage registered by only the mother has stayed more or less the same, about 7% to 8% since the end of the 1980s.

## Questions

- Suggest reasons for the fall in fertility rates.

## Keywords

1. Fertility rate: the number of births to every 1,000 women aged 15-44 years old.

## Explanations for fewer births

### Bullets

- Attitudes have changed towards having children outside of marriage.
- There are more contraception methods.
- There are more educational opportunities for women.
- Individuals have more freedom.

## Text

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Change of values and attitude has been suggested as one explanation. Society is now much more tolerant of births outside marriage than in the past. In the early 1950s, unmarried mothers were seen as 'psychologically disturbed'. Births outside marriage were deemed 'illegitimate.' Attitudes towards childless women has also changed. Nowadays, women if choose not to have children, they see themselves as being free, rather than missing out.

Reliable contraception methods have been available from the Health Service since 1967 for married or unmarried women. Therefore, women can control how many children they have and when.

Researchers often point to increasing education opportunities as a reason for the fall in fertility rates. The numbers of female under-graduates nearly tripled between 1970/71 and 2000/01. During those years, the number of women in employed work increased from 10 to 14.1 million. This gave women alternatives to the traditional role of mothers and child bearers.

Some researchers claim that more emphasis has been put on individualism during the past years. Such thinking is reflected by couples choosing to live together without getting married and choosing to have fewer children or none at all.

## Questions

- Suggest reasons for the changes in attitudes towards having children outside marriage.

## Keywords

1. Tolerant: accepting something.
2. Under-graduates: people in university studying for a degree.
3. Individualism: rejecting traditional social pressures and living for oneself.

## Marriage patterns

### Bullets

- There are a number of reasons why fewer people choose to get married nowadays.
- An increasing number cohabit instead of getting married.
- More people have children before marriage.
- Changing social values and attitudes are the main reason why more people cohabit.

### Text

Until recently, the majority of people in Britain took it for granted that marriage was a basis for family life. There are signs that this is now changing. An increasing number of couples are of the opinion that marriage is not necessary in a long term sexual relationship, or when they consider having children.

In general, since 1838 when marriages were first registered, up until the beginning of the 1970s, there has been an increase in the number of marriages in the UK. Since then, there

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have been fewer marriages, from 480,000 in 1972 to 306,000 in 2000. These figures refer to first and second time marriages, where one or both partners have been married before.

There has been a fall in the number of first time marriages from 390,000 in 1970 down to 180,000 in 2000, but the number of second time marriages has increased from 57,000 in 1961 (14%) to 126,000 in 2000 (41%). The majority of second marriages included divorcees rather than widowers. The largest increase was seen between 1971 and 1972, following the Divorce Reform Act 1969.

In past years, the trend has been for people to get married later on in life. In 1971, the average age for a first marriage was 24 for men and 22 for women. By 2000, it had risen to 30 for men and 28 for women.

More people now choose not to get married, and stay single or live together as a couple. A number of people choose to live together before getting married and an increasing number choose to live together instead of getting married.

According to McRae (1999) there are a number of reasons why some women reject the idea of marriage. Marriage restricts personal freedom and independence. Cohabiting means they don't feel that they are tied down. There is no advantage to being married. Thirdly, some reject marriage due to the fear of divorce. They have experienced divorce before, or have seen someone else go through it, which has made them reject marriage. Also, during the past fifty years, attitudes to other options have changed. Staying single or cohabiting appeals greatly to a number of people, and of course is acceptable by society.

Whilst the number getting married has fallen, the number cohabiting without being married has increased. Between 1979 and 1991 the percentage of women living with someone increased from 11% to 23%. According to Haskey (2001) couples who live together are likely to be young - nearly 40% of 25-29 year old women were living with a partner in 1998, and the pattern is similar for men. There has also been an increase in the number of couples cohabiting before getting married.

Between 1900 and 1960 approximately one out of every twenty children were born outside of marriage. This rose to 8% in 1971 and to 31% in 1992. However, 75% of the children born outside of marriage in 1992 were registered as children to both parents (45% in 1971). This shows that children born outside of marriage are brought up in a stable relationship between two partners. In over 70% of cases when the parents registered their children, they put the same address on the registration form.

For some couples, cohabiting and having children is instead of marriage, to others it is a natural step before they get married. Although they are a minority, the number of people who believe that there is no need to get married is on the increase. The number of women who don't think they need a man to raise a child, or a stable relationship with a partner is also increasing.

Cohabitation was seen as an opportunity to test the relationship before making it legal. Approximately 40% of people consider cohabiting as an option instead of marriage, and consider the freedom from the legal tie as an easier way of ending a relationship.

Cohabitation has increased during the last fifty years for many reasons.

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1. The attitudes of society towards a sexual relationship outside of marriage have changed. A number of people no longer regard it as being sinful. This can be explained by a decline in the relevance of religion. This process is known as secularisation.

2. Allan and Crown (2001) say that making contraception available to unmarried women in 1967 eradicated the fear of becoming pregnant and unmarried, therefore having a sexual relationship before marriage wasn't as much of a problem as it used to be.

3. In the past years, more young people have been leaving home to go to further education in colleges. In addition, building societies are more willing to borrow money to unmarried couples.

4. The divorce rate has risen in the last years. Couples who have experienced divorce are more likely to live together the second time. According to Mc Crae (1999) and Allan and Crow (2001), a number of people choose to live together because they fear the idea of divorce.

They way you analyse these figures depends on your viewpoint. Feminists tend to look at them as evidence that traditional patriarchal marriages do not meet the needs of women. Political right wingers, such as the New Right, believe that traditional family values are breaking down.

Another argument is that of the Functionalists, people like Ronald Fletcher, arguing that nuclear families are actually couples cohabiting, families based on a stable relationship.

## Questions

- Suggest other reasons for the increase in cohabitation.
- Is increased cohabitation evidence that families are dying out?

## Keywords

1. Values: The guiding principles or beliefs which affect how people act.
2. Nuclear Family : a family consisting of two parents and one or more children.
3. The New Right: Associated with Margaret Thatcher. They believe in individualism or the rights of the individuals over those of society
4. Functionalists: A form of sociology where social institutions are studied in terms of their usefulness for society.
5. Further Education: Post 16 education within a college leading to further qualifications.
6. Patriarchal: male dominance.
7. Secularisation: the decline in religious belief

## Divorce

### Bullets

- There has been a notable increase in the divorce rate since the 1970s.
- It is difficult to collect reliable figures about marriage breakdowns.

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## Text

Marriage is a legal agreement between two people. That agreement is legally terminated through divorce.

One of the most dramatic changes in family life during the past century has been the vast increase in the divorce rate. In 1911, there were 859 applications for divorce, with permission granted to about three quarters of those. In 1987, there were 183,000 divorce applications of which 165,000 were granted permission.

The best way to measure the increase is by looking at the divorce rate. The divorce rate refers to the number of divorces per thousand married couples. In 1993 the divorce rate was at its highest, reaching 180,000, then falling to 155,000 by 2000. It rose again to 157,000 in 2001. (Social Trends 2003).

Joan Chandler (1993) says that if these trends continue, about 40% of marriages of the present day will end in divorce. Throughout the 1990s, the National Statistics Office has recorded a decrease in the number of divorces and in the divorce rate due to a decrease in the number of first marriages. We must also remember that a number of couples separate, without getting divorced, and it is very difficult to collect statistics on this.

There are also a number of empty-shell marriages, where a couple still live with each other, are legally married, but love, sex and companionship has disappeared. To all purposes, they live separate lives, but are still married and live under the same roof. Of course, getting divorced is now easier, and those couples who tolerated empty-shell marriages or those couples who had separated in the past, would be more likely to get divorced these days.

The increase in divorce during the twentieth century has been astonishing. The big question for us as sociologists is what accounts for this increase? Increase in divorces is true of most modern societies.

## Questions

- Why is it difficult to collect reliable figures about relationship breakdown?

## Keywords

1. National Statistics Office: statistics from official data collected by the government agencies.
2. Empty shell marriages - where there is no love between a couple but they stay together, often for the sake of the children.

## Explaining the increase in divorces

### Bullets

- Changes in the law have made divorce easier.
- Some believe that the increase in divorces reflects the increasing value people place on value.

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- Changes in women's lives mean that women don't have to stay in unhappy marriages.
- Changes in social attitudes mean that divorce is more acceptable.
- Demographic changes mean that more people get divorced in the UK nowadays.

## Text

### 1. Changes in the Law

The law involving divorce has changed greatly, and has contributed to the increase in the number of divorces.

The big change came in 1971, although minor changes had happened before then which contributed to the increase in the divorce rate. In 1971, a law was passed which granted divorce if couples could show that the marriage had broken down. This meant, in reality, that divorce was possible after living separately for two years, or for five years, if one partner objected. In 1985, another Law was passed stating that divorce was granted after a year of marriage only - this was three years before. The divorce rate rose again after this law was passed.

Although the change in the law resulted in an increase in the divorce rate, this isn't the only explanation. Changes in the law are likely to reflect wider changes in society. The divorce rate has risen at times when the law has not changed for example during the 1960s. Legal changes enable more right to get divorced. But they do not explain why more people choose to divorce.

### 2. People's expectations of marriage

Ronald Fletcher argues that people expect more out of marriage and family life than they used to. Couples are no longer willing to be part of empty-shell marriages therefore divorce is more common. At the same time, most divorcees re-marry, therefore they do not reject marriage as a way of life, only the marriage they happen to be part of. They expect more from their relationship.

William Goode argues that marriage has become an occurrence for more emotional reasons. In the past, people married for practical reasons, and the fact that partners didn't love each other wasn't a problem. N Dennis (1984) says something along similar lines. He says that modern marriages are sustained by the emotional feelings of both parties towards each other. If these break down, there isn't much point to the marriage.

More recently, the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) has seen a similar shift towards what he calls 'confluent love.' This love means closeness, emotion and satisfaction rather than feelings of duty and obligation as reflected in traditional marriage vows ' "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer ... whilst we both shall live" '.

Giddens says that the decision to get married these days is often based on this type of love. When this emotion and closeness disappears from a marriage, it will probably end. If

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Giddens is right, then marriage can be a very unstable institution in these days, therefore divorce is likely to happen more often.

## 3. Changes in women's roles

Nowadays, women account for three quarters of the applications for divorce. Fletcher argues that this is because women tend to expect more from marriage than men, and women are now financially independent, and have more opportunity to succeed without their husbands.

Improving the woman's position within society has also contributed to the rise in the divorce rate. Some feminists argue that women have less to gain from marriage than men, therefore they don't see the point of marriage. Fewer women than men re-marry after getting divorced.

Nicky Hart (1976) says that a rise in the number of women working has put more stress on women. There is conflict between the woman's role in the house and in the workplace. The increase in the divorce rate therefore reflects that women want a better bargain out of marriage, and that they are unhappy with their traditional role of doing the housework.

In the past, the woman was 'bound' to an unhappy marriage because she couldn't support herself and her children financially without her husband's wages. Kurz (1995) says that if women couldn't be economically independent, then their chances of being able to get divorced were limited.

According to Allan and Crow (2001), over the past fifty years, opportunities for women have improved. More women work, divorce gives more consideration to the woman's financial needs, and benefits for women and children have improved. Although most women are worse off financially after a divorce, they manage to live independently from their husbands.

Feminists say that the increase in the divorce rate reflects what's wrong with the traditional patriarchal marriage - men dominate and division of domestic labour is unequal, with women responsible for child care and housework even if they have their own job.

There is some evidence to support this. Divorced men are more likely to re-marry than divorced women. According to Diana Gittins (1993) this is because women are disillusioned with marriage. In the 1940s, 66% of divorce petitions came from the husbands. By 2000, 70% of the divorce petitions came from the wives. This suggests that women are more dissatisfied with marriage than men.

## 4. Changes in the attitude and values of Society

During the nineteenth century, divorce was considered as something deplorable, and a divorced person was often rejected by society. This is especially true for women. Attitudes have changed gradually during the last century, and divorce has become much more common and acceptable. This alone has made divorce easier.

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Sociologists such as Bryan Wilson (1966) see a link between a decline in religion and the increase in divorce. Society has become more secular, and this has contributed to more divorces. Less than half of modern marriages are religious marriages. Out of the people who marry in a chapel or church, only a very small percentage are regular worshippers. Maybe the Christian concept of staying with someone for life is starting to disappear.

According to Colin Gibson (1994), modernism can create conflict between a husband and wife. Modernism places emphasis on the individual's achievement therefore some couples expect a higher personal satisfaction from marriage. This is more likely to happen in a second marriage.

Allan and Crow (2001) have a similar viewpoint. They argue that marriage is now more a relationship than an agreement. A couple look for love, satisfaction, and personal commitment and marriage doesn't have to be a relationship that lasts forever.

Ideas about divorce and its effect on children are also changing. In the past, couples stayed together 'for the sake of the children.' By today, more and more people see that a marriage which isn't working doesn't help the children, arguing that the children are better off in a happy environment with a single parent, rather than with two parents who are arguing.

According to Cockett and Tripp (1994), the increase in the divorce rate has contributed to making divorce 'normal.' This makes divorce more acceptable.

## 5. Demographic changes

In the past, getting married for life didn't mean having to live with the other person for a long time anyway. Life expectancy was so short, and many people died young, so that the marriage was relatively short. People often married late in life, and re-marrying after your partner had died was also common.

Social historians like Michael Anderson (1983) argue that the fact that people marry younger and live longer also contributes to the increase in the divorce rate. According to 'Population Trends' (1976) a marriage where the bride was under 21 was twice more likely to end than a marriage where the bride was older than 21.

During the 1980s, couples were more likely to live together before getting married. According to the 'General Household Survey' (1993), couples who had lived together before marrying were more likely to get divorced than those who hadn't. Out of the couples who had lived together, 50% had divorced after five years of marriage and 60% after eight years of marriage.

Although people link marrying at a young age with divorce, some sociologists argue that the couples do not divorce because they married young.

According to a study by Ineichen of marriages in Bristol (1977), divorce amongst young people was linked to other factors such as poor housing, manual jobs, and sharing a home with parents or relatives.

People who marry young are more likely to be working class, are more likely to have a

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child before marriage, and are more likely to live in poor housing, or live with their parents. Maybe these factors contribute to the high level of divorce, and not the fact that they married young.

## Questions

- Summarise the legal changes that have lead to an increase in the divorce rate.
- Why would the divorce rate have risen in the 1960s?
- What explanation for the increase in the divorce rate do you think fits best?

## Keywords

1. Benefits: money paid by the Government to people in need e.g. unemployment, pension.
2. Domestic labour: unpaid work done in the home e.g. house work, child care.
3. Patriarchy: male domination.

## Who gets divorced?

### Bullets

- People who marry young are more likely to get divorced.
- Working class people are more likely to get divorced.
- Children whose parents are divorced are more likely to get divorced themselves.
- Second marriages are more likely to end in divorce than first marriages.

### Text

A couple who marry young are more likely to get divorced. There are a number of reasons for this.

The girl might already be pregnant and this can put strain on the marriage. Financial problems are more likely amongst young people due to low wages or unemployment. They might not realise the demands of marriage or that they don't have enough experience of choosing a suitable partner. Their beliefs and attitudes are still developing and this can create a divide between them.

Generally, the lower the social class, the more likely the couple are to divorce. According to Kiernan and Mueller (1999), financial problems are at the heart of everything. Unemployment, dependency on benefits and low income are all linked to high divorce rates.

Some other factors linked to high divorce rates are - experience of parents divorcing may make divorce more acceptable.

Second marriages are more likely to end in divorce than first marriages.

Differences in terms of class, ethnicity and religion can cause problems. They may have

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less in common or may have different expectations of marriage that could lead to conflict. Wealthy people may find divorce more complex because of financial considerations.

## Questions

- Who would be most likely to get divorced?

## Keywords

1. Social class: division of people in the structure, depending on their job.
2. Ethnicity: shared identity based on religious and cultural factors.
3. Conflict: tension or disagreement.

## Divorce and children

### Bullets

- There are differences in opinion about the impact of divorce on children.
- The factors in the wake of a divorce have further consequences for children.
- According to the New Right, divorce is a serious threat to society.

### Text

Divorce has a number of consequences, for the couple, their children, their relatives and friends. There is a difference of opinion regarding its effect on children. Some see it as being damaging, and that the couple should stay together for the sake of the children. Others argue that the children are happier outside of an unhappy, bitter and quarrelsome family environment.

According to a study by Rodgers and Pryor (1998), 'Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes for Children', children of divorced or separated parents are more likely to experience poverty, poor housing, behaviour problems. However, only a minority experience these problems.

Why does divorce have a damaging effect on some, but not on others?

According to Rodgers and Pryor, it is not the divorce alone that causes these problems, but the other resulting factors. Financial problems can affect educational achievement. Family conflict could cause behavioural problems for the children. Parents' ability to cope with the new situation - if the parents can't cope with the changes brought about by divorce, then the children are also less likely to do so. Change in the family structure - if divorce leads to other changes, such as moving in with a step-family, this can cause problems. Contact with parents - if children don't have contact with one parent, it is harder to cope.

After completing a study in America, Mavis Hetherington (2002) reached the same conclusion. She says that only some children experienced serious emotional or social behaviour, compared to those who came from families who hadn't separated. According to Hetherington, the negative effects on children have been exaggerated, and we should

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accept that divorce can be a reasonable solution to an unhappy and destructive marital relationship.

## 2. Divorce and Society

According to the New Right, high divorce rates, with divorce often resulting in one parent families, are a serious threat to society. Most one parent families are run by the woman. A paternal role model is missing to enforce discipline and be a role model for the future. This can lead to lack of socialisation, especially for boys, which could lead to anti-social behaviour.

Some New Right thinkers, like Patricia Morgan (1999) see a direct link between the divorce rates and an increase in the crime rates. She says that there is a need to return to traditional family values in order to strengthen marriage. We need new laws to make it harder to get divorced. This should reduce the divorce rate and reduce the threat to social stability.

The Feminists, of course, oppose any barriers to divorce, as the current laws give freedom and choice, especially for women. Placing restrictions on divorce could force women to suffer unhappy marriages, and cruelty and violence in some cases.

Liberal divorce laws give more independence to women and are a positive step towards gender equality.

## Questions

- Investigate the effects of divorce on children.
- How do the opinions of theorists about the effects of divorce vary?
- Why is it difficult to prove the impact of divorce on children?

## Keywords

1. The New Right: a political viewpoint associated with Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Governments of the 1980s. It believed that competition was good for society and supported the traditional nuclear family.
2. Feminism: A belief that women are subjected to male domination or patriarchy in society.
3. Paternal Role: Expectations of being a 'father'.

## Elderly population

### Bullets

- The UK has an ageing population.
- There are two main reasons for this: Falling fertility rate and longer life expectancy.
- The elderly population is often seen as a problem.

### Text

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Like most industrial societies, the UK has an elderly ageing population. This means that an increasing proportion of the population is elderly - 65 years old or over.

In 1961, 12% of the population was 65 and over, and by 2001 this had risen to 16%. On the other hand, in 1961, 23% of the population in the UK were children under 16, in comparison with 20% in 2001. (Social Trends 2003 )

There are two main reasons for the elderly population - falling fertility and longer life expectancy.

The fertility rate has fallen in the UK, with the lowest rate recorded in 2001 since records began. This pattern is reflected by the birth rate. In 1900, the birth rate in the UK was 29, which fell to 18 by 1961, and 11.4 in 2001. This was the lowest rate since records began. (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2003).

This is the second reason for the ageing population. Life expectancy refers to the average age a person is expected to live. By 2001, men and women could expect to live 30 years longer than in 1901.

In 1901 life expectancy was 55 years. In 1971 men were expected to live until they were 77 and in 2001 until they were 81. In 1971 the life expectancy for women was 81 and by 2001 it had increased to 84.

Why are people living longer?

These are the reasons for longer life expectancy and the fall in death rates:

- Improved diet, hygiene and health.
- Advances in medicine, technology and drugs.
- Higher social benefits - e.g. direct financial payments and pensions.
- Higher standards of living in general e.g. better housing and heating. Better public hygiene has been an important factor in this.
- Better care facilities - social services providing nursing homes and housing improvements to help the elderly.
- Changing vocational structure - fewer dangerous and physically demanding jobs.

'Dependency Ratio'

Children under 16 and older people 65 and over are known as dependent age groups, as they don't work to support themselves. Those who are 16-64 are known as the working population, although not all of them work e.g. students and unemployed. There is an increasingly high dependency ratio of the elderly.

## Questions

- Why does the UK have an ageing population?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of an ageing population?

## Keywords

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1. Fertility rate: number of births for every 1,000 women aged 15-44.
2. Birth rate: number of births for every 1,000 of the population every year.
3. Life expectancy: an estimation of lifespan
4. Benefits: financial support in a time of need, paid by the government.
5. Vocational structure: how jobs are shared across the population. This affects the social class of the population.

## What are the implications of an elderly population?

### Bullets

- The elderly population is often seen as a problem.
- The majority of elderly people are healthy and active.
- Many elderly people are independent and support themselves.
- The majority are in regular contact with their families.
- Families are getting longer and include three or four generations.

### Text

The elderly population is often seen as a problem. More elderly people means greater demands on those caring for them. However, this argument could be one-sided as the majority of elderly people are healthy and active. A survey of elderly people in the European Union found that the majority had full lives. However, according to Social Trends (2003): 'the increase in the number of pensioners places greater demands on health, social services and social security arrangements. As a response to this, the state pension age will be increased between 2010 and 2020 to 65 for both sexes'.

The older people get, the more likely they are to live alone. This is usually due to the death of their partner. Women over 65 are more likely to live alone than men. On average, women live longer than men and they usually marry men who are older than them.

Even when living alone, the majority of elderly people are in regular contact with their families, especially their children. The birth of grandchildren increases the number of times they are in contact with each other. Elderly people who are apart from their families are usually childless.

Research shows that many elderly people are independent and determined to support themselves. However, they do become fragile and their partner or children support them. Most people still live close to at least one of their children.

In recent years, there is some evidence that elderly people have less frequent face-to-face contact with their adult children. This is partly because of the increasing distance between families. However, many still keep in contact with their families via the phone and e-mail.

With an elderly population, families tend to become longer and thinner. With fewer children being born, there are fewer brothers, sisters and cousins. In this respect, families are thinner; they haven't grown as much horizontally. With a longer life expectancy, families are becoming longer and consist of three or four generations. This results in beanpole families.

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Research in the Netherlands has found that 54.6% of elderly people are grandparents, and belong to three generation families. Fewer births and longer life expectancy result in beanpole families. This is further evidence of increasing family diversity.

## Questions

- What does research show about the lives of elderly people?
- How do the lives of elderly people vary according to their circumstances?

## Keywords

1. elderly old: those people in extreme old age who are dependent on others to live satisfactory lives.
2. elderly: those over 65. They may be in very good health and support their families or have jobs.

## Post-modern families

### Bullets

- A number of sociologists argue about the existence of the 'post-modern family'.
- People who reject traditional life patterns adjust relationships to suit their own personal needs.
- More people stay single.
- An increasing number of people are living alone
- More women are childless.
- There are more gay couples.

### Text

More and more people are delaying having their own family; some choose to stay single or childless. This has lead sociologists (e.g. Stacey 1990) to argue over the existence of the 'post-modern family'. This is because families or gender don't follow the disciplined and expected patterns of society. People who reject traditional life patterns adjust relationships to suit their own personal needs.

Some people never marry. They choose to stay single or can't find a suitable partner. The number of unmarried people is increasing e.g. of the women born in England and Wales between 1946 and 1950, only 7% were unmarried at 32 years old, in comparison with 28% born between 1961 and 1965. The pattern is similar for men too. A number of unmarried people co-habit - they live with a partner as a couple. In recent years, there has been a consistent increase in the number of people co-habiting, as we will see in the next section. Singlehood has also increased steadily - living without a partner. this may occur after divorce or relationship breakdown.

An increasing number of people are living alone. The largest increase can be seen in the 25-29 age group in social class 1 - people in professional occupations, especially women. In England and Wales in 1971, 6% of this group lived alone, which had increased to nearly 20% by 1991.

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In 1991, 90% of the under 30s age group lived alone, unmarried, over 50% of the 30-39 age group, and 30% of the 40-59 age group. In a number of instances, this was a personal choice. (Hall et al 1999).

Women choose to live alone because they are in a position to do so. New opportunities and employment during the last decades have meant that there is a third alternative for women other than getting married or caring for their parents.

Single women have more social networks and they partake in a number of social activities. To the contrary, single men tend to be more lonely and isolated. (Scase 2000).

In the past, being single was a negative status, especially for women. Today, things have changed. The term 'creative singlehood' is used to describe singlehood as being something positive, where people choose to stay single. They emphasise the importance of independence and freedom.

Attitudes towards childless women have also changed. Women who choose not to have children consider themselves as being 'free of children' -they emphasise freedom from children rather than loss.

Part of the decline in fertility in the past years is due to the increase in childless women. The majority of the increase in childless women since the 1950s has probably been optional. Being involuntarily childless affects between 5% and 8% of couples - there is no reason to believe that this is increasing (Coleman and Chandola 1999).

Researchers often refer to women's educational opportunities and increasing participation in the world of work as reasons for the decline in fertility. Some researchers claim that there has been an increase in the emphasis on the freedom of individuals in the past years, the right to choose, and have personal satisfaction. This has resulted in people being more eager to form their own life patterns.

In 1967, it became legal for homosexual men to live together. By 2005, Civil Partnerships offering many of the rights of marriage became legal to gay couples. In the present social and political climate, it is more acceptable for homosexual couples to openly live together, which a number do, as couples or families. From a number of in-depth interviews conducted in the mid 1990s, we see that a number of homosexuals and lesbians develop new approaches to the concept of family (Weeks et al 1999a). A number believe that they choose their own family members and create their own families. These families are based on partnerships, close families and their own families. This network provides support, love and a sense of identity.

During past years, an increasing number of homosexuals and lesbians have established homes based on a same-sex partnership. In reality, same-sex partnerships tend to be more democratic than heterosexual partnerships. Homosexual and lesbian couples tend to have a relationship which is based more on discussion and equality. (Weeks et al 1999a). An increasing number of lesbians and homosexuals choose to have and bring up children with their partner. In the UK, the adoption route was not an option before 2002 when an Act of Parliament was passed making it legal for homosexuals and lesbians to adopt children.

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## Questions

- What is meant by a post-modern family?
- What types of family patterns can be called post-modern?

## Keywords

1. Post-modernism: according to some sociologists, we are living in a post-modern society. A community influences by the media, images, opportunity and choice.
2. Gender: the expected behaviour for males and for females.
3. Creative singlehood: choosing to be single.
4. Fertility rates: the number of births for every 1,000 women aged 15-44 years old.
5. Democracy: fairness and equality.
6. Adoption: child's legal rather than natural parents.

## Why are family changes taking place?

### Introduction

#### Bullets

- Societies change all the time.
- We need to understand what the past was like to understand why our current society is like it is.
- Some people believe that changes in families have created social change.
- It is probable that changes in society have also affected how people create families.
- There is no point at which we can say history ends and sociology begins, but there are dates that mark important social changes.

#### Text

It is clear from all the studies that have been carried out in sociology that families are undergoing change. Fewer children are born, more people choose not to marry and when they do, they don't always follow the traditional pattern of working man, domestic wife. People are living longer and enjoying better health into old age. These changes are clearly going to have an impact on society and how we organise ourselves. It is important to understand that some changes in the family may be a result of changes that are taking place in society. Social changes may affect family life.

This is a more important debate than it seems at first; New Right sociologists and writers claim that crime rates are going up because of family changes. Thus family change is causing social change. However, it is possible that something more complex is happening than that. What if family change and crime rate change were both caused some other social factor that we have not yet understood? Sociologists should be open to the possibility that changes to society may have a bigger impact on our lives that we understand.

There is no point in time where we can say 'sociology starts here'. There are, however certain key dates or points in time that are important because they mark the start of major

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changes in British culture. For the sake of the A level specification, the first of these is 1945. This marked the end of World War 2 and the start of the Welfare State system of free health care, social security payment and the rise of social services and education systems. A second important date is 1979, when Margaret Thatcher, a Conservative prime minister was elected into power. This was when the policies of the New Right became important. New Labour was elected in 1997, but saw far less impact on society.

## Questions

- Suggest two key dates when society started to change a great deal.
- Why would society change a great deal after a major War has ended?
- Why should we study social change?

## Keywords

1. New Right - a political viewpoint associated with Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Governments of the 1980s. It believed that competition was good for society and that poor people were poor because of welfare benefits.
2. Welfare State - the system that exists in Britain to care for people: the Health Service, Benefit System, Education Service, the Emergency services etc.

## The Welfare State

### Bullets

- Health services before 1945 were poor.
- Life expectancy and health have improved since 1945.
- This is partly due to the welfare state.

### Text

Although there were health services before World War 2, these were paid for privately or through private insurance schemes. The very poorest people did not have an automatic right to see a doctor or a dentist and people died for lack of basic medical care. There were long debates throughout the 1920s and 1930s about this injustice. During the early 1940s, Britain was involved in a war that nearly ended in defeat. The Labour Party promised people that when the war ended, they would create a better society for everyone, one that made sense of the fighting. The soldiers would come home to jobs, homes, educational opportunities, a health service and a good standard of living.

This promise led to a major political victory for the Labour Party in the election of 1945, despite the fact that the popular wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, led the Conservative Party. 1945 is therefore seen as a major turning point in British society because it was then that many of the things that we take for granted came into being. These include free health care, welfare benefits, secondary education and support from the state to encourage jobs.

In 1945, when old age pensions were given to people over the age of 65, the average life expectancy for people was 65.9 years. In 2000, the average life expectancy for men was

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over 75, and for women it was nearer 80. There are social class differences however, so people who are wealthy live 7 years more on average than people who are poor.

Some of the reasons for improved life expectancy include: vaccination where children are routinely protected against killer diseases, health screening for certain cancers and killer conditions, health care during and just after pregnancy. Although the development of the welfare state is not the only factor in changing the lives of British people since the last War, it has certainly had an impact.

The view that the government should take care of the population which is part of the philosophy of the welfare state meant that old housing was pulled down and councils built housing for poor people to rent. These houses were built with running water and inside toilets. Health improved as a result of these improved conditions of houses. Before the war, old people who were poor were sent to unpleasant places known as workhouses. These were closed or converted into hospitals and people were paid pensions. All of these changes have had wide reaching effects on British society and family life.

## Questions

- What is the welfare state?
- Why was the welfare state important to the war effort during WW2?
- What major changes has the welfare state had on the health of the British population?

## Keywords

1. Life expectancy - the average age of death of people per thousand of the population calculated from the date of birth.

## Medical Technology and the family

### Bullets

- Medical change has affected life expectancy. People are protected from killing diseases in childhood and survive killing illness in adulthood.
- Contraception is now in the control of women
- Women have used contraception so families are smaller and many choose to remain childless.
- Contraception has removed the link between marriage and sexuality so attitudes to family and children have changed.

### Text

The improved health of the British population can be seen to be one of the most positive effects of the welfare state. However, there are secondary implications too. The British population is now living longer; Age Concern (2005) point out that there are now more than 11 million people of pensionable age in Britain. This amounts to nearly 20% of the population. By mid-2000, there will be more than 11,000 people aged more than 100. Hoff of the University of Oxford has pointed out that this can be seen as both positive and negative. In older old age, many people are frail and require care from relatives who may

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not be young themselves. However, increasing numbers of women are able to work because they have the support of their own parents in providing childcare.

Another important change in families created by changes in medical care and medical technology is related to the contraceptive pill. This was first available in the UK in 1961 and has had a major effect on families. Condoms have been available for centuries. They were used by men to protect themselves from sexual diseases rather than to control pregnancy. The pill put women in charge of family planning. Birth rates dropped and the average age of first pregnancy has risen to 27.4 in 2004 from an average of 25 in the 1950s. Nwandison and Bewley (2006) point out that there has been a rise in the average age of pregnancy and a fall in the number of children to each woman. It is difficult to overstate the impact of good contraception on the role of women in the family or in society.

As Anthony Giddens has pointed out, almost every culture, inequality between men and women was an essential part of the traditional family. For women, sexual activity was associated with pregnancy. Now, sexual activity has been separated from reproduction and women may engage in sexual behaviours under the same terms as men. Reproduction is now a choice for many women, and marriage is no longer essential. More than 33% of children are born outside legal marriage and in the West, 25% of women remain childless. The nature of marriage itself has changed as a result. In addition, our attitudes towards our children have changed. As we have fewer children, we invest more into their care and up-bringing.

## Questions

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of an ageing population?
- What features of traditional families cause gender inequalities?
- What has been the impact of contraception on family structure and family life?

## Keywords

1. Contraception - techniques used to prevent pregnancy and childbirth.

## The changing role of women in society

### Bullets

- In the 1850s, women had virtually no legal rights. They were viewed as the property of men.
- Women have been challenging those views through feminism.
- There have been many legal changes protecting women and now also men and transgendered people.
- The effectiveness of those laws can be queried; women still earn less than men. There is still some way to go on the road to full equality.

### Text

There are other reasons why the roles of women in the family have changed, apart from their ability to control their own reproduction. These are to do with longer standing social

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and political movements that have been taking place in society; most notably, the acceptance of feminism and female equality. It is important to note that changes in women's roles in society has had an impact on the role of men, so it may be more important to think in terms of gender changes.

Less than 150 years ago in Britain, women had few rights. They could not vote, own property or have custody of their children in the event of family breakdown. Women could not divorce men easily, even in cases of continued and public abuse. They were not educated and it was commonly believed that excessive education would render them infertile. Some of these attitudes linger on in British society, so in 1954, a Commander Hatherill of Scotland Yard was famously quoted as saying, 'There are about 20 murders a year in London and many are not at all serious. Some are just husbands killing their wives'. Rape within marriage was legal until the 1990s! Married women were unable to open bank accounts or get credit in their own names until the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, there have been dramatic changes in the lives of women as a result of determined political and social action. Before the turn of the 20th, women demanded equal rights with men and worked to change their status under the law. This was known as 'first wave feminism' and was concerned with the right to vote. Second wave feminism took place in the 1960s and 1970s and had a wider brief. Women did not just want political equality, but social equality as well. There was some backlash against feminism in the 1980s, so third wave feminism arose in the 1990s and was concerned about the politics of sex, ethnicity and gender. Although many women might reject the term 'feminist' to describe themselves, it is clear that they also accept some the ideals of feminism.

In Britain, people are protected from sex discrimination by a series of laws which began with sex equality laws in the 1970s on pay and conditions. From 2007, the notion of sexual equality has now been widened to include men and transgendered individuals. The effectiveness of equality laws has been called into question; on average women still earn 80% of male pay. Nevertheless, the laws have been backed up by campaigns, government commissions and a general change in the attitudes of many people, including women themselves, towards the abilities and aspirations of women. It is far less acceptable than it was in the 1950s to express negative attitudes towards females. This has given many women the confidence to challenge the view that their role should be in the home and not in work or politics.

## Questions

- What were the three waves of feminism?
- How effective have feminist campaigns been in changing the roles of women?

## Keywords

1. Transgendered - people born into one biological sex who choose to live their lives in the roles of the other biological sex.
2. Feminism - the view that society is male dominated and that the domination of men should be challenged.
3. Backlash - negative and critical reaction against something.

## Post Industrial family structures

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## Bullets

- Britain is a post industrial society. Its economy depends on service sector work.
- There has been a movement of population away from inner city areas based around industry to new estates outside cities.
- Old working class communities have been broken up and new privatised families developed.
- This movement has led to further family change.

## Text

The changes to society that have already mentioned have been taking place within the context of a sequence of much larger changes that have affected everyone. Britain's economy has been changing from an industrial society to a post industrial society. Until World War 2, or just before, most people were employed making and producing things for export. This is industrial society. This type of work relied on physical strength so men were employed. There has been a transition from manufacturing to service sector work. People are no longer making or creating, but selling a service to other people. This work tends to rely on technology and skills.

This move from manufacturing to service work has had far-reaching changes on where we live, and our transport systems. People used to live near the factories, the dock, the railway stations and the coal mines and steel works where they were employed. Many of these areas were destroyed in war time bombing, but others were cleared because the housing conditions were so poor. These inner city areas remain places where poorer people live. As part of the welfare state, council housing estates were built outside new towns for people to live in. This process had an impact on family life. Young and Willmott were the authors of a series of 1950s and 1960s studies into the impact of this process on working class families in London, known as the Bethnal Green studies. They found that working class extended families were being broken up and replaced by nuclear families. Feminists such as Gavron and Oakley in the 1960s and 1970s pointed out how lonely and isolated women were in these new family units and how domestic work was not satisfying to them.

This led to a new type of family style identified by Goldthorpe and Lockwood in their Affluent Worker studies. This was the privatised family. The new pattern of family life was centred on the home. The dynamic of marriage relationships changed, so men and women expected more from their personal relationships. Entertainment moved into the home with the advent of the television. Homes were more comfortable and less crowded as fewer children were born and more houses were built. Men were more likely to help with domestic labour, or rather, less likely to be ashamed of helping. Whilst all of these things were the result of social change, they also became part of the process leading to more change in families and family life as well. Many of the women identified as being lonely and chained to the home in the 1960s and early 1970s found their way into the labour market as a solution to their isolation in the 1970s and 1980s.

## Questions

- Why do industrial societies require men to work?

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- Why did families move away from inner city areas?
- What did feminists find out about the impact of this change on women?
- How did the changes impact on family relationships?

## Keywords

1. Industrial society - based on manufacturing.
2. Post industrial society - based on providing or selling a service.
3. Privatised family - one that is not part of a community.
4. Domestic labour - housework.
5. Affluent workers - high paid workers in the car industry, a phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s before mechanisation.

## Feminisation of work

### Bullets

- There are more women in the workforce.
- They take lower paid work and flexible work.
- The ability to earn money and to control reproduction has given women freedom to make choices that were not available many years ago.
- Women are still not equal to men in the employment market.
- Unskilled men find it very difficult to get work.
- This impacts on families as women are no longer dependent on men for an income.

### Text

Sometimes it is suggested that working class women did not work outside the home before WW2. This is possibly a myth. Working class women would have had jobs as cleaners, washer women and cooks. They were not part of the taxable workforce so we do not know how many worked or what work they did. Their work would have been an extension of the kinds of things they did inside the home. It would not have been seen as acceptable for middle class women to work after marriage. Women educated to be teachers and nurses were expected to give up their jobs on marriage even into the 1960s.

In the 1970s, women were having fewer children, they were lonely and isolated in their homes and they could control their fertility. The ideas of feminism were catching the public imagination. Many women found their way back into employment. The difference in the 1960s and 1970s was the number of women who took taxable employment in factories, offices and shops. Note that this was happening at the same time that traditional male jobs in industry were in rapid decline and male unemployment rates were rising. It has led to a process which is described as the feminisation of work. This can be taken to mean two things: there are more women in the workforce and the skills that are required by employers are the skills that are traditionally associated with women.

The Labour Force Survey shows that in 1971, women made up 37% of the workforce, whereas by the late 1990s, the figure was closer to 46% of the workforce. Whereas 59% of women worked in 1980, 70% of women worked in the 2000s. However, men and women tend to follow different patterns in their careers. Women are heavily located in secretarial work, whereas men are more likely to be managers or skilled tradesmen. Women also

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choose jobs that offer flexibility of hours, such as care work or part-time and evening work. Unskilled women are more employable in casual work such as shelf filling and check out operation than are unskilled men. The Equalities Review (2007) shows that the UK has the third highest female employment rate but also the highest gender pay gap in Europe. This may not be entirely due to prejudice and exploitation. Catherine Hakim (1995) has put forward the notion of preference theory and says that women make lifestyle choices. Women are choosing lower paid jobs that can accommodate their lifestyles.

Clearly this change in female employment has had an impact on families, so that in the 1990s and 2000s, the pattern of employment among parents is either two-wage or no-wage families. Women who work do not need to have a man to look after them and pay for them. They do not need marriage to be their career in the same way that their grandmothers did. They are free to make choices about their lives and many are choosing not to have children, to divorce unsatisfactory partners or not to marry at all. This is happening at the same time as traditional male work is becoming more scarce; the job market for unskilled men is very limited.

## Questions

- Why were employment rates for women low in the 1950s and 1960s compared to today?
- Why are employment opportunities for unskilled men low?
- What impact has female employment had on family life?

## Keywords

1. Unskilled - has no formal educational qualifications.
2. Feminisation - becoming more female.

## Changes in Social Attitudes

### Bullets

- There are massive changes in social attitudes that affect families.
- There are changes in sexual morality so childbirth outside marriage is not unusual.
- There are changes in traditional gender patterns.
- Did the changes in attitude prompt family change, or do they follow on because that is what people choose to do?

### Text

Changes in the structure and organisation of British families has been accompanied by massive changes in social attitudes. There was equality legislation in the 1970s that made discrimination against women and people of different ethnicities illegal. Though many now argue that these laws were weak, they represented the start of a massive change in social attitudes.

One of the most notable changes in public morality was that of changes in attitudes to sexual activity outside marriage. Although in the past, many children were conceived

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outside marriage, fewer were born to unmarried couples. It is now acceptable to many people for couples to live together without having married. This has provoked public debate and politicians of the New Right are critical of the growth in birth rates of children to unmarried couples. Hawkes (1996) points out that there is a dual sexual morality whereby men are expected to be active and predatory sexually and females as passive. Giddens points out that traditional family patterns involve the control of women and female sexuality. There are concerns in modern society because some females are seen as being willing to assume traditionally aggressive male attitudes to sexuality. It is not the attitudes themselves that are seen as wrong; it is the willingness of women to adopt them that has triggered debates.

Another area of social change has been in terms of attitudes to gender. Traditional gender beliefs suggest that males and females are in opposition. Germaine Greer (1970), in *The Female Eunuch* suggested that it was difficult for women to know what it was to be a female because femininity is defined by men. She went further and argued that men hate women and women are therefore taught to hate themselves. This was an enormously influential book and it sold out twice in the first year of publication. It was part of a trend that encouraged men and women to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Judith Butler (1995) has been critical of feminism. She has challenged the view that genders are opposites and suggests we can now choose where we are on a continuum, so that gender is what you do, not who you are. Certainly there is tolerance of some challenges to traditional gender patterns, though it remains arguable how much challenge is acceptable. Homosexuality, for example is now legal and acceptable in the media and same sex couples marry, but 'gay' is a term of abuse.

There is a question for sociologists to answer that arise from this. Did changes in attitudes cause changes in families or did changes in families allow changes in attitudes to follow? For example, modern men are generally more willing to help in the home than men did 50 years ago. Is this because they believed in feminist ideals and equality for women, or is this because their female partners now work and it is important for men to do their share?

## Questions

- Why was the equality legislation of the 1970s important?
- Why have attitudes to sex outside marriage changed?
- How acceptable is it for people to challenge traditional gender patterns in our society?

## Keywords

1. Eunuch - a man who has had his sexual organs removed.
2. Continuum - a gradual transition from one thing to another.

## What new types of families and households exist in modern Britain?

### One-parent families

#### Bullets

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- Single parents have increased over the past 30 years.
- The majority of one-parent families form due to a relationship ending.
- Over 90% of single parents are women.

## Text

The official definition of a one-parent family is a mother or father living without a partner, with their dependent child or children. The child is unmarried, under 16 years of age, or between 16-19 years old and in full-time education (Haskey 2002). In Britain, since the 1970s, one-parent families have increased from 8% in 1971 to 22% in 2001.

Single parents are an extensive group. This is evident from how they become single parents. There are several ways of becoming a single parent:

- End of marriage either through separation or divorce (separated or divorced single parents)
- End of cohabitation where partners separate
- Women who aren't married or who don't cohabit becoming pregnant
- Death of a partner - e.g. husband dies and leaves the wife with dependent children.

A number of separated or divorced couples try and share the responsibility of bringing up their children. This is known as 'joint-parenting'. It is difficult to think of such arrangements as being one-parent families. (Neale and Smart 1997). Due to this problem, some sociologists argue that using one-parent homes would be a more fitting term. This simply states that the 'absent parent' is not part of the home and doesn't live under the same roof (Crow and Hardy 1992).

Most one-parent families are run by women - over 90% in 2001. One-parent families have increased during the past 30 years as the result of the following:

- Most of the increase between 1971 and 1991 has been due to divorce. The divorce rate has risen quickly after 1971.
- At the same time, the marriage rate has been gradually falling.
- Unmarried couples with children are twice as likely of ending their relationship as married couples with children.

More women have children outside of a stable relationship (marriage or cohabitation). Women choose this option rather than terminating the pregnancy, having the child adopted or living with the father.

Being a single parent isn't usually the first choice for a single mother or father. The majority would choose to bring up their children with a partner in a stable relationship. If this fails, most choose to be single parents. Research suggests that being a single parent is a temporary set-up for many single parents (see notes on reconstituted families).

## Questions

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- What are the various reasons for becoming a one-parent family?
- Why have one-parent families increased over the past 30 years?

## Keywords

1. One-parent family - family unit where children live with one parent.
2. Joint-parenting - both parents sharing responsibility for bringing up the children, without living together.
3. Divorce - end of a lawful marriage.
4. Cohabitation - an unmarried couple living together as husband and wife.

## Views about single parents

### Bullets

- The New Right is very critical of one-parent families.
- According to feminists, they reflect the increasing independence of women.
- Marxists believe that they are used as a scapegoat.

### Text

According to the New Right, one-parent families don't provide suitable socialisation. In single mother families, there is no father figure to discipline the children and to provide a male role-model. This can lead to underachievement, anti-social behaviour, disrespect and crime. Boys grow up without any awareness of the traditional responsibilities and duties of a father. Single mothers become dependent on state benefits. Children don't have examples of discipline and the responsibilities of the world of work.

Being part of one-parent families may not be the main reason why these children have issues, but rather the poverty that many single parents experience. (Allan and Crow 2001). The New Right is often very critical of teenage mothers. However, only about 5% of single parents are teenagers.

From a feminist point of view, the increase in single mothers shows that women have more freedom to choose. Rather than looking at the one-parent family as a failing unit, some consider it as being another form of the family where women are free from male dominance. Evidence shows that a number of single women welcome this independence and the opportunity to control their own lives. (Graham 1987).

According to some Marxists, single parents are used as a scapegoat to account for many social problems such as crime.

### Questions

- Identify and explain the main differences between the main viewpoints of single parents (either in table form or as a short essay).

### Keywords

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1. Benefits - money paid by the state to support people who are unable to support themselves.
2. Feminist - the opinion that society is patriarchal and controlled by men.
3. Marxism - the opinion that the social system exists in order to support capitalism.
4. Scapegoat - wrongly blamed.

## Reconstituted families

### Bullets

- There has been a considerable increase in the number of reconstituted families. In 1998-99, they formed 6% of all families with dependent children in Britain. According to one estimate, by 2010, they will be higher in number than families with two biological parents. (Bedell 2002).
- Reconstituted families are an extensive group. Parentline Plus, (i.e. formerly the National Stepfamily Association), has identified 72 different ways that step-families are formed e.g. some are formed through a first marriage, some through a second marriage, and some through cohabitation. Once they have formed, this extensiveness continues e.g. some children have a close and regular relationship with their absent biological parent, but others don't see them at all.
- Children tend to stay with their mother after a partnership ends. Nearly 9 out of 10 step-families consist of at least one child from the female partner's previous relationship. (Living in Britain 2002).

### Text

A high number of single parents remarry and form new two-parent families. According to the 'General Household Survey' 1991, 80% of men and 75% of women who divorce before they are 35 years old remarry within 10 years.

In 1991, over 33% of all marriages were second marriages, where one or both partners were divorced. In such marriages, one or both parents already had children. A number of couples who remarry want children in the new marriage. The reconstituted or blended family - a family created from parts of former families - is another variation of the family which is becoming increasingly common in Britain. It is estimated that at least six million people live in such families, including about 10% of all children.

Like one-parent families, reconstituted families aren't a new thing. Peter Laslett (1965) believed that about 25% of all marriages in England in the 17th century were second marriages, although these were due to the death of the husband or wife, rather than divorce.

Although it is difficult to generalise about people who re-marry, many argue that the popularity of second marriages shows the importance of family values (or at least a family ideal) to most people. Gittins argues that, for women with children, a second marriage is an important financial consideration, however Fletcher and Murdock say that second marriages is evidence of the high values we place on marriage and traditional family life.

This marriage, divorce and second marriage cycle is sometimes described as serial monogamy. This is the pattern which Fletcher (1965) and others say is evidence of our commitment to the nuclear family. This opinion suggests that although more marriages

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end in divorce, it continues to be an important institution.

Second marriages are often considered to be the best option for the children of divorced parents. It is argued that step-parents can provide a 'new' (and possibly extended) family for these children.

However, a report produced in 1995 by the 'National Child Development Survey' study suggests that girls don't benefit from step-parents, that more step-family children leave home at 18 after a family conflict, have poorer educational qualifications and get married younger than girls from one-parent families.

A study by Burgoyne and Clark (1984) of reconstituted families suggests that they face a number of issues, unlike other families. For example, reconstituted families don't have the same boundaries as other families. Children still have contact with their blood parents and families, and parents have to consult with the ex-husband or ex-wife about holidays and the right to see the children etc.

In this respect, such families aren't independent like other families. A number of problems facing reconstituted families don't affect a 'normal' family, therefore a number have difficulty adapting to the behaviour of a conventional nuclear family. Such pressure and stress may be the reason why the divorce rate amongst those who have already been divorced is higher than first marriages. It's possible that society hasn't yet adapted to accept that divorce, single parents and second marriages are a normal part of the cycle.

In comparison with one-parent families, there has been little research, public discussion or government policies regarding reconstituted families. Maybe this is because they appear to be 'normal' families, or maybe because they are considered as a 'solution' to the 'problem' of single parents. (Allan and Crow 2001).

## Questions

- What is Fletcher's opinion on remarriage?
- What problems face some reconstituted families?

## Keywords

1. Reconstituted family - a family that comprises divorced or widowed parents who have re-married and children from the previous marriage.
2. Serial monogamy - getting married, divorced then remarrying. This can be a recurring process.

## Single occupancy households

### Bullets

- More and more people are living alone.
- Single occupancy households vary according to age, gender, marital status, location and vocation.
- Nowadays, living alone is seen as something positive.

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## Text

More and more people are living alone in single occupancy households. People under State pension age form the majority of single occupancy households. Young professionals form the single occupancy households in large cities. An increasing number of people choose to live alone.

Most people imagine single occupancy households as being older people living alone. By 2001, people under State pension age formed the majority of single occupancy households. The largest increase in the 25-29 age group is to be seen in social class 1. In England and Wales in 1971, 6% of this group lived alone. In 1991, this had risen to slightly under 20% (Hall et al 1999).

Gender: most people imagine single occupancy households as being women who live alone. As with age, evidence from 1971 supports this. However, by 2000, men under 65 formed the largest group of single occupancy households.

Of the under 30s age group living alone, 90% are unmarried. Of the under 60s age group, an increasing number of people living alone are divorced - 23% of the 30-39 age group and 36% of the 50-59 age group. As regards the over 60 age group, the death of a husband/wife - usually the husband - accounts for why they are living alone - 73% of these are widowed. (Hall et al. 1999)

Location and Vocation: younger single occupancy households are usually found in large cities. A number of them are young professionals who move to the city to find work. Of the young professionals who move to London, 62% of men and 53% of women live alone. (Hall et al 1999)

There are three possible reasons why people live alone:

- For some, it is a deliberate decision when they want to live alone.
- For others, living alone is a temporary arrangement due to specific circumstances.
- Others don't have any choice.

There has been a decrease in marriages and an increase in the number of single people. The age when people first get married has risen. These factors have contributed to the increase in single occupancy households. Over the past 30 years, there has been a gradual increase in professional managerial posts, which have often meant that individuals have to move and therefore live alone in a different area.

In young age groups, men are more likely than women to live alone. In general, men earn more than women therefore are more likely to be able to afford this. After a divorce, women are more likely to live with their children. With older age groups, women are more likely to live alone. This is mainly because they have been widowed.

At one time, people sympathised with those who lived alone. Nowadays, attitudes have changed and many regard this as being something positive. Many people choose this option as they appreciate their freedom and independence. Jan Macvarish (2006)

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suggests that 'there is an increasing acceptance of singleness as an alternative lifestyle choice in which solo-living is viewed as an opportunity for self-development.'

What are the implications of this trend? It is estimated that single occupancy households will continue to rise until at least 2021. Around 80% of new homes in the UK are single occupancy households. One estimate places this number as four million homes.

Compared to households consisting of more than one person, single occupancy households use more gas, electric and water per person. They produce more waste and more greenhouse gases. On the positive side, most people who live alone are happy and feel that they have made the right choice.

## Questions

- Who is more likely to live alone?
- What are the environmental implications of the increase in single occupancy households?

## Keywords

1. Single occupancy households - a home in which only one person lives.
2. Social class 1 - people in managerial or professional posts.
3. Vocation - work / profession.

## Gay and lesbian families

### Bullets

- Gay and lesbian families have increased recently.
- They have been given more rights.
- The relationship between the couple is often equal.

### Text

Until the 1990s, there hadn't been much research into gay and lesbian families. Research by Weeks et al (1990) from in-depth interviews shows that a number of gays and lesbians are developing new ways of understanding the concept of family. The sample saw that they had the freedom to choose their own family members and to create their own families. These families, out of choice, are based on partnerships, close friends and members of their original family. This network provides support, loving relationships and a sense of identity. It feels like a family.

During the past years, an increasing number of gays and lesbians have formed homes based on same-sex partnerships, and many demand the same rights as heterosexual partnerships. Weeks et al says that same-sex partnerships tend to be more equal than heterosexual partnerships and that this is an important feature when forming such relationships.

### Same-sex parents

An increasing number of lesbians choose to have children and bring them up with a

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female partner. A number use artificial insemination with sperm donated by a friend or an unknown donor.

On the other hand, gay men are more restricted. They can use a surrogate-mother or adopt. In the UK in 2002, an Act of Parliament made it legal for gays and lesbians to adopt children. Much research into gays and lesbians has focused on the gender identity of the children and their sexual inclination. Most studies show that children brought up by gay and lesbian parents are not different to children brought up by heterosexual parents. (Fitzgerald 1999)

The evidence suggests that what is important is the parent-child relationship, rather than the parents' sexual inclination.

Nowadays, the Law acknowledges same-sex relationships. Most studies of same-sex couples are based on interviews therefore bearing in mind that people don't always practise what they preach, there is no certainty of the validity of the evidence. However, here are some findings from such research:

- These couples emphasise equality, and see issues such as division of domestic labour as something to discuss and negotiate.
- One woman in a study by Weeks et al. in 1999 said that an equal relationship was easier between partners of the same sex. The emphasis is always on equality.
- In a study by Gillian Dunne in 1997 of 37 cohabiting lesbian couples, the domestic tasks were equally shared out, and, if there were children in the relationship, then child care was also shared in most instances. If one partner had a full-time job, she did less housework than her partner.
- Gillian Dunne (1997) says that gender inequalities in the labour market influence gender inequalities in relationships. In general, men have higher status jobs than their partners, which tends to influence their home relationship. Same-sex partnerships are free from the conventions and norms of society, which usually influence the relationship of a heterosexual couple. Culture doesn't affect them as much. They have more freedom to create their own family patterns.

## Questions

- Research into the rights of gay and lesbian families.
- What is meant by families out of choice and how is this relevant to gay and lesbian families?

## Keywords

1. Heterosexual - a relationship between a man and woman.
2. Equality - sharing responsibilities and duties.

## What factors affect family formation and family life?

### Introduction

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## Bullets

- Families are individual to the people who form them.
- Families reflect social patterns relating to class, ethnicity and location.

## Text

Families in our society tend to form over time and for reasons that make sense to the individuals who make up the families. They are individual to the people who make up the groups.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that patterns of social organisation affect family formation as well, and these are to do with the structure and organisation of our society. This topic is often referred to as family diversity.

Family forms can be affected by:

- Social class
- Ethnic and cultural background
- Locale (where you are geographically located in the country)

## Questions

- In what ways are all families similar to each other?

## Keywords

1. Ethnic - your sense of your culture and identity.
2. Class - a sense of position in society based on occupation, income and values.
3. Locale - where you are geographically located in the country.

## Family and social class

### Bullets

- Social class has a strong impact on life chance and life style.
- People are less aware of social class in modern Britain.
- Early studies of the families suggested middle class families set social trends for all families.
- They suggested that men and women were becoming more equal in families.

### Text

Social class boundaries in British society have blurred over the years, but there are differences between the classes in terms of their wealth and their cultural differences that can be identified. There are also important differences between the classes in terms of its

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impact on education, health and life chances.

In the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists who looked at families in Britain tended to look at working class families and how they were changing. Elizabeth Bott (1957) suggested that class was related to determining family relationships with working class families having different roles for husbands and wives. She claimed middle class families were more likely to share domestic roles. Michael Young and Peter Willmott studied working class families in East London before moving on to look at families in London suburbs. They then argued that changes in family structure took place in middle class families and these then set the trend for working class families to follow.

By the 1970s, many sociologists who looked at families were feminists who were concerned at women's place in the family with regard to domestic labour and power. Social class became less of an issue as people focussed on a study of gender relationships. However, it is clear from statistical data that there are significant differences in patterns of child-bearing, divorce, life expectancy and patterns of behaviour. This has not really formed part of recent study; partly because people have less of a sense of class identity than they did in the 1950s and 1960s.

## Questions

- Which social class was the focus of sociological study in the 1950s and 1960s?
- What did Bott and Young and Willmott say about family change?
- What impact has feminism had on the study of family life?
- What key areas of family life may be affected by social class?

## Keywords

1. Feminism - a way of looking at society from the point of view that men and women are not equal.

## Modern families and class

### Bullets

- Class is important in British families.
- Working class families are more female centred than middle class families.
- There are strong pressures on working class families that are related to low income.
- Middle class families use their wealth and their education to support their children through life.

### Text

Class is very important in British society in terms of opportunities and of life styles, but many people are far less aware of class differences than they once were. Nevertheless, ONS statistics show that at between 20 - 25% of children come from low income and workless households. In these homes, income is likely to be less than 60% of the average income. Social class and poverty still affect British families.

Recently, Nicola Charles repeated a famous family study carried out in Swansea in the

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1960s and discovered that working class families tended to be more female centred than middle class families. Changes in the nature of work meant that working class women are more likely to have jobs than men.

Beverley Skeggs (1997) study of working class women suggested that of her sample, more than a quarter had experienced disadvantage - this had resulted in abusive parenting, broken homes and disrupted family life. These things are not just restricted to working class families, but she claims that low class position causes people to feel excluded from society and for many women; this causes them to feel failures. Sue Innes and Gill Scott found that working class women experienced pressure because family life interfered with their ability to train for qualified work or to take on part time labour. They could not afford childcare as middle class women do, so family life consisted of juggling various responsibilities.

Lareau (2002) a North American sociologists suggested that there are significant social differences in the way that middle class and working class parents interact with their children so that middle class parents intervene in their children's lives, whereas working class children are allowed time to themselves. This gave the middle class children advantages. Gillies (2005) found that middle class parents actively use their influence to support their children whereas working class parents need to train their children to cope with poverty and failure. Class can have an impact on other family relationships; research by Steve Fenton (2003) in Bristol suggested that middle class parents were more likely to give their children financial support in university, whereas further down the class scale, less than a third supported their children.

## Questions

- What has happened to people's sense of class identity since the 1950s?
- What proportion of British children come from poor households?
- What impact does class have on parenting styles?

## Keywords

1. Exclusion - inequality based on the inability to fully take part in society.

## Ethnic minority and families

### Bullets

- Britain is a multi-cultural society made up of many ethnic groups.
- Cultural values affect the ideas that people have about family life.
- Asian families tend to have a very strong sense of family honour.

### Text

Ethnicity is a difficult concept to apply in sociology. We tend to use it to describe people who share a sense of national or cultural identity. We use the term ethnic minority to group together those people who do not share the culture of the majority population in a region. The use of the term ethnic minority can sometimes group people who in reality do

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not share much in common culturally or linguistically. The term Asian for instance covers a huge range of cultures, religions, languages and nationalities. Some of these cultural groups might even view others as ancient and traditional enemies.

It is clear, however, that different cultures have different views and traditions within their cultures about the nature and purpose of family and marriage. Asian families tend to value izzat, which is their sense of family honour. Many non-European cultures practice some form of arranged marriage and some cultures tolerate multiple marriage, usually for men who are allowed more than one wife. On the other hand, African Caribbean families are often headed by single mother, with men taking a secondary role in family life.

The modern UK is a multi-ethnic community. According to Census data, in 2001, there were approximately 59 million people in the UK, of whom 4,600,000 (8%) came from British ethnic minority backgrounds (BME). In order of size these populations are:

- Indians
- Pakistanis
- mixed ethnic backgrounds,
- Black Caribbeans
- Black Africans
- Bangladeshis.
- Remaining minority ethnic groups form a further 1.4 per cent of the UK population.

## Questions

- Why is ethnicity a difficult concept to apply in sociology?
- How many ethnic groups are there in your class and in your school or college?
- What different cultural values may affect family structures?
- What proportion of the British population is from an ethnic minority background?

## Keywords

1. Ethnic - your sense of your culture and identity.
2. Izzat - a sense of family honour.
3. Arranged marriage - families choose marital partners for their children.
4. Multiple marriage - people may have more than one marriage partner at a time.

## Differences between ethnic minority families

### Bullets

- There are a variety of ethnic minorities in Britain.
- Ethnic minority families tend to adapt their family lives to conditions in Britain.
- Ethnic minority families struggle to maintain their own cultural identity and resist dominant British norms.
- African Caribbean families tend to have more single parents.
- Asian families tend to be more traditional in structure than British families.

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## Text

The geographical location of ethnic minority communities varies. Wales and Scotland have about 2% of the total population from ethnic minority backgrounds, but England has 9% of its population from BME backgrounds.

Each of these social groups will have slightly different cultures and this will impact on family life, family structure and family formation. Asian households tend to be larger than for other ethnic groups and extended families are more common. Average household size is 2.35, whereas for Bangladeshis it is 4.46 and for Pakistanis it is 4.11.

African Caribbean culture is tolerant of cohabitation so 12% of families with children fall into this category. Half of all African Caribbean mothers have never married. British born African Caribbeans are also likely to form mixed cultural and ethnic partnerships. Berthoud points out that only a quarter of African Caribbean children live in households with two Black parents. Divorce rates are high among the African Caribbean community, being nearly double the average for the whole population. It is dangerous to generalise too much about African Caribbean families as Jocelyn Barrow found that there are three distinct types of West Indian families:

- Conventional nuclear families which tend to be in religious homes.
- Common law families where couples live together in cohabiting relationships
- Mother households which are matriarchal.

Chinese and Asian families are more likely to be headed by a married couple and are least likely to be single parent families. In addition, families of four or more children are not uncommon in the Pakistani or Bangladeshi community although birth rates are falling rapidly, especially as more women are gaining good educational qualifications and taking on professional work. Divorce rates are half those of the average for the population.

Berthoud (2000) suggests that the poverty that is often associated with ethnic minority families may be related to family structure as much as unemployment. African Caribbean parents are often single parent and Asian families have higher than the average number of children and non-working wives.

In addition, BME families will also be affected by other social pressures that do not impact on the majority white population. Many, though not all BME families are likely to have low income and experience racism.

## Questions

- What is ethnicity?
- What is izzat?
- What proportion of the British population originates from ethnic minority communities?
- What patterns are typical of Asian families?
- What patterns are typical of African Caribbean families?

## Keywords

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1. BME - British or Black Minority Ethnicity.
2. Asian - people whose ancestors originated in the Indian sub-continent.
3. African Caribbean - people whose families originated in the Caribbean islands but are descended from African slaves.

## Recent immigrant groups into Britain

### Bullets

- There has been recent migration into Britain from Eastern Europe.
- Often the decision to migrate is a family decision.
- Many migrants wish to return to their home countries.
- One family member makes the move and others follow.
- Migrants experience racism and poverty.

### Text

Since the expansion of the European Economic Union on May 1st 2004, it has been legal for many people to come and work in Britain from Eastern Europe. There have therefore been new communities growing up in Yorkshire, Humberside, the East of England and London. There has not been much sociological study of these family groups yet. However, sociologists from Middlesex University have discovered that family decision making is often important in the decision of people to migrate. Many migrants are young, and they may intend to return home after some years. Often one family member, usually a male, makes the move and then the family comes to join him later.

Sometimes families migrated, so a brother or sister would lead and then other siblings would follow. In many cases they studied, the first person to migrate was the female. Migration places strains on families as they have close relatives in two countries. People may be very worried about elderly relatives at home for instance.

Spencer et al (2006) found that ethnicity can affect how people behave towards you and many new migrants have experienced racism and ignorance from British, so they find it difficult to make friends.

### Questions

- Where in Britain do new migrants settle?
- How are new migrants received by British people?
- What strains can migration put on family life?
- Suggest reasons why migrants tend to live close to each other their new countries.

### Keywords

1. Migration - movement from one area to another.
2. Immigration - movement into an area.
3. Emigration - movement away from an area.
4. Sibling - brothers and sisters.
5. Racism - discrimination on the basis of ethnicity.

## Locale and family information

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## Bullets

- Family types can vary according to region.
- These patterns are sometimes linked to class.

## Text

You will already have seen that ethnic minority families are not spread out evenly all over Britain. Other family types tend to be in certain areas of the country. Eversley and Bonnerjea (1982) found that family types vary according to regions of the UK. The wealthier Southern England has higher than average two parent households, whereas coastal areas have large numbers of older single people. This is possibly because people have a tradition of retiring to areas where they holidayed when they were working. Old industrial areas such as Wales and the North of England tend to have strong extended families, however, as industrial areas decline and there is an increase of poverty, then a pattern of varied family types emerge. Rural areas tend to be characterised by polarisation - there is extreme poverty, however, in areas closer to cities there is a high density of wealthy couples and family businesses. Inner cities have a variety of ethnic types and many single parents. Ethnic minority families in Wales tend to be located in SE Wales and other centres of population such as Swansea, or the Wrexham and Caernarfon areas.

Even within towns there can be slight differences in family patterns. This may also be linked to social class because in Britain, different social classes tend to live in different parts of cities and towns. Dale Southerton (2002) found that in the town of 'Yate', people in different areas had different social values and views of family life based on spending power.

## Questions

- What patterns did Eversley and Bonnerjea discover in terms of family variation and locality?
- Did the information on the maps that you looked at support Eversley and Bonnerjea?
- Outline and assess reasons for family diversity in British society.
- 'Ethnic minority families are very different from traditional British families' Discuss
- Evaluate the claim that there is such a thing as a 'normal' British family.

## Keywords

1. Polarisation - large, and often, increasing differences between social groups.

## What do sociologists tell us about changing relationships within families?

### Gender, power and domestic labour

## Bullets

- Research shows that division of domestic labour is unequal between men and women.

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- Opinion varies according to the perspective of the sociologist.

## Text

This unit looks at the division of power between men and women within the family. It looks at domestic labour - work done by people as members of a home. It looks at housework and child care and asks who does what.

Research in this area looks at how the husband and wife contribute to domestic tasks. Here are some of the questions asked:

- To what extent is division of labour based on gender?
- Are some household tasks done by men and others by women?
- Is the division of domestic labour equal and fair? What does this show about the division of power within the family?
- Is power shared equally between the husband and wife, or do men rule? Has there been any change in this respect? Is power shared more fairly these days?

In many communities, family life depends on the role of both genders - family members have different responsibilities and these depend on their gender. This difference between the roles of both genders within the family is called division of labour. Some sociologists believe that this division of labour exists due to biological differences between both genders. Others, however, argue that it exists due to the culture of society.

Some sociologists argue that it is only fair for both genders to carry out different duties within the family: it is something that happens naturally. Talcott Parsons says that modern nuclear families share roles:

- with the father playing the role of leader (instrumental role), and the provider of the family;
- And the mother playing a more expressive role, providing emotional support, and trying to socialise the children.

Other sociologists have argued that the system to which Parsons refers to, has changed or broken down, and that the difference between the role of the mother and father has become less clear. By 1975 Willmott and Young were referring to the growth of the symmetrical family. They claimed that the marital roles of the husband and wife were becoming more similar. The husbands helped more with the domestic tasks like washing the dishes and cleaning, and helped more with bringing up the children, although this was the wife's main responsibility. The decisions concerning family life were also shared.

This view has been challenged by feminists such as Ann Oakley (1974). She argues that sharing duties is something superficial in most families. The family is still a patriarchal institution with the man being the main bread winner, and the woman having to deal with the housework. We will look at evidence supporting and opposing both views later.

## Questions

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- What does research show about domestic division of labour?
- How are the opinions of Parsons and Oakley regarding domestic labour different?

## Keywords

1. Domestic labour - unpaid work done in the home, such as housework and child care.
2. Roles: part played.
3. Conjugal roles: roles of married or cohabitating couples.
4. Division of labour - the difference between the roles of both genders within the family.
5. Instrumental role: person who provides (financially) for the family (role usually played by the father).
6. Expressive role: emotional support (role usually associated with the wife).
7. Symmetrical family - a nuclear family where the husband and wife have more equal roles (Young and Wilmott).

## Division of domestic labour

### Bullets

- The volume of research, regardless of when it was undertaken, shows that women do the majority of house work.
- Men do contribute to housework, however this is often seen as "helping the wife".
- Most research disproves the concept of a symmetrical family.

### Text

It appears that men have begun to play a greater role in bringing up children in the past years. This is due to working hours, and more families moving from one area to the other and being unable to depend on extended family for support.

Ann Oakley studied a sample of 40 housewives in her famous study, "The Sociology of Housework" (1974). This study shows a clear division of labour between the husband and wife. The wives regarded housework and child care as their responsibility, without having much help from their husbands.

Although Oakley had only a small sample, what she says has been confirmed by a later study. Martin and Roberts in "Women and Employment" (1984) say that 54% of women working full-time, and 77% women working part-time did most or all of the housework. They had a sample of 6,000 women.

Several studies have been carried out on gender and the division of domestic labour, and all these show that the majority of women are still mothers and housewives, that they still experience a period of full-time housework, although this is decreasing, and that they return to work on a part-time basis after their youngest child has started school.

Research by Fern and Smith (2003) and Calderwood (2005) support Oakley's work 30 years later. Research showed that fathers in their early 30s played smaller roles in caring for their children compared to fathers of the same age in 1991. The men in Gray's Research

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(2006) objected having to reschedule their work to help with child care and saw this as "babysitting".

The contribution is not very significant and according to Allan and Crow (2001), the majority of working women have the double load of employed work and domestic labour. Fiona Devine (1993) has a similar conclusion. After studying the families of workers in the motor industry in Luton, she found that an increasing number of women worked part-time, and that men therefore had to do more at home, and not because they wanted to. She says - 'At the end of the day, women are responsible for housework and child rearing, and their husbands help them.'

These studies paint a completely different picture to the optimistic one by Young and Willmott. They portrayed a society consisting of many symmetric families. It must be remembered that Young and Willmott based their conclusion on the answers given to one question: "Does your husband help you at least once a week with tasks such as washing up, making the beds, helping with the children, ironing, cooking or cleaning?" Therefore, it's not surprising that Young and Willmott found that over 85% of answers showed that the husbands helped.

What is surprising is that even studies looking at families where the man is unemployed have shown that this does not mean that he is more likely to help with the housework. McKee and Bell (1986) say that men who lose their jobs feel that their status as men is threatened, and that their wives did not want to see them suffering more by asking them to help with the household tasks.

Research by Innes and Scott (2004) on women in Glasgow showed that the burden of domestic work meant that they had to take certain types of employed work, that they were in low-paid jobs, and that their jobs were often on a part-time or temporary basis. The main reason for this was in order to be able to cope with the demands of their domestic responsibilities.

The research shows that women feel that many of their domestic roles are ignored, in particular their emotional, supportive and disciplinary role. Domestic tasks cannot be separated from child care as they have to be done simultaneously when the children are little. Some of the women in the sample acknowledged support from their own mothers, however this wasn't always possible if there were elderly, unwell or invalid family members.

## Evaluating gender and the division of domestic labour debates

We must bear in mind that there are more household tasks than cooking and cleaning, and the studies have tended to focus on these. Men spend time in the house doing different work e.g. cutting the grass or fixing the car perhaps, but these tasks are not daily tasks. Young and Willmott say that men's working hours tend to be longer anyhow, and that they have less time to spend on housework.

Most research into gender divisions of domestic labour are based on the use of time, asking who does what, and how much time it takes up. This approach raises a number of problems. Women tend to multi-task, for example child care and cleaning or preparing

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food at the same time. Leonard (2000) says that women therefore spend more hours than recorded.

These studies also do not state how important the tasks are. According to McMahon (1999), women's domestic tasks such as cooking and washing clothes are more important than men's tasks, for example gardening and fixing things.

These studies do not tell us much about the satisfaction women and men have from domestic labour. According to Allan (1985), the tasks likely to be done by women are often boring and repetitive, whilst the tasks done by men are more interesting and creative. For example, some men consider DIY and gardening more as hobbies rather than tasks.

## Questions

- What are the weaknesses of Ann Oakley's research?
- Collect further examples of research into division of domestic labour.
- Suggest reasons why research in the 70s and 00s have similar results.

## Keywords

1. Sample: a small group of people used by a researcher to represent the population in question.
2. Double burden: women taking responsibility for most of the domestic chores as well as doing full-time employed work.

## Dual-income families

### Bullets

- In a dual-income family, both the mother and father work.
- Reasons for working vary.
- Dual-income families often lead to a double shift for mothers.
- Families develop strategies to cope with housework and child care.

### Text

Studies suggest that dual-income families vary.

At one end of the scale, the dual-career family is to be found. There, partners have high career commitments, they usually work full-time and their work is an important part of their identity (Rapport & Rapport 1971). At the other end of the scale, one partner (the wife in most instances) does a little part-time work which has minimum disruption on his/her family responsibilities (Gowler & Legge 1978).

What are the tendencies in dual-income families?

According to the 'British Household Panel' survey in 1973, 43% couples with children and 61% childless couples worked. By 1996, the figures had risen to 60% couples with children,

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and 68% childless couples. Therefore, most couples juggle family life with their work.

Many women in dual-income families work part-time, especially if they have dependent children. 39% of women with dependent children work part time, compared to 22% of women who don't have dependent children. (Labour Force Survey 2005).

- Hochschild (1990) suggested that this leads to a double shift for women; one shift of employed work and one shift of domestic work.
- The woman's career is much more likely to be disrupted by the birth of a child compared to the man's career. The man's career is rarely disrupted. However, this is becoming less apparent with more women having children staying in full-time employment.

Therefore, in order to juggle work and family life, the biggest responsibility for housework and children falls on the mother.

What strategies do they have to keep the balance between the demands of their work and the needs of their family?

Dual-income families face problems in trying to balance the demands of their work and their family. David Cheal (2002) has identified six main strategies that enable parents to fit their work around their children's needs. These strategies include: working from home, non-standard working hours and rearranging domestic responsibilities so that the husband or other family members do more of the work.

The Labour Force Survey (2005) showed that 12% of mothers worked school term hours, compared to 2% of fathers.

In 2005, Caroline Gatrell conducted a qualitative study of working mothers. She conducted interviews with 20 women who had children under 5.

- The mothers continued to do most of the housework, regardless of their salary or working hours.
- Fathers looked after the children more and considered the children as being a central part of their lives.
- All mothers were 'deeply committed' to their young children, but not at the expense of their careers.
- Mothers considered their work to be an important part of their identity, and however much they loved their children; they weren't going to give up their work.

Therefore, the increase in dual-income families is likely to continue, partly because women are eager to work and develop their careers. Also, two wages are essential for a number of families in order to ensure an acceptable lifestyle.

## Questions

- What are the tendencies in dual-income families?
- Why have dual-income families increased?

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- What type of strategies could be developed in order to cope with employed work and child care?
- What does double shift mean, and why do mothers usually have to do a double shift?

## Keywords

1. Dual-income family - a family where both the mother and father work.
2. Dual-career families - families where a career is an important part of identity.
3. Double shift - a situation where mothers (usually) work and then have to take the main responsibility for looking after the children.

## Gender and decision making

### Bullets

- Men make the majority of important decisions, with women making the less significant decisions.
- Money management varies from family to family, depending on their circumstances.
- According to Vogler and Pahl, there has recently been more equality.

### Text

This section measures power by looking at who makes the decisions. If the wife makes the most decisions concerning the home, then she should have the power according to feminists. But this does not take into account the importance of the actual decisions.

In a study in 1980, Stephen Edgell conducted interviews with a sample of 38 couples in professional jobs. The investigation was called "Middle Class Couples". His research uncovered two things. Firstly, the woman decided things in a number of areas - such as buying food, children's clothes, and decorating. The pairs in question did not consider these decisions as important. Secondly, the man decided on 'serious' things such as moving house, buying expensive items such as a car.

Edgell's study contradicts what has already been said by people such as Young and Willmott about families becoming more equal, and this suggests that husbands have more power than their wives. However, bear in mind that this study was conducted over twenty years ago and was based on merely 38 middle class couples.

In "Money and Marriage" (1989), Jan Pahl looked at who managed the money within the family. This varied greatly from one family to the other. She studied 102 couples, and found several different systems e.g. the husband giving the wife a weekly contribution for the home and children, or in some families, the husband and wife contributing the same amount weekly towards the home and children. Pahl also says that the woman tends to take control in families on benefits. Often, the women used the money for the welfare of their children and husbands, and went without food and clothes themselves.

In a more recent study in 1994 by Carolyn Vogler and Jan Pahl, with interviews conducted with over 1200 British couples, they found that the men were mainly in control.

Vogler and Pahl say that 58% of the couples shared personal spending money equally, 12%

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said that the men had the most, 4% said the wife, and the rest disagreed. If money was short, the wife would do without in order for her husband and children to have enough.

Vogler and Pahl see progress towards equality as regards financial management. But this tends to depend on whether the wife works or not. Some suggest that the partner with the highest income takes control of the decision.

## Questions

- How does money management vary between families?
- What would feminists say about how money is managed within a family?

## Keywords

1. Representativeness: how the outcomes of research represent the group in question.
2. Professional: A salary is earned by the worker and not a wage. Usually higher paid than waged work.

## Dependency

### Bullets

- Research shows that many women are dependent on their husbands.
- This is not an easy subject to research.
- Marxists and Feminists are critical of the situation, and Functionalists see it as being natural.

### Text

Dependency is the extent to which women are reliant on men.

Some critics argue that the subject needs to be considered in a wider context looking at the whole society. Although the number of working married women has increased considerably, 30% of married women under 60 years of age are still not employed outside of the home. These are often dependent on their husbands for income. Being dependent on your husband is still a stage most women go through during their lives.

Even when women do work, their jobs are regarded as inferior to their husbands' jobs. In general, they earn less money than their husbands. Many women are also expected to support their husband in his job, although the husband isn't expected to support his wife in her job. Many women act as secretaries or messengers for their husband. Wives are also expected to sacrifice their own careers before their husband's career. If there is a chance of the husband being promoted within his job, and that this means the family having to move, the woman is expected to sacrifice her job.

Graham Allan (1985) notes that women are often also dependent on their husbands socially. Their only friends are their husband's friends. It is also more difficult for women to socialise on their own without their husband. It is much easier for a man to walk into the

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pub or a club on his own than it is for a woman. Social attitudes can also influence. If a man shares the housework, he is described as being under the thumb. If children are ignored by their parents, the mother is blamed.

It is very difficult to measure how many women are dependent on their husbands or partners. It is easy to show that a woman depends on her husband for money, but it is much harder to show that a woman is dependent on her husband emotionally. Charles (1990) says that women always put the needs of their husbands and children first when shopping, and Allan Crow (2001) says that a woman gets satisfaction from self-sacrifice because this proves that she is a good mother and wife.

The functionalists would argue that this is right. Division of labour gives the man opportunity to specialise in some things, and the woman in others. Marxists and feminists are very critical of the situation. Division of labour does not make both genders equal - it is the man who benefits from the situation.

## Questions

- In what ways are women dependent on their husbands?

## Keywords

1. Dependency: a situation in which women are dependent on their husbands/partners e.g. financially, emotionally.

## How has childhood changed since the Middle Ages?

### Bullets

- Aries claims that childhood is a fairly recent social construction brought about by industrialisation.
- Shipman was critical of the methods that Aries used.
- Pollack was critical of his methods and some of his conclusions.

### Text

Not only has childhood itself changed over the years, but our understanding of the nature of childhood has become the subject of debate. The debates began in 1962 with the publication of Philippe Aries' historical account of childhood, *Centuries of Childhood*. In this analysis, Aries claimed that childhood is a social construction. In the past, children were seen as small adults who worked alongside their parents. Parents could not afford to be sentimental about their children because so many died and families were large. As Shipman points out, the evidence to support Aries' arguments are not strong. He based his account on art and memorials and clearly, these were only made for the very wealthy. Nevertheless, Aries made an important point, which is that childhood is not a universal concept and that we have a social and cultural concept of what childhood.

According to Aries, childhood developed during the C19th and C20th as children were taken out of the workforce by Factory Acts and as they began to attend school in

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increasing numbers. However, he also pointed out that the experience of childhood was very different for rich and poor children. Throughout the Victorian period, the sons of wealthy families gradually withdrew from adult society, for example boys were sent away to boarding schools and expected to become toughened by the experience. Concepts of childhood as a separate stage in life developed among the middle classes and only later were accepted by working classes. In addition, he claimed that in working class families, as women were removed from the workplace, they took on a stronger gender association with childcare than had been common in the Middle Ages.

Shipman has been critical of Aries use of his sources of information. But, despite the fact that the methodology and the evidence on which this analysis has been based has been heavily criticised, many of the points remain valid. Critics of Aries' work include Pollack who claimed that parents were concerned with their children in historical times and showed sincere grief if they died. She also points out that physical punishment of children was not uncommon either. She claims that there were significant variations in how childhood was perceived.

## Questions

- How were children treated in the Middle Ages?
- Why did Aries consider that parents were not as affectionate towards their children as modern parents?
- What weaknesses are there with his arguments?
- What are the generally agreed characteristics of childhood in our society?

## Keywords

1. Childhood: a period of life when a young person is seen as being distinct from adults.
2. Social construction: a generally agreed perception of social reality.

## What have recent accounts of childhood suggested about modern children?

### Bullets

- Childhood has become increasingly restricted.
- Children have more access to material goods, but less freedom to play.
- Many children are more closeted in the home.
- New Right theorists argue that the media have a negative effect on children.
- Post modernists claim that there is no one uniform experience of childhood, children have many experiences based on their families, their gender, their locale and their ethnic backgrounds.

### Text

It is probable that many children throughout the 1940s and 1950s experienced considerable freedom to roam and play. There were fewer cars, and less fear of 'stranger danger'. There may have been some gender differences in this pattern; girls would have been expected to help in the home in a way that was not common for boys. However, Neil

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Postman (1983) suggested that this separate phase of childhood was disappearing towards the end of the century and claimed that children were becoming more like their parents and more sexually aware. He felt that the influence of the media on children was negative. In addition, as children had access to television and video in their own rooms, unsupervised by their parents they became aware of sexuality and violence in a way that was unmediated (or unexplained) by adults being able to comment on what was on television. He claimed that rising childhood pregnancy and childhood participation in adult crimes was evidence of this process.

Lee (2001) sees some value in Postman's work but argues that we live in an "an age of uncertainty"- adulthood is no longer stable (lack of jobs for life, high divorce rate), so adults become more like children (incomplete, insecure). Increasingly adults are immature and selfish in their behaviour. This led to a new social construction of childhood; children are seen as "beings in their own right". They have their own rights, interests, just like adults in society. 1989 Children Act (welfare of the child is paramount) meant that children now had a say in matters that affect them-divorce of parents for example. Families have become child-centred and treat the children as the priority.

Many commentators have viewed increasing consumerism and targeting of children as a market for specialist goods with some concern. Sue Palmer, in her 2006 study *Toxic Childhood* suggests that as parents become materially wealthy but time poor, they give in to demands for expensive consumer goods such as televisions and computer games which then act as 'electronic babysitters'. Children are not happy; in fact they are the victims of the heavy marketing of junk food and dangerous chemically enhanced foods that are contributing to rising rates of hyperactivity, dyslexia, autism and dyspraxia. Palmer suggests that such marketing should be banned. It is worth noting that advertising targeted at children under the age of 10 has already been banned in Scandinavian countries because it is accepted that children below that age cannot distinguish between advertising and reality.

Melanie Phillips suggests that modern children are allowed rights and freedoms that are unrealistic. She argues that children are too immature to cope with the freedoms that they experience and calls for more authoritarian childrearing. The above critical accounts of childhood tend to be associated with New Right thinking.

Post modernists take a different view. For example, Frank Furedi refers to paranoid parenting and suggests that children are restricted to the home because of unrealistic parental fears of kidnap, paedophiles and abduction. This encourages parents to keep children virtual prisoners in their rooms. As evidence, he points out that very few children are allowed to walk to school. Post modernists also point out that there is no one experience that is common to all children in the UK. Class, gender, locale and ethnicity all affect the experience of childhood so that over-generalisation will lead to unrealistic accounts of childhood.

## Questions

- What is a 'toxic childhood'?
- Suggest reasons why children are targeted by advertising.
- What evidence is there that children are seen as separate consumer group?
- Should advertising to children be banned?

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## Keywords

1. Consumerism: buying goods that are not needed.
2. Child-centred: children are prioritised.

## Boomerang Children

### Bullets

- "Boomerang Kids" is a new term to describe a growing group of young people who live at home, often after leaving home and then returning.
- They can be a problem for their parents.

### Text

According to Parentline Plus (2008), it is now impossible to assume that when your child becomes an adult that they will become independent and leave home. According to Government figures, 58% of men and 39% of women aged 20-24 still live at home with their parents in England. On average, such a young adult is 22 years old and has lived away from home (usually as a student) for at least 2 years.

According to Parentline Plus, this generation of "Boomerang kids" can be a problem for their parents. As these older children have lived away from home for a time, they have difficulty following ground rules set by their parents, which can cause conflict on issues such as drinking and drugs, housework, financial debts and unemployment.

These are some of the reasons accounting for the growth in this group of young people:

- Increasing student debts
- Unable to buy a house due to high lending rates and high house prices in Britain
- Getting married much later than their parents' generation.

Moving back home is an appealing option for these young people. This group is likely to grow as the country faces economic problems.

### Questions

- Suggest how the Government could stop the growth of the Boomerang Kids"
- Why is this a current phenomenon?

## Keywords

1. Boomerang Children : young adults unable or unwilling to leave home.

## Pivot Generation / Sandwich Generation

### Bullets

- Family responsibilities are changing.

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- Women often have to care for the older generation and members of the younger generation.

## Text

This also is a new concept and refers to the generation of people, usually middle-aged women who are caught between caring for elderly members of the family and caring for their own children or their grandchildren. Nowadays, by the time people are 50 years old, 60% have a parent who is still alive and slightly over 33% are grandparents. About 60% of them are still in employed work. This pivot generation therefore combines their employed work with care responsibilities, either for young grandchildren, or even their own children as more and more women over 40 are having children and caring for their elderly parent(s). Research by Mooney, Statham and Simon (2002) shows that women usually take responsibility for the care load and 30 women in their sample felt stressed trying to cope with all their responsibilities.

## Questions

- Suggest and discuss reasons for the growth of the pivot generation.

## Keywords

1. Pivot generation: a generation with a range of care responsibilities.

## Dark side of the family

### Bullets

- From the 1960s onwards, sociologists became more aware of the dark side of family life.
- The family can be a prison for its members as socialisation can be damaging.
- Childhood problems can affect people throughout their lives.

## Text

Up to the 1960s, the sociology of the family was dominated by the Functional viewpoint which focused on the positive side of family life. From the 1960s onwards, this viewpoint was questioned. People became more aware of the issues within family life - for example, domestic violence and child abuse. Sociologists became more aware of the dark side of family life.

Psychological viewpoints are held by writers such as Cooper (The Death of the Family) and Laing (The Politics of the Family). They argue that the family can be the source of great unhappiness and emotional pain for its members. Both writers point to how the process of socialisation (which to Parsons is a very positive aspect of the family) is essentially damaging. They view individuals, and children in particular, as being imprisoned within the family, and having to meet the emotional demands made on them and which result in submissive and conformist behaviour in adulthood.

Laing argues that several mental illnesses are normal reactions to stress within family life.

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In his book, *They F\*\*\*\*\* You Up: How to Survive Family Life*, Oliver James (2003) claims that a number of the problems we experience as adults stem from our childhood. If we lack confidence, if we are over-competitive, if we are jealous of others, then this is due to our upbringing.

According to James, relationship problems in life stem from non-empathy care during childhood and a problematic relationship with parents after. Non-empathy care means ignoring or misunderstanding children's needs - e.g. not feeding them when they are hungry, or forcing food on them when they aren't hungry. This can create fear and uncertainty and lack of trust. This can lead to relationship problems at a later stage.

Despite the evidence to support the viewpoints of James, a number of researchers object to the priority given to parents' care during childhood.

For example, sociologists would highlight influences such as peer groups, gender and social class when explaining adult behaviour.

## Weaknesses

1. A number of psychiatrists reject Laing's viewpoint, arguing that there are other reasons for mental illness than relationships within the family.
2. Others argue that Laing has over exaggerated, but agree that the family can play an instrumental part in the development of some mental illnesses.
3. The psychological viewpoint has been criticised for disregarding the way some family members are powerless due to the structure of the family.
4. Feminists have noted that it is not necessarily the family that creates oppression and unhappiness, but rather the patriarchal nature of the family: the cause of the unhappiness is rooted in the power men have to form the family to their advantage.

## Questions

- How can the family be a "prison" for its members?
- How are psychological viewpoints different from feminist explanations?

## Keywords

1. Psychological explanations: explanation from a psychology point of view, often ignore social factors.

## Domestic violence

### Bullets

- The levels and nature of domestic violence varies according to social background and gender.
- Women are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence.

### Text

Domestic violence is any form of violence which happens at home. However, the term is often used to refer to violence between partners who live together or who are married

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(partnership violence). It's difficult to define domestic violence. Should it cover threatened violence as well as actual violence? Should an attempt be made to differentiate between intentional violence and self-defence violence?

## Measuring Domestic Violence

Using a number of sources, this is the estimation of domestic violence in the UK by Elisabeth Stanko (2003).

- One in every four women and one in every seven men report a physical attack by a partner during their life.
- Approx. 10% of women experience domestic violence in a year.
- The majority of violence is by men towards women.

In order to understand domestic violence, information is needed about the seriousness, meaning and effects of violent actions.

James Nazroo (1999) attempted to find this information in a small study of couples. Each member of the couples was interviewed separately. This showed that violence from men is more likely to result in a physical injury. Only 1% of men were seriously injured by their partners compared to 10% of women. Men often intend to harm their partners - for example, by kicking or punching her mercilessly, or by banging her head against a wall.

It's not often that women intend to harm. When they do, it is often a form of self-defence after years of physical abuse. Even then, they stop after gaining control of the situation, unlike a number of violent men.

Threat and fright. Violence by a man is more likely to be threatening and terrifying. Sometimes women are terrified. Most men can push their partners away and laugh at them. They don't usually feel scared or threatened.

## Questions

- Why is it difficult to collect data about domestic violence?
- What ethical issues may be associated with the study of domestic violence?

## Keywords

1. Domestic violence: violence at home.

## Explanations of Domestic Violence

### Bullets

- Some theories suggest that men who abuse their partners are suffering from a psychological problem.
- Sociologists believe that violence is a form of social control.
- A number of victims blame themselves and hide what is happening to them.

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## Text

Some theories suggest that men who abuse their partners suffer from some kind of psychological problem. The list of possible problems is endless. Suggestions range from a brain abnormality, uncertain childhood, to uncontrollable anger due to family conflict during childhood and adolescence. These problems are expressed through domestic violence.

Sociologists have criticised psychological theories for the following reasons:

- Domestic abuse is global. It is not confined to a minority who are mentally disturbed.
- Psychological theories tend to ignore the wider society and its values. They ignore the possibility that we live in a patriarchal society in which men dominate women.

Many researchers regard domestic violence as a type of social control, men controlling women. It is based on force and the threat of force. Feminists view domestic violence as an expression of patriarchy - where women are controlled and downgraded by men. Nazroo's investigation and many other surveys document numerous examples of men's violence towards women. Often it is men who try to harm their wives or partners.

Researchers have outlined the following reactions to domestic violence. One of them is hiding, women often try to hide the violence they suffer. This is due to embarrassment or fear of their partner becoming more violent if he is found out. However, some do confide in a relation or close friend.

Others blame themselves for what happens to them and the violence they suffer. This is partly down to lack of confidence because of the embarrassment of violence. It is also the result of the individual feeling a failure. Domestic violence suggests that they have failed to care for the family, which is their responsibility. (Allan and Crow 2001).

Another reaction is social isolation where women feel lonely and they have no one to turn to for support. This is because the fear of how their partner will respond if they turn to others for help.

Many other women stay with their partners because they think there is no alternative. They could lose their homes and financial support therefore they have to stay, especially if they have children.

## Questions

- How are psychological explanations different from sociological explanations?
- Suggest reasons why victims of domestic violence would feel guilty.

## Keywords

1. Values: principles or beliefs that guide people and affect their actions.
2. Social control: way/ways of controlling people's behaviour.
3. Social isolation: not feeling like a full member of society

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## Child abuse

### Bullets

- The child abuse register is not a reliable indicator of how many cases of child abuse actually take place.
- Fathers are more likely to be involved in cases of child abuse.
- People who abuse children are concentrated in low-income groups.
- Data suggests that children from one-parent families are more at risk of all types of abuse.

### Text

Cases of abuse are reported by the public, the police, social workers, teachers and others. These cases are then investigated by social workers who have to decide whether or not the children are put on a child protection register. There are two problems with this register: a number of cases aren't reported. It reflects the concerns and priorities of governments, local authorities and the public e.g. in 1978, very little was known about sexual abuse - it wasn't considered to be an official or a public issue. By the mid 1980s, priorities had changed and reports of sexual abuse soared.

There are no in-depth studies available to look at the scope of physical abuse in the UK. There are some studies of physical punishment inflicted on children e.g. Newson and Newson (1989) found in a longitudinal study of 700 families in Nottingham, that 41% of 7 year olds were hit at least once a week, and that 22% of mothers used several things such as straps, canes and slippers.

What is the gender, social position and family situation of child abusers?

### Gender

An analysis of cases of abuse reported between 1983 and 1987 shows that fathers were involved in 61% of cases, and mothers in 36% of cases. Mothers are more likely of being involved in neglect and emotional abuse. (Creighton and Noyes).

Men are much more likely to abuse sexually. In a survey of children who had been sexually abused at Great Ormond Street Hospital between 1980 and 1986, only 8 out of 411 had been sexually abused by a woman. (Ben-Tovin et al. 1988)

### Poverty

People who physically abuse children are concentrated in low-income groups. Statistics by the Department of Health (1995) show that 95% of children on the child protection register come from families living in poverty. Is there a link between poverty and child abuse, or are they more likely of being caught because of their involvement with social services? (Corby, 2000).

Survey data states that sexual abuse is widespread across these social groups. However, in a study by Great Ormond Street, 92% cases of sexual abuse had come from manual

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working class backgrounds. This might reflect involvement with social services who are more likely to discover abuse in these families than in others.

## Family Structure

Official statistics suggest that children from one-parent families are more at risk of all forms of abuse. One-parent families are more likely to live in poverty, and to be involved with social services.

Children from reconstituted families are also at greater risk of being abused. However, this cannot be a result of the family situation.

What are the main theories that claim they explain child abuse?

## Questions

- Suggest reasons why there hasn't been much research into child abuse.

## Keywords

1. Manual Working Class: work involving using the hands.
2. One-parent family: a family where the children either live with the mother or father.
3. Reconstituted families - a family created from two previous families.

## How do social policies affect families in Britain?

### Introduction

#### Bullets

- There are many laws impacting on family life in Britain.
- The welfare state assumes families consist of two parents; a breadwinning father and a domestic mother. This is far from the reality of many people's lives.
- Politicians tend to view some family forms as being more efficient and effective than others.
- Sociologists have examined the effect of government on family life.

#### Text

There is a very large amount of government legislation that affects the family and family structure. More, probably, than most people are aware of, but just to start, there are strict rules over who we can marry, how many people we can marry at one time and with whom and what we can have sex. When we start to add in taxation and pension, education, hours of work, maternity and paternity pay, health and social care rules, then the amount of government rulings that can affect families should come into perspective. Politically, the family is an issue because it is felt by many people that certain types of family are more 'correct' than others. There is much media attention paid to single parents and to very young mothers for example.

When the British welfare state was set up at the end of World War 2, it was assumed that

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men were breadwinners and earned family money and that women would stay at home to care for children and older people. This assumption ran through all elements of British society, so in schools, girls were taught domestic skills and boys learned woodwork. This model of family life is still seen by many politicians and public commentators to be more efficient than other forms of family despite the massive changes that are taking place in British families and British society.

The view that some forms of family are somehow 'better' than others can be seen in much government policy. For example, although same-sex couples are allowed to have Civil Partnerships with similar legal rights to those of married heterosexual couples, this relationship is not actually called a marriage in law. The Conservative Party is much more associated with the view that some forms of family are better than others: it has policies that would offer married couples tax incentives to stay married. In 2006, Iain Duncan Smith, a Conservative politician suggested that family breakdowns are linked to drug and alcohol abuse, debt and educational failure. One of the main problems in his view was the breakdown of cohabiting relationships among couples with young children. Family and family policy has therefore been the subject of much debate and research in sociology.

## Questions

- What areas of family life are governed by laws?
- Why does the welfare state assume that men are breadwinners and women are carers?
- Are some forms of family 'better' than others?

## Keywords

1. Welfare State - the system that exists in Britain to care for people: the Health Service, Benefit System, Education Service, the Emergency services etc.
2. Ideology - a set of ideas or a belief system.

## Divorce and the impact on families

### Bullets

- There is considerable debate about divorce policy with some politicians accepting it as being part of life, but others viewing it as negative.
- Sociological evidence is divided on the issue
- Women who divorce and separate are likely to experience poverty.
- Families appear to adapt to divorce so that older people and children need not suffer unduly.

### Text

As divorce has become easier, and as more people choose to cohabit, there is strong evidence to suggest that more people experience family disruption and breakdown than they did 50 years ago. Ed Straw Chairman of Relate, a family guidance charity claimed in 2000 that 'the more family stability you have, the less benefits payments you make'. Alan Johnson, the Labour Education secretary said in 2007, 'The modern family is not always a married family. Marriage can provide stability, but is not for everyone'. David Cameron,

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leader of the Conservative Party 2007 is reported as saying 'Marriage is a great institution, and we should support it. If marriage rates went up, if divorce rates came down - if more couples stayed together for longer, would our society be better off? My answer is "yes"'

Burgess and Propper (1999) of Bristol University found that 26% of people living in poverty do so because of changes in family circumstances, divorce and separation being significant factors. However the link was not always completely clear, divorce and separation may be 'triggered by unemployment or vice versa'. They did find that while divorce and separation have a great impact on men; it has a more severe effect on women because they find it less easy to escape poverty as their earnings are lower.

Glaser (2007) researched the impact of family disruption and divorce on the lives of older people. Her concern was that older people who had experienced divorce would not have the same kind of family support as those who had not experienced family disruption. Her main findings suggested that separated elderly parents had more help from their children and also had more time to support their adult children with help caring for grandchildren. The conclusion is that families have mechanisms to support family members regardless of early family breakdown.

Bren Neale (2004) in qualitative research based on interviewing the children of disrupted relationships discovered that it is not divorce itself that is the key factor affecting children when families break up, it is the nature of the divorce and family change that can cause difficulties. Children who retain contact with both parents found divorce and separation to be less stressful than those who are separated from a parent. If children retain a degree of control over events and are consulted, then divorce or separation becomes holds little additional meaning over the daily challenges that may affect anyone: sexuality, school, poverty, friendships and long term illness.

## Questions

- What is the impact of divorce on family life?
- Should politicians comment on types of families? What is your view?

## Keywords

1. Qualitative - This involves the collection of meanings and research into feelings and perceptions.

## Fatherhood

### Bullets

- Traditional views of fatherhood are breaking down, but many many still place value on the breadwinner role in their families.
- Government policy claims to support the role of father, and there have been initiatives to force men to support their families financially.
- The working of the legal system in the case of marital breakdown and the long hours working culture of Britain means men may have trouble spending more time with their children.

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## Text

Recent policies over the past twenty years has responded to the growth in single parenthood by addressing the issue of 'feckless' fathers who refuse or are unwilling to take financial or emotional role in the rearing of their children. On Newsnight (February 2007) David Cameron, leader of the Conservative party suggested that fathers should be compelled to stay with their families. This is not a new position. In the early 1990s, the existing Conservative government set up the Child Support Agency to collect money from absentee parents, particularly fathers, in order to support lone mothers and reduce the benefit burden. This was an enormously expensive project and it has been the subject of many complaints. In 2006, the Labour party proposed to reform the Agency. The evidence however that fathers are irresponsible, is not so clear cut, as divorces are far more frequently initiated by women than men and seldom on the grounds of desertion. In addition, women are initiating divorce at some personal cost as fathers are less likely to experience poverty in family breakdown.

There has been considerable sociological and political debate on the role of masculinity, and of fatherhood since the 1970s. In the 1970s, feminists complained that society was patriarchal and pointed to the oppression of women in traditional nuclear families. A different debate is now emerging and Bob Connell (1987), an Australian sociologist, for example is associated with the view that there are a variety of masculine forms available for males to choose from, though some are more acceptable than others. Jim Rose (2004) suggested that fatherhood is very important to the successful socialisation of boys into viewing education as important. As a result of his research, he called for fathers to spend more time reading to their children. Research by Hatter et al, (2002) suggested that there are at least four different models of fatherhood available, but also pointed out that one of the main issues affecting men's participation in fatherhood is our long hours working culture.

Step families are the most rapidly growing family type and according to the ESRC in 2007, 20% of fathers aged 34 are step-fathers. Gorell Barnes et al (1998) found that the concept of step-fatherhood itself was complicated as many children and stepfathers did not view the relationship in those terms, either because they were strongly bonded or had not bonded at all with each other. A common finding of studies is that many fathers lose contact quickly with their children after divorce and that the legal system encourages this. This has led to the formation of Father's Rights Groups such as Fathers for Justice which has done much public campaigning. The suggestion therefore is that the government is emphasising the financial element of fatherhood through the CSA, but ignoring the relationship elements that are part of being a father.

## Questions

- What evidence is there that fathers are irresponsible towards their children?
- How important is the role of father in our society?

## Keywords

1. Long hours culture - people are expected to work for more hours in Britain than many other European countries.
2. Absentee parent - does not live with the family.

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## Parental responsibility

### Bullets

- The law does not treat all parents equally. Unmarried fathers have fewer rights.
- The government is trying to force some parents to take more control over their children in the case of anti-social behaviour.
- It is by no means clear that this will be an effective policy.

### Text

Further evidence that not all families are seen as equally correct can be seen in the operation of the legal system. The law does not treat all parents equally. Despite the fact that more than a third of all births in 1999 were outside marriage, it gives few legal rights to unmarried fathers. Mothers and married fathers have parental responsibilities for a child, but an unmarried father, even in a stable relationship, needs to have a legal parental responsibility document before he is even allowed to sign consent forms for school trips. Ros Pickford (1999) surveyed 200 fathers and discovered that very few were aware of their lack of legal rights, despite unmarried and married fathers having similar attitudes towards parenting and their commitment to their partners and children.

The issue of parental responsibility has gained further importance as the government has tried to solve problems of criminality by addressing the way that some people choose to rear their children. In 2005, the Labour Government implemented a new policy known as the Respect Agenda. In the case of children who are likely to receive ASBOs, agencies such as community safety officers can require parents to attend parenting classes to help them develop skills and take responsibility for their children's behaviour. Parents of children excluded from school can face fines of up to £1,000 and one mother has already been gaoled twice for allowing her daughters to truant from school. Gill Jones (2000) has suggested that it is unsafe of the government to assume that children are dependent on their parents or that parents will or can accept responsibility for their children. Many children who become the subject of police attention have experienced significant early disadvantage. Young men in particular, are socially excluded because they tend to have fewer qualifications and be less accepted for low pay work. This makes them vulnerable to anti-social behaviour.

### Questions

- Do all biological parents have equal rights?
- Explain the purpose of the 'Respect' Agenda.
- Should laws compel parents to control their children's behaviour?

### Keywords

1. ASBO - Anti-social behaviour order.

## How do functionalists explain family formation?

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## Functional viewpoints of the family

### Bullets

- The family is essential for the welfare and continuity of society.
- According to Murdock, the family fulfils four important functions.

### Text

Traditionally, the Functional theory has had the biggest influence on family sociology which emphasises the general role played by the family in society, and the advantages for the individual of being a member of a family.

Functional theories regarding society are based on the assumption that society functions on the basis of consensus (agreement) and that there is a tendency towards a balance between the different parts of society so that they co-operate in harmony.

Functionalists tend to assume, that if a social institution exists, it must serve a function or purpose. The family is therefore often considered in terms of the functions it fulfils for the welfare of the society and the individual. Murdock's analysis of the family's universal functions is a good example of this viewpoint, with his emphasis on the family's vital functions in every society.

Functional theories emphasise the inter-relationship between the family and other social institutions e.g. the family prepares children to be working adults and to undertake roles in the economy and support themselves and their dependants. In this way, the family system and economic system are linked.

Analysing the family in terms of the Functional viewpoint raises three main questions:

1. What is the function of the family? (Answers to this question involve the contributions made by the family to sustaining the social system).
2. What is the functional relationship between the family and other parts of the social system? (e.g. the family must be integrated to some extent into the economic system. We need to explore the relationship between the family and industrialisation).
3. This question relates to the functions achieved by the institution or part of society on behalf of the individual. In the family's case, this question considers the functions of the family on behalf of its individual members.

One of the first functionalists to analyse the family was George Murdock who argued that the family fulfils four basic functions in society:

1. sexual
2. reproductive
3. economic
4. educational

These are essential for social life as no members of society would exist without the sexual and reproductive functions; without the economic function (e.g. providing and preparing food), life would end; and without education (term used by Murdock to mean

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socialisation), there would be no culture.

Human society could not function without culture. Clearly, the family isn't the only institution that fulfils these functions. However, it does make an important contribution to each one and no other institution has yet been devised to compete with its efficiency in this respect.

## Questions

- What is meant by family functions?
- Explain Murdock's 4 basic functions.

## Keywords

1. Functionalists - sociologist who emphasise the way social institutions work to create a prosperous community.
2. Function - purpose, role played.
3. Consensus - agreement and collaboration.
4. Social system - a system which exists in society.

## Functions on behalf of Individuals and Society

### Bullets

- Murdock believes that the family is the best institution for fulfilling the requirements of society and individuals.

### Text

Families are functional for both society and individuals. The sexual function provides a good example of this. Husband and wife have the right of sexual access to one another and in most societies there are rules that forbid or limit sexual activity outside marriage. This provides sexual gratification for the husband and wife. It also strengthens the family as strong and often committing emotions that go hand in hand with sexual activity, units the husband and wife, and therefore the family unit. The sexual function also helps to stabilise society. The rules that limit sex within the family prevent disruption that would occur if everyone were allowed 'free play' of these emotions.

The family thus provides 'control and expression' of the sexual function and thus helps society and its individual members, as well as the family as an institution and society as a whole.

For the economic function, Murdock argues has a similar function. He argues that, like sex, it is "most readily and satisfactorily achieved by persons living together". He refers to the division of labour within the family, where the husband specialises in some activities and the wife in others e.g. the man working outside of the home to earn a wage to support the family, and the wife responsible for domestic tasks and looking after the children.

This economic co-operation within the family not only goes some way towards achieving this economic function on behalf of the entire society, but also provides "rewarding experiences" for spouses working together, which "cements their union".

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He concludes:

"No society has succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for the nuclear family, to which it might transfer these functions. It is highly doubtful whether any society will ever succeed in such an attempt."

## Questions

- Attempt to analyse how Murdock would explain the reproductive and educational functions.
- What do you think are the weaknesses of Murdock's argument?

## Keywords

1. Division of labour - how domestic tasks are shared in the home between its members e.g. husband and wife.

## Criticisms of Murdock

### Bullets

- Murdock's analysis disregards the negative aspects of family life.
- It does not reflect family diversity in Britain today.

### Text

In his enthusiasm for the family, Murdock doesn't seriously consider that its functions can be fulfilled by other social institutions, and he does not explore alternatives to the family.

Morgan noted that other institutions could just as easily fulfil the functions of the family, and that family isn't essential as such. Murdock does not answer the question "to what extent do these basic functions have to be related to the nuclear family institution?"

Murdock's description of the family is too good to be true. Other viewpoints of family life show negative elements. As Morgan says:

"Murdock's nuclear family is a remarkably harmonious institution. Husband and wife have an integrated division of labour and have a good time in bed."

Murdock's emphasis on harmony and integration is not shared by other researchers who point out that there is a dark side to family life.

This theory is dated. As we already know, fewer and fewer people are living in nuclear families and this does not necessarily mean that other family patterns including one parent, gay and lesbian couple can't fulfil the essential functions such as successful socialisation of children.

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## Questions

- What are the weaknesses in Murdock's work?

## Keywords

1. Function: purpose, role played.
2. Culture: a way of life in a particular community.
3. Division of labour - how domestic tasks are shared in the home between its members e.g. husband and wife.

## Talcott Parsons

### Bullets

- According to Parsons, the family has two main functions - primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities.
- Families are 'factory' like, producing human personalities.
- The family lost some of its functions due to industrialisation.

### Text

Parsons focuses his analysis of the family on modern American society (1955). He believed that the nuclear family had two fundamental functions.

Primary socialisation of children. Primary socialisation refers to socialisation that occurs in early childhood and which mainly occurs within the family. The individual is socialised into the norms of society and becomes an individual personality.

Parsons argues that families produce human personalities in an almost factory like manner. He believes that they are vital in this respect as primary socialisation requires a context which provides warmth, security and mutual support. Parsons believes that the family cannot be replaced.

Stabilisation of adult personalities. According to Parsons, this means that adults need emotional security and a source of relief from the stresses and strains of the wider society. The emotional support of partners in a marriage, and the chance for parents to indulge in childish behaviour with their children, helps to provide this security and release. It helps to prevent stress from overwhelming the individual and threatening the stability of society. For Parsons, the nuclear family is the ideal institution to fulfil these vital functions in an industrial society.

Like other institutions, the family became more specialist. It lost many of its functions e.g. the education system took over many of its educating and socialisation responsibilities. Its connections with wider kinship networks were weakened as it adapted to the demands of an industrial society.

However, it has not lost its two "basic and irreducible" functions. The nuclear family within an industrial society is as important as ever.

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## Questions

- What are the functions of the family according to Parsons?
- How can the family be compared to a factory?
- What does Parsons suggest would happen without the existence of the family?

## Keywords

1. Norms - expectations regarding how to behave in given situations.
2. Socialisation - learning a behaviour that is appropriate to your culture.

## Criticism of Parsons work

### Bullets

- Parsons' analysis is dated and based on American middle class families.
- He disregards family diversity.
- He is very traditional in terms of the roles of the husband and wife - separate gender roles.

### Text

1. Like Murdock, Parsons was accused of idealising the family with his image of happy children and compassionate couples taking care of each other's needs.
2. His image is largely based on the American Middle Class Family. As D.H.J. MORGAN says: "there are no classes, no religious or ethnic groups" in Parsons' analysis of the family.
3. Like Murdock, Parsons fails to look into the possible differences between Middle and Working Class families, or the different family structures in ethnic minority communities. Like Murdock, Parsons fails to look into the alternative functions of the family.

There is room to criticise his view of socialisation. He sees this as a one-way process where children are drilled with culture and their personalities moulded by powerful parents. This ignores the impact of children on parents.

He tends to ignore the two-way interaction between parents and children. There is no room in his thinking for children who wrap their parents around their little finger.

## Questions

- What are the weaknesses in Parsons' ideas given the nature of families nowadays?
- What elements of family life can be unhealthy for individuals?

## Keywords

1. Separate gender roles - specific male roles and specific female roles.

## Evaluating functional theories

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## Bullets

- They ignore the disadvantages of the family.
- The family only suits the needs of the capitalist society.
- Ignore alternative family patterns.
- Over idealise the family unit.
- Ignore the dark side of family life.

## Text

The Functional viewpoint has been criticised by a number of other sociological viewpoints. Some of the main criticisms can be summarised as follows.

Functional theories tend to focus on the positive functions of the family without giving much consideration to its disadvantages. Feminists, for example, emphasise the hetero-dominant nature of the traditional family relationship.

Feminists say that most family relationships benefit the man more than they do the woman. They claim that men are more powerful within the family as they earn more.

Functionalists assume that the family is equally beneficial to all. However, Marxists argue that society has been formed according to the needs of the capitalist economy and that the family exists to serve these needs rather than the needs of its members. The dominant class in capitalist societies benefits most from the way families are made up, rather than society in general.

Functionalists do not take into account the viability of alternatives to the family. For example, it has been argued by Betelheim that the Kibbutz in Israel satisfies all the definitions of family.

Interpretive sociologists argue that functionalists focus too much on the importance of the family to society and ignore the meaning family life has for individuals.

Functionalists assume that families perform useful and vital functions for members and the society. Married couples are portrayed as living happily together, having a good time in bed, and reproducing the next generation. The high divorce rate in a number of western countries suggests that this is not the case.

Due to this portrayal of the perfect family, functionalists tend to ignore the 'dark side' of family life - conflict between the husband and wife, male dominance, child abuse. They do not give enough attention to the drawbacks of the family - the damaging effects that this can have on the wider society.

## Questions

- To what extent is functional analysis of the family relevant nowadays?

## Keywords

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1. Feminism - a theory aiming for social, political and economical equality between men and women.
2. Capitalist society - a society in which financial success is of prime importance.

## The New Right

### Bullets

- The New Right theory agrees that the family is an essential social institution.
- They believe that the family unit has resulted in social decline.
- An overly generous welfare state has resulted in inadequate family forms e.g. single mothers.

### Text

Like functional Sociologists, New Right thinkers see the family as the pillar of society. They also tend to see the "normal" family as the nuclear family unit e.g. John Redwood, the Tory MP said in 1993: "the natural state should be the two-adult family caring for their children".

Such viewpoints often reflect the social view that the family is a "natural" institution based on biological requirements.

In recent years, the concept that the family is "under threat" or "diminishing" has had much coverage. This opinion was not supported as much by sociologists, but rather by journalists, politicians and pressure groups. It was linked in particular with the NEW RIGHT in the 1980s and 1990s.

Such ideas challenge the presumption of the Functionalists that the modern family performs its duties effectively and that the quality of family life is better than it ever was in many ways.

In recent years, government ministers, newspaper editors and pressure groups such as the "Moral Majority" in the United States have suggested that the family unit has been undermined by social changes which have threatened the traditional norms marriage and family life. Amongst the changes that have been held accountable for this is more sexual freedom, leading to co-habiting before marriage and an increasing number of unmarried mothers; more tolerance of homosexuality as an alternative to marriage; higher divorce rates, leading to more one-parent families; financial support provided by the state for one-parent families.

Charles Murray, an American right wing theorist believes that a sub-class is developing and growing in contemporary western communities. Murray believes that births outside of marriage often lead to one-parent families, with women being the head of the majority of those. Murray believes that when single-parent families become a common form of family that they will be a breeding ground for a sub-class. Murray links members of the sub-class with other factors such as underachievement amongst boys, high crime rate (especially street crime), drug abuse and sexual indifference. He believes that the only answer is for the state to intervene and reduce benefits to make people take responsibility for their own lives.

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A similar attempt is seen by David Cameron's 2008 recommendations (leader of the Conservative Party) to force people to do voluntary community work as a way of 'deserving' their benefits, thereby preventing a culture of dependency where people get money for doing nothing. Murray recommends punishment for births outside of marriage and forcing the value of marriage upon nuclear families.

Feminism has also had an influence and has resulted in a situation where more women are working outside of the home rather than doing housework and bringing up children.

The New Right argues over returning to "traditional family values" as means of improving many current social issues - such as disorderly children, educational underachievement and child poverty.

In recent years, government policies have reflected concern for the family. Their policies have reflected this concern. These policies are often influenced by values. The New Right supports the nuclear family and believes that this is the best type of family and should be encouraged. The remainder aren't as good and should be discouraged. Saunders (2000) says that governments should 'explicitly favour married parenthood over all other choices for raising children' and introduce taxes and benefits to support this. The marriage agreement should be reinforced and married couples should have special legal rights.

## Questions

- How are the New Right theories similar to the Functionalism theory?
- How would reinstating traditional family values improve social problems?

## Keywords

1. New Right theory: a political viewpoint associated with Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Governments of the 1980s. It believed that competition was good for society and that poor people were poor because of welfare benefits.
2. Family ideology: a belief in how a family 'should' be.

## Criticism of New Right Theories

### Bullets

- The new right creates an 'ideal' image of traditional family life.
- They link social problems with family structure and ignore other factors.

### Text

According to the New Right, overly generous benefits have supported the sudden increase in single-parent families. These benefits should be reduced so that being a single-parent is a less attractive option. However, Marxists say that many such family problems could be attributed to insufficient benefits from the state, lack of jobs and child care facilities, and other factors beyond the control of single parents.

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Moreover, the model of the family which is so popular with the New Right thinkers only fits a minimum number of households. Only about 5% of households now consist of a working father, a mother who is a housewife and dependent children.

Critics of the New Right argue that governments should not force any type of family on people. Rather, they should recognise that families vary and that diversity is on the increase. Government policy should therefore support every family. (Bernardes 1997). It is not up to the government to force couples to stay together by not granting divorce as easily. And the rights of those co-habiting should not be limited on the basis that they are not married.

It is argued by many sociologists that governments should not voice opinion on which is the best family form and base its policies on that opinion. They should accept the decisions that people have made for their family life and develop policies to support every family.

## Questions

- Is it possible to justify the criticisms of the New Right?

## Keywords

1. Marxists - a group that believes that the social system exists in order to sustain the capitalist society.
2. Benefits - money received from the state to support people who are unable to support themselves.

## What criticisms do people have of families?

### Marxist Viewpoints on the Family

#### Bullets

- They look at the duties fulfilled by the family in a capitalist society.
- The family is an institution which oppresses women.
- The family meets the requirements of a capitalist society.

#### Text

Marxist viewpoints have some things in common with functional viewpoints, in so far as they look for functions undertaken by the family in order to sustain capitalist societies. The big difference is that Marxists see this process as being essentially harmful and exploitive, as they are critical of capitalist society.

Engels' work (first published in 1884) is the starting point. He argues that family and marriage represent early attempts by men to pass on their possessions to their own sons through the control of female sexuality.

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Like many writers in the 19th century, including Marx, Engels saw society (with that society incorporating marriage and family) as something which had evolved through many periods, from primitive communism, where sexual behaviour was largely uncontrolled, through to capitalism, where marriage is based on monogamy (marriage between one husband and one wife). He considered monogamy to be the most efficient way of ensuring that private possessions were passed on through inheritance.

With only one husband and one wife in a family, questions weren't likely to be asked regarding paternity or which wife's children should inherit. Therefore, men could be certain that they had legitimate children who were legally entitled to their wealth.

Engels saw the bourgeois nuclear family as an institution which oppressed women. Women were mainly seen as child bearers. They were economically dependant on their husbands and they were expected to stay faithful to them. However, it was lawful for men to commit adultery and use prostitutes.

However critical Engels was of the family, he didn't wish see the family being abolished. In actual fact, he condemned the way social conditions deprived working class people from any real family life.

He argued in favour of the socialisation (note that this is a new meaning of this term - it is used here to mean that society takes control of many family functions within a communist society) - for example, socialised child care plans to enable mothers to become financially independent.

Engels approved monogamy, but on the basis of love rather than economic incentives. This could only happen if women became economically independent and if divorce was easily granted.

Although his work is over a hundred years old, his two fundamental points - that the family serves the demands of the capitalist economy and prevents women from becoming equal in the home and outside - are still seen as central points by many critics of the modern family.

More recent work by Zaretsky (1976) looks at more recent developments in the family. He argues that the family is like a private unit to protect its members from hardship for the proletariats.

## Criticisms of Marxism

Marxist viewpoints of the family follow on from the Marxist theory. If, for example, the family provides emotional support for the workers, then this helps them to accept injustices in the capitalist system. This makes sense if capitalism is considered as being unjust. However, a number of sociologists reject this idea of capitalism.

Sociologists generally agree that the economic system has some impact on the family. Nevertheless, most would disagree with the opinion that the family is shaped by the needs of such a system.

## Questions

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- What is a capitalist society?
- Does the family oppress women?

## Keywords

1. Marxist: a group who believes that a social structure exists to sustain a capitalist society.
2. Capitalist society - a society in which making a profit and financial success are the priorities.
3. Bourgeoisie - the controlling group in a capitalist society.
4. Proletariat - workers/people exploited in a capitalist society.

## Feminist Viewpoints

### Bullets

Feminists are critical of the family.

They study issues such as division of labour, child abuse and domestic abuse.

Some Feminists say that the recent improvements for women need to be acknowledged.

### Text

During the past decades, feminism had more influence on studying the family than any other approach towards understanding society. Feminists have been very critical of the family. But unlike other critics, they have tended to emphasise the drawbacks of family life for women.

Feminists study areas of family life such as housework and domestic violence within sociology. They have challenged some general ideas about the inevitable dominant nature of men in families and have questioned the opinion that family life is becoming more equal.

Feminists have also highlighted the economic contribution made to society by women's domestic labour within the family.

Above all, feminist theory has encouraged sociologists to view the family as an institution which involves relationship and power. They have challenged the image of family life as something which is based on co-operation, mutual interests and love, and have tried to show that some members of the family, men in particular, benefit more from families than other family members.

Liberal feminists however are critical of those radical feminists who oppose families. They believe that the improvements to women's family life in the past decades should be acknowledged.

## Questions

- Why is feminism often critical of the family unit?

## Keywords

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1. Feminism - the belief that society is patriarchal and is controlled by men.
2. Patriarchy - male dominance.
3. Domestic labour - work done in the house e.g. house work, child care.

## Marxist/Feminist Viewpoints

### Bullets

- Marxist Feminists discuss the impact of capitalism on women in families.
- The family is patriarchal.
- Domestic labour serves the needs of the capitalist economy.
- The wife has an important role in being the emotional support to relieve the husband's frustration which arises from capitalism.
- Women do unpaid work, such as being housekeepers.
- Children are socialised to the values of a capitalist system.

### Text

Many feminist writers have been critical of traditional Marxism - for failing to take account of how women are oppressed in capitalist societies - and of radical Feminism which views patriarchy (male dominance) as the main issue but which fails to link this with the economic structure of society.

Marxist feminists therefore try to link the unequal position of women in society with the roles they undertake within the capitalist system. An important part of this is the women's place within the family. Their main arguments are as follows.

The family is patriarchal. Unlike the functionalists who have tended to see the husband and wife's roles in the family as different but equal, Marxist feminists argue that men dominate the family relationship. The concept of "equal/symmetrical marital roles" is a myth.

Domestic labour serves the demands of the capitalist economy. Marxist feminists such as Margaret Benston (1969) have analysed domestic labour (unpaid domestic work) in economic terms. They argue that part of the profit made by workers is produced from the labour of housewives, their work adds to the labour force of workers (ability to work). So, by cooking, washing their clothes and even sleeping with their husbands, housewives make their husbands more productive workers. And by making and bringing up children - future workers - without any cost to employers, housewives play a vital part as regards reproducing labour force.

The fact that the husband has to pay for producing and sustaining the future workforce (i.e. the children) acts as a strict discipline on his behaviour in work. He cannot easily stop working with a wife and children to support. The responsibilities weaken his bargaining power and commit him to paid labour.

Fran Ansley reverses Parsons' opinion that the family functions to stabilise adult personalities, to the Marxist framework. She views the emotional support given by the wife as a security valve for the frustration that builds up in her husband from working in a

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capitalist system. Rather than being turned against the system which produced him, the frustration is relieved by the comforting wife. Therefore there is no threat to the system.

In Ansley's words:

"When wives play their traditional role as takers of shit, they often absorb their husbands' legitimate anger and frustration at their own powerlessness and oppression. With every worker provided with a sponge to soak up his possibly revolutionary ire, the bosses rest more secure."

A similar point is made by Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood in their discussion on male dominance in the family. They claim that "The petty dictatorship which most men exercise over their wives and families enables them to vent their anger and frustration in a way which poses no challenge to the system."

The family has an ideological role reproducing individuals for the workforce is nothing more than producing children and keeping them in good health. It also means reproducing the attitudes that are essential for an efficient workforce in a capitalist system.

David Cooper argues that the family acts as a conditioning device first, teaching children to accept an authoritarian and profitable society. Within the family, children will learn to conform and give in to authority. Therefore, the stage has been set for the obedient and passive workforce which capitalism needs.

A similar point is made by Diane Feely, who argues that the structure of family relationship socialises the young to accept their place in society which has been tiered according to class. Feely claims that the family with its "authoritarian ideology is designed to teach passivity, not rebellion".

The family prevents equality between two sexes at work. Many sociologists have noted the disadvantages women suffer in employment because of their domestic and child care responsibilities. But Marxist Feminists argue that these inequalities are built into the capitalist system. Women not only act as unpaid domestic labourers but also, according to Irene Bruegel (1979) provide a "reserve army of labour".

They are the source of cheap labour who can be called into paid employment when needed, for example to do part-time jobs, but who disappear into the family again when they are no longer needed.

## Questions

- What makes the arguments of Marxist Feminists different to traditional Marxists?
- How does capitalism exploit the woman's role?

## Keywords

1. Patriarchy - male dominance.
2. Symmetrical marital roles - equal roles of the husband and wife within a marriage.
3. Paid labour - ability to work.
4. Ideology - set of ideas/beliefs.
5. Reserve army of labour - workers who can be employed and made redundant.

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## Radical Feminist Viewpoints/Theories

### Bullets

- The family is a patriarchal institution.
- Women bear the responsibility for domestic labour and they are expected to fulfil this inferior role as a wife and mother.
- Domestic violence is a real threat to many women.

### Text

Radical feminists are critical of the family for many of the same reasons as Marxist feminists. But they emphasise the ways that the family is a patriarchal institution, i.e. an institution that enables men to dominate, exploit and oppress women. The family therefore doesn't just benefit a relatively small group - the capitalist class - but men in general.

According to Delphy and Leonard (1992), women are oppressed in the family. In a way, they see that women are wasting their lives playing an inferior role in the home. Delphy and Leonard acknowledge that the majority of men do house work, however that evidence shows that the time women spend doing house work hasn't decreased during this century.

Writers such as Kate Millett (1970) argue that the way society is ordered enables men to dominate women. In its most extreme form, this means violence. Studies of violence in the family, for example 'Violence against Wives' by Russell and Rebecca Dobash (1980), show that this is a real threat to many women and children.

Like Delphy and Leonard, Purdy (1997) argues that women are exploited by the family arguing that these disadvantages arise mainly from their child care responsibilities. She believes that there is much emphasis on women being mothers and enjoying this role. She thinks that society assumes that women will have children. She calls on women to refuse to have children, what she calls 'babystrike', so that the capitalist society listens to women's grievances.

Greer (2000) agrees by arguing that there is a strong ideology which suggests that being a 'wife' is the most important role for a woman. Greer believes that Britain's high divorce rate strongly suggests that women don't enjoy marriage. About 75% of divorce petitions are submitted by women.

Unlike Marxist Feminists, radical feminists don't see that a socialist society is the answer, but they argue that women must build an alternative society independently which will challenge patriarchy and polarisation of gender roles. During the past years however, many feminists have focused not on replacing but on improving the family. They argue that men should play a bigger, not smaller part in the family, arguing that this would take much stress off women.

This would require changes in other areas such as employment - for example, shorter working weeks, more opportunities for job sharing, longer paternity leave and better

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maternity rights.

## Questions

- How is radical feminism different from Marxist feminism?
- Is babystrike actually happening, but in a disorganised fashion?

## Keywords

1. Patriarchy: male dominance.
2. Domestic violence: violence/abuse that takes place in the home.
3. 'Babystrike': women refusing to have children until the government acknowledges the importance of their role.

## Criticisms of feminism

### Bullets

- Feminists are criticised for focusing too much on the negative aspects of family life.
- They tend to ignore successful families.

### Text

Critics argue that Feminists focus too much on the negative side of family life. They ignore the possibility that a number of women enjoy looking after the home and bringing up children.

There is evidence of an increasing tendency towards more equality between partners. Rather than celebrating this pattern, critics say that the Feminists continue to focus on the remaining inequalities.

Marxists and Feminists consider the family as performing pre-determined functions. They also tend to see a specific form of family which is essential for the socialist system. They tend to ignore the variety of family forms. They see family as something which has been determined by the requirements of the economic and patriarchal system rather than by an agreement between a husband and wife which suits the needs and aspirations of both.

They tend to focus on the negative aspects of family life and ignore the pleasure it gives some individuals. Many women choose to stay home to bring up their children as this is a very satisfying role for them.

Black feminists such as Helen Carby have criticised White feminists for not taking into account the importance of racism as well as patriarchy as a form of dominant authority. They agree that the family can be very important as an escape from racism within the workplace and in society. The family is a source of support away from racism.

## Questions

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- To what extent are the above criticisms true?

## Keywords

1. Racism - differentiation based on race/ethnicity.

## What is the future of the family?

### Introduction

#### Bullets

- Opportunity and choice characterise family life today.
- People choose gender identity (among other identities).
- Plastic sexuality is sexual behaviour that is unrelated to reproduction and undertaken for pleasure.
- Relationships are negotiated, this is confluent love.

#### Text

One of the best known modern sociological theorists in Britain is Anthony Giddens. He claims that we live in an age that he describes as late modernism. It is characterised by change and choice. People are not so bound by tradition so they have increasing life chances and opportunities to choose identities for themselves.

In the past, tradition defined who people were and what they should do. Today, there are fewer social rules and people are individualistic. They are more concerned with themselves than their communities. Applied to the family, this means that people have more freedom to choose family forms that suit themselves. Families have therefore become more diverse.

Giddens sees something very positive in the changes described by the post modernists. He argues for example, that personal life has become more democratic as sexuality is no longer linked to reproduction (via effective and female controlled contraception). He goes on to say that there has been an acceptance of same gendered sexuality. He calls these changes in attitude 'plastic sexuality'.

People have become free to have 'confluent love', where they create a relationship that is part of their developing identity as individual people. They share mutual satisfaction as they negotiate the nature of their relationship. This becomes part of a process of creating equality between the genders. Giddens is critical of cultures that impose traditional morality on men and women. He sees traditionalism as a barrier to personal satisfaction. He claims that traditional societies and traditional families act to oppress women in particular.

#### Questions

- What are the characteristics of late modern society?
- Why was the period of the industrial revolution and onwards called modernism?
- What is 'plastic sexuality'?
- How far is it possible to prove or disprove Giddens ideas?

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## Keywords

1. Modernism: a term which describes the world which is characterised by industrialisation and urbanisation.
2. Post-modern - according to some sociologists, we live in a world where there are no absolute rules of conduct. It is a society influenced by the media, images, opportunity and choice.
3. Identity: a sense of who you are
4. Industrial Revolution: a period which started in the late 18th century and transformed Britain, and later other societies from being agricultural based to manufacturing based economies.
5. Confluent love - a relationship dependent on both partners finding fulfilment and satisfaction in the relationship.

## Post-modernism

### Bullets

- The post-modernism theory anticipates the end of traditional family patterns.
- The latest changes mean that modern family patterns are more viable.

### Text

Some sociologists believe, however, that some important fundamental changes have occurred in western societies, and that we have consequently moved to an age which should now be known as post-modernism.

Post-modernism theories have become more influential in Sociology, and have challenged the traditional arguments.

They disagree with the traditional theories which explain human behaviour according to the influence of socialisation or a person's background. They argue that factors such as gender, ethnicity and social class aren't as influential on people's behaviour and life patterns i.e. there is more freedom to be had in forming a social identity.

The American sociologist, Judith Stacey, considers family diversity as a reflection of post-modern society. There is not one specific family form. Fewer people are living in traditional nuclear families and are enjoying the freedom of being able to choose a family pattern which suits their own personal needs, rather than feeling pressurised into conforming to the social expectations of the traditional nuclear family.

This is characterised by the various family patterns which now exist e.g. gay and lesbian couple families, one parent families, co-habiting couples etc. There are no specific actions and norms. Stacey welcomes this diversity, and regards it as an opportunity for people to develop their own family forms that suit them.

Stacey argues that these changes mean that it is now impossible to regard the family as an unit which evolves through a series of stages alongside economic changes, as seen during the industrial revolution.

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The post-modern family is more viable. It is not yet possible to say whether there will be one dominant form of 'family'. Also, Stacey believes that we will never return to the domination of one family pattern (e.g. nuclear family).

Society appears to have accepted these changes and considers them as an environment which could be stable and effective to socialise children. This is reflected by government policies and legal changes e.g. allowing gay couples to adopt a child, civil partnerships etc. However, there is opposition, from the Right Wing in particular, to these changes in family patterns, and the 'deterioration' in the family unit is often used as an argument for social deterioration. Some politicians would like to see the traditional nuclear family being reinstated with state support to keep this family unit as the ideal.

## Questions

- What are the characteristics of a post-modern society?
- Why do post-modern theorists question the validity of the traditional theories of the family?
- What is the future of the nuclear family according to post-modernists?

## Keywords

1. Post-modernism - economic and social characteristics of the modern world - opportunity and choice.
2. Right Wing - often politicians. They believe that the nuclear family is the ideal family.