2. Families and households

INTRODUCTION

As you have probably guessed, this chapter deals with family life in all its many forms, and the main aim of this opening section is to explore 'different conceptions of the relationships of the family to the social structure, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies'. To do this successfully we need to:

- outline different perspectives on family life
- examine how these perspectives see the role of the family in society
- explore how economic and social policies impact on family structures and relationships.

Defining the family group

Preparing the ground

The first thing we need to do is define 'a family' given that, in order to relate the family to social structure and social policy, it would be useful to know what it involves.

WARM UP: FAMILY DEFINITIONS

To get you started, in small groups, think about and discuss among the group what a family means to you. Make a note of the kinds of things you believe it involves.

Once you have done this, as a class, compare your notes and identify the common features (if any) of a family.

At a guess, I'd say your definition of a family will probably involve two basic ideas, considered in terms of family.

- **Characteristics**: You will have identified certain features of a family (such as different generations sharing a common residence) that make it different to other social groups.
- **Relationships**: This involves the idea families share particular social relationships (for example, that someone is a mother or grandfather to a child) that clearly mark them out as a distinctive group in society.

As I am sure you have discovered, however, defining a family is not quite as easy as you might have first thought, for a couple of reasons.

- Is there such an institution as 'the family' in any society? In other words, is there only one family type or is it possible to talk about many different types?
- If there are a variety of types, are they

really different or are they simply variations on a basic theme? For example, if our definition of a family involved the idea of 'two adults and their children', is a family consisting of 'one adult and their children' a different form of family?

Although they may not seem too important at the moment, how we answer these questions is going to be central to our initial exploration of family life.

If we look at some sociological definitions of families, we can begin with a classic one provided by **George Murdock** (*Social Structure*, 1949):

> The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation 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 cohabiting adults

As an initial definition, it is useful for a couple of reasons: firstly, it is both a starting-point (we have to begin somewhere) and, speaking personally, a definition most of us would recognise as being 'a family'. Secondly, whether we go with it or not, it is useful for highlighting a couple of general points about families. It tells us, for example:

- **Social relationships** are a key concept to consider (families are not necessarily linked to the concept of marriage, for example).
- **Functions**: Family groups seem to exist to fulfil a number of purposes, the main ones being reproduction and the raising/socialisation of children.

There are, however, a few debatable areas to consider.

- **Adults** and **children**: This definition suggests families do not have to be *monogamous* (for example, one man married to one women), they can also be *polygamous* – where one man is married to a number of women (*polygny*) or one woman married to a number of men (*polyandry*). However, it also suggests a family involves children – which raises the question, how do we classify a childless couple? Are they a family (and if not, what are they)?
- **Sexuality**: Does this definition allow for the possibility of homosexual families?
- **Common residence**: Do family members have to live together to consider themselves a family?

Discussion point: classic or outdated?

Is Murdock's definition too restrictive in the way it defines the family?

Can you identify any groups that might constitute a 'family' without conforming to his definition?

Murdock's definition was originally produced in the USA in the 1940s.

Do you think the world has changed and, if so, what implications does this have for the way we can define a family?

If Murdock's definition raises more questions than it answers, perhaps we need to investigate a slightly different way of defining the family group – and one way involves introducing the concept of **kinship**. This involves relationships based on biology (so-called blood relationships – such as between a mother and her child – where

there's a genetic link between the two) or *affinity* (relationships created through custom – such as two adults living together – or relationships created by law, marriage being an obvious example here).

Weiss ('Family support and education programs', 1988) uses this concept to define the family group as, 'A small kinship structured group with the key function of . . . socialisation of the newborn'. **Giddens** (*Sociology*, 1993) suggests family groups can be defined as, 'A group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for the children.'

However we decide to define a family, it is clear we need to distinguish this group from a concept used with increasing frequency, namely a **household**. This, at its most basic, involves a single person or group living together in the same location (such as friends sharing accommodation). In this respect, we can note most families are households, but not all households are families.

Digging deeper

So far we have seen that defining a family is not unproblematic (that is, there are arguments over how best to define it), which should alert us to a key characteristic of family life in our society, namely its *diversity* (considered in terms of both different family structures and relationships). We will develop these ideas in a moment, but for now we can note we have identified a distinction between two types of definition:

- **Exclusive** definitions (such as that produced by Murdock) where the focus is on the specific characteristics of a family that make it different to other social groups (such as a household or a school class). This type has the advantage of being clear about what is – and is not – a family group but, as we have seen, it is perhaps difficult to produce a definition that applies to all possible types of family.
- **Inclusive** definitions (such as those of Weiss or Giddens) where the focus is on defining a family group in terms of the general relationships (such as kinship or

Growing it yourself: families or households?

Using the following table as a template (and working individually, in small groups or as a class) what advantages and disadvantages can you identify to the use of concepts like families and households?

Families		Households	
Advantages of this concept	Disadvantages of this concept	Advantages of this concept	Disadvantages of this concept
Identifies kinship as significant	Difficult to define	Includes all groups who live together	A household can be different to a family
Further advantages and disadvantages?			

affinity) that make it different from other social groups. One advantage to this definition is that it covers a variety of different family forms, but if the definition is drawn too broadly it may include family-type groups (such as households) that are significantly different to families in terms of their relationships.

Each type of definition has, therefore, certain advantages and disadvantages for the sociological researcher and, whichever definition you choose to use, it is ultimately just that – a choice reflecting your personal ideas, interests and preoccupations; there is, in effect, no correct way of defining a family group.

Thus, rather than see families as a particular type of social group it might be better to think about them in terms of what **John Goldthorpe** (*Family Life in Western Societies*, 1987) calls 'a network of related kin'; in other words, as a *social process* based on relationships involving a particular set of:

- **labels** – such as mother, father, son and daughter
- **values** – such as the belief parents should raise their own children
- **norms** – such as living together (through marriage or cohabitation)
- **functions** – such as primary socialisation.

By adopting this view we start to capture the potential richness of family relationships and, by extension, reflect the diversity of family experiences in our society.

However we eventually decide to define 'the family' (something, as I've suggested above, that is actually quite difficult to do) it is probably safe to say that family groups are important to us – the majority of us, after all, spend at least some of our lives surrounded in various ways by 'family' of some description. This being the case, therefore, it would be useful to examine how different sociologists have explained the social significance of these groups.

Family perspectives

Preparing the ground

Family groups, considered mainly in term of what they exist to do, are generally considered by sociologists to be important institutions in any society. However, as you might expect, there are disagreements over how we interpret the role of the family group and, in this section we can introduce some different perspectives on the relationships of families to social structure. **Functionalist perspectives** start from the observation the family group has existed – in one form or another – in all known societies (in other words, the family is considered to be a 'cultural universal' because it has existed in all known cultures in one form or another). For this reason, families are seen as crucial to the functioning of any social system (you will recall, no doubt, functionalists consider the family to be one of the four major *functional sub-systems* in any society). To put this another way, the family group is considered functional – and therefore essential – for any social system because it has a couple of vital purposes, namely:

- **Socialisation**: Families are the main institution for the initial socialisation of children and any institution charged with this responsibility plays a significant part

in the reproduction of cultural norms and values.

- **Social order**: The family acts as a stabilising force in society. Great stress is placed by functionalists on things like emotional and sexual stability, economic co-operation and so forth.

New Right perspectives, although closely related to functionalism, involve more directly political (rather than sociological) ideas about the significance of families. For New Right theorists, whether we define them in terms of personalities (politicians such as Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush in the USA) or practices (issues such as anti-abortion, anti-immigration, anti-Europe and liberal economic policies), the family group is the cornerstone of any society.

The New Right particularly like to promote the idea of 'traditional family relationships' – families should consist of two, heterosexual, adults, preferably married (to each other) with clearly defined gender roles and relationships (which normally means men as family breadwinners and women as domestic workers).

The New Right view of a traditional family

Marxist perspectives on family life reflect their conflict view of society, where they relate what the family group does (socialisation, for example) to how it benefits powerful groups, whether this be on a group level – how a ruling class benefits from various 'free family services', such as raising children to be future employees – or a personal level, such as how men dominate and exploit women.

For Marxists, it is not what the family does that's important, but *why* it does it. One argument here is the family helps to maintain and reproduce inequalities by presenting them as 'normal' and 'natural' within the socialisation process.

Feminist perspectives have, traditionally, focused on the role of the family group in the exploitation of women. In this respect, attention has mainly been given to identifying how traditional gender roles within the family have been enforced and reinforced, mainly for the benefit of men. The family group, therefore, has tended to be seen as oppressive of women, trapping them in a fairly narrow range of roles and responsibilities (domestic labour and child care, for example) that defines female roles in terms of the kind of *service functions* just noted.

In modern families, the notion of women's *dual role* or *double shift* (women as both paid workers *and* unpaid housewives) has been emphasised as has, more-recently, the idea of women performing, according to **Duncombe** and **Marsden** ('Love and intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and "Emotion Work"', 1993) a *triple shift* – the third element being the idea of *emotional labour* (that is, investing time and effort in the psychological well-being of family members).

Postmodern perspectives reject the kinds of views we have just noted (since they all, in their different ways, are seen as putting forward narrow (or prescriptive) views about what families *are* and how they *should be*). The key ideas of this perspective in relation to family life and relationships are *diversity* and *choice*, two concepts that reflect postmodern ideas about behaviour and lifestyles.

From this viewpoint, sociological perspectives such as functionalism, Marxism or feminism are hopelessly outdated in their view of societies and individuals. A family – in short – is whatever people want it to be (whether it involves adults of the opposite sex, the same sex, own children, adopted children or whatever). From this perspective, therefore, the relationship between families and the social structure is a largely meaningless question for two reasons. Firstly, they reject the idea of social structures – which makes trying to identify and isolate any relationship between family groups and something that doesn't exist (social structures) a fairly pointless exercise. Secondly, they reject the idea we can talk, in any useful way, about 'the family'; all we have, in effect, is a variety of people living out their lives and lifestyles in ways they believe are acceptable and appropriate to how they want to live.

Digging deeper

In thinking about families and their relationships to social structure we have two distinct viewpoints to consider; on the one hand, we have traditional sociological perspectives (such as functionalism) that emphasise how the structure of society impacts (for good or bad) on family forms and relationships. On the other, we have postmodern perspectives that suggest the question of any relationship (of whatever type) between families and social structures is not worth posing (let alone trying to answer).

Whatever your position in relation to the above, we need to dig a little deeper into the different perspectives we have just outlined, if for no better reason than this is an AS textbook designed to provide a range of views for you to personally evaluate, accept or reject. In this respect, therefore, **functionalist** sociology has tended to look at the family as the initial, essential, bedrock of social integration in any given society. This involves the idea that ways have to be found to make people feel they belong to the society into which they were born – to believe they have something in common with the people around them. **Ronald Fletcher** (*The Family and Marriage in Britain*, 1973), in this respect, has identified the *core functions* of the family as being:

- **procreation** and **child-rearing** (the 'having sex and its consequences' bit – which includes, of course, the initial, general, socialisation process)
- **regulation of sexual behaviour** (between adults, for example, by defining the limits of sexual freedom)
- **provision of a home** (in the widest sense of the word).

In addition, Fletcher argues families perform certain non-essential functions, many of which provide linkages with the wider social structure. These include:

- **consumption** of goods and services
- **basic education**

- **health care** (both physical and psychological)
- **recreation**.

For **Talcott Parsons**, on the other hand, the modern family has become increasingly specialised. He argues it performs only two essential functions:

- **Primary socialisation**: Families are 'factories whose product is the development of human personalities.'
- **Stabilisation of adult personalities**, which involves adult family members providing things like physical and emotional support for each other.

Marxist perspectives have been generally more critical of the role of the family group, seeing it in terms of:

- A **safety valve** for (male) frustrations: The majority of men are relatively powerless in the workplace and this condition is disguised by allowing males to be powerful figures within the family group. This serves as a safety value for the build-up of tension and frustration at work and directs frustration away from criticism of employers, workplace conditions and so forth. In this respect, we could also note the family is a fairly violent institution in our society: The Home Office, for example, through its Crime Reduction Service ('Domestic Violence', 2004) documents the range, risk and consistency of family-related violence in terms of the fact that: 'Every year, around 150 people are killed by a current or former partner. One in four women and one in six men will suffer from domestic violence at some point in their lives.'
- **Channelling** and **legitimising** the exploitation of women. Within the family, for example, many women are still generally expected to do the majority of domestic labour tasks (a situation that mirrors, the exploitative work relationships experienced by many men). This situation is, to some extent, considered right and proper or, at leant, legitimate by many men and women because it is seen as being part of the female role in (patriarchal) society.
- **Free services**: The basic idea here is that the majority of children raised within a family group will grow-up to be future workers who will, according to this perspective, be taking their place amongst those exploited by capitalist owners. The costs of replacing 'dead labour' (a concept that includes both those who literally die and those who become too old or sick to work anymore) are, in the main taken on by the family group in a couple of ways.
  - **Economic costs** involved in raising children to adulthood fall on the family group. Employers make little or no contribution to these general family costs.
  - **Psychological costs** are also involved since the family group is an important socialising agency. If children are to be future workers they need to be socialised in ways that orientate them towards seeing their future in such terms.

  Complementing the idea of free services, we can note how Marxists relate such ideas to that of the family group as a:
- **Stabilising force** in capitalist society. This idea reflects the argument that the responsibilities people take on when they create family groups locks them into capitalist economic relationships. In

other words, family members have to work to provide both the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter – and the range of consumer goods that goes with modern lifestyles (Personal computers, DVDs, the family car and so forth). The requirement to take responsibility for family members (both adults and children) also acts as an emotionally stabilising force in society.

Finally, in this respect, we can note the idea of the family group as:

- **Consumers** of products: Marxists note how the family group has, historically, moved from being active producers of goods and services to passive consumers of these things – someone, after all, has to buy the things that make profits for a ruling class and the family, with all its expenses and expectations represent an increasingly important source of consumption.

Feminist perspectives on family life tend to stress things like:

- **Service roles**: Women, by and large, take on the role of 'unpaid servants' to their partner and children. This is sometimes done willingly – because they see it as part of the female role – and sometimes unwillingly because their partner will not, or is unable, to take it on. This type of role – especially when it's part of a female double shift involving both paid and unpaid work – contributes, according to feminists, to:
- **Exploitation**: In this respect, feminists point to the idea women in our society increasingly suffer from dual forms of exploitation:
  - **patriarchal** exploitation as domestic labourers within the home

  - **capitalist** exploitation as employees in the workplace.
- **Reserve army of labour**: **Mary Macintosh** ('The State Oppression of Women') argues that women are called into the workforce at various times when there is a shortage of male labour and forced back into the family when there is a surplus. Women are a marginalised workforce, forced into low pay, low status, employment on the basis of sexual discrimination.
- **Oppression**: Feminists also point to the idea that women's lives within the family are oppressive when considered in a couple of ways. Firstly, in terms of the 'housewife role' effectively forced on women. Even though many women seem to perform this role willingly it could be argued this willingness to identify domestic labour with femininity is a result of both socialisation and patriarchal ideologies. Secondly, in terms of violence within the family. **Dodd** et al ('Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004'), for

example, note '16% of all violent incidents were incidents of domestic violence'. They also report just over two-thirds (67 per cent) of the victims of domestic violence were women.

Postmodern perspectives, on the other hand, tend to view family groups in **individualistic** terms – as arenas in which people play out their personal narratives, as it were. In this sense, we can identify two basic forms of individualistic experience:

- **Choice**, in the individual sense of the word, whereby people are increasingly able to make decisions about their behaviour – from the basic choice of whether or not to form a family group to the variety of extended choices now available in terms of how people express their 'lived experiences' in family relationships. Think, for example, about the multitude of different family forms and relationships in our society – from childless couples, through step-families, to gay couples with children and beyond. This notion of choice links into the idea of:
- **Pluralism** as the defining feature of postmodern societies. In other words, such societies are increasingly characterised by a plurality of family forms and groups which coexist – sometimes happily and sometimes uneasily. Within this context of family pluralism, therefore, Postmodernists argue it's pointless to make judgements about family forms (in the way we've seen other sociological perspectives make such judgements about the form and function of family groups). From this perspective therefore, each family unit is, in its own way unique and involves people working out their personal choices and lifestyles in the best ways they can.

As **Judith Stacey** ('Fellow Families?', 2002) puts it when discussing same-sex relationships, 'Under the postmodern family condition, every family is an alternative family.' Because of this uniqueness, as we have seen in the previous section, one of the problems we encounter when discussing families is the difficulty involved in trying to precisely define this group; exclusive definitions appear much too narrow and restrictive, in the sense they generally fail to account for all types of family structures, whereas inclusive definitions may be so widely drawn in terms of what they include as a family as to be somewhat less than useful for students of AS Sociology (and their teachers, come to that). In this respect, **David Elkind** ('Waaah, Why Kids Have a Lot to Cry About', 1992) has suggested the transition from modern to postmodern society has produced what he terms the **permeable family** which, he notes, 'encompasses many different family forms: traditional or nuclear, two-parent working, single-parent, blended, adopted child, test-tube, surrogate mother, and co-parent families. Each of these is valuable and a potentially successful family form'. In this respect he argues: 'The Modern Family spoke to our need to belong at the expense, particularly for women, of the need to become. The Permeable Family, in contrast, celebrates the need to become at the expense of the need to belong.'

While Elkind doesn't necessarily see this latter state – the idea individual needs and desires override our sense of responsibility to others (and, in some respects, the 'denial of

self' in favour of one's children and their needs) – as generally desirable **Dyske Suematsu** ('Postmodern Family', 2004) is not so sure: 'A family is essentially a unit of support. There were days when human beings could not survive without it. Those days are over.'

Discussion point: is the family dead?

Do you agree or disagree with the argument Suematsu puts forward that, in some respects, families have outlived their usefulness?

What arguments could you put forward to either support or reject this idea?

Whatever your personal perspective on family life, whether you see yourself as a family traditionalist, looking forward to producing 1.6 children – the current average family size in the UK – in a loving, heterosexual, relationship or as a postmodern free-spirit ready-and-willing to indulge whatever sexual craving takes your fancy,(with whoever takes your fancy), in a loose-knit family-style relationship, it remains true that governments – the makers of social policy – tend to have quite specific views about what constitutes a family.

The technical term for this idea is an **ideology** (a set of related beliefs about something) and, in the next section, we can examine some ways social and economic ideologies and policies impact on family structures and relationships.

Family and social policy

Preparing the ground

We can begin this section by defining social policy which, according to **Susan** and **Peter Calvert** (*Sociology Today*, 1992) refers to: the main principles under which the government of the day directs economic resources to meet specific social needs.'

We can add some flesh to the bare bones of this definition by noting **Susannah Morris**'s observations (*Social Policy: From the Victorians to the Present Day*, 2004) that social policy involves the government identifying and regulating:

- **social problems** – such as an increase in the level of crime
- **social needs** – such as those of the unemployed
- **social conditions** – such as the provision of health care through something like a National Health Service.

WARM UP: SOCIAL POLICIES

Although you may not be aware of it, you already know a great deal about how social and economic policies impact on family life.

Using the following table as a starting point (and working initially in small groups, adding any further family areas as required), identify as many things as you can that impact on what you're allowed/not allowed to do in the context of family life.

Once you have done this, get together as a class to combine the things you have identified.

Family Area	What can you do?	What can't you do?
Marriage	Marry someone of the opposite sex	Marry someone of same sex Marry a close relative (brother or sister) Marry someone under 16
Divorce	You can get divorced	Marry someone else while already married
Sexuality	Have a sexual relationship	Have a sexual relationship with someone under 16
Children (0–12)		Paid employment
Teenagers (13–16)	Paid employment: a limited number of hours each day	
Adults	Cohabit (with people of same/different sex)	

Some of the areas we're going to look at later (such as divorce) may also provide examples of policies.

As should be apparent, from the work you've just done, social and economic policy is a potentially vast area to cover (even if we restrict ourselves to considering only those polices directly affecting families), since it involves both a:

- **Historical perspective**: identifying, for example, polices from both the distant past – such as the various *Factory and Child Labour Acts* of the nineteenth century – and the recent past – such as the *Child Support Agency*, created in 1993 to ensure parents living apart met 'their financial responsibilities to their children'.
- **Future perspective**: thinking about polices now being proposed – such as limits on the smacking of children – and polices whose impact cannot be adequately judged, as yet.

Rather than trawl through this vast sea of policy, therefore, this section focuses on two main areas, namely:

- **identifying** a selection of government policies that impact on family life
- **reviewing** a sample of recent social and economic policies to give you a flavour for this area (and your further research if so desired).

Before we look at these ideas, don't forget family life is also covered by general social policies relating to the criminal law; although we tend to talk about things like domestic violence as if they were somehow a special legal category, it is actually a form of criminal assault. Areas such as child abuse and bigamy are also covered by crime policies.

Digging deeper

Rather than simply list a selection of recent social and economic policies that have impacted on family life, a more interesting way to think about this information might be to use a biographical approach. This involves creating an imaginary individual and showing some of the ways social policies

impact on their life – from birth to retirement. You should also remember what follows is just an illustration – it is designed to give you a general overview of how social policy impacts on family life. Having duly noted this proviso, we can begin our biological approach with:

- **Conception**: Until recently, contraceptive devices were available 'free' (paid for out of general taxation) from the National Health Service (NHS); however IVF (fertility treatments) are now available for those unable to conceive 'naturally'.

Here's one I made earlier.

- **Abortion** is also available for a period of 24 weeks (under the *Abortion Act*, 1967) after conception. Whether or not you are conceived will depend upon a range of family circumstances governed by government policy (child care facilities, employment prospects for your parents and so forth).
- **Pregnancy**: Working women are entitled to maternity leave, *statutory maternity pay* and, once they have given birth, they have a right to resume their former job. From 2003, fathers also have the right to a period of paternity leave (up to two weeks), during which they can claim statutory paternity pay from their employer (currently £100 a week or 90% of average weekly earnings if this is less than £100).
- **Birth/infancy**: The NHS provides free medical services, the level and range of which depends on government funding policies and decisions made by Regional Health Authorities. In general, the lower the social class of your parents, the greater the chance of you not surviving childbirth (child mortality) or the first few years of life (infant mortality), as the following table illustrates:

Higher managerial (non-manual)	Semi-skilled manual
2.7 per 1,000 live births	7.5 per 1,000 live births

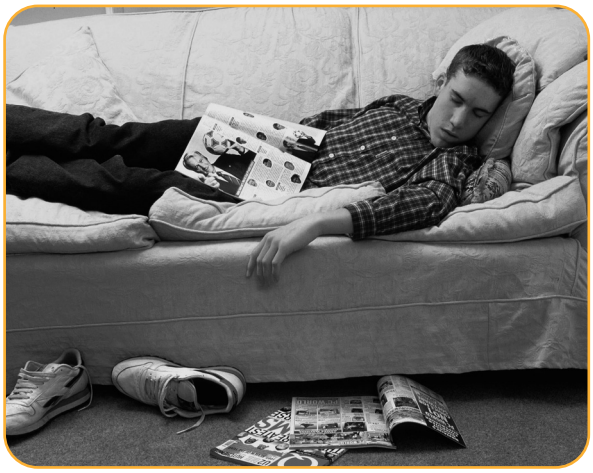
Table 2.1 Infant Mortality rate 2002 (for babies born inside marriage) by father's occupation (Standard Occupational Classification 2000)

If, for whatever reason, your parents can't care for you, the government (through local councils) makes provision for fostering/adoption.

- **Pre-school**: Nursery facilities are not provided by the government (although tax credits are available for nursery places), which restricts the ability of one

parent to work and affects family living standards. If your mother works, you are most likely to be looked after by a grandparent (one-third of children under 15 in 2002). If you are abused or neglected, you may be taken into local authority care – something that happened to 40,000 children in 2002.

- **Education**: Between the ages of 5 and 16 you must, by law, receive formal tuition, either through attending a state (free)/private school or by a private tutor (who can be your parents). The education you receive may depend on your parents' income (if they can afford to send you to a private school) or where they live (children who attend schools in inner city areas achieve fewer GCSE and A-level exam passes than those who attend schools in suburban areas). Such things may affect your future employment prospects and may affect the decision about whether or not you remain within the family home.
  - You may be eligible for free school meals and there is the possibility you could be suspended or excluded from school.
  - A range of health/welfare services and benefits are provided by the state, but these no longer include things like free prescriptions or dental and eye care.
- **Early adulthood** (16–18): Once you reach the minimum school-leaving age, a range of government policies come into effect. You can legally marry (as long as your parents agree) and you can have sexual intercourse (as long as your partner – of whatever sex – is at least 16). If you get a job, you have to be paid the legal *minimum wage* for your age. Your earnings, however, will be subject to Income Tax and National Insurance deductions.



- **Adulthood** (18+): Adult family members are affected in numerous ways by social and economic policies.
  - You can get married (subject to various restrictions – incest, bigamy, age of prospective partner and so forth), cohabit (live with someone) and divorce.
  - If you start your own family, your housing options may be limited. In the past 20 years the government has discouraged the building of low-rent (subsidised) housing and local authority ('council') housing has been progressively sold to private owners and housing associations.
  - Your ability to afford a mortgage is affected by your employment prospects, which relate to things like your level of education and where you live (the South East has lower rates of

unemployment than the north of England, Scotland and Wales).

- In 2002, the average house price was £128,000 (although regional differences apply; living in London, for example, is more expensive – a detached house, on average, will set you back £385,000 in 2004). These factors may result in children continuing to live within the family home (see above).
- Mortgage tax relief was abolished in 2002.
- Between the ages of 18 and 24, if you claim the Job Seeker's Allowance continuously for six months you will have to enter the New Deal scheme; if you can't find a job through this scheme you will be required to do one of the following: subsidised employment; work experience with a voluntary organisation/environmental task force or full-time education. If you refuse to do one of these options your Job Seeker's Allowance will be stopped.
- The government provides a range of (means tested – they depend on your level of income) social security benefits for adults and families. These include working families' tax credit/income support; council tax benefit; incapacity or disability benefits and housing benefit. In addition, child benefit is paid to all families with eligible children, regardless of income.

- **Old age/retirement**: State pensions currently start at 65 for men and 60 for women (although this may change by 2010 with the retirement age for all set at 65). Pension payments depend on the National Insurance contributions you have – or have not – paid throughout your working life (many women in our society, for example, have not paid enough contributions to qualify for a full state pension).
  - Pensioners who rely solely on a state pension are one of the most likely groups to experience poverty (roughly 20% of all pensioners are classed as poor). Means-tested income support is available for pensioners who, at 52%, are the largest recipient group of social security expenditure (the next largest group – 26% – are the sick and disabled).
  - As a pensioner, you may receive some free services (the bus pass!), but you have to pay VAT (at 17.5%) on heating costs (although the government does make provision for 'bad weather payments'). Hypothermia (death through lack of heat) is one of the greatest causes of premature death

Old age – the happiest days of your life?

in our society. Medical services are still free, but the elderly are often considered a low priority in terms of health provision. You may have to wait months or years for non-essential surgery.

- Services such as home helps, district nurse/health visitor, day centre care, social workers and meals-on-wheels are also provided for those aged 65 and over.
- If you reach a stage where you are unable to adequately care for yourself, you will be faced with the choice of entering a private nursing home (which will be expensive and largely unsubsidised – which may affect any inheritance for your children) or, more likely, you will be forced to rely on your children for care and accommodation ('care in the community'). If you have no children or no means of support you will receive some form of state care.

In this section we have looked at a range of social policies affecting family life and experiences in our society which, as I indicated earlier, involves a sense of historical development and continuity. Continuing this general theme, therefore, we can turn next to an examination of changes to family and household structures and their relationship to processes of industrialisation and urbanisation.

Family and household changes

Introduction

As I have just noted, the focus of this section is an examination of changes in family and household structure and their relationship to industrialisation and urbanisation. To understand the nature and extent of such changes we need to do two main things: firstly, we have to outline what we mean by:

- family and household structure
- industrialisation
- urbanisation.

Secondly, we need to examine how family and household structures have changed historically in our society and how such changes can be related to processes of industrialisation and urbanisation.

WARM UP: FAMILY GENOGRAMS

A genogram originally developed by **McGoldrick** and **Gerson** (*Genograms in Family Assessment*, 1985) is a way of describing family relationships and their structure. It is similar to a family tree, but a little more sophisticated in terms of the information it contains.

Draw a genogram for your family (using the examples of McGoldrick and Gerson's notation over leaf).

Start by identifying your immediate family and work outwards from there . . .

Males are indicated by squares, females by

circles. Marriage/cohabitation is shown by an unbroken line.

The person drawing the genogram is indicated by a double box. Put the birth date of each family member at the top left.

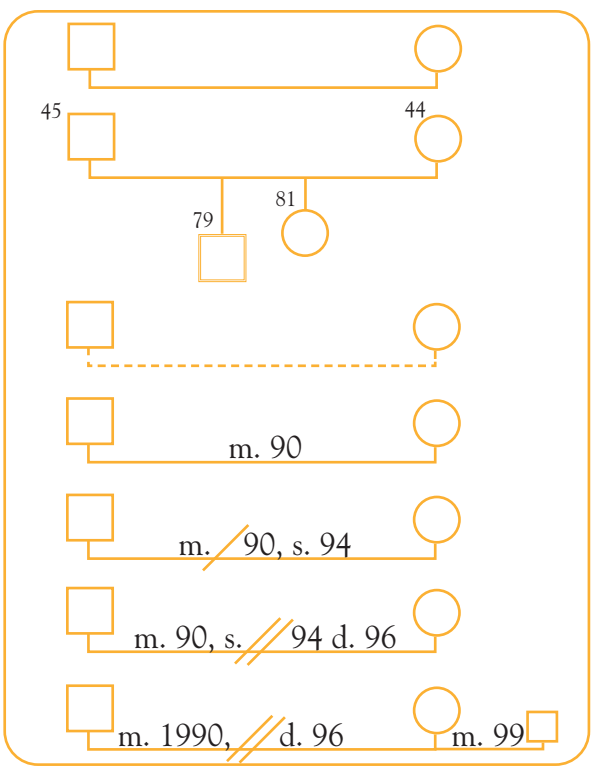
Links between living family members can be indicated as a broken line. Indicate the relationship (uncle, for example) beneath the line.

Marriage dates are recorded above the link line.

A separation is recorded by a slash (with date) along the line.

Divorce is recorded as above, except two lines are used.

Remarriage (or ex-marriage) is indicated to one side with a smaller shape.



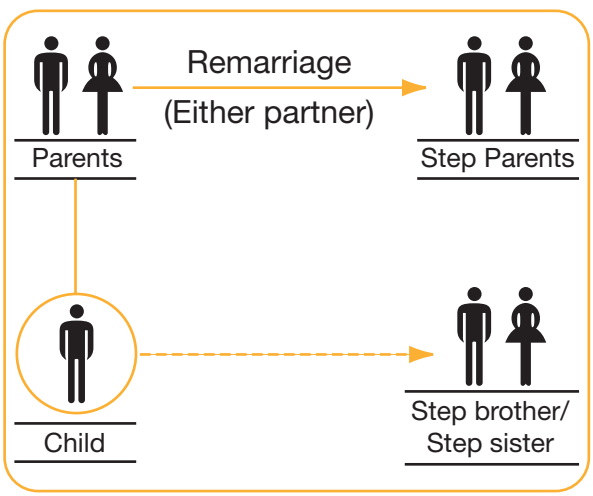
Preparing the ground

Family/household structure is based on the idea we can identify differences in the way people relate to each other; in other words (going back to the work we did on the concept of structure in Chapter 1) family and household structures are *differentiated* (or different) from each other on the basis of the different lifestyles, values and norms surrounding people's relationships. The following examples of different family and household structures make this a little more understandable:

- **Nuclear** families consist of two generations of family members (parents and children) living in the same household. Contacts with wider kin (aunts and cousins, for example) are usually infrequent and more likely to involve 'impersonal contacts' such as the telephone or email. For this reason, this family structure is sometimes called an *isolated nuclear* (reflecting its isolation from wider kin and it's 'economic isolation' from the rest of society) or *conjugal* family – a self-contained unit where family members are expected to support each other socially, economically and psychologically.
- **Extended** families, as the name suggests, involve additional family members. This structure comes in three basic flavours:
  - **Vertically extended** consists of three or more generations (grandparents, parents and children) living in the same household (or very close to each other). *Matrifocal* families are a

variation on this type of family structure in that they involve (or are focused on) women (a female grandparent, female parent and children). Conversely, *patrifocal* families (quite rare in our society) are focused on men.

- **Horizontally extended** involves relations such as aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. (relations of the same generation as the parents). These 'extensions' to the basic family group branch out within generations – a wife's sister and her partner, for example, living with the family group. *Polygamous* families (where one man lives with many women or vice versa) sometimes take this form – the parents may, for example, be drawn from the same generation.
- **Modified-extended** refers, according to **Michael Gordon** (*The Nuclear Family in Crisis: The Search for an Alternative*, 1972) to the idea that wider family members keep in regular touch with each other. This may be both physically (in the sense of visiting or exchanging help and services) and emotionally (contacts by telephone, email and the like). Related to this idea is a distinction drawn by **Peter Wilmott** ('Urban Kinship Past and Present', 1988) when he talks about **local extended** families, involving 'two or three nuclear families in separate households' living close together and providing mutual help and assistance; **dispersed extended** families, involving less frequent personal contacts; and **attenuated extended** families involving, for example, 'young couples before they have children', gradually separating from their original families.
- **Single-parent** families involve a single adult plus their dependent children. Although this is more likely to be a female parent, a significant proportion involve a male parent. This type of family is sometimes called a *broken nuclear* family, because it often – but not always – arises from the break-up of a two-parent family.
- **Reconstituted** (or '*step*') families (usually nuclear in form) result from the break-up of one family (through things like death or divorce) and its reconstitution as a unique family by remarriage or cohabitation. It may, therefore, involve children from a previous family as well as the new family.



A reconstituted (step) family

- **Homosexual** families: Usually nuclear in form, this type of family involves adults of the same sex plus children (own or adopted). Homosexual couples cannot currently legally marry in the UK (a Labour Government Bill to recognise 'Civil Partnerships' – giving each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples – was rejected by the House of Lords in June 2004). Gay couples can, however, legally cohabit.

Tony Barlow and Barrie Drewitt, who have lived together since 1988, paid an American surrogate mother to carry twins artificially conceived using one of the partner's sperm.

Household structures in our society, involve the following:

- **Single households** consist (as you might have guessed) of an adult living alone. Traditionally, death and relationship breakdown have been the main reasons for this type of household, although there is increasing evidence people are choosing to live this way (in 2003, for example, 13% of all households consisted of a single person).
- **Couple households** consist of two people living without children. In 2003, 25% of all households were of this type, making it the second most common household type after couples with dependent children (38% of all households).
- **Shared households** are not particularly common and involve, for whatever reason, a group of people living together. This may be a temporary arrangement (such as students sharing a flat) or a permanent arrangement whereby families/individuals live together as a *commune*.

We can complete the first part of this section by briefly outlining what we mean by the concepts of:

- **Industrialisation** – a process whereby machines are extensively applied to the production of goods in society (*mechanisation*). One result of this process is the development of factories and the ability to mass produce consumer goods (clothes, cars, mobile phones). Related to this process is the concept of:
- **Urbanisation**, which involves the idea of population movement away from rural (village) living to larger communities based in towns and cities. This is sometimes called social migration from the countryside (rural areas) to towns – urban areas which developed as industrialisation and factory production developed.

Digging deeper

Having familiarised ourselves with some basic concepts about family and household structures, industrialisation and urbanisation, we need to explore the relationship between these ideas. To do this, we need to frame debates about possible changes in this relationship within a sociological context, one that involves thinking about the relationship between *social change* and *social behaviour* in a historical context – and to explore possible historical changes within both society and family structures, we need

to do two things: firstly, establish a framework for our analysis of social change and secondly examine historical changes in society and how they link to economic changes over time. Since we want to look at the effects of industrialisation, we can organise the framework in terms of the characteristics of three 'historical types' of society, namely:

- **pre-industrial** (or *pre-modern*)
- **industrial** (or *modern*) and
- **post-industrial** (or *postmodern*).

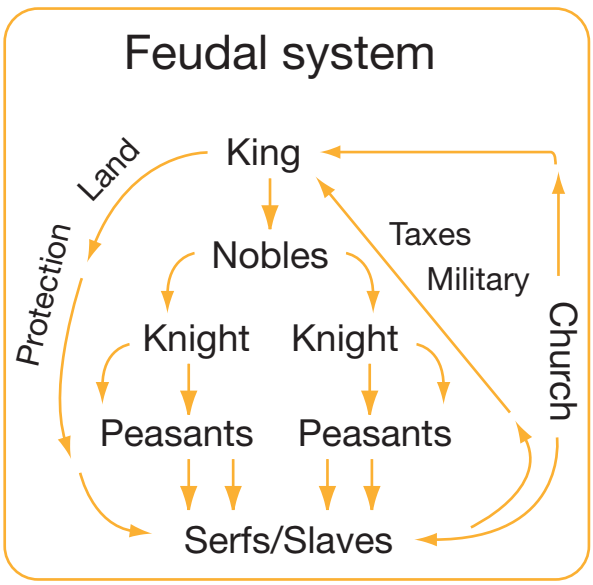
The table below identifies a range of significant social and economic features of each of these basic types. When referring to this table, keep the following in mind:

- **Types of society**: These are not 'hard-and-fast' categories – pre-modern society didn't end abruptly, to be replaced by modern society. The table simply helps you identify some possible differences between different types of society.
- **Post-modernity**: There are arguments within sociology about whether we now live in a postmodern/post-industrial society. I have included it as a type here mainly because it's easy to make the mistake of thinking 'industrialisation' is something that happened a long time ago. Whatever we want to call present day society (postmodern or *late modern*, for example) the important thing is to relate family and household change to both an understanding of the past *and* the present.
- **Mass production** refers to the idea that machines were used to produce goods to a standard design, cheaply enough to make them available to large numbers of people.
- **Service production** refers to the idea that providing services to people (either physically – as in McDonald's – or through things like banking, insurance and knowledge-based systems) is the dominant form of economic activity in postmodern society.
- **Feudal** refers to a political system involving a major social distinction between the Nobility (large

	Pre-modern	Modern	Post-modern
Time	Pre-18th century	18th-late 20th century	Late-20th century to present
Features of economic production	Pre-industrial Agriculture Tools	Industrial Mass production Mechanisation	Post-industrial Service production Automation
Scale	Local	National	Global
Political system	Feudal	Capitalist	Late capitalist

Table 2.2 Selected characteristics of types of society in Britain

landowners) and the Peasantry (largely landless).



- **Capitalist** refers to a political system based on a class distinction between owners (employers) and workers (employees).

In the table I have suggested significant historical changes in our society based on the idea of economic changes to the way goods are made and services provided. There is, in this respect, little doubt Britain today is a very different place to Britain 500 years ago and it would not be difficult to establish changes in, for example, personal relationships (family or otherwise) between these two periods. However, the crucial question we need to explore next is the extent to which the social changes created by industrialisation and urbanisation produced changes in family and household structures.

Family and household changes

Preparing the ground

In terms of the question just posed, there are two basic positions we need to examine. The first argument suggests **industrialisation** and **urbanisation** were important factors in the promotion of family and household change. These processes, as they developed over a couple of hundred years between the late seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries, radically changed the nature of work and economic production as Britain gradually moved from an *agrarian* (agricultural) to an *industrial* (factory-based) society. This change in the nature and organisation of work – from the land-based, rural, agricultural, family-centred, organisation of pre-industrial society to the capital-intensive, urban, industrial, factory-centred, organisation of industrial society – produced, from this viewpoint, radical **family and household changes**. The basic argument here is that family structures changed from the predominantly extended-family organisation of pre-industrial society to the predominantly nuclear family organisation of industrial society. The main reason for this was that industrialisation saw the development of factories and, in turn, the rapid growth of large urban centres (towns and cities) to support and supply labour for factory-based production.

To accommodate such changes, the old extended families of pre-industrial society

(ideally suited to the demands of a family-based, subsistence form of farming) were broken down into nuclear families that fitted the economic requirements of:

- **geographic mobility** – the need for families to move to towns and factories
- **labour flexibility** – the need to move to where jobs were located.

Industrialisation, therefore, was seen as the motor for family change – people were forced to change the way they lived to accommodate new forms of economic production.

If we trace this idea into the late twentieth/early twenty-first century, a similar pattern emerges, but this time the emphasis is on family **fragmentation and diversity**. The nuclear family structures created by industrialisation and urbanisation are disrupted by the needs of global economic systems and work processes, processes of de-industrialisation (a decline in the economic importance of manufacturing) and of de-urbanisation (a move away from towns and cities to the countryside).

The second, alternative, argument also involves thinking, initially, about **industrialisation and urbanisation**. The argument here is that these occurred in Britain (the first country to industrialise) *because* pre-industrial family structures were mainly nuclear and thus ideally positioned to take advantage of new economic opportunities requiring family mobility and flexibility; in other words, pre-industrial family structures – with few unbreakable physical or emotional ties with extended kin – are seen as the motor for subsequent industrial development.

In addition, the relatively large number of extended households in pre-industrial times (which included, for example, servants who had few, if any, emotional or economic ties with their employers) also represented flexible structures that could adapt relatively easily to the changed economic world. This idea of flexibility translates relatively easily to **post-modern society**, which, so this argument goes, requires highly flexible family and household structures if new economic opportunities are to be grasped and exploited. Our society, it is suggested, has already evolved fragmentary family and household structures (through industrialisation and changes to legal relationships – the easy availability of divorce, the growth of single-parent families and single-person households etc.) that are well-suited to taking on board globalised forms of work (living and working in different countries, working at home using computer technology and so forth).

Having identified two opposing sides to the debate, therefore, we need to examine the historical evidence to help us decide which, if any, of these two arguments best describes the relationship between changes in family and household structures, industrialisation and urbanisation.

Digging deeper

Evidence for the first argument (generally known as the 'Fit Thesis' because it proposed a close fit between changes in family structures, industrialisation and urbanisation) has been put forward by Functionalist writers such as **Parsons** ('The Social Structure of the Family', 1959) and **Goode** (*World Revolution and Family Patterns*, 1963) as well as, in a slightly different way,

the social action theorist **Max Weber** (*The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904).

In basic terms, extended family structures were seen as the norm for pre-industrial society because they were:

- **Multi-functional**: A wide family network performed a range of different functions related to the economic and social well-being of family members.
- **Kinship-based**: Members of the extended family group shared not only a household, but a common economic position that involved working together as a social group (mainly as subsistence farmers but also in various craft trades – brewing and baking, for example – within the home).
- **Economically productive**: People lived and worked within a family group that provided the only viable means for their physical survival.

This situation arose, according to this argument, for three main reasons.

- **Agriculture**: Labour-intensive farm work required as many people as possible to work the land.
- **Geographic mobility**: The ability to move away from the family group was severely limited by poor communications (no railways or cars, basic road systems and so forth). This meant, in effect, family members – even if they had wanted to – were physically unable to move far from the family home.
- **Society**: In pre-industrial society there was no well-developed welfare system (few hospitals existed, for example) which meant family members relied on their own resources when it came to looking after and caring for the sick, the elderly and so forth.

The development of industrial society produced, according to this view, a structural family change – nuclear families became dominant because of the demands of factory forms of production and the opportunities this system created.

- **Geographic mobility**: People had to be mobile to find and keep work in the new industrial processes. There was a huge – if gradual – movement away from rural areas to the developing towns and, in such a situation, the extended family of pre-industrial society gradually broke down.
- **Social mobility**: New opportunities arose for social mobility and economic advancement as different types of work developed – people were no longer simply subsistence farmers. However, to seize these new opportunities, families had to be ready and willing to move to those areas where the chances of economic advancement were greatest.

- **Nepotism** (favouring your relations over others) was no longer a significant social asset (as it was in extended families), since the new industries demanded the demonstration of skills and knowledge rather than family connections.

If we extend this argument to post-industrial society we can identify significant changes to both family and household structures.

- **Family structures**: One feature of post-industrial society is the increasing *diversity* and *fragmentation* of family life – notwithstanding **Chester**'s observation (*The Rise of the Neo-conventional Family*, 1985) that the majority of people in Britain still live at least part of their life within some form of nuclear family structure. Just as, in the industrial period, family structures changed to accommodate new forms of economic organisation, so too, in the post-industrial period, further changes have occurred.

  New forms of working (especially through computer technology and networking) open up opportunities for homeworking which, in turn, means single-parent families are, potentially, no longer excluded from the workforce. The relatively small size of nuclear families and improved communications (such as the ability to stay in close contact with extended family members relatively easy) makes this family group increasingly mobile – both in terms of national and international movement.
- **Households**: One of the features of post-industrial society is the increase in the number of single-person households, indicative, according to this argument, of the way economic changes have impacted on people's behaviour. The single-person household is, of course, potentially the most geographically mobile of all family/household structures and reflects the changing (increasingly global) nature of work.

Having outlined the evidence for the first argument, we can turn to an alternative interpretation of the relationship between family and household structures and industrialisation.

Pre-industrial society

Carlin ('Family, Society and Popular Culture in Western Europe c. 1500–1700', 2002) argues, 'most households in early modern Western Europe were nuclear family households, i.e. all the blood relations they contained were one couple and their children'. Although extended families existed, the main reasons for this type of family not being more common seem to be:

- **Life expectancy**: Average life expectancy was low (around 35–40 years) and, consequently, parents didn't always live long enough to become grandparents. Although this may have been a reason for many families remaining nuclear, we should note calculations of *average* life expectancies in pre-modern societies may be biased by high rates of infant and child mortality (large numbers of children dying drags the average down).
- **Choice**: **Carlin** (2002) notes that some parts of Western Europe, with similar birth and death rates to Britain, contained more vertically extended (sometimes called *stem*) families. This suggests, at least in part, people in Britain were choosing not to live in extended family structures.

- **Retirement**: Demographic evidence (information about how people live) from areas where people did survive into old age suggests they were expected to retire into households separated from their children.
- **Extended households**: **Peter Laslett** (*The World We Have Lost*, 1965 and *Household and Family in Past Time*, 1972) notes that upper-class households frequently included both wider kin and servants (mainly because there was sufficient room for them to live within the household). Lower-class households, although frequently nuclear because of high mortality rates among the elderly, probably contained 'lodgers' (who are likely to have been kin) staying temporarily within the family group. Laslett, however, estimates only 10% of pre-industrial households contained more than two generations of kin.
- **Modified extended structures**: **Michael Gordon** (1972) suggests arguments that the extended family was dominant in pre-industrial society confuse *temporary extensions* to a family (such as a relative living within a nuclear family for a short period) with the idea of a *permanent extended family* structure which, he argues, 'is seldom actually encountered in any society, pre-industrial or industrial'.

According to this argument, therefore, the mainly nuclear pre-industrial family was actually necessary for industrialisation.

Industrialisation

Harris ('The Family and Industrial Society', 1983) argues nuclear family structures dominated pre-industrial society because industrialisation required:

- An **inheritance system** that concentrated wealth, making capital (investment money) available to relatively small numbers of people. A close-knit, nuclear structure allied to a system of *primogeniture* (inheritance, by the first-born son, of a family's total wealth) made this possible. In addition, it forced those who didn't inherit to move away from the family home. **Wegge's** (really quite fascinating) research into peasant population movements in Germany ('To Part or Not to Part', 1999) supports this idea when she notes, 'it is the primogeniture institution which better promotes emigration'.
- **Population growth**: According to the Office for National Statistics, the population of England and Wales trebled between 1700 (6 million) and 1851 (18 million), indicating the existence of a large, landless, potential workforce. This is significant because it suggests geographic mobility wasn't a requirement for the development of industrialisation since what we see here is a population explosion in urban areas, rather than migration from the countryside to towns.
- **Migration**: If ideas about population growth are valid, it suggests urbanisation didn't result from the break-up and migration of extended rural families; rather, it occurred as the result of the population growing rapidly during the early industrial period.

Rosemary O'Day (*Women in Early Modern Britain*, 2000), for example, notes that a large rural class of agricultural labourers existed in the seventeenth century. They

owned no land and lived by selling their labour outside the family group.

In terms of this argument, therefore, **Michael Anderson** (*Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, 1995) points out there were 'many continuities' of family structure during the change from agricultural to industrial forms of production, during which no single family or household structure was wholly dominant. Thus, although we have focused on extended/nuclear family and household structures, this doesn't mean other types (with the possible exception of gay families) were not in evidence. Both reconstituted and single-parent family structures, for example, existed in pre-industrial societies, mainly because of high adult death rates, especially among the lower classes.

However, the historical evidence does suggest that, at least during some part of the industrialisation/urbanisation process, changes to family and household structures did occur, especially in relation to social class and the increasing diversity of family and household structures. **Anderson** (1995), for example, notes the working classes, during the process of industrialisation, developed a broadly extended family structure which resulted from:

- **Urbanisation**: As towns rapidly developed around factories, pressure on living space (and the relative underdevelopment of communications) resulted in extended family living arrangements.
- **Mutual aid:** The lack of state welfare provision meant working class families relied on a strong kinship network for their survival. During periods of sickness and unemployment, for example, family members could provide for each other.
- **Employment**: Where the vast majority could barely read or write, an 'unofficial' kinship network played a vital part in securing employment for family members through the process of 'speaking out' (suggesting to an employer) for relatives when employers needed to recruit more workers.
- **Child care**: Where both parents worked, for example, relatives played a vital part in child care. In addition, high death rates meant the children of dead relatives could be brought into the family structure. In an age of what we would now call child labour, young relatives could be used to supplement family income.

Middle-class family structures tended to be nuclear, mainly because of:

- **Education**: The increasing importance of education (for male children) and its cost meant middle class families were relatively smaller than their working class counterparts.
- **Geographic mobility** among the class from which the managers of the new industrial enterprises were recruited weakened extended family ties.

Upper-class family structures, according to **Roger Gomm** (*The Uses of Kinship*, 1989) have historically been a mixture of nuclear and extended types, although extended family networks, even up to the present day, are used to maintain property relations and for mutual economic aid amongst kin.

In addition, wealth meant extended kin (such as elderly grandparents) could be relatively easily accommodated within the family home and the evidence suggests it was – and still is to some degree – relatively

common for the vertically-extended family to exist among the upper classes.

Post-industrial society

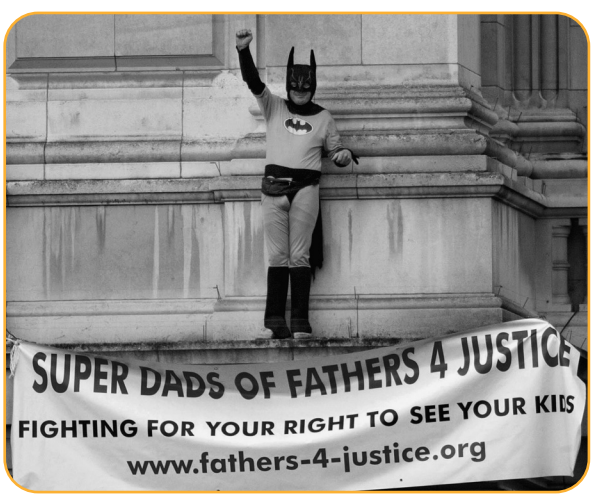
Family and households structures in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries are, arguably, more complex, fragmented and diverse than at any time in our history, ideas we can briefly examine in the following terms.

- **Diversity**: As we have seen earlier, our society is characterised by a wide range of different family and household structures (nuclear, reconstituted, single-parent, gay and extended) apparently co-existing. It is, however, difficult to disentangle this diverse range of family structures, for two reasons.
  - Nuclear family structures seem to be the dominant family form, although they clearly involve a range of different family relationships; a single-parent family contains a different set of relationships to those in a reconstituted family, for example. The question here, therefore, is the extent to which either or both these family structures can be characterised as nuclear families.
  - Definitions of nuclear and extended family structures determine, to some degree, your view of their relationship. For example, **Willmott**'s (1988) concept of a dispersed extended family appears to plausibly characterise many types of family relationship in our society – what we have here, therefore, is a basic nuclear family structure surrounded and supported by extended family networks (and whether or not you count this structure as nuclear or extended depends, as I have suggested, on how you define such things).
- **Social changes**: Relatively easy access to divorce (resulting from legal changes over the past 50 years) has led to greater numbers of reconstituted/single-parent families and single-person households.
- **Social attitudes**: Whatever the origins of such changes, it is clear lifestyle factors, in terms of greater social acceptance of single-parent and homosexual family structures, has played some part in creating family structural diversity. The Office for National Statistics (2000), for example, recorded 26% of all families with dependent children as containing a single adult parent.
- **Life expectancy**: Increased life expectancy, a more active lifestyle and changes to the welfare system (which in recent years has encouraged the de-institutionalisation of the elderly) has created changes within family structures, giving rise to the concept of a *new grandparenting* (grandparents play a greater role in the care of grandchildren, for example, than in the recent past). These trends have led to what **Julia Brannen** ('The age of beanpole families', 2003) calls the *beanpole family structure* – a form of inter-generational (different generations of family members), vertically-extended family structure with very weak intra-generational (people of the same generation – brothers and sisters, for example) links.

  Similarly, **Bengston** ('Beyond the nuclear family', 2001) speculates about the extent to which the phenomenon of increasing bonds between different generations of family members (as represented, for

example, by the new grandparenting) represents 'a valuable new resource for families in the 21st century'.

- **Ambivalence**: **Luscher**, ('Ambivalence: A key concept for the study of intergenerational relations', 2000) on the other hand, suggests that people are becoming increasingly uncertain (ambivalent) about family structures and relationships in the light of family changes. Increases in divorce, for example, have led to the widespread creation of single-parent and reconstituted families. These may have resulted in a weakening of family relationships as family members seek to create new social spaces for themselves and their (new) families away from the relationships that previously existed in their lives. One result of these changes, perhaps, is families seeking 'to put geographical distance between different family generations'.



- **Households**: Finally, one of the most striking features of our society is the growth of lone person households. In 2003, for example, this household type was the single most common family or household structure in our society – according to the Office for National Statistics (Social Trends 34, 2004), 29% of families and households in the UK now involve a single person, marginally outstripping 'couples with no children' (28% of all family and household structures).

In turn, on current projections ('Complicated Lives II – the Price of Complexity', Abbey, 2002), the 'Couple with no children' household will soon be more common in our society than the 'Couple with children' family – at present, according to the Office for National Statistics (Social Trends 34, 2004), each of these types constitutes 28% of all family and household structures.

Growing it yourself

Having looked at the two arguments about the relationship between family and household structures, industrialisation and urbanisation:

1. Create a list (based on the following table) of what you think are the **three** most important strengths and weaknesses of each argument.

Argument 1		Argument 2	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
1.			
2.			
3.			

2. Based on the strengths and weaknesses you've identified, write a brief (500–600 words) comparison of the two arguments.

In this section we have looked at the debate surrounding the significance of historical family and household changes and, in the next section we can bring things a little more up to date by looking more closely at both the diversity of contemporary family structures and changing patterns of family relationships.

Family and household diversity and change

Introduction

In the two previous sections we have looked at the complexities of family life by considering, firstly, how this social group can be defined and, secondly, how different family structures have developed in our society across the centuries. We can build on this work in two main ways. Firstly, by investigating in more detail 'the diversity of contemporary family and household structure' (in other words, the differences within and between family and household groups). Once we've done this we can then examine 'changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce and child bearing'.

WARM UP: DISCUSSING FAMILY DIFFERENCES

One way of thinking about diversity is to discuss your family experiences with others. I have identified some questions to get you started in the table below. In small groups, discuss and record your answers to these questions – and any others that spring to mind during the discussion.

Your plans?	Division of labour	Rules	Parents and children	Structure
Do you plan to marry, have children, a career?	Who does what in your family – paid work, domestic work, child care, etc.?	Who makes the rules, what are they, how are they enforced (and by whom)?	What's the relationship between you and your parents? Do you have brothers and sisters? Natural or step-parents?	Is your family nuclear, extended, single-parent, etc.?

Preparing the ground

The previous exercise will have sensitised you to a range of differences – some minor and others quite major – between the family/household groups in which we live. We can develop this 'sense of difference' by identifying five main types of family and household diversity in contemporary Britain, using a general framework suggested by **Rhona** and **Robert Rappoport** (*Families in Britain*, 1982):

Organisational diversity

This refers to differences in family life and experiences both within and between family groups. In this respect we could think, for example, about differences in:

- **family structures**: nuclear and extended, for example
- **roles**: in terms of things like the household division of labour – who does what within the group?
- **status** of the family members: married or cohabiting, natural or step-parents etc.
- **relationships**: in terms of things like contact with extended kin, the extent to which the group is *patriarchal* (male dominated) or *matriarchal* (female dominated).

Cultural diversity

This refers to differences within and between different cultural (or *ethnic*) groups in terms of things like:

- **size**: the number of children within the family
- **marriage**: for example, whether the marriage is arranged by the parents or 'freely chosen' by the participants
- **division of labour**: considered in terms of whether family roles are patriarchal (for example, the male in paid employment and the female as housewife) or symmetrical (where roles and responsibilities are shared equally among family members).

Richard Berthoud's analysis of diversity amongst White British, Black Caribbean and South Asian families (*Family formation in multi-cultural Britain*, 2004) highlights a number of key differences within and between these broad ethnic groups. For example:

- **Black Caribbean** families are characterised by:
  - Low rates of marriage.
  - High levels of single parenthood. In 2001, 43% of Black or Black British families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent (Social Trends 34).
  - High rates of separation and divorce.
  - Relatively high levels of mixed partnerships (living with someone from a different (usually white) ethnic group).
  - Absent fathers (not living within the family home but maintaining family contacts).
- **South Asian** (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) families are characterised by:
  - High rates of marriage.
  - Low rates of separation/divorce/single-parenthood. In 2001, 11% of Asian/Asian British families were headed by a lone parent (Social Trends 34).

- Lower rates of mixed partnerships.
- Greater likelihood (especially among Muslims and Sikhs) of arranged marriage.
- Majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women look after home and family full time.
- High fertility rates among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.
- Larger family size (four or more children).
- Grandparents more likely to live with son's family.
- Patriarchy – power and authority more likely to reside with men.

If you want to review Berthoud's research, you can find a more detailed description at: www.sociology.org.uk/as4aqa.htm

Class diversity

This refers to divisions between social classes (upper, middle and working, for example) and within these broad groupings. For example, a distinction (identified originally by **Goldthorpe** et al's 'Affluent Worker' (1965) study) is sometimes made within working class families between the:

- **traditional family**, characterised by *segregated conjugal roles* (family members have different household and work roles, develop different leisure and friendship patterns and so forth) and the
- **privatised family**, which involves a 'home and child-centred' focus, characterised by the family partners having *joint conjugal roles* (where both partners may work and take responsibility for domestic labour tasks such as childcare) and common leisure and friendship networks (which is a sociologist's way of saying they do things together and have friends in common).

Diversity between social classes involves things like:

- **Relationships** between the sexes (whether the family group is patriarchal or symmetrical, for example). Middle-class families are more likely to be the latter.
- **Socialisation** of children (upper- and middle-class families, for example, tend to stress the significance of education and the importance of qualifications).

  Diane Reay ('Activating Participation', 2004) has also highlighted the importance of middle-class women's *emotional labour*, which is invested in their children's education; she notes, for example, the active educational involvement of many middle-class women in terms of helping their children, monitoring school progress, questioning teachers about their children's school performance and so forth.
- **Kinship networks** and their importance, considered in terms of the different level and type of help (financial, practical and the like) family members can provide.

Life-cycle

This refers to differences occurring at different stages of a family's lifetime. This may include factors such as:

- **Age**: The family experience of a young couple with infant children is quite different from that of an elderly couple with adult children who may have left home and started a families of their own.

- **Attachment**: For example, families with children of school age may become dual-income families, with both partners working for at least part of the day. This family's experience will be very different to that of a single-parent family.

Generational differences

These may be in evidence in terms of how people of similar generations have broadly shared experiences. For example, family members who were raised during the 1940s have the experience of war and post-war austerity (hardship – things like the experience of rationing, for example); family members who grew up during the 1980s, on the other hand, may well have developed very different attitudes and lifestyles.

The extent to which the generations are linked (such as the relationship between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren) is also relevant here.

Although *family diversity* is clearly important, we also need to keep in mind the increasing significance of *household diversity* in our society. We can, for example, develop some ideas about the 'non-family' households we identified earlier in this chapter.

Single person households have some interesting features:

- **Proportion**: One-person households in our society have doubled in the past 40 years (from 14% in 1961 to 29% in 2003).
- **Age**: Within this group, an important demographic change is the proportion of people under retirement age living in single person households – just over 50% in 2003, up from 33% in 1961.
- **Region**: This type of household is more likely to be found in urban areas, especially large cities such as London and Glasgow.

Discussion point: single people

Brighton and Manchester are two areas in the UK that have the highest proportion of single households, whereas Northern Ireland has the lowest.

What single factor might explain this difference? (For the answer, see below under Region.)

Couples with no children are a significant household type, although over the past 40 years their proportion has remained largely unchanged (at 30–35% of all households and 28% of all families and households). Within single-person/couple households we could note differences in:

- **Economics**: Important distinctions can be made between employed and unemployed single people, for example, as well as between dual and single-income couples. Each group's economic situation will impact on their lifestyles and relationships.
- **Age and lifestyle**: a young single person, for example, is likely to have a very different lifestyle from an elderly single person.
- **Region**: Urban areas such as Brighton, Manchester and London have large gay communities which contributes to their high percentage of single-person households.

Shared households cover a range of differences, from the not uncommon (a

group of friends living together – short or long term – to share rent and living costs) to the less common communal living arrangements we find in some societies (the *kibbutzim* of Israel, for example). Again, the lifestyles and experiences of these diverse groups are likely to be very different.

Digging deeper

When we start to think about the extent of family and household diversity – and its possible social implications – there are a number of observations and explanations we need to consider. Before we do so, however, it is important to note that when thinking about the extent of such diversity in our society a pertinent question might be 'How deep do you want to go to discover diversity?'

In other words, if you drill down deeply enough you'll find differences between every family or household relating to how they're structured and organised in terms of roles and relationships. There comes a point when sociologists have to draw some sort of line about diversity – but, unfortunately, there are no guidelines to tell us where to draw such a line. Keeping this idea in mind, however, we can make the following observations about diversity in terms of:

- **Family structures**: Although we have identified a range of diversity here, we can note that, depending on how you draw your definition, nuclear family structures are the general norm in our society (if you assume the majority of single-parent families were originally nuclear and would like – given suitable opportunities – to be nuclear or will, at some point in the future, become nuclear).

  On the other hand, we could probably make a convincing argument that some type of modified extended *family* is the norm, given many families enjoy some form of contact with extended kin.
- **Family processes**: The idea of diversity in family relationships may be overstated. The 'cereal packet family' (consisting of married adults with one male and one female child living in a loving relationship where dad earns the money and mum does the housework) beloved of media and advertising may not be a realistic representation of family life, but, following **Chester**'s (1985) argument, most people are, at some point in their life, either living in nuclear-type arrangements or, perhaps more significantly, wanting to live in that type of arrangement.

Explanations

It is one thing to observe the idea of family and household diversity (however we choose to define it), but it is quite another to explain it. It is possible, though, to identify factors that contribute to diversity, in terms of **demographic changes**, that relate to things like:

- **Life expectancy**: As the following table illustrates, people in our society are generally living longer.

Average Life expectancy (years)	1926	2001
Women	59.3	80.4
Men	55.4	75.7

Table 2.3

In addition, the overall population is generally ageing; that is, there are proportionately more elderly than young

people in the population (a consequence of longer life expectancy and a declining birth rate). These ideas are significant for family diversity in a couple of ways. Firstly, couples are potentially living together for longer (especially after their children have left home) and the longer a relationship has to last, the more likely it is, statistically, to end in separation or divorce. Secondly, it raises the increased possibility of grandparents becoming involved in the raising of their grandchildren (allowing both parents to have paid work, for example).

- **Relationships**: Apart from things like a relative decline in the number of people marrying, an increase in the number cohabiting and an increasing likelihood of people choosing to remain single/unattached throughout their lifetime, the average age at which men and women marry is increasing, as the following table demonstrates:

Average age at first marriage	1971	2001
Men	24.6	30.6
Women	22.6	28.4

Table 2.4

Some consequences of this particular trend include smaller families and increased opportunities for women to establish a career before marrying and then returning to that career after completing a family.

- **Immigration**: Diversity has been increased by different forms of family organisation and relationships among immigrant groups.
- **Family size**: The trend towards smaller families (the average size is now 1.6 children, compared with 2.3 in 1950 and 4 in 1900) releases adults from childcare responsibilities and increase the opportunities for both partners to have paid work outside the home.

Economic changes include ideas like:

- **Female independence**: According to **Abercrombie** and **Warde** (*Contemporary British Society*, 1992), 'One of the most significant changes in the labour market in the 20th century is the rising proportion of married women returning to work after completing their families . . . Greater participation by women in paid work and changes in family structure thus seem to be closely related'.
- **Affluence**: The relationship between poverty and family size is well documented (poorer families tend to have more children), so it is little surprise to find a relationship between increasing affluence and smaller families.
- **Globalisation**: As our society becomes ever more open to influences from other cultures, we're presented with a greater range of choices about how to behave. This has a couple of dimensions: firstly, family and household arrangements from one society may be introduced into another (different ideas about male and female roles, for example) and, secondly, it opens up the potential for a *hybridisation* of family and household cultures – that is, a situation in which two different cultural family forms combine to produce a new and slightly different form.

Attitude and lifestyle changes involve a range of different factors:

- **Sexuality**: Increasing tolerance of 'alternative sexualities' (homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality and the like) and lifestyles (such as transvesticism) serves to increase household diversity.

The popular comedian Eddie Izzard are we, as a society, more tolerant of alternative sexualities such as Transvesticism than in the past?

- **Religion**: The decline in the power of organised religion amongst some ethnic groups – known as *secularisation* – may account for increases in cohabitation, the decline of marriage, the availability of remarriage after divorce and so forth. Conversely, among some ethnic groups the reverse may be true – their religion may put great emphasis on marriage and disallow divorce.
- **Femininity and masculinity**: Changes in the way we view our bodies (and our sexuality) create changing meanings for male and female lives. Women in the twenty-first century are less likely to define their femininity in terms of child-rearing and domestic labour than their grandmothers, for example. Similarly, changing perceptions of masculinity have resulted in changes to how some men view family roles and relationships.

Legal/technological changes make important contributions to diversity in terms of:

- **Divorce**: Legal changes relating to both the availability and cost of divorce encourage diversity through the development of different family structures. Similarly, changes in attitudes to divorce, step- and single-parenting have resulted in less stigma (social disapproval) being attached to these statuses.
- **Medical**: The availability of contraception (enabling couples to plan their families) and abortion change the way people relate to each other in terms of starting and continuing families.

In this section we have outlined a number of observations about family and household diversity and suggested a range of social and economic factors contributing to this process. As you should be aware however, the concept of diversity does not simply involve listing examples and offering general explanations; sociologically, it has a moral dimension, in the sense it would be useful to understand the social and psychological implications of family diversity.

In this respect, **Bren Neale** ('Theorising Family, Kinship and Social Change', 2000), poses the question, 'How are we to view the diversity and fluidity of contemporary patterns of partnering, parenting and kinship?', and answers it in terms of two further questions: 'Should we view these transformations with optimism or, at least, accept the reality of them and attempt to

work with them, or should we view them as a cause for concern?'

To complete this section, therefore, it would be useful to outline some of the views associated with these two basic perspectives on diversity, beginning with a perspective that generally views family diversity as a 'cause for concern'.

New Right perspectives

These perspectives on family diversity can be summarised in terms of how they view **family structures**. The traditional (heterosexual) nuclear family is seen as more desirable than other family structures – such as single-parent families, for example – because it provides a sense of social, economic and psychological stability, family continuity and primary socialisation. It is, for New Right theorists, an arena in which, according to **Neale**'s (2000) characterisation, 'traditional family values' are emphasised and reinforced, thereby creating a sense of individual and social responsibility that forms a barrier against 'rampant, selfish, individualism'. In other words, within the traditional family children and adults learn certain moral values that are continually reinforced through their relationship with family members. In this respect, **family relationships** are seen as a crucial source of both individual happiness and, perhaps more importantly, social stability because of the moral core at the heart of such relationships – a sense of morality that includes things like:

- caring for family members
- taking responsibility for the behaviour of children
- economic provision for both partners and children
- developing successful interpersonal relationships.

Patricia Morgan (*Marriage-Lite*, 2000), for example, argues a marriage – rather than cohabiting – is a more desirable relationship state for both individuals and societies. For Morgan, this is not just a moral argument but also one based on the notion that cohabitation is not simply, to paraphrase **Penelope Leach** (*Children First*, 1994), 'Marriage without a piece of paper'. On the contrary, Morgan asserts cohabitation is:

- **Unstable**: She notes, for example, the fragility of cohabiting relationships in terms of the idea that they 'are always more likely to fracture than marriages entered into at the same time, regardless of age and income'. In addition, cohabiting couples tend to behave in a more sexually promiscuous way than married couples ('Cohabitants behave more like single people than married people', as she puts it) – another reason, she argues, for the instability of this type of family relationship.
- **Fragmentary**, in the sense that their instability means cohabitating couples with children who marry are statistically more likely to divorce. Of those who never marry, '50% of the women will be lone unmarried mothers by the time the child is ten'. One reason for this, Morgan argues, is that, unlike marriage, cohabitation for women is 'not so much an ideal lifestyle choice as the best arrangement they can make at the time'.
- **Abusive**: both women and children, Morgan notes, are at greater risk of physical and sexual abuse 'than they would be in married relationships'.

Neale summarises the general New Right position on family and household diversity in terms of:

- **Community**: Stable family relationships – such as those created within married, heterosexual, dual-parent nuclear families – provide significant emotional and psychological benefits to family members that override any possible dysfunctional aspects. In addition, a sense of personal and social responsibility is created which is translated into benefits for the community in general, for example, children being given clear moral and behavioural guidance within traditional family structures.
- **Commitment** to others, both in terms of family and the community, is encouraged by the sense of moral duty created through stable family relationships. Within the traditional family, for example, each adult partner plays a role – such as breadwinner or domestic worker – that involves a sense of personal sacrifice and commitment to other family members.
- **Morality**: Developing from the above, the notion that any type of family structure is just as good – or bad – as any other (what New Right theorists call 'moral relativism') is not only mistaken but dangerous since it questions the concept of moral commitment to others – both family and community – which, for the New Right, sits at the heart of social responsibility. They emphasise, in this respect, the need for a moral consensus that encourages 'beneficial' forms of family structure and 'discourages' forms – such as single-parenthood – that are seen as damaging to both individuals and communities.

An alternative interpretation of family diversity suggests it should be embraced, either because it points the way forward to an optimistic realignment of family roles and relationships or, not to put too fine a point on it, because it is going to happen whether we want it to or not.

Postmodern perspectives

This view of the world is neatly summarised by **Zeitlin** et al (*Strengthening the Family: Implications for International Development*, 1998) when they note: 'The post-modern world is shaped by pluralism, democracy, religious freedom, consumerism, mobility, and increasing access to news and entertainment. Residents of this post-modern world are able to see that there are many beliefs, multiple realities, and an exhilarating but daunting profusion of world views – a society that has lost its faith in absolute truth and in which people have to choose what to believe'.

As you might expect, a number of ideas about family diversity follow from this type of view, which we can identify and summarise in the following terms.

- **Economic changes**: Global economic changes impact on national and local economies in numerous ways, one of which, according to Zeitlin et al, is the breakdown of 'economic forces underlying social conformity'. For example, in the past women generally needed to marry (as advantageously as they could) because they were either barred from the workplace or consigned to low-pay forms of work which made their financial survival problematic without male support. In addition, inheritance laws focused on the need to produce children

within marriage if they were to inherit land and property. Increasing economic independence and gradual changes in legal norms relating to inheritance no longer makes marriage an economic necessity for women.

- **Political changes**: One feature of globalisation – as it relates to political ideas – is the 'questioning of the old order' as people are increasingly exposed to new and different ways of doing things. In situations where the possibility of choice develops, it is hardly surprising to find people exercising such choices in their personal relationships and lifestyles – which, as the established political and legal order changes, results in family and relationship diversity.
- **Cultural changes**: Related to the above changes, the media contributes to relationship diversity by both exposing people to new ideas and, in some ways, endorsing or failing to condemn new types of family relationship. People become, in this respect, generally more accepting of single parents, surrogate mothers and gay and lesbian families.

For writers such as **Jagger** and **Wright** ('End of Century, End of Family?', 1999) attempts to 'turn back the tide of family diversity' and 'recapture an idealised "nuclear" version of family life where time stands still and traditional values are re-vitalised' is no longer a possibility or an option (presupposing, of course, it ever was). Family relationships reflect the wider economic, political and cultural changes in our society that have, according to different postmodernist writers, become characterised by things like:

- **Choice**: Just as when we go to the supermarket we expect a choice of things to buy, so too do we increasingly expect our personal relationships to be governed by choice.
- **Uncertainty**: **Smart** and **Neale** ('Good enough morality? Divorce and Postmodernity', 1997) draw our attention to the idea that, although the downside of increased choice is uncertainty ('Have I made the right choice?') we should not simply assume marriage, as opposed to cohabitation for example, involves greater personal certainty because it is legally sanctioned (it is legally more difficult to break away from a marriage than from a cohabiting relationship). On the contrary, perhaps, it is our knowledge of uncertainty – that a family relationship is not backed up by legal responsibilities and sanctions – that makes people work harder within such relationships to make them work.

Finally, we can note how **Neale** (2000) summarises the general postmodern position, in terms of a 'relational approach' to understanding family and household diversity that involves:

- **Commitment**: Family (and other personal) relationships are increasingly played out in *micro networks*. That is, people are increasingly likely to negotiate their relationships with other individuals in ways that take more account of personal needs and responsibilities, rather than, perhaps, worrying about what 'others in the community might think'.
- **Morality**: In situations where a wide diversity of family roles, relationships and structures exist, notions of social morality (that one way of living is better than any

other) become much weaker. In this respect, society in general becomes 'less judgemental' about how others choose to form family relationships (the idea of gay family structures, for example, being a case in point).

Family and household changes

Introduction

This section examines 'changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce and child bearing' and this involves, firstly, establishing what these respective patterns are (using a variety of statistical material) and, secondly, offering a range of explanations for why these patterns exist.

Marriage

Preparing the ground

When examining changing patterns of marriage we have to keep in mind that the picture is complicated by serial monogamy (in our society people can marry, divorce and remarry), which makes simple comparisons between past and present difficult. However, this doesn't mean marriage statistics tell us nothing of importance.

Look at 'Growing it yourself', below. From this we can note a number of broad changes:

- **First marriage**: A steady and absolute decline in the number of people marrying over the past 50 years.
- **Second marriage**: Conversely, remarriage (which includes second and subsequent marriages) peaked in the 1980s and has

Growing it yourself: thinking about marriage

What changing patterns of marriage can you identify in the following table?

Year	All marriages (000s)	First marriage (000s)	Remarriage (000s)	Remarriage as % of all marriages	UK population (Millions)
1901	360	–	–	–	38
1950	408	330	78	19	49
1960	394	336	58	15	51
1970	471	389	82	17	53
1980	418	279	139	33	53
1990	375	241	134	36	55
1999	301	180	128	43	56
2000	306	180	126	41	57
2001	286	180	106	37	58

Table 2.5 UK patterns of marriage
Source: Social Trends 34: 2004

since slowly declined. Remarriage, as a percentage of all marriages, has doubled in the past 50 years.

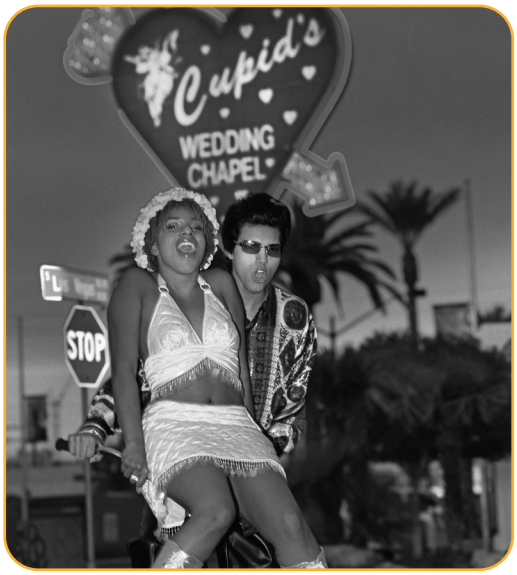
- **Marriage** was most popular just after the Second World War and during the 1970s, since when it has rapidly declined.

Digging deeper

There are a number reasons we can consider for changes in the popularity of marriage.

- **Alternatives**: In contemporary society the main alternative option is cohabitation (see below); this has increased in popularity in recent years and, although many cohabiting couples eventually marry, many do not.
- **Social pressures**: There is less stigma attached to both being unmarried and bearing/raising children outside marriage. These ideas, coupled with the easy availability of contraception (allowing sexual relationships outside marriage to be relatively free from the risk of conception) mean social pressures to marry have declined.
- **Secularisation**: For some (but by no means all) ethnic groups, the influence of religious beliefs and organisations has declined (secularisation), leading to changes in the meaning and significance of marriage. If people fail to see marriage as special or important, this opens the way to the development of other forms of partnership (such as cohabitation).

  In addition, if some men and women are increasingly choosing to remain childless, the legal and moral aspect of marriage may lose its significance, making it less likely for people to marry.



Does the increasing popularity of non-Church weddings indicate a decline in the religious significance of marriage?

- **Lifestyle**: The decision not to marry may have become something of a lifestyle choice. Among women especially, increased financial, career and personal independence may be reflected in decisions about alternative relationships – something related to both male and female expectations of marriage (questions of who, for example, is expected to perform child care and domestic labour roles).

  The argument here is that women are increasingly less likely, for a range of reasons, to enter into a relationship (such as marriage) that restricts their ability to work and develop a career. As **Andrew Oswald** ('Homes, Sex and the Asymmetry Hypothesis', 2002) argues:

  > Women are now more highly educated and can look after themselves financially. They do better at school than boys. They go to university in equal proportions to men and often go into better jobs. Their skills are in demand in the workforce. Nobody needs

brute strength any more, and certainly having brutes in a high-powered white-collar office, where teamwork matters, is worse than useless. In a sense, the modern world of work is better suited to females. In 2002 a lot of women do not depend on men.

- **Risk**: **Ulrich Beck** (*The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, 1992) has argued that, in contemporary society, people's behaviour is conditioned by their knowledge of risk – in other words, we increasingly reflect on and assess the likely consequences of our actions. In this respect, knowledge about the statistical likelihood of divorce – with all its emotional, legal and economic consequences – may lead people to the simple step of avoiding the risk by not marrying.
- **State support**: Until recently, the state offered a range of tax incentives (Married Man's (sic) Tax Allowance and Mortgage Interest Relief, for example) for couples to marry; these are no longer available.

Although the type of explanations for the decline in the popularity of marriage just noted are significant – either alone or in combination – we need to consider data reliability and validity. In terms of the reliability of contemporary (or recent) data, we can note two things.

- **Internal reliability**: All marriages are recorded by law and the definition of a marriage hasn't changed over the past 50 or so years, so we can be reasonably confident that marriage statistics accurately measure what they claim to measure.
- **Longitudinal changes** (changes over time) in marriage can be accurately tracked using official statistical data – but only up to a point.

The historical picture of marriage in our society is, however, complicated by:

- **divorce** – it wasn't, for example, available to most people 150 years ago
- **data availability** – marriage statistics were not collected as accurately in the nineteenth century, for example, as they are now.

These two factors make tracking long-term historical changes in the popularity of marriage both difficult and potentially unreliable.

When assessing the validity of marriage statistics, we need to keep in mind how population changes may affect their validity. To understand the significance of this idea we need to note two main ways in which marriage is measured.

- **Raw number** measures involve a simple counting of the number of people marrying in any given year. For example, in the previous table (UK Patterns of Marriage) we saw there were 286,000 recorded marriages in the UK in 2001. This type of measure, however, creates problems when we take into account differences in population size (in terms of both historical and cross-cultural comparisons). An obvious example here is any attempt to validly measure the relative popularity of marriage between the UK and the USA, using a 'raw number' measure, would have to take into account the large difference in population size (in 2001, for example, the UK population was approximately 58 million, while that of America was approximately 275 million).
- **Marriage rates** (as in the following table) can be both a more valid way of

	1981	1989	1993	2001	2002
UK	7.1	6.8	5.9	5.1	4.8
France	5.8	5.0	4.4	5.1	4.7
Ireland	6.0	5.0	4.4	5.1	5.1
Germany	5.8	6.4	5.5	4.7	4.7
Denmark	5.0	6.0	6.1	6.6	6.9
Spain	–	–	–	5.2	5.1

Table 2.6 Marriage rates (per 1000 population): Selected European countries
Source: Social Trends 30–34

measuring marriage and used as the basis for comparing both *historical* and *cross-cultural changes* in the popularity of marriage.

However, we need to keep in mind both these forms of measurement are sensitive to population changes, which we can illustrate in two ways.

Firstly, in terms of the overall number of people living in a particular society at a particular time, which we can illustrate by using the concept of a '**babyboom**'. During the Second World War in Britain people, for various reasons, delayed starting a family. In 1950, the average span for family completion (from the birth of the first to the last child) was 10 years and this compression of family formation is important because it produces a *population bulge* – a rapid, if temporary, increase in the number of children in society (a so-called *baby boom*). As these children reached adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s we saw an increase in the number of people marrying. For this reason, we shouldn't simply assume a rise in the number of people marrying means marriage has become more popular.

Having said that, the fact there are more people in a particular society doesn't necessarily mean there will be more marriages. For example, in the UK in 1901, there were 360,000 marriages for a total population of 38 million; in 2001, in a population of 58 million, there were 286,000 marriages. This would indicate a significant decline in the popularity of marriage, something seemingly confirmed by looking at marriage rates over the past 20 years – a near 32% decline in the UK.

Secondly, therefore, we need to understand how the validity of marriage statistics can be sensitive to changes in the *characteristics* of a population, which we can illustrate in terms of **marriageable cohorts**. This is the idea that, in any given population, some age groups (cohorts) are more likely than others to marry. We can see the significance of this idea – in relation to questions of whether or not marriage has declined in popularity – in a couple of ways.

Firstly, in any population there are 'peak periods' for marriage (the age range at which marriage is more likely – in 2001, for example, the average age at first marriage for men was 30 and for women 28). The more people there are in this age range (as a result of baby booms, for example) the greater the number of likely marriages (and vice versa, of course).

Secondly, the relationship between this marriageable cohort and other age-related

cohorts in a population is also significant. For example, if there are large numbers of children or elderly people in a population, this will affect both raw marriage numbers and, most importantly, marriage rates; in the case of children, for example, they are not legally allowed to marry and, in the case of the elderly, they are less likely to marry. The size of these cohorts (both in absolute terms in the case of raw marriage numbers and in relative terms for marriage rates) does, however, affect the validity of marriage statistics.

If, however, we control for these groups and focus our attention on the 'marriageable population' rate we can note that, for this cohort, there was a decline from 7.1 marriages to 6.8 marriages between 1981 and 1989 – a decline in the popularity of marriage on a much smaller scale than that suggested by either raw marriage numbers or rates.

Cohabitation

Preparing the ground

Unlike marriage and divorce data, information about cohabitation is not legally recorded, so anything we say about the number of couples 'living together' outside marriage in contemporary Britain will always be limited by data reliability. As **Gillis** (*For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*, 1985) notes:

> Couples living together 'as husband and wife' have always been difficult to identify and quantify. Informal marriage, however, is not a new practice; it is estimated that between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries as many as one-fifth of the population of England and Wales may have cohabited.

Keeping this in mind, we can note trends about cohabitation in our society in terms of:

- **Gender**: **Haskey** ('Trends in marriage and cohabitation', 1995) notes that in the mid-1960s, approximately 5% of single women cohabited. By the 1990s, this had risen to 70%, a figure confirmed by **Ermisch** and **Francesconi** ('Patterns of household and family formation', 2000). However, they observed that, on average, such partnerships lasted only two years, were largely 'experimental' and not intended to develop into long-term relationships.

  Haskey ('Cohabitation in Great Britain', 2002) also notes that, of women marrying in the late 1960s, 2% had previously cohabited with their partner. By the late 1990s, this had risen to 80% of all women marrying. According to the General Household Survey (2004), cohabitation among women aged 18–49 rose from 11% in 1979 to 32% in 2001.

- **Age**: According to Social Trends (2004), 13% of adults aged 16–59 reported living in a cohabiting relationship that had since dissolved. Twenty-five per cent of the 25–39 age group reported cohabiting at some point, compared with 5% of those aged 50–54. In 2002, 25% of unmarried adults aged 16 –59 reported living in a cohabiting relationship.

  Ferri et al (*Changing Britain, Changing Lives*, 2003) noted a trend for younger people to cohabit, not simply as a prelude to marriage (approximately 60% of

cohabiting couples subsequently marry) but also as a possible alternative. The General Household Survey (2004) confirmed that 25–29 year olds represent the main age group for cohabitation in our society.

Among older age groups, **Berrington** and **Diamond** ('Marriage or Cohabitation', 2000) found cohabitation was most likely in situations where one or both partners had been married before. The likelihood of cohabitation is also increased in situations where one or both partners had parents who cohabited.

Digging deeper

Given that cohabitation (or *consensual union* as it is often termed) is a similar form of living arrangement to marriage (and the only form currently available – until or if civil partnerships are recognised in law – to same-sex partners) it is not too surprising to find the reasons we have examined in relation to changing patterns of marriage (lack of stigma, secularisation, lifestyle choice, risk avoidance and lack of incentives to marry) all apply to cohabitation. Having noted this, however, we can briefly explore reasons for cohabitation in a little more depth **Smart** and **Stevens** ('Cohabitation Breakdown', 2000) interviewed 40 separated parents and identified the following reasons for cohabitation.

- **Attitudes to marriage**: These ranged from indifference to marriage to being unsure about the suitability for marriage of the person with whom they were cohabiting.
- **Trial marriage**: For some of the mothers involved, cohabitation represented a trial for their partner to prove they could settle down, gain and keep paid work and interact successfully with the mother's children.
- **Legal factors**: Many cohabiting parents were either unwilling to enter into a legal relationship with their partner (often because they were suspicious of the legal system) or they believed it easier to back away from a cohabiting relationship if it didn't work out as they had hoped.
- **Opposition** to marriage as an institution was also a factor, with some parents believing cohabitation led to a more equal form of relationship.

Table 2.7 summarises the different 'commitments to cohabitation' identified by Smart and Stevens.

Finally, we can note **Lewis** et al ('Cohabitation, Separation and Fatherhood', 2002) found three distinct orientations to cohabitation in their sample of 50 parents who had cohabited, had a child and then separated.

- **Indistinguishable**: Marriage and cohabitation were equally preferable.
- **Marriage preference**: One or both partners viewed cohabitation as a temporary prelude to what they had hoped would be marriage.
- **Cohabitation preference**: Each partner saw their relationship in terms of a moral commitment on a par with marriage.

Contingent commitment involved couples cohabiting 'until they were sure it was safe or sensible to become permanently committed or married'.	**Mutual commitment** involved the couple feeling as committed to each other and their children as married couples.
Characteristics of contingent commitment • the couple have not known each other for long • legal and/or financial agreements are absent • the children are not planned (although they may be wanted) • pregnancy predates the cohabitation • there is a requirement for significant personal change if the relationship is to work • there is no presumption that the relationship will last – only a hope	**Characteristics of mutual commitment** • the relationship is established before cohabiting • there are some legal and financial agreements • children are planned and/or wanted by both parents • both parents are involved in childcare • there are mutually agreed expectations of the relationship • there is a presumption that the relationship will last

Table 2.7

Growing it yourself: marriage and cohabitation

Copy the following table and then individually, in small groups or as a class, identify as many advantages and disadvantages of marriage and cohabitation as possible.

The following statements from Lewis et al's respondents might help get you started:

- 'My commitment to a relationship is the same, regardless of the piece of paper.' (Father)
- 'I don't honestly see a lot of difference between marriage and cohabitation . . . what matters is the relationship and whether it works or not.' (Mother)

Marriage		Cohabitation	
Advantages	Disadvantages	Advantages	Disadvantages

Divorce

Preparing the ground

In 'A Brief History of Marriage' (2002), **Samantha Callan** notes: 'The first divorce [in Britain] took place in 1551 and, over the next 187 years, 300 marriages were dissolved by private acts of parliament . . . '.

In 1857, the *Divorce Act* allowed divorce for adultery (but only for men – and rich men at that). It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that divorce (as opposed to separation) became a possibility for both men and women, rich or poor.

This brief – and highly selective – overview tells us that, for most of our history, divorce has been beyond the reach of most people. However, as 'Growing it yourself', on page 102 shows, once it was available, people seem to have taken advantage of it in ever increasing numbers.

In terms of the trends illustrated by these tables, over the past:

- 40 years divorce has become increasingly popular and rates for both sexes have increased
- 30 years divorcees, both male and female, have been getting older (reflecting, perhaps, the later average age of modern marriage partners)
- 20 years divorce peaked and then returned to its previous level (a result of the baby boom bulge)
- 10 years we have witnessed a slight decline (and flattening out) in the numbers divorcing.

Digging deeper

We can start by noting that the same population changes affecting the validity of marriage statistics also apply to divorce statistics. If more people marry, for example, this increases the chances of a rise in the numbers of people divorcing. We can however suggest some reasons for changes in *patterns* of divorce.

- **Legal changes**: Whenever we examine historical changes to the number of people divorcing in our society, we always need to be aware of potential *reliability* problems with divorce statistics. The legal definition of divorce, for example, has changed many times over the past century (as Table 2.10 shows) and, each time divorce is made easier, the number of people divorcing increases.

  Legal changes, although significant, are not necessarily a *cause* of higher divorce; rather, an increase in divorce after legal changes probably indicates the number of people who *would* have divorced – given the opportunity – before the change. This includes, for example, couples who had separated prior to a change in the law and those living in *empty-shell marriages* – couples whose marriage had effectively ended but were still living together because they could not legally divorce.
- **Economic changes**: for example, in 1949, Legal Aid was made available for divorcing couples for the first time. This created opportunities to divorce for those other than the well off.
- **Social changes** cover a range of possible reasons.

Growing it yourself: reasons for divorce

In small groups, identify as many reasons as possible why people may want to divorce.

Once you have done this, look at the following tables and cross off any reason on your list that would have applied equally to the dates in the table (for example, 'not being in love any more' or 'adultery' would have applied equally in 1921 and 2001).

As a class, write any remaining reasons for divorce on a white board/flipchart.

Read the 'Digging deeper' section and match your reasons to those I have provided.

Year	No. of divorces (000s)	Average age at divorce	
		Males	Females
1921	3	–	–
1941	7.5	–	–
1947	47	–	–
1951	29	–	–
1961	20	–	–
1971	80	39.4	36.8
1981	160	37.7	35.2
1991	180	38.6	36.0
1999	170	–	–
2000	155	38.6	36.0
2001	157	41.5	39.1

Table 2.8 Divorce in the UK
Source: Social Trends 30–34

	1961		1981		1999	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
16–24	1.4	2.4	17.7	22.3	29.0	30.3
25–29	3.9	4.5	27.6	26.7	31.5	32.3
45 and over	1.1	0.9	4.8	3.9	6.3	5.1
All 16 and over	2.1	2.1	11.9	11.9	13.0	12.9

Table 2.9 Divorce by gender and age per 1000 of population
Source: Social Trends 30–34

Year	Main Change
Pre-1857	Only by Act of Parliament
1857: Matrimonial Causes Act	Available through Law Courts for first time (but expensive to pursue). 'Fault' had to be proven. Men could divorce because of adultery, women had to show both cruelty and adultery.
1923: Matrimonial Causes Act	Grounds for divorce made the same for men and women.
1937: Herbert Act	Added range of new grounds for divorce (desertion, cruelty etc.) and no divorce petition was allowed for the first three years of marriage.
1969–1971: Divorce Reform Act	Abolished idea of 'matrimonial offence' (adultery, etc.) as grounds for divorce. 'Irretrievable breakdown of marriage' became the only requirement. Divorce could be obtained within two years if both partners consented and five years if one partner contested the divorce.
1985: Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act	Time limit on divorce reduced from three years of marriage to one.
1996 – 2000: Family Law Act	Introduced range of ideas ('no-fault' divorce, counselling, cooling-off period to reflect on application for divorce – not all of which have been applied). Idea was to make divorce a less confrontational process.

Table 2.10 Divorce: selected legal changes in the UK

- **War-time marriages**, for example, have a high probability of ending in divorce.
- **Attitudes to marriage**: The weakening of the religious significance of marriage (people probably no longer view it as 'until death do us part') also goes some way to explaining attitudes to divorce – there is little moral stigma attached to it anymore (or, if you prefer, less stigma attached now than in the past).
- **Lifestyle choices**: Some couples see marriage as a search for personal happiness, rather than a moral commitment to each other (which , as an aside, may also explain the increase in *remarriages*; divorcees (90% of whom remarry) are not unhappy with marriage as an institution, just the person they married).
- **Social position**: As women have experienced increased financial opportunities and independence they have become more willing to end an unsatisfactory marriage.

- **Romantic individualism**: The arguments here are two-fold: firstly, that family relationships have, over the years, become stripped of all but their individual/personal functions – if people 'fall out of love', therefore, there is nothing to hold their marriage together. Secondly, that we increasingly have (media-fuelled) illusions about love, romance and family life and once the reality hits home, many people opt for divorce as a way out of an unhappy marriage experience.

'At risk' relationships

Statistically, those marriages most at risk of ending in divorce involve:

- Different social backgrounds: Pressure from family and friends can create conflict within the marriage that makes divorce statistically more likely. Differences in class, religion and ethnic background also lead to a higher risk of divorce.
- Short acquaintance before marriage.
- Separation for long periods.
- Teenagers: A range of reasons apply here (length of potential marriage, low incomes, shared accommodation with parents and so forth).
- Remarriage: Divorcees are twice as likely to divorce again.

Strange reasons for divorce

Anita Davis, a family law solicitor has identified some odd reasons for divorce:

- a husband was divorced because he made irritating noises with Sellotape
- a wife divorced her partner because he crept into bed for sex during her hospital treatment for sexual exhaustion
- a woman divorced her partner for refusing to let her buy her own underwear
- a man sued for divorce because his wife used their Pekingese dog as a hot water bottle.

Separation

Preparing the ground

Our ability to understand changing patterns of separation are complicated by two factors, divorce and cohabitation.

Divorce

In the past – before divorce was either available or affordable – it was not uncommon for married couples to end their relationship by separation. However, we have no reliable data about those who separated (or those who would have separated had divorce been possible). The best we can do is make educated guesses – based on the number who currently divorce and the fact that, every time it is made easier more people divorce – about the prevalence of separation. Once divorce became readily available, of course,

Charles and Diana – one of the most famous separated couples of recent times.

Year of marriage	Males	Females
1965–1969	7	7
1970–1974	10	10
1975–1979	14	13
1980–1984	10	14
1985–1989	13	16

Table 2.11 Percentage of first marriages in Great Britain ending in separation within five years: by year of marrige and gender
[Source: Social Trends 34]

separation as a way of ending a relationship became much less common – couples divorced (which allowed them to remarry) without the need to separate.

The *1969 Divorce Reform Act*, however, introduced the concept of separation into the divorce process itself; a divorce could be granted after two years of separation if both partners consented and five years if only one partner consented.

In terms of married couples therefore, separation is, as Table 2.11 suggests, likely to be a *prelude* to divorce rather than, as in the past, an *alternative*.

Cohabitation

To further complicate matters, do we include in our analysis figures for cohabiting couples who separate? Numbers here are difficult to estimate and data reliability is low because this information is not legally recorded.

However, one area in which we do have reliable data for contemporary separation is for marriages that breakdown within the first 12 months. This is because of **judicial separation** decrees. Although couples cannot divorce – and they remain legally married – they can apply to the family courts for a legal separation. All marital obligations are ended and it can be granted for things like adultery or unreasonable behaviour, although it is not actually necessary to show the marriage has irretrievably broken down. Table 2.12 gives some idea of the (relatively small) number of such separations.

Year	Petitions	Decrees granted
1980	5423	2560
1983	7430	4854
1990	2874	1794
1997	1078	589
1998	1374	518

Table 2.12 Judicial Separation: 1980–1998. Source: Office for National Statistics 2000. A 'petition' is an application for separation. The separation is confirmed when a decree is granted by the Courts. The difference between the two figures results from couples deciding to stay together following the petition but before any decree.

Digging deeper

When thinking about separation, we can note two points. Firstly, we can't reliably establish comparative historical patterns of separation and secondly, the concept itself is largely redundant in our society given the easy availability of divorce.

What we can usefully do, however, is change the focus slightly to briefly examine the possible *consequences* of separation for the breakdown of marital or cohabiting relationships. **Rodgers** and **Pryor**'s review, for example, of over 200 research reports in this general area ('Divorce and Separation', 1998) showed children of separated families had a higher probability of:

- poverty and poor housing
- poverty during adulthood
- behavioural problems
- school underachievement
- needing medical treatment
- leaving school/home when young
- pregnancy at an early age.

They also identified a range of factors that influenced these probabilities:

- financial hardship
- family conflict
- parental ability to recover from stress of separation
- multiple changes in family structure
- quality of contact with the non-resident parent.

Lewis et al (2002) noted in their sample of 50 parents who had cohabited, had a child and then separated:

- 40% gave 'irresponsibility of their partner' as the main cause of separation
- 70% of separations were started by the woman
- Mothers initially took primary responsibility for the child (which is similar to the pattern for marriage breakdown).

Child-bearing

Preparing the ground

Changing patterns of fertility and child-bearing involves looking at the behaviour of those who decide, for whatever reason, to have children and the following table identifies some key recent changes.

Year	Number of live births (000s)	Births per 1000 women aged 15–44	Average age of mother (1st child)	% of births outside marriage
1964	876	93	–	7.2
1971	–	–	23.7	–
1991	699	64	25.6	30.2
2003	621	54	26.7	41.4

Table 2.13 Live birth statistics: England and Wales
Source: Office for National Statistics

Over the past 40 years, changing patterns of child-bearing in our society can be summarised in terms of the following:

- general fertility has substantially declined, in terms of both the number of live births and the birth rate
- family size has declined from an average of 3 to 1.6 children
- the average age at which women have their first child is increasing
- births outside marriage now account for nearly half of all births – a substantial increase over 40 years ago.

Digging deeper

When we think about reasons for changing patterns of fertility, a number of factors spring to mind.

Contraception

The development and widespread use of the contraceptive pill, for example, has allowed people to plan their fertility more easily than in the past.

Childlessness

An interesting feature of modern households is the number of people who choose to remain childless (who, as we have seen, form the majority of UK households). The Office for National Statistics (Social Trends 34, 2004), has noted: 'Related to the trend of delaying childbirth, is the growth in the number of women remaining childless':

Year of birth	% childless at age 35
1960	11
2000	25

Table 2.14

One reason for this situation is **later marriage**. As we have seen, men and women are increasingly choosing to marry later and, consequently, start a family later. This has led to an increase in child-bearing among women aged 30 and over.

McAllister and **Clarke** ('Choosing childlessness', 1988) noted the following points about childless households:

- **Rates**: The UK has one of highest European levels of childlessness.
- **Decisions** to remain childless are affected by a range of life events.
- **Education**: Highly qualified women are more likely to remain childless.
- **Security**: Parenthood was identified with disruption, change and poverty; the childless chose independence over the constraints of childcare and material security over financial risk.

Technology

Improvements in both child and mother care, IVF treatments and so forth have extended fertility into age groups which, in the past, would have been too old to safely bear children.

Financial costs

One factor in decisions about the number of children produced within families is likely to be the cost of raising them.

The **Family Expenditure Survey** (Office for National Statistics, 2000) estimated the average spend on each child (for both single- and two-adult households) as £52 per week. ***Pregnancy & Birth* magazine** (March 2001) estimated having a baby 'costs parents £20,315 for the first five years alone' (although this rises to £36,000 for more affluent households).

First child		Subsequent children	
Typical spend	Less Child Benefit	Typical spend	Less Child Benefit
About £67 pw	About £52 pw	About £56 pw	About £46 pw

Table 2.15 Middleton et al ('Small Fortunes: Spending on children, childhood poverty and parental sacrifice', 2002) estimate of the cost of children in 1995

In this section we have looked at areas such as family diversity and changing patterns of family life (in terms of things like marriage, divorce and cohabitation). In the next section we can continue the general theme of family and social change by looking more closely at possible changes in family relationships.

Family and social change

Introduction

The focus in previous sections has been on the family group as an institution – although we have, at times, touched on relationships within this group. In this section, the focus changes to the family group itself in order to examine 'the nature and extent of changes within the family'. To do this we can look at evidence relating to 'gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships'. The section is completed by looking at 'changes in the status of children and childhood'.

Gender roles

Preparing the ground

The first thing we can usefully do is to outline the distinction sociologists generally make between 'sex' and 'gender'.

- **Sex**: **Anthony Giddens**, (*Sociology*, 1989) notes, 'sex' refers to the physical characteristics that lead to people being labelled 'male' or 'female'. Sex characteristics are, in a sense, biologically determined and 'fixed' (although it is, of course, now possible to change your biological sex).
- **Gender**, on the other hand, refers to the social characteristics assigned by any given society to each biological sex (whatever these may actually turn out to be). In other words, *gender* represents the things we, as a society, associate with being biologically male or female.

The classic expression of these ideas is **Robert Stoller**'s argument (*Sex and Gender: on the Development of Masculinity and Femininity*, 1968): 'Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural connotations; if the proper terms for sex are "male" and "female", the corresponding terms for gender are "masculine" and "feminine"; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex'.

WARM UP: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

To get you thinking about gender, consider the following categories of masculinity and femininity. In small groups, think about what the two concepts mean to you and also how you think our society views them (make a table like the one I've started and add your ideas to it). As a class, bring your ideas together.

Masculinity		Femininity	
What does 'masculinity' mean to you?	**What do you think masculinity means in our society?**	**What does femininity mean to you?**	**What do you think femininity means in our society?**
Men should be strong and protective.	Men are expected to be unemotional ('boys don't cry').	Women should make themselves attractive to men.	Women should be in touch with their 'caring side'.
Further Meanings			

While all societies (considered both in historical and comparative terms) have 'men and women', the *meaning* of gender can vary considerably in the same society over time and, of course, between different societies.

Masculinity (what it means to be 'a man'), for example, is a concept that has a different general meaning in our society than it does in Australia or Peru. In addition, its meaning changes to reflect different stages in our physical development – 'boy', for example, is a different gender category from 'man'.

Femininity (what it means to be 'a woman') similarly has different meanings at different times and in different places although, as **Beattie** ('Who Was That Lady?', 1981) notes, there are significant differences in the way we use language to describe gender:

> . . . 'girl' like 'lady' is often used for 'woman' in contexts where 'boy' or 'gentleman' would not appear for 'man'. We find Page Three 'girls' (not women) in *The Sun*. Calling a nude male pin-up a 'boy' would be derogatory. Our tendency to call all women 'girls' is enormously significant. We stress their positive evaluative properties (especially the physical ones) and suggest a lack of power. We are to some extent creating immaturity and dependence through linguistic devices [language].

When we start to think about gender roles within the family group, therefore, we must understand their content (what people do and how do they do it, for example) and, by extension, how such roles have changed.

Gender perspectives: Traditionally, sociological perspectives on *conjugal roles* (the roles played by men and women within a marriage or cohabiting relationship) have fallen into two (opposed) camps characterised by their different views on the essential nature of family roles. We can, for example note the concept of:

- **Patriarchy**: This view, mainly associated with feminist and conflict perspectives, generally sees the family group as male dominated, oppressive and exploitative of women. Over the past few hundred years the form of patriarchy may have changed (it no longer, perhaps, takes the aggressive form of the Victorian family, with the father ruling the family roost through a mixture of violence and economic threats), but both violence and more subtle forms of male control (in relation to who does housework, controls decision making and so forth) are still characteristic of family life from this perspective.
- **Symmetry** is the other side of this coin, and is associated (mainly) with

functionalist perspectives, such as **Willmott** and **Young** (*The Symmetrical Family*, 1973), who argued it was possible to track historical changes in family relationships in the following way.

- **Pre-industrial family** (pre-1750), an economically productive unit with the father as patriarch (head of household), exercising complete physical and economic control over his family.
- **Asymmetrical family** (1750–1900), characterised in terms of segregated conjugal roles involving a separation between home and work – both for the husband, who spent long periods away from the home and the wife, whose role as mother and domestic labourer started to become established.
- **Symmetrical family** (twentieth century), which they characterised as involving joint conjugal roles that demonstrate greater levels of equality between males and females in terms of both paid and domestic (unpaid) work.

Whatever the reality of the situation, as I've briefly characterised it, a third way of looking at gender roles within the home is one that straddles the two.

New Right perspectives argue family relationships should be 'symmetrical' in the sense of husband and wife (this perspective doesn't particularly like non-marriage family relationships) performing 'different but complementary' roles within the family; these roles are, supposedly, tuned to male and female biological capabilities – men as the traditional family breadwinner and women as the family carer and domestic labourer. In other words, a patriarchal form of family relationship based around a biological (as opposed to social) symmetry.

Digging deeper

If we move away from these types of 'standard' arguments about gender roles within the family, the first thing to note is families are potentially confusing and contradictory institutions, an idea neatly expressed by **Decca Aitkenhead** ('When Home's a Prison', *The Guardian*, 24/07/04): '"What about Dad?" Eileen demanded "He used to hit you". "Your father never laid a finger on me! Not once!" flamed Kathleen Ward. Eileen knew her father had once been to prison for beating her mother – yet . . . nobody bothered to correct the discrepancy'.

An alternative way of thinking about gender roles (which we can relate to ideas about domestic labour and power), therefore, is to think about them in terms of *identities*. That is, how family members organise their relationships on the basis of two concepts noted by **Hogg** and **Vaughan** (*Social Psychology*, 2002), namely:

- **Social identity –** which represents how our membership of social groups influences our perception of certain roles. For example, in our culture, the roles 'male' and 'female' carry general social characteristics that define the meaning of 'being a man or a woman'. These ideas are important because they represent a *structural* aspect to our relationships – I know how men and women are expected to behave, for example, because my cultural (gender) socialisation has taught me the general characteristics of such roles.
- **Personal identity**, on the other hand, works at the level of social *action*. How I actually play (in my case) 'the male role' is open, to apply **Goffman**'s ideas ('The

Presentation of Self in Everyday Life', 1959), to *interpretation* and *negotiation* within, for example, my family.

Thus, how I interpret and play the role of 'husband' is conditioned by my perception of what this role means in general cultural terms (what husbands are expected to do) and in the more specific, personal, context of my family relationships – which probably goes some way to explaining why, in my household, I have to iron my own clothes and mow the lawn (although not, of course, at the same time).

In this respect, as **Alison James** ('Imaging Children "At Home", "In the Family" and "at School"', 1998), argues, 'The home is a spatial context where identities are worked on' – which, in plain English, means family identities are not fixed, but, on the contrary, fluid. They are, as **Anne-Marie Fortier** ('Making home: queer migrations and motions of attachment', 2003) puts it, 'continuously re-imagined and redefined'.

Growing it yourself: social and personal identities.

In pairs, identify ten words commonly used to describe adult men and women. Enter the most popular words identified by the whole class in the table below.

Men					Women			
+	−	+/−				−	+	+/−
				1				
				2				
				3				
				4				
				5				
				6				
				7				
				8				
				9				
				10				

For each male and each female 'describing word', decide as a group whether you think they are used positively (+), negatively (−) or neither (+/−) in our culture.

Discussion point: take my wife

Use the table on page 111 as the basis for a discussion about how language can be used as a means of social control. You might want to think about the following:

How do you feel about being described in certain ways (such as being called 'boy' or 'girl')? My wife, for example, dislikes being called 'dear' (she also dislikes being called 'my wife', but that's another story).

How does the language used to describe the sexes impact on how we see ourselves (our masculinity and femininity) and on our behaviour (you could, if you wish, explore some of the derogatory (insulting) ways males and females are described)?

If we think of gender roles in terms of *identity*, therefore, we can note two things:

- **Changing gender roles**: In the past, social identities relating to gender roles were dominant; they provided clear, unshakeable, guidelines for roles within the family (the classic idea of husband as breadwinner and wife as domestic labourer/carer, for example). There were few opportunities to develop *personal identities* that differed from the social norm – and the penalties for trying were severe (in terms of, for example, male violence against women who attempted to reject or renegotiate personal identity within the family).

  In contemporary families, although we are aware of social expectations about gender behaviour, we have far more sources of reference for our personal identities – and far more opportunities for the successful renegotiation and reinterpretation of our roles within the family.
- **Diversity** of gender roles within contemporary families is, consequently, much more apparent – family groups with very similar social and economic circumstances may display marked differences in the way gender roles are allocated and performed.

Allan and **Crow** (*Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Space*, 1989) reinforce this idea when they note: 'The creation of the home is an active process which is an integral part of people's family projects'. **Stacey** (*Brave New Families*, 1998) observes that in 'post-modern society' both the *public domain* (the workplace) and the *private domain* (the home) have undergone radical changes in recent times to become 'diverse, fluid and unresolved, with a broad range of gender and kinship relations'. **Reich** (2001) argues the 'incredible shrinking family' is one where: 'People spend less time together, couples are having fewer children, financial support between spouses is eroding, and care and attention are being subcontracted . . . living together remains a conjugal norm, but there is no longer adherence to permanent monogamous family units as the basis for family life, or of heterosexual relationships composed of male breadwinner and female homemaker'.

Finally, **Michael Willmott** (*Complicated Lives*, 2000) argues:

> It no longer makes sense to rely on traditional roles when dividing up tasks in the home. Instead, new roles must be negotiated by every couple depending on their individual circumstances. In the future, the important thing will be who has the time or the inclination to do the housework, and not whether they are a man or a women.

Which is as good a reason as any turn to an examination of domestic labour.

Domestic labour

Preparing the ground

Like it or not (and, on the whole, I don't), housework is something that has to be done – and, to explore who does it (and why), we need to think about what counts as housework (or 'domestic labour' if you prefer).

For our purposes, domestic labour refers to *anything* that needs to be accomplished in order to ensure the running of a home and family; it includes the standard stuff like cooking, cleaning and shopping as well as things like household repairs (mending the microwave!) and chores; it may also include things like care of children, the sick and the elderly.

Complete the 'Growing it yourself' exercise below. Having done this exercise, we can summarise recent evidence about domestic labour in our society.

Amount and type

As Table 2.16 (Office for National Statistics, 2002) demonstrates, on average women spend twice as long on housework each day as men. It also suggests that men and women do different tasks within the household – women spend more time on routine domestic tasks (cooking, cleaning, etc.),

Growing it yourself: who does what?

A relatively simple piece of social research you can carry out is to establish who does what around your home, using a content analysis grid to record your observations.

As a class, identify as many aspects of housework as you can (don't go into too much detail, except where it's necessary to distinguish things like general care of children (washing, feeding, dressing and so forth) as against things like playing with children).

Once you've agreed this, draw and complete the following grid for your family.

Household task	task usually performed by?				
	Male parent	Female parent	Both parents	Children (male or female?)	Other relative (e.g. grand-parent)
Cooking					
Laundry					
Shopping					
Playing with children					
Further tasks . . .					

men spend more time on repair work and playing with children). **Ramos** ('Domestic Work', 2003) noted how women's share of domestic labour increased with children in the household.

Men	Women
(2 hrs 20 mins.)	(4 hrs)
Cooking	Cooking
Childcare	Childcare
Gardening	Cleaning house
Pet care	laundry

Table 2.16 UK 2000 Time Use Survey: average daily housework and main chores

- **Age**: Ramos (2003) notes how the amount of female housework increases with age – younger women do less housework than older women.
- **Comparative**: According to the Future Foundation ('Complicated Lives', 2000) there has been a slight decline in the amount of housework done by women and an increase in male housework. They estimate 60% of men do more housework than their father, while 75% of women do less housework than their mother.
- **Employment**: Although **Man-yee Kan** ('Gender Asymmetry in the Division of Domestic Labour', 2001) found levels of female housework were marginally reduced by paid employment, unemployment or retirement increased female housework hours and reduced those of her partner. Throughout the

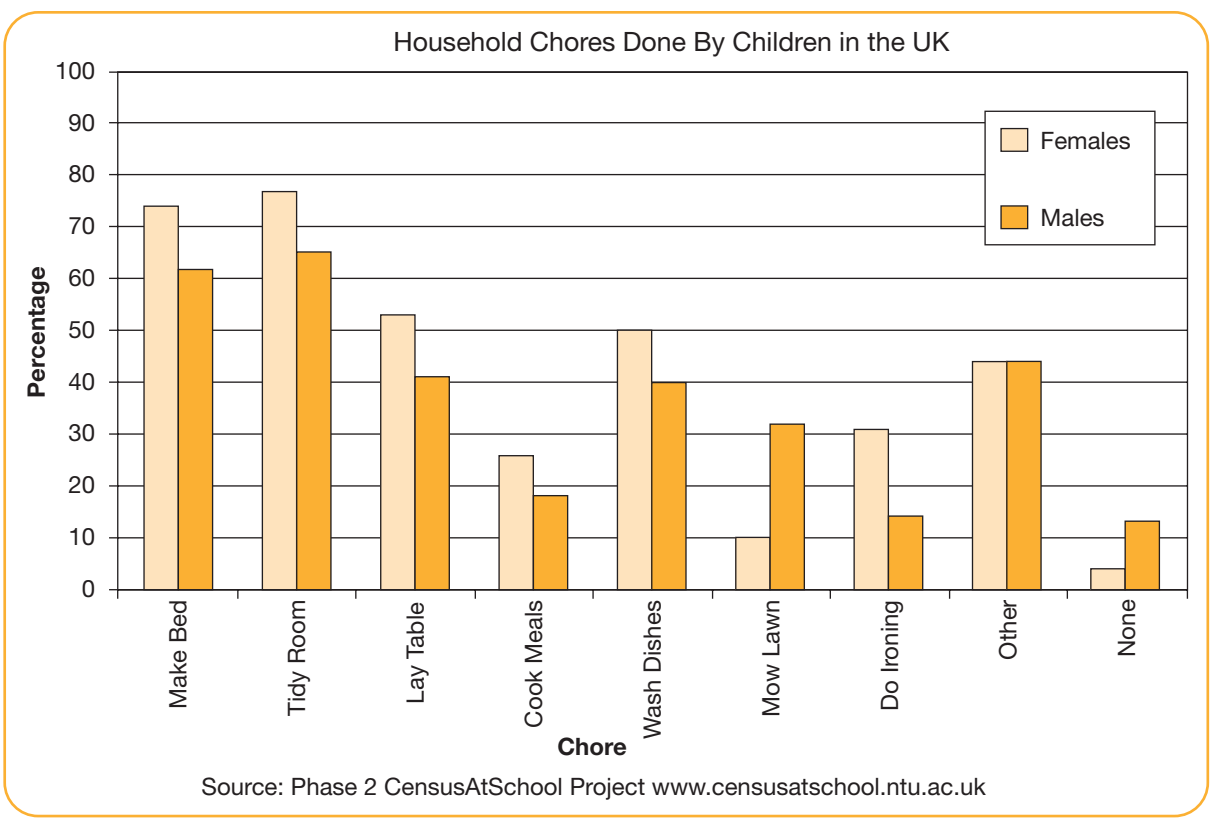


Table 2.17

1990s, *total family workload* (paid and domestic labour) stayed roughly constant for men, whereas for women it decreased (an increase in paid work was off-set by a decrease in domestic work). However, Ramos (2003) noted that, where the man is unemployed and his partner works full time, domestic labour is equally distributed.

- **Income and Education**: Man-yee Kan (2001) noted how levels of both male and female housework decreased by income and level of education.
- **Gender Beliefs**: Ramos (2003) found that, in families with 'traditional gender beliefs', women do more housework than in families where beliefs reflect sexual equality. In households where partners hold conflicting beliefs, men do less domestic work.
- **Children**: One area of domestic labour often overlooked is that performed by children. However, as table 2.17 demonstrates, they contribute to housework in a number of ways.

  Jens Bonke ('Children's household work', 1999) notes that children generally make a relatively small contribution to domestic labour – contributions peak at age 20 (approximately 2½ hours a week) and boys contribute less than girls. In lone children families, girls averaged five times as much housework as boys (2½ hours/week as against 30 minutes).
- **Grandparenting**: A final area we should note is the role played by grandparents in the care of children. **Tunaley** et al ('Relatively Speaking', 1999), for example, suggested almost 50% of working parents in the UK rely on grandparents for child care, for any of four main reasons:
  - more working women
  - long and unsociable working hours
  - more active grandparents
  - high cost of child care.

A more detailed set of statistics on domestic labour can be found at: www.sociology.org.uk/as4aqa.htm

Digging deeper

Debates over domestic labour can be a methodological minefield in terms of:

- **Reliability**: There is no clear definition of housework – some researchers focus on domestic tasks, whereas others, such as **Duncombe** and **Marsden** (1993) have included 'emotion work' (the work women do to 'make their partners and children feel good') as part of the definition.
- **Validity**: We need to be aware of *observer effects* (when housework is recorded in diaries by respondents) and *interviewer effects* (when people are questioned about their housework chores). A general problem here is men overestimate – and women underestimate – the amount of time spent on domestic labour.

In order to interpret the data, however, we can return to the distinction, noted earlier, between social and personal identities.

Social identities

It is clear that, in some respects, cultural beliefs about male and female abilities and roles are significant in terms of explaining differences in domestic labour. Evidence drawn from a range of studies suggests domestic labour is both overwhelmingly performed by women and that, to some extent, this is tied up with notions of:

- **Patriarchy**: Ideas about gender roles and behaviour reflect patriarchal attitudes mainly – but not exclusively – amongst older age groups in the population. **Pleck** ('Working Wives. Working Husbands', 1985), for example, noted the 'more traditional' the views held by couples about gender roles, the greater the level of domestic labour inequality.

  Pilcher ('Gender Matters?', 1998) found similar views. Older respondents – unlike their younger counterparts – didn't talk about equality but thought instead in traditional ways about gender roles, responsibilities and relationships which reflected their socialisation and life experiences – where 'men undertook limited household work, married women had limited involvement in paid work and where a marked gendered division of labour was the norm'.
- **Femininity**: Although changing, notions of what it means to be a woman are still, to some extent, tied up with ideas about caring and nurture (and, as **Ramos** (2003) suggests, responsibility for child care still falls mainly on the female partner).
- **Masculinity**: Conversely, traditional notions of masculinity are still, to some extent, bound up with ideas about

Discussion point: is housework the new sex?

Housework is not the new sex. It's the same old dreary chore

Rachel Johnson: *Daily Telegraph*: 23/05/2003

> You know that thing when you have your hands in the kitchen sink, and your beloved comes up behind you and wraps his arms around you. 'Mmm, I love it when you're doing the washing-up,' he says. The whole point of this manoeuvre, as we all know, is to signal the attractiveness of women pinned, like butterflies, in the middle of committing an act of domesticity.
>
> As Pat Mainardi wrote in *The Politics of Housework*, women are conditioned to want to live in a clean, sweet-smelling home, with piles of folded laundry in drawers, plumped cushions and gleaming surfaces. Men are quite happy to do some light carpentry, moving furniture around, some weekend DIY, to help live this dream. 'But men recognise the essential fact of housework right from the very beginning. Which is that it stinks,' says Mainardi. That was in 1970. Three decades later, housework – which is unrewarding, unrecognised, unpaid work that never ends – is being sold back to women, who do most of it anyway, as sexy and glamorous. Marigolds the new Manolos? Phwoar! We've come a long way, baby'.

To help you discuss this (frankly quite scary idea), think about:

What does the phrase 'women are conditioned to want . . . ' mean?

How do you think men and women are conditioned in relation to housework?

How is 'housework being sold back to women'?

What does the article tell us about changes in gender roles over the past 30 years?

providing for a family by taking on the main economic role. **Linda McDowe** ('Young men leaving school', 2001), for example, noted the 'continued dominance of a "traditional" masculinity' in her study.

Personal identities

Although social identities are clearly important, personal identities give us a sense of the way gender roles are interpreted and negotiated according to the specific family circumstances of those involved; this is especially clear when we consider class differences (although in some ways this represents a *displacement* of domestic responsibilities – high income families can pay others to do their housework), age and educational differences.

Callaghan ('The Interaction of Gender, Class and Place in Women's Experience', 1998), for example, highlights the importance of considering these factors when thinking about how gender roles are created and performed within the family and **Dench** ('The place of men in changing family cultures', 1996) argues that younger men, as a group, believed 'couples should share or negotiate family roles' and resist conventional ideas that men should be the main breadwinners.

Speakman and **Marchington** ('Ambivalent patriarchs, shift workers, breadwinners and housework', 1999) however, noted how some men used *learned helplessness* when trying to avoid domestic tasks – their 'inability' to work domestic machinery served to throw domestic tasks back into the hands of their partners.

To sum up the ideas at which we have just looked, we can identify three main reasons for the generally unequal distribution of domestic labour in our society.

- **Social identities**, relating to deep-seated cultural beliefs about male and female 'natures' exert a powerful pull, through the socialisation process, that leads to the reproduction of traditional forms of gender relationship (women as 'carers' for example).
- **Socio-personal identities** involving the way the latter are *pragmatically* ('reasonably') shaped by the former. For example, in a family where the man is the main breadwinner, decisions about who will give up work to care for children may be guided by the reality of differences in earning power.
- **Personal identities** involve looking at quite specific relationships between the family partners and may be played out against a background of complex personal and cultural histories. For example, a man may be able to get away with doing little in the household; on the other hand, his relationship with his partner may not allow him to shirk his share of family responsibilities. Gender roles and relationships are shaped, to some extent, by how partners personally relate to one another.

Power relationships

Preparing the ground

Like any social institution, family groups involve power relationships. In other words, they involve 'struggles' between family members – both adults and children – in areas like:

- **Physical** resources – things like food, clothing and shelter – considered in terms of who provides and consumes these things.
- **Social** resources – things like decision making, control over family resources (such as money) and so forth.
- **Psychological** resources – things like love, trust, affection and care – in short, the range of emotional securities (and insecurities) that surround our relationships.

In this section, therefore, we need to explore this aspect of family life in more detail and to do this it would be helpful to define **power**. According to **Anthony Giddens** (1989) power involves 'the ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns or interests count, even where others resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of force, but is almost always also accompanied by the development of ideas (ideology) which justify the actions of the powerful.'

In terms of this type of definition, therefore, power has two dimensions we need to note:

- **Force**: This aspect is probably the one that springs most readily to mind because it involves making someone do something against their will – usually through the act or threat of violence.
- **Authority**, however, is an important aspect because it suggests we can get people to do what we want because they think it's right – or they feel they want – to obey us.

Growing it yourself: power and control

Copy and complete the following table to identify how power/authority is exercised in your school or college.

Examples of situations which use:	
Power	**Authority**
Detentions Attendance	Taking notes in class

Having outlined the concept of power, we can examine some examples of how it is exercised within families.

Domestic violence

This covers a range of behaviours (physical and emotional), the aim of which is to aggressively control the behaviour of a family member (adult and/or child). It can involve physical violence (assault), sexual violence (rape) and economic sanctions (denying a family member something they need, for example). The one common thread linking these examples is the desire for power and control on the part of the perpetrator.

The extent of domestic violence is difficult to estimate reliably since it generally happens behind closed doors within the privacy of the family group and victims may be reluctant to admit or acknowledge their victimisation. Keeping this in mind, **Hilary Abrahams** (Domestic Violence Research Group, University of Bristol) has identified some significant facts about domestic violence:

- **British Crime Survey** (2000): 20% of all crimes and 23% of all violent crimes were

classified as domestic violence (more recent figures from **Dodd** et al ('Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004') suggest this percentage has recently fallen – they report 16% of all violent incidents were incidents of domestic violence).

In 1995, 10% of 16–29 year old disabled women were assaulted within the home. Women are most likely to be sexually assaulted by men they know, and 45% of reported rapes were carried out by a current partner.

- **Repeat victimisation**: Nearly 50% of all victims experience more than one violent attack by their partner.
- **Gender**: The majority of victims (81% according to the 2002 British Crime Survey) are female.
- **Reported crime**: In 1999, nearly 40% of female murder victims (92 women) were killed by present or former partners. The comparable figure for men was 6%.

Kirkwood (*Leaving Abusive Partners*, 1993) notes that domestic violence has psychological consequences, including low self-esteem, dependence on the perpetrator and a tendency to minimise or deny the violence. In addition, a Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust report (1998) found 20% of young men and 10% of young women agreed abuse or violence against women was acceptable in some circumstances.

Child abuse

This is a further aspect of power within family groups, with writers such as **Humphreys** and **Thiara** ('Routes to Safety', 2002) claiming a strong link to domestic violence. In terms of statistical evidence:

- One child dies each week from adult cruelty. Roughly 80 children are killed each year, mainly by parents and carers – a level that has remained constant for almost 30 years (Office of National Statistics: 1998–2001).
- Twenty-five per cent of all *recorded* rape victims are children (Home Office Statistical Findings 1996).
- The most likely abuser is someone known to the child (National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse, 1996).
- According to the NSPCC, around 30,000 children are currently on child protection registers for being at risk of abuse.

Decision making

Power relationships are not always played out in terms of violence or abuse – the majority of family groups experience neither of these things (the rate of child deaths from abuse/neglect each year is less than 1 in 100,000, for example). Power relationships, therefore, can take other forms within the home.

- **Financial** decision making is a significant indicator of where power lies within a family, since these types of decision – buying a house, a car or a holiday for example – involve concepts of authority. **Edgell**'s influential study (*Middle-Class Couples*, 1980) suggested men made the most important financial decisions within the family, whereas women made decisions about everyday domestic spending (food, clothing and the like).

  Although Edgell's study is nearly 25 years old, **Pahl** and **Vogler** ('Money, power and inequality within marriage', 1994) broadly confirmed his argument, although

they found the 102 couples in their sample could be grouped into four main categories:

- **Wife-controlled pooling** (27% of couples) involved joint bank accounts with female control of finances.
- **Husband-controlled pooling** (37% of couples) involved a joint bank account with the husband controlling financial decisions.
- **Husband-controlled** (22%), where the husband had his own bank account and took responsibility for all major family bills. This type was most commonly found in higher income families.
- **Wife-controlled** (14%) included couples with no bank accounts where the wife controlled the family finances. This type was common in low-income families.

As the above suggests, financial decision making can be a complex issue, not simply in terms of 'who makes decisions' but, most significantly perhaps, in terms of the type of decisions made; men, it seems, generally take the most important (macro) decisions whereas women are given a degree of financial *autonomy* (freedom) to micro-manage household accounts. This, in part, reflects traditional gender roles in terms of household management being seen as part of the female role.

A further aspect to financial decision making is added by the existence of **secret economies**: In a small proportion of families, one or both partners have access to bank accounts of which their partner has no knowledge. **Jayatilaka** and **Rake** (Fawcett Society Report, 2002), for example, noted that in 5% of families men had secret accounts and in 10% of families women kept such accounts. Most families in their study reported a strong belief financial decisions should be shared, but this didn't seem to be the case in reality – particularly for women with low personal incomes (less than £400 a month). Twenty-five per cent of these women said their husband controlled family financial decisions.

In general, the study suggested women believed they either had some control over or input into financial decisions that, according to Rake, were objectively taken by the male partner. As she notes: 'Bringing money into the household brings with it a sense of entitlement to decide how it is spent. Because men earn more than women they have greater control of how money is spent or shared, and more access to personal spending.'

- **Work and relocation**: Other areas of major decision making in dual-earner families include those relating to work, and includes things like whose work has the greatest priority when, for example, the family is forced to move because of a change in employment. **Irene Hardill** ('A tale of two nations? Juggling work and home in the new economy', 2003) found women were more likely to be the 'trailing spouse' – male occupations had greatest priority and the family relocated mainly to follow male employment patterns.
- **Status enhancement** is an interesting – and little-discussed – aspect of authority within families. It involves, according to **Coverman** ('Women's Work Is Never

Done', 1989), 'work done by one partner (typically the woman) to aggrandize the other partner's career' (dinner parties, attending work functions and so forth). In extreme cases, status enhancement can take the form of a 'trophy wife' – a marriage pattern used by some powerful (mainly, but not necessarily, older) men as a form of status symbol, used to demonstrate their wealth and power.

Digging deeper

There are a number of different aspects to power relationships within the family. Some – domestic violence and abuse, for example – rest on the expression of physical force as a form of power that creates control through fear and intimidation; others – probably the majority – rest on concepts of authority (who has the right to make decisions, for example).

When we think about the patterns of domestic labour and power relationships we have previously examined, we can see decision making (in its widest sense to include things like how family life is organised) involves a complex interplay between the *private domain* (the domestic arena of relationships within a family) and the *public domain* (work, for example). This distinction is useful because:

- **Exercising power** involves access to sources of power. The greater the access to (and control over) a variety of sources, the greater your level of power.
- **Major sources of power** in our society originate in the public domain, mainly because it's where family income is earned.

We can explore the theoretical side of these ideas by applying **Stephen Lukes**' (*Power*, 1990) argument that power has three main dimensions.

- **The ability to make decisions**: Although women exercise power within families, it's mainly in areas where they're traditionally seen to have greater expertise (the micro-management of family resources to which we have previously referred). Major decisions tend to be monopolised by men, mainly because men tend to earn more money and this 'public domain resource' gives them power within the family.

  Where both partners work, women have more control over the wider decision making process (which supports the idea power is substantially dependent on control over a wide range of social resources). Having said this, female power depends on such things as the status of female work, relative level of income, domestic responsibilities and so forth.
- **The ability to prevent others making decisions** involves the 'ability to manipulate any debate over the kinds of decisions that actually reach the stage of "being made"'. In terms of gender roles, the personal identities of family members are important (for example, how each partner sees their role within the family).

  Gender socialisation is significant also, since if males and females are raised to have certain expectations of both their own social role and that of their partner then the ability to make decisions affecting the family group takes on a 'natural' quality. It appears 'right, proper and natural' for women to raise children and men to have paid employment, for example. In this instance, decisions about family roles never reach the stage of

actually having to be made, simply because the stronger partner makes the decisions.

- **The ability to remove decision making from the agenda** involves the idea that who does what inside and outside the family group is conditioned by various social factors (gender socialisation, male and female social identities, the realities of power distributions in society and so forth) that reflect our personal experiences.

  For example, decisions about paid employment, domestic labour and the like may be removed from the decision making agenda (the respective partners don't actually have to make conscious decisions about them) for a variety of reasons: they may for example share the belief women are better child-rearers than men. Alternatively, where one partner earns more than the other, has higher career expectations and so forth, this partner may remain in work while the other cares for the children.

Childhood

Preparing the ground

In this final section we are going to examine the changing status of children and childhood, which involves two things: defining what we mean by 'children' and exploring historical differences in perceptions of childhood. These tasks are not unconnected, since our ability to identify and explain changes will depend, to some extent, on how childhood is defined.

WARM UP: DEFINING CHILDHOOD

To get us started, we can think about two broad indicators of childhood:

- **biological** (how people physically and mentally develop) and
- **cultural** (the characteristics people give to the label 'child').

Using the following table as a starting point, what characteristics of childhood can you identify?

Indicators of childhood	
Biological	**Cultural**
Age at which childhood begins and ends	Innocence? Immaturity?

It is not always easy – either biologically or culturally – to precisely identify an agreed set of characteristics about childhood (in this respect we sometimes refer to the idea as a 'contested concept' because there are always arguments about how to define it).

Biologically, we are all young once and, with the passage of time, we all become old – but this simple statement hides a much wider and more complex set of ideas.

Culturally, two ideas are significant:

- **Duration**: It is difficult to say precisely when child status ends (or even when it begins, come to that). In my lifetime, the age when people are officially classified as 'adults' has changed from 21 to 18 (although, just to confuse things further, at 16 you can legally do some of the things 'children' can't do – work full time, marry, join the army and so forth). This simple cultural change alters the way

we define childhood and, of course, children.

- **Social categories**: 'Childhood' actually hides a range of different categorisations of people who are 'not adults' (babies, toddlers, infants, teenagers, youth . . .). The status and experience of being a teenager is very different to being an infant – so should we classify them all as children?

  Come to that, the status of 'teenager' – as **Thomas Hine** (*The Rise And Fall of the American Teenager*, 2000) demonstrates – is a relatively modern invention (the word was apparently first used in the USA during the Second World War – 'teenagers' didn't make much of an appearance in Britain until the mid to late 1950s).

What this shows is that societies develop beliefs about age categories and our understanding of their meaning helps us to interpret not only age differences, but also concepts of *age-appropriate behaviour*. For example, while it may be considered appropriate for a male child to cry, crying may be considered inappropriate for an adult male – although, just to confuse things further, there are times – at a funeral for example – when it isn't inappropriate for a man to cry. Although this makes tracking changes in our general perception of childhood a little difficult, we can begin by looking at a **historical dimension**. The work of **Philip Aries** (*Centuries of Childhood*, 1962) stimulated debate about the changing status of childhood and children and, although it has been extensively criticised in recent times (for example, **Martin Shipman**'s, 'When Childhood Was Discovered'), it is useful for our purpose because it helps us focus on a number of questions relating to the historical analysis of childhood.

- **Recent construction**: Aries argues that in Western Europe the idea of childhood is a relatively modern one that developed over the past 300 or so years – effectively with the change from pre-industrial to industrial society. While there were (obviously) 'non-adults' in pre-industrial society, Aries argues they were neither called 'children', nor treated in ways we, nowadays, would recognise as 'childhood'.
- **Religious beliefs**: Changing beliefs about children developed as the Christian Church popularised the idea of children as 'fragile creatures of God' – in effect, childhood became defined as a phase of 'uncorrupted innocence', to be nurtured and encouraged. Children were not to be seen as little adults, but as something different and perhaps highly vulnerable – human beings who needed the protection of adults.
- **Physical and cultural separation**: Gradually, children started to live in a separate sphere from adults. As the education system developed (from the mid-nineteenth century onwards) children were treated differently to adults. As Aries puts it, they were 'progressively removed from adult society'.

Whether or not we agree with Aries' argument about the 'invention of childhood' – **Linda Pollack** (*Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*, 1983) suggests the view there was no conception of childhood in pre-industrial society was mistaken – there seems little reason to doubt that, over the past few

hundred years, the status of children has changed in a number of ways. As **Archard** (*Children: Rights and Childhood*, 1993) helpfully notes, 'Aries claims to disclose an *absence* of the idea of childhood, whereas he should only claim to find a *dissimilarity* in ideas about childhood between past and present'.

We can, therefore, identify a number of historical changes in the status of children.

Attitudes

If we accept (and as sociologists I think we should) that, according to **Chris Jenks** (*Childhood*, 1996), 'childhood is not a natural but a social construct', it follows that its status is, to a large degree, determined by adults. Jenks notes two basic historical statuses of children that have existed, in one form or another, over the past 300 years.

- The **Dionysian child** is one constructed as 'a wilful material force . . . impish and harbouring a potential evil'. This view suggests adults must control children in ways that prevent them falling victim to their essential 'badness'.
- The **Apollonian child**, on the other hand, is constructed as 'angelic, innocent, untainted by the world it has recently entered. It has a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that must be encouraged, enabled, facilitated, not crushed or beaten into submission'. This view suggests the role of adults is to create the conditions under which children can develop their essential 'goodness'.

These ideas reflect a basic uncertainty, as a society, about how to understand the status of children – at one and the same time we feel they need to be both controlled by adults and given the freedom to develop 'naturally', away from the corrupting influence of adult society. As **Hendrick** ('Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood', 1990) suggests, the status of children has undergone a number of radical transformations since 1800.

- The **delinquent child** started to appear in the mid-nineteenth century, reflecting concerns about how to deal with law-breaking children and provide protection and care. One solution was:
- The **schooled child**, involving ideas about the need for education (moral and spiritual as well as technical – the skills of literacy and numeracy required for the newly-emerging industrial culture).
- The **psycho-medical child** was constructed towards the end of the nineteenth century with the development of psychological theories and techniques. This perception stressed the uniqueness of childhood status and constructed childhood as a time of biological and emotional 'stress and turmoil'. At this time the concept of *adolescence* as a distinctive phase of childhood started to develop, through the work of writers like **G. Stanley Hall** (*Adolescence*, 1904).
- The **welfare child** emerged in the twentieth century, stressing both the vulnerability of children and ideas about delinquent behaviour being shaped by neglect, poverty and so forth.
- The **psychological child** has emerged in the late twentieth century and focuses on the idea of children having their own needs which, in turn, should be protected and encouraged.

Legal protections

The changing status of children has been reflected in their changing legal status – not simply in terms of legal definitions of 'children' (an 1833 Royal Commission, for example, decided childhood officially ended at 13) but also through laws designed to either protect children or control their behaviour. The nineteenth century, for example, saw the introduction of *Factory Acts* designed to limit the type and length of work done by children as well as laws governing a child's education.

The regulation of childhood has, of course, continued throughout the last and into the present century – in 1972, for example, the minimum school leaving age was raised to 16 (with a suggestion it may soon be raised to 18 or even 19). Children aged 13 to 16 can legally work 12 hours a week during school terms and not after 7 pm. Sexual behaviour is also regulated by law and the table below demonstrates cultural variations (even within the UK) in the age of consent.

Children's Rights: The latter part of the twentieth century has witnessed moves – both official and unofficial – to develop concepts of 'Children's Rights' – the idea that children, like adults, have fundamental human rights that should be both stated and protected.

The United Nations 'Declaration on the Rights of the Child' (1959), for example, defined the minimum rights a child should expect and in 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child laid down rights that included:

Article 6: All children have the right to life. Governments should ensure children survive and develop healthily.

Article 16: Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

Age of consent: selected countries

Country	Male–Female	Male–Male	Female–Female
Canada	**14**	**18**	**14**
Chile	**12**	**18**	**18**
France	**15**	**15**	**15**
Guyana	**13**	**Illegal**	**Illegal**
Iran	**Must be married**	**Illegal**	**Illegal**
Korea	**13**	**13**	**13**
Saudi Arabia	**Must be married**	**Illegal**	**Illegal**
Spain	**13**	**13**	**13**
Tunisia	**20**	**Illegal**	**Illegal**
G. Britain	**16**	**16**	**16**
N. Ireland	**17**	**17**	**17**

Article 31: All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a range of activities.

Article 34: The Government should protect children from sexual abuse.
(Source: www.un.org)

Growing it yourself: children's rights

A simple and satisfying task is to design and create a poster, illustrating 'changing constructions of childhood', based on the ideas of **Jenks** and **Hendrick**.

Digging deeper

To complete this section we can look at reasons for the changing status of children and childhood. In the early industrial period (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), for example, we can note:

- **Economic roles**: As the family group stopped producing things (and turned into consumers), children lost their economic role.
- **Separation of home and workplace**: 'The home' became a place different to 'the workplace' and, with the loss of their economic role, women and children developed new and different statuses.
- **The sexual division of labour**: The removal of women's economic role led to an increasing focus on their 'natural' role as mother and child-rearer, responsible for primary childcare within the family.
- **Changing perceptions of children**: Hand-in-hand with altered adult statuses, the social identities and status of children changed – they became people in need of 'care, attention and nurture' (something which, rather conveniently, fitted the new role assigned to women).

Governments in the nineteenth century also took an interest in the status of children, for a number of reasons.

- **Education** was needed to establish basic levels of literacy and numeracy for the new industrial enterprises. Since families were largely unable to perform this task, separate institutions (schools) developed which served to define and prolong childhood.
- **Moral conformity**: Education was also seen as a way of socialising the unruly working classes.
- **Economic productivity**: The use of machinery in factories made adult workers more productive and reduced the need for (unskilled) child labour.
- **Moral entrepreneurs** (people and organisations who take it on themselves to 'protect the morals' of others) protested about the exploitation of children. This, coupled with ideas about the 'uncorrupted innocence' of childhood, led to legal and social changes to their status.

In the twentieth century:

- **Social science** developed to underline the concept of childhood as involving various stages of social, psychological and biological development. This hardened the division between full adult membership of society and the period in which the child 'learns how to achieve full adulthood'.
- **Attitudes**: In some ways, contemporary attitudes to childhood reflect an extreme

reversal of pre-industrial concepts; moral concerns about the 'increasing corruption of childhood innocence', through such things as child abuse and exposure to sex and violence in the media, reflect how childhood is seen as a somewhat idyllic period before the cares and responsibilities of adulthood.

- **Education**: This is increasingly promoted – especially at the post-16 level. The 2004 Labour Government has set a target of 50% of all 18 year olds attending University (compared with approximately 15% in 1974). This, again, serves to redefine notions of childhood, based on the dependent status of children.

Contemporary trends: Disappearing Childhood? Two (opposed) contemporary perceptions of children and childhood can be summarised by, firstly, looking briefly at the work of those (*liberationalists*) who argue children should not be seen as a separate, segregated, category of human beings; rather, they argue children should be given the same rights as adults.

A second position in this debate is characterised by writers such as **Neil Postman** (*The Disappearance of Childhood*, 1985) who argues:

Discussion point: children's liberation

In the 1960s and 1970s, the debate over 'children's rights' developed into calls for children's liberation. The following table lists a number of rights put forward by John Holt (*Escape From Childhood*, 1974) and Richard Farson (*Birthrights*, 1974)

Tick those you agree/disagree with and compare your views with those of the rest of your class (be prepared to argue your case).

A child has a right to:	Agree	Disagree
Exercise choice in their own living arrangements		
Information that is accessible to adults		
Choose belief systems including to educate oneself		
Sexual freedom		
Work		
Vote		
Freedom from physical punishment		
Justice		
Own property		
Travel independently		
Whatever drugs their elders use		

Modern communications (**Postman** cites television, but recent developments in mobile phone technology and the Internet would also apply here) are blurring the distinction between childhood and adult, changing the status of children, as he describes it, to one where 'adults have a different conception of what sort of person a child is, a conception not unlike that which prevailed in the 14th century: that they are miniature adults'. **Television**, for example, represents 'open admission technology' – it cannot differentiate between adults and children; the latter, therefore, are exposed to images of adulthood (sex, violence, news and so forth) that, according to Postman, diminish both adult and child abilities to decide where childhood ends and adulthood begins. Children, in this respect, become more like adults in terms of their criminality, sexuality and dress, and adults, in our culture at least, become more like 'children' in their equation of 'youthfulness' with health, vitality and excitement. Will a point be reached when the distinction between them disappears?

Internet technology has arguably closed this gap further since it effectively allows children access to information and images that, in former times, were denied until adulthood.

Finally, one area in which the status of children is becoming increasingly blurred is in the workplace. The growth of **service sector industries** (such as fast-food outlets) has created a growth in (illegal) child labour.

Child labour crackdown: Sean Coughlan: April, 2002
Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/1949145.stm

When you hear of illegal child labour, the leafy suburbs of Surrey might not be the first place that springs to mind. But in recent months, the county has seen some of the highest-profile prosecutions for child labour offences so far seen in the United Kingdom.

A McDonald's restaurant, Woolworths, Tesco, Safeway, Burger King, Odeon Cinemas, Heritage Hotels, Fourbuoys and Thorpe Park amusement park have all been successfully prosecuted.

What is believed to be the biggest ever fine for such offences was imposed on a McDonalds' franchise holder in Camberley. The £12,400 penalty followed an investigation that found school pupils working up to 16 hours a day, in what was described as a 'fast-food sweatshop'.

Growing it yourself: child status

Make a list of possible reasons why the status of children has changed in the past 100 years.

Select four reasons from your list and write 100 words on each explaining how they illustrate the changing position of children in our society.